

Sacred Spaces & Sustainable Places:
Applying Diné Wellness Philosophies as a framework for Participatory Landscape Design

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Proposal

Abstract

This research explores the integration of Indigenous philosophies in the landscape design process. We draw on the Diné wellness concept of Hózhó^{1,2} to develop a community-based participatory design framework^{3,4}. Crucially, we apply a *research by design* methodology to assess whether the framework supports socio-ecologically⁵ sustainable outcomes in the Navajo Nation.

Research Problem Statement

Since time immemorial, Indigenous communities have cultivated ontological, epistemological, and ethical philosophies that, when applied and refined through cultural practices, foster socio-ecological resilience and sustainability^{6,7}. Yet, Western planning theories and design processes often undervalue or marginalize Indigenous philosophies and ways of knowing⁸. This paradigm limits the meaningful alignment of design outcomes with community needs and may negatively impact the well-being of individuals, communities, and the environments they call home. Thus, in the face of increased climate instability and social unease, we ask: How can Indigenous philosophies be integrated into design processes to support socio-ecological sustainability, resilience, and wellness?

Background and Significance

Design interventions in Indigenous communities such as the Navajo Nation must align with traditional values and cultural frameworks to foster acceptance and promote ownership. Hózhó is a foundational Navajo philosophy that emphasizes the pursuit of harmony and balance in all aspects of life—spiritual, social, and environmental. Applying Hózhó in the context of landscape architecture offers a unique opportunity to enhance the socio-ecological performance and sustainability of design solutions, supporting outcomes that are not only functional or aesthetically pleasing, but are also enduring and culturally significant.

Green infrastructure—i.e., rain gardens, bioswales, permeable pavements, and vegetated roofs—has been shown to offer socio-ecological benefits and solutions that support climate resilience and mitigate risks including extreme heat, water scarcity, and flooding^{9,10}. Ultimately, however, the effectiveness and sustainability of these solutions often depends on their acceptance by communities. Importantly, Hózhó can play a critical role in nurturing such acceptance, if applied as a participatory design framework, as the core attributes of the philosophy can guide the development of design proposals that align with cultural values and environmental priorities of Diné people.

The proposed research aims to apply the concept of Hózhó in the development of a community-based participatory design framework that engages University of Arizona student and students, faculty, staff, and other members of the Navajo Technical University (NTU) community in collaboratively developing a landscape master plan for the campus. The process will emphasize and intentionally integrate Thinking, Spirituality, Relationship, Reciprocity, Respect, and Discipline in community engagement activities such as workshops, design charrettes, and storytelling activities, to facilitate a culturally grounded design approach. The final master plan will include green infrastructure solutions tailored to the unique landscape and climate of northern New Mexico, while enhancing the social and cultural functions of the campus.

This research will offer significant outcomes, not only for the Navajo Technical University community, but also for the field of landscape architecture as it will provide a framework for engaging with Indigenous communities and demonstrate how traditional knowledge and philosophies can be integrated into enhance prevailing landscape design processes, especially those related to engaging with vulnerable or underserved communities. By evaluating the outcomes of this approach, this research will provide insights into how co-developed solutions can promote long-term socioecological benefits.

Objectives of Study

This study focuses on developing, applying, and evaluating a participatory design process rooted in the philosophy of Hózhó to create a climate resilient landscape master plan. Five objectives guide the approach:

1. Develop a Hózhó-informed participatory design framework that guides the co-creation of culturally relevant landscape design solutions through community engagement activities.
2. Facilitate inclusive, collaborative workshops with students, faculty, staff, and community members to develop design proposals that apply the attributes of Hózhó to achieve socio-ecological harmony and well-being.
3. Co-develop a landscape master plan for the Navajo Technical University campus that integrates green infrastructure to enhance climate resilience and stormwater management.
4. Evaluate how Hózhó impacts outcomes of the design process by tracking how participants' contributions are incorporated and how the evolving designs reflect community values.
5. Assess how the framework was experienced, with a particular emphasis on understanding whether the attributes of Hózhó were perceived by participants.

