



DINÉ COLLEGE

THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION OF THE NAVAJO

Office of the President

March Report

As you are aware, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) will be visiting our college in less than two weeks. Provost Garrity and her team have been working on the assurance argument that was submitted. If you recall, one of the areas of concern was the assessments. These focused on a few areas; general education, co-curricular activities, etc. I will have Dr. Garrity give a presentation on what is in the assurance argument so the board will be knowledgeable about our submission when you meet with the HLC team. They are classifying this as a working "meal." Dr. Garrity will be at the airport on her way to the HLC conference with her team. So, I will differ to her at the beginning of my report.

We are in a good position with our submission. There have been a lot of action that has taken place over the years and recently. For example. The adoption of the new strategic goals, the expansion of the process, the adoption of the revised charter, the adoption of financial policies, the adoption of a student handbook, creation of a professoriate, and the adoption of a general education handbook to name a few. I also want to share that we are moving forward in other areas concerning HLC. One of those is the adoption of our MBA and the possible visit this summer. I also want to share that through our American Indian College Fund and the New Mexico Teacher Education grant, we are aligning ourselves to create a principal's program as another master's degree.

It is important to note that as we plan to build, we keep two thoughts in mind. The first, is about sustainability, and the second is about scale. In other words, if we are using outside grant funds to build a program or to plan it, we have to be sure that it is sustainable once the grant funding ends. And most of the time, grant funds are to pilot or start a program. We need to be cognizant that the programs have the capacity to grow. These two ideas are ultimately about finance and our capacity. When we discuss capacity, we must also be thinking of human capital. Do we have the staff to operate these programs, can we recruit or must we train?

I give this background to lay the foundation for what we have been doing. Vice-President Lewis has been leading an effort to capitalize on finding creative solutions to capture additional funds. While it is in her report and on the agenda, I wanted to highlight these actions. She has been working with our investment team and governmental entities to take advantage of energy credits. Whether it's through an energy audit or the Department of Energy tax breaks, this is an approach that may result in \$2-3 million in additional revenue. On top of that, we are proposing (it's on the agenda) working to utilize the Employee Retention Credit program to capture an additional \$3-4 million. While these are estimates based on our research, it shows the potential and the creativity; that our team is using to do more than just run a college but look for ways to provide the additional funds we need to grow and build to meet the opportunities facing Diné College.

This does not just stop here. After meeting with President Buu Nygren and explaining our plan for training and an executive MBA for middle management and hearing his concerns about the Navajo Nation giving back millions of dollars in grants, for a variety of reasons. We created, under the direction of our vice-provost of research Andrea Christelle, a grant management training program. We are identifying the personnel to teach (University of Arizona is assisting) and looking at creating a price structure. This will be the first program under our proposed School of Transformation. If you recall, this will not be under HLC but a CEU process, with a certificate that will be issued by Diné College. The target audience are grant managers but also federal programs at the K-12 schools (public and federal).

I also want to share that we have submitted two congressional “earmarks” to two of our senators. With both of these submissions, we worked closely with the staff of Senators Ben Ray Lujan and Mark Kelly. As I mentioned before, I met with Sen. Lujan and staff to discuss our ideas centered on education and Navajo language. I believe we have a strong submission, and the areas of funding are priorities for the senator. The submission to Sen. Kelly is a “continuation” of our previous funded request. These areas continue the idea of technology and innovation. Once again, we worked with the senator’s staff to lay the groundwork for our submission. While nothing is guaranteed, I believe based on our research we have a good opportunity. It must be noted that the climate in Washington is our major obstacle. There is talk of a Continuing Resolution (CR) through the remainder of next year because it is an election year. The divisiveness of congress is our major challenge. Nonetheless, no one expected this year’s budget to be passed and it was at record levels. A CR would actually be good based on current levels and no cuts but it does mean that there would not be new appropriations. We will keep you posted.

I wanted to bring these efforts to your attention because sometimes we just focus on what is immediately before us and not some of the ideas we are working on. I’m excited by these efforts because they show an expansion of ideas across the college.

I met with the Arizona Governor’s higher education policy advisor Erin Hart last week and it was a very productive meeting. She asked that we share Sen. Kelly’s request for funding so their legislative office can also support this request. With this in mind, we will be reaching out to Governor Lujan Grisham to seek similar support. The discussion was to also include TCUs in any mention of higher education. As you recall this was what we had done with Governor Ducey but with a new administration we have to do the same. Our legislative director Crystal Carr has been doing this and will continue.

These are efforts that we are undertaking going forward but we also have a challenge currently in receiving our funds from the Navajo Nation for last year. We have not received a single dollar of our \$4.7 million. We have heard a lot of finger pointing and ultimately, we were told that we need to request supplemental funding. We are not the only ones in such a predicament, Navajo Technical University has not received \$2.1 million. We had a meeting with DODE, NTU and ourselves on Thursday. I will keep you posted on the results. We have discussed the situation with our council delegate and he is meeting with other delegates on our behalf. What we are asking, in addition to the funds, is for the funds not be distributed on a cost reimbursement basis. We are asking to change the Higher Education

Act to allow the funds to be distributed up front. The reason for this situation seems to be the retirement of two key individuals who process the invoices at both DODE and OMB. This goes back to the need for our grant management workshop.

In the ARPA funds through NTIA we received funds or services to lay fiber from Chinle to Tsaile. We are having a bit of a hiccup in the speedy laying of fiber. The reason is the right of ways and the slow moving of this process. We are still hopeful that this is done by next fall. Again, this is working through the vendors. When this is completed it will be a real game changer in our ability to offer more services and quality delivery of courses.

I want to just briefly inform the board that we are planning to go 100% in person next fall. This does not mean we will no longer offer on-line courses but we need to meet the diverse needs of our students. While many like the convenience of on-line, the success rate is not where we would like it to be. An evaluation is being done by the provost to determine what courses and delivery is best. Of course, we will probably focus on hybrid but we can't be simplistic in our approach. Student success is as important as student access.

We have also focused on expanding our dual enrollment program to be more program focus. As we continue down this path, it will, and we are hoping, that this will result in more students attending Diné College with a head start towards a degree and not just college courses. It has been a slow process but Winifred Jumbo has laid the groundwork to really grow the program. Like, I mentioned above, this is about student access and student success by ensuring that our students are college ready.

I wanted to give a brief update on the holding company and the groundwork for these endeavors. I am recommending that we have a work session with our attorneys to finalize recommendations for our structure. In the absence of the full work session that an ad-hoc committee be created to focus on this opportunity. Additionally, I have asked our attorney to update our by-laws so they are aligned with our updated charter. We have had a lot of hearings lately, primarily from many years prior, and these have been slowed.

I received word on Monday that our human resource director has resigned. We are disappointed but will continue to search for the right candidate to fill this position.

And finally, our students at the AIHEC student conference did an outstanding job. We took many first prizes but more importantly, the entire team made Diné College look good. The students studied hard, competed with dignity and heart, honored their college and had fun. The staff treated them like adults and provided support, a shoulder to cry on and valued their efforts. We also sponsored one event, the Knowledge Bowl and I was told it was the best one they've had. We have reason to be proud.