



Navajo Nation Appropriations For Scholarships Increase

**BY ROSE GRAHAM
DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR**

A college education remains the best investment a student can make in his or her future. However, college has never been more expensive. Through the years, we have reported that federal funds for scholarships are on a decline. As such, we have been working with Navajo Nation leaders to find additional revenue.

For the first time over the last five years, federal funding was nearly matched by funding from the Navajo Nation, trust funds and corporate contributions in 2014. Revenues from a portion of Navajo Nation sales taxes and set-asides from the Higher Education Grant Fund helped make this possible.

The amount of funding available for Navajo scholarships rose by 28 percent from 2013. Total funding in 2013 was \$14,869,748 and the total in 2014 was \$19,104,750.

The U.S. Dept. of Education recently reported that tuition at four-year colleges more than doubled over the past three decades.

In 2015, the maximum Pell Grant covers only about 30 percent of the cost of a four-year public college education. The rising cost of college may be one reason that the number of students apply-

ABOVE President Russell Begaye congratulates Amanda Tachine for being one of 11 women honored by the White House as a Champion of Change at a ceremony on Sept. 15. See story on page 16. *Courtesy photo*

ing to ONNSFA for scholarships and financial aid fell by 26 percent from 2013.

The ONNSFA submitted a proposal to the Navajo Nation Council to use a portion of the \$554 million Cobell settlement for scholarships to establish trust funds so that scholarship funds are available for future generations.

It is to the Navajo Nation's benefit to have an educated workforce. We need to ensure that prospective college students are not priced out of the education they need to set themselves up for future success.

College graduates with a bachelor's degree typically earn 66 percent more than those with only a high school diploma; and are also far less likely to face unemployment. An individual with a college degree will earn approximately \$1 million more in their lifetime than those without a degree.

Every qualified student deserves access to a college degree that allows them to put their talent to work. As such, we will continue to work with Navajo Nation and federal officials to increase scholarship opportunities.

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92 Students Earn the
Nation's Top Scholarship

**Apply online at:
www.onnsfa.org**

Chinle Agency Office
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Crownpoint Agency Office
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Ft. Defiance Agency Office
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Shiprock Agency Office
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Tuba City Agency Office
(866) 839-8151

Central Office
(928) 871-7444

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2014 Calendar Year Statistical Profile

Total Number of Applications	13,791	Enrollment Status of Recipients:	
		Undergraduate	89 percent
		Graduate	11 percent
Total Number of Students Requesting Awards: (Students are counted once whether they receive one or more awards during the calendar year.)	10,799	Gender of Recipients:	
		Female	63 percent
		Male	37 percent
Total Number of Awards: (All financial aid and scholarship awards made by ONNSFA during the calendar year are included in the total. In some instances, a student may have received two awards – one for the Spring term and another for the Fall term. Each award is counted independently.)	7,946	Number of Awards by Funding Source:	
		Federal	4,141
		Navajo Nation, Trust and Corporate	3,805
		Total Awards By Funding Source:	
		Federal	\$ 9,821,301
		Navajo Nation, Trust and Corporate	9,283,449
		Grand Total	\$ 19,104,750
Total Number of Students Receiving Awards: (Students are counted once whether they receive one or more awards during the calendar year.)	6,035	Total Federal Fund Awards to:	
		Need-Based Students	\$ 5,485,126
		Chief Manuelito Scholars	4,336,175
		Grand Total	\$ 9,821,301
Percentage of Students Funded in 2014 Calendar Year: (The total number of students awarded from the total number of students that applied. Applicants are counted once.)	60 percent	Chief Manuelito Awards:	
		Total Number of Student Awards	1,717
		Total Number of Students Awarded	1,256
		Total Expended From All Sources	\$ 5,799,171
		Percentage Expended From All Sources	30 percent

Types of Student Funding

Financial Need-Based Awards (up to \$2,000 per semester)

Need-based funding is provided to students who demonstrate financial need according to the Financial Need Analysis (FNA) form submitted on their behalf by the school of attendance. Students in this category are deemed not to have sufficient personal or family resources to meet a college's or university's cost of attendance (e.g. tuition, books and housing). Awards of up to \$2,000 per semester or \$4,000 per academic year are provided to students based upon their individual need assessment. Primary funding sources of need-based awards are PL 93-638 funds and Navajo Nation Funds.

No-Need-Based Awards (\$500 per semester)

No-need-based funding is provided to students, who are deemed to have enough resources to meet the cost of attendance at a college or university of their choice.

Chief Manuelito Scholarships (\$3,500 per semester)

Merit-based scholarships are provided students, who achieve a high grade point average and a commensurate ACT or SAT college test score. Students are required to complete courses in Navajo Language (1 unit) and Navajo Government (½ unit) prior to the application deadline to be considered for this scholarship. Full-time

undergraduate students may also qualify for the Chief Manuelito scholarship under the 24/3 rule by completing 24 credit hours of college-level courses with a 3.0 GPA.

Graduate Student Awards (\$2,500 to \$5,000 per semester)

Grant awards are provided to Navajo students seeking graduate-level degrees.

Part-Time Undergraduate and Graduate Awards

Funding is available for eligible part-time undergraduate and graduate students. Part-time application requirements and award amounts vary.

Background and Operating Highlights



Background

The Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance (ONNSFA) was established in 1972. The ONNSFA provides scholarship and financial assistance to enrolled members of the Navajo Nation attending accredited institutions of higher education or accredited vocational training schools. The ONNSFA also provides financial aid services using supplemental funding from several sources including the Navajo Nation, corporate contributions and trust fund revenues

Agency Offices

The ONNSFA has five agency offices across the Navajo Nation including: Chinle, Ariz., Crownpoint, N.M, Window Rock, Ariz., Shiprock, N.M., and Tuba City, Ariz.

ONNSFA Website - www.onnsfa.org

Information about ONNSFA policies, downloadable forms and a link to the online application process may be found at www.onnsfa.org. Students are encouraged to create an account, a username and password and apply online. Applicants with online accounts are able to check the status of their application, the documents received by the ONNSFA and the decision rendered on their application.

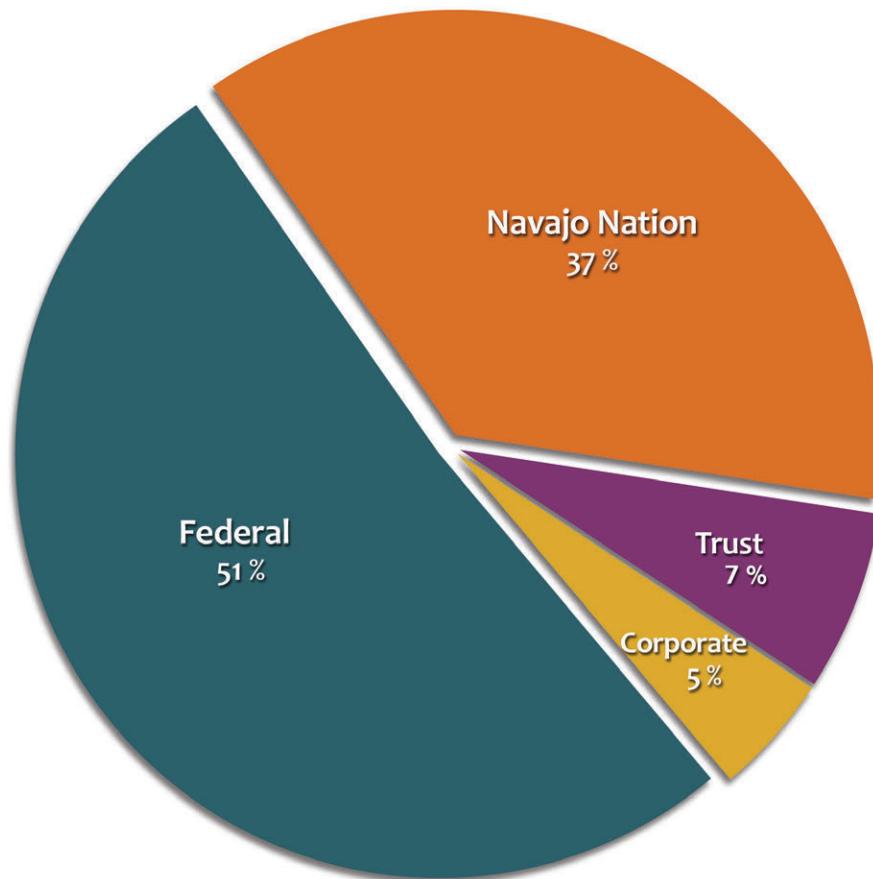
Operating Highlights

ONNSFA disbursed \$19,104,750 to 6,035 students at more than 500 schools throughout the country in Calendar Year 2014. Based on 2010 Census data, the population of the Navajo Nation is 173,667 and of those 115,823 are age 18 and over. In 2014, there were a total of 10,799 ONNSFA applicants which amounts to only 6 percent of the entire population of the Navajo Nation.

ABOVE A total of 92 graduating seniors earned the merit-based Chief Manuelito Scholarship in 2014. Scholars present at the award ceremony held on July 25, 2014, in Piñon, Ariz., are featured in the group photo. *Photo by Don James*

Acceptance Ratio of ONNSFA recipients: (students awarded to number of applicants)	6:4
Denial Ratio of ONNSFA recipients:	44 percent
Awarded Students to Denied Ratio:	56 percent
Total Denials:	4,764
Total Funding to Undergraduate Students:	\$ 14,827,649
Total Funding to Graduate Students:	\$ 4,277,101
Average Undergraduate Student Award:	\$ 2,759
Average Graduate Student Award:	\$ 6,480
Number of Undergraduate Students:	5,375
Number of Graduate Students:	660
Class Level of Recipients:	
Freshman	1,988
Sophomore	1,688
Junior	865
Senior	832
Master Candidate	454
Doctoral Candidate	195
Post Bachelor Certificate	5
Post Master Certificate	8

Funding Sources



2014 Calendar Year

Federal Funds:	\$ 9,821,301
General Funds:	7,089,880
Trust Funds:	1,312,648
Corporate Funds:	880,921
Total :	\$ 19,104,750

Calendar Year 2014

Total Awarded: \$19,104,750
Number of Awards: 7,946

From January 1 to December 31, 2014, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance awarded a total of \$19,104,750 in scholarships and financial aid. The total number of students who received awards from the four funding sources equated to 6,035. The total number of awards made from all funding sources amounted to 7,946. The pie chart above illustrates the proportion of each funding source to the total amount administered by the ONNSFA.

Federal Funds (BIA P.L. 93-638)

Total: \$9,821,301
Number of Awards: 4,141

Federal funds, provided through a P.L. 93-638 contract with the Navajo Region Bureau of Indian Affairs, comprised about 51 percent of the funds awarded by the Navajo Scholarship Office. Federal funds are used to award

undergraduate students with financial need as determined by the student's Financial Need Analysis and also for merit-based awards to Chief Manuelito Scholars.

Navajo Nation General Fund

Total: \$7,089,880
Number of Awards: 2,728

Navajo Nation General Funds comprised about 37 percent of scholarship funds. These funds are used to provide awards to graduate students, undergraduates and students enrolled in the Navajo Teacher Education program.

Trust Funds

Total: \$1,312,648
Number of Awards: 380

Interest revenue from trust funds comprised about 7 percent of funds awarded by ONNSFA in 2014. Policies for trust funds including the Graduate Trust Fund, the Navajo Engineering & Construction Authority Trust Fund, the Voca-

tional Education Trust Fund and Tucson Electric Funds stipulate that "10% of the fund [market value] shall be used as scholarship and financial assistance." Interest revenue from these sources fluctuate from year-to-year based upon market value.

