

Native American Studies at Dartmouth

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Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, was founded in 1769 by Eleazar Wheelock. At the same time, Wheelock relocated Moor's Charity School from Lebanon, Connecticut, to the Dartmouth campus, for the education of Native American students. In an effort to raise funds for his school, Wheelock dispatched a Mohegan Indian named Samson Occom to the British Isles. Occom, a former student of Wheelock and an ordained minister, delivered more than 300 sermons in England and Scotland and raised about 12,000 pounds in private donations. The founding charter of Dartmouth College identified as a key part of its purpose "the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in the Land in reading, writing & all parts of Learning which shall appear necessary and expedient." In Wheelock's view, Indian students were to be educated in English schools so they could serve as missionaries to other Indians. But Wheelock soon experienced doubts about the "fitness" of Indian students to fill the missionary role and he back peddled on his commitment to Indian education.¹ No more than 71 Indians attended Dartmouth in the years 1770-1865, and only 28 enrolled in the next hundred years. By 1969, two hundred years after the college was founded, Dartmouth had graduated a total of 19 Native Americans. Dartmouth renewed its commitment to Native American education when John Kemeny took over as president in 1970. The college began to actively recruit American Indian students, established a Native American Pro-

gram to support them, and, in May 1972, adopted a Native American Studies Program, one of the first in the United States.

Dartmouth's Native American Studies Program (NAS) constitutes the academic wing of a number of programs and groups that were established with separate responsibilities but which share a common commitment to providing a network of support for Native students at the college. The *Native American Program* (NAP) provides Native American student support services and works with students, administrators, campus-wide faculty and programs to ensure the success of Native American students through their four-year residency on campus. *Native Americans at Dartmouth* (NAD) is the Native student organization. Among other activities, NAD hosts a pow wow at Dartmouth each spring. The *Native American Council*, (NAC), composed of members from NAS, NAP, NAD, and other college officials, meets four times each term. A *Native American Visiting Committee* (NAVC) of outside alumni annually reviews all aspects of the Native American programs, reports directly to the president of the college, and offers regular assistance and support.

A Native American employee in Admissions and Financial Aid is primarily responsible for Native American recruitment and each year Dartmouth holds a College-funded "fly-in" program for prospective Native students from around the country. In 1998, 23 Native students from 16 tribes enrolled at Dartmouth; in 1999, 34 from 19 tribes enrolled, and in 2000, 23 from 16 tribes. The total population of Native students on campus—between 100 and 140—is not large, but it is significant in a college of little more than 4,000 students. During the 1970s, the Native student graduation rate averaged 50 percent; since that time, the rate has risen to an average of 72 percent. Dartmouth has matriculated more than 450 Native students and the Native American Alumni Association includes well over 300 active members.

Native American Studies at Dartmouth had modest beginnings and Native students have not always had an easy time on a campus, which was, until the 1970s, almost exclusively a white male institution.² Michael Dorris, the founding chair of the program, was the sole faculty member and taught two experimental courses. He was also kept busy fighting the "Indian mascot" issue. As Dorris devoted more and more time to his writing career in the 1980s, Michael D. Green and Elaine Jahner each took turns at the helm. Native American Studies became a permanent program offering a certificate. It has grown significantly in the last decade and now offers a major and a minor. In its first year as a major program, 1998-99, it had 14 majors; in 1999-2000 it had 21. Enrollment in Native American courses has increased steadily in recent years, with some classes reaching 70-75 students, a relatively large number for a college with a tradition of small classes. In each of the last two years, NAS has taught a total of 23 courses, and an average of more than 400 students.

The program's initial course offerings were organized around the study of Native American ethnology, literature and history. Course offerings now deal with history, culture, religion, archaeology, government, language, literature,

law and policy, as well as more specialized topics taught by regular faculty and visitors. Currently, core courses include *Indian Country Today*, *North American Indian History*, *Peoples and Cultures of Native North America*, *Native American Literature*, an introduction to *Native American Religious Systems*, and a senior seminar as a culminating experience. This year a new seminar, *Grant Writing for Native America*, will give senior students the opportunity to apply research and writing skills they have developed in college to the kind of “real life” projects many of them will tackle after graduation. Majors may also apply to the honors program and write a senior thesis in Native American studies.

Native American studies at Dartmouth aim to increase students’ understanding of the historical experiences, cultural traditions, and political aspirations of Indian peoples in the United States and Canada. It also encourages students to explore the intersection of Indian and European histories and systems of knowledge. Students learn about Native American ways of living, societal organization, world view, and relations with Euro-American colonizing powers. They learn to appreciate how the value systems of different cultures function and to understand the dynamics of cultural change. They examine contact and conflict between Native and non-Native societies and recognize the unique status of Indian peoples in the United States and Canada as nations possessing certain sovereign powers and distinct legal rights.

Courses in Native American studies at Dartmouth attract students of all ethnic backgrounds. Most courses are cross-listed with other programs or departments. Students who elect to take a major or minor in Native American Studies take a number of core courses and explore interdisciplinary approaches to Native American studies. In order to qualify for a major, a student must successfully complete ten courses in the program; minors complete six courses. Students pursue their own interests and develop an individual program but they also take certain required courses, to ensure that they acquire a shared body of substantive knowledge, gain exposure to crucial ways of critical thinking, and understand the interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary, nature of Native American studies.

