

The American Indian Program at Cornell University

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The American Indian Program at Cornell University strives to develop new generations of educated Native and non-Native people who will contemplate, study, and contribute to the building of nation and community in Native America. It pursues this mission through four specific goals: to develop recruitment and retention practices that enable American Indian students to complete their academic programs at Cornell; to provide a challenging curriculum for undergraduate and graduate students in American Indian Studies that encompasses a variety of disciplines and reflects an accurate portrayal of Indigenous peoples; to build the intellectual foundation for the resurgence of Native community and nation through rigorous scholarship and research; and to develop an outreach program that facilitates the learning environment through a comprehensive dialogue grounded in Indigenous culture.

Cornell University consists of seven different undergraduate colleges—some private and others public—with the Graduate School spanning all fields of study across the different colleges. The Ithaca, New York, campus also includes Cornell's law, business, and veterinary medicine schools. The American Indian Program is a university-wide program, but it is administered mainly by the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. While seeking and sustaining connections most directly with New York State Indian communities through student recruitment and extension activity, the program reaches Indian people all across North America in both its diverse composition of students and its wide range of scholarly inquiry.

The movement to build an American Indian Program at Cornell University originated in the 1970s, when several staff, faculty, and students formed an

American Indian Affairs Committee to serve Indian students and expand interest in Indian affairs on campus. Effective leadership was provided by Frank Bonamie, a Cayuga chief living in Ithaca, and Barbara Abrams, a Tonawanda Seneca doing graduate work in education. Abrams was hired by the university to recruit American Indian students and to assist those already on campus. Enrollment increased from only a few Indian students in 1975 to more than 30 by 1981. In the spring of 1981, the American Indian Affairs Committee submitted a proposal and Provost Keith Kennedy responded with the necessary funding to launch a modest American Indian studies program. Because Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences already had a history of intermittent extension relations with New York state Indian communities and because Dean David Call demonstrated a special enthusiasm for the newly proposed program, American Indian Studies was situated in that statutory college for administrative purposes. Raymond Fougner, an Oneida secondary-school educator from Syracuse, New York, was the first director of Cornell's American Indian Program. Charlotte Heth (Cherokee), Professor of Ethnomusicology, served as director from 1987 to 1989.

Under the influence of the late Ron LaFrance, an educator from the Mohawk community of Akwesasne, the American Indian Program concentrated heavily on student service and community outreach activities early in its history. LaFrance began his career at Cornell as an extension associate, served as acting director for a while, and then became director in 1990. The word "studies" was even dropped from the program's name in order to underscore the full-circle philosophy that guided its development over the late 1980s and early 1990s. A selection of courses on American Indian history, policy, and culture would be available for all Cornell students, but the program's priority would be to expand the opportunity for Native Americans to earn degrees in any field of their choice. With José Barreiro (Taino) steering the program's publications, what began as a regional magazine in 1984, *Indian Studies*, steadily grew into today's widely read and highly respected journal on global indigenous issues, *Native Americas*. Meanwhile, the number of American Indians at Cornell exceeded 50 undergraduate students and 30 graduate and professional students by the early 1990s. In September 1991 the program opened its residence house, Akwe:kon (a Mohawk word meaning "All of Us"). Designed architecturally to feature Iroquois concepts and values as well as general American Indian aesthetics, Akwe:kon houses 35 Native and non-Native undergraduate students.

From 1995 to 1999 the American Indian Program was directed by Jane Mt. Pleasant, a Tuscarora agronomist and tenured Cornell professor. Mt. Pleasant further advanced Cornell's extension and research ties to Indian communities through her own American Indian Agriculture Project. A Natural Resources specialist in the New York State Sea Grant Program, David Greene, also joined the American Indian Program during Mt. Pleasant's administration. Ongoing projects in Fisheries and Native Plants Restoration/Management are the result

of Greene's extension work on several New York State Indian reservations. Mt. Pleasant's directorship also enhanced the academic development of the American Indian Program, as American Indian Studies became a graduate minor and the cross-listing of courses was implemented. In January 2000 Daniel Usner, a Professor of History whose involvement with American Indian affairs at Cornell began in 1980, succeeded Mt. Pleasant as director. A restructuring process initiated in 1998 is now underway, more sharply demarcating the four major components of the program.

The multiple objectives of Cornell's American Indian Program have always been pursued within a single administrative operation. American Indian Studies is an academic unit resembling other area and ethnic studies programs at Cornell, but it shares program space and staff with the student support, community outreach, and publication components of the program. The directorship of the American Indian Program is intended to rotate among tenured faculty. Four associate directors are responsible for managing student services, outreach activities, publications, and academics. The director coordinates all of these responsibilities and leads long-term academic planning and development.

