American Indian Studies Program • www.uwoyo.edu/aist • Spring 2009
Hello, and greetings from all of us in American Indian Studies. We’re pleased to present, once again, The Ledger. We’ll use this opportunity to highlight some of the activities with which we’ve been involved, some of our students and faculty, and some of the colleagues and friends who sustain and support us with their good work and good example.

The projects we undertake and the accomplishments we share reflect the help of many hands. As you will see, the pages of The Ledger are a testament to the fact that none of us in American Indian Studies works alone. We depend on each other and we depend on you to let us know how we’re doing and how we can better serve you. We depend on you, too, to become a part of our American Indian Studies community and to join us in our commitment to educational excellence, a commitment that is reflected in The Ledger.

Of special note is the interview with our recent guest, Professor Charles Wilkinson. As an attorney, educator, researcher, writer, and tribal advocate, Professor Wilkinson has devoted his professional life to bettering the lives of America’s indigenous peoples. We were honored to host him for a short time in November, and we are proud to present his exclusive interview for The Ledger.

Our collaboration with others is illustrated, as well, by the article describing the new Graduate Certificate Program for Teachers of American Indian Children. We were very pleased to be invited by the College of Education to co-sponsor this curriculum and we anticipate positive results for teachers and students alike. Of course, this certificate program will influence and affect the lives of many, far beyond the classroom experience. It is a significant step in our collective journey toward cultural awareness and social justice.

The interest within American Indian Studies to create new classes that include international travel components and to add comparative, cross-cultural dimensions to several existing classes is illustrated in the article about our recent, and planned, activities in New Zealand and Mexico. At one time, these foreign travel experiences for our students were a dream. Now, they are a reality, thanks, once again, to the help of many hands.

Of course, no issue of The Ledger would be considered complete without a student profile. This issue highlights Northern Arapaho tribal member Melissa Elk and her service to American Indian Studies and to the University of Wyoming community, more broadly. Melissa is soon to graduate and we will miss her, as we miss all our graduates who have shared their time and talents with us and who have enriched our lives in many ways.

If you would like to learn more about the projects and people reviewed in The Ledger, about our classes and faculty, and about projects you may wish to support with your financial contributions, please visit the American Indian Studies Web site (www.uwyo.edu/aist) or call us at (307) 766-6521. We will be pleased to hear from you and, as always, we extend our sincere appreciation for your friendship and support.
When the Elk family’s blue minivan drives up to the Nelson Street Community Center, it takes several minutes to unload the pots and pans filled with stew, frybread, meatloaf, salad, and Jello, followed by the coffee pot and the vacuum cleaner. They seem to think of everything.

Melissa Elk has been a student in Wayne C’Hair’s Arapaho language class since it was first offered at UW, and she and her family have provided most of the Friday night dinners that the class shares.

“Week after week, Melissa has cooked and shared food, not because she wanted any attention for herself, but because she wanted the Arapaho language classes to succeed, and she wanted Wayne C’Hair to be properly fed and welcomed,” said Judith Antell, Director of American Indian Studies.

“I was brought up to show respect by feeding the elders,” says Melissa. “It’s important that someone cooks for Wayne. I’m happy that he comes to Laramie. It’s such a long trip.”

For her dedication to the Arapaho language class dinners, Melissa received the Outstanding Service Award for Students, sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences Board of Visitors.

Melissa is a senior in art and an enrolled member of the Northern Arapaho Tribe. She has been married to Tommy Elk for 12 years, and they have two children, Eugene, in fifth grade, and Erin, in kindergarten. In the evenings, Melissa, Eugene, and Erin often read and do their homework together. “Kids learn best from their parents,” Melissa says. “If they see me succeeding in school, they’ll do the same.”

In the art studio, Melissa likes to work in ceramics, hand-building sculptures of traditional American Indian musical instruments and animals. “When you work with clay, you always have to keep an eye on it, to see what it’s doing,” she says. Melissa hopes one day to be a teacher at a school on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

“Being a mom and a student is hard, but it’s good to be in school and discover new things,” Melissa says. She has learned to set priorities and follow a routine to keep up with family and school, and she credits her husband Tommy for supporting her in her endeavors.

Student Voices: Melissa Elk

Melissa’s Chokecherry Gravy

Berry gravy of any kind is a traditional favorite food for Arapaho people. Chokecherries are complicated to cook. If you don’t make the gravy the right way, it’s no fun spitting out the cherry pits.

After you pick chokecherries, grind them in a food grinder, pits and all. Form them into burger-sized patties and dry them. You can freeze the patties and use them throughout the year.

