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## University of Wisconsin System American Indian Studies Consortium Standards

**Preamble:** The desire for standards emanates from the Native Peoples of Wisconsin to create and enforce a level of professional understanding about, and importance of, their various cultures. American Indian Studies programs have grown up in the academy as a response to these desires as a way to formulate and communicate a systematic and strengthened understanding of native cultures. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to establish standards for *instruction, teacher qualification and course content of American Indian Studies in undergraduate general education classes, teacher education programs, and American Indian Studies programs*. We desire the University System to reward and recognize faculty actively involved in these pursuits, to support the on-going implementation of these standards in future appointments while respecting the contributions by those whose pioneering work made these expectations possible. These standards are offered as an ideal guideline to serve as a tool to retain quality where it exists and to be cited as a vehicle to help encourage quality where needed. These standards should apply whether Native American topics appear within the context of various discipline-based courses or as part of a comprehensive American Indian Studies Program.

1. Principle among the major criteria proposed are that *materials must be presented from an American Indian perspective* ( which include) :
  - a. The role of the **oral tradition** and boundaries that respect what sorts of knowledge may be shared, when and with whom. Indian cultures are part of a living culture that warrant sensitivity as students seek to approach different types of knowledge and levels of intimacy within tribal communities. Categories of information (such as stories, artifacts, images and objects) are not automatically subject to open and public examination at the convenience of the students.
  - b. This is related to the fact that instruction in cultural awareness must include notions of the sacred along with spiritual practices and sources of knowledge; *pedagogical approaches should emphasize the inseparability of spiritual and cultural matters* and convey this in discussions of Native American peoples.
2. *There is a world view shared across most Native American cultures* reflecting a holistic appreciation of life, nature, and knowledge. However, *it is unacceptable to oversimplify* the Native American experience based on a generalized commonality of outlook at the expense of noting the wide variety of conditions (historic, environmental, and geographic), awareness of cultural complexity, religious practices and other elements that contribute to the rich tapestry of the more than 500 indigenous nations.
3. *Knowledge of the past is indispensable* for a variety of topics:

- a. It is imperative to ***include the complex pre-contact cultures and achievements of Native Americans***; it is equally important to ***include awareness of post-contact developments***;
  - b. It is vital to convey the ***continuity of experiences over time to the present*** as seen in ***adaptations, survivals and innovations***;
  - c. Students need to understand the context of these dynamic interchanges among an ***invaded, occupied and oppressed people***;
  - d. Instructors need to know and convey awareness to students that ***a unique element of this history is the special relationship of sovereignty and treaty rights*** that separate American Indian Studies from other realms of race and ethnic studies.
4. ***Given that language and culture are inseparable for Native American peoples, language issues need to be discussed*** even if an educator lacks the working knowledge of a particular tribal language. Among those issues to be explored are:
- a. What happened to languages over time;
  - b. The diversity of Native American languages;
  - c. The issue of preservation;
  - d. Teaching about language, its nuances and its importance as an issue within Indian communities (especially the implication for cultural identity and content if languages die out and are irretrievably lost);
  - e. If possible, mastery of an Indian language by an instructor may permit students to acquire this language as part of a second language component for an undergraduate degree within an American Indian Studies program.
5. Instructors must be acutely aware of the Oral Tradition to Indian cultures and integrate that approach into the curriculum throughout the academic year so that students come to appreciate and respect that tradition. Given this importance, instructors should endeavor:
- a. To teach and impart knowledge by oral tradition;
  - b. To give greater prominence and awareness to the oral tradition in student evaluation and assessment by augmenting written examination methods with oral ones, thus validating this key value within the Native American cultures;
  - c. To appreciate that oral traditions have their own standards (with sufficient rigor) and assumptions that reflect part of a living culture and adaptation to changing circumstances; the Academy must not automatically place written expression above the spoken word.
6. ***Elder epistemology*** ( ways of knowing, approaches to knowledge, sharing knowledge) ***is a keystone in Native American cultures***. Acknowledging the role of tribal elders and incorporating their knowledge whenever possible and appropriate is essential to students in American Indian Studies. Contacting elders and integrating their contributions are the responsibility of the instructor. There are several options to consider as ways to achieve these ends:
- a. Elders visit campus (either in person, via videotaped presentation, or perhaps simultaneous audio-visual distance connection);
  - b. Students will visit elders and be taught on site by elders;
    - i. For a single visit or limited series of visits;
    - ii. For a longer sustained period as part of credit-based curricular requirement (e.g., an independent study);

- c. Have elders build a personal relationship with a faculty member who can then begin to incorporate the acquired knowledge and experience into a curricular format.
7. ***Faculty must maintain a level of active involvement and first-hand knowledge of contemporary Indian peoples, conditions, and issues.*** These shall be achieved in a variety of ways including:
- a. On-going evidence of working with indigenous peoples or communities (urban, rural, reservation);
  - b. Creative activities of scholarship, research, publication, public outreach, and other venues traditionally sanctioned by the academic community.
  - c. Demonstrated progress in acquiring the requisite skills along with first-hand knowledge, if necessary, as part of these series of proposed standards.
8. ***Careful, considerate and accurate implementation of Wisconsin Act 31 at all levels of public instruction remains a central motivation for the establishment of the UW American Indian Studies Consortium and its proposal of these standards.***
- a. It is required in the statutory language of Act 31 (1989) that each school board, as part of the social studies curriculum, include instruction in the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands in Wisconsin. This instruction must take place at least twice in the elementary grades and at least once in high school.
  - b. Therefore, ***students in the process of state teacher certification***, along with those undergoing recertification in compliance with new state guidelines, should ***expect to benefit from competent faculty in education at all levels*** to help them fulfill the spirit and letter of Act 31;
  - c. Campus-specific American Indian Studies programs should assume leadership responsibility in promoting these standards among faculty and offered courses, ***advocating fulfillment of Act 31*** within the university and the larger community, and finally serving as a resource to aid with implementation of these goals.

These standards recognize that American Indian communities are affected by all public policies that may change over time, and that it is the intent that these standards be flexible enough to respond to such changes. Therefore, this is to be an active and living document, reflecting the living nature of Native Peoples and their cultures, and oral tradition, and permitting a process for review and amendment.