

# **Indian Studies at the University of North Dakota**

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Indian Studies at the University of North Dakota has similarities with many other Native American Programs. The Department began in the 1970s as a response to demands by students and faculty. Briefly, academic and Indian student service functions were combined in a single office. But the UND pattern soon diverged from the pathway chosen at most other higher education institutions. The state legislature required that the University of North Dakota become the primary vehicle for meeting the needs of American Indian students within the state. University planners decided to have an academic department rather than following the Indian Studies Program model that so many colleges chose. The legislature determined that UND's department was to be the only one in the state system. The department is not charged with student services responsibilities like counseling, recruitment, grant support for existence, and financial aid services. A separate Native American Programs office was established simultaneously. Indian Studies remains an academic department funded by state appropriations and its primary mission is academic. The department is funded by state appropriations as other departments are.

Indian Studies' mission has remained the same since 1977. We provide: 1) an understanding of Indian history and culture 2) opportunities for experience in Indian communities 3) a foundation for employment on and off reservations and 4) the knowledge and skills for graduate studies. These opportunities are

available for non-Indian and Indian students alike. We feel that one of the strengths of the department is its opportunity to provide information about American Indians to the 96 percent of UND students who are not American Indians. We do this by providing a service course for many other departmental curricula and by making even our upper division courses accessible to non-majors. Most of our courses are options for the general education requirements of the University.

Another strength of the department is that our students are taught by faculty members who meet the university requirements for all tenure track faculty: scholarship, teaching, and service. We pride ourselves on the rigor of our courses and the success of our majors in moving on to graduate school - just like the other academic departments at the university. Given the relatively recent acceptance of ethnic studies, rigor is crucial to maintaining status within a university. Naturally the Department of Indian Studies is a focus for many of the 370 American Indian students at UND. These students may not be majors but often take courses or just drop by to talk. Our centralized suite allows students and other Indian related programs a place to get together for social and programmatic dialogues.

UND's faculty, students and staff have created more than 30 programs that target Indian students or are exclusively Indian. The most well-known of the programs nationally is Indians into Medicine (INMED). INMED has graduated about 20 percent of the existing Indian physicians in the United States and has provided preparation for the medical fields to students from junior high through undergraduate school. The College of Education and Human Development has provided many collaborative efforts with reservations and tribal colleges. In 2001 several tribal college presidents including Dr. Karen Swisher of Haskell Indian Nations University, held UND doctorates.

Student Services are provided focus by Native American Programs directed by Dr. Leigh Jeanotte. He has been at the university since the early 1970s and received his doctorate at UND. Native American Programs has a full-time recruiter, academic assistance, and is a focal point for most Native American activities on campus.

Other programs include Indians into Psychology, the Native American Law Project, the National Resource Center on Native American Aging and the Native Media Center. President Charles Kupchella appointed an informational and advisory body, the American Indian Programs Council in 2001. The UND Strategic Plan 2001-2002 includes a primary goal to move UND toward becoming a "premier institution for American Indian students, the state, and the region."

In the midst of these positive signs, there is an obstacle of particular difficulty for Indian Studies and programs at UND. The mascot and athletic logo is a stylized Indian head replete with feathers that represents UND as "The Fighting Sioux." American Indians and non-Indians alike have been working to change this since the 1970s. Each new generation of students generates anti-name activists and they join a consistent cadre of faculty and

staff who deem the name and its multiple manifestations offensive. Recently, the State Board of Higher Education directed UND not to change the name and directed continuation of the logo. Many think this was in response to athletic fans and the hockey benefactor, Ralph Englestadt, who has built a \$100 million hockey arena on university property. He threatened to leave the arena incomplete if the name was changed.

This issue highlights the dilemma that American Indian studies and Indians in general face in higher education. We need education and UND provides not only sound educational programs but has, mostly with federal and foundation funding, provided a welcoming, supporting environment. Many faculty and staff at UND work very hard to make the university a welcoming experience and they provide outreach to the Indian communities. At the same time other elements at the university ignore the issues many Indians consider a question of ethics and not of majority rule.

One Indian alumnus told this writer that his experience was wonderful and his education excellent (he holds a doctorate from UND and more than a decade's experience as an higher education administrator). Many individuals involved in Indian programs on campus have made the same decision as many of the students—to continue to work to change the name while taking advantage of the atmosphere of support and opportunity in other aspects of the UND experience.

The Indian Studies Department is pragmatic. The Department has gone on record officially along with nearly every other Indian related program, two of our colleges, the Law School faculty, the University Senate, and the UND Student Government. However, we do not utilize our classrooms for campaigns against "The Fighting Sioux"—by consensus of the Department members. We feel that our best role is to educate students about Indian history, culture and issues as a whole and let them draw conclusions—the way an academic department should operate in our opinion.

