



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
INDIAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

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New Mexico Partners with Harvard University to Research and Address Behavioral Health and Sacred Sites Issues in Tribal Communities

Santa Fe – The New Mexico Indian Affairs Department has partnered with Harvard University to conduct research on both behavioral health and sacred sites issues impacting New Mexico’s Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos.

As a part of Harvard University’s [*Native Americans in the 21st Century: Nation-Building II*](#) course (Nation-Building II), the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department conducted two research projects with two graduate student teams. The teams represented participation from the university’s Harvard Divinity School, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health as well as Brandeis University’s The Heller School for Social Policy and Management and Suffolk University’s Sawyer Business School. The research team of Madison Esposito (Tyme Maidu Tribe), Kimberly Fabian, and Mia Fernandes (Mattakeeset Nation) focused on suicide prevention and postvention efforts in tribal communities through the lens of behavioral health workforce development. The second team of Dakotah Kennedy, Jimmy O’Leary, and John Wigle (Tuscarora Nation) examined the state’s existing legal framework to identify more effective ways to protect and manage tribal sacred sites and cultural resources.

Offered through Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School of Education, and the Kennedy School of Government, this community-based research course connects current graduate students with tribal clients to focus on major issues that Native Nations face in the 21st Century. The Nation-Building II course typically culminates in the

preparation and presentation of a comprehensive research paper based on research problem definition, client relationships, and on-site community-based investigation.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the teams fulfilled their community-based investigation, final presentation, and final report submission requirements virtually. Each project's final work product will help shape and direct the agency's work in these respective areas.

"The Indian Affairs Department is beyond pleased with the final work product that the Harvard students developed. Our intention is to now incorporate the findings into our work as we continue our efforts of advancing the well-being of our Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos. The department looks forward to continuing this partnership with Professor Henson and Harvard University," said IAD Cabinet Secretary Lynn Trujillo.

"Our students greatly enjoyed working with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, the 23 Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos, and other community partners," said Professor Eric Henson. "I received many positive comments regarding the process, and these projects were particularly called out by students for being engaging, challenging, and one of the best learning experiences available at the University."

In observance of the National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month of September 2020, the Indian Affairs Department will share the final research report "Bolstering the Behavioral Health Workforce: Supporting Suicide Prevention and Postvention in Indigenous Communities" on the [NM Indian Affairs Department](#) website. During this month, the department looks to raise awareness and share resources relating to suicide prevention in the state's tribal communities.

The New Mexico Indian Affairs Department sends a special thank you to our partner experts Teresa Gomez, Jennifer Nañez, Ann Rodgers, Aaron Sims, and Jeremy Oyenque; our state partners at the Department of Cultural Affairs – Historic Preservation Division and the Human Services Department – Behavioral Health Services Division; our tribal partners at the All Pueblo Council of Governors, First Nations Community HealthSource, Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department, the Pueblo of Acoma, and the Pueblo of Zuni; and Professor Henson and all our partners at Harvard University.

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