

A Chance to Succeed, a Desire to Serve

by Michele St. George

American Indian students attending Arizona State University (ASU) couple their drive to achieve with the desire to contribute to their communities.

Kenneth Shurley, a Navajo (Diné) doctoral student in Educational Technology, was raised in Window Rock, Arizona and plans to return to the Navajo Nation after graduating, to assist and educate the Navajo people with educational technology applications. “The mixture of education and technology is still quite innovative to the Navajo people,” says Shurley. “My goal is to use my degree to ease the transition between the two and to show the Navajo people the sky’s the limit when it comes to technology and education.”

In a possible first for ASU, three sisters from the Navajo Nation — Dorthea, Benita and Elvira Litson — graduated simultaneously from programs offered on the ASU Tempe and Polytechnic campuses



Kenneth Shurley, a doctoral student in Educational Technology, is a Gates Scholar and co-chair of the Gates Millennium Scholars Organization at ASU.

Elvira. “It gives you a sense of wanting to go back to help change so many things. Getting an education is the biggest step to being able to do just that; it was my motivation for finishing my degree.”

ASU was ranked by *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* magazine as third in the nation in the number of



Dorthea, Benita, and Elvira Litson graduated simultaneously in 2005 from programs offered on the ASU Tempe and Polytechnic campuses.

doctorate degrees awarded to American Indians, and sixth in the number of American Indian master’s degrees awarded. (Source: *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, July 13, 2006). The majority of ASU’s American Indian students come from the Navajo Nation, the largest of the 22 tribes represented in Arizona.

“The number of American Indian students studying at ASU nearly doubled in a 10 year period and over 200 are currently studying at the master’s and doctoral levels,” says Maria Allison, University Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate College. “The Graduate College is committed to creating an environment in which American Indian and all underrepresented groups can thrive in higher education. One of ASU’s goals as a New American University is to increase access to its educational resources. ASU has several innovative ways to ease the path for our more than 1,000 American Indian undergraduates who want to progress to master’s and doctoral degrees and we’re always looking for new ways to provide support to those who want to obtain advanced degrees.”

Doctoral student Ken Shurley is one of over 100 Gates Millennium Scholars who are current students or alumni of ASU. American Indians represent about a third of all Gates Scholars who have attended ASU.

Shurley is Co-chair, with Monica Joe, of the recently formed Gates Millennium Scholars Organization (GMSO), one of the first of its kind in the country. “GMSO plans to facilitate networking events with scholars, peers, professors, employers and other community members, to promote leadership development and community service, and to foster diversity in the disciplines of education, engineering, library science, mathematics, public health and the sciences,” says Monica Joe, a Navajo (*Diné*) from Teec Nos Pos, Arizona. “GMSO can provide resources and new opportunities for each scholar to enhance their education and knowledge and to give back to society and the land they each come from, in their own unique ways,” she says.



Monica Joe, a Gates Scholar and co-chair of the recently formed Gates Millennium Scholars Organization at ASU

Monica Joe just received her Bachelor’s degree in Psychology and plans on working full-time for the next year in Phoenix to acquire work experience in her field, then return to ASU for her master’s degree, possibly in Public Policy or Social Work. “I feel it is imperative to my future,” she says.

Joe notes that she would like to give a

special thanks to the Graduate College at ASU for the support given to GMSO and thanks to the GMSO officers and Gates Scholars who put such hard work into their educational careers. “GMSO would also like to share our gratitude to the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) for their support and continuous help in keeping many scholars on their toes.”

The Gates Millennium Scholars Program is also planning a Leadership Academy on the ASU campus, in 2009, as part of its Leadership Development program. “The ASU Graduate College helps support non-traditional students by hosting programs such as the Leadership Academy and providing year-round activities designed to build a sense of community and provide tools and resources to be successful in graduate school,” says Andrew Webber, Associate Vice Provost of the Graduate College.

In addition to hosting meetings of the GMSO, the Graduate College also assisted in the launch of the Shades Multicultural Mentoring Program, which matches graduate and undergraduate students in all STEM areas



Jacqueline Wauneka (left) and Wynora Bekis each received a Doctorate of Education in Educational Administration and Supervision at the Spring 2008 ASU Commencement.

(Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in a peer-to-peer source of support and information on multicultural issues affecting Native American, African American, Asian American and other underrepresented groups.