Work Plan

Overview

The research is organized into four interconnected phases. Each phase will be guided by specific attributes of Hózhó. The attributes of Thinking, Spirituality, Relationship, Reciprocity, Respect, and Discipline are embedded in each phase to support a design process that is culturally grounded, community-driven and participatory in nature, and leads to socio-ecologically sustainable outcomes.

Importantly, the integration of Hózhó into each phase not only guides the outcomes but will also inform the design process itself. This, in turn, will help to ensure that participants feel respected, heard, and enabled to meaningfully contribute throughout the process, leading to a truly collaborative experience. We will assess whether the approach results in design proposals that reflect the socio-ecological balance, based on community review, and whether the approach promotes a sense of agency and well-being, based on participant reflection.

Integration of Hózhó into community engagement and participatory design process

Phase 1: Pre-Engagement Planning

This phase emphasizes Thinking and Respect by carefully formulating the engagement strategy and project approach that emphasizes mindfulness. We will draw on our existing network and relationships in the Navajo Technical University community to establish working partnerships with campus leaders, community elders, and other stakeholders to demonstrate our commitment to a collaborative process. The pre-engagement planning phase will focus on identifying shared goals and aligning the engagement process with both community values and design priorities. To acknowledge the importance of Reciprocity, the team will ensure that all stakeholders are empowered to contribute equally to shaping the process.

Phase 2: Community Engagement and Participatory Design Workshops

This phase integrates Relationship and Reciprocity as guiding principles. We will conduct participatory workshops to foster meaningful conversations intended to identify priorities for strengthening connections between participants and the NTU campus environment. The workshops will emphasize Thinking, inviting participants to reflect deeply on their experiences and envision how landscape improvements can support beneficial social, environmental, and economic outcomes. Activities will honor Spirituality by drawing on Navajo traditions that acknowledge and celebrate the interconnectedness between people, land, and community well-being. Participants will be encouraged to practice Respect in their interactions by considering diverse perspectives, engaging in mutual learning, and identifying how ecological stewardship can be supported by the landscape master plan. During design charrettes we will balance creativity with Discipline, ensuring that ideas remain practical and aligned with long-term sustainability and campus development goals.

Phase 3: Data Analysis and Plan Development

The data analysis phase will be grounded in Discipline by requiring meticulous attention to detail, ensuring that insights gathered from the workshops are synthesized accurately and comprehensively. We will apply the principle of Thinking to reflect on community input, identify patterns, and evaluate how these insights align with both environmental sustainability and

cultural values. We will reinforce Relationship through continuous engagement with community members, validating preliminary ideas and refining proposals based on feedback from stakeholders. Spirituality will be integrated into this phase by reviewing design proposals to ensure that the consensus plan reflects harmony and traditional Navajo values regarding land stewardship and the promotion of community well-being. Throughout this process, Reciprocity will be demonstrated by acknowledging the contributions of all participants and integrating their ideas into the final recommendations.

Phase 4: Reporting and Dissemination

In the final phase, Respect and Reciprocity be featured prominently as the master plan and research findings are shared with NTU community members and other stakeholders. The reporting process will emphasize Relationship by celebrating the collaborative effort and ensuring that the community feels a deep sense of ownership of the outcomes. Spirituality will be honored through ceremonies marking the completion of the project, reinforcing connections between people and place. Thinking will guide the preparation of academic publications and toolkits, ensuring that the research contributes to broader knowledge on sustainable landscape design and participatory processes. Discipline will be maintained throughout dissemination efforts by carefully documenting and sharing the process and outcomes in ways that inspire future projects rooted in Hózhó.

Mixed Methods for Assessing Participant Perceptions

To assess how participants perceive and experience the integration of Hózhó in the design process, we will employ a mixed-methods approach. Our approach will combine qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to gain insight into how the principles of Thinking, Spirituality, Relationship, Reciprocity, Respect, and Discipline influenced the engagement process and participants' contributions to the project. The analysis will emphasize understanding whether the participatory process fostered a sense of agency, cultural alignment, and beneficial socio-ecological outcomes for stakeholders.

Data Collection

Pre- and Post-Workshop Surveys (Quantitative):

Surveys will be administered before and after the participatory workshops to measure participants' expectations, experiences, and overall satisfaction with the process. Likert-scale questions will focus on the participants' perceptions of inclusivity, respect for their contributions, sense of connection (Relationship), and alignment with cultural values (Spirituality). Survey results will provide a quantitative measure of how well the process incorporated the attributes of Hózhó.

In-depth Interviews and Focus Groups (Qualitative):

A subset of participants, including community elders, students, faculty, and staff, will be invited to participate in post-engagement interviews or focus groups. These discussions will explore their experiences with the framework, focusing on how specific activities (e.g., storytelling, participatory mapping) promoted deeper thinking and cultivated reciprocity among stakeholders. Transcripts will be analyzed thematically to identify how different aspects of Hózhó were reflected in the process and to surface any challenges participants encountered.

Design Artifacts and Feedback Documentation (Mixed):

Data from design artifacts—such as maps, sketches, and charrette outcomes—will be analyzed to assess the extent to which co-created designs reflect community values, priorities, and the principles of Hózhó. Iterative feedback collected during validation sessions will offer additional insights into participants' evolving perspectives on the process and outcomes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Thematic Analysis:

Qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic coding techniques to identify recurring themes related to the principles of Hózhó. Themes will be linked to specific moments or activities within the design process to evaluate which elements were most effective in fostering cultural alignment and harmony.

Statistical Analysis:

Quantitative survey data will be analyzed to identify trends or correlations between participants' engagement levels, satisfaction, and the perceived alignment of the process with cultural values. Descriptive statistics will summarize general patterns, while inferential statistics may reveal significant changes between pre- and post-workshop responses.

Project Schedule

Phase	Activities	Duration
Phase 1: Pre-Engagement Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Form research team, including students, faculty, and community stakeholders. b. Develop engagement framework based on Hózhó attribute and schedule. c. Create outreach materials and obtain IRB approval for data collection. 	Dec – Feb (2024-25)
Phase 2: Community Engagement and Participatory Design Workshops^{11,12,13}	<p><i>Activity 1: Storytelling & Listening</i> Facilitate sharing of experiences related to the landscape and environment.</p> <p><i>Activity 2: Participatory Mapping Workshops</i> Identify areas for design interventions (e.g., stormwater management, heat mitigation).</p> <p><i>Activity 3: Preliminary Design Charrettes</i> Conduct collaborative design workshops to develop preliminary design concepts.</p> <p><i>Activity 4: Iterative Feedback Sessions</i> Refine ideas based on community feedback.</p>	Mar – Jul (2025)
Phase 3: Data Analysis and Plan Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Analyze data from workshop activities (e.g., storytelling, maps, charrettes). b. Develop a draft landscape master plan (includes student travel between Crownpoint/Tucson). c. Conduct final feedback sessions to validate design with stakeholders. d. Survey participants. 	Aug – Oct (2025)
Phase 4: Reporting and Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Produce a detailed report for the grant funder. b. Present findings to the Navajo Technical University and local community. c. Prepare manuscript(s) for publication and dissemination of findings by other means (conferences, symposia, etc.). 	Nov – Dec (2025)

