

Written Testimony  
of  
Diné College Interim President  
Dr. Martín Miguel Ahumada

Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
Hearing on S. 2564 Diné College Act of 2016

April 13, 2016

**Introduction**

Good afternoon Chairman Barrasso, Vice Chairman Tester, and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to me to testify on the *Diné College Act of 2016*. This unique piece of legislation on Indian higher education is rooted in the historic Treaty of 1868 between the United States of America and the Navajo Indian Tribe which provided funding for the education of the citizens of the Navajo Nation. The far-reaching purpose of the *Diné College Act of 2016* is to honor the federal government's treaty obligations by ensuring that the Navajo Nation and its people have the right to self-determination; can maintain and strengthen distinct institutions of higher education that teach Navajo language, culture, traditions, and history; and can improve the economic and social conditions of the Navajo Nation and its people through higher education.

My name is Dr. Martín Miguel Ahumada. I have had the privilege of serving as the Interim President of Diné College since October 2015. I find it a special honor to have this chance to address the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs regarding the *Diné College Act of 2016* to benefit the very first tribal institution of higher learning established in the United States. This landmark institution is widely embraced—and vitally needed—as a role model for other Indigenous collegiate institutions across the United States and in other countries of the world. It is an honor to champion the *Diné College Act of 2016* which hopefully can open doors and positively impact similar indigenous institutions.

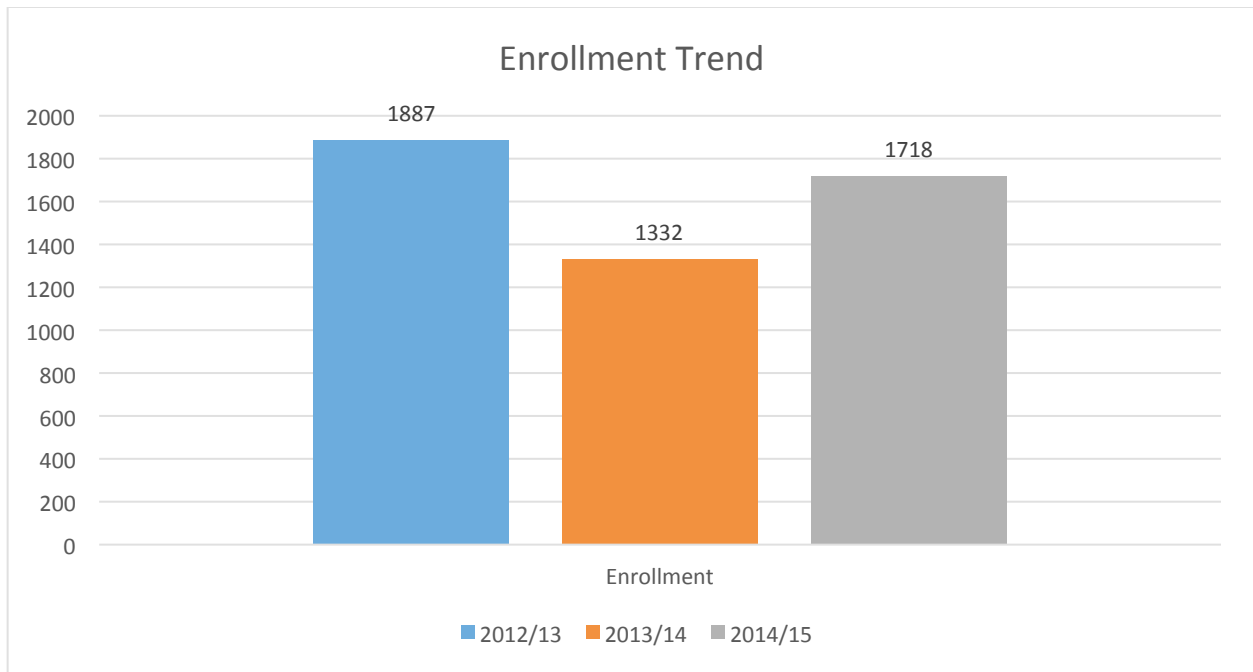
In my career in higher education, which spans more than 35 years, I have worked with university and higher education ministries in different countries, with premier national and state commissions of higher education in the United States, with leading public and private universities, and with several U.S. federal agencies.

On behalf of all the citizens of the Navajo Nation—and to honor our federal government's historic 1868 treaty with the Navajo People—I ask for your unwavering support for the *Diné College Act of 2016*. I applaud Senator Flake's sponsorship of

Senate Bill 2564, which will modernize prior legislation for Diné College by providing (1) annual funding for the ongoing “operation and maintenance” of Diné College; (2) construction grants to Diné College in the amount of \$2,000,000 for each fiscal year from 2017 through 2020; and (3) direct the Secretary of the Interior to submit to the appropriate Congressional committees a report on the results of a detailed survey and study of all capital projects and facility needs of Diné College.

