For six weeks in January and February 2010, Rory Held could be described as “crazy busy.” The junior from Cold Spring, Minn., spent every free moment during that time mentoring high school students from Hatton and Northwood, N.D., on a robotics project. The robotics team is part of For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, more commonly known by its acronym, FIRST. Being a mentor for the team kept Held busy and involved in technology, one of his passions.

Held originally came to the U of M, Crookston to major in golf and turf management and intended to minor in technology. After two classes his sophomore year with Associate Professor Martin Lundell, Held changed his major to information technology management and has never looked back.

“I always liked computers, and I began working at the Help Desk when I was a freshman,” Held explains. “I just knew after I took those two classes that it was where I wanted to spend my time.”

As a senior in high school, Held began attending the U of M, Crookston as a Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) student. The PSEO program is offered by the state of Minnesota to high school juniors and seniors as an opportunity to earn college credit as a high school student enrolled in an institution of higher education.

“I lived on campus as a senior in high school,” Held says. “It was a great experience, and I enjoyed it.” PSEO served Held well, he was able to complete a number of his general education courses and adjust to campus living. He continues to work at the Help Desk and finds it rewarding. “I enjoy working with the staff at the Help Desk,” Held continues. “And, I also like to help set up and troubleshoot computers.”

He joined the Association for Computer Technology, a student club on campus, and also works security when it is needed. But, it was his love for technology that led to an undergraduate research project on robotics for Held where he and two other students worked on programming a robot to complete a given task.

Eventually, Held would find his way to his current role as a mentor for FIRST. “Last year, I watched. This year, I get to be involved and I am applying a lot of what I learned in my collegiate career to help with the work on the robotics team,” Held says. “We spend a lot of time brainstorming, designing, building, programming, and learning together.”

FIRST focuses its mentors and coaches on inspiring and guiding their students. The program also emphasizes gracious professionalism and sportsmanship. These are things Held found attractive about the program. He also enjoyed the enthusiasm and energy so abundant at the competitions and looks forward to experiencing it firsthand.

Held savors the idea of competing, “The atmosphere is electric during the robotics competitions, and I want to be a part of helping students experience that excitement and encourage an interest in the field of computer technology.”

FIRST’s mission is to inspire young people to be science and technology leaders, by engaging them in exciting mentor-based programs that build science, engineering and technology skills, that inspire innovation, and that foster well-rounded life capabilities including self-confidence, communication, and leadership. You can learn more by visiting www.usfirst.org.