

# **Strengthening the Next Seven Generations: American Indian Studies Program at Arizona State University**

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The American Indian Studies (AIS) Program at Arizona State University (ASU) located in Tempe, Arizona is an emerging program in its final stages of approval. The Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) is expected to approve the program at its January 2001 meeting. Upon approval, it will be among the youngest undergraduate programs at ASU's main campus fulfilling an important need and bringing a long awaited dream into reality for a number of dedicated and committed American Indian and non-Indian students and faculty, the university and the state and American Indian nations.

## ***Mission and Purpose***

The mission and purpose of the AIS Bachelor of Science degree is to contribute to the articulation, celebration and protection of American Indian cultures. It emphasizes the unique status of American Indians as sovereign governments with unique cultural traditions and contemporary interests and challenges. AIS provides a long-needed institutional home for intellectual inquiry, service, policy analysis, and research. The AIS program's attention to American Indian voices (student, faculty and community) strengthens the university's ability to recruit and retain American Indian faculty and students, and to provide a vibrant link with American Indian communities.

ASU offered a variety of programs and courses with American Indian themes, although it lacked a structure to bring these programs and courses together.

Presently American Indian Studies provides a means to assist American Indian nations, along with public and private employers, to meet their needs in terms of a qualified work force. The AIS program intends to fill gaps in the curriculum, provide linkages between the disciplines, and meet the skills and competency needs of American Indian, federal, state, and private employers. The degree encompasses two areas of emphasis: (1) Legal Policy, Community and Economic Development; and (2) Arts, Languages, and Cultures. Service learning and learner-centered direct experience are essential to all aspects of the degree.

### ***Vision and Need***

The vision and need for an AIS Program at ASU are not new. The state of Arizona is located in the southwest along with over 40 American Indian nations in the region. In Arizona, there are 23 American Indian nations on 21 reservations including 2 of the largest Indian nations in the country: the Navajo Nation and the Tohono O'odham Nation. ASU, one of 3 state universities, has a student population of over 45,000 students attending the 3 campuses (Main, East and West). The American Indian population at ASU main campus has grown at a 200 percent rate over the past 12 years and consists of approximately 1000 students during the 1999-2000 academic year.

The idea of an AIS Program at ASU has been discussed by interested faculty and students for at least 40 years. However, the administrative and political support for this effort was lacking. Not until the mid 1990s was formal action taken by the administration to appoint an individual to study the feasibility of developing such a program and to provide resources towards this effort. Many factors contributed to this action including: (1) a steady increase of American Indian students; (2) the loss of five American Indian faculty within a brief time period of three years; (3) low American Indian student retention and graduation rates; (4) the growing political visibility of the American Indian nations in the Southwest; (5) the consistent pressure from a core group of organized American Indian faculty and academic staff; (5) and support within the university administration.

### ***Organizational Structure***

The proposed AIS Bachelor of Science degree is housed within the College of Public Programs (COPP), one of twelve colleges at ASU. After examining similar programs at the university, it was decided that the most appropriate home for the AIS Program was the COPP rather than the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This decision was made based on several factors. First, the COPP was comprised of six departments and programs and is relatively small in comparison to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences which houses 26 programs and departments including Women's Studies, African American Studies, and the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. Secondly, the Dean of Public

Programs was a strong supporter of the AIS initiative. Third, two American Indian faculty in the School of Justice Studies (one of the departments in the COPP) played a pivotal role in the formation of the American Indian Studies Program. These same faculty members also were responsible for developing a Certificate in American Indian Justice Studies within the School of Justice Studies. Last year, this certificate was successfully consolidated into the AIS Program and renamed the Certificate of American Indian Studies. Fourth, an American Indian Justice Studies faculty member was assigned to take the primary lead in directing the program's development and implementation and was subsequently appointed as the full-time Director of the AIS Program.

