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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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Education Committee hears report on proposed Bachelors of Social Work Program at Diné College through the University of Utah

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - The Education Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council met today and accepted a report from Diné College's Department of Social and Behavioral Science regarding a proposed joint- distance education Bachelors of Social Work degree program from the University of Utah with Diné College – Shiprock campus.

The Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) program will meet the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation standards and would eventually expand to other Diné College campuses.

Students who graduate from the joint BSW program would be eligible to enter into advanced standing programs in earning their Master of Social Work graduate degree one year after completing the BSW program. The program will also provide federal funding for Diné College students.

Professor James Mischeke, faculty member in the Department of Social and Behavioral Science at Diné College, informed the committee of this excellent opportunity for Diné College and its students and said this proposed program was a directive from Diné College President Ferlin Clark whose vision is to make Diné College a four year degree granting institution.

"This is an opportunity for Diné College students to study with the best and brightest at the University of Utah (U of U)," explained Mischeke. "It stands internationally recognized as one of the top 80 universities in the world in terms of quality of education."

The proposed program will assist with student tuition. Students will be matriculated as scholars at the University of Utah; they would be paid a very substantial salary working at agencies serving Navajo clients. While at work, students will be working off their student debt in terms of financial aid loans received and would allow Diné College to build its reputation as a research institution.

In addition, a pilot project from the University of New Mexico's School of Medicine has indicated that about 75% of social service professionals serving the Navajo Nation will have been retired in the next five years, which justifies the need for this educational opportunity at Diné College.

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"Considering particularly the difficulties that the Navajo people have experienced such as our veterans, we need to have people on the front line to help the Navajo people," added Mischeke.

An appropriate Diné College official will need to sign the memorandum of understanding to partner with the U of U. Recently, Mischeke said he met with Patrick Panos, director of the U of U BSW program at the Shiprock campus, and was informed by Panos that Diné College and the U of U have 30 days to turn the proposal into the federal government for the educational initiative to become a reality.

Council Delegate Leonard Anthony (Shiprock) said this program is a great opportunity for educational growth and said, "It will be significant for our students to earn their degrees nearby. The general consensus of the committee is we need to save this program, we can't just let this opportunity and those dollars go."

The Diné College Board of Regents is scheduled to meet Sat., March 20 and hear Mischeke's proposal if put on the Board of Regents' agenda. The Board of Regents does have final word on whether to move this proposed program forward.

"My point is that if something doesn't work out in 30 days, the University of Utah will rescind this offer," Mischeke said. "We will have lost a decade of hard work for my professional students."

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