Corporate Funds

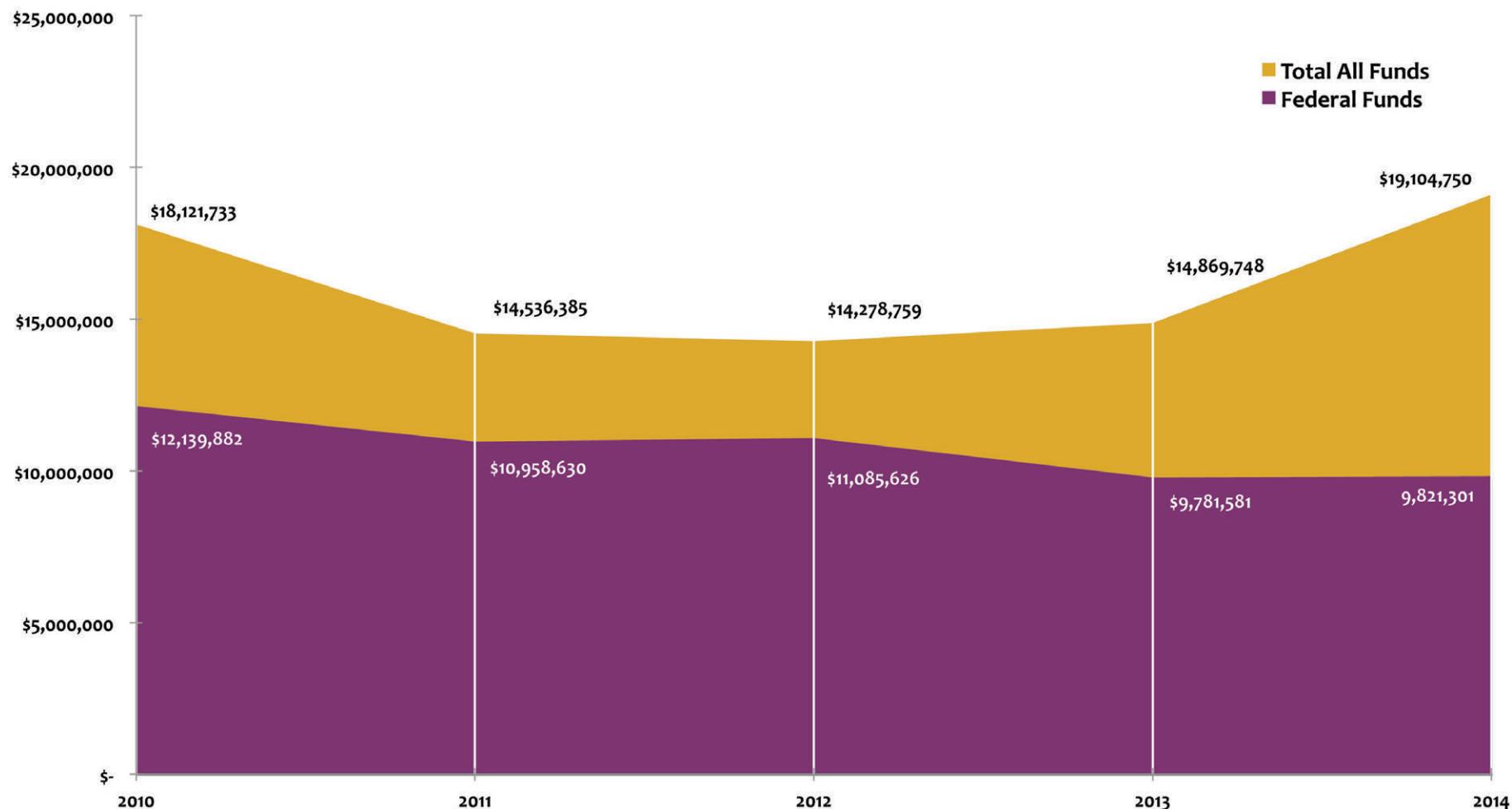
Total: \$880,921
Number of Awards: 697

Contributions from corporations comprised about 5 percent of the total funds awarded by ONNSFA in 2014. Leases with companies including Peabody Energy, Chevron Mining, Inc., Four Corners Power Plant (APS) and El Paso Natural Gas include a provision that companies make a contribution to the scholarship fund.

Note: The total number of students awarded from all funding sources (6,035) differs from the total number of awards (7,946). This is due to the fact that students may have received awards from a combination of funding sources and are counted in each source.

2010-2014 Overview

ONNSFA Funding



Since 1983, the Navajo Nation has administered its own scholarship program through a P.L. 93-638 contract. Federal funds for scholarships are supplemented with Navajo general funds, interest from established trust funds and corporate contributions.

For the first time over the last five years, federal funding was nearly matched by funding from the Navajo Nation, trust funds and corporate contributions. Revenues from a portion of Navajo Nation sales taxes and set-asides from the Higher Education Grant Fund helped make this possible.

We are grateful to Sharon Pinto, regional director of the BIA's Navajo Regional Office, for her efforts to provide additional federal funding by transferring unused funds within the BIA budget to the Navajo Nation for scholarships.

The ONNSFA is well aware that the demand for scholarships will continue to grow as the population of the Navajo Nation increases. In testimony provided during hearings regarding the

Year	Federal Funds	Total Funding	% Change (Total Funding)
2010	\$12,139,882	\$18,121,733	-
2011	\$10,958,630	\$14,536,385	-20 percent
2012	\$11,085,626	\$14,278,759	-2 percent
2013	\$ 9,781,581	\$14,869,748	+4 percent
2014	\$ 9,821,301	\$19,104,750	+28 percent

use of \$554 million settlement award to the Navajo Nation, the ONNSFA requested \$25 million for several initiatives including the establishment of a student loan program, additional trust funds and a fundraising office.

Proceeds from the \$554 million settlement award provide a tremendous opportunity to effect positive change with the proceeds from the award. We are hopeful that recommendations set forth by the ONNSFA will be given favorable consideration.

Summary of Awards by Funding Source

Federal Funds	Number of Awards	Total Award Amount
Chief Manuelito Scholarships	1,293	\$4,336,175
Need-Based	2,848	5,485,126
Total	4,141	\$9,821,301

Navajo Nation General Funds	Number of Awards	Total Award Amount
Chief Manuelito Scholarships	110	\$ 385,000
Graduate	504	2,225,774
Need-Based	331	543,171
Teacher Education	129	429,503
Vocational	573	1,027,182
Sales Tax Revenue	1,081	2,479,250
Total	2,728	\$7,089,880

Corporate Funds	Number of Awards	Total Award Amount
Chevron Mining Inc.	374	\$276,585
El Paso Natural Gas	15	73,000
Four Corners Power Plant	145	87,250
Navajo Nation Oil & Gas	5	25,000
Peabody Energy	135	318,571
Sussman	23	100,515
Total	697	\$880,921

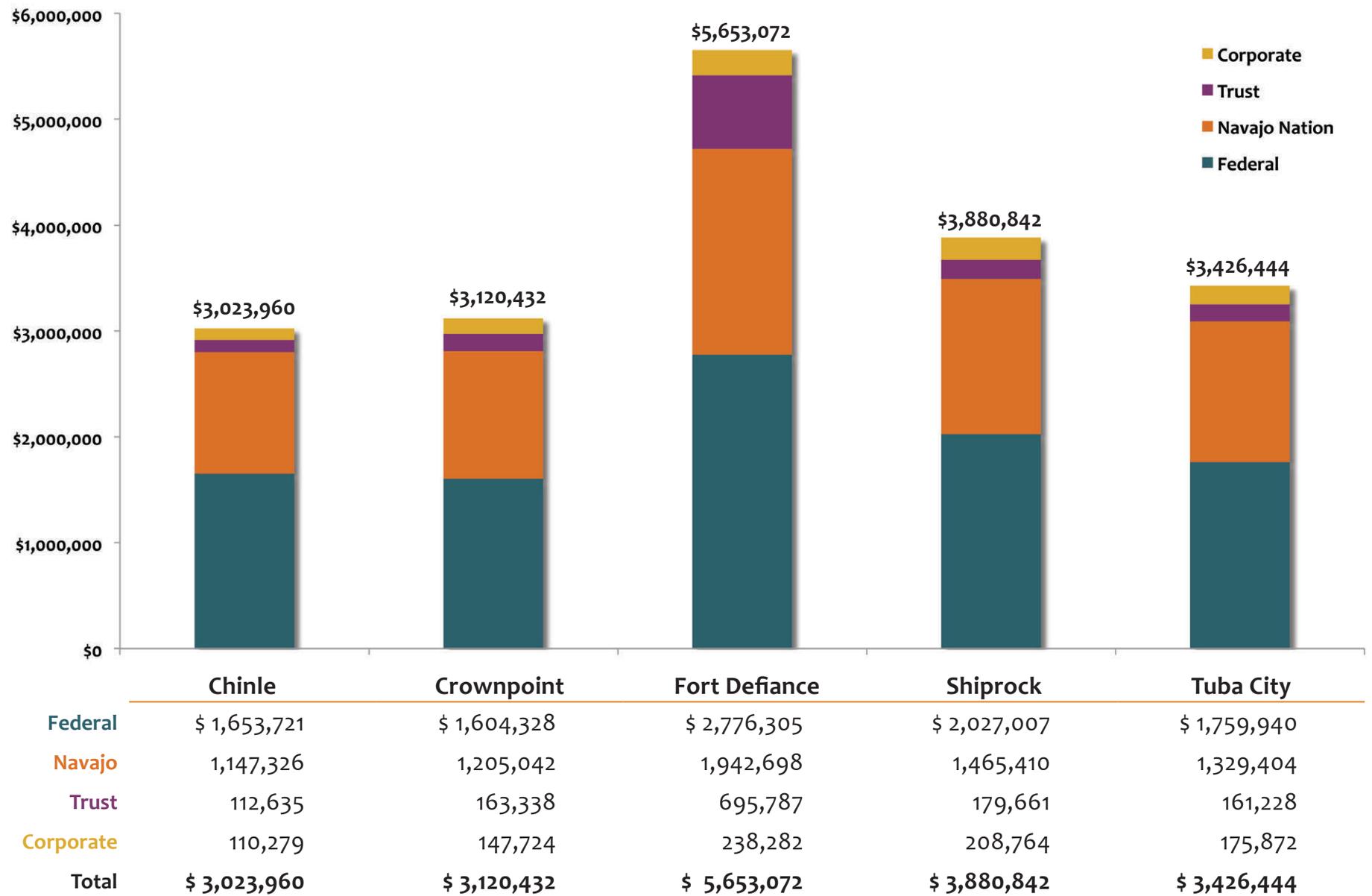
Trust Funds	Number of Awards	Total Award Amount
Graduate Trust	95	\$663,620
Navajo Engineering & Construction Authority	102	368,918
Tucson Electric	20	27,237
Vocational	163	252,873
Total	380	\$1,312,648

Total - All Sources	7,946	\$19,104,750
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Note: The total number of students served and the total number of awards differ as a student may have received an award from more than one funding source and are counted in each funding source.

