



Jordan Jimmie, Undergraduate Diné

Hometown: Flagstaff, Ariz.

Interviewed and photographed by Amanda Bahe

Jimmie is a senior at the UA studying environmental hydrology and water resources and has a minor in American Indian studies. He is a member of the Leupp chapter on the Navajo Nation and graduated from Sinagua High School in Flagstaff. Jimmie has used his time as an undergraduate student to gain hands-on research experience and is an active member of numerous student organizations. He has had summer internships at the UA and the University of Texas-Austin, where his research focused on identifying stable isotopes in different layers of sediment that correspond with a time deep in the past.

Sediment:
material that is moved by environmental processes and settles in a new location

Q: How did you become interested in hydrology?

I was always interested in environmental sciences and was always fascinated by water. Flagstaff is exposed to all four seasons. There's snow on the peaks. That snow melts, runs off, it goes into Oak Creek Canyon. I went camping with my friends by a reservoir that feeds into Oak Creek once. I sat on this dead tree across the tributary and watched the snow melt. I saw this little stream turn into a massive river in the span of a couple hours. Right then and there I was like, "I like water. I want to study it, I want to understand it." The force of Mother Nature really astounded me at that time and I could've sat there all day.

Q: How is your field of study important to your community?

Water is life. It's so important yet people don't know. Our culture today is so out of tune with where our stuff comes from. We don't know where our water comes from. Traditionally, we were always taught to never waste. It's unique that we have this Native perspective and cultural ties to conservation, to stewardship to the land and our environment – having a balance between us and our impact on Mother Nature. Water issues are going to affect Native nations that happen to land on watersheds, so having people that are knowledgeable, able to advocate and can back it up with the science, is important. We've got to be smart, to make sound decisions with an educated background. The younger people that are going off to college now, we're going to demand answers that have scientific background and evidence. We're the generation to go

back and actually question – we're not old enough to do that yet – but it's going to happen.

Q: How do you want to use your degree?

I want to do whatever I can. I could be a hydrologist or go to law school. I want to help Native nations, not only the Navajo nation, because water is becoming such a big issue. People are going to be looking to Native nations with water rights as a water source. I want to be there in any capacity that I can.

Q: Would you like to work for the Navajo Nation?

I would love to go back if there are jobs.

Q: What are your goals – what do you hope to accomplish?

I want to start a hydrology program at tribal college. It would be cool to teach. I always joke about this with

my friends, but it would be cool to have a scholarship named after me. Have a family. I want to be happy. And this is just me, but I want to serve God in any way that I can. He's the reason why I'm here. He's the reason why I'm in school, why I'm funded, why I wake up every day. So, I feel like He's put it in my heart to give back in any way I can and it all goes back to how my education can make a change.

Q: What are some things that you are doing to prepare for grad school or a career?

I've had three summers worth of experience – one summer at UA Cancer Center, one at the University of Texas at Austin, and most recently at the UA Native American Research and Training Center where I worked on a community garden. I was president of AISES last year so gaining that leadership skill, that experience, was invaluable. It definitely put me outside my comfort zone and that's how I feel graduate school is going to be. You're not going to be comfortable. You're going to be pushed every single day. You can't slack off. You have to want it. I got involved with things that are not academic, like a running club for a few semesters, which helped me learn to balance my life in terms of physical and mental health. Volunteering in any way I can, building relationships with faculty members or professors. My college holds an annual conference, and I've submitted an **abstract** and it's been accepted every year, so I've been able to present there. I feel it's good that they know that I'm there.

Abstract:
a summary
of a
research
project

You know, this Native kid is doing it as well. Having that presence is definitely good especially in a

program that has predominantly white students.

Q: Would you encourage students to partake in an internship experience?

Yeah! There's so much incentive – a stipend, GRE prep. You get a lot

of tangibles, but you also get to go somewhere else and do cool things. That's what a mentor told me. You get to do that cutting edge stuff you would've never thought of. I would highly encourage somebody to just apply. I got rejected to eight programs before getting accepted to one. Just take a chance! You never know what you're going to get out of it and that's the beautiful thing about it. You're going to go away the person that you are, but you're going to come back improved. You're going to be a better student. You get to go away for a while, be independent, and take ownership of your work. Something that I worked so hard on meant so much more to me.

Q: What are some things that you have struggled with?

Learning to network. I think that's something that I've really struggled with - being shy and not wanting to draw attention to myself is something that I definitely had to work on.

Q: What does a typical day in the life of Jordan Jimmie look like?

When I wake up, I think about what I need to do that day. I always make sure to pack my lunch. Plan for the bus. Get ready, get to campus. I always make sure I get coffee. I cannot do anything without coffee! I refuse to. I make sure I go to class, and then after that I prioritize what I need to do that day, like what's due that day or what's due that week. I always check my email. Right after class I go straight over to the library for a couple of hours. I make sure to go to the student recreation center. After that, I either kick it with some friends or go home, and I always cook.