Budget

	Budget Item	Amount
Personnel	0.60-month Institutional PI Summer Salary (Kenneth Kokroko)	\$5,250
	Co-PI Summer Salary (Mathew Tafoya)	\$3,550
	Hourly Student Worker (TBD, 75 hours @ \$16.00/hour)	\$1,200
	Subtotal	\$ 10,000
Travel	University of Arizona Student Trip to Navajo Technical University (15-20 students)	\$5,000
	Navajo Technical University Student Trip to University of Arizona (15-20 students)	\$5,000
	Subtotal	
Materials/ Supplies	Community stakeholder engagement (workshops and design charrettes)	\$500
	Post-engagement assessment (survey and qualitative data analysis software)	\$500
	Subtotal	\$1,000
Dissemination/ Publication	Open Access Publication Fees	\$1,000
	Subtotal	\$1,000
Institutional Indirect Costs	Maximum Facilities & Administrative Cost (12%)	\$3,000
	Subtotal	\$3,000
	Total Expenses	\$25,000

List of Deliverables

Landscape Master Plan

A comprehensive design plan co-developed with community members and stakeholders, reflecting the principles of Hózhó. The master plan will integrate green infrastructure solutions such as stormwater management systems and shade strategies, tailored to the cultural, social, and environmental needs of the Navajo Technical University campus community.

Implementation Framework for the Master Plan

A practical guide for implementing the landscape master plan, including timelines, phasing strategies. The Implementation Framework will also outline steps for long-term maintenance to ensure the sustainability and landscape performance of the proposed improvements.

Community Presentation and Feedback Sessions

A series of presentations to share the project progress and outcomes with the NTU and local communities. These sessions will serve as opportunities to reflect on the collaborative process, celebrate community involvement, and gather feedback to validate the process and project's impact.

Project Report Submitted to CELA

A detailed report documenting the project outcomes, including the participatory design process, key insights, and assessment results will be submitted to CELA. The report will be formatted in accordance with the requirements stipulated in the 2024-25 Bob Cardoza CLASS Fund Research Grant Information Packet.

Refereed Journal Article

A scholarly article submitted to a peer-reviewed journal focusing on participatory design, Indigenous philosophies, or landscape architecture. The article will contribute to academic discourse on community-based and participatory design by showcasing how Indigenous philosophies can be applied to guide landscape design and participatory frameworks.

White Paper/Toolkit for Practitioners and Educators

A concise, actionable resource summarizing the project's findings and best practices. The toolkit will outline how Indigenous philosophies, particularly Hózhó, can be integrated into design processes. It will be aimed at landscape architects, planners, educators, and community organizers working in culturally diverse or underserved contexts, generally, and in Indigenous communities, specifically.

Conference Presentations and/or Symposia Participation

Presentation of the project outcomes at regional and/or national conferences, such as the ASLA Conference on Landscape Architecture, CELA Annual Conference, or Indigenous-focused symposia. These engagements will help disseminate the findings widely, foster dialogue, and build networks for future research collaborations.

References

1. Kahn-John, M., & Koithan, M. (2015). Living in health, harmony, and beauty: The Diné (Navajo) Hózhó wellness philosophy. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 4(3), 24–30. <https://doi.org/10.7453/gahmj.2015.044>
2. Kahn-John, M. (2010). Concept analysis of Diné Hózhó: A Diné wellness philosophy. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 33(2), 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0b013e3181dbc658>
3. Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (Eds.) (2008). *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
4. Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19(1), 173–202. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.19.1.173>
5. Xiang, W. N. (2019). Ecopracticology: The study of socio-ecological practice. *Socio-Ecological Practice Research*, 1, 7–14 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42532-019-00006-6>
6. Trospen, R. L. (2009). *Resilience, reciprocity and ecological economics: Northwest Coast sustainability*. Routledge.
7. Trospen, R. L. (2003). Resilience in pre-contact Pacific Northwest social ecological systems. *Conservation Ecology*, 7(3), 6. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-00551-070306>
8. Jones, R. (2019). Climate change and Indigenous health promotion. *Global Health Promotion*, 26(3_suppl), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975919829713>
9. Palliwoda, J., & Priess, J. A. (2021). What do people value in urban green? linking characteristics of urban green spaces to users' perceptions of nature benefits, disturbances, and disservices. *Ecology and Society*, 26(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12204-260128>
10. Gerlak, A.K., & A.A. Zuniga-Teran. 2020. Addressing injustice in green infrastructure through socio-ecological practice: What is the role of university-community partnerships? *Socio-Ecological Practice Research* 2:1 49-159.
11. Tiwari, R., Lommerse, M., & Smith, D. (Eds.). (2014). *M² models and methodologies for community engagement*. Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-11-8_1
12. Sanders, E. B.-N., & Stappers, P. J. (2008). Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. *CoDesign*, 4(1), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701875068>
13. Day, C., & Parnell, R. (2003). *Consensus design: Socially inclusive process*. Architectural Press.

