



**Board of Regents of the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute
2026 Quarter 1 Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2026**

A. Call the Meeting to Order

Chairperson Begaye called the meeting to order at 9:15AM MST.

B. Welcome and Invocation

Regent Bush gave the welcome and invocation.

C. Roll Call

Present

Mr. Adam J. Begaye, Chairperson, Navajo Nation-New Mexico

Mr. Hershel Gorham, Vice Chairperson, Oklahoma Tribes

Ms. Esther Peterson, Secretary/Treasurer, Navajo Nation-Arizona

Dr. John Bush, Member, Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona-South

Mr. Timothy Harjo, SIPI Alumni

Ms. Donna Montoya, Jicarilla Apache Nation

Mr. Caleb Secatero, SGA President (or designee)

Mr. Francis Tafoya, Eight Northern Pueblos

Dr. Tamarah Pfeiffer, President, SIPI (Ex-Officio, non-voting member)

Absent

Mr. Clyde Davis Jr., Mescalero Apache Tribe

Vacant

Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona-North

Vacant, Southern Pueblos Council

D. Appointment(s) and Update(s) on New Board Member(s)

1. Chairperson Begaye invited Board appointee Ms. Lorissa Garcia, Southern Pueblos Council, to give introductory remarks. Ms. Garcia overviewed her educational background and professional accomplishments.

A motion to appoint Ms. Lorissa Garcia to the SIPI Board of Regents was made by Regent Tafoya with a second by Regent Bush: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed. Ms. Garica was welcomed to the Board.

2. Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA)-North Vacancy
Chairperson Begaye and Executive Director Wallace are working with ITCA leadership to fill this vacancy on the SIPI BOR.

E. Introduction of Special Guests

Chairperson Begaye welcomed:

1. Associate Deputy Director of Postsecondary Education, Bureau of Indian Education, Ms. Stephanie Conduff
2. Members from the Haskell Indian Nations University Board of Regents:
 - President Dalton Henry.
 - Regent Dr. John Bush, Western Region
 - Regent April Carmelo, Pacific Region.
 - Regent Casey Douma, Southwest Region
 - Mr. Robert Porter, Legal Counsel

F. Approval of the Agenda

Recommendations to modify the agenda were to: (1) Chairperson Begaye requested adding an Action Item to remove Mr. Clyde Davis Jr., Mescalero Apache Tribe, for failing to attend Board meetings; and (2) President Pfeiffer requested pulling Resolutions #6 through #9 2026-1 on the Agenda and instead use Report #1 2026-1 as the basis for action on purposed SIPI BOR Constitutional Amendments.

A motion to accept the agenda modification as noted above was made by Regent Bush with a second by Regent Peterson: 8 yes, 0 no, and 0 abstain. The motion passed.

G. Approval of the Meeting Minutes

Regent Peterson overviewed the SIPI BOR October 16, 2025, Quarter 4 Meeting Minutes.

A motion to accept the 2025 Quarter 4 Board Minutes made by Regent Tafoya with a second by Regent Montoya: 8 yes, 0 no, and 0 abstained. The motion passed.

H. Introduction of New Employees

New employees in facilities and security were introduced. It was noted that SIPI is still under a federal hiring freeze and that facilities and security are the only areas that are exempt from the hiring freeze.

I. Action Items

1. Resolution #1 2026-1: Policy Statement on Native American Education Goals and Objectives

There was no discussion after Chairperson Begaye overviewed the Resolution.

A motion to accept the Policy Statement on Native American Education Goals and Objectives was made by Regent Bush with a second by Vice Chairperson Gorham: 8 yes, 0 no, and 0 abstain. The motion passed.

2. Haskell Indian Nations University Improvement Act

Chairperson Begaye overviewed the Haskell Indian Nations University Improvement Act (HINUIA) S.2140 & H.R. 4085 and January 2, 2026, correspondence received from the Haskell BOR Requesting Support for the HINUIA.

Haskell BOR President Henry followed by reviewing the antecedents that led the Haskell BOR to pursue the HINUIA. Regent Bush expressed his support for the Act, noting that it eliminates Bureau of Indian Education setbacks and creates a better educational environment. Regent Montoya asked fiscal impacts to which Chairperson Begaye referred summary material in the Board packet.

Associate Deputy Director expressed the following concerns as the legislation is currently written: (1) Haskell would lose access to shared services (e.g., insurance, legal) that the BIE provides, (2) the ability to attract and retain a president, and (3) the loss of budget advocacy from the BIE. President Pfeiffer stated that SIPI should not be seen as a partner to this Act.

