

THE PRAGMATISM OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES:  
AN EXAMINATION OF NATIVE AMERICAN  
STUDIES AT MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP  
TO MONTANA'S TRIBAL COLLEGES

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

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in

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April 2011

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between Montana State University-Native American Studies and Montana's tribal colleges. The thesis seeks to bridge the academic classroom with the pragmatic tribal community through outreach efforts. The author attempts to gauge the interest, between Fort Peck Community College and MSU-NAS, as to implementing measures such as a student exchange program and MSU-NAS tribal community service initiative. Measures such as these seek to improve communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the two institutions. The author's methods include conducting multiple interviews with MSU-NAS faculty, tribal college faculty, MSU-NAS graduate students, and former MSU-NAS graduate students. The author also traveled to Fort Peck Community College on two separate occasions to discuss these ideas. The results of these trips and interviews evidence a clear desire within the MSU-NAS department, as well as at FPCC, to foster a stronger relationship through efforts such as a student exchange program and possibly a tribal community service initiative. The author concludes that more formal efforts made by MSU-NAS towards FPCC will improve the department's outreach component. The author also concludes that the faculty at FPCC, particularly Vice-President of Academic Affairs Dr. Florence Garcia, will be receptive of these efforts and open to a dialogue regarding increased cooperation and collaboration between the two institutions. The author believes that a formal memo of understanding, drafted by MSU-NAS and sent to FPCC, detailing the efforts that MSU-NAS is willing to make regarding a student exchange program would be helpful to this end. The author also concludes with a recommendation that a formal dialogue begins among MSU-NAS faculty, which examines ways in which MSU-NAS can have a more practical relationship with Montana's tribal communities.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Montana State University Native American Studies (MSU-NAS) is one of a limited number of graduate programs in higher education that focuses primarily on concerns in Indian Country. Sovereignty, identity, land, and literary recognition are but a few of the myriad social, political, and cultural issues that are considered within the program. While thoughtful critical analysis is being afforded to these issues in MSU-NAS classrooms, and in scholarly productions, it is difficult to state what significance the program has to Native communities represented by these topics. Although there are seven reservations within the state of Montana, there is currently no option within the program to connect graduate students with these communities. This thesis seeks to examine the feasibility of such an option while strengthening the relationship between MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges.

The nature of this thesis raises many questions such as: How is "Native community" defined? Which Native communities should we be serving? Is our purpose to serve Native communities? Do Native communities need or desire the services of MSU-NAS? Is MSU-NAS able to provide the services that particular Native communities determine they need?

These questions, in turn, provoke other questions such as: Who are the appropriate people to ask in order to gauge interest? Should I contact the tribal college? Should I contact the tribal council members? Who else might be appropriate to contact?

These questions, coupled with my own personal etiquette, posed challenges of logistics. I believe that it is better, in this instance and with regards to this thesis, to have face-to-face discussions. Face-to-face meetings demonstrate a greater commitment; however, scheduling meetings between people who have varying schedules and may be hundreds of miles apart has proven very difficult.

Etiquette is another challenge, alluded to frequently in this thesis. The author is very careful not to be intrusive, behave self-righteously, or appear omniscient in any way. I am very careful to behave humbly, listen attentively, and speak graciously as I engage people throughout this project. There is almost an inherent mistrust or perhaps a healthy cynicism regarding non-native researchers entering into Native communities for academic reasons. This circumstance dictates that I be constantly aware of being perceived as someone who may not have the tribe's best interest at heart, or perhaps someone who might behave less than ethically if given the opportunity. "Proceed with Caution as well as the Utmost Respect" ultimately has proven to be a theme with regards to this thesis.

### Theory and Method

Theory and method, as well as their application, have been a continuous topic of debate between myself, and my committee; not only during the production of this thesis but for the duration of my participation in MSU-NAS. I strongly feel that the theory is implicit in the body of work and that this implicitness makes for a more effective thesis. My committee strongly feels that the theory and method need to be explicit in order for

the thesis to be more effective. The tone of my writing may be frustrated in this section. It has been a struggle for me to write.

My fear is that the paper reads too scientifically, if too much print is used to explicitly address theory and method. The author feels that the thesis is an exercise in demonstrating respect in order to foster relationships and better cooperation for the greater good of MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges. The exercise of putting common sense and decent manners in academic terms of theory and method potentially takes the reader away from central themes of the thesis; Be polite; Ask questions and listen attentively; Do work that can have a positive impact on others. As I mentioned in my defense, I learned my manners at home, from my parents, grandparents, and community, not necessarily in a graduate level theory and methods course. I do, however, acknowledge that academics may need to be reminded to be respectful at times. Ethics training may be helpful to this end. I make suggestions, in the thesis, regarding what this training may consist of.

Perhaps more important is the concept that building relationships is not necessarily research. This thesis seeks to build **relationships** among **people** who are **concerned** with and **affected** by the issues examined and addressed in **Native American Studies**, such as tribal sovereignty, water rights, federal Indian policy, and land fractionation. This thesis is **not** about "**researching Indians**." It is important that this distinction is expressed. The gap between this distinction may be where the debate resides, regarding theory and method, between myself and my committee. The following excerpts are from recent email correspondence, between myself, and Dr. Herman, that

demonstrate this debate. Honestly, I am not sure that debate is the right word. Certainly, my committee and I have drastically different opinions on how theory and method should be addressed. These emails detail how Dr. Herman feels that it is important that I be explicit in the thesis regarding theory and method. The following correspondence also details my reluctance to being explicit, with regard to theory and method, as well the reasons why I am so reluctant. I do not offer much analysis of the emails because they contextualize one another when read as correspondence. Dr. Herman expresses his view that pragmatism and theory are one and the same in the following email. He also expresses his desire for me to cite more secondary sources, and why I should. He is concerned that the thesis is too much of a narrative.