KENNETH J. KOKROKO | PLA, ASLA

CURRICULUM VITAE

Assistant Professor, School of Landscape Architecture and Planning, University of Arizona

(Last updated October 2024)

CHRONOLOGY OF EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

EDUCATION

- 2017 **University of Arizona | School of Landscape Architecture and Planning** | Tucson, AZ
Master of Landscape Architecture
Masters Report: *Interstitial Interventions: Exploring an Emergent Landscape Infrastructure*
Honors: American Society of Landscape Architects (Arizona Chapter) Honor Award
- 2013 **University of Arizona | School of Anthropology** | Tucson, AZ
Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology; Minor in Environmental Sciences

PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

- 2020-2023 Licensed Landscape Architect, Michigan
License Number 3901001786; renewal pending

CHRONOLOGY OF ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

- 2021-present **University of Arizona | School of Landscape Architecture and Planning** | Tucson, AZ
Assistant Professor, tenure eligible
- 2013-2014 **University of Arizona | Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology** | Tucson, AZ
Post-Baccalaureate Research Assistant

CHRONOLOGY OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2017-2021 **SmithGroup** | Ann Arbor, MI
Associate | Landscape Architect | Urban Designer

HONORS & AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL & NATIONAL AWARDS

- 2023 **American Society of Landscape Architects Honor Award | Analysis and Planning**
American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
Joe Louis Greenway Framework Plan
(work completed in 2021 with City of Detroit General Services Department, JLG Community Advisory Council, SmithGroup, Studio Incognita, Sidewalk Detroit, Toole Design, HR&A Advisors)
- 2022 **Deans' Diversity and Equity Initiative (DEII)**
Selected by University of Arizona College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture Dean Nancy Pollock-Ellwand as DEII Fellow, 2022-2023
- 2022 **National Planning Excellence Award**
American Planning Association (APA)
Joe Louis Greenway Framework Plan
(work completed in 2021 with City of Detroit General Services Department, JLG Community Advisory Council, SmithGroup, Studio Incognita, Sidewalk Detroit, Toole Design, HR&A Advisors)
- 2020 **AIA Regional & Urban Design**
American Institute of Architects (AIA)
Campau / Davison / Banglatown Neighborhood Framework Plan
(with Interboro Partners & SmithGroup)

PUBLICATIONS & CREATIVE ACTIVITY

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL PAPERS

- 2024 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.**, Will Leipold, and Meredith Hovis. "Applying a pedagogy of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration as socio-ecological practice in landscape architecture education." *Socio-Ecological Practice Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42532-023-00175-5>

