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Diné College confers associate degrees on 211 graduates

Commencement ceremony reflects philosophy of Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón

TSAILE, Ariz. – Under brilliant skies Thursday, hundreds of parents, spouses, faculty and tribal leaders congratulated 211 Diné College graduates at a uniquely Navajo commencement ceremony held at the Diné College Tsaile campus here on the east side of the Ned Hatathli Center.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Diné College Regents shake hands with graduates during the 2006 commencement ceremony at the Diné College Tsaile campus. Along with him, from right to left, is Board of Regents President Clinton Jim, Evelyn Meadows, Hanson Ashley, M.S., Bernadette Todacheene, Ed. D., and student representative Crystal Carr.

Joining those receiving their associate's degrees were four students who obtained their bachelor's degrees in elementary education, and six who received master's degrees in education and curriculum and instruction from Arizona State University.

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., told the graduating students that he was proud of them and thanked them for their hard work. Despite the difficulties to earn a degree, he said, it is always worth it. He sang a song from the Blessing Way at the conclusion of the commencement.

The ceremony began with the procession of students and faculty entering from the east led by Diné Studies teacher and medicine-man Avery Denny who chanted a traditional journey song and carried the original planting stick used when the Tsaile campus was first blessed more than 30 years ago.

Diné College President Ferlin Clark walked alongside him carrying the college's wedding basket containing corn pollen and *jish*. These were laid before a small fire that burned between the audience to the east and the students and official guests and dignitaries to the west. With the fire in the middle, the seating arrangements took on the circular shape of a hogan.

***“I’m from here.
I was raised herding
sheep, slept on a
sheepskin in a hogan.
This is me.”***

– Dr. Manley Begay,
Commencement speaker,
1975 Diné College graduate

“I’m from here,” he said. “I was raised herding sheep, slept on a sheepskin in a hogan. Our summer home is way up in the mountains and we planted corn. This is me.”

As the first Navajo to receive a doctorate from Harvard University and now with a lengthy resume of impressive academic achievements, he told them that if an old shepherd like him can succeed, so can they. He urged the graduates to never quit regardless how hard the academic journey may seem to them.

When he went to school, he didn’t do it by himself, Dr. Begay said. A lot of people prayed for him. He said he was among the second class to graduate from Diné College at the Tsaile campus 31 years ago. He paid homage to his wonderful teachers such Dr. Bob and Ruth Roessel, Kenneth Begay, Mike Mitchell, Andy Natonobah, Gerald Judd, Gordon Dempsey and Teddy Draper, Sr.

He said that although Harvard University is considered one of the best schools in the country, the teachers at Diné College show care and concern for each of their students.

“This is one of the best schools I’ve ever been to,” he said. “It’s probably even better than Harvard University.”

Students today are just as fortunate as he was to attend Diné College because of the professors they have now, such as Harry Walters, Wilson Aronilth, Ben Barney, Irv Morris, Tony Lee, Don Whitesinger, Jack Jackson, Sr., Walter Jensen and many more.

As graduates received their degrees, they stepped around the fire clockwise to shake hands with President Shirley and the Board of Regents. Dozens of women graduates were beautifully dressed in traditional woven dresses and Navajo jewelry.

The ceremony opened with Talia Tsosie singing the national anthem in Navajo and Curtis Ray Benally serving as master of ceremony.

Dr. Manley Begay, Jr., director of the Native Nations Institute at the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy and senior lecturer in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Arizona, presented the commencement address punctuated with Navajo humor and encouragement.



President Shirley presents a certificate for completing an associate degree Magna Cum Laude, which represent perfect grades throughout a course of study, to Kristel N. Bia during a banquet Wednesday for graduates of the Chinle Branch of Diné College. With them is Quintanya Claw, Miss Diné College 2005-06.

“When you learn from the best, you know that you can only do good things,” Dr. Begay said.

He urged the students not to waste time in completing their educations and pursuing good jobs.

“So don’t take too long,” he said. “You may run out of cedar, you know? So hurry up. There’s not time to waste. Time goes on. Pretty soon it’ll be 31 years since you graduated. You’re very lucky to be here at Dine College. You’re lucky to be on my land here.”

Following Dr. Begay, Neva Begay, a summa cum laude graduate, presented congratulatory remarks, saying they must have the will power to continually improve their lives.

“It is right to be content with what we have but never with who we are,” she said.

She concluded with a quote from Mother Teresa:

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of being selfish. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you. Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today people will often forget tomorrow. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give the world the best you’ve got anyway.



Dr. Manley Begay

The mission of Diné College is to apply the principles of *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* to advance quality student learning. This is accomplished through *nitsáhákee*, (thinking), *nahatá*, (planning), *iina* (living) and *shiihasin* (assurance). The college emphasizes the study of Diné language, history and culture while preparing students for further studies and employment in a multi-cultural and technological world.

Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón is the Diné traditional living system, which places human life in harmony with the natural world and the universe. The philosophy provides principles for protection from the imperfections in life and for the development of well-being.

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