

Who's Program Is It, Anyway?

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Abstract:

In 1989, the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department Student Training Program was established at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ. Navajo anthropology majors participate in CRM projects thereby acquiring training and experience in archaeological fieldwork, ethnographic methods, and laboratory procedures. Students and other staff face numerous challenges related to the program. Solutions vary with the different perspectives incorporated in our program: traditional or non-traditional Navajo students, Navajo or Anglo supervisors, Anglo or Navajo academics, and Navajo or Anglo CRM staff. Not all views can be accommodated and thus our program grapples with the issue of "Who's Program Is It, Anyway?"

The Navajo Nation Cultural Resource Management (CRM) program has been in existence since 1977 and for much of that time we were under the heavy thumb of the BIA. In the early 1990s, however, a 638 contract was finally signed. This contract authorized the Navajo Nation to conduct all of what had formerly been the BIA archaeology functions including fieldwork, review, and compliance.

Today there are two main Navajo cultural preservation organizations. Established as a result of the 638 contract is the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department (HPD) with 9 sections including Compliance and Review, the Traditional Cultural Program, the Navajo Tribal museum, the Forestry program, Facilities Management (Historic buildings) program, the Chaco Protection program, the Branch of Roads, Chambers Sanders Trust Lands, and Glen Canyon Environmental Studies. HPD's main office is in Window Rock, Arizona, but there are various branch offices in Gallup, New Mexico, Flagstaff, Arizona, and Shiprock, New Mexico.

The other tribal cultural preservation office is the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department (NNAD); our main office is in Window Rock. We have a branch office in Farmington, New Mexico, run by Larry Vogler and I direct the Flagstaff, Arizona, NAU branch office. At these three offices, we have a total of about 90 part time and permanent employees, over half of whom are Navajo. The NNAD director, Tony Klesert, is Anglo;

our assistant director, Larry Benallie, is Navajo; and the directors of the Farmington and Flagstaff offices are Anglo.

By way of a brief background, I first started working for the NNAD Window Rock in 1987, at which time there was a Farmington office but no Flagstaff office. I noticed that while we kept telling Tribal officials that we performed training of our Navajo staff, we were doing more lip service than real training. Most of our Navajo staff at that time came to work for us with no college education at all (there are some notable exceptions). As I worked in the office I wondered how in the world NNAD could develop an effective and respected Tribal CRM program when the vast majority of Navajo staff had no more than high school educations and were being trained only as competent technicians, certainly not as supervisors capable of managing complex archaeological and ethnographic projects.

I discussed this situation at some length with a colleague at NAU, Shirley Powell, and we came up with the idea of an official Navajo student archaeology/ethnography training program that would be based at NAU and that I would run. Shirley took our idea to Dr. Robert Trotter, then Chair of the Anthropology department and Dr. Henry Hooper, then Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. When we had tentative signs of their approval, I went to

my boss Dr. Tony Klesert and presented him with my idea. Although initially skeptical, Tony soon became enthusiastic and has spearheaded many a fight on our behalf. So to abbreviate this little tale, we set up an office at the Bilby Research Center on the NAU campus in the summer of 1988, which consisted of one small office and an empty file cabinet. A decade later we have over 20 employees and far too many full file cabinets. But this story is not intended to be about office structure; it is about the students in the program.

So how did we get students? The program was set up for Navajo or other Native American students who were pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees in Anthropology at NAU. Well, at that time, there really weren't any in the department at NAU, so we allowed them to minor in anthropology. We received no funding for the program from the Tribe, so I had a delicate balancing act of trying to run a CRM program which consisted of just me, plus try to track down some Navajo students to recruit into our program (without having any funds available for recruiting), plus train them rapidly so I wouldn't feel totally unethical in billing for their time on projects.

From the inception of our program I realized that we had to take a long-term approach to training our students. We could not, nor could Tribal officials, expect that we would be filling archaeological positions with fully trained students from our program in just a few years. The academic career of a student from undergraduate, to Master's program, to Ph.D., is a minimum ten-year pursuit and we had to envision our program as a long-term commitment to producing qualified archaeologists. We have now been at NAU for just over 10 years and although I do not yet have a student in a Ph.D. program, we do have two students who are completing Masters programs this year and another who has just been accepted into the Masters Program.

We also finally got some funding from the Tribe. We had a returning student in our program, Eula Yazzie, who was a geography major and anthropology minor. Upon her graduation she was elected to a Tribal Office, she was a council delegate (analogous to our senators from the White Cone/Indian Wells Chapter), and she managed to get on the Budget and Finance Committee, one of the most powerful Tribal committees. With Eula's tireless lobbying on our behalf we were awarded Tribal General Funds for our program and were finally able to devote some energy to recruiting both on and off the Reservation at elementary

through community college levels. This allowed us to devote some time to real training of our students and set up a systematic program that would take them through all aspects of doing archaeology and ethnography.

