



DINÉ COLLEGE

THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION OF THE NAVAJO

Office of the President

January Report

The spring semester is underway. Our enrollment is down more than we saw during the Fall semester. We do not have any hard reasons for the drop but anecdotally we are hearing some of the following. Students are tired of zoom classes. Continued frustration with having adequate access to the internet. Obligations at home and their family. As of Wednesday, at noon, we had 1041 students. This is about 88% of last Springs enrollment. We still have a couple of days of enrollment and I will give the board the latest figures on Friday. I am hoping that we get above 90% and close in on 95% but as of now, it's not looking like that. Just a reminder, this does not include Dual Credit students. We will be evaluating these numbers and looking for trends in the next month. During this time, and with the expectation of changes after C19, I am looking at having a survey conducted that looks at what programs are of interest to potential students as well as the business and government sector. We need to be predictive with our programs and not just reactive. The last analysis of the job market I did was last year and it will take a while for the economic market to stabilize to truly see what will be new. Until then, I have been focusing on looking at the big picture in program development. While there has been a lot of focus on technology, higher education is transitioning to finding ways to incorporate technology and not let it be the full driver. In other words, this will mean training our faculty not just about technology delivery but also utilization within degree programs.

For the first time in 53 years, Diné College is in Utah. Our Aneth micro-campus/learning center is ready to be a place where students can come to and attend their classes. In addition, our Newcomb, NM micro-campus/learning center will be ready shortly. Both of these sites were funded by Navajo Nation CARES funding to provide access to college for students living in these communities. In addition, we have also look to provide these centers to offer tutoring for K-12 students as we continue to "open." I also want to share that I had a meeting with the Biden-Harris Education Transition Team about the micro-campus and I recommended the creation of a Native American Tutoring Corps that can work at such sites and others to provide the tutoring that our K-12 students will need to catch up. Our students could serve as the tutors and earn scholarships and stipends. They are very interested. I said we would be willing to pilot such an initiative. We will use the new Covid Relief funds 4 to hire an employee at both sites so it will not impact our general budget.

I met a third time with the Biden-Harris transition team earlier this week and the conversation was specifically about Diné College and other TCUs. The only people on the call were myself, AIHEC CEO and their legislative director. Two of our main focuses were on increase broadband and the creation of O&M as promised in our enabling legislation. I also pushed the need to create a lab on Navajo that can serve not just our reservation but also the region. We spoke how the model is already out there where you have medical institutions. The lab would be a full functioning health facility but also a party of our academic program. They were intrigued. To build on this point, Diné College can be a solution for the challenges facing Indian education. As you are aware, only 8% of Navajos have a college degree or certificate. We need to raise this number. I have been working with Achieve60AZ to highlight the need to increase the number of college graduates. Part of this conversation is to build partnerships with our business community which in turn can assist in improving enrollment which will help our graduation rates. As we continue to engage with our state and federal legislatures, we are changing the conversation to show how we are partners for the growth of our states and nation. For example, I have been asked to be one of five members from Arizona to improve higher education within the state. The other members are the chair of the Arizona House Education Committee, senator on the Education Committee, president of the Arizona Board of Regents and chancellor of the Pima Community College system. These conversations will help educate and drive our Arizona legislative agenda. I have already discussed the need for academic funding for Diné College. We have on the agenda, our proposed legislative agenda for tribal, state and federal.

I wanted to share that last week I met with the vice-presidents and the provost to review their annual goals. While 3 months is too short to track progress, we did work on refining, changing and clarifying the existing goals. We will also be working towards a single page “heat map” that will be a part of the second quarter board reports. I am confident and comfortable with the work that we have done and I believe the goals align perfectly with the Board/President goals and the committee goals.

I have had a few meetings with the Central Consolidated School Superintendent Benavidez. We are working together to align our legislative priorities where they overlap as a way to maximize our voice. For example, by showing result of Impact Aid not going to the students who generate it, we can show how remediation in English and Math is hurting our ability to offer expanded academic programs. In this light, Impact Aid becomes more than just a CCSD issue but a regional economic impact issue and a higher education issue. The loss of funds is actually magnified by the extended impact. This is providing Diné College with a new model of engagement with our partners and region. As we continue to build this out, I can see how it will have immediate benefit as well as long term benefit.

I want to end my report by providing you with information that impacts operations going forward. I have attached a report on the latest Covid Relief fund 4. I have also provided the approved budget signed into law in December.

Finally, I have asked Crystal Cree to present the “final” report on the Navajo Nation CARES Act funds. We want to show you some of the wonderful upgrades as well as the much needed investments into our infrastructure to create a healthy and safe environment.

After attending the Board of Regents retreat and also having an executive retreat, it is evident that Diné College is positioning itself to change how we engage with the outside. For a year now we have spoken about this change. I believe because of C19 and the pressures that it forced us to make decisions and change directions that this has expedited our progress. There are many ways that we are now able to engage in the conversations of a solution-oriented institution. I look forward to seeing the future and how this evolves.