

Partnership opens path to legal careers

TUCSON, Ariz. – The Navajo Law Fellowship Program was established Dec. 3 when Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez finalized a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Arizona at the James E. Rogers School of Law. Nez was joined by Miss Navajo Nation Shaandiin Parrish.

The overall goal of the program is to increase the number of Navajo law school graduates and create pathways to legal careers.

Nez called the new fellowship program an investment in the future of the Navajo Nation. He said it empowers young Navajo people to determine their own futures and creates another pathway for Navajo students to come home and give back to their communities. “This MOA is intended to empower our Diné students - to bring them home to the Navajo Nation to help our people through this partnership with the University of Arizona. I am thankful to the University for working with us to create this new opportunity,” he said.

Under the terms of the agreement, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance and the University of Arizona will match financial aid awards to Navajo law school students who are part of the fellowship program.

In addition, first-year law school students will receive academic advisement, information, and an overview of the Navajo Nation legal system and legal career possibilities within the Navajo Nation. They will also be placed in a summer honors externship that may include rotations through selected Navajo Nation law offices, court locations, legal aid offices and other placements.

Second-year students will be offered a course on Navajo Nation law and the legal system. The summer externships will build on first-year experiences and include a workshop that helps to prepare for the Navajo Nation Bar Exam.

Third-year students will participate in a workshop that prepares them for the Arizona Bar Exam and Navajo Nation placement following the exam.

“This is a great partnership and a great opportunity to foster the development of more Diné professionals. Our Nation has a great need for more legal expertise to help move us forward in many ways whether it be securing water rights, the protection of our women and children, or other important matters,” said Vice President Myron Lizer.

As part of the program, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance will also provide additional funds to cover a portion of fees for students who are admitted to and attend the Pre-Law Summer Institute at the University of New Mexico and fees for the state bar exam application and the Bar Review course necessary to help prepare for the bar exam.

During the visit to the campus, Nez met with Navajo students who are part of the Navajo Nation Future Physicians’ Scholarship Fund program, which was established under the former administration.

The agreement with the University of Arizona, College of Medicine is designed to help more Navajo students pursue careers as physicians. The program currently provides financial aid to seven Navajo students for the costs of tuition and academic support to help them earn a medical degree from the University.

“Our Nation is working with IHS to construct several new hospital facilities in our communities including Dilkon, near the city of Gallup, and we’re working to develop more, so we need more health and medical professionals to return home and help our people,” Nez said.

He also met with University of Arizona President Dr. Robert C. Robbins to discuss how to develop more partnerships to benefit Navajo students and to develop stronger support from the University for all Native American students, by creating a senior level position to advise the University on Native American issues to help students, providing academic advisors for Native American students, more financial assistance, as well as efforts to improve retention and graduation rates.

Nez delivered a letter from the Native SOAR student organization outlining concerns and recommendations from the Native American student body representatives.