
Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

The CAS ad-hoc working group on Native American Studies was formed to explore the potential for engagement with Native American Studies among students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. The group met regularly over two years to promote Native American Studies and assess the level of interest in the subject. They collaborated with other academic units and student services. They worked with representatives from the Native American community to create a speaker series and to discuss the needs of the community, the development of a program in Native and Indigenous Studies, and opportunities for Native American students on campus. The group consisted of Fritz Allhoff (Professor, Philosophy), Stephen Covell (Chair, Comparative Religion), Diana Hernández (Director, Multicultural Affairs for Students), and Michael Nassaney (Professor Emeritus, Anthropology).

The group discovered many exciting possibilities for students, faculty, staff and community members in this area that are in need of better coordination to be more effective. More systematic coordination would increase opportunities to disseminate information about activities to maximize interest and participation among members of the local Native American and WMU communities. In order best serve our Native American students, the local Native American community, and faculty interest in Native American and Indigenous Studies we propose the creation of a University-level Committee for Native American Affairs. It would be charged with the following:

- (1) Identifying mechanisms for supporting Native American students;
- (2) Developing strategies to recruit Native American students;
- (3) Advising and coordinating outreach to local Native American communities;
- (4) Investigating the potential for an academic program in Native American Studies;
- (5) Further developing and strengthening partnerships with Native American groups; and
- (6) Sharing information regarding Native American activities within and beyond the University

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

The ad hoc committee was initially charged with exploring the feasibility of an academic program in Native American Studies using currently available resources. There are faculty interest and related courses in various departments (e.g., anthropology, comparative religion, and philosophy), and potential synergies also exist with political science and sociology. But a CAS ad hoc committee is too limited to explore and develop any of these possibilities, as there is also University interest beyond the College in academic programming (e.g., Health and Human Services, Fine Arts) and more broadly including the charges listed above. A more inclusive body that involves additional principals, including administration, development,

student aid and student services, other Colleges, and senior leadership in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, would provide better coordination and oversight. It would also improve communication, eliminate redundancy, and provide a more holistic approach to WMU's engagement on Native American issues

Numerous units stand to be impacted by this initiative in a positive way and coordination can be accomplished with few additional resources. The goal is to seriously explore the potential of Native American Studies by being inclusive and intentional.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

One aspect of this proposal is a minor in Native American Studies. However, even this is challenging given the current availability of faculty resources and expertise. At a minimum, we would need to identify a small number of courses that are regularly taught, plus be able to regularly staff something like an Introduction to Native American Studies, which is currently not being offered by the University. So, it might just not be possible to get to an academic program, with what we have available.

It would be an important first step to bring together University stakeholders to have a conversation about how to proceed. Another important step is to activate participation from the local tribal communities, including discussion of their needs and resources. As an example, someone from those communities may be able to teach the above-mentioned course; furthermore, funding might be available from tribal communities to help build these programs. Including and engaging the Native community in these efforts will demonstrate a stronger and collaborative effort. It is also critical that in absence of Native faculty, Native elders authenticate the lived experience of the community.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

As mentioned previously, the ad-hoc working group sponsored a series of events and speakers, which were well attended by University and tribal members. Those were meant to be preliminary meetings that would help with introductions and promote further conversations. In addition to those, WMU already has a significant presence in research and creative activity related to Native American studies.

Dr. Michael Nassaney has directed the annual WMU archaeological field school since 1994, and is principal investigator of the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project, a long-term partnership between WMU and the city of Niles. His work on the study of colonialism and the fur trade in the western Great Lakes substantially intersects with Native American issues. The Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee, a group appointed by the city of Niles, includes Native American representation from the Pokagan Band of Potawatomi whose ancestors were integral participants in the fur trade. Citizens of the Band are eager to learn how collaboration can benefit both groups.

Dr. Fritz Allhoff runs the WMU Alaska Tax Program, which takes accounting students to rural Alaska each winter, in order to prepare taxes for indigenous villagers. That program, sponsored

by a non-profit in Anchorage, returns over \$5,000,000 per year to rural villages and is an important economic driver for the region.

A permanent committee would be able to promote and leverage these projects, as well as identify other faculty initiatives from around campus. With a consolidated approach, we would also be able to research extramural funding opportunities; as it stands, though, there is not enough coordination among our efforts for them to maximize impact and recognition.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

This committee is meant to promote efficiency of Native American initiatives by principally consolidating them into a single committee; as mentioned above, part of the challenge at present is the existence of myriad, uncoordinated efforts. And so the committee would provide a centralized unit that would ensure communication among all participants, thus promoting better coordination.

Additionally, there may also be revenue potential the committee could identify. By expanding our outreach into Native American communities and to prospective Native American students, we increase the chances that those students will matriculate at WMU—student revenue dollars are very much in play, and WMU needs to be well-positioned to capture those. By developing a critical mass of interest in Native American issues, we also open the door for investment (e.g., from Native American communities) as well as extramural funding to support related research projects.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

There are no immediate impacts on course offerings, but the committee would have a serious look at what is being taught elsewhere on campus and whether those offerings and rotations can be streamlined in such a way that we might be able to offer a minor in Native American studies. But even short of the minor, coordinating the courses could help build interest and a critical mass, to which we could return at some time in the future, perhaps when resources become available to design and develop a more substantial program.

There are also no workload issues beyond the service commitment of members of the Committee once it is established. The CAS ad hoc committee members remain resolute in their commitment to this project and believe others working on Native American issues would also be delighted to serve on such a committee.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

We propose that Committee membership should consist of the following:

- (1) Faculty (active and emeriti, preferably representing multiple colleges)
- (2) Chairs/Directors (preferably representing multiple colleges)
- (3) Administrators (representing student interests, for example from Multi-Cultural Affairs)
- (4) Staff

- (5) Alumni (representing tribal interests)
- (6) Representative of the WMU Native American Student Organization

We also believe that this committee should oversee funding for a speaker series on Native American and Indigenous history, culture, religion, politics, etc. Maintaining a regular forum for the discussion of Native American life will help to draw attention and to create momentum for further engagement with critical ideas and issues for our students, faculty research and the local community. Funding for a speaker series need not be extravagant, two talks/events per semester could be accomplished for under \$10,000. There are multiple outside granting agencies and endowments that could be drawn on for further support as needed.

8. Contact

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