After the Director of the AIS Program was appointed, a small support staff was provided consisting of two graduate students and an administrative associate. One of the major problems during the planning and organizational phase of this project was the lack of adequate office space. The space shortage forced the staff to work in two separate buildings. The Director maintained her regular faculty office located in a separate building from the staff. Despite the split, the staff was productive and began the process of writing the Proposal Request For Planning Authority for AIS. Another unforeseen circumstance was the twelve month absence of the AIS Director (who accepted a temporary appointment in Washington, D.C.). During her absence the Acting Director and staff continued the work and submitted the AIS planning proposal to the ABOR for their approval. At the end of the 1999 fall semester, the director resumed responsibility for writing the Proposal Request For Implementation Authority for An American Indian Studies Program and to further develop the AIS curriculum, and to recruit and hire faculty.

Many months were spent gathering information on AIS programs from across the country and collecting necessary data to justify the need for an AIS program at ASU. A major part of this planning phase involved several senior, well respected American Indian scholars with extensive experience in American Indian studies programs. Furthermore, meetings were held with American Indian leaders and educators to help design a program that would be responsive to their needs.

### ***Program Strength***

A major strength of the program is the support and commitment of many individuals. One of the most important components of the AIS Program is the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board is an outgrowth of the planning and advisement activities that consisted of tribal leaders, American Indian activists, representatives from the native community, the private sector and faculty members from the university.

Initially, the AIS program had two advisory committees, one representing the community and another representing the university faculty. The Community Advisory Committee was selected based on their commitment and interest

in Indian education and ASU's efforts to establish an American Indian Studies program as well as their link to American Indian nations and peoples in the Southwest. The university committee included faculty members actively involved in American Indian Studies and/or working with American Indian students and familiar with curriculum development and knowledgeable of university policy. The faculty committee consisted of individuals from various disciplines and programs across campus, including Justice Studies, English, Education, Law, Anthropology, Women's Studies, History, Social Work, Latin American Studies, Art and the Center for Urban Inquiry.

Recently, the community and university advisory committees were combined into one advisory board. The reformulated board provides an excellent combination of knowledge and expertise that promotes exciting dialogue and thoughtful and useful feedback to guide the AIS Program. It also gives additional strength and integrity to the program and promotes a unique opportunity for collaboration among the American Indian nations, the Phoenix Indian community, the private sector, and the university.

Another important strength of the AIS Program is the enthusiastic support of the university administration, including the Office of the President and the Dean of the College of Public Programs. The support is reflected in their active involvement in AIS activities and in their funding of various programs initiated by the AIS Program. Last year, AIS had the opportunity to invite Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Professor Emerita of English for a spring semester as a visiting professor. In addition to teaching several classes for AIS, Professor Cook-Lynn provided invaluable guidance in the development of the AIS curriculum and in the overall development of the AIS Program. Furthermore, with special funding from the College of Public Programs, AIS hosted the first American Indian Studies Directors' Consortium. The purpose of the conference was to provide a supportive forum for American Indian Studies programs across the country and to discuss issues that impact AIS programs. Both the President of the University and the Dean of Public Programs participated in the event.

### ***Current Program Status***

#### Curriculum

Survival of American Indian nations as distinct political and cultural entities depends upon cultural preservation, education, self-determination, and economic development. The AIS degree employs curricular strategies that incorporate these themes and recognize the importance of political empowerment and economic self-development to the articulation and continuity of American Indian cultures.

It is imperative that students understand the multifaceted cultural bases for contemporary American Indian experiences in order to adequately address cur-

rent issues such as governmental sovereignty, land restoration, and community and economic development. Accordingly, the AIS degree emphasizes two complementary and interdependent goals: (1) the building of a rich foundational understanding of the history and philosophy of Indian cultures; and (2) the investigation of political, legal, and economic strategies for protecting, strengthening and promoting first nation status for American Indian populations. One emphasis area (Arts, Languages, and Cultures) will allow students the opportunity to pursue the former topic in depth and the second area of emphasis (Legal Policy, Community, and Economic Development) offers an opportunity to pursue the latter topic in depth.

A primary objective of the curriculum is to articulate the conceptual frameworks for understanding American Indian cultures and investigate innovative solutions to longstanding problems. The sources of these conceptual frameworks include tribal specific mythologies, languages, religions, cosmologies, and Native and western legal histories. Thus, the proposed degree facilitates in-depth exploration of the discipline's religious-philosophical and politico-legal parameters.

