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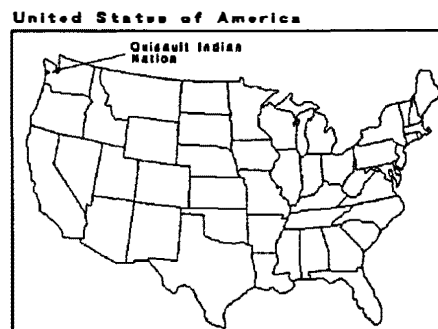
COMMUNITY-DETERMINED LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

An Academic Program for Native Americans at
The Evergreen State College

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Is access to formal educational systems essential for the survival of indigenous and oppressed peoples? Our response is yes, But More important questions are: Who has a right to create knowledge that is validated by schools or universities, and: Who controls the content and learning processes of formal educational systems?



All societies have mechanisms for teaching the young the patterns, norms and roles of their culture, of training youth for their roles in society, and for ongoing adult learning and development. The Fourth World populations of the world don't need to rely upon formal educational institutions to

teach the knowledge and skills of the culture. Families and communities build this learning into their integrated, holistic patterns of daily life. Our First, Second and Third World societies have, to a large measure, given this responsibility to a professional class of people who create and define what is valid knowledge and how it is to be taught and learned. The power to create and validate knowledge, and to control its dissemination, is given to those who by birth or training have accepted a certain paradigm of knowledge -- variously called western, Cartesian, scientific, etcetera. Popular or vernacular knowledge may be studied as an intellectual curiosity, but not validated as an equivalent way of knowing the world, the unknown or oneself.

However, global political and economic webs of interdependence and exploitation, fueled by modern communication technologies, do not allow anyone to live in isolation, or peace, in the contemporary world. Knowledge of one's own cultural world view, language, norms, skills and ways of being are essential for cultural survival. But, perhaps unfortunately, so is knowledge of how forces external to our communities are working to dominate and control our lives, relationships to the world, and our values. This knowledge, particularly in its contemporary forms, may not be included in traditional educational systems. Yet, gaining access to formal educational systems -- if possible at all -- requires abandoning or replacing traditional values with modern (i.e. western) ones.

We believe that the answer to this dilemma lies in two arenas of work to be done. One is to encourage/assist/allow Fourth World peoples to create and control their own educational institutions that would supplement (add to, not replace) traditional patterns of teaching and learning. Another path is to encourage/force/assist First, Second and Third World educational institutions to give equivalent validity to knowledge, skills and learning processes controlled by Fourth World members of their societies.

The example presented in this paper represents an attempt to create a Native American community-controlled educational content and process within a state-controlled university in the United States. The status of Native American nations in North America is similar in many ways to that of other Fourth World nations on every continent. Modern states have taken land, natural resources and the power to determine individual and community destinies, imposed legal, economic, educational, religious and social service systems, and, in general, both overtly and covertly tried to destroy traditional

cultural ways of living and thinking.

Yet, at least one university -- The Evergreen State College in Washington State -- has been willing to initiate a new and different relationship with Native American communities in its region. If successful, this could be a significant example of a First World university giving a Fourth World community the power to create knowledge and have it validated as equivalent to the knowledge created in other academic programs of the university.

Native American Access to Higher Education in the United States

In the United States, educational programs provided by most colleges and universities are not designed for people who do not wish to share or buy into the "American Dream," and especially not for the people who are native to this country. The curriculum content, regardless of the philosophical orientation of the authors or teachers, is approached from the western civilization/colonial/pioneer point of view. In these institutions, Native Americans are subjected to an education which is opposed to the existence of their tribes, not only as political entities but as cultures with spiritual and economic relationships with the land we now call the United States. The "melting pot with no lumps" self-identity of Americans, promoted throughout the literature in all academic disciplines and in the popular culture of Euro-Americans, leaves no room for other world views and definitions of education.

Within this context, the only sources of the knowledge needed to preserve Native American cultural paradigms lie within tribal communities. If Native American communities are to survive as nations, they must build and maintain knowledge of and loyalty to those nations and their institutions. While knowledge about external and foreign philosophies and practices is useful in communicating with and relating to the rest of the world, if the tribes are to survive as a people and as self-governing nations, they must build and control their own educational processes. American universities and colleges have not been willing to accept cultural and educational paradigms that define knowledge differently than the Euro-American scientific and intellectual one does. However, an exception may be emerging at The Evergreen State College.

