Photo by Sean Weaver/NMHU

Diné College President Maggie George delivers the commencement address May 9 to New Mexico Highlands’ Class of 2015.

**Diné College President Tells Graduates to Take Risks, Gather Spiritual Medicine**

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Las Vegas, New Mexico – Take risks and gather your spiritual medicine for your life journey, Navajo Diné College President Maggie George told graduates at the Highlands University main campus commencement May 9.

A record number of 952 students graduated from Highlands and its centers, with 438 earning their diplomas in Las Vegas. Of these graduates, 52 percent earned bachelor’s degrees and 48 percent completed master’s degrees.

“It’s important to take risks, follow through, listen and allow yourself to try new things because challenges create opportunities,” said George, who delivered this year’s main campus commencement address. “It’s also important to have seasoned mentors who care about you and will help you gather your spiritual medicine for your life journey. Don’t be afraid to ask for advice.”

George told the graduates to be proud of who they are and where they come from – something she said strengthened her throughout life from growing up on the Navajo reservation in Red Valley, Arizona to directing a White House initiative on tribal higher education to leading Diné College since 2011.

Founded in 1968, Diné College was the first of 37 tribal colleges in the United States. It serves residents of the 26,000-square mile Navajo Nation, which includes parts of New Mexico, Arizona and Utah.

George earned her Ph.D. in higher education policy and leadership from the University of Kansas. She is a Highlands alumna, where she completed her B.A. in elementary education and her M.A. in guidance and counseling.

Her career spans more than 30 years as a teacher and counselor, college education professor, and higher education administrator.

George told the graduates to be an advocate for others, giving the personal example of interning at the New Mexico State Hospital and Sangre de Cristo Mental Health Center as a graduate student at Highlands.

“I learned to push the boundaries of what it means to be compassionate despite the odds and to be a warrior for advocacy. I learned to step up and speak for those who would not otherwise be heard,” George said.

George stressed the importance of being someone who acts rather than being acted upon. She concluded her speech by saying: “We all have gifts to share. Be generous with sharing your gifts. Remember this day is just the beginning of an unknown journey that will be filled with unimaginable triumphs as well as defeats. Your job now is to jump in with both feet and savor every moment.”