The American Indian Studies component is an interdisciplinary program of courses designed to enhance students' understanding of the unique heritage and status of American Indians. About eight to twelve courses are offered each semester, ranging in level from first-year writing seminars and introductory lecture courses to upper-level and graduate seminars in specialized topics. (See course-listing for 2000-01 below.) Some of the Cornell faculty who affiliate with the American Indian Program are appointed entirely in other departments. Their courses are cross-listed with American Indian Studies, and they participate as members of the program's curriculum committee. Currently these professors include Sherene Baugher in Landscape Architecture, Angela Gonzales (Hopi) in Rural Sociology, Bernd Lambert in Anthropology, and Daniel Usner in History. Professor Jane Mt. Pleasant's appointment is shared equally by the American Indian Program and the Department of Crop and Soil Science. The faculty who presently teach solely within the program are Senior Lecturer Robert Venables and Visiting Lecturer Brian Baker (Ojibwa). Venables regularly teaches "Indian America to 1890" in addition to more specific courses on Iroquois history and culture and on American Indian philosophies. Baker teaches "Indian America in the 20th Century" along with courses on sociology, policy, and imagery. The program sometimes relies on part-time faculty to supplement these offerings. In the 2000-01 academic year Kevin Connelly (Onondaga), who received a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Cornell in 1999, taught a seminar in anthropological linguistics. Michael Doxtater (Mohawk) taught another on Indigenology, while completing his Ph.D. in Education. There is a wider circle of faculty who are less directly involved with the American Indian Program but who serve as valuable advisors to the program in general and to individual students.

Courses taught in 2000-2001 at Cornell University's American Indian Program

Indian America to 1890 (AIS 100).

Slide lectures survey the rich cultures and complex histories of the Indian nations north of Mexico. Indian arts and philosophies are compared and contrasted with those of Europe, Africa, Asia, Canada, and the United States. The origins of today's major legal issues involving American Indians are also discussed. The course begins with a survey of Indian America before Columbus and ends at Wounded Knee in 1890. Guest lecturers, including American Indian leaders, provide additional perspectives.

Images of American Indians: Myths and Realities (AIS 110).

This first-year seminar explores the juxtaposition of myth and reality in images of American Indians. Whether real or unreal, Indian images have touched the lives of American Indian people in profound ways. What are the origins of these images and why do they continue to proliferate in American culture? Were they designed to justify American colonialism or to facilitate the assimilation of American Indians? To what extent have popular images affected the culture and identity of American Indians?

Communicating with Our Ancestors (AIS 111).

The concept of ancestors and future generations is an important part of contemporary indigenous cultures. What do the ancestors want their future generations to know? Indigenography is the study of sacred texts, narrative history, songs, stories, paintings and writings that are used by cultures to transmit tribal memory. This first-year writing seminar explores Eastern Woodlands indigenography by studying the audio, visual, textual, and graphic signs and symbols that are used to communicate within the same culture.

Indian America in the 20th Century (AIS 175).

This course addresses major U.S. policies affecting American Indians in the twentieth century, and ways in which American Indians pursued strategies to sway the process of social change. American Indian political, economic, and cultural issues are examined through history, literature, art, and film. The approach of this course is interdisciplinary and an emphasis is placed on the study of American Indians as living cultures. Current trends are discussed, and the implications for American Indians in the twenty-first century are explored. Guest lecturers include American Indian scholars and leaders.

Cultures of Native North America (AIS/Anthro 230).

Cultures of Native North America. A survey of the principal Inuit and American Indian culture areas north of Mexico. Selected cultures will be examined to bring out distinctive features of the economy, social organization, religion, and

worldview. Although the course concentrates on traditional cultures, some lectures and readings deal with changes in native ways of life that have occurred during the period of European-Indian contact.

American Indian History, 1500-1850 (AIS/Hist 276).

A survey of North American Indian history from the sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Relations between Indian nations and with European colonies are explored. Different cultural groups and cross-cultural encounters are compared, with emphasis on resistance and adaptation to European colonialism. The formative years of U.S. Indian policy and the experiences of Indian people through the removal era receive close attention.

American Indian History since 1850 (AIS/Hist 277).

A historical study of American Indians in the United States and Canada from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The active and complex role played by Indian people in their responses to government policies and to socioeconomic changes is emphasized. Challenges faced and initiative taken by Indians are traced from the early reservation years to the current era. Cultural change and continuity within Indian communities are also examined.

Ethnohistory of the Northern Iroquois (AIS 318).

The development of Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) history and culture is traced to the present day.

Pre-Industrial Cities and Towns of North America (AIS/CRP/LA 360).

Various American Indian civilizations as well as diverse European cultures have all exerted their influences on the organization of town and city living. Each culture has altered the landscape in their own unique way as they created their own built environments.

American Indian Politics and Policy (AIS 367).

This course addresses the Constitutional basis of the Federal-Indian relationship through an examination of treaties, Supreme Court decisions, and Congressional law-policy. The effects of European and American forms of governance on traditional American Indian political structures are detailed and contrasted with contemporary tribal governments and political organizations. Issues relating to sovereignty and self-governance with respect to tribal governments are addressed relative to state and federal governments.