Funding Activity by Agency

Total Amount of Funds Expended - \$19,104,750

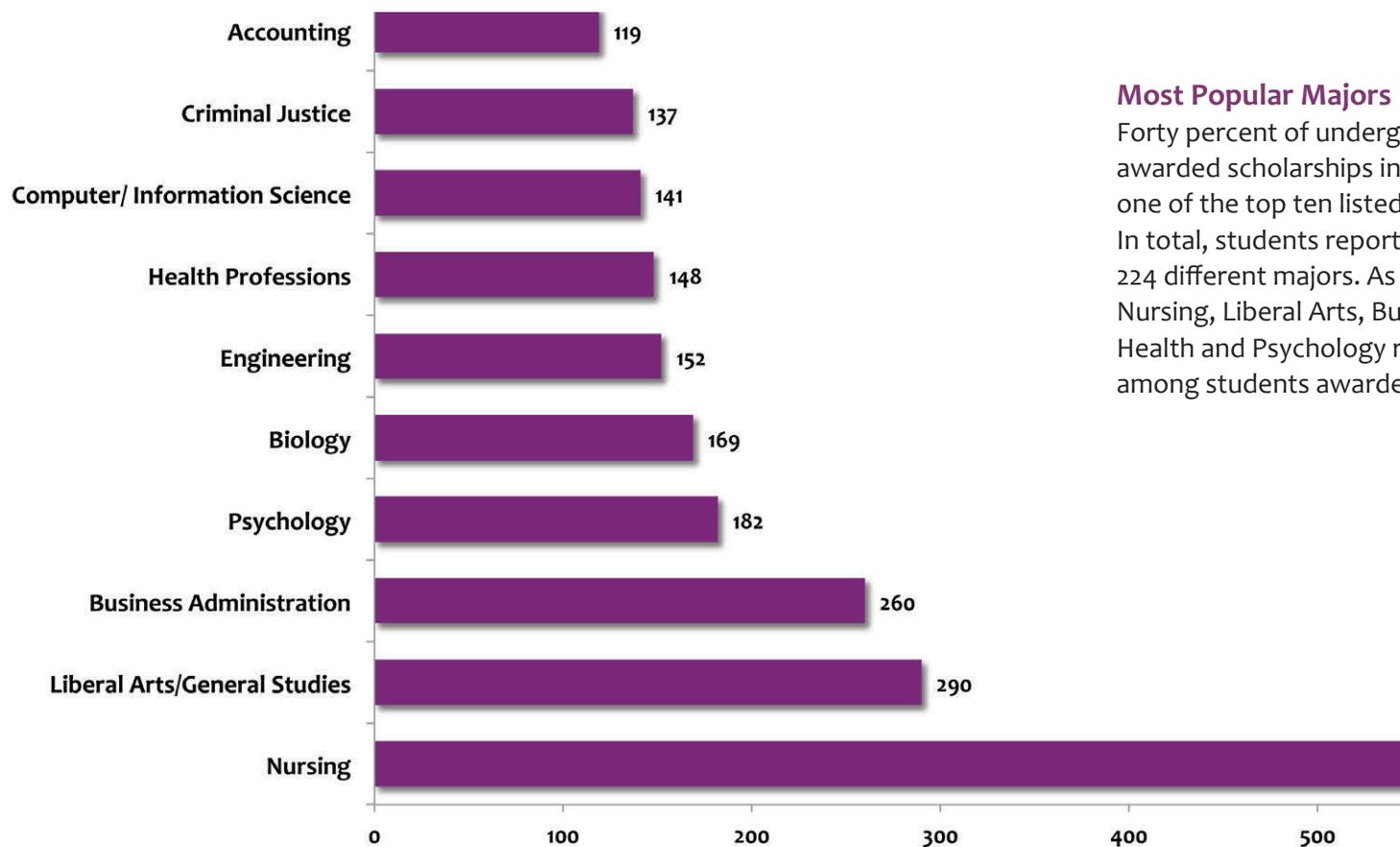


Total Number of Awards - 7,946

	Chinle	Crownpoint	Fort Defiance	Shiprock	Tuba City
Federal	715	671	1,112	873	770
Navajo	471	509	726	522	500
Trust	43	68	152	68	49
Corporate	78	120	151	198	154
Total	1,309	1,373	2,145	1,666	1,473

Undergraduates

Top 10 Universities/Colleges, Majors



Most Popular Majors

Forty percent of undergraduate students awarded scholarships in 2014 chose to major in one of the top ten listed on the the graph at left. In total, students reported seeking degrees in 224 different majors. As in the last several years, Nursing, Liberal Arts, Business Administration, Health and Psychology remain a strong interest among students awarded scholarships.

Majority of Recipients Attend Top 10 Schools

Students at a total of 367 colleges and universities were served by ONNSFA in Calendar Year 2014.

As in years before, colleges and universities within the four corners were favored by students. More than 1,000 recipients attended Navajo Technical University and Diné College combined. Approximately 66 percent or 3,529 of undergraduate students awarded scholarships or financial assistance attended one of the educational institutions listed in the table above.

Institution	No. of Students Receiving Awards	% of All Awards to Undergraduates	Total Awarded to Students	% of Total ONNSFA Funding
Navajo Technical University	556	10%	\$ 1,184,093	6%
Diné College - Tsaile	457	9%	\$ 1,104,950	6%
University of New Mexico	452	8%	\$ 1,573,644	8%
San Juan College	434	8%	\$ 916,845	5%
Arizona State University	399	7%	\$ 1,398,406	7%
Northern Arizona University	338	6%	\$ 1,201,056	6%
Fort Lewis College	285	5%	\$ 896,225	5%
University of New Mexico - Gallup	269	5%	\$ 640,478	3%
Utah State University - Eastern	186	3%	\$ 447,338	2%
University of Arizona	153	3%	\$ 482,314	3%
Total	3,529	66%	\$9,845,349	52%

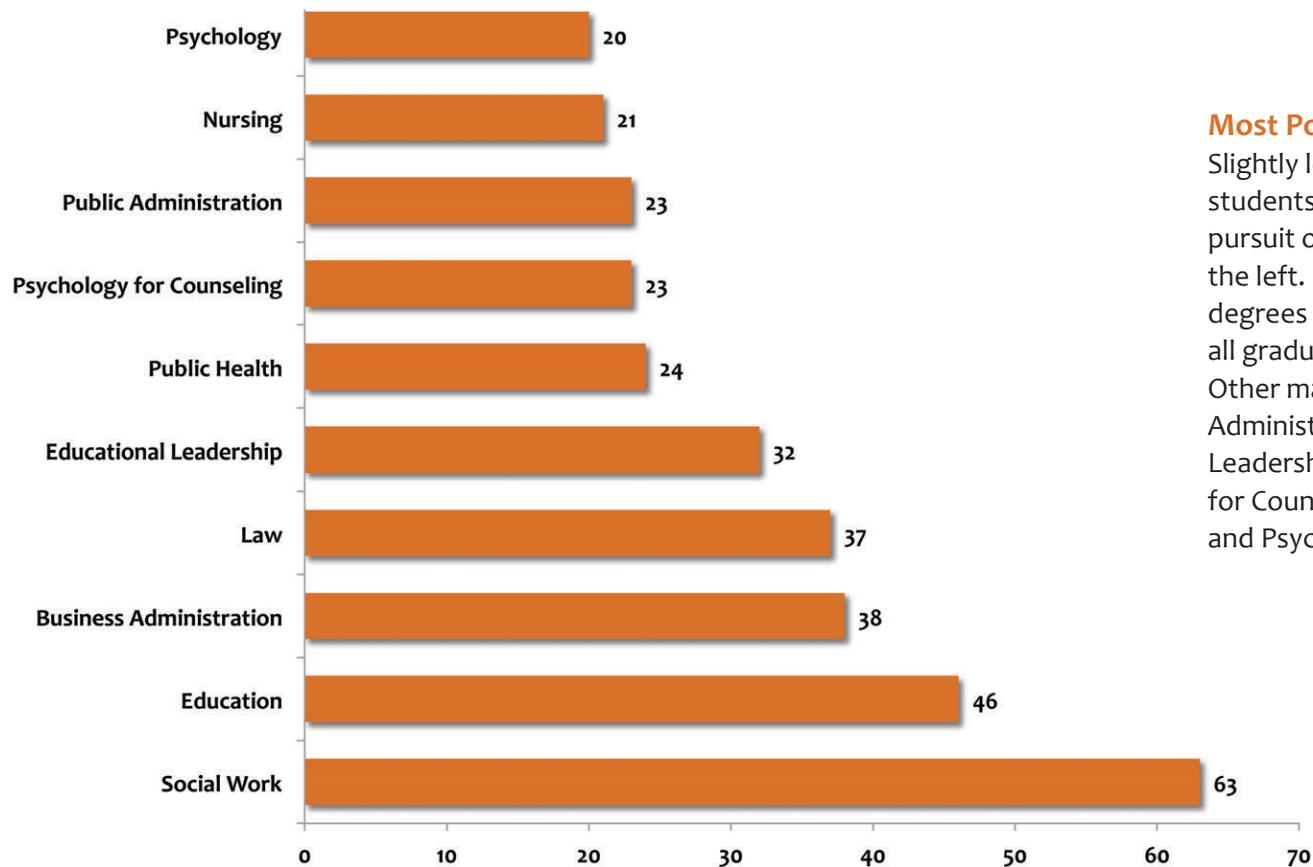
More Than Half All ONNSFA Funding Provided to Top 10 Schools

Awards to students attending the ten institutions listed accounted for 52

percent or \$9.8 million of the total amount awarded for scholarships and financial assistance by the ONNSFA in 2014. Navajo Technical University and Diné College each received approximately 6 percent, the University of New Mexico received 8 percent, San Juan College, 5 percent, Arizona State University, 7 percent, Northern Arizona University, 7 percent.

Graduates

Top 10 Universities/Colleges, Majors



Most Popular Majors

Slightly less than half of the 660 graduate students served by ONNSFA in 2014 were in pursuit of one of the top ten majors listed to the left. In total, graduate students sought degrees in 107 different majors. Ten percent of all graduate students chose to major Social Work. Other majors included: Education (7%), Business Administration (6%), Law (6%), Educational Leadership (5%), Public Health (4%), Psychology for Counseling, Public Administration, Nursing and Psychology (3% each).

Top 10 Graduate Colleges/Universities

A total of 660 graduate students at 142 colleges and universities throughout the United States received scholarships or financial assistance from the ONNSFA.

Approximately 65 percent or 426 graduate students served attended one of the 10 educational institutions listed in the table at right. Schools in New Mexico and Arizona dominated the top ten list.

