

## Diné College holds first virtual winter commencement

Written by Staff Reports

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TSAILE, Ariz. — Fearing an outbreak of COVID-19, Diné College conducted its first ever virtual graduation ceremony Dec. 11 during which more than 50 students received associate's and bachelor's degrees and certificates.

The graduation ceremony included Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 graduates — the latter of whom weren't able to participate in an actual ceremony in March due to the coronavirus outbreak. The Navajo Nation continues to have a high COVID-19 caseload and a simultaneous in-person graduation was subsequently canceled.

Amanda Begay, a bachelor's degree graduate in psychology who is from Lukachukai, Ariz., said the coronavirus pandemic made things that much more challenging. With her undergraduate studies now behind her, she said she's ready for the next educational step.

"My plan is to continue onto graduate school to pursue a master's degree in counseling or law," Begay said. "There are so many options to choose from. Eventually I know that I will fall into the right career that I am passionate about."

The roughly 90-minute ceremony featured Dr. Jill Jim, executive director of the Navajo Nation Department of Health and a recent appointee to President-elect Joe Biden's COVID-19 advisory board, as commencement speaker.

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“Congratulations to the graduates,” Jim said. “You have to take this opportunity to pursue something and come back to the Navajo Nation.”

Jim has a doctorate in Public Health, a master’s degree in Health Care Administration, and a second master’s in Public Health from the University of Utah. She has a bachelor’s degree in Health Promotion and Community Health Education from Northern Arizona University. Some of her work experience includes serving as a Health Care Analyst for HealthInsight in Albuquerque, acting as consultant for Navajo Area Indian Health Service, and as epidemiologist for the Utah Department of Health.

Sage Bond, a Diné College alumnus and popular folk musician, sang the national anthem.

James Tutt, dean of Diné College’s School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, emceed the event, which was recorded by the Navajo Nation Office of TV and Film.

Avery Denny, a medicine man and Diné College professor of language and culture, performed the annual Journey Song.

According to I-T officials, the event was viewed online 5,300 times. The ceremony was available on Zoom and Facebook.

### ***Staff Reports***