**Core Courses.** Eight required courses have been designed to further these objectives:

AIS 180 *Introduction to Indian Studies* examines the disciplinary aspects of AIS including theoretical perspectives of essential concepts such as sovereignty, self-determination, indigenous identity and cultural survival. The introductory course promotes public awareness and understanding of Indian studies as a fundamental factor in the strategic solution of perennial problems in Indian affairs and public policy in the United States.

AIS 280 *American Indian Law and Society* is an examination of the sovereign status of American Indians and legal relationships between tribes and the U.S. Government. Students focus on a practical understanding of law and the implications for American Indian nations.

AIS 370 *American Indian Languages and Cultures* will provide students with knowledge about the diversity of American Indian languages, the socio-religious importance of language, and Native efforts to maintain their languages and cultures.

AIS 380 *Contemporary Issues of American Indian Nations* provides an upper-division analysis of present-day American Indian interests and challenges. Specific strengths and challenges that confront Indian nations are presented including sovereignty, gaming, jurisdictional concerns, land loss and restoration, health, art and culture, and the impact of social and cultural change from both a tribal-specific and a national perspective.

AIS 385 *Federal Indian Policy* provides the foundations for the understanding of federal Indian policy and its impact on social and legal justice for American Indian nations.

AIS 394 *Basic Statistical Analysis* provides students with training in statistical research methods. When the program grows, AIS will offer its own course in statistical research methods. In the meantime, students will be required to complete JUS 302: Basic Statistical Analysis in Justice Studies, or a comparable course.

AIS 420 *American Indian Studies Research Methods* provides an overview of diverse approaches to critical intellectual inquiry. These approaches include the purpose of research, concepts and measurement, the modes of observation and analysis of data.

AIS 498 *Pro-Seminar in AIS* is a capstone experience for graduating students, which requires completion of a substantial paper, provides a synthesis of curricular emphases and facilitates the evaluation of students' grasp of the discipline's central body of knowledge.

In addition to the 24 credit hours of core classes, students will select 18 hours in an area of emphasis. Future AIS course development will be based on the two emphasis areas, particularly in relation to political discourses, sovereignty, and theories of Indigenoussness.

During the fall semester of 2000, 104 students were enrolled in AIS courses. Students that have taken AIS courses over the past three semesters have the option to apply these courses towards a Bachelor of Science Degree in AIS after the ABOR approves the program at their January 2001 meeting. The following courses are required for the three different programs:

#### Major Course Requirements (42 hours total):

Introduction to American Indian Studies  
Federal Indian Policy  
American Indian Law and Society  
American Indian Languages and Cultures  
Contemporary Issues of American Indian Nations  
Basic Statistical Analysis  
Research Methods  
Pro-Seminar in AIS  
Eighteen (18) elective hours in the two areas of emphasis

#### Minor Course Requirements (15 hours total)

Introduction to American Indian Studies  
Federal Indian Policy  
Contemporary Issues of American Indian Nations  
Six (6) Elective Credit Hours from the two emphasis areas

#### Certificate Course Requirements (21 hours total)

Introduction to American Indian Studies  
American Indian Law and Society  
Contemporary Issues of American Indian Nations  
Law, Policy and American Indians  
Internship  
Two (2) electives

The AIS curriculum is founded upon an educational model that emphasizes the complexity of issues that confront Indian nations. The model advocates the political and strategic necessity (and limitations) of Indian people asserting their tribal identities; facilitates university-tribal collaborative efforts; provides a focus for coalition building and other intellectual traditions, academic programs and research centers that examine the social impact of race, ethnicity, class, and gender; promotes theoretically astute and research-based approaches to the diminishment of conflict between Indian nations and non-Indian governments; and provides students with the practical skills and competencies needed to gain employment in the potential pool of federal, state and tribal employers.

