

NEWS RELEASE

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Diné College Chosen for Virginia-based Research Project

TSAILE, Ariz. — A new tie-in with the federal Department of Homeland Security is helping Diné College get in on the ground floor on research related to the factors that cause the spread of violent crime in the United States.

The college was selected to participate in a DHS-funded program beginning May 20. Two students and one instructor from Diné College will travel to George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, to take part in a research project aimed at improving prevention efforts connected to school shootings and other forms of mass violence.

It's the first time in the College's 50-year history that Diné College was selected to participate in such a project.

"I was invited to recruit students for a research team and submit a proposal in February 2018," Sara Kien, Ph.D., the Diné College participating instructor, explained. Kien — she received the Faculty Member of the Year award at the May 11 commencement — will collaborate with faculty members from the DHS Center of Criminal Investigations and Network Analysis at GMU to oversee research activities and to mentor students.

"The long-term goals will be to apply the knowledge gained to the spread of other types of violence and harm in communities, such as suicide," Kien said.

The two students participating in the 10-week program are Tatyanna Begay and Ashley Lee. Both Begay and Lee are pursuing baccalaureate degrees in psychology and plan to go to graduate school. Both carry very high grade point averages and are set to graduate from Diné College in 2019.

Kien, who holds a doctorate in cognitive psychology from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, said the program includes up to \$50,000 in follow up funding to continue research activities at Diné College during the 2018/2019 academic year and to continue collaborations with the DHS Center at GMU.

Kien said with the experience that Begay and Lee will acquire, the two will be more likely to gain admittance into a graduate psychology program at a major research-oriented university.

The Research Background

In explaining what the proposed research entails, Kien said in spite of growing evidence to support the possibility of a contagion effect for violence, mass killings and suicide, there has been very little research that investigates mechanisms that zero-in on how the contagion occurs.

“It is important to identify these mechanisms because different mechanisms motivate different strategies for preventing the spread of violent crime,” Kien said.

Kien said there will be two studies undertaken by the research team: The first study is to code and analyze social media posts immediately following incidents of extreme violence in order to examine the relationship between potential mechanisms of social contagion, the spread and distribution of particular posts and violent responses.

The purpose of the second study, Kien said, is to investigate a causal influence from an online participant pool through GMU.

“The two students have been preparing for this opportunity throughout their experience in the psychology program,” Kien said.

The students will get a \$650 stipend per week as well as a housing allowance and travel costs, Kien said. Kien added, “Students will gain research experience that will strengthen their graduate school applications, increase their individual skill sets when seeking employment and enhance their ability to make a difference in their communities.”