Two unique programs provide an opportunity for American Indian teachers and administrators to receive their master’s and doctoral degrees from ASU, without leaving their homes or jobs on the Navajo reservation. Wynora Bekis, Jacqueline Wauneka and Janet Slowman Chee (all are Navajo *Diné*) received their Doctorate of Education in Educational Administration and Supervision in spring 2008 as part of the Native American Educational Leadership (NAEL) program, in which ASU faculty travel to Window Rock, Arizona, to provide coursework for teachers, administrators and higher education personnel to complete their doctoral degrees.

ASU professor, L. Dean Webb, in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) initiated and became director of the NAEL program. “To our knowledge this is the first and only doctoral program delivered entirely on a reservation — it is certainly the first and only one ever delivered to the Navajo nation,” says Dr. Webb. “ASU faculty make the 10-hour round trip drive from Tempe, Arizona to teach and their commitment is matched by students who sometimes drive for hours from New Mexico, Southern Utah and eastern and western Arizona to get to Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation. The program is entirely supported by student tuition and fees, the same as our Tempe-based Ed.D. program. Some students get tribal scholarships, but many get student



Photo by Laura Segall

ASU Presidential Advisor Peterson Zah places the ceremonial regalia around Dwayne Lopez during the American Indian Convocation in spring 2008. Lopez is from the Salt River, Pima, Maricopa Indian Community and received his Masters degree in Interdisciplinary Studies.

loans, so it is a real commitment on their part to get their advanced degrees.”

“I am the first in my family, both maternal and paternal, to receive a doctorate,” says Dr. Wauneka, who is a principal at Tuba City High School. “My goal is to continue to be a Principal and to one day be a Superintendent. I want to improve the quality of education on the Navajo reservation. We can no longer accept high dropout rates, illiteracy, students failing AIMS, and so on. We have much to offer our Navajo students. We need to set high standards and reach those standards.”

Of the 31 students who are enrolled in the doctoral program, 24 are Navajo and 26 of the students are women. Six graduated in May 2008.

Also graduating this spring from ASU were 17 Navajo teachers with master’s degrees in Education Administration. The Navajo School Administrators Preparation Program (NASPP), funded by a US Department of Education grant, prepares administrators for Navajo schools through a collaboration between ASU and Diné College. The program infuses Diné content, and courses are taught on or near the Diné College campus in Tsailé, Arizona. ASU faculty who are Navajo themselves, or familiar with Navajo content, teach the courses.

An on-campus source of support is the Native American Achievement Program (NAAP), a partnership between ASU and the Navajo Nation, San Carlos Apache Tribe and the White Mountain Apache Tribe to provide academic support to ASU students, often with financial assistance from their tribe. “Students who receive a schol-

arship from the Tribe/Nation are automatically on the NAAP, thus required to complete a set of activities aimed at student success,” says Michael Begaye (Navajo-Diné), NAAP Director.

Other organizations at Arizona State University that promote and support the academic success of American Indian students include the Native American Summer Institute (NASI), Indian Legal Program (ILP), American Indian Students United for Nursing (ASUN), and the American Indian Studies Program (AIS). ♦

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Useful Links

ASU: <http://www.asu.edu>

ASU Graduate College: <http://graduate.asu.edu>

ASU Presidential Advisor Dr. Peterson Zah:
<http://www.asu.edu/president/zah>

ASU Native American Achievement Program (NAAP):
<http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/mss/msc/naap.htm>

Navajo School Administrators Preparation Program (NSAPP): <http://cdte.dinecollege.edu/nsapp/usdepted.htm>

Financial Education

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of teens understood how to use a credit card, only 26% understood how credit card interest and fees work. Also, 51% of teens agree that it is easier to buy things with a credit card than cash. Unfortunately, this mindset often leads to irresponsible money management. About 60% of Americans fail to pay off their credit cards every month. The average American now carries more than \$5,000 in credit card debt. Overall credit card debt has soared more than 300% since 1990.

These financial challenges are a direct result of a lack of financial education. With the slowing economy and the rising costs of gas and groceries, it is crucial that our youth gain the financial literacy they need to be better prepared to make informed choices. Smart money and spending habits are tools that our youth should adopt and continue to use throughout their adult lives. ♦