Appraisal of Diversity Efforts  
American Indian Studies Program  
College of Arts and Sciences  

Diversity as a Visible and Active Part of American Indian Studies  

One would be hard pressed to find a unit on campus where diversity is more of a central piece of the unit’s culture and daily work. To begin with, the faculty in AIS were selected based on their active involvement in living native cultures and half of the faculty are Native American. The student served by the unit also represent a high degree of diversity with many of the students coming from Native American cultures, as well as from non-native cultures including Asian and Asian American, African and African American, Pacific Islander and Pacific Islander American, and European and European American.  

The course work in AIS investigates, celebrates, and researches American Indian knowledge and worldview. This focus on non-European knowledge offers vital and unique ways of looking at the world. AIS is a multi-disciplinary program, with faculty in English, film studies, anthropology, history, political science, sociology, art, and medicine.  

Unlike many academic departments, the American Indian Studies Program has as its mission to support the recruitment of American Indian students and faculty, and to help with the cultural life of American Indians at UW. Thus, working closely with the Office for Minority Affairs, AIS helps with the recruitment of undergraduate and graduate students by meeting with individual students and by involvement in Native American Day. AIS also plays a central role in helping the First Nations Student group with its yearly winter and spring powwows, and AIS takes the leadership role in planning and carrying out the yearly Raven’s Feast, Native American Graduation Event. For the past several years, Professor Marvin Oliver has presented each American Indian graduate with a framed, signed print. Each of the other AIS faculty also supports the event by providing food and by working the event.  

AIS also engages the external community in a number of ways. First, Native Americans are often brought into AIS classes to provide information and perspective on issues. Secondly, a great deal of the research the faculty are engaged in investigate Native American issues. Finally, much of the service work carried out is in connection with Native American initiatives in education such as the American Indian Sciences and Technology Education Consortium, the Microsoft IT Project, and Project WET. Service has included faculty involvement on the President of the United States’ Advisory Board on Tribal Education. Recently Professors Marvin Oliver and Tom Grayson Colonnese
were involved in an innovative Internet II Project with Abanaki Studies at the University of Maine/Orono.

The American Indian Studies Program provides a prototype of how diversity can serve as a guiding force for teaching, research, service, and for student involvement and support.