### ***History and Background***

Indian students first arrived in sufficient numbers to affect university policy in the late 1960s. By 1971 they and committed faculty and staff had convinced UND to establish the Office of Indian Studies that mainly provided counseling, financial aid and advising. Dr. Art Raymond, the first head of the Office, led several faculty members and other staff and students in curriculum design, acquiring a center for Indian students and expanding services to Indian students. By 1974, advocates for an academic program had built upon a 1971 approved minor, secured university support and forwarded a plan for a major to the Board of Higher Education and the state legislature. The state approved but offered no money so the pioneering supporters of Indian Studies and Indian presence launched more efforts to secure funding.

Funds from the legislature were forthcoming in 1977, faculty were hired and the Fall semester schedule included the first Indian Studies courses leading to a degree. The Dean of Arts and Sciences, Bernard O'Kelley was the first chairperson but was soon succeeded by Dr. Stanley Murray. Dr. Art Raymond became a permanent faculty member of the Indian Studies Department. Dr. Mary Jane Schneider joined the faculty and is a full professor today. Her eminence as a scholar, she is one of sixteen Chester Fritz Professors in the entire university, personifies the academic place of Indian Studies at UND. Dr. Schneider's *Indians of North Dakota* is an excellent model for Indian studies texts that meet regional, discipline, and pedagogical needs. Its 1994 edition is the basic text for Introduction to Indian Studies, the key course in the curriculum.

University faculty and administration continued to provide recognition and support to the department. They have voted for including many Indian Studies classes in the core requirements for any degrees and some departments expect their majors to take our departmental courses. With this support from colleagues, our courses attract the students necessary to maintain our position in the budgeting process. No matter how good our curriculum and faculty are, without consistent student enrollment we would be fighting to maintain ourselves as a department.

Aside from the logo issue, Indians studies must maintain itself in the hurry burly of College and University competition for resources. We once had three and a half tenure lines but lost the half line in a budget move several years ago. Although expansion is often discussed, the current situation in North Dakota state higher education does not support increased faculty numbers for any department. Of course enrollment grows and Indian Studies receives pressure to have larger classes and to justify itself in terms of numbers served. Presently, this pressure is not sufficient to increase our class sizes beyond 25 for the Introduction class nor for advanced classes. Indian Studies faculty are able to emphasize writing and student interaction with faculty because of small class size.

Most challenges arise beyond the university. American Indians are peripheral to the larger society and marginalized populations are often forgotten or their programs easy to cut. For instance, the North Dakota State Department of Instruction made a decision that will impact Indian Studies immeasurably. Our Introduction to Indian Studies course has long been one of the two courses students used to meet state teaching certification requirements. Many North Dakotans have lost their abysmal ignorance of the Indian experience because of this course. However, in 2002, the Department of Public Instruction announced that this course was no longer acceptable. Teachers need a smattering of knowledge and teaching skills for dealing with all ethnic groups—in two credits. This decision robs future teachers of the chance to learn about the only large minority within North Dakota and will eliminate Indian introductory courses at others universities within North Dakota. No one protested the decision because

it was a surprise. The state had eliminated the Director of Indian Education position earlier so no one in the education community was focused on the interests of Indians and the need for knowledge about Indians for state teachers. It remains to be seen whether the state will change its posture.

### *Curriculum*

The Department offers a Bachelor of Arts and a Minor in Indian Studies. The degree conforms to the traditional format of a college degree. Majors need 125 credits, 36 in Indian Studies. The minor requires 22 credits. Introduction to Indian Studies, Research and Writing in Indian Studies, North American Indians, History of Federal Indian Law and Policy and the capstone course, Senior Colloquium, are required. Other courses are selected from the categories of Arts, Literature and Language (6 credits), History (3 credits), and Contemporary Issues (6 credits). Minors take the same required courses plus electives from any of the categories. The Department offers special topics to supplement its standard courses in response to student interest and faculty research foci, e.g., White Images of Native Americans, Tribal Colleges, Indians in Children's Literature, and the Fur Trade. Many of the courses reflect the location of the University in the transitional area between Woodlands and Plains. Chippewa History, History of the Three Affiliated Tribes, Sioux History, Contemporary Plains Indian Culture, and Traditional Plains Tribes are examples of the regional emphasis. Other courses feature Indian Country as a whole. One concern is that the two American Indian languages offered at the University (Michif and Lakota) are offered in the English Department. Other departments also offer courses that focus on American Indians but that are vetted by their curriculum committees. This provides advantages in bringing more to the university as a whole. The disadvantage is that approval for these courses is made by those who might not realize the pitfalls possible.

The essence of a curriculum is the consensus reached by faculty about its purposes. During the past 25 years the Indian Studies faculty members have evolved a consensus. Since 1977 the Department has insisted that courses be taught with the rigor expected of any curriculum in the academy. In an atmosphere of respect for the Indian experience, Indian Studies students must operate within the framework of the academy. Of course, this consensus operates within an atmosphere of academic freedom for faculty and students alike. We agree that students must demonstrate research, writing, and critical thinking skills.

