Department of Native American Studies Assessment 2012

Mission Statement

The Native American Studies Department at the University of Montana builds its curriculum on the foundation of three interrelated principles: sovereignty, indigeneity and community well-being. In so doing we pay close attention to the continuing role of traditional value systems, the impacts of colonization and the efforts toward decolonization within tribal communities. We define sovereignty broadly as one of the rights of all indigenous peoples, including both the political-legal foundations as provided in U.S. law and policy and self-determination more generally. Indigeneity underlies the unique holistic relationship that Native American communities have to the land and to the environment. In addition, our degree program not only intends to advance the well-being of our individual students, both native and non-native, but also to enhance the well-being of Indigenous communities across Montana, the United States and globally, by providing necessary and relevant education about those communities as well as the skills and knowledge for those working within those communities to do so effectively. Our curriculum and the foundations of faculty research are broadly cross-disciplinary with these principles at their base.

Department Educational Objectives

1. Teach both Native and non-Native students about the importance of Native American arts, culture, contemporary issues, history, language, law, literature, social structures and social practices

2. To provide quality academic advising to Native American students on campus and Native American Studies majors and minors

3. To be a resource for tribes, The University of Montana, and local community members for information and advice relative to Native American matters

4. To participate in larger efforts to increase Native American student enrollment and retention and advance state efforts to implement Indian Education for All

Student Learning Goals

1. Critical Thinking Skills: Upon completion of a major in Native American Studies, the student will be able to analyze and synthesize diverse types of information. The student will also be able to evaluate documents within their historical and cultural contexts.

2. Written Communication Skills: Upon completion of a major in Native American Studies, the student will be able to write papers of various length in which: 1) a clear thesis statement is made and supported with appropriate evidence 2) proper grammar and efficient style are employed 3) critical thinking skills are demonstrated throughout.

3. Primary and Secondary Research Skills: Upon completion of a major in Native American Studies, the student will be able to identity, locate, and properly cite a variety of research materials including: 1) books and academic journal articles, 2) oral interview subjects, 3) published government documents (e.g.
Congressional materials, treaty documents, census reports, etc.), 4) archival materials. The student will also be able to incorporate these materials in written work, as described in learning goal #2.

4. **Subject Knowledge**: Upon completion of a major in Native American Studies, the student will have at least a basic knowledge of key facts/issues/concepts stressed in the required coursework. For example, the student should know and be able to discuss the significance of key federal Indian policies; be familiar

**Measurement Tools**

Exit exam; writing analysis of final papers in 494

**Areas for Improvement**

**Modifications/Improvements**

As we have noted on past exit exams, students are strong in most areas of content knowledge--in particular, they perform well in terms of critical analysis, knowledge of important statutes and laws, and general knowledge regarding modern Native communities; Students should improve in certain areas, including knowledge of dates (although they do well in terms of general historical knowledge); Students are also weaker than we would expect in designating specific policy eras; Students are strong in general in identifying and defining key concepts, but results are mixed regarding certain concepts, such as "distributed power," where some fail to define the term;

Some of courses could, through quizzes and exam questions, place a higher emphasis on knowing dates and time periods associated with important policies and legislation; regarding policy eras, these eras are naturally open to interpretation--however, faculty teaching history, sovereignty, and the introduction course should meet to discuss ways to be as consistent as possible in naming and dating these policy eras; Regarding knowledge of abstract concepts (e.g. "distributed power") some students may do less well because they have transferred from other institutions that do not teach or use the same terms--as a department, we have attempted to be as consistent as possible from one course to another using these terms, but we could put more thought into how to address students who fulfilled requirements for our major elsewhere;

As we have noted on past exit exams, students are strong in most areas of content knowledge, but are weakest in their knowledge of dates.

Past student surveys revealed that our majors had difficulties getting into required NAS courses. Based on that data, we changed or policy and reserved spaces in all of our classes for majors and minors. Our most recent survey reveals that this policy change has been effective.

Many students tell us in their exit surveys that they would like to have more Native American language courses. Our department, in recent years, has supported the development of Blearsackfoot and Arapaho language courses. In coming years, we will continue to look for qualified instructors and resources to expand on these successes.

**Future Plans**

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