Colleges/Universities Represented

Twelve percent of graduate students attended the University of New Mexico. Other colleges or universities included Arizona State Univer-

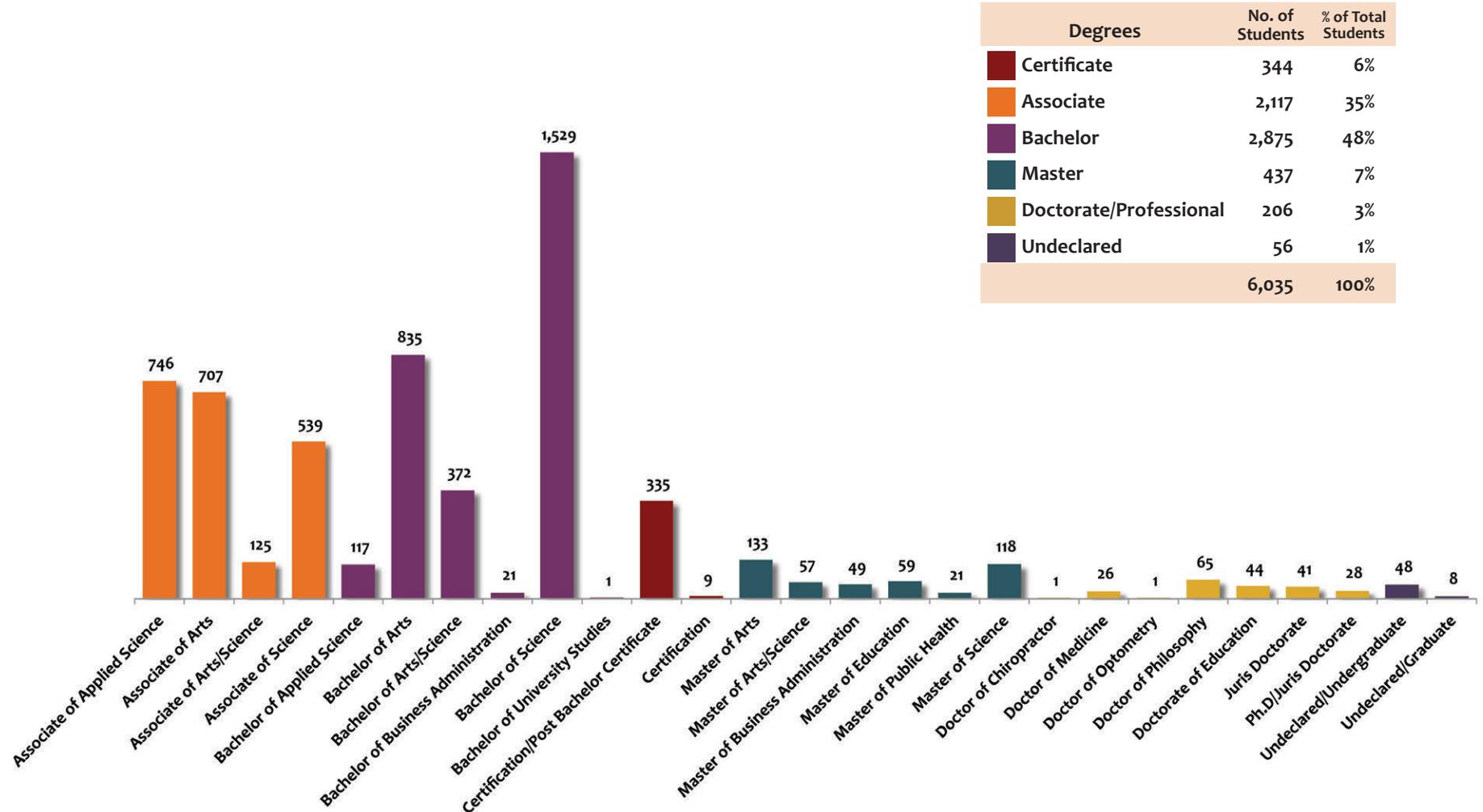
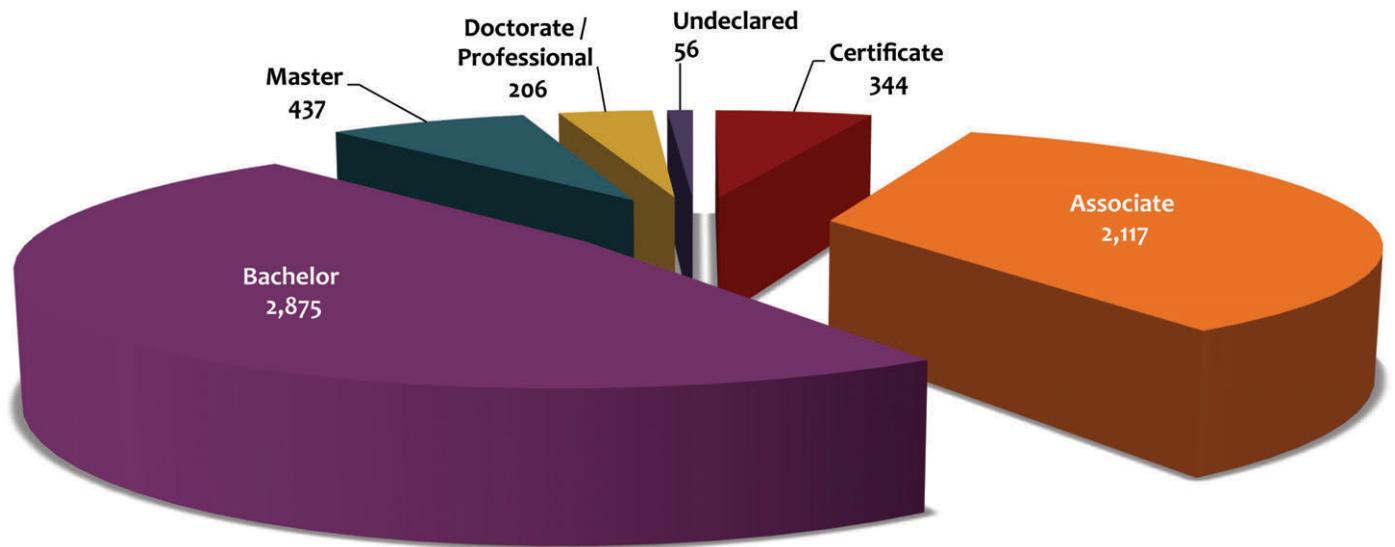
Institution	No. of Students Receiving Awards	% of All Awards to Graduates	Total Awarded to Students	% of Total ONNSFA Funding
University of New Mexico	81	12 %	\$ 603,297	3%
Arizona State University	76	12%	\$ 699,250	4%
Grand Canyon University	62	9%	\$ 384,000	2%
Northern Arizona University	50	8%	\$ 280,386	1%
University of Arizona	44	7%	\$ 225,650	1%
University of Phoenix	38	6%	\$ 261,190	1%
New Mexico Highlands University	35	5%	\$ 222,250	1%
Fielding Graduate University	14	2%	\$ 75,250	<1%
New Mexico State University	13	2%	\$ 173,780	1%
Western New Mexico University	13	2%	\$ 71,500	<1%
Total	426	65%	\$2, 996,553	16%

sity (12 percent), Grand Canyon College (9 percent), Northern Arizona University (8 percent), University of Phoenix (7 percent), University of Arizona (6 percent), New Mexico Highlands University (5 percent) and Western New Mexico University, Fielding Graduate University and New Mexico State University (2 percent each).

Student Performance

Degrees Sought by Award Recipients

Approximately 83 percent of all students receiving awards in 2014 were in Bachelor or Associate degree programs. Seven percent were seeking master degrees, six percent a Certificate and three percent a Doctorate/ Professional degree. One percent of recipients had not declared a degree. The graph below provides an overview of all degrees being pursued by award recipients in Calendar Year 2014.



Degrees	No. of Students	% of Total Students
Certificate	344	6%
Associate	2,117	35%
Bachelor	2,875	48%
Master	437	7%
Doctorate/Professional	206	3%
Undeclared	56	1%
	6,035	100%

Student Awards (by Chapter)

Chapter Affiliation

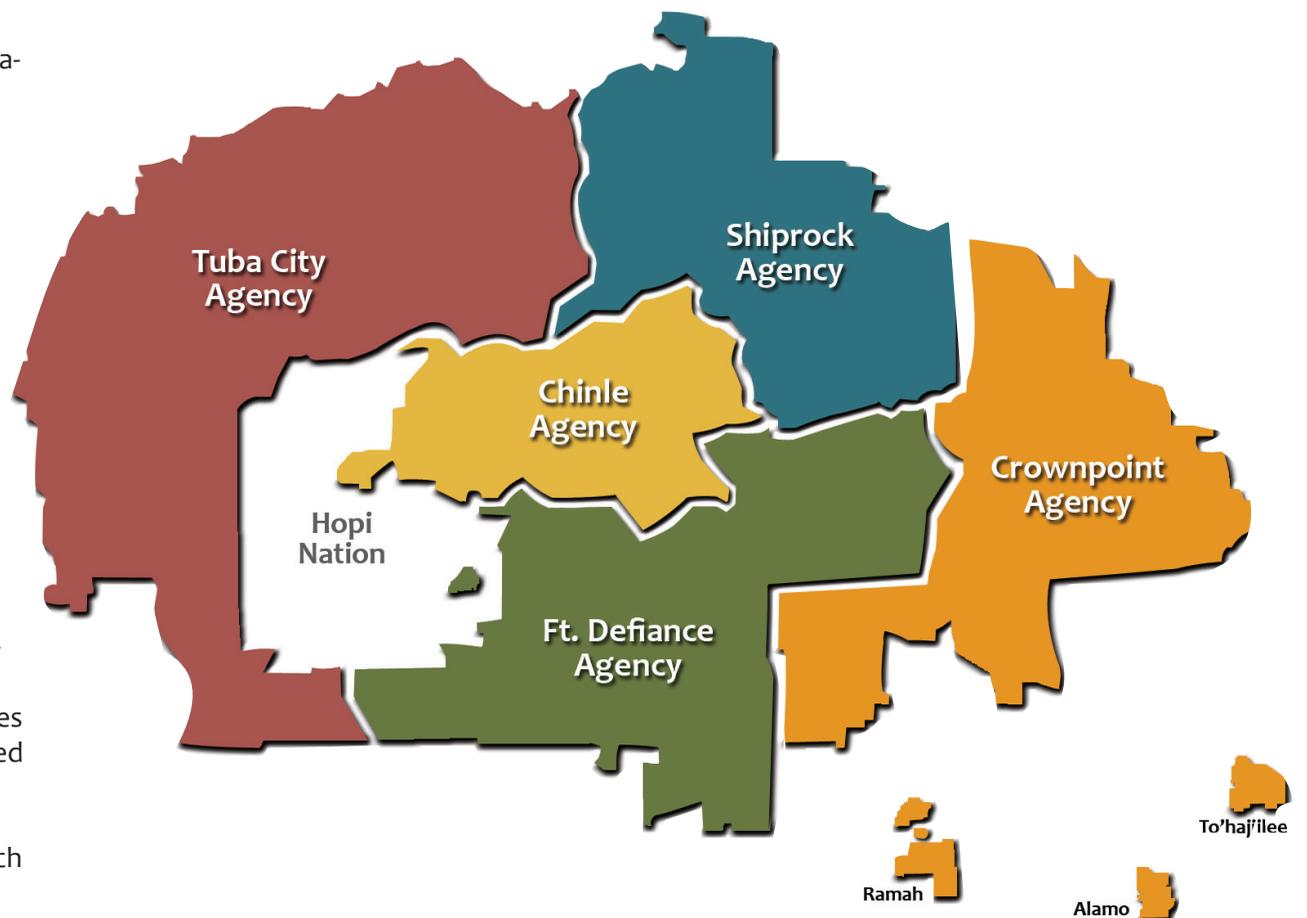
Students submitting an ONNSFA application are asked to state their chapter affiliation. This information is used to determine which agency office a student's file will be assigned to and for reporting purposes.

Choosing a Chapter

On occasion, students inquire about which of the Navajo Nation's 110 chapters they should state on the application. We encourage students to consider the chapter nearest to their residence or the chapter at which their parents are registered to vote.