Now, we have certainly encountered numerous problems in establishing and maintaining this program. Foremost is the poor opinion that most Native Americans hold of anthropology in general and archaeologists in particular. At the most general level, anthropologists on the Navajo Reservation and elsewhere have usually been extractive in their studies. We have extracted data, information, personal histories, artifacts, and samples of every kind from Navajo people for our professional advancement and given back virtually nothing to the communities other than fractured and distorted visions of Navajo history and society. There are of course some wonderful exceptions to this pattern, including people who have worked in medical anthropology and people who have worked on lands claims cases, but as a whole, anthropologists are considered a sub-species of humans in Navajo eyes.

To compound the difficulty, Navajos, as most anthropologists are aware, have an aversion to coming in to contact with objects associated with burials and certainly with skeletal remains. In my experience, this is where things begin to get complicated. Navajos have a word, *Jischáá'*. *Jischáá'* means any place or item associated with the burial of an individual. The Navajo Nation *Jischáá'* policy states "Dine' traditional and spiritual values shall be observed in dealing with *jischáá'*, human remains, and associated funerary items, burials, and/or the relocation and transfer of gravesites. All individuals involved in burial issues must be warned that handling human remains, direct exposure to *jischáá'*, or discussion of burial issues may affect their overall health in the immediate future or sometime during their lifetime... Individuals involved with burial issues will come into contact with the Navajo public after they have been in contact with *jischáá'* or human remains, and that contact may affect the health of other individuals... Pregnant women should not be involved in the handling, removal, or intimate discussion of *jischáá'*, human remains, or funerary items. Men whose wives are pregnant should also not be involved in such activities or discussions." Finally, the policy states, "Traditional Dine' avoid *jischáá'*. They do not talk about someone who has passed on, and they do not carelessly mention or discuss the subject. Interviewers need to be aware that interviewees may be extremely uncomfortable even talking about the topic, may not be

willing to visit the grave site, and should not be interviewed over and over regarding the same topic."

The above statements concisely represent Traditional Navajo views of burials – burials are of course associated with archaeological sites, and in general archaeological sites include the houses and objects of people who are no longer living. On some level everything that archaeologists do and touch is *jischáá'*. The ethnographic work associated with development projects generally centers on Traditional Cultural Places which may include offering places, springs, lightning struck trees, plant gathering areas, and gravesites. Because of NAGPRA, for every project whose effect is greater than 1 acre, we have to ask local inhabitants if there are any graves they know of that will be disturbed by the proposed development, and if so, how they would like us to deal with it. Given the above *jischáá'* statement, this is obviously a sensitive subject. So we see that not only the archaeological work, but also much of the ethnographic work that is conducted touches on very difficult and dangerous subjects.

From the anthropological/archaeological perspective we want to increase our knowledge of the past and of the people who formerly lived in these areas, therefore, we have developed a specialized field around this topic. We have persuaded the general populace and our lawmakers that this is a valid area of study and we now have laws protecting cultural resources. Because of these Federal Laws, prevailing dominant society opinion, Anglo influence, and a genuine desire to preserve traditional history, the Navajo Nation has enacted its own laws to protect cultural resources. Given the strong cultural values associated with *jischáá'*, however, it is easy to understand why our office is not overrun with students wanting to become anthropologists.

In regard to Darby's question of how our organization facilitates Tribal involvement in CRM, NNAD approaches this in a number of ways. We definitely feel a responsibility to increase Tribal awareness of what we do and increase Tribal involvement in CRM. Naturally, given the above discussion, many individuals are not interested in finding out more about what we do. Most traditional Navajos are clear on their history and the meaning of prehistoric sites in that history and are not interested in the Anglo scientific view of these remains. So we approach this issue in a variety of ways: we have worked with high school students on recording historic Navajo sites and Anasazi remains, we do popular

summaries for the local communities of our excavation and ethnographic projects, and endeavor to differentiate between traditional history and archaeological or ethnographic findings. We incorporate traditional history into reports and popular summaries by interviewing local residents and incorporating their views.

I don't mean to imply that Navajo resistance to anthropology and archaeology equates to a desire to see the sites destroyed – this could not be further from the truth. These sites (prehistoric and historic) have an important place in Navajo traditional history and should not be disturbed.