When you are ready to make gravy, soak the chokecherries in water until they become crumbly. Bring two cups of chokecherries or two dried patties to a boil in two cups of water. In a separate bowl, mix one and a half cups of flour with one cup of water until it forms a smooth paste, and then pour it into the berry mixture, stirring constantly. If you prefer to use cornstarch to thicken the gravy, use two tablespoons of cornstarch mixed with one cup of water. Simmer for several minutes. The gravy should thicken and have a creamy texture. To sweeten the gravy, add sugar to taste, starting with half a cup. Cool slightly and serve like soup. Frybread dipped in chokecherry gravy is delicious!
Most of us who teach American Indian children have a good attitude toward our students and the importance of our work. I had a good attitude about multicultural education in general and about American Indian education specifically when in 1999, after an absence of ten years, I returned to teacher education on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Since that time, I have learned how little I knew. Lessons come almost daily. I had literally nothing but a good attitude, and I soon realized my deficiencies. I have learned some things that all teachers of American Indian children need to know. To name a few: to listen, and to act with humility and respect for self, others and nature. I also have acquired appreciation of the complexities and obligations of extended families.

Among the hundreds of teachers with whom I have worked in schools on and near the Wind River Reservation, there is a surprising absence of fundamental knowledge about historical, social, psychological, cultural, and instructional dos and don'ts of teaching Indian children. This lack of foundational knowledge is, I believe, typical among those who teach in Indian Country. It seems to have always been this way.

Well before the historic Meriam Report to the United States Secretary of the Interior (1928), educators called for special preparation of teachers who served Indian children. Forty years after Meriam, the Kennedy Report made essentially the same recommendations, showing that little progress had been made. This pattern continued until very recently.

In early 2008, Professor Angela Jaime (Pit River/Maidu) and I, working with graduate students and Indian educators, launched a formal certificate program to prepare teachers with the attitudes, knowledge, and competencies to teach American Indian children. We were guided by the aforementioned reports, current research on Indian education, and Shoshone and Arapaho elders.

Each of the five courses of the certificate program is teacher-oriented and emphasizes classroom applications of anthropological, historical, social, psychological, and curriculum knowledge. Cultural relevance, personal connection, and collaborative problem/project-based learning are important keys to success in teaching American Indian learners. When Indian children see the purpose of the lessons they are required to do, they are more motivated and engaged in learning. It seems true that the most effective methods of teaching American Indian children are also the best methods for teaching all children.

Support from the American Indian Studies Program, the faculties of the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences, and the University of Wyoming administration was enthusiastic. Significant support has come also from the teachers who are participating in the Graduate Certificate Program for Teachers of American Indian Children. (See uwyo.edu/TAC for details and application guidelines.)

Two Wyoming teachers, Christine Rogers and Marty Conrad (Choctaw/Creek), have completed the pilot version of the program. Their feedback contributed significantly to its development, and their work in the certificate program produced important contributions to Wind River Reservation professional development programs for educators. Christine and Marty collaborated to create The Four Hills of Learning, a documentary film that illustrates the passion and need for culturally relevant education through the voices of young people, leaders, and elders on the Wind...
American Indian Studies’ initiatives focused on learning about indigenous peoples at the international level are growing. Through comparative study of tribal cultures and issues throughout the world, AIS students and faculty confirm that many of the values and struggles facing indigenous peoples abroad are similar to those of North American Indians, and that the exchange of ideas and cultures resulting from an international travel experience benefits everyone.

In June 2008, American Indian Studies and English faculty member Caskey Russell (Tlingit) and Chicano Studies Director Ed Munoz led a group of six UW students on a tour of contemporary and historic Mayan sites in Mexico as part of a new AIS summer study abroad class, Indigenous Peoples and Their Environments. In preparation for the trip, the students spent classroom time learning about environmental issues, land rights, and political resistance for both the Maya and Native people in the United States. In Mexico, the students noted the resilience of the Maya, despite their lack of a land base and their lack of treaty rights: The Maya are leaders in wetland reclamation in the Yucatan, the Mexican Constitution guarantees them the right to practice their culture, and the Mayan language is recognized as an official language of Mexico.

UW student Jenny Ingram noted that visiting the nighttime light show at the ruins of Chichen Itza was a pivotal experience for her. “When the lights flashed across the statues on the Temple of the Warriors, I thought for a moment that someone was there,” she said. “In that instant, I realized that Chichen Itza is a living place. I could imagine how it looked in its heyday, and I could also imagine what it means to the contemporary Maya, who spend their days as guides and vendors in that ancestral place.”

Russell looks forward to teaching the class again in summer 2010 and hopes to shape it to include more extensive interaction with Maya people.

