

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Humanities Initiatives at Tribal Colleges and Universities
Institution: Diné College



NATIONAL
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FOR THE
HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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National Endowment for the Humanities

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Narrative Section of a Successful Application

This sample of the narrative portion from a grant is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Division of Education Programs well before a grant deadline. This sample proposal does not include a budget, letters of commitment, or resumes.

Project Title: *The Frontier of Native American Literature: Imaginative Paths to Discovery*

Institution: Diné College

Project Director: Cristine Soliz

Grant Program: Humanities Initiatives for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities

3. Narrative

Intellectual Rationale

Faculty participants in Imaginative Paths will explore, in a series of seminars, the ways that culturally relevant, imaginative literature can advance critical writing and reading in English across the disciplines and to ultimately improve the ways we teach the humanities. Our goal of helping to build a challenging intellectual environment through Native American literature will address several needs, one of which concerns the faculty. As a tribal college with multi-satellite branches situated across the Navajo reservation (one main campus at Tsaile, AZ, and seven satellite campuses), the members of our faculty maintain heavy teaching loads and have few opportunities to interact intellectually. The problem of improving intellectual life has been studied by other colleges who have generously made their documents available on the Web. (<http://cndls.georgetown.edu/provostseminar/>) This is a central concern of academic institutions because student intellectual experience depends on faculty intellectual experience and so efforts that advance faculty experience will positively impact students, as our project is designed to do. Additionally, Imaginative Paths responds to the specific need of our students to achieve high proficiency in English. Because our College is on the Navajo reservation, our students demographically comprise more than 95 per cent Native Americans who are at various stages of English language learning and who would benefit from programs aimed at increasing critical writing and reading in English. Many studies show that English writing skills and the learning process are improved through culturally relevant content. For example, a program at Brown University, “Teaching Diverse Learners”, encourages what the program calls “culturally responsive teaching” based on studies that show the importance of cultural correlations in learning. (Ladson-Billings in <http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tld/tl-strategies/crt-principles.shtml>) Our project addresses both of these needs by providing the context for faculty intellectual

interaction through an examination of the nature of, and ways to use Native American literature in diverse aspects of student learning and as a means of adding to subject areas a specific and imaginative human dimension that is at once transcultural and interdisciplinary. Faculty will explore how Native American literature can provide cultural footholds necessary for learning across the disciplines specific to our demographics, in addition to providing cultural role models of Native Americans who are making contributions to society through writing. As a tribal college our relationship to Native literature is complex, and faculty seminars will provide an ideal platform to explore this unique relationship. What is this relation, and what is the role of tribal colleges in analyzing and understanding the American Indian literary and its effects both on American culture and on the needs of Native American culture? In addition, our relation to English is complex, and while students no longer suffer severe punishment for speaking their own language, what are the effects of this historic relation on our approaches to teaching and learning English now, and can Native authors as role models provide incentives to students to enter diverse conversations through writing? Importantly, the seminars will also allow us to share teaching strategies that have worked for us, an interchange that will encourage improvements in how we facilitate our classrooms and teach the humanities. The specific needs of Diné College are reflective of the needs of higher education nationwide. With advances in computer technology and altered views of and approaches to knowledge, our college, as most others, has been occupied with trying to understand resultant changes in knowledge dissemination and to develop strategies for gaining insight into and improving student learning. Both print and online information show the need for achieving high literacy proficiency in English in the information age of the 21st century (Harrington and Brisk). Imaginative Paths will allow faculty to explore ways to work toward these goals and develop a dynamic intellectual

community through the humanities, which has always been a leader in creating a climate conducive to high quality teaching and instilling a life-long love of learning. Foundational readings across the Divisions in Native American literature can challenge students to think and write critically in diverse subject areas and to reach their own potential of writing in whatever field they choose. Our project is consistent with the ultimate goal of humanities, which is to strengthen the intellectual life of the whole person. It will lay the foundation for future humanities projects at Diné College and not only enrich humanities education through publishing our findings, but, in the movement toward stronger teaching and active learning strategies, Imaginative Paths will help strengthen the intellectual lives of both faculty and students, and thus contribute to building a vibrant academic community of learners.

