Perseverance Key to Completing PhD

by Faith Price

Dine/Nimiipuu student renee holt will be defending her dissertation this summer and then be officially done with her doctorate in Cultural Studies and Social Thought in Education.

She says her biggest challenge over the seven years it’s taken to finish her PhD would be belief in self.

“Completing this PhD has been one of the toughest challenges I’ve ever embarked on,” says holt. “It is exhausting, mentally taxing, and can make a person doubt they belong here. It took me a couple years to work through that doubt but it was belief in myself that carried me through. Anyone who ever says they’re going for a PhD is in for a surprise. It requires self-discipline, responsibility, and accountability, but also tenacity.”

holt completed her doctorate as a single parent to three children, something that demonstrates those very attributes. Her daughter graduated from high school two years ago and is now a college student herself at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her oldest son is in high school, and youngest son is in elementary school.

“I chose WSU because it was in my homelands and my children and I would be close to family,” said holt. “It’s highly important to choose a program that has access to or can provide a support system that you can lean on when times are tough and living close to home was important for that especially as a single mom.”

holt leaned on the support of the members of the Native American Women’s Association at WSU, a group she was involved with for the past three years. As an older student and mother, she found herself often mentoring the undergraduates in the group.

“It’s where I found mentees but was also a mentor and this allowed me to revisit many of own strengths and weaknesses. We all grew,” said holt.

holt received her bachelor’s degree from Lewis–Clark State College and her master’s from the University of Idaho, prior to beginning her doctoral work at WSU. One thing she would emphasize to new college students is to stay focused.

“Be committed, stay true to your people, work for your people, and help your people,” said holt. “These are important because when feelings of doubt and question creep in (and they will) you’ve got to go back to that place where you started and revisit your ‘why?’ Why am I here, why did I start, why did I choose this… these questions can help you get refocused and back on track when you need it.”