*Hi, Colin,*

*I just finished your draft of chapter 2. I think you tell a good story, but I think, too, there is more to tell. That is, I think there is a payoff there that you can still cash in. And I see this payoff coming to you in two ways. First, I know you tend to approach things from a pragmatic perspective and have little patience for theory or criticism. But my view, as I've said before, is that this distinction is a false one. Pragmatism is a theory, not theory's opposite. So in this way, your work is very theoretical, but you have yet to put it together as such. It is nice to see you referencing texts here as you do with the Deloria essay on anthropologists. That is you taking your experiences, theorizing them, and then putting them into conversation with others. More of this! It's there, it's implicit, but you can pull it out, look at it as theory and method, and then describe it and call attention to it as such. I am not sure if you want to do this in the chapter or in your intro, but somewhere, it should be done. Second, your plan/recommendations for MSU-NAS. What from this trip and this experience did you glean that will help you make recommendations for how MSU-NAS goes forward in its tribal outreach/internship efforts? You mention the trip to the bar with Jim Shanley. What are his thoughts about the relationship and what might be done? I am not asking that you divulge personal stuff that came out in your time together, but what is your takeaway regarding outreach possibilities at FPCC? This really needs to come out; otherwise, the chapter runs the risk of being more anecdotal*

*than informative. I hope this helps. A pleasure to read. And once again, I am very glad that you had this opportunity and went representing our department so well.*

*Good luck,  
Matt<sup>1</sup>*

I responded to Dr. Herman with the following email. I state my respect for his opinion as well as my reasons for keeping theory and method more implicit as opposed to explicit. I explain why I disagree with Dr. Herman. I am concerned with the idea of citing prominent NAS scholars because it is expected, or because it is the status quo. I do not feel that citing authors that I have read contributes to the effectiveness of the work.

*Matt,  
Thanks so much. The third chapter is titled "Suggestions and Recommendations". This is where I address what my thoughts are and why, regarding MSU-NAS moving forward with its outreach efforts. Your suggestions, regarding tying the theory and method of my thesis together, is exactly what I am struggling with. That is why I appreciate your approach and your feedback, because I feel one of your strengths as my instructor and chair is certainly one of my weaknesses and something, as I mentioned, that I am struggling with. I hope after all three of you read the entire thing that I can return to it and improve upon it. Specifically I do not want to state things as too obvious and I do not want to make suggestions in a way that seems too elementary. I also do not want to quote Deloria, Warrior, Ortiz, or other noted Native scholars because it is expected. I want to leave some things open so to speak, so that the reader can ponder what their own personal investment may be in the ideas presented. I realize that I am making my own assumptions here, regarding what I may think is obvious, and being stubborn about how it is being presented. My challenge is finding the balance between my own personal opinions and owning the responsibility of writing a graduate level thesis, addressing the issues that you have suggested..... I will send the thesis, formatted in its entirety, to you on the 6th. Thanks for all of your help.*

*Sincerely,*

*Colin Miller<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, message to the author, Email. (April 2011).

Dr. Herman, while encouraging me to write an honest and original paper, kept urging me to explicitly address theory and method. He replied with this.

*As far as your project goes, you absolutely need to be true to yourself. We wouldn't want anything else. When you start writing for someone else, you abandon all that is important about your project, which is YOU. All the same, I'm not sure that I see open-endedness (perhaps I'm not entirely sure what you mean by that) and specific recommendations/conclusions as being mutually exclusive. In fact, the stuff you've written recently as replies to my comments are precisely the kinds of things you could include in your thesis as ruminations on method, voice, audience, and purpose. You do have a method--a rationale for why you are doing what you are doing the way you are doing--and need to lay that out there, either in your intro or in your chapter 4, it seems to me. Write about how your chair keeps pestering you and why you are resistant to the proddings. Again, that's method, that's YOU, and in a way, it's precisely the kind of thing I have been nagging about to see more of!*<sup>3</sup>

I responded, still trying to explain my stance and my reluctance in creating a paper, I perceive, is too academic for many readers. My opinion is that I made observations through my experience in the program, acted on them through interviews and travel, and made recommendations and suggestions through a written work. There is nothing terribly original about the theory or the method. I have not been inspired or motivated to write this thesis by prominent scholars. It is the result of cooperation between people. I do acknowledge that there are requirements and expectations to meet and I strive to do so. It has been a real challenge, academically, to address theory and method in a satisfactory way to my committee.

*I was really waiting to hear back from committee members before I wrote anything else. I understand your criticism. It is something that I am struggling with. Specifically, I want the paper to be somewhat open ended*

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<sup>2</sup> The Author, message to Dr. Matt Herman, Email. (April 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, message to the author, Email. (April 2011).

*in order to give faculty members and graduate students personal investment in the project if they so choose. My fear is that if I am too specific in my recommendations, that the whole idea is too easily rejected, without a thorough analysis of how the project can be continued. I also very much take to heart, and agree with, Dr. Garcia's notion that "this should start small" and see how it goes. My other challenge is once again your exact criticism. I am trying to add color to an academic paper so that it does not read too scientifically or academically, so to speak. I want an 18 year old freshman undergrad to read it as easily as a tenured professor. I also want to fulfill my obligations of writing a graduate level thesis.*

*It is true that I have been working on this for several months with multiple trips to reservations, yet it wasn't clear that this project was going to come to fruition until the last several weeks. And then I had to wait a few weeks in order to take my final visit to Fort Peck. I have tried to emphasize that logistics have been the greatest challenge in the project and also that it has been imperative that I not be too forceful or emphatic with my ideas or intentions. I want the thesis to represent these circumstances, as a mode of emphasis. I am trying, once more, to find that balance in this paper between being professional and responsible with regard to my academic obligations and also being true to myself, what I believe is most effective, and relating what I deem to be an accurate portrayal of the research and reasonable outcomes.<sup>4</sup>*

This is the final email that I received from Dr. Herman, before my thesis defense:

*Well, I think my point is that the concrete is there, and you should develop it further so that those who come after can learn from you. "Fostering trust" is a concrete recommendation. How did you pursue it? Did it work? That's concrete, and that's what I am talking about. Humility, graciousness, cooperation--if those are not concrete elements of an ethics regimen, then I am not sure what they are. How did you try to put these "core principles" into practice? Did it work? Why or why not?*

*I really don't think we're that far apart on this, but maybe I'm wrong.<sup>5</sup>*

Ultimately, my defense committee felt that it was essential, despite my protests and contrary opinion, that I explicitly address theory and method in the thesis. I respect

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<sup>4</sup> The Author, message to Dr. Matt Herman, Email. (April 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, message to the author, Email. (April 2011).

my committee, professionally and personally, however; I think that debating value of implicit versus explicit theory and method may be misguided, concerning this thesis. The theory of this thesis is that a healthy respect and etiquette be exercised towards Montana's tribal colleges, in order to foster a better relationship between MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges. The theory is that more communication, stronger cooperation, and better collaboration between the two entities allows these academic institutions to better address issues central to Native American Studies; such as tribal sovereignty, federal Indian law and policy, land, water, and language preservation.

The method employed through this thesis has been to conduct interviews with MSU-NAS faculty, as well as tribal college faculty, in order to gauge interest in fostering a stronger relationship between MSU-NAS and tribal colleges. The method has also included visiting tribal colleges, in order to demonstrate commitment and respect. The theory, in this instance, is that personal meetings are far more effective in fostering meaningful relationships than email or telephone correspondence. Email and telephone correspondence are not as personal. One cannot shake hands, or hug, or smile across the telephone or email.

I believe the theory and method of having personal meetings with tribal college faculty has been effective in demonstrating desire and commitment; by MSU-NAS, to having a stronger, more tangible relationship with Montana's tribal colleges. The recommendations and suggestions in this thesis will prove futile; however, if they are not acted upon in some form or fashion. A formal meeting, comprised of MSU-NAS faculty

and graduate students, to discuss the suggestions and recommendations in this thesis, should be the next step in fostering better relationships with tribal colleges.

The theory is that MSU-NAS students will benefit from a more holistic education if they are able to spend time in one of Montana's tribal communities. This same theory hypothesizes that tribal colleges can benefit from the presence of MSU-NAS graduate students in their communities. The method is to begin a dialogue with tribal colleges in order to determine the most mutually beneficial way for MSU-NAS students to visit tribal communities.

The author theorizes that when students are able to spend time in tribal communities, they are then able to speak, at least in part, from personal experience in a tribal community. Students, who are only exposed to classroom education, are provided only a limited perspective on issues paramount to Native American Studies. This limited perspective potentially hinders M.A. students from speaking knowledgably, effectively, and with conviction to concerns in Indian Country. The theory is that it is the responsibility of MSU-NAS, as a graduate program in the field of American Indian Studies, to actively address misinformation; concerning tribal history, tribal culture, federal Indian law and policy, etc., within the scope of popular American history and culture. The method is by graciously engaging Montana's tribal colleges, through service; MSU-NAS may foster relationships, that allow for better cooperation, collaboration, and communication. These partnerships may allow MSU-NAS to more effectively address misinformation regarding tribal history, culture, and politics.

The theory and method, at times, are the same. MSU-NAS should politely and graciously inquire of tribal colleges how graduate students might provide a service while visiting their communities. A mutually beneficial relationship may be fostered in this way. The theory is a tribal community service initiative, should be formally explored by the faculty and graduate students at MSU-NAS. This initiative should try and identify willing partners among Montana's tribal colleges, such as FPCC.

Scholars such as Devon A. Mihesuah and Linda Tuhiwai Smith have written extensively on theory and method, and with regard to conducting research in Indian Country. I acknowledge these scholars contributions to Native American Studies and cannot overstate their usefulness to the field. Mihesuah, in particular has written a set of guidelines that pertains to ethics, for people who wish to conduct research in Indian Country. They can be found in chapter six of her book, *So You Want to Write About American Indians: A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars*. These guidelines might prove helpful, and should be taken into consideration if ethics training is considered for MSU-NAS graduate students visiting reservations, as this thesis has recommended.

I would be less than sincere, however, if I claimed that Mihesuah has been a primary influence upon the theory or method employed in the production of this thesis. I reiterate the thought that I have not cited many secondary sources, because I do not feel that their citation would add to the effectiveness of this thesis. A literature review, in my opinion, was simply not necessary, or perhaps appropriate, to this thesis. I simply made an observation that the MSU-NAS department did not seem to have much of a tangible connection to the reservation communities in Montana. It occurred to me, that the seven

tribal colleges and seven reservations within the state's borders should be utilized as an extremely important partner and resource for MSU-NAS. The opposite also occurred to me; that MSU-NAS should be utilized by Montana's tribal colleges and hopefully considered a partner and resource. It made sense to me that if communication and cooperation could be improved between MSU-NAS and tribal colleges, issues that impact people, such as tribal sovereignty, water rights, and the federal Indian land trust, could be more effectively addressed. It made sense to me to explore how this could be improved, and I was curious what other people's thoughts on the matter were. I knew that I needed to employ the greatest respect to everyone who gave freely of time to me. I also knew that being polite, and gracious, and demonstrating respect was the only appropriate way to behave while I was a visitor to another community. I think that I have my parents, grandparents, and the community which I was born and raised in to thank for this notion of respect; more so than any scholar that I have been exposed to.

The theory that respect, grace, and humility lead to better communication and cooperation, I believe, is true. I believe that it is true with regard to this thesis. The method of interviewing people, respectfully; traveling considerable distance to demonstrate commitment; and providing service and a meal to demonstrate good will has been effective in promoting better communication. I feel like I can call Dr. Garcia, and others, at Fort Peck Community College and that I will be welcomed back, without hesitancy. I hope that I am right. The thesis will fail, in a sense, if the MSU-NAS department does not make it a priority to follow up on the suggestions and recommendations in the thesis. The logistical challenges are real to improving

communication and cooperation, and should not be undermined; however, the benefits of working with tribal colleges far outweigh any potential obstacles. Hopefully, this thesis will lead to improved relationships between MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges. This author believes that this cooperation is in the best interest of all of the people concerned with, and affected by issues central to Native American Studies, such as federal Indian policy, land, water rights, and tribal sovereignty.

## CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS GAUGING INTEREST  
AND PERCEPTION OF MSU-NAS OUTREACH  
TO TRIBAL COLLEGES

This chapter is the result of twelve interviews that were conducted between February 2010 and June 2010. Also short surveys, consisting of three questions, were completed by eleven graduate students in September of 2010. The interviewees were comprised of five MSU-NAS faculty members, including the Departmental Chair, one student advisor, one former Katz Endowed Chair, the Program Coordinator of the Diversity Awareness Office at MSU, two former NAS graduate students, the current Vice President for Academic and Vocational Programs at Fork Peck Community College, and the President of Blackfeet Community College. All of the MSU-NAS faculty members were asked the following questions:

- 1.) Does MSU-NAS serve the communities that it purports to study? How?
- 2.) What is the relationship between MSU-NAS and tribal communities?
- 3.) What are some positive aspects of MSU-NAS or what are the strongest aspects of MSU-NAS?
- 4.) What have been the challenges for MSU-NAS over the years?
- 5.) Where is MSU-NAS lacking?
- 6.) How would you like to see MSU-NAS develop or what direction would you like to see the program go in?