OTHER SCHOLARSHIP

PEER-REVIEWED ABSTRACTS

- 2024 Hall, C., **Kokroko, K.**, Mexia-Alvarez, N., Bugaj, A., Davi, L., Horley, L., Munguia-Vega, A., and Antebi, N.: Developing a Cross-Cultural Framework for Sustainability Solutions in the US-Mexico Borderlands: Integrating Interdisciplinary and Community-Driven Research in Curriculum, EGU General Assembly 2024, Vienna, Austria, 14–19 Apr 2024, EGU24-14000, <https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu24-14000>.
- 2023 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.** "From Liability to Asset: Engaging Radical Imaginaries to Unveil the Transformative Impact of Landscape Planning & Design in Distressed Urban Communities." *Proceedings of the CELA Annual Conference, 2023*.
- 2023 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.** "Service Learning in the Landscape Architecture Design Studio: A Guide for Success." *Proceedings of the CELA Annual Conference, 2023*.
- 2022 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.** "Detroit's Joe Louis Greenway: Urban Trail Development as Infrastructural Necessity, Not Recreational Luxury." *Proceedings of the CELA Annual Conference, 2022*.

PLANNING & DESIGN

- 2023 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.** "La Doce Vacant Land Activation Plan: Community Engagement Report." Tucson, AZ
Client: Southwest Folklife Alliance.
- 2023 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.**, Oscar Rodriguez Ponce, Will Liepold. "Main Gate Square Streetscape Improvement Plan." Tucson, AZ
Client: The Marshall Foundation
- 2022 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.** & Will Liepold. "South Tucson Housing Authority Open Space Improvement Plan." City of South Tucson, AZ
Client: South Tucson Housing Authority
- 2022 **Kokroko, Kenneth J.** and Luran Morrissey. "Grace Lutheran Children's Art and Nature Garden." Sahuarita, AZ
Client: Grace Lutheran Church and Child Learning Center; Completed, 2023.

PUBLICATIONS BY OTHERS ABOUT WORK

NEWSPAPERS & PUBLIC MEDIA

- 2023 "Students from Arizona and Sonora create green infrastructure." *El Imparcial*. 29 April 2023. <https://www.elimparcial.com/sonora/hermosillo/Estudiantes-de-Arizona-y-Sonora-crean-infraestructura-verde-20230429-0021.html>
- 2023 "Students from the University of Arizona build a botanical median with native plants on Hermosillo Boulevard; Desert Walkers, Unison and City Hall join." *Proyecto Puente*. 27 April 2023. <https://proyectopuente.com.mx/2023/04/27/estudiantes-de-la-universidad-de-arizona-haran-camellon-botanico-en-morelos-y-progreso-en-hermosillo-con-arboles-y-plantas-nativas/>

CONFERENCES & SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

INVITED KEYNOTES

- 2022 “Green Infrastructure as Equitable Development: Designing for Resilience in Underserved Communities” | International Seminar on Green Infrastructure in Hot Dry Climates: An Educational Endeavor in Urban Spaces Facing Vulnerability | Universidad de Sonora School of Design and Architecture; Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico | Virtual

INVITED SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

- 2023 “Creating Cross-Cultural, Interdisciplinary Academic Research Experiences” | Inside UAZ-Funded Scholarship Series | Tucson, Arizona
With: Caitlyn Hall, Nicole Antebi, Lysette Davi, Laura Horley, Will Leipold*
- 2023 “Detroit's Joe Louis Greenway: Community engagement methods for supporting equitable growth in underserved communities” | Perth, Western Australia
- 2023 “Landscape design as an engagement tool for greening projects in Hermosillo, Mexico” | Shades of Urban Greening: Linking design, social science, and environmental science approaches to understand ecosystem impacts of green infrastructure in drying cities | Perth, Western Australia
With: Adriana Zuñiga-Teran
- 2023 “Tucson’s dream gardens: A community-engagement methodology for understanding residential plant preferences (upcoming) | Shades of Urban Greening: Linking design, social science, and environmental science approaches to understand ecosystem impacts of green infrastructure in drying cities” | Perth, Western Australia
With: Adriana Zuñiga-Teran

SCHOLARLY & PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- 2024 Hall, C., **Kokroko, K.**, Mexia-Alvarez, N., Bugaj, A., Davi, L., Horley, L., Munguia-Vega, A., and Antebi, N.: Developing a Cross-Cultural Framework for Sustainability Solutions in the US-Mexico Borderlands: Integrating Interdisciplinary and Community-Driven Research in Curriculum, EGU General Assembly 2024, Vienna, Austria, 14–19 Apr 2024, EGU24-14000, <https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu24-14000>.
- 2024 “Applying a pedagogy of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration as socio-ecological practice in landscape architecture education” | CELA 2024 Annual Conference | St. Louis, MO
- 2024 “From Play to Policy: Applying Gamification to Enhance Community Engagement in Urban Greening Policymaking” | CELA 2024 Annual Conference | St. Louis, MO
- 2023 “Service Learning in the Landscape Architecture Design Studio: A Guide for Success” | CELA 2023 Annual Conference | San Antonio, TX
- 2023 “From Liability to Asset: Engaging Radical Imaginaries to Unveil the Transformative Impact of Landscape Planning & Design in Distressed Urban Communities” | CELA 2023 Annual Conference | San Antonio, TX
- 2022 “From Classroom to Practice: Skills, Mentorship, Culture and Experience” | Black Landscape Architects Network's ASLA Panel at 2022 American Society of Landscape Architecture Annual Conference | San Francisco, CA
With: Julian Stanfield, Victor Cizik, Divine Ndemeye, Jescelle Major
- 2022 “Detroit's Joe Louis Greenway: Urban Trail Development as Infrastructural Necessity, Not Recreational Luxury” | CELA 2022 Annual Conference | Santa Ana Pueblo, NM

Matthew Kirk Tafoya
Master of Arts, American Indian Studies
University of Arizona
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Formal Education

Doctor of Philosophy Current

University of Arizona, American Indian Studies,

University of Arizona, Major in Natural Resource Management and Native Nation Building with a Minor in Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Studies focus on tangible solutions to Native health issues that are associated with or consequent of colonization and climate change. Solutions include Native Nation Building principles combined with climate change adaptations like food sovereignty, green infrastructure, ecological restoration, sustainable living, and conservations efforts.

Master of Arts December 2014
University of Arizona, American Indian Studies.

University of Arizona, major in American Indian Studies with focus in Law and Policy. My thesis entitled “Traditional Navajo Culture is a Protective Factor “makes the case that Native Americans can and should use their respective cultures to center and inform their suicide and substance abuse prevention programs.

Bachelor of Science 2010
Arizona State University, major in Justice Studies with an emphasis in federal Indian law and policy and minor in American Indian art history, business, communication, and political science.
Diné College, major in Diné Studies. 2009-2010

Areas of Interest

Traditional Navajo economy, government, history, culture, art, language, and philosophy.
Navajo male material culture knowledge, history, evolution, and production techniques.
Apache male material culture knowledge, history, evolution, and production techniques.
Southwestern Native American wilderness survival knowledge, skills, and techniques.
Post-Colonial Native American urban and rural survival knowledge, skills, and techniques.
Ta’ Chee: Navajo male puberty ceremonial knowledge, materials, process, and outcomes.
Identification of Navajo Sacred Sites and the traditional knowledge associated with sites.
Traditional Navajo archery and weapons information and manufacturing.

Employment History

P

Graduate Assistant, American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona from August 2019 to

May 2020. Worked with Dr. Len Necefer to introduce, advocate, and educate on transitioning the Navajo economy from natural resource extraction to outdoor recreation. Much progress was made up until the Covid 19 Pandemic started and put the Navajo Nation into lockdown which ended the research program.

Teaching Assistant, American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona from August 2018 to

May 2019. I worked collaboratively with four other T.A.s under the co-leadership of Dr. Tristan Reader and Dr. Len Necefer to Teach “Many Nations” a history and survey of Indigenous people in North America. I taught 6 out of 32 lecture classes and several classes on Friday.