Q: How are you giving back to future generations of students?

I think a lot about my younger brother and creating that pipeline to get students to college. Encouraging them is really impactful. The fact that [others have done it], opens doors

to a student. As Natives, we're at a disadvantage at a university, but [other students] went [before me] and that's boss! So why not me? Why can't I do that? Changing that perspective and saying if somebody can do that, then I can. That's what I hope I'm doing, at least with my little brother and younger people.

Q: What advice do you have to give to Native American youth?

I would say just do it. I remember that I wanted to put off taking physics but then I said to myself, "Jordan, just do it!" Don't be scared! You're just as capable as anyone else. If you're able to get to the UA, you have every right to be in the classroom just like any other student. It just depends on what you're going to make of it. I would say find your passion because it adds so much encouragement. It lights a fire in your heart and your mind to say, "You know what, there's a bigger picture as to why I'm actually here." Tie it to your interests. If you want to study art because you have a passion for it, it doesn't have to be STEM.

It's going to be hard, I'm not going to lie, but just take it day to day. That's what I try to do. Think of the world as your playground. You have this opportunity in the palm of your hand to say I'm going to do the STEM degree. What if you don't do it? Would you want to live knowing that you never took that chance? And this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Many people that I started college with, they're not even here. I don't know what they're doing. They never went back so it seems as though once you leave, you're done. And at the same time, it can be taken away in the blink of an eye, so you have to work hard. But it all ties into if you're passionate about it. If you're passionate about something, it doesn't seem like work.

Ramos, pathways

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Q: How did you become interested in the sciences?

My mom was a big influence. When I was growing up, she worked for several tribal environmental programs so she would talk about the issues when she would come home. I mean, when your mom's talking about something, it seems important to you when you're a kid – and it is important. I watched her throughout my childhood and into high school as she finished her bachelor's degree. Watching her go through the process of college was a big influence, too.

At the school I got into, biology was one of the main science options. They didn't have emphases, such as wildlife or range management. So that was the major I chose. I just knew I wanted to go to grad school and that I wanted to do environmental work. During my undergrad, my tribe didn't have a wildlife program, so that's when I switched to wildlife for my master's. As I finished my master's, I knew I really wanted to include the cultural component and work with my community, and I thought, how can I do that?

Q: How are you giving back to future generations of students?

Recently, we had Maya Begay (see GIVING FORWARD inset on page 13) as a summer intern. I helped her with her poster and some of the lab work. We carved out a part of my research – including the traditional knowledge component – for her to conduct and to present on the poster. I also tutor at the on-campus Native American Student Affairs because I teach two lab sections for Biology 181 and I have to know the material for that class, which makes me feel more able to help. I have one or two students whom I see regularly.

A couple of years ago, I received a NASA Space Grant, and the whole goal is to do community outreach with science, so I worked [in Tucson] with students at Ha:šañ Preparatory and Leadership School and back home at a similar charter school for Native students called Klamath River Early College (KRECR). I taught students about spatial technology. At KRECR, students used GPS units to find fake scats made out of clay. Then, they uploaded the locations into an online geographic information system and created maps with their data.

Q: Would you like to return to your hometown or work

Seafha Ramos, PhD candidate at the UA // Photo by Amanda Bahe

for your Nation?

I do want to go back home. As far as jobs, I'm thinking either a federal agency or maybe teaching. I would really like to be closer to my community – that's a big goal. Someone told me a while back that I should go somewhere I can really make big changes, like Washington D.C., and I thought about it and that's just not for me, at least not at this time. I don't want to be all the way across the country from my community. I remember someone else saying that I would have some internal conflict about a lot of things because I'm going to be asked to do a lot of things and I just have to

choose what truly is in my heart or what feels right for me and my family.

Q: Who was your greatest influence?

For sure, my mom – both when I was younger and now. In high school, I had a couple of teachers who were really instrumental as well – one was my science teacher and the other was my math teacher. I really knew that they cared about me and my future and they did a lot of things to help me in my personal life, which is huge. I have professional mentors whom I go to now – one is my supervisor at the NPS. She's a really good professional mentor so I ask her a lot of questions about career moves or different things I should be thinking about. I have family and different people back home I ask about cultural things – you know, like going to the dances or going to community language classes.

Q: What advice do you have to give to Native American youth?

Volunteer opportunities and internship positions are there to help. Not only is it getting them experience in the field, but also allows them to be involved in the environment. If they have the opportunity, gathering traditional foods and basket materials are also great. I would also say to stay focused, positive, and determined.

Q: What are your goals – what do you hope to accomplish?

I've been thinking a lot, lately, about graduation. I'm on that last stretch right now of data analysis and writing, so when all the data are analyzed and I've written up and defended my dissertation, I can graduate! I feel that once I reach that milestone, I will be better able to contribute to the professional world as well as use my education to be a positive influence in any way I can.