The questions that were posed to current MSU-NAS graduate students, through the short survey, were:

- 1.) Would you like to see either a field option or a field requirement, in the curriculum for NAS graduate students, which places students in Montana's various tribal communities?
- 2.) Why or why not?
- 3.) If you answered "yes" to question number 1, do you have any suggestions as to a format that might be most beneficial to the tribal community, MSU-NAS, and the student?

There were other questions posed to the different interviewees on an individual basis. These questions and their responses will be presented throughout the paper.

#### MSU-NAS Faculty Q and A

##### Question #1.) Does MSU-NAS Serve the Communities that it Purports to Study?

This was initially the main focus of the research. The question evolved as it became apparent that it is fundamentally a difficult one to answer with any sort of practicality. As previously mentioned, the idea of serving Native communities begs all sorts of other questions: How is "Native community" defined? Which Native communities should we be serving? Is our purpose to serve Native communities? Do Native communities need or desire the services of MSU-NAS? Is MSU-NAS able to provide the services that particular Native communities determine they need?

The question seemed relevant, though, as most faculty members responded with clear, if not confident, answers. Perhaps, most telling was the response of the NAS department chair, Walter Fleming. “No,” he said, frankly. Dr. Fleming went on to explain the irony of his response. “That was the program’s initial purpose,” he stated.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Fleming continued to explain that the program’s purpose at its inception was, and still is, to provide an advanced degree to tribal college professors so that their respective institutions could earn accreditation.

Former Katz Endowed Chair Bill Yellowtail was a bit more prolix in his answer. Mr. Yellowtail asserted that the program “needs more applied science.” MSU NAS is “not doing enough to address real life issues,” he said. The department is “building a class of detached intellectuals.”<sup>7</sup> Mr. Yellowtail gave the strong impression, through his response, that he believed the department needs to have a more meaningful presence in Montana’s tribal communities.

Dr. Wayne Stein, who has previously served as department head, was thoughtful in his response. “I think it [MSU-NAS] does [serve tribal communities] in a roundabout way,” he said. Dr. Stein expounded on his initial response by expressing “Indian students are in our classes. Also, non-Indian students are in our classes who may be businessmen, lawmakers, and bankers who may be ‘friends to the Indian’ by way of their education.” Dr. Stein went on to say that, “Indian faculty are held accountable by their respective communities,” and that, “(Native faculty) are responsible as Indian professionals for

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Walter Fleming, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Bill Yellowtail, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

perception to the outside world.”<sup>8</sup> Dr. Stein’s assessment that the department is serving Montana’s tribal communities in a “roundabout way” and his subsequent evidence of this assertion may suggest that there is potential for pragmatic application that MSU-NAS has yet to realize.

Dr. Matt Herman responded that he was a little “embarrassed” to admit, “I don’t quite know what our mission statement is.” He explained, “I think that we put Native concerns at the forefront of our research, as opposed to the periphery, in an academic sense.” Once more, an MSU-NAS faculty member seems to imply that the potential of pragmatic application to tribal communities in the NAS department is not being addressed. Dr. Herman proceeded to praise his colleague Dr. Kristin Ruppel by exclaiming, “Kristin’s research involves the most specific ties to specific Native communities.”<sup>9</sup> Dr. Ruppel, revealed later however, in her own interview, that her research “is centered more internationally and in Idaho, respectively, but not in Montana.” Dr. Ruppel also seems to concur with Dr. Herman, and perhaps Mr. Yellowtail, when she avows that the relationship between MSU-NAS and tribal communities “seems rather abstract,” however she retracts slightly from that assertion by adding, “Maybe that’s not fair.”<sup>10</sup>

Rounding out the faculty, Dr. Larry Gross also responded a bit sheepishly to this first question. “I haven’t really been here long enough to know. How’s that for an excuse.” Dr. Gross continues, “Part of the problem has to do with definitions: What are the communities? That is part of the problem. We need to do two things: 1.) What is the

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

work that faculty do? 2.) What is the work that grad students do?” Dr. Gross’s points are valid, yet can also be perceived as rather abstract, especially when viewed in light of the clarity of his own personal work. “For myself, I am trying to serve my own community (the Anishinabe) in my own way, and I hope that my own work is serving my own community.”<sup>11</sup> Dr. Gross cites his academic work as well as his advocacy for veterans coping with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as efforts he hopes will benefit his Native community.

Question #2.) What is the Relationship between MSU-NAS and Tribal Communities?

This question also has evolved as tribal ‘colleges’ has replaced tribal ‘communities’ as the focus of this research. Also, the MSU-NAS department head Dr. Fleming responded to this question by referencing tribal colleges in his answer. The relationship between Montana’s tribal colleges and MSU-NAS is an opportunistic one for both entities because, besides the obvious academic connection, Montana has seven tribal colleges, one for every reservation.

Mr. Yellowtail answered that the relationship was “almost nil” and qualified his statement by adding “in order to be relevant, we must be connected to tribal matters.”<sup>12</sup> Dr. Ruppel states her thoughts a bit differently but seems to concur with Mr. Yellowtail when she says, solidifying her earlier assertion, “Without getting out to the reservations, our relationship becomes abstract.”<sup>13</sup> Dr. Herman may tend to agree with Mr. Yellowtail and Dr. Ruppel on the nature, if not the merit, of this relationship. He describes the

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Larry Gross, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Bill Yellowtail, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

relationship as, “an intellectual one principally.” He also declares, “along with that we have a commitment to helping members from tribal communities succeed at the University.”<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Stein seems to have an optimistic opinion of the relationship between MSU-NAS and Montana’s tribal communities. He asserts that it is “quite good” and “very positive overall.” However, he also qualified his own statement by adding that, “most Indian communities do not give us much thought.”<sup>15</sup> Dr. Fleming characterizes the relationship as “friendly, but mainly with tribal colleges. Much of the leadership (at tribal colleges) came from this institution, although not necessarily this department.”<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Stein’s optimism notwithstanding, the faculty seems unsure of what the relationship is between the NAS department and Montana’s various tribal communities, at least in a formal sense. It is open to interpretation what an abstract or intellectual relationship may be. Dr. Fleming and Dr. Stein seem to be the most qualified to answer this question, though the responses from Doctors Ruppel, Herman, and Gross may be more relevant if the direction and vision of the program are to be considered. Dr. Gross responded, “I don’t know too much about that. I still feel a bit like a stranger here in Montana.”<sup>17</sup> Dr. Ruppel seemed to echo this sentiment by saying, “I don’t actually know much about that. I rely more on Jim (Burns), Wayne, and Walter.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Walter Fleming, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Larry Gross, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

Question #3.) What Are Some Positive Aspects of MSU-NAS? or What Are the Strongest Aspects of MSU-NAS?

Bill Yellowtail responded that the strongest aspect of the department was a "faculty with great potential."<sup>19</sup> Another interviewee, who wished to remain anonymous, agreed completely with this notion Mr. Yellowtail went on to express his belief that the department needs to be implementing a more pragmatic approach. "Why not a center for Indian Land Assets?"<sup>20</sup> Various other interviewees referenced the faculty in their answers as well, yet maybe not in regard to the faculty's potential. Several people used the term "family" when referring to faculty members, implying the support enjoyed among one another, as well as for the students in the department.

Dr. Fleming answers the question by stating that the "strongest (aspect of the department) is the relationship of individuals. The faculty is accessible." He finishes his thought by saying "the closeness of the department." Dr. Fleming also mentions "flexibility: allowing people to do what they wish and reducing barriers so that students may pursue what they wish. The department is philosophically student oriented," he concludes.<sup>21</sup> Jim Burns was short and pointed in his response. "We are family. We are different as far as how we run the department; our stated values."<sup>22</sup> Dr. Herman supports this statement, explicitly citing Mr. Burns when he says "The level of commitment, especially by Jim, to support Native students (is the strongest aspect of the

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Yellowtail, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Bill Yellowtail, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Walter Fleming, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Jim Burns, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

department).”<sup>23</sup> Dr. Ruppel concurs explicitly with the notion of the NAS department being like a family when she says, “Family is the word that comes to mind. They (the NAS department) are supportive of people as a family and supportive of people who have families.”<sup>24</sup> Dr. Gross offers support and appreciation to Walter Fleming and Wayne Stein in his answer. “My personal opinion would be the presence of Walter and Wayne. One thing I really appreciate about Walter and Wayne is that they have gotten the battles over to legitimate NAS. Not only have they been able to save the program but they have been able to grow it as well.... No one questions the legitimacy of NAS on this campus. That is different than my experience on other campuses. Through their efforts the department can survive budget cuts and continue to grow.”<sup>25</sup> Dr. Stein, for his part, answered the question in terms of how he perceives the department ranks, in comparison with other similar programs across the nation. “I think student services is best in state and probably top four or five in the nation. Academically we are top ten and would be higher if more resources were available. [The] classroom experience is top ten for Indians and non-Indians.”<sup>26</sup>

As a third year graduate student, I feel qualified to offer my own assessment of the answers to this question, and I would agree that there is very much a familial sentiment experienced among many of the faculty and students. I have personally experienced very strong support personally, academically, and financially. In my humble

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<sup>23</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Larry Gross, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

opinion, this sense of family is an absolute asset to the department and all of the students associated with MSU-NAS.

The next two questions are grouped together because of their similarity. They seemed to generate very similar responses and how an interviewee responded seemed predicated on a personal approach to the question. The responses elicited from question 4 sometimes answered question 5 as well.

Questions #4.) What have been the Challenges for NAS Over the Years? and #5.) Where is NAS Lacking?

Dr. Fleming answered question 4 by noting “the recruitment of grad students,” along with “lack of recognition due to lack of existence” and also “(lack of) support from the graduate division” as a few of the biggest challenges for NAS over the years. When asked where NAS is lacking, Dr. Fleming wistfully alluded to a desire to offer greater financial support to the students in the department. “(We) need to establish a financial aid program.”<sup>27</sup> Dr. Fleming’s assessment of the “lack of recognition as a discipline,” was echoed by several other faculty members, including Doctors Herman, Stein, and Ruppel, as well as Jim Burns.

Dr. Stein is critical of the state of Montana. He asserts, “Politically, Montana’s political system finds it difficult to recognize NAS in a positive way.”<sup>28</sup> Dr. Stein went on to address the budget of MSU-NAS as both “weak and a challenge.... We need more faculty, professors, and assistants in student services.” Dr. Stein also notes “keeping

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. Walter Fleming, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

connected to tribal communities” as a challenge and finishes this thought by quipping, “It’s easy to get lost and stay in our own little university world.”<sup>29</sup>

Jim Burns also notes a lack of resources as a challenge but seemingly qualifies his statement as an observation and not an excuse by saying, “We have always been asked to do more with less.” Mr. Burns responded to question 5 by replying that MSU-NAS is lacking in its “self-evaluation efforts. (Also) we are not pursuing enough grants.” He concludes his response by saying, “(Our) presence in the tribal communities is lacking.”<sup>30</sup> The last part of Mr. Burns’ response reinforces Dr. Stein’s, among others, thought that we need to stay connected to tribal communities.

Dr. Herman, as noted earlier, began his response to question 4 by stating that “establishing its legitimacy” has been a challenge for NAS. He continued on with his thought by adding, “establishing its legitimacy with respect to tribal communities.” As to where the department may be lacking, Dr. Herman responded, “There are a lot of areas where we are lacking for sure. All NAS (departments) are going to have a gap with regards to budget. Our biggest blind spot or weakness would be that we have nobody who can teach a Native language at this time.”<sup>31</sup> Dr. Gross shares Dr. Herman’s sentiment with regards to Native language. He responds to question 5 by saying, “I would like to see us do more with language, work with tribal colleges more to promote languages.”<sup>32</sup> Dr. Gross, as well as Bill Yellowtail, has a couple of unique thoughts that differ a bit from his colleagues’ responses. “[I think] we could be more assertive and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jim Burns, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Larry Gross, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

creative to address work that could earn a Master's in more culturally sensitive ways other than a thesis, (i.e.) Is there a way to bring the oral tradition into the work that our grad students produce?" Another thought that Dr. Gross expressed was "perhaps changing the governing structure of NAS; having a council instead of a chair."<sup>33</sup> It seems Dr. Gross sees as a challenge, the implementation into the department of more traditional Native ways of knowing and functioning. Bill Yellowtail answered question 4 by saying, "There is too much remorse. Too many students walk away feeling guilty." He finished the thought by asking, "Why is remorse such an attractive psychology?"<sup>34</sup> I am not sure whether the question was rhetorical or not. Regardless, I do not know the answer.

Dr. Ruppel, as noted earlier, answers question 4 by saying, "Like NAS programs all over the country recognition as a discipline [is a challenge]." She went on to express, "There is a lot of misunderstanding as to what our purpose is. Money is always a problem. [And] I dread the day Walter and Wayne retire." Regarding question 5, Dr. Ruppel says "I worry about our introductory course, which is front and center for me [as GTA coordinator]. It is a constant struggle for me to make that [NAS 100] better. I think we need to find more grant money for students." She finishes her response somewhat emphatically by claiming, "I think really where we can become better is engaging the reservation communities."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Yellowtail, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

Question #6.) How Would You Like to See  
MSU-NAS Develop or What Direction Would  
You Like to See the Program Go In?

This final question may be the one that consistently produced the lengthiest answers from the faculty. It also may have produced the most telling responses with regard to this particular thesis. All of the faculty members were confident and assertive in their answers and all had their own particular thoughts. The faculty also overwhelmingly shared a common sentiment, however, and this sentiment is revealing.

Dr. Fleming, the current department chair, had this to say in his response. “*Personally*, [I think we need] more on-campus face-to-face exchange between Native and non-Native students. [We] need to achieve a balance between Native and non-Native students. *As a department*, we need more outreach, such as on-line, to the communities where folks are homebound. We need a doctoral program.”<sup>36</sup>

I asked Dr. Fleming about the feasibility of an internship for our grad students, as a manner of outreach towards Native communities. This is how he responded, “In order for an internship of some sort, the funds would need to be there. Any benefit would need to be substantial dedication of time and receive substantial amount of college credit. For example a 3 month internship could equal 12 college credits. Anything else is not really beneficial,”<sup>37</sup> he opined.

Dr. Stein addresses this question both thoughtfully and assertively, at once. “I would like to see more outreach to communities. We are weak in our service but we need more people to do outreach in the communities. I would like to see a language

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<sup>36</sup> Dr. Walter Fleming, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

preservation center, but that takes specialists that don't have to necessarily publish or teach. This is a weakness tied to our financial base.

“I would like to see a student center such as that at U of M (The University of Montana). (Its) primary focus would be on outreach in communities, (such as) helping tribal governments operate more efficiently. The center could help focus on tribal sovereignty, among other topics. This center would help us, as a department, be more viable. Our outreach efforts would really help our perception in the (tribal) communities.”<sup>38</sup>

Dr. Herman begins his answer by stating the need to address the weaknesses in the department that he has previously noted. “(We need to be) addressing the weaknesses that I just mentioned. We need to find a way to teach Indigenous language and promote Indigenous language and help tribal communities with language preservation. In addition, we need to think about strengthening our research that could be beneficial to tribal communities. I think it would be good to develop some sort of applied thesis option for students who want to work with tribal communities with regards to scholarship.”<sup>39</sup> Dr. Herman concludes his response by offering a wish list for the department. This list is composed of a doctoral program, an applied thesis, and an initiative addressing Native language preservation.

Dr. Gross, in his answer, agrees with Dr. Herman's assessment that the department needs a doctoral program. He also concurs that efforts need to be made within the department regarding the preservation of Native languages. “A Ph.D. program

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<sup>38</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

should be the next step. We need to discuss areas that we would specialize in, (perhaps) such as language recovery and environmental policy. (We need to be) becoming more practical in that way. Whether that will happen or not, I don't know. Money is always the issue. We need to double our faculty."<sup>40</sup>

Dr. Ruppel does not hesitate with her response. "I'd like for it (MSU-NAS) to become more relevant and have more concrete relationships with reservations; doing research that is meaningful in tribal communities." She then finishes her response offering a wish list of her own. "It would be nice if we were a little bigger, and could hire more Native scholars. I don't want to be huge, though."<sup>41</sup>

Jim Burns and Bill Yellowtail are briefer in their responses to this final question, yet their comments are no less relevant. Mr. Yellowtail states that the department needs to be "investigating how to 'future think' or 'futuring.'" He describes this roughly as "interdisciplinary or integrated scholarship oriented to the future." Mr. Yellowtail is emphatic that (MSU-NAS) needs to "relinquish our attachment to remorse." He finishes simply saying, "(We need more) outreach to tribal communities."<sup>42</sup>

Jim Burns clearly was a busy man when he graciously gave of his time for this interview. The one-hour requested time allotment was running out which may have contributed to the brevity of his answer. "It always seems I am playing catch up. In a nutshell, I would like more course offerings that are relevant in a contemporary sense, more Native faculty. There's a lot! I could give you a wish list."<sup>43</sup> Mr. Burns did not

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<sup>40</sup> Dr. Larry Gross, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Bill Yellowtail, personal interview, interview by Colin Miller, (February 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Jim Burns, personal interview, interview by Colin Miller, (February 2010).

have the opportunity to give me his wish list as he needed to return to the job for which he is being paid.

The responses that these questions generated paint a relatively clear picture. The MSU-NAS department faculty collectively has a real desire to be more connected to tribal communities. This set of interviews was the first step in the production of this thesis. After spending time in the classroom, I found myself wondering what our relevance or significance is to tribal communities, particularly in the state of Montana. After being able to determine a collective sentiment from the faculty, I wanted to try and get some semblance of understanding as to how other graduate students may feel.

#### MSU-NAS Graduate Class Questionnaire Q & A

A questionnaire consisting of three questions was handed out in an MSU-NAS graduate level seminar class. Not all of the students who responded are graduate students in the MSU-NAS department. These students responded to the following questions in September of 2010.

Question #1.) Would You like to See Either a Field Option or Field Requirement in the Curriculum for NAS Graduate Students, Which Places Students in Montana's Various Tribal Communities?

The answers are 100% in the affirmative. The only responses that did not consist simply of a "yes" or "sure" are the following. One student responded, "I think this would

be beneficial.” Another students responded, “Yes, however, it would have to be within the right contact people and not intrusive to elders, etc...”

Question #2.) Why? Or Why Not?