Content and Design:

Humanities Content. Topics for discussion are divided into six categories of questions; each category will be examined in relation to texts in the order of texts listed below. For an expanded list of seminar questions, please see the attached [hypersyllabus](#), 49.

TOPICS: 1. **The Humanities:** What is the human experience and how have Native Americans understood this experience? Academically, what distinguishes the humanities and teaching in the humanities? How foundational to learning is open communication and to the humanities? How can Humanities lead the way in creating a cohesive community of learners? How important are both the humanities and faculty in strengthening the intellectual vigor of a academic community? How does Diné and Native American philosophy relate to humanities principles?

2. **The Nature of Native American Literature:** What is the nature of Native American literature? What critical approaches can be used to access both oral and written literature. What narrative strategies distinguish Native American literature? What elements of storytelling in Eurasian traditions have been adopted into Native storytelling and why?

3. **Tribal Colleges and Native American Literature:** What relationship does a tribal college have to Native American literature? What authority can it assume in general to Native literature? In what ways has the literature affected American culture and is this different from its importance in the psychology of Native Americans? Is there a leading role tribal colleges should play in interpreting and promoting American Indian literature?
4. **“Culturally Responsive Teaching”:** What ways can Native literature help students connect to a range of subject areas, from psychology to business and environmental science? How can Native literature create a discursively attuned classroom and motivate active learning in diverse subject areas? What culturally responsive teaching approaches do humanities instructors use? What are teaching approaches that follow Diné philosophy and Diné College mission?
5. **Learning English Through Native American Literature:** Do Native American authors provide an incentive to our students to strive for high proficiency in English? What themes in Native literature might effectively be used in various non-humanities classes? What rationale might underlie approaches to a theme or syllabus? What successful assignments have our colleagues had using Native American literature? What challenges are faced by instructors with limited experience teaching literature and interpretation? Is there institutional resistance to interdisciplinary approaches? What are our own human experiences in making texts accessible to the students? As a tribal college, do we need to be open about the relation that Native languages have had to English, and the effects of this relation on our approaches to teaching English now? Can Native authors provide incentives as role models for students to give themselves permission to enter diverse conversations through writing?
6. **Intellectual Community:** How can we incorporate our seminar discussions into improving the intellectual climate and the quality of teaching across the curricula and in our own research

and writing? An intellectual community is one marked by a love of learning, and a successful teaching strategy would be one that inspires a love of learning. What specific steps can we take to advance the intellectual climate in this way? What is the role of Humanities in improving the intellectual environment and in providing a challenging academic life for our community of learners? How can we promote Diné educational principles in the classroom?

TEXTS: E-texts: about 105 pages total on humanism and the humanities (see syllabus), and e-texts at the Univ. of Virginia Electronic Text Center, originally published from 1867 to 1902. For more detail, refer to e-texts on the syllabus in the appendices. [George Grinnell Bird](#), a naturalist who accompanied General Custer to the Black Hills in 1874 when they discovered gold and who retells Native stories, [John Vance Cheney](#) (b. 1848), an American poet and librarian who shapes a Native story through Eurasian formats, [Mary Austin](#), who didn't claim to be Native American, but fully absorbed Native American philosophy which she represented in her writings, [Vincent Colyer](#), on the Indian Board of Commissioners in the 1870s, and whose notes on his impressions of the tribes in the West provide useful historical background, [Frank Terry](#), Superintendent of U.S. Boarding Schools in Montana, describes how and why American Indian students were given new names; [Simon Pokagon](#), a Potawatomi, also contrasts naming practices, both texts providing comparative clues about characterization in imaginative literature, and [Zitkala-sa](#), a Yankton Sioux, noted for writing the first Native American opera, "Sun Dance" (Cheyfitz 308); [Daniel Garrison Brinton](#) (1837-1899), selections from either of two early works on Native American authors or stories, useful for grasping the problematics in Native literature.