Native American Studies at The Evergreen State College

The Evergreen State College was created in 1967 with a mandate to design innovative curricular structures and pedagogical strategies that may be more appropriate for the 21st century than the 16th century models that still dominate the world of higher education today. At Evergreen, teaching and learning is organized into full-time, year-long, team-taught interdisciplinary units called programs. Knowledge is pursued collaboratively rather than competitively, interactively rather than passively, through discussion and projects rather than lectures and exams, holistically rather than fragmented and specialized, with theory and practice interwoven, and with different cultural paradigms of knowledge actively explored and recognized as equivalently valid.

Within this general college-wide approach to education, the Northwest [United States] Native American Studies program was established in 1973. Strongly influenced by faculty member Mary Ellen Hillaire, of the Lummi Nation, the program's goal was to bridge the gap between oral and written tradition. Mary Hillaire's model was based on the following concepts:

- a) **Hospitality** -- an absolute trust in students' learning motivations and abilities;
- b) **The Learning Triad** -- the student, the student's community, the institution/program/faculty and the relationships among them are the sources of learning;
- c) **Personal Authority** -- the student chooses how to best utilize personal, community and college resources to pursue learning goals.

Until her death in 1982, this model was effective in allowing individual Indian students to achieve their educational goals while living in their own communities. Since Hillaire's death, the Native American Studies program has grown to become one of the most popular programs on campus, but it has primarily served non-native students. An 1988, a two-year study of the program resulted in a renewed institutional commitment to develop a model for how the college could and should respond to the needs of Native American

students and communities.

The college is located in western Washington State, an area rich with Indian Nations working to strengthen their cultural and economic identities. There are thirty-one federally recognized tribes in the state, and many other groups who identify themselves as Native American communities. In western Washington, the tribes are primarily fishing cultures with long and deep relationships to the land and waters of the region. Part of the college's renewed commitment to serving the educational needs of local Native American communities involves the establishment of a Board of Advisors to the program. Twelve representatives from Washington State tribes and urban Indians are being selected to serve on the Board. The purposes of the Board of Advisors include:

- 1) To assist the Native American Studies (NAS) program in planning and setting an annual agenda for identifying educational issues related to Native Americans;
- 2) To assist the NAS program to synthesize the results of an annual symposium on Native American issues;
- 3) To assist the NAS program to identify and prioritize community educational and public service activities;
- 4) To assist the college in getting information out to the Indian communities in the state.

The New Model:

A Native American Community-Determined Program

In addition to the formation of the Board of Advisors, the 1988 study led to the hiring of three additional Native American faculty (now totaling ten in a faculty of 150) and a commitment to establish a new community-based and community-controlled academic program. Faculty member Carol Minugh, of the Gros Ventre Nation, has been the primary coordinator of this effort.

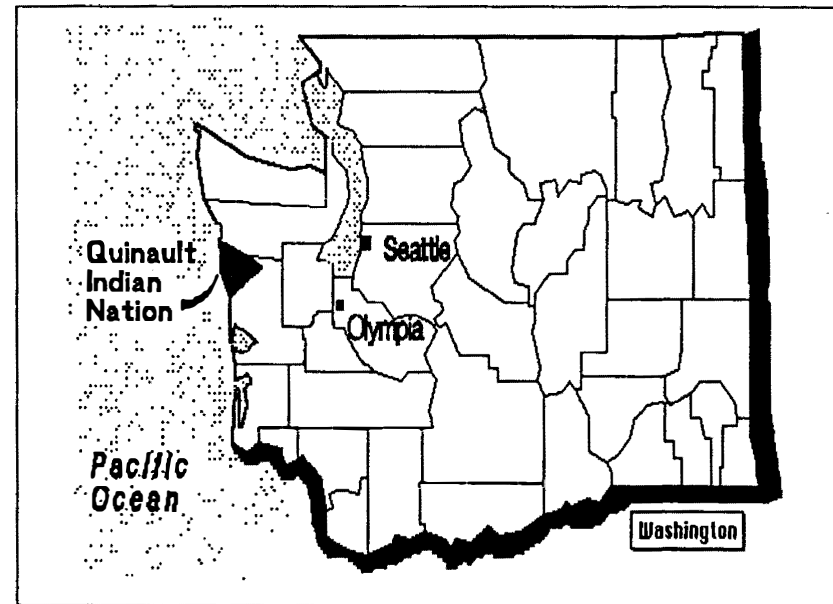
Self-determination, individual and community empowerment, community participation and community responsibility will be the watch words of the new program. The program will allow local tribal people, individually and as a community, to identify and develop their own priorities of learning. The creation and expression of

individual and community structures of knowledge about oneself and the community will lead to research and analysis of the dynamics that define that reality and, eventually, to individual and community pathways toward futures defined by the participants.