Meanwhile, American Indian Studies’ relationship with the Māori in New Zealand, initiated by a summer class in 2006, continues. After a contingent of Māori visited UW in October 2007, Angela Jaime (Pit River/Maidu), AIS and Educational Studies faculty member, traveled to New Zealand in August 2008 to learn about Māori language and culture immersion schools. Jaime’s research at UW focuses on American Indian education, and she has worked closely with tribal schools on the Wind River Reservation.

“The revitalization of the Māori language in the past 37 years is astounding,” said Jaime. “They are an inspiration to all indigenous cultures striving to preserve their languages.”

Jaime plans to take students to New Zealand in June 2009 for an in-depth learning experience in the immersion schools. Her summer class, Field Experiences in New Zealand, will be offered for credit in the Educational Studies Department and the American Indian Studies Program.

American Indian Studies Director Judith Antell (Anishinaabeg) will return to New Zealand in 2010 for a semester of study at the University of Waikato’s School of Māori and Pacific Development, where she will focus on Māori history, culture, and contemporary concerns. In addition, she plans to travel throughout New Zealand, visiting indigenous colleges, strengthening established ties with Māori people, and making new connections in order to more fully develop international education and travel opportunities for UW students and faculty. “International study will sharpen the thinking of our students and faculty about the experiences of American Indians in relation to indigenous peoples in other parts of the world,” said Antell.

Ongoing contact with the Māori is significant for American Indian Studies, which is working to formalize a student/faculty exchange program between the University of Wyoming and the University of Waikato in New Zealand.
Charles Wilkinson, a former attorney with the Native American Rights Fund and currently Moses Lasky Professor of Law at the University of Colorado, Boulder, visited UW on November 21, 2008, when this interview took place. Wilkinson is the author of twelve books, including most recently Blood Struggle, which examines the fight for tribal sovereignty. His visit to UW was one of several campus events held in November, acknowledging American Indian Heritage Month. An intellectual premise in the discipline of American Indian studies is that American Indian tribes have the inherent right to be self-governing nations. UW’s American Indian Studies Program is committed to supporting tribal sovereignty by educating tribal members, contributing to the preservation of indigenous languages, providing assistance to tribal communities, and educating non-tribal members about tribal peoples and their governments.

Why is tribal sovereignty difficult for many Americans to understand?

The most basic reason is that we haven't been teaching tribal sovereignty in our schools. It's not a difficult concept to understand. Indian tribes are governments. They're one of three sources of sovereignty in the United States: the federal government, the states with cities and counties, and Indian tribes. Tribes can pass laws, have courts, manage resources, have schools and do the things that governments do, but people haven't been told that. What they've been told is that reservations are backwater places where not much is happening, and exactly the opposite is true. Sovereignty is increasingly understood because tribes are ever more serious and powerful governments. As a result, we are seeing the concept of sovereignty introduced more in the schools, and that's going to increase public understanding.

What is unique about U.S. Federal Indian Law and tribal sovereignty, in comparison to the rights and agreements that other indigenous people in the world have?

Tribes in our country have been international leaders. In some countries tribes have had greater accomplishments, but the historic and profound American Indian revival of modern times and sovereignty are at the heart of it. The U.S. experienced the first great effective uprising of Native sentiment worldwide, the first one with results. I think that it gave heart to indigenous people in other nations. Now in Canada, sovereignty is expressly mentioned and protected in the Canadian constitution. That isn't the case here. In New Zealand, there has been the birth of the indigenous language revival, and the Māori have taken the worldwide lead on that. The fact of tribal sovereignty here is very powerful, and of course it has limitations; tribes have many limitations, but it is a real sovereignty, and in many nations we don't see that. By real sovereignty, I mean sovereignty that is recognized as such and is working and creating results. Tribes have lost most of the land in the U.S., but the tribal land base is growing rapidly as they acquire land. It is counterintuitive that the tribal land base is growing. People don't expect that, but it's grown since the early 1960s by seven and a half million acres, one and a half times the state of Massachusetts, so now tribes have about 60 million acres, about three percent of the United States. It's still not enough, but critical to sovereignty, because sovereignty requires a land base. Indigenous people in places like Mexico or India don't have a land base or self-determination. But there are some commonalities among indigenous people around the world: love of land, love of family, love of traditions, and a strong sense of generosity.
What are some of the major issues for tribal sovereignty today?