### Significance of the Diné College Act of 2016

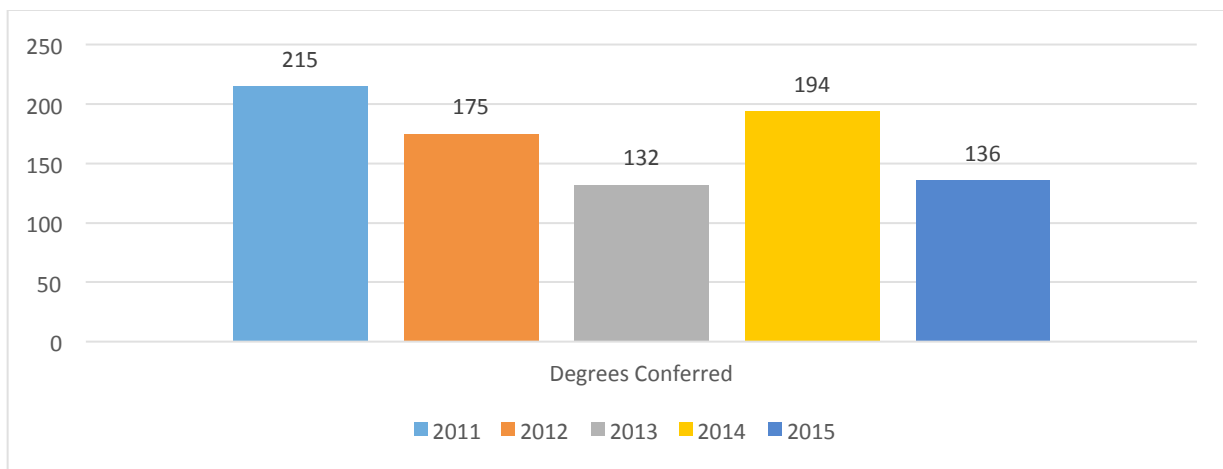
The *Diné College Act of 2016* will enable this landmark institution to continue providing outstanding higher education services to the Navajo people—and to continue serving as a model and mentor for Indigenous institutions of higher education throughout the United States and in other countries. As the first tribally-controlled and accredited collegiate institution in the United States, Diné College serves a predominantly Navajo student population across the 26,000 square miles of the Navajo Nation—spanning the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Our main campus is located in Tsaile, Arizona, a branch campus in Shiprock, New Mexico, and four regional sites located in both of these states. For many students living on the Navajo Nation exploring post secondary opportunities, Diné College is the closest and most affordable option. It is not uncommon for our students to drive 50 miles each way to attend classes. Despite the long distances, our enrollment numbers are increasing. Last academic year (AY14-15), our enrollment reached over 1,700 students and it is anticipated that next year’s enrollment will near the 1,900 as we experienced three years ago (AY12-13). Below is a three-year enrollment trend chart.



Diné College was featured in the 2015's Best and Worst Community Colleges, an online study by WalletHub, <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-worst-community-colleges/15076/>. WalletHub compared 670 community college institutions across the nation in four key measurements that includes Cost and Finance, Classroom Experience, Education Outcomes, and Career Outcomes. Diné College ranked number one in the Cost and Finance area among the community colleges in the United States for providing \$55.00 per credit hour, the lowest per credit hour tuition making Diné College an affordable choice. In the Career Outcomes, Diné College also ranked number one for graduating students with great jobs and leaving without student debt. Diné College, like most tribal colleges and universities, provides tribal members with a feasible opportunity for a meaningful, well paying career.

Diné College offers General Education courses that provide students with a high-quality experience while earning Certificate as well as Associate and Bachelor degrees. Diné College has been strengthening its first two Bachelor of Arts programs, the first of which is in Business Administration and prepares students for positions in Tribal Management and Economic Development. The other program is in Elementary Education and prepares teachers who can develop Navajo Children's academic skills and cultural identities in both English and Navajo.

Diné College is in the midst of establishing new bachelor's degree programs in Biology, Psychology, Secondary Math Education, and Secondary Science Education. It is also laying the groundwork for both a bachelor's degree program—and ultimately a master's degree program—in the increasingly important field of Indigenous Public Health.



Equally important, Diné College is designing and implementing multiple nation-building initiatives with an eye on creating new businesses and jobs in areas central to the Navajo way of life, including farming, livestock, natural resources, and the arts. By molding our institution to needs of the Navajo Nation, several unique programs have been created such as the Diné Environmental Institute, the Diné Policy Institute, the

Diné College Dual Credit Program, the Diné College Radio Station (KXWR 92.1 FM), and the Navajo Language Academy, just to name a few.

Diné College not only prepares students for the workforce but also generates solid career opportunities in academia. Diné College employs over 300 qualified personnel who genuinely care about the success of our Navajo students. The faculty and staff of Diné College have established an environment of encouragement and growth at Dine College.

## Recommendations

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, in order to advance the work the work of the Navajo Nation through Dine College, we request your support of the *Diné College Act of 2016* to modernize all prior federal legislation relating to Diné College.

We recommend that: (1) funding be authorized and appropriated to meet Diné College's annual resource requirements for basic "operations and maintenance," (2) construction grants be approved for Diné College in the amount of \$2,000,000 for each fiscal year from 2017 through 2020 (3) a directive be given to the Secretary of the Interior to submit to the appropriate committee of Congress a report on the results of a detailed survey and study of all capital projects and facility needs of Diné College; and (4) adequate funding is provided to the Secretary of the Interior to conduct the detailed survey and study of all capital projects and facility needs of Diné College.

To date, funding for the construction grants and facilities study have never been appropriated.

Prerequisite inventories were submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs by Diné College in 1979, 1988, and 1996, but no action was taken. Subsequent to April 2014, the College held several meetings with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, wherein consensus was achieved on the vital need to initiate a facilities study. Diné College maintains over 580,000 square feet of building space across six different academic sites.

Collectively, tribal leaders and members of Congress of the past four decades recognized the significance and important of a higher education institution within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation. With the anticipated increase in future enrollment, we can no longer wait to update and enhance Diné College.

In closing, I urge your support of the *Dine College of 2016 Act*. With the passage of the Dine College Act of 2016, we will be enabled to continue fulfilling the noble goal of continuously improving our programs and services to make Diné College an exemplary

higher education institution for the Diné People. We urge Congress to take this step forward to help fulfill the goals of the Treaty of 1868, and use this step forward as a model for other indigenous institutions.