Preserving Life Stories of the Navajo People

The 2013 Navajo Oral History Project brings together five students from Diné College and fourteen students from Winona State University (WSU) to create documentaries of life stories from five Navajo elders.

“This is the fifth year of the project, a journalism partnership with our students collaborating with WSU journalism students,” said Dr. Miranda Haskie, Social and Behavioral Sciences at Diné College. “They share knowledge with each other and produce documentaries.”

The group is focusing on Navajo artisans this year interviewing a painter, a rug weaver and a silversmith. They are interviewed, photographed, and video recorded the Navajo elders over an 18-day period in May and June. Included in their project every year is a film about a Navajo Codetalker and a long-standing employee of Diné College.

Their final product of the collected material will be archived at the college libraries of Diné College and WSU, the Navajo Nation Museum and Library as well as the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian.

Participants in the project will premiere their final production of the documentary films at museum shows held at each institution. In the fall, there will be a reception event at WSU in Winona, Minnesota on Friday, September 13, 2013 and at Dine College, Tsaile Campus on Monday, September 16, 2013.

The Diné College summer journalism and research class is a collaborative project that included Dr. Tom Grier of WSU and Robbie Christiano, a WSU Graduate student teaching assistant.

President’s Corner

Yáátééh!

I hope everyone is having a great summer. I want to take this time to update the College community on recent accomplishments, developments, and initiatives.

Our annual progress report on General Education and Student Learning Assessment was submitted to the Higher Learning Commission in early June. Our Progress Report was accepted and we received positive feedback from HLC. I want to thank the faculty, staff and administrators that played key roles in gathering the data for the report and drafting the report. The Progress Report and response letter can be viewed on the College’s intranet at: https://warriorweb.dinecollege.edu/ics/admin/Project%20Siih%20Hasin

In January 2013, we were notified that we were one of two Tribal Colleges selected to serve in the “Achieving the Dream” network. In June, the Core Leadership team comprised of the Board of Regents President, College President, Vice President for Student Success, Academic Dean, and a Data Technician attended a four-day kickoff event in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The kickoff event allowed the leadership team to meet with our Leadership and Data Coaches for the three-year initiative. In the coming months you will hear more on the ATD initiative and the important role that each one of us in the Diné College community will play in dialogue and strategies to promote student success. On August 20, 2013, we will plan our own kick off events at the College along with the regularly scheduled Convocation. Stay tuned for the agenda in early August.

The President of the: Institute of American Indian Arts, Navajo Technical College, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, and Diné College met on June 28, 2013 to discuss their 2014 NM legislative agenda and to work on bylaws to establish the NM Tribal College Consortium. The Secretary of Indian Affairs was an invited guest to the meeting to provide the Presidents technical assistance on capital outlay processes. The quarterly meeting with the NM Higher Education Department will be on June 25, 2013 in Santa Fe, NM. We are happy to report that our legislative efforts in NM have paid off with the recent rollout of $100k for dual credit reimbursement. Diné College has signed to Master Agreements for dual credit with Central Consolidated School District and Navajo Prep.
Alumni Robert Begay, ‘89, whose scholarly work was the focus of two Navajo Times articles “Some Navajo clans have ancestral ties to Chaco Canyon” and “Chaco Canyon: There is a Navajo connection to the place.” Robert wrote a master thesis entitled “Exploring Navajo-Anasazí Relationships Using Traditional Oral History.” His thesis challenges the standing ideas that anthropologists, archaeologists, academics, and even many Navajo people’s ideas about Navajo origins and ceremonial knowledge.

When contacted by Diné College, he jokingly remarked, “Besides my committee and copyeditor, this is perhaps the first time anyone else has read my thesis.” Robert explained his thesis uncovered knowledge that many medicine people already knew. In essence, he was simply retelling Navajo history from a traditional standpoint.

Upon graduating from Diné College, Robert went into the Marines for four years after which he completed both his B.A. and M.A. at NAU. Now the father of five children, Robert works at the Navajo Nation Behavioral Services as a Principal Planner where he concentrates on strategic planning and policy development. Until recently, for much of his career, Robert’s work focused on cultural resources issues and preservation of Navajo ceremonial knowledge.

About his Diné College experience, Robert says, “The College provided me challenging professors who were engaged in Navajo communities and who encouraged scholarly inquiry. I truly hope the College continues this tradition.” When asked about one memorable College experience, he recalled reading One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest in his Introduction to Literature class remains pivotal. He joked that it prepared him to work in government work.