Since the early 1970s Congress has been very supportive of tribal sovereignty and self-determination, and so has the Supreme Court up until the late 1980s. The Supreme Court is not much interested in tribal sovereignty now, and it's frankly very distressing to see people who call themselves conservatives, people who claim they believe in local control, who believe in the original intent of the Constitution—and I'm thinking of Justice Scalia, Justice Thomas, and Justice Roberts—not being much interested in tribal sovereignty, and not taking it in the direction that the Court had taken it before they came. So one place where tribal sovereignty has been limited is tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians. Congress can change that, and I hope it does. States take a disproportionate amount of tax revenue out of Indian Country. That should be changed so that tribal governments can capture those tax revenues. To show you how powerful tribal sovereignty is, tribes are treated the same as states under the major environmental laws—the clean air act and clean water act—but the states receive much more federal support. The tribes should receive equal support. Tribes are leaders across the West in natural resource management and cultural management. They should receive more support from Congress for that, to make it equal to the support that the states receive. Tribal courts and tribal police should get more support. States fund local courts. The federal government should fund the tribal courts better. The tribes have really exercised their sovereignty over mineral development. Basically what happened, and of course this is the case at Wind River, was that the early mineral leases in the 1950s, 1960s, and to some extent in the 1970s, were handled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the time when the BIA was really the government on the reservations, and the tribes were forced to rubber stamp their decisions. Tribes are now the real governments, the BIA is in the back, and the tribes can now control mineral development. One problem is that a lot of these old leases are still in effect, but you can bet that any new leases will be controlled by the tribes, and they're going to negotiate fair royalties and not be swindled the way they were under the old leases. You see numerous tribes now taxing extraction and receiving those revenues in addition to royalties, and you see tribes going into production and not just receiving royalties. There's been a very significant change.

What does the Obama administration mean for tribal sovereignty?

There's reason to believe that Obama may have the greatest positive impact in history on Indian tribes. Right now, you would probably have to give that honor to Nixon, with Clinton second. Obama has long had some interest in Indian matters. When he was in law school, he went to meetings of the Native American Law Students Association (NALS). His platform is the strongest Indian platform of any presidential candidate ever. During the campaign, he held several conference calls with Indian leaders. He has committed to have an Office of Indian Affairs in the White House. His spirit is with the tribes. He was the first presidential candidate to visit Indian Country since Bobby Kennedy. Right now in the transition period, the Department of the Interior transition committee is co-chaired by Keith Harper, an Indian attorney, and John Leshy, who previously was the Interior Solicitor during the Clinton Administration. Obama is serious about Indian issues. It's a very exciting time, and Indian Country is very gratified by this development.

Why should someone take an interest in tribal sovereignty and Federal Indian Law?

For me, Indian tribal sovereignty is the most luminous idea that has ever touched my mind. The determination, the commitment to self-determination, and to the culture of Indian people is stunning. They will not quit. The most powerful nation in the world took step after step to crush their culture and eliminate Indianness, their land and their world views, and they refused to let it happen. It is so inspiring that a small group could have organized and re-established serious working sovereignty, self-determination, and self governance in the way that tribes have. All Americans should admire what they have accomplished. The best way to get out of the crisis of climate change is to adopt the Indian world view. It's a serious living world view, a relationship to the natural world, and if we would honor it and borrow from it, we would be on our way to resolving climate change.
This issue’s word search, created by Reba Teran, highlights Eastern Shoshone words for birds. Teran is Language Coordinator for the Eastern Shoshone Tribe. All completed puzzles returned to American Indian Studies by March 31 will be entered in a drawing to win an AIS attaché bag. Please include your name and contact information on the puzzle.

Bahsoekoembee (Bah-soe-koe-m·bee)  Tree Swallow
Soeahqwahqwah (Soe·ah·qwah·qwah)  Robin
Zeedoevay (Zee-do-e-vay)  Horned Lark
Wyahvoe (Wy-ah-voe)  Nighthawk
Heetoe (Hee-toe)  Meadowlark
Nuhguhn (Nuh·guhn)  Canada Goose
Bahseeyah (Bah-see-yah)  Bald Eagle
Bahndaysh (Bahn-day-sh)  Loon
Hoozshah (Hooz-shah)  Sage Grouse
Zaggwaysgee (Zah·qway·shee)  Cooper's Hawk
Weedoysh (Wee-doy-sh)  Cedar Waxwing
Hypoii (Hy-pooi)  Double-breasted Cormorant
Dahkahwuhtoy (Dah-kah-wuh-toy)  Black-capped Chickadee
Gah-k (Gah-k)  Crow
Booiyoogenee (Booi-yoo-gee·nee)  Peregrine Falcon
Beeyahgwernyah (Bee-yah-gwee-ya)  Golden Eagle
Beeyahgahk (Bee-yah-gah-k)  Raven
Gwayshee (Gway·shee)  Swainson's Hawk
Booiyoo (Booi-yoo)  Duck
Moombeech (Moom-beech)  Owl

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