

Diné Policy Institute

Navajo Brain Drain

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Mission

Through Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon, Diné Policy Institute provides quality research to facilitate and analyze issues and educate all people, enhances and ensures that well-reasoned policies are developed to protect the sovereignty and cultural integrity of the Ni'hooka' Dine'e', in order to renew the principles and values of Sa'a Naghai Bik'e Hozhoon.

The Diné Policy Institute is established under Diné College as a research institute to “mesh” Western research practices with traditional Navajo values, Natural, Traditional, Customary, and Common laws (as found in the CN-69-02) and principles to advise (by recommendation) the Navajo Nation law and policy-makers

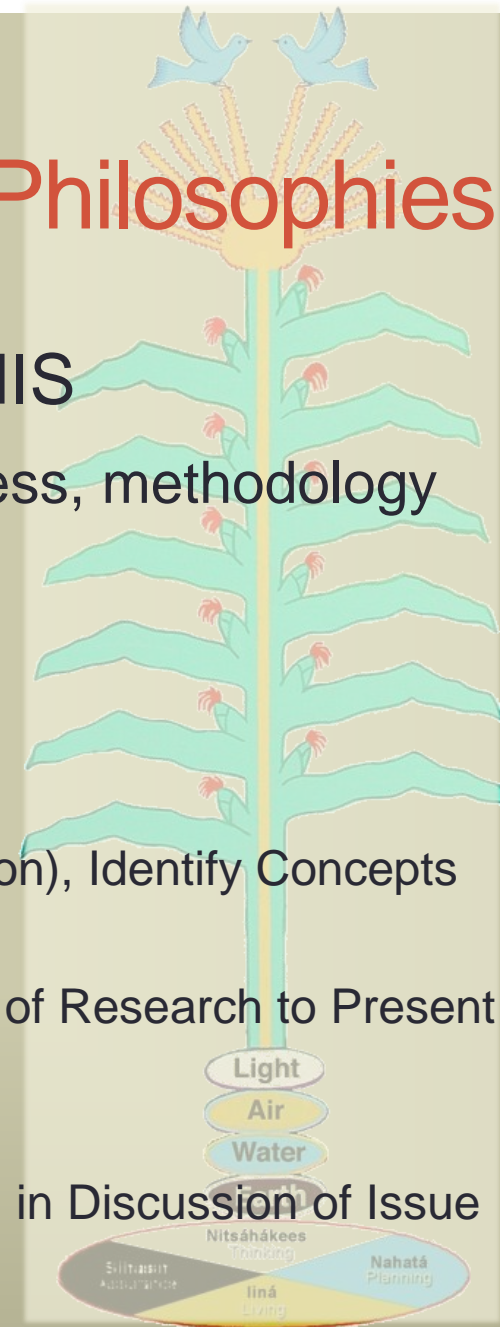
Unique Approach - DPI Process

Integrating Indigenous Values and Philosophies

- ❑ *Rooted* in the Corn Stalk Philosophy - NNIS
- ❑ Diné bibee haz'áanii bitsésiléi: - Informs process, methodology
- ❑ Unique Among Tribal Colleges

Process:

- Identify Issue, Frame Issue from Diné Perspective
- Interview Knowledge Holders (Advisory Circle, Cultural Liaison), Identify Concepts
- Conduct Mainstream Academic Research
- Understand Diné Knowledge Contextually, Apply Both forms of Research to Present Day Issue
- Articulate Application of Diné Knowledge to Issue in Writing
- Advocate for Inclusion of Perspectives from Diné Knowledge in Discussion of Issue



Current DPI Projects

- ❑ Navajo Nation Government Restructuring/Reform
- ❑ Navajo Nation Food System and Food Sovereignty
- ❑ Navajo Nation Energy Policy

Diné College Activities

- Diné Education Philosophy (DEP) Series
- Diné College Research Internship for Course Credit
- Diné Student Internship
- Campus Presentations
- Other Projects

Development & Navajo Nation

Development Literature Definition of Brain Drain:

- Phenomenon in which educated or skilled professionals depart one country, generally their native country, to another, in order to obtain better wages or working conditions, or other more promising opportunities, presumably unavailable at home. (Kwok and Leland, 1982; Bagdanavicius and Jodkoniene, 2008).

Development Research and Navajo Nation Development:

Development literature –

- **Education:** most salient indicator of any nation or group's ability to reduce poverty and spark development.
- A nation's ability to produce **sustainable development-**ability to create effective learning experiences and develop professional skills to meet societal needs.
- Crucial that developing regions retain an educated workforce
- Correlation between lower education levels and underdevelopment: poverty, income, employment

Navajo Nation

- Navajo Nation recognized as area of severe underdevelopment
- However, in development research, too much focus has been placed on **Symptoms** vs. **Causes** of poverty and underdevelopment
- Levels of education are much lower on the Navajo Nation than for other regions or ethnic groups in the United States.
- Focus resources on efforts leading to self-sufficiency—**Education**

Navajo Nation

- Not a **NEW** Idea...
- Navajo Nation already invests millions of dollars to increase intellectual capital
- Issue:
 - Scholarships often for education at Off-reservation institutions
 - Many recipients do NOT return to reservation
 - Return on investment not always realized (Brain Drain)

Approach to the Study

Approach to the Study:

- Education—useful in addressing causes of underdevelopment
- But when students choose NOT to return to Navajo Nation after receiving higher education:
 - Inefficiency in investment (educational and social)
 - Failure to contribute to development or increase in quality of life for Navajo Nation
- Better understanding of “Brain Drain” and its impacts:
 - Help the tribe increase efficiency in educational investment
 - Facilitate Navajo Nation developing systemic solutions to poverty vs. mitigating problems—leading to development for all

Goals/Objectives

- Identify/ better understand factors in decision to return to or Stay Away from reservation
- Gain insights—how individuals might be retained (or encouraged to return) as residents of Diné bikéyah
- Provide recommendations—Policy that can lead to higher return rate and retention
 - May lead to developmental benefits for Navajo Nation.