The mission of the NAS program depends upon attracting a varied faculty and student body who bring their own perspectives and build upon their individual experiences and understandings. Faculty include both Indian and non-Indian scholars. NAS has five tenured positions, supplemented by regular visitors. Faculty members hold joint appointments in NAS and a corresponding academic department. At present the regular faculty includes: Colin G. Calloway, a British historian currently serving his second three year term as chair of NAS; Elaine Jahner, a specialist in Native American literature; Christopher Jocks, a Mohawk scholar of religion; Sergei Kan, a Russian Jew who teaches anthropology, and Dale Turner, an Anishinabe professor of government who teaches tribal sovereignty and contemporary issues. Joint appointments sometimes present administrative problems, and additional hurdles at the time of hiring and ten-

ure, but they also unite scholars in related fields to a joint commitment in the study of Native America and allow Native American Studies to build valuable alliances with other departments, programs, and individuals. The Dean of the College, James Larimore, is Native, as is Lori Arviso Alvord, Associate Dean of Student and Minority Affairs at the Medical School.

In addition to its regular faculty, the NAS program benefits from adjunct faculty, visiting faculty, and visiting scholars. Bruce Duthu, a Houna professor at Vermont Law School and formerly director of the NAP at Dartmouth, teaches a course on American Indian law and policy; Dan Runnels, a San Poil from Colville, teaches an introduction to Native American languages and the NAS freshman seminar. Alyce Spotted Bear, formerly chair of the Three Affiliated Tribes, has been a regular visitor to NAS in recent years, teaching courses on Plains Indian women and Indian education as well as serving as a mentor to Native students. Each year, the endowed Gordon Russel Visiting Professorship brings an established scholar to teach for one term in the NAS department: Bernd Peyer, a Swiss scholar who lives and teaches in Germany; Chadwick Smith, now principal chief of the Cherokee Nation; Russel Barsh, an expert on international indigenous rights, now at New York University; Adrian Tanner, an anthropologist at Memorial University in Newfoundland; and Thomas S. Abler, an Iroquoianist and anthropologist from Waterloo University in Ontario have all held the Russel professorship. NAS receives a steady stream of visitors, as conference participants and guest speakers, and occasionally has the opportunity to host distinguished visitors for a longer stay, as when Wilma Mankiller held the prestigious Montgomery Fellowship in 1996.

By including other individuals and other programs who understand, or want to understand what we do, NAS has increased its reach and its presence on campus. With Native faculty jointly appointed in other departments, students at Dartmouth College can now encounter Native teachers and Native issues in their "regular classes," without ever setting foot in a NAS class. Most of our students are non-Indians. We offer them an introduction to the complex, challenging and fascinating worlds of Native America and, in doing so, open some different perspectives on the American past and present.

Although funded from the beginning by regular institutional funds, NAS has also been supported by private donors and corporate funding, and receives invaluable assistance from the development office on campus in identifying and approaching potential sponsors. In recent years, the generosity of individual alumni has allowed NAS to revive its internship program, to initiate a pilot program that brings a tribal elder/mentor to assume an advisory role to Native students on campus (a program that has received additional funding from the Educational Foundation of America), and to plan building a Native American research center with short-term fellowship opportunities.

Many Native and non-Native students at Dartmouth participate in term-long internships with a tribe or Indian organization. Students often identify and set up individual internships themselves; some students undertake internships

through Dartmouth's Tucker Foundation, which was established in 1951 to "further the moral and spiritual life of the college," and provides a variety of local, national and worldwide voluntary services, workshops, and programs.

Dartmouth's Baker Library has supported Native American Studies by building up an extensive collection of material relating to Native American history and culture. The Baker Library and Special Collections currently holds approximately 14,000 Native American titles, the majority of which relate to North America, including Canada. The NAS program also maintains and supports its own research library where students, faculty, alumni and visitors can consult more than 4,500 books and a wide variety of periodicals, journals, films, tribal newsletters and related materials. The collection is constantly being updated as new scholarly books and periodicals are released.

Native American Studies hosts regular symposia. Recent themes have included Native Americans and Christianity, survival and revival in Native New England, new and future directions in Native American studies, the role of traditional knowledge in academia; relations between German people and Indian people over three centuries (in coordination with the German Studies Department), Native American and African American histories (in conjunction with African and African American Studies), and Native American archaeology (in conjunction with the Anthropology Department). The program also holds regular colloquia in which visitors, faculty, and students can share their work and engage in open discussion over lunch.

Dartmouth is preeminently an undergraduate liberal arts college and does not have a graduate program in Native American studies. However, in 1992 the college created the Charles Eastman Fellowship (named after the Dakota physician, Ohiyesa, who graduated from Dartmouth in 1887) for Native American graduate students. The fellowship sustains a pre-doctoral scholar for a full year to complete work on his/her Ph.D. dissertation. Recipients include Christopher Jocks (Mohawk, and currently an assistant professor at Dartmouth), JoAnn Woodsum (Cahuilla), Kevin Connelly (Onondaga), Dan Runnels (Salish, and currently adjunct), Peggy Ackerberg (Potawatomi), Joseph Gone (Gros Ventre), Darren Ranco (Penobscot), and Vera Palmer (Tuscarora), who has also served as a mentor, established a women's singing group, and taught a course on Native American literature.

Located in northern New England's upper Connecticut Valley, Dartmouth does not have a major Native American population base nearby. At a small college, our program will never be as large as those at the University of Arizona, the University of Minnesota, or UCLA. But Dartmouth does have enduring strengths upon which to build. NAS has almost a 30 year history at Dartmouth and is a prominent part of the culture here. Native American Studies today has more faculty, evolving plans for the future, new office space for the program, new offers of financial support from alumni, and new opportunities. Building a reputation for academic excellence has enabled NAS to make great strides at Dartmouth and will allow us to pursue new initiatives in the future.

Notes

1. Bernd Peyer, "The Betrayal of Samson Occom," *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* 91, No. 3 (November 1998), 30-37, quote at 36.

2. The experiences of some of Dartmouth's Native alumni are related in Andrew Garrod and Colleen Larimore, eds. *First Person, First Peoples: Native American College Graduates Tell Their Life Stories* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).