Voter Registration

Students, who become registered voters on the Navajo Nation, have an opportunity to elect leadership at the chapter and national levels. Many Navajo Nation services and funds are divided among chapters based upon the number of registered voters and population. A list of the number of awards provided by the ONNSFA to students at each chapter follows:



Ft. Defiance Agency

1,498 Students

- Cornfields - 35
- Coyote Canyon - 41
- Crystal - 33
- Dilkon - 53
- Ft. Defiance - 266
- Ganado - 68
- Houck - 47
- Indian Wells - 31
- Jeddito - 43
- Kinlichee - 69
- Klagetoh - 37
- Low Mountain - 33
- Lower Greasewood - 33
- Lupton - 24
- Mexican Springs - 27
- Nahata Dziil - 37
- Naschitti - 40
- Oak-Pine Springs - 42
- Red Lake - 38
- Sawmill - 61
- St. Michaels - 159
- Steamboat - 47
- Teestoh - 47

(Ft. Defiance Agency)

- Tohatchi - 63
- Twin Lakes - 57
- White Cone - 31
- Wide Ruins - 36

Crownpoint Agency

1,093 Students

- Alamo - 6
- Baca/Haystack - 35
- Bahaali - 34
- Becenti - 41
- Casamero Lake - 21
- Chichiltah - 32
- Church Rock - 88
- Counselor - 19
- Crownpoint - 163
- Huerfano - 58
- Iyanbito - 34
- Lake Valley - 8
- Littlewater - 32
- Manuelito - 32
- Mariano Lake - 27
- Nageezi - 23
- Nahodishgish - 20

(Crownpoint Agency)

- Ojo Encino - 22
- Pinedale - 36
- Pueblo Pintado - 22
- Ramah - 28
- Red Rock - 39
- Rock Springs - 40
- Smith Lake - 19
- Standing Rock - 24
- Thoreau - 54
- Tohajiilee - 38
- Torreon/Star Lake - 38
- Tsayatoh - 24
- White Rock - 15
- Whitehorse Lake - 21

Shiprock Agency

- 1,239 Students**
- Aneth - 73
 - Beclabito - 33
 - Cove - 30
 - Gad í'ahí - 25
 - Mexican Water - 37
 - Nenahnezad - 80
 - Newcomb - 28
 - Red Mesa - 48
 - Red Valley - 36

(Shiprock Agency)

- Rock Point - 69
- San Juan - 27
- Sanostee - 54
- Sheepsprings - 27
- Shiprock - 377
- Sweetwater - 37
- Teec Nos Pos - 45
- T'iis Tsoh Sikaad - 17
- Tsé Daa K'aan - 57
- Toadlena/
- Two Grey Hills - 32
- Upper Fruitland - 107

Tuba City Agency

- 1,143 Students**
- Birdsprings - 30
 - Bodayway/Gap - 27
 - Cameron - 30
 - Chilchinbeto - 39
 - Coalmine Canyon - 43
 - Coppermine - 32
 - Dennehotso - 43
 - Inscription House - 30
 - Kaibeto - 36
 - Kayenta - 133
 - Lechee - 60

(Tuba City Agency)

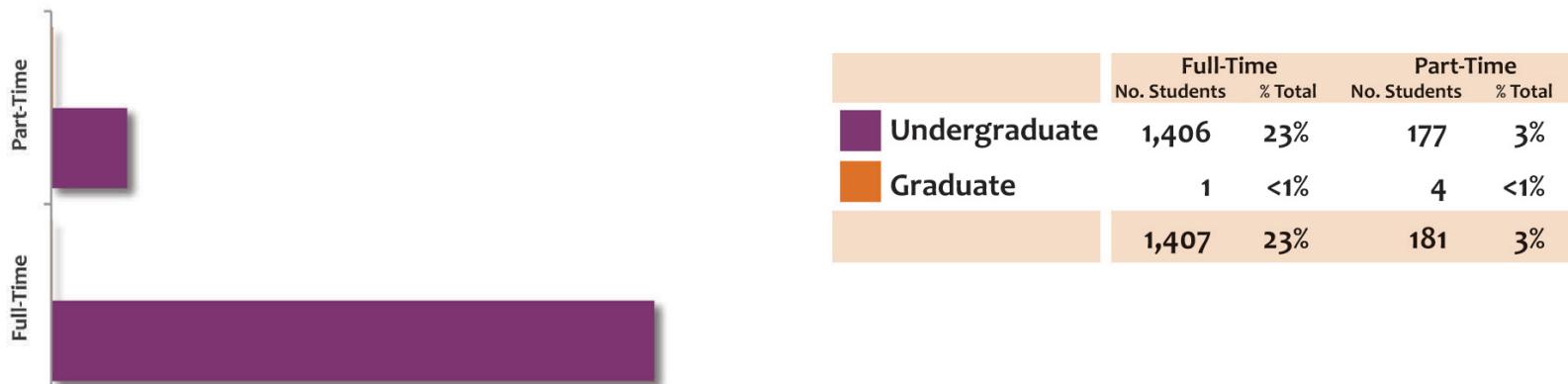
- Leupp - 62
- Navajo Mountain - 39
- Oljato - 85
- Shonto - 69
- Tolani Lake - 22
- Tonalea - 50
- Tó naneesdizí- 313

Chinle Agency

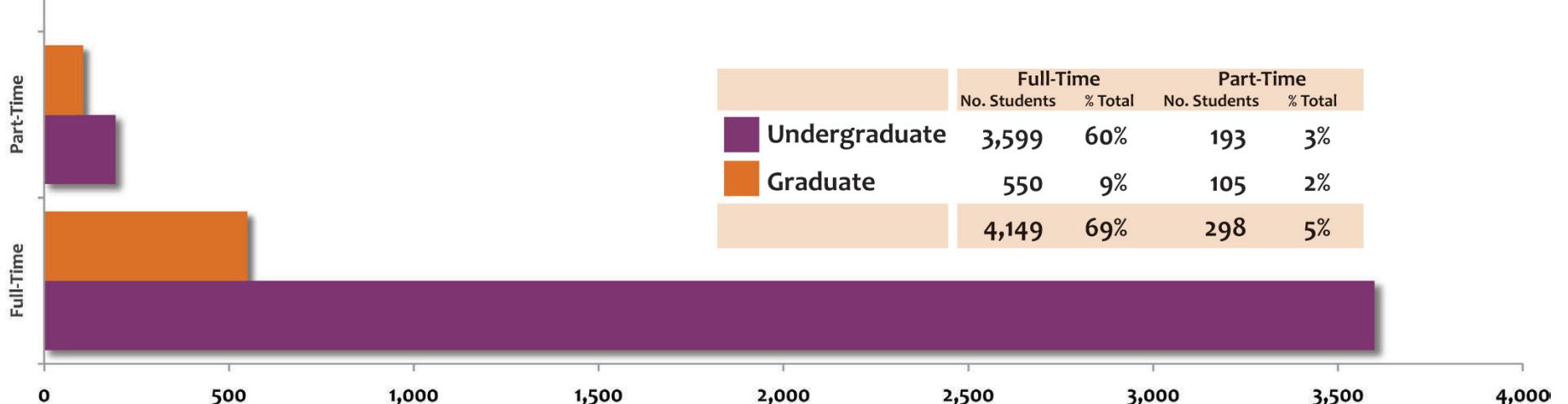
- 1,062 Students**
- Black Mesa - 21
 - Chinle - 378
 - Forest Lake - 23
 - Hard Rock - 34
 - Lukachukai - 83
 - Many Farms - 95
 - Nazlini - 45
 - Piñon - 79
 - Rough Rock - 38
 - Round Rock - 43
 - Tachee/Blue Gap - 30
 - Tsaile/Wheatfields - 82
 - Tselani/Cottonwood - 72
 - Whippoorwill Springs - 39

Two- and Four-Year Institution Enrollment Data

Enrollment at Two-Year Institutions



Enrollment at Four-Year Institutions



Graduate Funding - \$4,277,101

	Four-Year	Two-Year
Full-Time	\$ 4,050,451	\$ 12,000
Part-Time	211,150	3,500
Total	\$4,261,601	\$ 15,500

Undergraduate Funding - \$14,827,649

	Four-Year	Two-Year
Full-Time	\$ 11,181,800	\$ 3,333,071
Part-Time	194,081	118,697
Total	\$ 11,375,881	\$ 3,449,768

Majority of Award Recipients Enrolled at Four-Year Institutions

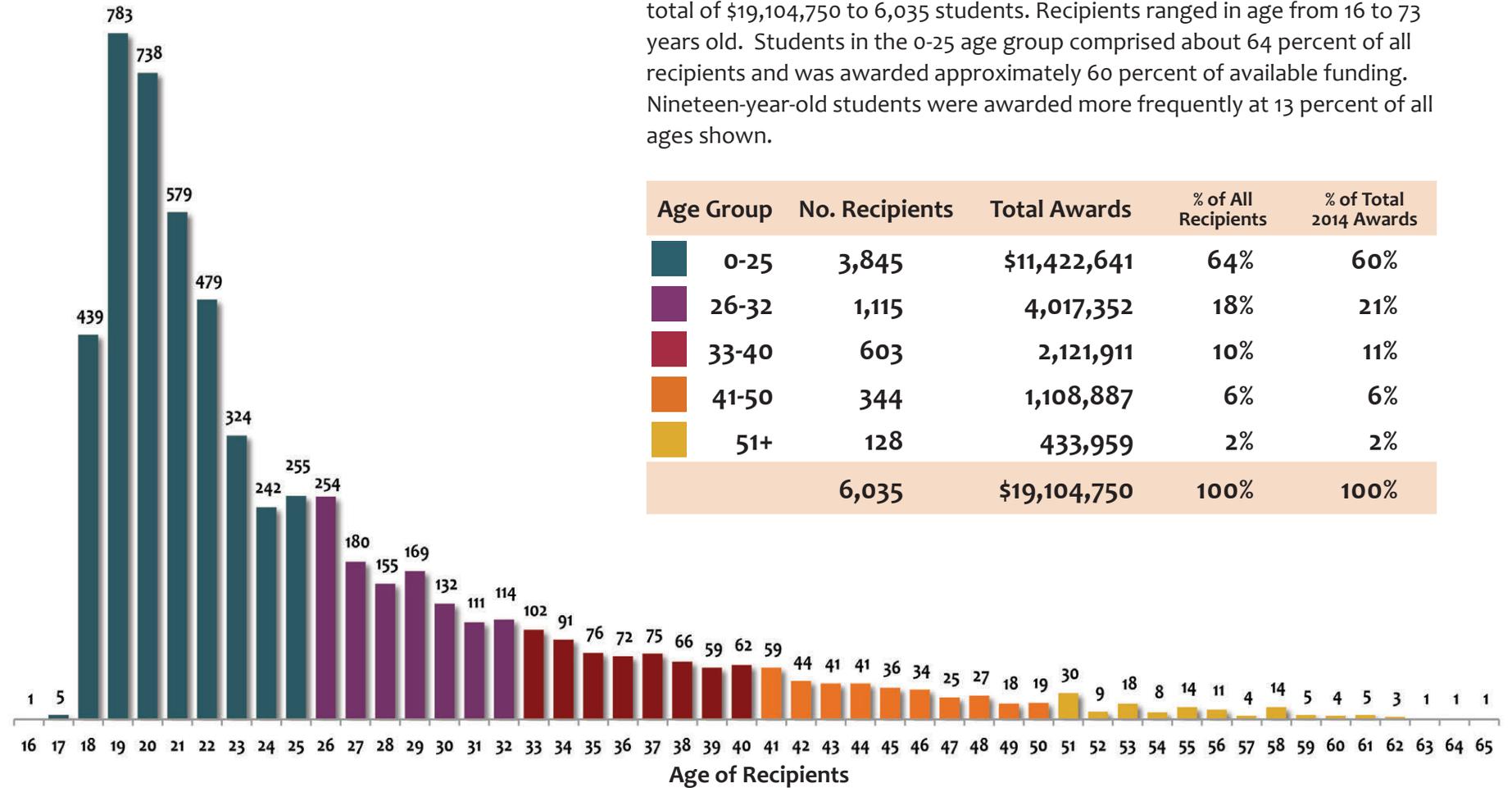
Seventy-four percent or 4,447 of all students provided awards attended four-year institutions in 2014. A total of 4,149 undergraduates and graduates were full-time students at a four-year institution. A total of 298 undergraduate and graduate students were part-time students at four-year institutions and equated to 5 percent of all award recipients.

About 26 percent of all students receiving awards were enrolled at two-year institutions in 2014. Undergraduate enrollment at two-year institutions included 1,406 full-time and 177 part-time students. Less than one percent of all graduate students were enrolled at two-year institutions. Graduate students were either seeking post-bachelor certification or taking long-distance education classes in pursuit of master degrees.