Regent Tafoya asked how funding will be achieved in this model. It was indicated that it would be similar to the Institute of American Indian Arts. Haskell BOR President Henry indicated that the bill had been revised to \$27 million to compensate for the lack of shared services previously provided by the BIE.

Associate Deputy Director Conduff stated if the HINUIA is passed, Haskell would be responsible for working with the hill to achieve funding. She also noted the operations and maintenance costs are not covered by the legislation and there are no transition timelines. These are all things, she noted, that would need technical amendments.

President Pfeiffer stated that she has moved schools from the BIE and all they inherit are the walls. Human capital is an important consideration she added. Regent Garcia concurred on the walls only comment. Discussions then turned to the following Resolutions.

i. Resolution #2 2026-1: Calling on Congress to Pass the HINUIA

President Pfeiffer said she did not see anything about Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation in the HINUIA. Haskell BOR President Henry indicated that they are currently On Notice with HLC, with BIE barriers creating presidential instability and other issues causing the University's current accreditation status.

President Pfeiffer asked if they have made similar requests to the tribes with regards to supporting the HINUIA. Haskell BOR President Henry said they have support from the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, National Congress of American Indians, and each Board member is or has made similar requests to the tribes that they represent.

A motion calling on congress to pass the HINUIA was made by Regent Bush with a second by Regent Harjo: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstained. The motion and supporting Resolution passed.

ii. Resolution #3 2026-1: Resolution in Support of the HINUIA

Dr. Bush supports the resolution and writing a letter in support of the HINUIA. Regent Tafoya asked if SIPI's support could lead to SIPI being grouped into the HINUIA. President Pfeiffer said anyone could interpret anything anyway.

Chairperson Begaye will work with Dr. Rives to revise SIPI BOR letter to reflect that the passage of our Resolution is institution-specific. The SIPI BOR is not seeking inclusion of the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in S.2140 or H.R.4085. Nor should SIPI be included in these bills. The Haskell Board of Regents completed their due diligence before making an informed decision. And we support their decision for their institution.

Regents Harjo, Peterson, and Vice Chairman Gorham do not see a problem supporting the HINUIA and do not see SIPI being grouped into legislation without tribal consultation.

A motion to support the HINUIA was made by Regent Bush with a second by Regent Harjo: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstained. The motion and supporting Resolution passed.

3. SIPI Board of Regents Governance

Chairperson Begaye started a discussion on the MOU between the SIPI BOR and the BIE indicating its origin dates back to 2024 and the draft is not perfect.

Associate Deputy Director Conduff comments included saying that nothing has changed since the last MOU, it is not going to happen in reference to a non-federal employee supervising a federal employee, and BIE cannot get saddled with another SES. She asked which MOU are you wanting, the one we have been working on for the past year or this one. She said there will not be two MOUs, that you are cutting an entity out, and made several references that the SIPI BOR is an advisory board.

Chairperson Begaye responded with documentation that established the scope of the responsibilities for the SIPI BOR. And indicated that this is a MOU for how we interface with the BIE, with Associate Deputy Director again asking which MOU.

Dr. Rives suggested that we table the item and seek clarity with Director Dearman. He was the one who asked Chairperson Begaye and Executive Director Wallace to develop a “Shoot for the Stars MOU with the BIE.”

Regent Harjo made a motion to move into Executive Session with a second by Vice Chairman Gorham: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed and Board moved into Executive Session at 11:37 AM MST.

Regent Garcia motioned to reconvene into open session with a second by Regent Montiya: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed and Board reconvened into Open Session at 12:04 PM MST.

Chairperson Begaye’s report for Executive Session indicated that there will be a work session scheduled with Director Dearman, other members of the BIE, Solicitors, and the SIPI BOR to review what can and cannot be done in the SIPI BOR-BIE MOU.

Chairperson Begaye and Associate Deputy Director Conduff agreed to set a February work session to that end. Chairperson Begaye will be seeking a motion to table Resolution #4 2026-1: BOR-BIE MOU and Resolution #5 2026-1: Tribal Self Determination and the SIPI Board of Regents until the aforementioned work session is complete.

A motion to table Resolution #5 2026-1 and Resolution #6 2026-1 was made by Regent Montoya with a second by Vice Chairperson Gorham: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed and the stated Resolutions were tabled.

4. Removal of Regent Mr. Clyde Davis Jr., Mescalero Apache Tribe from the SIPI BOR

Chairperson Begaye is seeking a motion to remove Regent Davis from the SIPI BOR for not regularly attending SIPI BOR meeting.

The requested motion was made by Vice Chairperson Gorham with a second by Regent Tayfoya: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed. Regent Davis was removed from the SIPI BOR. Chairperson Begaye will follow up with the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

5. College Matters for BOR Concurrence/Approval

i. SIPI Strategic Plan 2025-2030

President Pfeiffer overviewed the four goals of the Strategic Plan and their importance.

ii. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

Dr. Begaye overviewed the revision process to this policy and assured that previous Board member concerns were addressed.

A motion to provide concurrence to the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy was made by Regent Tafoya with a second by Regent Bush: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed and the AI Policy was approved.

iii. Four Semester Matriculation for Adult Basic Education

Dr. Begaye highlighted the importance of a four semester policy and responded to questions regarding whether this would effect student financial aid.

A motion to approve the new policy was made by Regent Bush with a second by Vice Chairperson Gorham: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed and the new Policy was approved.

iv. Minimal Qualifications for Teaching Online Courses

Dr. French indicated that 40% of SIPI courses are online and the establishment of this policy assures educational quality.

A motion to approve the new policy was made by Regent Montoya with a second by Regent Tafoya: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed and the new Policy was approved.

v. 2026-2027 Academic Calendar

There were no suggested changes to 2026-2027 Academic Calendar.

A motion to approve the 2026-2027 Academic Calendar was made by Regent Bush with a second by Regent Garcia: 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed.

Regent Garcia had to leave the meeting at 12:25 PM. Lunch recess occurred from 12:25 PM – 1:12 PM MST.

J. BOR Resolution Implementation

1. Northern Arizona University Partnership Exploration (Resolution # 3 2024-7)
Chairperson Begaye sent a letter to NAU per the last Board meeting, seeking continued partnership exploration during calendar year 2026. No response was received. Resolution #3 2024-7 is terminated.
2. Partnership Exploration with the Canoncito Band of Navajos (Resolution #1 2024-10)
President Pfeiffer continues to reach out to the new administration but has not received any responses. She will continue in her efforts to make contact

K. Reports

1. Board of Regents

- i. Draft 2025 BOR and BOR Development Office Accomplishments Report: Board members will be asked to send their accomplishments to Dr. Rives for inclusion in this Report that will be presented at the SIPI BOR 2026 Quarter 2 Meeting.
- ii. Board Member Meeting Expectations: Chairperson Begaye emphasized the importance of continued Board member attendance at scheduled meetings.
- iii. Individual Board Member Reports

Regent Tafoya: Expressed appreciation for increased Board Member attendance at this meeting. Requested information about SIPI so he can take to his tribal education departments. Would like the SIPI administration to come and update his tribes. Because of distance and cost, he would like to share information on distance learning, believing it will be helpful to increase SIPI's enrollment.

Regent Gorham: Invited Chairperson Begaye and Executive Director Wallace to come and talk about SIPI to the United Indian Nations of Oklahoma in April. He also requested the same documents as Regent Tafoya. He noted comments from prospective SIPI students included the lack of landscaping and that facilities are run down. He also noted that we need to find solutions to increase enrollment.

Regent Secatero: Deferred his commentary to the Student Government Association Report.

Regent Montoya: Plans to get in front of new council members in the fall to reintroduce them to SIPI.

Regent Bush: Serves as the President of his Education Department and just completed Arizona Legislative Day. He is concerned about the lack of student awareness about SIPI and the College's continued enrollment decline.

Regent Harjo: Secretary of Commerce for his Tribes. He encouraged Chairperson Begaye and Executive Director Wallace to return to Oklahoma for continued meetings. He has also heard student concerns about the condition of SIPI's facilities and grounds.

Regent Peterson: Concerned that she went to Tribal Education Department and they knew nothing about SIPI. She will reach back out to them.

Chairperson Begaye emphasized the importance of our grass roots efforts to build individuals and communities up. He his happy to assist Board Members with their efforts at their request.