The Department tries to maintain an atmosphere of support and discussion for Indians and non-Indians alike. Our office is a center for many faculty and students to gather, discuss personal and academic issues, and interact. The faculty spend most of each day in the office in order to be available to students. The rigor of academia needs a human face and we do our best to provide it.

Some students and even staff have questioned the departmental stance on standards over the years. Critics have indicated that they see Indian Studies as a support system that should be judged on whether Indian students receive sympathetic grading. Others want us to validate the ideologies students bring to the classroom and their patterns of study. Fortunately neither the Department nor the administration agrees. Graduates frequently thank us for the standards. Some would like us to change our name to Native American Studies Department, some would have us be an all Indian department, and some would have us change the names of many of our courses, Sioux History for example. However, none of these suggestions have led to a consensus among students and faculty so we remain as we are.

A crucial decision in 1977 was to separate the Office of Indian Studies into an academic department lodged in the College of Arts and Sciences with tenure track positions and into the student services Native American Program. Each one was funded from university appropriations-not grants. This division has been maintained. Additional Indian related programs have been added and they are housed wherever most appropriate—on the academic side or on the student services side of the university organizational chart.

The advantage for Indian Studies is obvious. We are able to provide academically sound courses that are part of a curriculum to students who are majors and who are advised by full-time faculty in Indian Studies. Also, the supportive atmosphere of proximity and collegiality allows consensus building about courses, student needs, interaction with students, faculty advising and the interactive stimulation all disciplines need. Tenure is awarded by the Indian Studies faculty in the UND governance structure just as it begins with the department in other academic areas. A cynic also noted that once a department is created, inertia helps guarantee its survival.

Philosophically, the department has reached a consensus on key issues. We believe that our students are best served by presenting a balanced view of the American Indian experience while privileging no particular school of thought. Our decision on the “who can teach Indian Studies issue is illustrated by the fact that a Chippewa teaches Sioux History and a non-Indian teaches Chippewa History. We model our belief that Indian information is learned not genetically bestowed and that many different perspectives are the best pedagogical approach.

### *Students*

UND is located near numerous reservations and this is reflected in the three percent Indian student body of the university (the state has four percent). The majority of the 370 Indian students are from Turtle Mountain Reservation (Chippewa). A significant number come from the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara), Standing Rock Reservation (primarily Lakota), Spirit Lake Reservation (mainly Dakota), along with varying numbers from nearby

Sisseton-Wahpeton, White Earth, Leech Lake and other reservations throughout the country. In the Spring of 2002 there were Navajo, Omaha, Blackfeet, Oneida, and First Nations Canadians enrolled as well. Non-Indian students include Canadians, Europeans and the core population of UND- students from North Dakota and Minnesota. Indian and non-Indian students like this diversity and the faculty revels.

We graduate three to six students each year from a consistent pool of 25-30 majors. Minors average about 60. About half of the majors are non-Indians. In advising students, we urge them to pursue a double-major because of the obvious difficulties faced by liberal arts graduates with “only” a bachelor’s degree. More than half of our majors attend graduate school, usually in the area of the second major. As more graduate Indian programs appear, this pattern will change. Psychology, Communications, and Social Work are the primary second majors with History and English following closely.

Majors were surveyed in 1998 and in 1997. We surveyed all of the Indian students enrolled at the university who had at least 3.0 averages. With a bit of conflating, the results are interesting. Our Department received plaudits from the students for providing the knowledge that they did not have about Indians as a whole and even about their own tribal experiences. Students often mentioned the quality of academic skills assistance they received from “hard but supportive” faculty members. They liked the fact that we did not lower our standards for Indians and consistently indicated that our efforts helped them in their other classes and in their jobs. Students also indicated that commitment to cultural values and involvement in Indian-related activities contributed to the persistence and success. Since 1978, 163 students have graduated in Indian Studies.

### ***Faculty***

The Department has three tenured professors filling its three lines. Dr. Mary Jane Schneider is a Chester Fritz Distinguished Professor, currently chair of the Department and one of its founders. Her scholarship this year includes an article in the *Handbook of North American Indians XIII*. Her work most used by students and colleagues is *North Dakota Indians*, 2nd ed. (1994). Her doctorate is from the University of Missouri and she teaches a variety of courses focusing on the art and culture of the plains societies. Professor Schneider has worked on the Fort Berthold -Three Affiliated Tribes Reservation among others.

Dr. Birgit Hans, Associate Professor, holds the doctorate from the University of Arizona and has a master’s degree in Indian Studies. Her specialty is literature, oral and contemporary. Her publications include articles on D’Arcy McNickle, captivity narratives and popular literature. She has worked on the Hopi and Navajo reservations. She teaches the research writing course required of all Indian Studies majors.