The Hillaire-model Learning Triad will be built upon as the sources of knowledge and the framework for research, analysis and communication of learning. Responsibility for the program will also be three-pronged. The community will assist in determining the curriculum subject matter, provide facilities, coordinate the enrollment, provide specific training programs and assist the students financially. The Evergreen State College will provide faculty, develop the curriculum and facilitate the learning process, teach the skills of research, analysis and communication, provide access to campus resources, identify appropriate consultants, insure a rigorous educational program, evaluate and validate the learning process pursued by each student, coordinate student financial aid, financially support a student organization, host an annual symposium on a Native American issue relevant to the tribes and seek additional funding when needed. The students will help prioritize the community educational needs, determine their personal course of study, create their own student organization and participate in community projects and educational programs. Planned during the 1988-89 school year, the program began in the summer of 1989 with twenty students from the Quinault Nation. Twenty additional students will begin in the fall quarter. The Quinault Nation was selected as the site for the first community-based program because of the active support of the tribal government and the number of individual requests for additional studies beyond those available at the local two-year Community College. The Quinault Nation is one of ten tribal governments actively creating alternative self-governing relationships with the United States federal government. Aggressive and effective tribal leadership over the past twenty years has resulted in substantially increasing the tribal land-base and strengthening their economy. Initial students include teacher aides in the tribal school, social service workers, tribal management employees, fisheries and forestry workers and other adults seeking either specific skills or a liberal education.

Classes will be held in the local community of Taholah on the Quinault reservation. Faculty will have regular office hours in the community. Classrooms will be provided by the community. Access

to the resources of the college will be facilitated by the coordinating faculty, and will include guest visits by other Evergreen faculty, team-teaching assignments for more long-term teaching, use of the campus library, and collaboration with other academic programs and student services as needed by the community or individual students.



Academic credit-generating work will include formal classes, individual projects and studies, group or community projects, participation in educational offerings sponsored by other organizations or agencies, documentation of prior learning experiences and new job-related work skills. Summer 1989 opportunities included a "writing from experience" class and the opportunity for the teacher aides to enroll in a school district-sponsored teacher training class on the "psychology of cognition" for credit.

Collaboration with other colleges and universities will also be an important component. For example, the Northwest Indian College, a tribally controlled Community College on the Lummi Reservation, offers two-year degrees for Native Americans in western Washington. Evergreen and Northwest Indian College will share resources when the needs of a student can best be met by the other. One example will be an opportunity for students to obtain a

two-year technical degree through Northwest Indian College and an additional two years of liberal arts education through the Evergreen program. In addition, the faculty will encourage students to find the best institution for a specific program of study when the Evergreen program is not appropriate. This will be necessary when the student needs vocational training or is interested in professional programs such as nursing or engineering.

The Board of Advisors to the Evergreen State College will act as a clearing house for research projects that the local tribal communities have identified and would like assistance with. Faculty and students in the community-determined program and/or other campus-based faculty and students might be encouraged to participate. Research through this program and in tribal communities will emphasize the community participation and empowerment of the community members -- that is, participatory research. The college's commitment to and success with participatory research projects has been extensive. One documented case study is included in a paper entitled *Participatory Research as Critical Theory: The North Bonneville, USA Experience* by Donald Comstock and Russell Fox.

Internships and other public service opportunities in local tribal communities will also be suggested by the Board of Advisors. These opportunities, open to all students at the college, will include an orientation to the tribal community and the culture of that community by faculty and members of the Board of Advisors. Projects could include developing curricula, organizing a youth group, or digging a ditch.

Projected Future of the Program

After the program has been established on the Quinault reservation for two years, the college hopes to expand the program to at least one additional community. This may be a centrally located reservation so that members of several smaller tribal communities will have easy access to the program.

It is hoped that by the third year the program will have its own mobile unit consisting of two fully-equipped offices and a student resource center with multi-media and reference materials. This unit will have a regular route to the various reservations served, and students will have access to the faculty and resources on a scheduled

basis.

A longer-range hope is that the communities we work with will develop ever increasing pools of leaders and educators who continue to provide spiritual, cultural, economic and political leadership as their communities become more and more self-determined and self-reliant -- i.e. healthier communities.

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