

Neuroscience and the Navajo Nation

By: Cheyenne Grabiec



URBRAIN TEAM

Left to Right: Kathleen Rodgers, Ph.D., PI, Frederick Boyd, Ph.D., Co-PI, and Kaitlyn Haskie, MS, Project Manager

Located in the center of the Navajo Nation, Diné College is a tribal college with curriculum rooted in the Diné language and culture. Their mission is to advance quality post-secondary learning and development to ensure the well-being of the Diné people.

Recently, Diné College and the University of Arizona have collaborated to create the URBRAIN (Undergraduate Readying for Burgeoning Research for American Indian Neuroscientists) program. The URBRAIN program was created to give Navajo students the opportunity to advance their education

from Diné College to graduate programs in neuroscience at top-tier research universities. Through the program students will develop neuroscience literacy, be provided with professional development opportunities, and gain a sense of belonging within the academic community.

While some may ask, “What does neuroscience have to do with the Navajo Nation?”, the URBRAIN program understands the importance of neuroscience to the Navajo people. More than one third of the most prevalent diseases in Native American communities are neurological. However, the diagnoses, treatments, and study of neurological diseases are complicated. Many communities, including the Navajo Nation, lack adequate access to care and understanding of cultural norms.

By giving Navajo students the opportunity to further their education in the field of neuroscience in a culturally appropriate manner, the program is giving students the ability to serve their communities and answer community questions about neurological diseases that exist on the Navajo Nation. It is important that the research students engage in is important and relevant to themselves and their community.

The URBRAIN program is also working with Diné College faculty to improve student instruction, enhance career progression, and increase research output. The program is also working to help expand Dine College’s research infrastructure and develop fundamental laboratory research skills.



Corn Stock Statue at Diné College



For more information visit:
<https://www.dinecollege.edu/academics/ur-brain/>

Contact:
Kathleen Rodgers, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
krodgers@email.arizona.edu