- *“Because it would be mutually beneficial.”* – LaVonne Jurack
- *“Present ‘out of the box’ views to NAS grad students”* – Anonymous
- *“Any higher educational program within tribal communities will always benefit the community.”* – Anonymous
- *“Give direct access to communities in which they are studying.”* – Francine Spang Willis
- *“I think students should spend time in communities to see the inner workings and positive things that are developing in the communities. To see that it is Indians doing this work. Many see outside negative aspects, things that are different to what they are used to.”* – Camille Stein
- *“Personally, I would welcome the opportunity to participate in a reciprocal type of arrangement with a tribal community, but think this should be an option, not a requirement.”* – Marie Claymore
- *“It would be beneficial for NAS grad students to see how the tribal colleges operate. Great idea!”* – Colleen Stein
- *“I think you have the ability to learn much more from the active participation in a group or organization than you can from solely in-classroom experience.”* – Mary DeGraw

- *“Not only would it bring in new recruits for MSU, but would enable MSU graduate students to address the students at tribal colleges to encourage the furthering of their educations.”* – Donna M. Maday
- *“Too, because I am a teacher. I’m back getting a Master’s with the goal of returning to the field so exposure to tribal communities would be appreciated.”* – Derek Akin
- *“It would be beneficial to non-Native people to experience the people who they are studying.”* – Anonymous

Question #3.) If you answered “yes” to question number 1, do you have any suggestions as to a format that might be most beneficial to the tribal community, MSU-NAS, and the student?

- *“Your motto should be, ‘Do something!’ Too much hard work goes into graduate research theses for ‘nothing’ to happen to benefit Natives.”* – LaVonne Jurack
- *“Extension program is very useful.”* – Anonymous
- *“1.) Could possibly teach a summer class at TCU for grad credit. 2,) Do volunteer work to share skills and knowledge.”* – Colleen Stein
- *“?”* – Anonymous
- *“Have to identify people on each of the reservations – need to spend a ‘good’ amount of time and weeks to get to know people and form some type of relationship rather than making an appearance never to be seen (again).”* – Camille Stein

- *“No, sounds like it needs research.”* – Marie Claymore
- *“Need more time to talk about and possibly discuss.”* – Francine Spang Willis
- *“In my Master’s program we had a semester long internship requirement and many students used an internship as an independent study option to ‘replace’ specific degree classes such as leadership management.”* – Mary DeGraw
- *“Maybe sub-teach [substitute teach] is a class of their interest/emphasis.”* – Donna M. Maday
- *“Well... I think being in the tribal colleges and being able to interact, perhaps teach, (the) testimonial with students would be valuable. Also some time to ask questions. (The) program could deal with many aspects - tribal elders, projects....”* – Derek Akin
- *“See the tribes’ tribal government in council.”* – Anonymous

#### Former MSU-NAS Graduate Student Q & A

Two former MSU-NAS graduate students were interviewed for this thesis. The purpose of these interviews was to try and gauge how these students felt about their experience in the program. The questions that were posed to these former students also intended to determine their opinions on where and how the department could improve itself. One interviewee chose to remain anonymous.

Question #1a.) Could You Talk to me a Bit  
about Your Own Experience with the  
NAS Department At MSU?

The anonymous graduate student responds. “I started as an undergrad with an NAS minor and I loved it. Those were my favorite classes and favorite instructors. Native issues were addressed with passion and intellect. I came back for a Master’s in NAS. I taught the class (NAS 100) and I think I did well. I got good evaluations. All along there has been unrest, political unrest in particular, between and amongst faculty and grad students.

“How come there is no relationship with the tribes? There does not seem to be any collaboration with Indian communities. I am hugely disappointed. It is almost to the point that they are hurting Native studies but I wouldn’t go there. Indian people should have a huge presence on campus, (and) not just Native Americans but world Indigenous.

“What is the purpose of NAS? Bringing NAS to an equal place at the table with other academic disciplines. Here we are in 2010 and Black and Women Studies have developed leaders and movements. We need to develop leaders from our own movements. Where are we going to be 100 years from now? We cannot be content to produce widgets from grad students. NAS needs to say we need to produce leaders from NAS grad school. It starts with a vision. Where do Indians sit at the 21<sup>st</sup> century table? We need to speak about this. We need to bring Indian kids into the mix.”

“On the rez, the problem is not money, it is spirit. The Indians think it is money, the white folks think it is money. It is spirit! My focus is to find a way to live

sustainably and well instead of a thirst for money. NAS needs to develop leaders. MSU-NAS needs to serve as a conduit between Indigenous leaders around the world.”<sup>44</sup>

Question #1b.) How Would You Characterize  
Your Experience at MSU-NAS?

This question is very similar to the one posed to the previous interviewee, however it is worded slightly differently and therefore may elicit a different type of response. Lark Real Bird Paz responds. “It was positive because I came here with a question in mind. Why are we the way we are (as Native Americans)? I learned about our history when I learned about (it) in the Federal Indian Policy class. My experience on the rez generated that question. I left the rez and returned and I worked for my tribe for 4 years wanting to help and it ended badly. My own tribe fired me for petty reasons.”<sup>45</sup>

Question #2a.) Where Do You  
See the Program Lacking?

Anonymous Graduate Student: “The weakness is that NAS is not being addressed. When I hear that funding is a problem, I just yawn. Making excuses is not leadership. They could make money out of thin air. Phyllis Berger was a white millionaire who left hundreds of thousands to the NAS department. We are not thinking big enough.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Anonymous Graduate Student. By Colin Miller. *personal interview*, (April 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Paz, Lark Real Bird, interview by Colin Miller, *personal interview*, (April 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Anonymous Graduate Student, interview by Colin Miller, *personal interview*, (April 2010).

Question #2b.) What Are the Weaknesses or Challenges of the Program?

This is how I posed the question to Lark Real Bird Paz. Once again, the question is very similar to the one that I posed to the previous interviewee, however, it is worded slightly differently. This is how she responded. “The weakness is the non-rez experience. We need to incorporate native language more.”<sup>47</sup>

Question #3.) What Are the Strengths of the Program?

“The strength is the geographic location of Bozeman with Indian communities. Human resources are huge. The strength of the department is its potential. Give me a vision. What do you want for the future? I cannot accept going out with a whimper. The strength of the department is giving rag-tag kids (from the rez) a chance and tell them that they are the best.”<sup>48</sup> That is how the anonymous graduate student responds.

