



## ASU Hozho' and Education brings together students, tribal leaders



*Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and members of his cabinet traveled to Tempe on April 11 to meet with Arizona State University students. Hozho and Education: Balancing Culture, Life and Education was hosted by the Pre-Health Association of Native American Leaders and the Native American Business Organization. Students asked President Shelly questions ranging from leadership to cultural identity to scholarships and education. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

TEMPE, Ariz. — There are more than 2,000 Native American students that attend Arizona State University. In May 2013, almost 300 students from 65 tribes graduated from ASU.

The keystone to success for many native graduates is the American Indian Student Support Services (AISSS), which provides students with a free computer lab, printing services and scholarship assistance.

More importantly, it provides students with a native community for support.

AISSS has services like the Native American Achievement Program, which provides emotional and academic support to empower and retain students at ASU. Students can also find tutors, peer mentors, dedicated professors, student organizations and new friendships at AISSS.

On April 11, two student organizations hosted an event that brought Navajo Nation leaders to ASU for a question and answer session on education, scholarships, self-identity and leadership.

### **Hozho' and Education**

Slowly but surely, the Navajo undergraduate and graduate students attending ASU began entering Discovery Hall on the main campus for the opportunity to hear Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly speak.

Hozho' and Education: Balancing Culture, Life and Education was coordinated by the Pre-Health Association of Native American Leaders (PANAL) and the Native American Business Organization (NABO).

Delmar Blackhorse, NABO

President and economics major originally from Bluff, Utah provided the welcome address.

“My community is small and simple. That’s how I describe myself. I carry my community with me everywhere I go,” Blackhorse said.

NABO was founded in 1990 to provide students with networking opportunities for business etiquette and support for academic success. It also promotes cultural awareness.

“We wrestle with two ideologies. On one hand, we’re



*President Shelly said Indigenous leadership begins with growing up on the Indian reservations. Living on tribal nations gives future leaders the insight and firsthand experiences with problems facing Native American people across the country. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*What happens in Washington, D.C. Indian Health Services determines the number of doctors, nurses and other health professionals needed on the Navajo Nation, said Larry Curley, Division of Health Director. He said the Navajo Nation is on the cusp of delivering our own Medicaid services, which will create a need for educated billing code specialists and other professionals. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*Albert Damon, director for Division of Economic Development, said a 1 percent tax was implemented for scholarships, education and economic development. He said \$6 million was generated last year, with half of the funds going to scholarships and the other half to economic development. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

a business organization. On the other, we're a part of the Native American community here," he said.

PANAL was established in 2011 for undergraduate and graduate students studying careers in health. They provide volunteerism, internship opportunities, mentors and peer cultural awareness.

Co-presidents Waynette Taylor and Aaron Bia also provided welcome addresses.

Taylor is an undergraduate student majoring in biological services and will be graduating in May. She said PANAL is always seeking new ways to strengthen the Native American community on campus.

"This is our approach to implement a creative way in trying to bring about culture and education," Taylor said. "We wanted to have the opportunity to bring the Navajo Nation to ASU. It's such an honor."

Bia, a sophomore originally from Chinle, is majoring in global health.

"We are thankful today that we have a panel of Native American leaders. As a pre-health organization, we believe in education and know it is a pathway to life," Bia said.

### Statistics

Ramon Littleman, originally from LeChee, Ariz., is a junior in pursuit of his degree in construction management. He is also a budding filmmaker and the mastermind behind the You Tube video, "Native American Educational Unity."

He screened the two-minute video and said he made it in response to the lack of videos and statistics about Native Americans pursuing higher education.

The video is a montage of scenes from ASU campus, contrasted against students exercising and holding signs of educational statistics. Throughout the video, President Shelly's voice echoes views on

education and the return home to become leaders.

"I created a video with Ben Shelly because I am inspired by him as our Navajo Nation President," Littleman said. "I like the way he speaks. He speaks firm. He speaks well."

"I want to share the stories, it's really inspiring," he added.

### T'áá hwó ájít éego

President Shelly told the students their road to higher education was going to be a hard climb, but not to give up.

"Some of you probably get up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, 'I'm going to do something positive today and meet the challenge head-on,'" President Shelly said.

He said meeting that challenge was a matter of self-reliance and the ability to do things for yourself because nobody's going to do things for you.

"It simply comes down to two words: self-reliance. In Navajo, it's *T'áá hwó ájít éego*," President Shelly said. "Nobody's going to do it for you. Not your parents or grandparents. Not your leaders. You have to do it yourself."

During the question and answer portion of the discussions, he shared his experiences serving the Navajo people as a council delegate and as president. He said the most obvious difference was that delegates make laws and as president, you administer laws.

President Shelly said, "A council delegate will represent a certain number of people from their chapter. That's their only concern. When you're president, you think different, you look at the whole Nation."

He encouraged students to take pride in being Navajo and to respect their culture and tradition. Tradition and culture is common sense, the dos and the don'ts of life, he said.

"Navajo should be your first language and English your second language. The Holy

People put you on earth to speak Navajo and it saved a lot of lives through our Navajo Code Talkers,” President Shelly said. “Learn from your grandmas and grandpas. Balance yourselves.”

**Academics and Scholarship**

Sen. Carlyle Begay told students not to let the suit and tie that he wears on a daily basis not to fool them.

“I was actually a chizzy Navajo sheepherder,” Begay said.

He grew up with his nali, his paternal grandmother and she shared stories about the perseverance of his Navajo ancestors.

“Never forget who you are or where you come from,” Begay said. “You are bridging a gap of a generation. The Navajo Nation isn’t as isolated as it used to be.

“Our culture was isolated for many decades, if not centuries. You are the future leaders of our people,” he added.

The biggest question from the university students was in regard to scholarships from the Nation.

Lena Joe from the Navajo Nation Scholarship Office shared a brief history of the program.

She explained the scholarship program began in 1953, an effort spurred on by Chairman Sam Ahkeah, with a meager \$30,000. In 1972, the Indian Self-Determination Act, or Public Law 93-638, opened the funding stream to \$15 million per year.

“To this day, we receive about \$14 to 15 million per year and we receive about 17,000 applications per year,” Joe said.

Students receive from \$500 to \$2,000 from the Navajo Nation Scholarship Office, regardless if they attend a two-year college or attend the university setting.

She noted that students are encouraged to seek other resources because the Nation would need at least \$80 million annually to fund all students.



**STATISTICAL DATA:**

- **Less than 50 percent of Native Americans graduate high school.**
- **Of that amount, only 20 percent graduate college.**
- **Only 8 percent graduate from college.**
- **About 60 percent of college students dropout.**
- **Native Americans make up 3 percent of ASU’s student population.**
- **ASU was established on Feb. 26, 1885.**
- **There are 59,794 students who attend the main ASU campus in Tempe and a total of 72,254 students from all campuses.**
- **A total of 58,404 students are undergraduates. There are 13,850 students as postgraduates.**



*Ramon “Moonie” Littleman, a junior majoring in construction management, said his two-minute video featuring President Shelly inspired students to bring tribal leaders out to ASU for a presentation. “I created a video with Ben Shelly because I am inspired by him as our Navajo Nation President,” he said. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*Sen. Carlyle Begay said Navajo students in college today are bridging a generational gap by pursuing higher education. He said the opportunity available to Navajo students today was not available to countless generations of Navajo ancestors. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*The ASU students listened intently to the information that was shared by the Navajo Nation. Representatives from the Divisions of Human Resources, Health, Education, and Economic Development were on hand to provide thorough answers on scholarships, leadership and cultural awareness. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*