An anthropological background has made tremendous contributions to my work. Creating and coordinating a multi-ethnic, non-sexist office that deals with extremely sensitive issues is not easy. Our group of people includes male and female traditional Navajos; non-traditional Navajos; and occasional student workers from other tribes including Hopi, Apache, and Ho-Chunk tribes. We also have other employees from a wide variety of backgrounds and ethnicities. Our fieldwork is mostly conducted on the Navajo Reservation and we encounter the full spectrum of Navajo individuals everyday – from traditional elders who speak no English to the non-traditional heavy metal, teenage gang member. Our archaeological field crews conduct large excavations on the Reservation and those crews consist predominantly of local laborers.

In somehow keeping this juggling act in the air, I find that I use my anthropological background everyday. The most common problem that I see in the office and regularly need to mediate misunderstandings due to different cultural backgrounds. The easiest example is our staff meetings. The entire staff gets together and reports on the status of their projects and their plans for the next two weeks. Each person has a few minutes to present his or her news. Additionally, general office issues come up as a sort of free-for-all discussion, and what inevitably happens is that the Anglos dominate the conversation while the Navajo staff don't participate. I then get complaints, mostly from the Anglo staff, saying that they don't know what the Navajo staff want because they won't speak up. There are some very different styles of communication happening here. The Anglo style is to have a heated discussion where everyone interrupts everyone else and he or she who speaks the loudest gets his point heard. Navajos find this extremely rude and will wait until

they are given the opportunity to express their views. So, I try to structure the discussion in such a way that we can have a moment or two of quiet and then specifically ask Navajo individuals if they have anything they want to add. There are a million examples of this kind of cultural miscuing that happen everyday. After having worked on the Reservation for almost 20 years and worked as a Navajo Nation employee for over a decade, I feel that I am just beginning to have a sense of the degree of cultural differences.

These problems are not just restricted to Navajo-Anglo interactions by any means. Some of our students were not raised on the Reservation and some do not speak Navajo. Because of this they are discriminated against in the field by the local laborers who all speak Navajo. The non-Navajo speaking students are considered by the locals to be elitists who do not work as hard as they do. I encourage our students to take Navajo classes offered at NAU and work on ethnographic interviewing so they can be exposed to the Navajo language and take the opportunity to try to speak it, despite ridicule. I can only hope that with continued interaction these groups will begin to understand one another better and develop personal relationships.

Finally, with all of this as background to who we are, what we do, and how we try to do it, we get to the question that is posed in the title of this paper, *Who's program is it?* When I started the program a decade ago, I naively (or some might say stupidly) thought it would of course be the students' program. My abstract goal was just to train Navajo students in the practical aspects of archaeology so they could assume supervisory and administrative roles. I ultimately wanted the program to be run by a Navajo person, hopefully a graduate of our program. In order to accomplish this goal, we are continually training interested students. The coordinator of our program, Kerry Thompson, is a graduate of the program who received her B.A. in anthropology from NAU and has just been accepted into the Masters Program.

That aside, the anthropology department at NAU has its ideas of who we are and what we should be doing, the Navajo Nation politicians and administrators have their ideas of who we are and what we should be doing, and what little funding we do get does come from them. The former students/graduates of our

program have their ideas of what training should consist of and how it should be done. The current students Navajo, non-Navajo, traditional, and non-traditional have their wildly differing views of the program, what it should teach, and how it should be run. And then there are various employees of the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department (Navajo and Anglo) that have their views of the training program, what it should do, and how it should be run. None of these various camps have any hesitation in telling me how I can make things better. I do try to be somewhat receptive to what everyone has to say and try to somewhat objectively evaluate his or her comments. However, I really believe that the program should be a Navajo program, run by Navajos for Navajos. My role, as I see it, is to mentor folks in acquiring degrees and adequate training so they will be in a position to take over not only the student training program, but also all of NNAD and NNHPD; and if at that time they choose to totally change the way that anthropology and archaeology are done on the Reservation, that is their choice. To foster this goal as much as possible I consciously try to stay out of the day-to-day running of the student's training program. My conscious choice has been to try to get the students to make these decisions, so they feel they have a stake in the program, that it is their program. I don't usually tell them of my hidden agenda, and consequently, I get complaints that they want more guidance or I should be telling them what to do. It is much easier to be told what to do and be able to complain about it, than it is to have the responsibility for figuring out what you want to learn and have a stake in making sure you get what you want. I definitely believe that this latter approach is far better in the long run and people who have left the program and are working either in anthropology or other areas continue to re-affirm this belief.

This may all be moot, however, as the Tribe's decreasing revenues have meant a cut in our budget by a total of 50% over the last 5 years. Given these cuts, we are actively seeking outside funding sources. My final challenge in regard to the training program is to have our students in all the important Tribal CRM positions and to have one of our students get his/her Ph.D., and take over my job so I can retire.