Research Questions:

- Engage/interview Navajos—2 fundamental questions:
 - How do Diné who grow up on the Navajo Nation and go away to college and decide not to return to the Navajo Nation come to that decision?
 - How do Diné who grow up on the Navajo Nation and go away to college and decide to return to the Navajo Nation come to that decision?

Methods:

- **Philosophical assumptions:**
- Diné philosophy: In Diné teachings knowledge is not produced, it is already in place for us to discover.
- Relational ontology: assumed that knowledge is produced, gained, and maintained through relationships (Gergen, 2009; Levinas, 1981; Oliver, 2001).
- Collaboration: Acknowledged at the outset the implicit challenges, ambiguities, and advantages of working as a team of reservation-based policy researchers and university-based academics.

Example Questions from Interviews

Can you tell me a bit about your life growing up on the Navajo Nation (e.g. where did you live? where did you go to school? what activities were you involved in? what did you want to be when you grew up?)

What thoughts did you have while you were in college about returning to live on the Navajo Nation?

As you considered your plans after graduation from college, what were your thoughts about returning to live on the Navajo Nation? What were the key issues as you considered this possibility?

As you consider your future, what thoughts do you have about living on the Navajo Nation? What are the key factors you will consider as you make future plans?

What advice would you give to others who are considering the question of whether to live on the Navajo Nation after they graduate from college? How do you see the issues involved in the decision changing over time?

Data Gathering

Research Team:

Diné Policy Institute:

Robert Yazzie, JD; Amber Crotty, MA;
James McKenzie, BA; Dana Eldridge, BA

Brigham Young University:

Steven A. Smith, PhD; Aaron P. Jackson, PhD;
Quintina Adolpho, MS; Carrie Fleischer, MA

University of Minnesota:

Donald Baum, MS

Participants

Participants all indicated that they met the following criteria:

- Grew up on the Navajo Nation. This was defined as having spent at least one-half of their school years (K-12) attending reservation schools.
- Left the Navajo Nation to pursue postsecondary education.
- Had lived and worked off of the Navajo Nation for at least two years.
- Were still living off of the reservation.

Data Gathering

- Interviews were conducted research team.
- 20 to 60 minutes (avg. 40 minutes)
- Transcribed by research team, and reviewed by entire team.
- Identifying information (specific places and people) removed from transcripts.

Analysis & Results

Analysis

Collaborative Hermeneutic Interpretation (CHI)

- All research team members read all the transcripts.
- Meaningful passages identified—sections of dialogue with meaning relevant to the research questions
- Preliminary interpretations or themes generated by each Team Member
- Team members meetings—
 - Sharing of preliminary themes
 - Began to construct a final collaborative interpretation.
- Team's collaborative interpretations critically evaluated in terms of Diné philosophy and values - Diné Cultural Experts

Results

Following readings by research team—four complex themes identified:

K'é or Relationships/Connections to Family, Culture, Homeland, People

- K'é, in one application, can be used to describe relationships and connections.
- Many participants feel deep desire to return to their family, culture, homeland and people.
- A number of participants, while living away from the reservation, maintained a strong attachment to their homeland though their circumstances sometimes made it difficult or impossible to return.
- Subthemes included a) culture, language and traditions; b) having a desire to return and help one's people; c) family; and d) having a sense of belonging and being rooted in one's homeland.

Results

liná or Lifestyle/Lifeway

- liná, which for many participants represented reasons they would not return.
- Another complex theme including subthemes of a) preferring city life; b) finding fewer activities on the reservation; c) finding a native community off the reservation; and d) moving from a traditional lifestyle toward adopting a more mainstream, westernized lifestyle.

Results

Bee ach'j' na'hwii'ná or Resources and Roadblocks to Making a Life

- Many participants identified lack of resources on the reservation – made living there more difficult
- Again represented reasons why participants would not return.
- Sub-themes were identified as a) infrastructure, b) services, and c) “The System.”

Results

Bee ajit'į or Opportunity, Prosperity and Personal Improvement

- Illustrated dilemma many Navajo citizens feel – desire for personal growth and opportunity.
- Participants identified a number of reasons that prevented them from returning to the reservation.
- Subthemes included a) education, b) job availability, and c) work experience.

Discussion:

- Navajo Nation spends millions of dollars to educate its Navajo citizens.
- Social and economic benefit to the Nation is lost through the process of “brain drain” (Baldacchino, 2006).
- Complex themes identified validates that NN citizens face demands that mainstream culture do not – especially returning to the reservation upon completing higher education.
- Other cultural demands placed on those who leave the reservation, economic realities that make it difficult for some to return.
- Our study shows that some desire to return to the reservation to live and work but economic and social barriers prevent them from doing so.

Outcomes/Implications:

- Study will be published in an academic journal (e.g. Journal of American Indian Education, Diné College Press)
- Diné Policy Institute will disseminate findings and offer policy recommendations to Navajo Nation entities:
 - Key Considerations- decision to return or stay away
 - Ideas for policy and programming leading to “Nihi dah ndii daal” (return home), or a higher return rate and retention of college-educated NN citizens, which may lead to developmental benefits for Navajo Nation.
 - **Navajo Nation Scholarship Office**