

Devona Sharpe: Navajo Nation Reflection

Winter Term 2007

For the month of January, we traveled to the Navajo Nation in Chinle, Arizona, to volunteer at the newly development literacy program at Chinle Elementary. The Chinle Elementary School is comprised of 95.5% Navajo children and is run by Navajo community members. It was our goal to become more aware of the disadvantages that many Navajo Natives face as well as working with the children of the Navajo community to aid with their academic success.

While on the reservation we were able to experience many different aspects of Navajo culture. We wanted to further our understanding of the culture through integration and daily interactions with the community. We lived in a humble mobile home (as most working class Navajos in Chinle) and learned many of the cultural customs. We were able to attend the Navajo Nation inauguration, a Gourde dance, and a Pow-Wow, and we experienced many of the delicious native foods. We wanted to experience Navajo values, their unique emphasis on family structure, and the dichotomy of a nation within a nation.

Our initial goals were to become more aware of the help that is truly needed on Navajo Reservation, to help students to become more inspired about the goals that they can accomplish, and to learn more about the Navajo people and their deep-rooted culture. However, the experiences learned on the reservation—learning to keep a fire going throughout the night, and learning to be more patient with children and help them to have faith in themselves—are priceless lessons that we will forever be grateful for.