



OFFICE OF NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

P.O. BOX 129 | ST. MICHAELS, NAVAJO NATION (AZ) 86511
PHONE: (928) 871-7436 | FAX: (928) 871-7437

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Navajo Technical University starts Navajo Language Translation Program in preparation for the 2020 Elections.

St. Michaels, Navajo Nation (ARIZ) – The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (“Commission”) in partnership with Navajo Technical University (“NTU”) and the Navajo Interpreters Association (“NIA”) collaborated in the development of a continuing education certificate program that focuses on Navajo language interpretation and translation of election terminology.

“The goal of this continuing education certificate program is to address the need for Navajo interpreters to be present, available, and expertly trained to meet the needs of the Navajo-speaking population for the upcoming 2020 election year, so that the Navajo people will be properly informed and represented when they cast their ballots. This program is borne out of the need for Navajo-speaking people to be counted and represented in their local, tribal, county, state and federal government’s elections. This continuing education certificate program has been designed in partnership with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, the Navajo Interpreters’ Association, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarships and Financial Aid, the Rural Utah Project, the Navajo Nation Bar Association and the Navajo Nation Department of Justice.” said Dana Desiderio, Navajo Technical University Adjunct Professor and Graduate Student of Diné Studies.

The need to ensure that Navajo voters receive consistent and uniformed voter information is central to increasing informed voter participation. NTU developed a curriculum on Navajo interpretation and translation for election, and voting terminology that is to start in January 2020. The program is certified and will allow for Navajo speakers to advance their Navajo language skills toward a more formalized platform that is similar to the Spanish, Vietnamese, Japanese and other world languages that are already in place at polling sites on Election Day across the United States.

Fluent Navajo speakers who are interested can apply for the Navajo language certificate program at NTU beginning today. Navajo individuals who speak, read and write the Navajo language are ideal candidates. The Navajo Nation Scholarship Office will provide scholarship assistance to those that qualify and enroll into the program.

Desiderio further states, “The program will focus on developing the technical skills necessary for a Navajo Interpreter to do consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, sight interpretation, and transcription and translation for Navajo-speaking voters. The program consists of five courses, each focused on the areas for proper preparation of election workers:

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principles and ethics of election procedures, introduction to election and voting terminologies, consecutive and simultaneous interpretation, site interpretation and translation, and a capstone course that will test each student's skill in context. Each student's progress toward successful completion of the program will be evaluated. Students must complete each course with a grade of B or higher and must score at least a B on the exit examination. The exit exam will be facilitated by the Navajo Interpreters' Association."

Prerequisite: Must be above average proficient in technical language in English and Navajo. Have good command of both languages, especially in the areas of terminology, legal terminologies, etc. Proficiency will be measured with an entrance interview consisting of 5 questions given in English and 5 questions given in Navajo by the Navajo Interpreters' Association. Successful interviewees will be admitted based on the strength of their answers.

With the successful completion of the exit exam, individuals may be hired as a Navajo translators and interpreters for 2020 elections and other special elections in their districts. "Fluency in the English language is the standard for non-Navajo election authorities. No government across the United States gives attention to effective Navajo language assistance until Navajo Nation entered settlement agreements with county state authorities. Standardizing interpretation in Navajo is not only thinking outside the voting rights box but also an initiative to preserve our Diné language." said Leonard Gorman, Executive Director of the Commission.

For more information on the certificate program contact: Dana Desiderio at d.m.nez@student.navajotech.edu or you can contact the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission at (928) 871-7436.

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