Funding for graduate students attending four-year institutions totalled \$4,261,601 and or those attending two-year institutions totalled \$15,500. Total funding for undergraduates attending four-year institutions came to \$11,375,881 and for those attending two-year institutions to \$3,449,768.

Awards to Recipients by Age Group and Class Level

Ages of All Award Recipients



Awards to Undergraduates

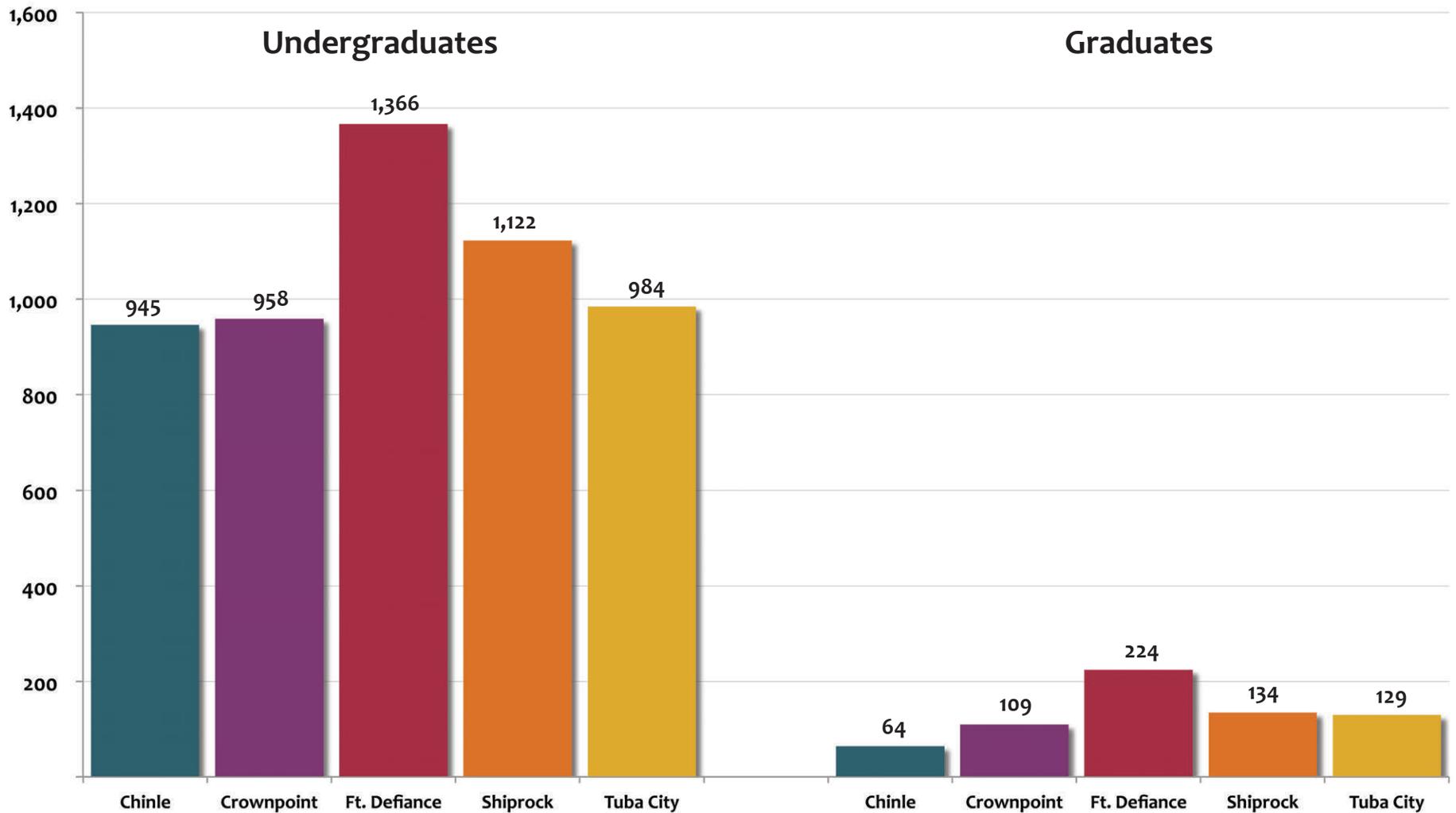
Age Group	No. of Students	Total Amount	% of Total 2014 Awards
0-25	3,750	\$ 10,745,573	56%
26-32	854	2,205,468	12%
33-40	436	1,104,489	6%
41-50	244	547,840	3%
51 +	91	224,279	1%
Total	5,375	\$ 14,827,659	78%

Awards to Graduates

Age Group	No. of Students	Total Amount	% of Total 2014 Awards
0-25	95	\$ 677,068	4%
26-32	261	1,811,884	9%
33-40	167	1,017,422	5%
41-50	100	561,047	3%
51 +	37	209,680	1%
Total	660	\$4,277,101	22%

ONNSFA Award Recipients By Age

Number of Applicants Receiving Awards (by Agency)

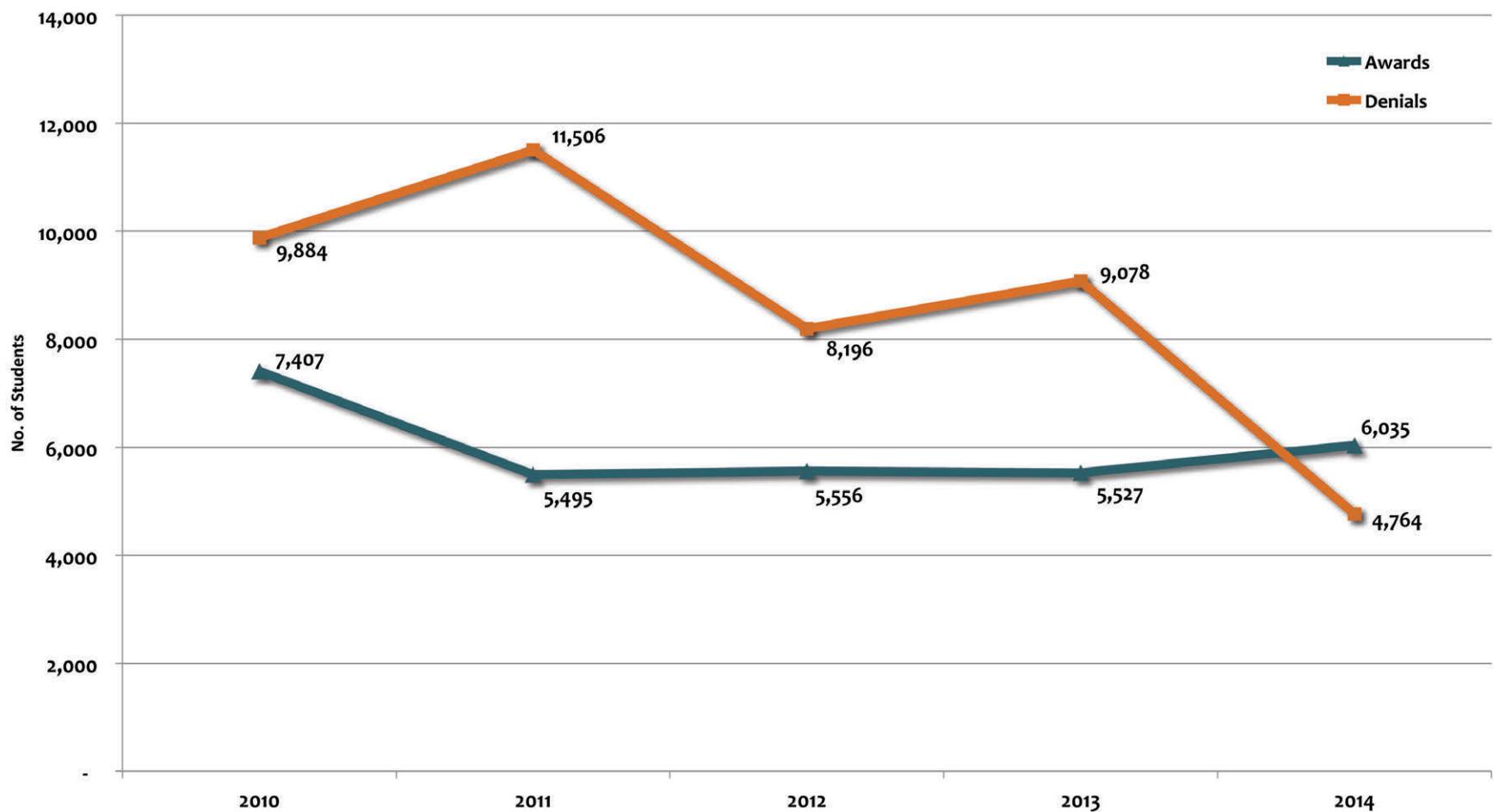


Agency	Undergraduates Awarded	Graduates	Awarded/Denied Ratio	% Awarded	% Denied
Chinle	945	64	1,009:1,029	50%	50%
Crownpoint	958	109	1,067:735	59%	41%
Fort Defiance	1,336	224	318:259	55%	45%
Shiprock	1,122	134	628:427	60%	40%
Tuba City	984	129	371:354	51%	49%

In 2014, a total of 10,799 undergraduate and graduate students submitted applications for financial aid to the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance.

As illustrated in the graph above, the Fort Defiance Agency awarded the most number of students at the undergraduate and graduate level. About 55 percent of students served by the Ft. Defiance Agency received awards. The Chinle Agency with the lowest number of applicants ended with a 50 percent award and 50 percent denial rate.

Overview of Awards & Denials



Dramatic Decreases in Denial Rate, Number of Applicants Posted in 2014

Year	Total Applicants	Awards	Denials	% Awarded	% Denied	% Change (No. of Applicants)
2010	17,291	7,407	9,884	43 percent	57 percent	-
2011	17,001	5,495	11,506	32 percent	68 percent	-2 percent
2012	13,752	5,556	8,196	40 percent	60 percent	-19 percent
2013	14,605	5,527	9,078	38 percent	62 percent	6 percent
2014	10,799	6,035	4,764	56 percent	44 percent	-26 percent

In 2014, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance saw a dramatic decrease in its denial rate to 44 percent. From 2010 to 2013, the denial rate averaged almost 60 percent of all applicants due to the high number of applicants and limited funding.

For the first time over the last five years, 56 percent of all applicants received awards. Another 4,764 or 44 percent of all applicants were denied.

In another significant development, the number of students applying to ONNSFA for scholarships and financial aid fell by 3,806 or approximately 26 percent from 2013 when 14,605 students submitted applications.

The reduced number of applicants and the 28 percent increase in funding from \$14.8 million in 2013 and \$19.1 million in 2014 were significant factors in increasing the ratio of awarded to denied applicants.

White House Honors Amanda Tachine as a Champion of Change

On Sept. 15, Amanda Tachine was one of eleven young women honored by the White House as Champions of Change for doing extraordinary things to empower and inspire their community

“It’s quite an honor and I’m grateful for this recognition,” Tachine said in a press release from the President and Vice President’s office.

“I don’t see this as an individual award. I see it as an award bestowed to the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation has influenced me and shaped who I am today. I do this work for our people.”

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye congratulated Tachine. He said she was able to be innovative in her experience to reach this top level and be recognized as a person who has great ideas on how to change America.

Tachine is Náneeshtézhí Táchiinii (Zuni Red Running into Water clan)



Amanda Tachine

born for Tl’izilani (Many Goats clan). Her maternal grandfather’s clan is Tábaahí (Water’s Edge) and her paternal grandfather’s clan is Ashiihi (Salt). She is from Ganado, Ariz.