Print texts: [Catherine Rainwater](#). *Dreams of Fiery Stars: The Transformations of Native American Fiction*. This book offers critical approaches to Native literature and investigates the connection between storytelling and human transformation, and ways that Native writers have

altered conventions of Eurocentric, written narrative to achieve non-Eurocentric purposes with a long tradition in oral storytelling. It is useful for a comparative look at strategies of narration.

Louise Erdrich. Love Medicine: A Novel. Louise Erdrich is a Chippewa author who won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Love Medicine, first published in 1993. This newest edition has been reorganized by the author with five new sections and deals with 20th century transcultural interactions on issues such as gender, religion, sexuality, environmental, political and health sciences, and family.

James Welch. The Indian Lawyer, portrays the criminal justice system and law as it replaces the normative functions of Native American ceremony. Welch (b. 1940 d. 1993), Blackfeet, studied under Richard Hugo and won the American Book Award in 1986 for Fools Crow.

Carlton Smith. Coyote Kills John Wayne: Postmodernism and Contemporary Fictions of the Transcultural Frontier (Recounters With Colonialism). This work explores how Native American literature and representation fit into the “transcultural frontier” of America, the concern of our community in the Southwest. It explores various literary and cultural theories and examines Leslie Silko’s and Louise Erdrich’s works in representations of Cowboys, Indians and the West.

Luci Tapahonso. Blue Horses Rush In. Professor Tapahonso is a Navajo poet at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Her book has many pieces that can be useful in sociological, political, and anthropological contexts, in addition to being specifically culturally relevant.

N. Scott Momaday. House Made of Dawn. Professor Momaday is Kiowa, a Ph.D. and former Guggenheim Fellow. House Made of Dawn won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 and is considered a landmark in Native American literature. Its continuing popularity is attributable in part to presentation strategies, which are considered postmodern. The story deals with many socio-political and historical issues: post-war adjustment, termination and relocation, and shows the

power of Native American storytelling, song, psychological, and physical sports traditions.

Project Activities, Work Plan, and Schedule. The detailed [hypersyllabus](#) (49) has extensive information about coordinating the six categories of questions to probe six texts and various hypertexts, reading schedules and goals. Briefly, we will conduct four seminars in the Spring and four in the Fall at three campuses, Tsaile, AZ (main campus), Shiprock, NM, and Tuba City, AZ. The meetings will be held through Polycom (video conferencing), with the exception of two seminars that will be conducted by visiting scholars, at which time faculty will converge at the main campus. Initial activities for the project director will involve detailed paper, phone, and email work to: establish a firm list of 15 participants, coordinate times, order books, hire an assistant to take minutes, establish photocopy procedures, complete and upload the Web pages, establish communication paths with participants, notify visiting scholars and arrange for lodging and transportation, and submit necessary purchase requisitions. For a dynamic interchange of ideas, colleagues will be encouraged to co-facilitate sessions, conduct frequent discussions by email, and blog in the space provided on the hypersyllabus. We will maintain ongoing evaluations of our project activities.

How will our project approach teaching and learning in humanities? Our project will examine how the human and imaginative experience of Native American literature can be a powerful, qualitative tool for teaching and learning across the curricula. So our approach will be to seek ways through collegial discussion and readings to help students learn that they can participate in the building of knowledge, civic community, and kinship. Native literature will interpose the human element into diverse subject areas as something our students will immediately connect to and we will teach each other to unleash this power to stimulate active learning and help develop and strengthen a life-long love of learning. Concrete goals of an

annotated bibliography, syllabus builders, and simple surveys will guide our discoveries.

Beneficiaries. The intended beneficiaries of our project are students and faculty. Faculty will receive limited remuneration, but huge benefits in intellectual climate through better channels of communication as teachers of each other and through new approaches to teaching and learning.

In seeking to create a vibrant, cohesive intellectual community the entire community will benefit.

