Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Department of Native American Studies
Academic Year 2014-15 Assessment Report

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 OBJECTIVES and ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC ISSUES

1. To 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

Aligns with strategic goals: 2) Education for the Global Century; 3) Discovery and Creativity to Serve Montana and the World; and 4) Dynamic Learning Environment.

We offer a variety of courses that are designed to help our students serve their home communities, pursue graduate and professional degrees in a variety of fields, and achieve their goals in a rapidly changing world. NAS courses, including our numerous general education offerings, consistently rate well in student evaluations. Of these courses, our introduction to Native American Studies, ecological perspectives, and religion/philosophy offerings consistently fill multiple sections each year, collectively accounting for over 500 students annually. Hundreds of UM students each year fulfill their indigenous/global, historical/cultural, and ethics/human values requirements by taking NAS courses. All of our classes stress the importance of understanding diverse cultural practices and perspectives and most of them are interdisciplinary in nature. In our department, faculty members trained in history, anthropology, literature, and film collaborate to design and maintain this interdisciplinary curriculum. We all teach some classes that extend into disciplinary fields other than those in which we are formally trained, stretching our knowledge bases and helping us demonstrate to students the importance of combining the methodologies
of many disciplines to better understand complex issues and communities. Many of our courses, including “Indigenous World View Perspectives,” “Contemporary Issues,” “Tribal Sovereignty,” and others, help our students understand how Native American issues and concerns are intertwined with those of other indigenous peoples and the broader global community.

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

Aligns with strategic goal 1) Partnering for Student Success

Our NAS Adviser Michelle Guzman works very closely with other UM advisers, faculty members, and support staff to serve our major, minors, and a large number of Native American non-majors. She keeps in close contact with these students from their first year through to graduation, and sometimes beyond. Michelle offers more than just academic advising. She provides moral support, a sympathetic ear for students facing the difficulties of transitioning from home to our institution, and helps plan social and cultural events that help students feel valued and welcome. Our office also displays a calendar of important date deadlines (e.g. registration, drop/add, graduation applications, scholarship applications) for our students and Michelle further reminds them of these dates through emails and face-to-face meetings.

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

Many of our faculty members, including adjunct faculty, serve in official advisory roles to Native American tribes. Faculty members have also worked with Native communities on language revitalization efforts, hosted Native film series for the Missoula community, and played important roles in a variety of national and international academic organizations. In these, and many other ways, we are dedicated to being accessible to the UM community, Native American communities, and the general public.

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

Through collaboration with American Indian Student Services and our own advising and other activities described above, we work to recruit and retain Native students. Some of our faculty members work with local K-12 teachers as part of a collective effort to move forward our state’s Indian Education For All activities. This past year, for example, one faculty member worked with the sixth grade team as part of a University of Montana School of Education grant. This grant project creates tablet apps dealing with Montana tribal cultural and historical content in furtherance of Indian Education for All. Another professor made a presentation to all of the 4th grade students at Target Range elementary about Native American history and culture and their sporting traditions. Our faculty members have also served on UM’s ASCRC committee, created new course work, and otherwise been active in designing effective Native American related curriculum on this campus.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS

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<th>Exit Assessment Exam</th>
<th>Pretest/post-test from NASX280</th>
<th>Ungraded Writing Assessment of class research papers</th>
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<th>Learning Goal</th>
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<td><strong>1. Critical Thinking Skills</strong>: 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.</td>
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<td><strong>2. Written Communication Skills</strong>: 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.</td>
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<td><strong>3. Primary and Secondary Research Skills</strong>: Upon completion of a major in Native American Studies, the student will be able to identify, 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.</td>
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<td><strong>4. Subject Knowledge</strong>: 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.</td>
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**RESULTS AND MODIFICATIONS**

### Critical Thinking Skills:

One of our means of assessing this outcome is to use the Exit Exam and Survey that we administer to our graduating seniors. Because the original data from seven graduates who took the exam was lost, we had to locate some of them (three total) after graduation. Please note that the resulting data is, therefore, from a smaller than usual number of student participants. The results, nevertheless, are similar to exit exam results from previous years. Those questions that ask for longer answers (e.g. the questions about distributed power and the Native American Church) show that, in general, our students are able to effectively define and articulately analyze complex concepts.

We also use a rubric to assess papers submitted for one of our writing courses every year. This year we are using papers from the NASX280: Native American Studies Research Theories/Methods course. Although this is intended to be a sophomore level course, the majority of the students this semester were juniors and seniors and so we feel it is appropriate to use their papers for a final assessment. Portions of this assessment rubric related to the thesis, organization, and analysis relate to this outcome. On average, students scored well this year, with overall averages between 3 and 4 on a scale of 4.

### Written Communication Skills:

Student responses on the NASX280 Post-Test and final papers (submitted as revised second drafts) indicate that our juniors and seniors on average do not have significant deficiencies in writing, though there is room for improvement in all areas. There are some general problems with sentence structure and other mechanics of writing that we should continue to address.

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*please see the above comments. Also note that this is the first year that we are participating in the University-wide Program Level Writing Assessment (papers are being submitted for NAS235X: Written and Oral Traditions and NASX280: Native American Studies Research Theories/Methods)*
Primary and Secondary Research Skills

Based on responses to the NASX280 post-test and student performance on papers for that class, we are pleased that our students are able to identify and use a variety of primary and secondary source materials. Their responses to this post-test also indicate that they are writing research papers in multiple NAS courses. Their responses to questions asking them about research ethics and citation styles are also satisfactory.

And

Subject Knowledge

Student subject knowledge is measured using the exit exam. Their performance on the history, spirituality, and current events questions is generally strong, with the exception of some problems identifying exact dates. Their performance on the literature questions is comparatively weak. These latter results are somewhat predictable because we have offered fewer sections of our NASX235: Written and Oral Traditions and our upper division literature classes in recent years. This is the case because we have only recently filled a faculty line replacing one of our past professors who specialized in this area. Our other senior faculty member specializing in literature has had a reduced teaching load in recent years and recently when on sabbatical. Nevertheless, we should consider other ways to address weaknesses in this area.

*please see the above comments. Although we have yet to do so formally, I (as the department chair and assessment committee chair) believe that we need to collaborate more as a faculty to set common goals, use common conceptual terms/definitions, minimize content overlap among our courses, and take other steps to do an even better job in the area of subject knowledge.

APPENDICES

1. 2013-14 Exit Assessment Exam and Survey (please note that the survey size is smaller than usual)
2. Pretest and Post-test results from NASX280: Native American Studies Research Theories/Methods
3. Results of the Ungraded Writing Assessment Rubric and results based on final papers submitted for NASX280
FUTURE PLANS FOR CONTINUED ASSESSMENT

It is my hope as head of the NAS Assessment Committee and as the current department chair, that we can find ways to improve our assessment methods next year, as well as do more to use this data to improve our services. I will make this a priority next year as we also engage in serious discussions about the future of our curriculum. Two areas in particular where I think we can do better are individual course assessment (e.g. through ungraded pre and post-tests) and tracking our graduates’ career progress and opinions after they leave the university. In addition to having a new faculty member, we are fortunate to have new and dynamic staff members who may be able to help us stay in contact with our graduates.