2. SIPI Quarterly Reports

i. College Overview

Highlights of President Pfeiffer's report included:

- Preparing to travel to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium Student Conference in Washington D.C.
- Working on fiscal spend-down
- Reopening the Science and Technology building after a four month closure.
- Mentioning the next Higher Learning Commission visit is scheduled for January 2028. It will be the College's four-year review.
- Moving tutoring to Academics.
- Identifying new programs in development for the fall of 2026: Certificate in Conservation and Resource Protection, Pre-Nursing A.A.S (program revision), two certificates in Culinary Arts, along with an A.A.S in food science, with emphasis on food truck. She also noted that this will be the first time in 19 years that SIPI has had new programs.
- Expanding dual credit: 17 students earned between three and nine credit hours in the fall and 25 dual credit students are enrolled this spring.
- Identifying Dr. Lesky as the project manager for Library renovation, as well as providing leadership in the IT infrastructure project and the facility master plan.
- Revising the Sexual Harassment Policy.
- Overviewing the four goals of SIPI's new 2025-2030 Strategic Plan that is included in the Board Book.

ii. Hiring Process

Mr. Monte Monteith indicated that the federal hiring freeze is over. There is a new system. SIPI has 35 open positions but needs approvals before commencing in searches.

iii. Appropriated Funds

Mr. Monteith indicated that SIPI remains flat funded for operations, which represents a decline when factoring in inflation and tariffs. However, SIPI has a surplus due to the hiring freeze. These funds can only be used for one-time expenses and not for facilities. President Pfeiffer has a spreadsheet monitoring how these funds are being used.

Mr. Monteith indicated that operational funding through June 2027 is waiting on President Trump's signature. He also reminded the Board that facilities and operations and maintenance is not forward funded.

iv. Grant Funds

Mr. Monteith noted that each multiyear grant displayed in the Board Book is only one grant. President Pfeiffer sought Bill and Melinda Gates grant funds to support student advocacy since appropriated funds cannot be used for that purpose.

3. Board of Regents Development Office

i. Fiscal Year 2026 SIPI BOR-Development Office Budget

Executive Director Wallace indicated \$200,000 of the budget is from Title III grant funds and the remaining \$44,000 is from fundraising.

He also reported that he received federal approval for a 5% annual increase in the remaining years that the Title III grant is funded. President Pfeiffer said the request needs to come to the President's Office for approval first because they are responsible for finding sources to support reallocation. Executive Director Wallace was not made aware of the fact.

A motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2026 SIPI BOR-Development Office Budget was made by Regent Tafoya with a second by Regent Montoya: 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed

ii. Silent Auction: Suazo Hutchens Emergency Assistance Fund

Executive Director Wallace said the successful event raised \$5,800 for the fund.

4. Student Government Association (SGA)

Regent Secatero indicated that the SGA hosted 23 activities between October-December 2025 and is hosting three events this week. He is preparing for AIHEC Student Conference that President Pfeiffer referenced.

Regent Secatero also noted that the SGA Cafeteria Survey had 30 respondents. A report given to the President's Cabinet, and SGA is waiting to hear back on their report.

L. Old Business

1. Report #1 2026-1: Proposed Changes in the Constitution to the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute Board of Regents

Discussion focused on whether it should be the SIPI BOR or the Tribes and Tribal Organizations that determine a Board's member's second term. There was agreement that the all elected Regents, excluding the SGA President, would be placed on year one status if new term limit structures are approved.

A vote on the Proposed Changes in the Constitution to the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute Board of Regents was tabled until the changes discussed above were made in the Report.

2. SIPI 2025-2030 Strategic Plan – Concurrence.

There was no discussion as President Pfeiffer previously reviewed the Strategic Plan in her College Overview Report.

A motion to approve the SIPI 2025-2030 Strategic Plan was made by Regent Montoya with a second by Vice Chairperson Gorham: 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The motion passed

M. Public Comment

Associate Deputy Director Conduff apologized for her earlier conduct in the meeting, noting that she is passionate about Native American Education. Before she had to leave, Chairperson Begaye agreed to provide her with a date for a work session with the SIPI BOR, BIE, and the Solicitors. The Board agreed to February 13th at 9AM MST.

N. Announcements

1. Chairperson Begaye reviewed the BOR schedule for calendar year 2026. Key dates are:
 - February 13: SIPI BOR-BIE MOU Work Session
 - May 13: New Board Member Orientation
 - May 14: SIPI BOR Quarter 2 Meeting
 - May 15: Commencement
 - August 31: SIPI BOR Quarter 3 Meeting
 - December 7: SIPI BOR Quarter 4 Meeting

2. Chairperson Begaye also noted future annual college reports starting in the fall of 2026 are:
 - i. Addition of a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for Adult and Basic Education (Resolution # 1 2024-7).
 - ii. Key Performance Indicator Goal Setting and Reporting (Resolution #2 2024-7)

A motion to adjourn was made by Regent Montoya with a second by Regent Harjo: 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. The meeting Adjourned at 3:25 PM MST.

Submitted by Joseph Rives, Ph.D.
Recording Secretary