Program Manager, Partnership to Improve Community Health (PICH) at Tsehootsooi Medical Center from March 2015 to July 2017. Implement \$3,000,000 grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for two and half years to reduce chronic disease by increasing access to healthy food and beverages within the Fort Defiance Service Area. I exceeded programmatic goals by over 300% and focused the work on localized traditional food production.

Community Involvement Coordinator, Methamphetamine and Suicide Prevention Initiative at Tsehootsooi Medical Center from September, 2012 to February, 2013 and from May, 2013 to January, 2014. Research, develop, implement, and evaluate methamphetamine and suicide prevention strategies for the Navajo people within the Fort Defiance service area.

Consultant, Diné College, July and August of 2010

Develop, design, and produce the college catalog for the 2010-11 academic year.

Owner and operator, Tribal Sovereign Tees, 1997-2008

Research and develop political Native American t-shirt designs for sale to public. Analyze market, develop market share strategy, and influence the way Native people think about themselves and how non-natives think about Native people. Promote and sell my t-shirts. One of my designs (Homeland Security Fighting Terrorism Since 1492) achieved national popularity.

Store Manager, Way Out West, 1997-98

Oversee daily operations, planning, logistics, customer service, and custom screen printing of store and mobile units.

Office Assistant, American Indian Institute, ASU, 1995-97

Assist in the daily operations of A.I.I., recruit Native students, help students with campus services/resources, answer questions and deal with concerns of students. Develop social, academic, and cultural activities for students to help adjust to campus life.

Professional Experience

Father and Son Traditional Navajo Leather Project conducted eight-week, hands-on project with Window Rock Unified School District and MSPI Program, Ft. Defiance, 2012-2013.

Arizona State Museum, Interned with Ethnographic Collections Curator, 2012.

Naalchid: Traditional Navajo Government Research Project conducted at Diné College for Navajo History class and campus community, 2010.

Electronic Publishing

Poetics & Politics 2011, Cooperate to host visiting author at public reading as part of a series of poetry readings and discussion with five Native American authors. My group hosted Dr. Franci Washburn.

Scholarships

Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter Scholarship, 2012

ASU Maroon and Gold, 1993-95

ASU President's Award, 1993-95

Navajo Nation Scholarship, 1993-96, 2011-12

Dubois Scholastic Award, 1995

American Indian Association Scholastic Award, 1994

Morris Udall Public Policy and American Indian Affairs Fellowship, 1996

Woodrow Wilson Public Policy and International Affairs Scholarship, 1996

Awards and Honors

Honorable Mention, Navajo Nation Fair, Tribal Arts, 2012 and 2014.

First Place, Painted Dessert Invitational Indian Market, Painted Dessert National Park, 2012

Third Place, Knowledge Bowl, American Indian Higher Education Consortium Annual Conference, 2010

Third Place, Edge of the Cedars, Cultural Arts Division, 2010

First Place and Third Place, Museum of Northern Arizona, Cultural Arts, 2009

Third Place, Navajo Nation Fair, Tribal Arts, 2009

First Place, Navajo Nation Fair, Domestic Arts, 2009

Second Place, Navajo Nation Fair, Tribal Arts, 2008

Second and Third Place, Navajo Nation Fair, Tribal Arts, 2007

First Place, Navajo Nation Fair, Tribal Arts, 2006

First Place, Traditional Clothing Competition, SWAIA, Santa Fe Indian Market, 2006

Winner, Student Debate on Indian Gaming, ASU, 1993

Professional Presentation

Improving Indigenous Social Ecologies from the Ground Up. Indigenous Health Care Conference. Gold Coast, Australia, July, 2014.

Designing Data for the Future. Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ. May, 2024.

“What Southwestern Tribes can do to adapt to climate change” presentation at the 21st Annual American Indian Studies Association Conference in Tempe, AZ in February 2020.

“Traditional Foods and Gardening Improves Physical, Mental, Emotional, Spiritual, and Emotional Health” presented at the 48th Annual Meeting and Health Conference: Shoring Up Native Health in Scottsdale, AZ 2019.