She has led efforts in a dynamic two-tiered college access mentoring program, Native SOAR (Student Outreach, Access, and Resiliency) where Native American graduate students and staff mentor underrepresented, mostly Native American college students who also in turn provide mentorship to Native American high school students.

Tachine received a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Arizona. She is currently a Postdoctoral Scholar at the Center for Indian

Education at Arizona State University where she hopes to continue advancing ideas and strategies for Native student success.

(Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU News)

Excerpts from, “An Open Letter to Native College Students” www.huffingtonpost.com 08/20/15

As a new academic year approaches, I want to share some words from my heart. Know that these words are not just from me; they are shared experiences and stories that I’ve learned from family, college classmates, mentors, teachers, and Native college students like yourself. I hope this letter serves as a source of inspiration as you journey towards attaining a college degree.

Like many of you, I knew college was in my pathway. When I was eight years old, I told my mom that I was going to college. And in May of 2015, I fulfilled that dream and graduated with a doctorate in higher education from the University of Arizona.

There are not many Native peoples on the college journey. Nationally, one percent of Natives receive a college degree each year. Some say we are a forgotten or “hidden” group in society. There are many days when you may feel alone, possibly invisible in your classroom, your residence hall, the campus recreation center, the student union – pretty much anywhere on campus. But take heart, you are not alone. You are very precious, and you have an array of amazing gifts to tap into for strength.

I wrote my dissertation about Navajo students’ college experiences, based on interviews with ten students. It’s titled, “Monsters and Weapons: Navajo students’ stories on their journeys to college.” The “monsters” are the challenges, and the “weapons” are what helped them to overcome the monsters.

You are probably already aware of some of these monsters: financial hardships, educational deficits, addiction, personal struggles. What I want to share with you here are the weapons. I hope they offer you a source of strength.

Prayer: Our ancestors and grandparents taught us to respect and honor our spiritual traditions and faith in the Creator. A sacred teaching that you can practice is prayer. You may be far from family, your home and your ceremonial places; however you can always tap into prayer...

When challenges seem unbearable, tap into your spiritual practices. It will give you strength to move forward. Also be comforted that there are many who are praying for you. Remember what Native elders and leaders say: “We are the answers to our ancestors prayers.” Think about that: those powerful words breathe life into our purpose.

Trusting Relationships: It can be hard to share with your family and friends your struggles while in college. Let’s face it, because there are so few Natives in college, we often wonder who could relate to our situation or simply listen with an open heart. But it’s important to have trusting relationships with loved ones whom you can share your joys and pains...

Hopefully you already have trusting relationships with parents, grandparents, cousins, friends, or a partner. Reach out to them, communicate how you are doing, and seek their counsel when discouraged. They care for you and only want the best for you. It’s OK to confide in them about your struggles. You’d be surprised, most people, no matter their age, have or are wrestling with something similar. They can relate and support you.

Transformation: We as Native peoples have gone through much adversity, and yet we have persevered. I think it’s because we have the ability to transform the negative into positive. We all have “monsters” that

surround us, but transformation is in our blood. It’s the belief that we have to move forward, for our people and future generations.

I often ask Native students why they are in college. Most tell me their purpose is to help our people. That is a beautiful, visionary purpose. Many Native students, like you, see that the possibilities for a promising future rest upon obtaining a college degree. College is a means toward the betterment of our people...

Think about why you are in college. You may hope to be a role model for family and even tribal nations at large. You may strive to defy the odds that are stacked against us. You may aspire to improve the well being of tribal nations. If you have yet to consider these reasons for attending and graduating from college, think about these transformative intentions. Think about the future and past generations, your daughter, son, niece, nephew, granddaughter/son, and grandma/pa. Move forward for them.

In closing, college may seem like a lonely journey, but remember that you are not alone, and you have powerful weapons. Many of us are praying for you, willing to listen to your experiences, and can help remind you about why you are on this journey. We are looking forward to the day when your name is called upon, when you walk across the stage and receive your degree. We’ll be rejoicing with you. So, keep going, keep going, we are with you.

With love,
Amanda R. Tachine (Navajo), Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Scholar, Center for Indian Education
Arizona State University

Honoring the Navajo Nation's Investment in Education

LeManuel Lee Bitsóí

University of New Mexico
Bachelor of Science, 1995

Harvard University
Master of Education, 1998

University of Penn State
Doctorate, Higher Education
Management, 2007



ABOVE “T’aa hwo aji’t’eego,” the timeless tenet of Diné philosophy instilled by his mother continues to be a guiding principle in LeManuel Lee Bitsóí’s life. He translates the concept as “My destiny depends on me.”

It may have taken 11 years for LeManuel Lee Bitsóí to obtain a bachelor’s degree. However, he discovered that persistence and resilience are key attributes to any goal in life. Those attributes led him to attain degrees from the University of New Mexico and two Ivy League institutions – Harvard and the University of Penn State.

A native of Naschitti, N.M., Bitsóí is Kinyaa’áani (Towering House People) born for Hasht’ishnii (Mud Clan). His maternal grandfather’s clan is the Tsi’naajinii (Black-Streaked-Wood People) and his paternal grandfather’s clan is Nihoobáanii (Gray-Streak-Ends Clan). He is the youngest of seven with three sisters and three brothers.

While in high school, he attended summer enrichment programs focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), which included a memorable stint at Nizhoni Camp (now Nizhoni Academy) at Northern Arizona University. It was there a faculty member recognized his writing ability – a skill that would prove useful and have major impact on his career.

Bitsóí graduated from Tohatchi High School in 1984 and received a full scholarship to attend New Mexico State University. Due to his exposure to STEM subjects, he set out to become an engineer.

“I changed my major three times before settling on industrial engineering and enjoyed my coursework until I completed differential equations,” he said. “It was at that point that I pondered, ‘What in the world does calculus, especially differential equations, have to do with anything in my world?’ ‘Shortly after the semester ended I decided I needed to do some introspection and really figure out what I

wanted as a career.”

Bitsóí took a break from university studies to work fulltime. He drove a bookmobile for the Navajo Nation Library System for a few years before transferring to UNM.

His experience assisting patrons of the library system, especially children, prompted Bitsóí to pursue a career in academia, particularly in student services. He wanted to help students like himself find their passion and pursue suitable careers.

“With renewed vigor, I focused my efforts and studies on human development and graduated cum laude in 1995 from UNM,” he said.

Upon graduation, Bitsoi began work as a financial aid advisor at San Juan College in Farmington, N.M. He soon learned that to advance his career in higher education administration, he needed a master’s degree.

“Since I always dreamed of attending an Ivy League institution, I applied to the Harvard Graduate School of Education,” he said. “With hope and a prayer, I mailed my application and was admitted.”

“There was a time when I used to wonder what my life would have been like or where I would be if I had become an industrial engineer,” he said. “I stopped wondering when I stepped onto the Harvard University campus in 1997.” At Harvard, Bitsóí’s concentration was administration, planning and social policy, with an emphasis on higher education management.”

Thoroughly enjoying his coursework, Bitsoi had the fortune of having Dr. Derek Bok, a former President of Harvard University and expert in higher education, administration and management as a professor.

He graduated with a Master of Education

degree from Harvard University in 1998, where he was initiated into another prestigious honor society—Phi Delta Kappa. He later earned a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in 2007, where his research focused on the conditions that encourage and discourage American Indians from pursuing higher education.

Bitsóí currently lives in Chicago, Illinois, and serves as Director of Student Diversity and Multicultural Affairs for Rush University Medical Center. Prior to his appointment at Rush University, he served in various administrative roles at Harvard University, Georgetown University and Dartmouth College.

“While I have had the fortune of having numerous mentors and role models in my life, I always remember the influence that my mother and siblings have had on my education and career,” Bitsóí said. His mother, who raised her family as a single mother, instilled in her family the timeless tenet of Diné philosophy “T’aa hwo aji’t’eego.” All of his siblings earned education credentials, which have led to successful careers in their professions.

To attain the same level of success, Bitsóí said it is crucial students learn how to focus and concentrate on long-term goals and be cautious of “weapons of mass distraction” including social media and the internet. He explained that while both are great tools to navigate society and assist with learning, they can also be detriments.

“On the cultural side, it is vital that you know where you come from and your clans,” he said. “Some people say that maintaining our language is a lost cause, but I whole-heartedly disagree with that sentiment. Our beautiful and precious language, Diné bizaad, is in our DNA.”

“It is what allows us to hold onto our land, Dinétah,” Bitsóí said. “It is what sustains us a distinct tribal nation because once our language is gone, we will be like everyone else and our land could be taken. That’s the importance of our language.”

Ultimately, one of Bitsóí’s career goals is to lead an institution or organization. “Perhaps this leadership post could be at a tribal college? Of course, all is possible with hope and prayers, along with “T’aa hwo aji’t’eego,” as my destiny depends on me.”

Ninety-two Graduates Earn Chief Manuelito Scholarships in 2014

By George Hardeen
Communications Consultant
Navajo Generating Station

PIÑON, Ariz. – Ninety-two 2014 Navajo high school graduates were honored with the Navajo Nation’s top academic achievement award, the Chief Manuelito Scholarship.

The high-achieving students from across the Navajo Nation and as far away as Chandler, Las Vegas, Farmington, Flagstaff, Gallup and one home schooled student each introduced themselves in Navajo at the annual Chief Manuelito Scholarship banquet held July 18, 2014, and told proud parents and friends where they intended to go to college.

While several were planning to attend Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of New Mexico, others have been accepted to Stanford University, Brown University, Dartmouth College, Yale University, Brigham Young University as well as Navajo Technical University, Laramie County Community College, Utah State University – Blanding, and the Colorado School of Mines, among many others.

Former Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim, a graduate of Princeton University, told the students that his 101-year-old grandfather once told him he wished he could live another 10 years. Why, Jim asked him?

“So I can learn another song, another prayer, and do another ceremony for someone else, and I would love to learn another ceremony,” Jim said his grandfather told him “to have that kind of attitude, life long learning. Life-long learning is so important.”

He told the students that some people think they know everything once they get their degree or a Ph.D.

“I don’t want you going that route,” he said. “Be like my grandfather, 100 years old and still be willing to learn.

The Chief Manuelito Scholarship was established in 1980 to provide scholarships to high achieving Navajo high school graduates. They are awarded based on ACT/SAT test scores and final high school grade point average.

Students receive \$7,000 annually to cover direct educational expenses associated with attending a post-secondary institution.

Students must complete required Navajo



ABOVE Jayne Sandoval is congratulated for her academic achievements by G. Brad Brown, Sr. Vice President of Peabody Energy Southwest Operations. Peabody Energy and Salt River Project each contributed \$5,000 for the awards ceremony.

language and Navajo government courses prior to high school graduation. Once in college, they need to maintain a 3.0 GPA and be a fulltime student. If they do, they can receive their scholarship for four years.

Vice President Jim presented both Peabody Energy and the Salt River Project with a plaque in recognition of their more than \$5.24 million financial contribution to the scholarship program since 1987.

Both contributed \$5,000 for the awards ceremony.

Keynote speaker Mariah Nicole Claw, a student at Dartmouth College, advised the new Chief Manuelito Scholars not to be afraid of failure but to take advantage of the support system of family to help get through the inevitable rough spots of college academics and life.

She told the scholars that they are now part of a special fellowship.

“Each one of you has earned the honor of calling yourself a Chief Manuelito Scholar, which, of course, includes a very pretty monetary reward,” she said. “This scholarship, this gift, that you will be receiving should not be taken for granted. This award is far more than financial assistance. It is the manifestation of one of our great leader’s wishes.”