In addition to the AIS course requirements, the university requires that all students enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program successfully complete a minimum number of hours of general studies courses. AIS courses such as the Introduction to American Indian Studies, Contemporary Issues, and the American Indian and Cinema, Arts and Media, American Indian Law and Society, American Indian Languages and Cultures, and Federal Indian Policy have been approved as fulfilling some of the general studies requirements. As the program grows, other AIS courses will be included to meet the general studies requirements.

#### Organization and Staffing

Currently, the AIS Program has a full-time director who teaches two courses a year, a lecturer who is assigned to teach at least five courses a year, and a graduate student who teaches one course a semester. Additionally, a faculty member (from another department) is assigned to teach two courses per year for AIS. AIS also has an administrative associate that assists the director in the daily administrative responsibilities and also advises students. This past year, AIS hired its first two faculty members. One faculty member will begin teaching courses during the spring semester of 2001 and the second faculty member is scheduled to begin teaching in the fall semester of 2001. The hiring of additional faculty is dependent upon student enrollment. Therefore, major emphasis of the program for the next few years will be on recruitment efforts. Positions such as the lecturer position will most likely be redesigned to meet the upcoming needs for recruitment and to enhance the visibility of the program.

### *Additional Projects & Future Endeavors*

#### Policy Center

In addition to the faculty and administrative staff, AIS is also involved in the development of a policy center and has a half-time position for a policy center coordinator. The major focus of the policy center is to strengthen ASU's working relationship with tribal governments as it relates to policy issues and to assist in the sponsorship of conferences and workshops that address topics of special interest to tribal governments and American Indian scholars. Additionally, the policy center will focus on the development, collection and maintenance of a data base of policy-related documents on American Indian issues that will be available for students, faculty and American Indian governments. AIS is currently working with a representative from the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Community's Economic Development Office and the Scottsdale Community College to coordinate efforts in the development of a key policy center initiative.

#### Conferences/Consortiums

During the spring semester of 2000, the AIS hosted the first American Indian Studies Directors' Consortium. The purpose of the conference was to stimulate dialogue on American Indian Studies and its increasing importance and visibility on the national and international scene. The conference was attended by directors and interested faculty from across the country. It was well received and generated a high level of interest and discussion. As a result, AIS is hosting the second annual AIS Directors' Consortium scheduled for February, 2001. This conference will most likely become an annual event. Additionally, AIS is planning to co-sponsor conferences with various departments and colleges on campus, including Women's Studies and the American Indian Law program in the College of Law. Moreover, AIS is currently working on plans to host the first American Indian Film Festival of Arizona (AIFFA). This effort is being co-sponsored with the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. The film festival will be a juried event of American Indian film makers and is expected to take place in March, 2002. Two noted American Indian film makers, Phil Lucas and Victor Masayesva, will be featured during this two-day event. In addition to the educational benefits that these forums provide, they are also an excellent means for the AIS Program to collaborate and network with other entities and individuals that are involved or interested in American Indian studies. Furthermore, they provide visibility to the program and to American Indian issues in general.

#### Graduate Studies

Upon approval of the AIS undergraduate degree the AIS Program plans to issue a graduate certificate in American Indian Studies. There is a great de-



mand for an AIS graduate program at ASU among the current graduate students attending ASU and students from other universities in the U.S. and Canada.

### International Collaboration

Preliminary meetings have been held with the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria in Canada to develop a collaborative exchange program. Once the graduate certificate program is established, we will seriously explore the possibilities of working with the Indigenous Governance Program. It is imperative that students understand the multifaceted cultural bases for contemporary American Indian governments and experiences and their role at the national and international levels. A collaborative effort at the national and international level highlights and unifies the commonalities among native nations.

### *Conclusion*

Survival of American Indian nations as distinct political and cultural entities depends upon cultural preservation, education, self-determination, and economic development. The AIS Program employs curricular strategies and a learning environment that incorporate these themes and recognize the importance of political empowerment, cultural integrity and economic self-development to strengthen American Indian nations and cultures. The AIS Program at ASU is excited about its role in achieving the goals and activities planned to assure the powerful existence of the next seven generations and beyond.