

ASU Professor Emeritus Laura Tohe named poet laureate of Arizona

She is the second person — and second ASU professor — in the state's history to hold the position

By Kristen LaRue-Sandler, ASU News
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Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs [announced](#) on Wednesday the appointment of Arizona State University Professor Emeritus [Laura Tohe](#) as poet laureate for the state of Arizona.

Tohe is the second person in the state's history to serve as Arizona poet laureate; the position was previously held by ASU Regents Professor [Alberto Álvaro Ríos](#), director of the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing, who served two consecutive two-year terms from 2014 to 2018.

Established in 2012, the position of Arizona poet laureate is appointed by the governor to champion the art of American poetry, inspire an emerging generation of literary artists, and educate Arizonans about poets and authors who have influenced the state through creative literary expression.

"I'm thrilled to appoint Laura Tohe as Arizona poet laureate," Hobbs said. "Over the course of her career, Dr. Tohe has distinguished herself as a poet, [librettist](#) and writer of both fiction and nonfiction. She is a storyteller whose words reflect the heart, history and hopes of our state. As poet laureate, Dr. Tohe will continue Arizona's tradition of creativity and help inspire the next generation of writers."

Tohe said she was deeply honored and grateful to be named poet laureate.

"Growing up with stories all around me in a rural community on the Navajo Nation homeland inspired me to write poetry, but not until after college. Never did I imagine I would ever receive this incredible honor," Tohe said. "Poetry is alive; it celebrates our human experience with language, voice and reflection. I especially look forward to sharing and supporting poetry in Arizona's rural communities. This is an exciting opportunity."

An award-winning poet and writer, Tohe was born in Fort Defiance, Arizona, and grew up speaking both Diné bizaad/Navajo language and English. She taught in the Department of English at ASU for 24 years, retiring in 2018. Tohe previously served as poet laureate of the Navajo Nation from 2015 to 2019.

“Although she retired just as I became dean, I have had the pleasure of interacting with Laura Tohe frequently at humanities events. She remains a dedicated supporter of our community,” said Jeffrey Cohen, Foundation Professor of English and dean of humanities in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

“Her poetry is luminous — and I cannot think of a better way to honor her talent and achievement than for her to be poet laureate of Arizona. What a lucky state we are to have her as our poet!”

Tohe’s work has been published nationally and internationally. Her oral history book "[Code Talker Stories](#)" features a series of interviews with Navajo Code Talkers and their descendants. She has been recognized with numerous awards including the 2025 Native Writers' Circle of the Americas Lifetime Achievement Award, the Academy of Poets Fellowship Award 2020-2021, the 2019 American Indian Festival of Words Writer’s Award, the Faculty Exemplar Award from ASU and the Dan Shilling Public Scholar Award from Arizona Humanities. She was nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize. She holds a doctoral degree in creative writing and literature from University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

The Arizona Commission on the Arts facilitated the nomination and selection process. Nominations were open to the public, and all nominees were reviewed by a five-member committee chaired by Nicole Dahl, one of the agency’s 15 governor-appointed commissioners.

Panelists were impressed by Tohe’s stature in the literary community, citing her time as the [Navajo Nation’s poet laureate](#), her professorship at ASU and her award-winning published work. Panelists also appreciated the depth of Tohe’s experience working in and with [communities across Arizona](#).

As outlined in state legislation, Tohe will serve a term of two years. During her tenure, she will offer public readings in various regions of the state and pursue a major literary project. Visit the [website of the Arizona Commission on the Arts](#) for more information about its grants, services and programs.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Award-winning poet and writer Laura Tohe (shown in a portrait from a 2019 story ahead of the international premiere of her second libretto) will serve a term of two years as Arizona's poet laureate. She grew up speaking both Diné bizaad/Navajo language and English, and she served as poet laureate of the Navajo Nation from 2015 to 2019. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU News