

Diné College names James McKenzie director of Navajo Language Institute

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TSAILE, Ariz. — Diné College’s commitment to maintaining and revitalizing the Navajo language continues, and college officials hope the hiring of a Navajo Language Immersion Institute Director will strengthen that progress.

James McKenzie, who previously served as Navajo Language Development Coordinator at the College, assumed the new role Dec. 18. McKenzie brings to the job more than five years of experience with Navajo language immersion efforts and said he’s eager to create community partnerships and improve success with Navajo language initiatives.

“I’m humbled and excited at the new opportunity,” McKenzie said. “While I will have some new duties, I will still collaborate with a lot of the people and departments with whom I have worked at the College and beyond.”

McKenzie, who has roots in the Shiprock area, has worked in various capacities at Diné College, including stints as a Senior Policy Analyst and Interim Director of the Diné Policy Institute, as well as co-chair for the College’s 2015 Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit, before working with the Center for Diné Studies as Navajo Language Development Coordinator, where he helped to initiate immersion programming and contributed to the development of a proposed bachelor’s degree.

In his new role, though, McKenzie will oversee the establishment of new initiatives and spaces for Navajo language immersion and, “reach out and forge partnerships with Navajo Nation

educational institutions and schools,” he said.

“What we aim to do is serve as a resource for programs aimed at bolstering Diné language learning through immersion efforts,” McKenzie explained. “To address the decline we are seeing in the language, this institute will work to promote more effective collaboration, Navajo Nation-wide.”

McKenzie, who has studied with immersion programs in Mexico, Germany and China, has played a key role in the development and implementation of Diné College’s highly successful Navajo language immersion camps and courses. He said future plans include the development of a Navajo language immersion “campus,” where students and groups can fully immerse themselves in the Diné language and culture.

“This immersion campus idea will center Navajo language learning in a culturally relevant environment, including multiple hogans and other culturally grounded spaces, which will serve as places of learning,” McKenzie said.