She said even though it has been almost 150 years since Chief Manuelito spoke about education, the Navajo people are still atop the dry mesa he described and the greater society still has a hold on many of the things Navajo people need.

“I firmly believe that if we are to see positive changes in our communities, we must assume responsibility, for we are the future of the Navajo Nation,” Ms. Claw said.

“We are the generation that has access to

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2014 Chief Manuelito Scholars

Antonio, Gerilyn, Wingate High School, University of New Mexico
Arviso, Chase F., Bloomfield High School, San Juan College
Avalos, Quesha, Betty H. Fairfax High School, Northern Arizona University
Bahe, Christielle A., Crownpoint High School, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Barber, Mataya N., Agua Fria Union High School, Arizona State University
Barbone, Tristan D., Navajo Preparatory School, New Mexico State University
Begay, Andria B., Coconino High School, Northern Arizona University
Begay, Brandon A., Coconino High School, Northern Arizona University
Begay, Justin A., Shiprock High School, Stanford University
Begay, Merissa M., Los Lunas High School, New Mexico State University
Benally, Onri J., Red Valley-Cove High School, Utah State University-Eastern
Benally, Tianna L., Wingate High School, Fort Lewis College
Black, Jr., Larrison F., Page High School, Arizona State University
Bowsley, Nolten J., Monument Valley High School, Utah State University-Eastern
Bremer-Bennett, Laura J., Rehoboth Christian School, Calvin College
Brooks, Colby B., Winslow High School, Arizona State University
Brown, Danielle E., Valley High School, University of Arizona
Brown, Jessica R., Kirtland Central High School, Arizona State University
Butler, Micah R., Smithville High School, Cornerstone University
Castillo, Chad C., Rehoboth Christian School, University of New Mexico
Chambellan, Miranda, Manzano High School, New Mexico Institute of Mining & Technology
Charleston, Garhett, Miyamura High School, University of New Mexico-Gallup
Charley, Avery K., Window Rock High School, University of Arizona
Clyde, Martisha, Piedra Vista High School, Arizona State University
Curley, Caleigh A., Window Rock High School, Northern Arizona University
Curley, Mariah J., Navajo Preparatory School, Texas Technical University
Curley, Tia H., Kirtland Central High School, Fort Lewis College
Dailey, Leandrew A., Navajo Preparatory School, Fort Lewis College
Deschine, Miriam I., Window Rock High School, Northern Arizona University
Dixon, Breanna M., Monument Valley High School, Utah State University-Eastern
Ellison, Dominique E., Kirtland Central High School, Arizona State University
Etcitty, Hannah R., UNM-Gallup Middle College, Chicago State University
Etsitty, Terri M., Monument Valley High School, Fort Lewis College
Farland, Shoshana L., Monument Valley High School, Arcadia University
Footracer, Cheyenne M., Agua Fria Union High School, Colorado School of Mines
Garcia, Baylee N., Belen Senior High School, Northern Arizona University
Garcia, Victoria R., Piedra Vista High School, Texas Technical University
Gishey, Clay H., Ganado High School, Mesa Community College
Gorman, Harrenson C., Crownpoint High School, Dartmouth College
Gorman, Jalyn Z.T., Rehoboth Christian School, Northern Arizona University
Goy, Lionel, Coconino High School, Coconino Community College
Habel, Jessica, Mountain View High School, Utah Valley University
Hanson, Bradley J., Monument Valley High School, Northern Arizona University
Harvey, Jr., Alvin D., Aztec High School, New Mexico State University
Haskey, Robyn B. Y., Tuba City High School, Arizona State University
Henderson, Timberlin, Piedra Vista High School, Western State College of Colorado
Herder, Kentaro J., Monument Valley High School, University of Arizona
Hooper, Zoey K., Kirtland Central High School, New Mexico Highlands University
Iverson, Sage E., Las Vegas Academy Int' l Studies, Brigham Young University
James, Kyra V., Ganado High School, University of Arizona
Jesus, Meteighka L., Navajo Pine High School, Navajo Technical University
John, Sonya N., Navajo Preparatory School, Northern Arizona University
Laughter, Angel L., Betty H. Fairfax High School, Arizona State University
Mackey, Christian M., Kirtland Central High School, University of Denver
Mannie, Cedrick M., Ganado High School, Eastern Arizona College
McCabe, Kendra L., Fort Thomas High School, Yale University
McNiell, Chase, Rehoboth Christian School, Stanford University
Miller, Taylor K., Kirtland Central High School, Duke University
Murray, Nicholas P., Window Rock High School, Arizona State University
Nakai-Chapman, Joshua B., Piedra Vista High School, NM State University
Nez, Alexander M., Tuba City High School, Northern Arizona University
Nockideneh, Dillon J., Page High School, Utah State University-Eastern
O'Reilly, Caitlin E., Page High School, Arizona State University
Oldham, Jess B., Lander Valley High School, Laramie County Community College
Peaches, Karla R., Monument Valley High School, Northern Arizona University
Reano, Brandi L., Navajo Preparatory School, Dartmouth College
Roanhorse, Kara G., West Mesa High School, Brown University
Russell, Taylor A., Kirtland Central School, University of Utah
Saltclah, Sheldon V., Whitehorse High School, University of Utah-Eastern
Sandoval, Jayne A., Holbrook High School, Northern Arizona University
Scott, Kayla B., McClintock High School, Northern Arizona University
Sells, Natalia L., Navajo Preparatory School, Fort Lewis College
Smith, Shantel, Richfield High School, Snow College
Soland, Tara L., Gallup High School, University of Arizona
Talk, Athena R., Kirtland Central High School, Northern Arizona University
Tapaha, Kanani K., Kirtland Central High School, Dartmouth College
Thompson, Tezha A., Many Farms High School, Fort Lewis College
Todacheenie, Shelby L., Page High School, Northern Arizona University
Todea, Naat'aanii B., Boulder High School, University of Colorado-Boulder
Todechine, Marcus J., Flagstaff High School, Arizona State University
Toledo, Amber A., Cuba High School, New Mexico State University
Toledo, Talon R., Thoreau High School, Arizona State University
Tom, Tannon S., Winslow High School, Arizona State University
Tsingine, Niomi P., Kirtland Central High School, University of Arizona
Tsosie, Chelsi A., Window Rock High School, Northern Arizona University
Vale, Autumn L., McClintock School, Northern Arizona University
Weaver, Maelynn S., Discovery Canyon Campus School, University of Colorado-Colorado Springs
Yazzie, RaineSommer, Navajo Preparatory School, Diné College
Yazzie, Tamera, Gallup High School, University of New Mexico
Yazzie, Titus T., Chandler High School, Northern Arizona University
Yellowhair, Nathan, Highland High School, Arizona State University
Yellowman, Theodora L., Home School, Mesa Community College

Scholars, Continued from Page 18

a college education, unlike our grandparents and parents. Whether we hope to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, educators, or whatever else, this scholarship is a means to lifting ourselves out of our current state as a struggling nation.”

She reminded the students, “*T’aa hwo’ aaji t’eego* (it’s up to you). I believe in you. And I know that you will make every person who is on your team so very proud.”

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon, who served as emcee, advised the students to learn their college’s system to

be able to graduate as soon as possible. Just as important, he said, is to not be afraid to seek assistance when they need it.

“Learn to ask for help,” he said. “Don’t hide things and keep it hidden from parents or professors, from colleagues, from friends. There are places on campus where you can get help, tutoring, advice, encouragement. Many people have gone through what you’re going to be going through and certainly they are there to be able to help.”

With some schools’ tuition costs from \$20,000 to \$50,000 per year, he said they

should get good at applying for other scholarships besides the Chief Manuelito Scholarship. Some scholarship programs don’t receive enough applicants for their funds.

“Literally you can get paid to go to school,” Witherspoon said. “But you have to put in the 20 hours to identify the scholarships and apply for the scholarships and send them off. That will be the easiest money you never have to pay back.”

He added that their first semester grades will determine the availability of hundreds of other scholarships they can apply for.

Honoring the Navajo Nation's Investment in Education

Heather Fleming

Stanford University
Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering
with a focus on Product Design, 2002

Watching her cousins build wells on the reservation, Heather Fleming knew that she wanted a job that would provide an opportunity to return to the Navajo Nation and work to improve the land and environment.

“Growing up submersed in the issues on tribal lands, I wanted to use design, creativity, and business to address the social challenges we face,” Fleming said.

In 2008, she started her own design firm, Catapult Design, to focus on the type of design work that excited her.

“My design firm focuses on just that – we create new and well-designed products and services for communities that are typically overlooked by the design community,” Fleming said.

Catapult Design partners with organizations to develop sustainable solutions that address technology and social issues such as: rural electrification, water purification and transport, food security, and improved health.

“Most of our work is international, which gives me opportunities to travel to Asia, Africa, and South America.”

Fleming, who is Bit’ahnii (Folded Arms Clan), born for Bilagáana, was born in Tuba City, Ariz. She grew up in Vanderwagen, a community out of Gallup, N.M.

She graduated from Gallup High School in 1998 and was accepted to Stanford University.

“I knew going to school to a school like Stanford was an honor,” she said. However, “Classes were hard. Most of the other students were more advanced than I was. I felt like I had to work harder to get where my peers were at and I had to find the resources I needed on my own.”

Fleming initially majored in Civil Engineering.

“Several of my older girl cousins became civil engineers and worked for the IHS to install water lines. I was very inspired by the fact that their jobs helped people. I decided I wanted to be an engineer without really knowing what that meant,” Fleming said.



ABOVE Heather Fleming’s firm offers product design, design education and design research programs to address problems through innovative ideas. Her firm was recently awarded a grant to develop a visual guidebook in the Navajo and English languages for starting a business on the Navajo Nation.

She realized she didn’t really have a knack for Civil Engineering. Instead, she discovered the field of Product Design, a combination of engineering, art, and human psychology.

“As a kid, I loved to sketch and write stories and create things,” Fleming said. “Product Design appealed to me because it was all about the discipline of creating or designing products that meet the needs of people. It’s a very thoughtful and creative but also technical major. That multi-disciplinary nature appealed to me.”

Upon graduation, Fleming went to work as a Product Designer in Silicon Valley at a small firm called D2M, Inc. She later taught Design for Sustainability as an Adjunct Lecturer at Stanford University and taught the Senior Thesis class in Design as a Senior Lecturer at

California College of the Arts.

Fleming said there were glorious aspects to every job she held. “But my job now, running my own design firm that focuses on the type of projects that excited me, is the most rewarding,” she said.

“My organization has run three projects on the Navajo Nation. These three projects are by far the most meaningful jobs I’ve had in my career.”

Fleming plans to continue starting small projects on the Navajo Nation and hopes one of those projects will grow and expand into a long-term prospect.

“Ideally I would like to closer to the reservation and to my family,” she said. “I would like to work with motivated and passionate people there on initiatives that better the community and empower others.”

For students stepping onto a college campus for the first time, Fleming said, “It’s important to know that everyone struggles. It’s important to understand that others have overcome these struggles and that you can too.”

“It’s also important to know that you will have to step outside your comfort level in order to be successful. Meaning you will have to take classes that are challenging for you, or ask for help from strangers, and meet new people in order to build a support network.”

“Pursuing an education is time for you to challenge yourself and learn more about what your interests and strengths are,” Fleming explained. “To know who you are and what you want is very empowering.”

“When you do well on a test, complete a class, or earn a degree – these are all successes that will help us comprehend how much we can accomplish if we allow ourselves to try,”

Fleming said one of the best classes she took as a high school senior provided an opportunity to work with mentors who shared their professional journeys with her. She realized how much flexibility there is when pursuing a career.

“You don’t have to be one thing your whole life. There’s room to explore your interests and ideally to create your dream job.”