Anthropological Linguistics (AIS 401).

Linguistics, the study of verbal signs, is looking for answers to our inquiries about human nature through the evidence provided by our language. This upper-level seminar investigates, by linguistic comparison, core human differences in worldview, perception, and identity. It focuses on Iroquoian thought

and worldview as evidenced in culturally central forms of language use. The central text is a published, Onondaga-language version of an epic oral narrative—the Iroquois League Tradition.

American Indian Philosophies: Selected Topics (AIS 442).

This seminar provides an opportunity for students to read and discuss a wide range of American Indian philosophies.

American Indian Studies (AIS 600).

This graduate-level seminar surveys the field of American Indian Studies across different academic disciplines. Designed specifically for students considering the graduate minor in American Indian Studies, it offers some common intellectual ground beyond the more specialized avenues of scholarship. Various areas of study are explored, with an emphasis on current methods, theories, and problems involved in researching Indian topics in Canada and the United States.

A concentration in American Indian Studies is available to all undergraduate students at Cornell, as a supplement to their major areas of study. It is earned upon completion of five courses from the American Indian Studies listing, two of which must be the introductory-level courses. Since the concentration was inaugurated with the graduating class of 1994, more than 60 students have graduated from Cornell with an undergraduate concentration in American Indian Studies.

The American Indian Program at Cornell also offers American Indian Studies as a minor field in graduate study. Graduate students wishing to engage in American Indian scholarship, in conjunction with their major field of study, select a faculty member from the field of American Indian Studies to serve on their special committee. Individual programs are designed to suit students' specific interests. They also participate in a graduate seminar in American Indian Studies in order to become familiar with the progress of various disciplines in the field. Students can gain an overall understanding of American Indian experiences and issues, while specializing in particular subject areas that can facilitate their professional or scholarly interaction with American Indian communities.

During the last decade, more than 12 American Indians have received Ph.D.s from Cornell University. Others have earned law and business, animal and human medicine, and master's degrees. Most recipients of advanced degrees have left Cornell to contribute significantly to education and scholarship, community development, and leadership in Indian affairs. After receiving both a Ph.D. in Environmental Toxicology and a D.V.M. from Cornell, Mary Fadden Arquette became Principal Investigator for the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment. Gerald Alfred was awarded his Ph.D. in Government by Cornell in 1994 and is now Director of the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. Doctoral dissertations recently completed by American Indians

at Cornell include Angela Cavender Wilson's "De Kiksuyap! (Remember This): Dakota Language, History, and Identity in the Eli Taylor Narrative" (History), Dixie Henry's "Cultural Change and Adaptation among the Oneida Iroquois, AD 1000-1700" (Anthropology), Michael Doxtater's "Indigenology: A Decolonizing Learning Method for Emancipating Iroquois and World Indigenous Knowledge" (Education), and Sean Teuton's "Homelands: Politics, Identity, and Place in the American Indian Novel" (English).

The major accomplishments of Cornell's American Indian Program will continue to rest firmly in the various means of support provided to American Indian students across the university campus. Associate Director Raeann Skenandore, an Oneida from Wisconsin, now coordinates the program's recruitment and retention efforts—in close collaboration with Student Services Associate Danielle Terrance, an Akwesasne Mohawk. The program's student support team works closely with admissions officers and guidance counselors in all of the different colleges to ensure that American Indian students receive appropriate attention. They participate integrally in the minority affairs community of Cornell and represent the university at local, regional, and national events. Akwe:kon Residence House serves as a main center of activity for students, but work and social space are also available to them at the program office in Caldwell Hall. Cornell's American Indian student organizations are very active, and the Annual Pow Wow and Smoke Dance Competition has become a major spring event for the entire university. The total American Indian student population at Cornell currently numbers about 120 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. American Indian Program faculty regularly interact with students inside and outside the classroom, channeling many of their teaching activities to meet program-wide needs and facilitating service learning in nearby Indian communities.

In planning the future of Cornell University's American Indian Program, there is a great need to expand the studies component. The number of faculty engaged in researching and teaching American Indian topics remains relatively small, and there are obvious gaps in our curriculum. The program is attempting right now to generate interest in a few academic departments, which might consider appointing new faculty in American Indian Studies. This quest for additional scholars in the field is inseparable from our desire to bring more Native American faculty to Cornell. Although our record in producing Indian scholars is strong, there is insufficient progress in appointing Indian scholars here. The professional staff in student services and publications is comprised mostly of American Indians, but too few Indian professors are involved in the program. The need among students for curriculum and mentorship, plus the growing importance of American Indian Studies in scholarship, will drive our latest effort to bolster the academic component of Cornell's program. The integrated framework of student support, community outreach, publications, and academics—we hope—will become even stronger with this growth.