Institutional Context

Diné College, as the Navajo Nation's institution of higher learning, leads the way for Navajos to make a positive impact in their communities, a stated goal of the college. Through higher education, the College ensures that Navajo culture remains a positive shaping force in the U.S. Southwest and an important player in and contributor to Southwest culture and the region's economic viability and dynamic cultural diversity. Humanities at the college plays a key role in educating undergraduates in the fundamental academic disciplines of English, literature and the arts, and continually seeks ways to invigorate our curriculum and approaches to teaching that meet the educational mission of the College. This mission is represented by a figure who embodies balance and harmony, Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón, and, as the catalog states (48), is the "Diné traditional living system, which places human life in harmony with the natural world and the universe." This philosophy provides the impetus for our proposed project because it incorporates principles of teaching and learning that promote thinking, planning, and a thriving and harmonious life with a positive outlook or confidence, which in the Diné language are Nitsáhákees, Nahatá, Iiná, and Siihasin. Imaginative Paths is coherent with this philosophy and seeks to enhance *Nitsáhákees*, critical *thinking* in reading and writing, as well as to expand and enhance *Nahatá*, the ability of faculty to *plan* and design vibrant courses that dynamically challenge our students, in our case through Native American literature. Student interest in this literature may be shown through our library collection, which our librarian characterizes as

strong if not exceptional, (see library resources letter, 39, Appendix 4), and Diné faculty can take the lead in building on these efforts and expanding our understanding of the literature's critical importance and the importance of tribal colleges to this literature. Our two-year College has a strong curriculum in Diné Studies and Diné teacher education, even offering degrees in Diné teaching at the Master level. The humanities division can contribute to this strength by preparing the whole student to effectively meet the bicultural needs of Native Americans and the demands for high literacy imposed by continual developments in this information age (Harrington and Brisk). Although we prepare students in foundational general education courses required by the state and offer a broad spectrum of courses in the humanities, we are strategically located to actively explore or encourage broad-based interdisciplinary strategies of learning and communication, not only because this philosophy is central to the Humanities and Liberal Arts, but because it is coherent with Diné philosophy and the mission of the College.

Staff and Participants

Project Director: Cristine Soliz, Ph.D. I have been on the English Faculty at Diné College since Fall 2002 where I teach literature, humanities, and freshman English. I will act as main facilitator of the seminars and be responsible for all general operations. For three years at Diné College, I have organized a Spring symposium and forum, doing 99 percent of all the legwork, contracting funding, invitation and coordination of guest speakers, contracting their lodging, VIP lunches, facilities, and equipment, setting the agenda as well as designing the agenda and advertisements (See Symposium samples in Appendix 1, 19). I have a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Washington. (See Vita in Appendix 2, 22.)

Assistant: We will hire an assistant to take detailed minutes of our seminars. This will involve attendance at the 2-hour meeting, plus an hour for preparing the document. (See Budget, 18)

Visiting Scholars: Both visiting scholars, Catherine Rainwater and Robert Warrior, are English

professors and have a strong publications records and writing awards. See their Curriculum Vitae in Appendix 2, as well as descriptive paragraphs on the hypersyllabus under “Visiting Scholars”.

Evaluation

We will consistently evaluate our activities in terms of our stated goals. (See *goals* on the [syllabus](#).) Participants submit written evaluations of each session and a final written evaluation of the entire project. At the first seminar, we will discuss evaluation as a learning tool and how best to present our evaluations and make them available for the benefit of all. Faculty will discuss what literature might help their current syllabus so that we can prepare a student survey prior to literature use and one after its use to see whether the imaginative piece helped students access the subject area content. If some participants already incorporate Native literature on their syllabi, we can refine questions and discussions about ways to further strengthen active learning through discursively attuned teaching. We will prepare pre- and post-survey forms for faculty to collect information on the success of using Native literature as part of our evaluation process.

Follow-up and Dissemination

We will prepare an annotated bibliography of Native American fiction that can be posted on the library Web site or made available on the project Web page. We will also design “Syllabus Builders”, using as a guide Georgetown University’s and the Heath Anthology’s presentation of this concept [online](#). A formal document drawing on the frequent evaluations of the participants and notes and blogging will be prepared by the project director and made available on the Web. Because Diné College must rely on a large Adjunct Faculty pool, these documents and our project Web site will be a valuable source for them also and a means of coordinating and improving overall teaching and learning at the College. Participants will be encouraged to publish papers or reports through various Native American journals and sources and in these ways significantly advance our understanding of humanities teaching and learning.