Lark is short and direct with her answer. She cites the faculty as the strength of the program. “The faculty is encouraging and laid back and lets you set your own path.”<sup>49</sup>

Question #4) How Would You Like to See the Program Develop?

“Include the tribal college community,” Lark says. “I would like for tribal people to come in and share their experience. I want you guys (non-Natives) to understand us

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<sup>47</sup> Paz, Lark Real Bird, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (April 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous Graduate Student, personal interview, interview by Colin Miller, (April 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Lark real Bird Paz, personal interview, interview by Colin Miller, (April 2010).

from the inside and understand us as tribal people.”<sup>50</sup> This question was not posed to the anonymous graduate student, in the interest of time, much of the student’s previous interview relates to this question.

After interviewing the faculty and former graduate students and engaging in conversations with fellow graduate students, I felt that I had identified a collective desire by MSU-NAS to be more connected to Montana’s tribal communities. At this point it seemed logical to try and contact members of Montana’s tribal communities to attempt to gauge their perception of our department and also attempt to gauge their desire to establish a tangible working relationship with MSU-NAS. This was to prove more challenging than I had anticipated.

My initial intent was to travel to all seven reservations. I needed to first attempt to establish contacts on the reservations. Dr. Herman put me in touch with Jeanine Pease at Fort Peck Community College, and she was extremely helpful. Unfortunately, she ended up leaving for a position in the Crow Cabinet, but not before I was able to make my first trip to Fort Peck Community College. It made sense to me to try and communicate with the faculty and administrations at the tribal colleges as a mean to connect with the tribal communities.

I was also able to set up an interview with John Salois at Blackfeet Community College. I contacted Mr. Salois through the college’s website. He was serving as president of the college at the time. Mr. Salois granted me an interview, and I traveled to Browning, Montana on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to meet with him. Mr. Salois was very gracious with his time as well as his responses to my questions. He expressed a

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

firm desire to be more connected to the MSU-NAS department. He also was very considerate in offering ideas as to how BFCC could accommodate future MSU-NAS graduate students wishing to enter onto the Blackfeet Indian Reservation as a means to supplement their education. Unfortunately, he also had left his position as President of Blackfeet Community College by the time that I sought to return to his institution. I was never notified that he had stepped down nor was I given any contact information for him. I was not offered any explanation as to why he had stepped down, nor did I ask for one. This was frustrating for me, yet understandable at the same time. It has been a primary focus of this project not to be intrusive when seeking information, assistance, interviews, etc.

Dr. Pease and Mr. Salois were asked many of the same questions. Although they are no longer at FPCC and BFCC, respectively, their responses are still relevant to this paper. The sentiment that they express in their responses is a clear and confident one and, from my research, it is shared by other faculty and staff at FPCC where I eventually returned.

#### Tribal College Faculty Q & A

Question #1.) How Would You Characterize the Relationship between MSU-NAS and (Either) the Fort Peck Community or Blackfeet Community?

Dr. Pease prefaced her response by explaining that she was relatively new to Fort Peck and had only been there about two years as of March, 2010. “MSU has been very successful at building professionals at the tribal colleges. There were 19 of us who

earned our Masters between '85 and '95 at MSU and are now faculty and administrators at tribal colleges. William Tietz was very instrumental in these efforts. When I was president at Little Big Horn (tribal college), Tietz really helped out with our accreditation process. Kathy Kaya, the librarian, was extremely helpful at writing our grants and establishing our libraries.”<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that Dr. Pease is very complimentary of both Dr. Fleming and also Dr. Stein during her interview.

John Salois responds, “We have personal relationships with people over there. We have no formal relationship with the university. We have had people transfer over there. I have personal relationships with Jim Burns, Bill Yellowtail, and Henrietta Mann. I do not know Walter Fleming or Wayne Stein. I have not experienced any outreach from the university (and) I have been here 5 years.”<sup>52</sup>

Question #2.) How Would You  
Characterize the Relationship between  
Yourself and MSU-NAS?

Mr. Salois addresses this question, at least partially, in his previous answer. He did not expand on this response, and we moved on to the next question. Dr. Pease has this to say. “I think we are really aware of it (MSU-NAS). We have used, for example, Walter’s texts here. There are people who we know quite well there. When I was at Little Big Horn (we had a stronger relationship) but we are so far away here at Fort Peck. People here at Fort Peck usually stay put because we are so far away. Fort Peck is a function of distance. MSU-Bozeman is where we do all of our extension grant works.

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<sup>51</sup> Dr. Jeanine Pease, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>52</sup> John Salois, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (June 2010).

Our INBRE grant is with Bozeman.”<sup>53</sup> Dr. Pease is very positive in her tone and with her comments. She does not answer the question in the most direct manner, however, as she describes Fort Peck’s relationship with MSU in general as opposed to MSU-NAS. In all fairness, the questions are asked in an open ended manner, and Dr. Pease is given as much time to respond as she cares to take. I intentionally attempted to give all interviewees the freedom to respond however they chose to do so. Trying to determine what are the appropriate questions to ask has been one of the challenges of this project, and oftentimes the responses have helped to determine what the appropriate questions are.

Question #3.) What Is the Perception of MSU-NAS in the Fort Peck (or) Blackfeet Community, if There Is One?

Dr. Pease addressed this question in her previous answer and once more we moved onto the next question in the interest of time. It has become abundantly clear, through my experience in trying to generate interviews at tribal colleges, as well as my visits to tribal colleges, that the faculty and administration are very busy and that time management is always a challenge. I tried to be mindful of this and requested an hour per interview, which I was granted in every instance.

Mr. Salois is short and direct in his response. “It’s been positive but more formal outreach is necessary. Communication needs to be improved.”<sup>54</sup> Mr. Salois’ reply that “more formal outreach is necessary” and “communication needs to be improved” may beg additional questions and ones that I did not ask at the time of the interview. Why do

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<sup>53</sup> Dr. Jeanine Pease, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>54</sup> John Salois, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (June 2010).

we need to improve communication? Why is more formal outreach necessary? I am not quite sure of the answers to these questions, yet I do concur with Mr. Salois on both counts. As evidenced by the responses from the MSU-NAS faculty as well as MSU-NAS graduate students, this communication is desired even if the reasons for wanting it are not fully understood.

Question #4.) Do You See Any Ways in Which the Relationship Between MSU-NAS and FPCC or BFCC Can be Improved Upon?

Dr. Pease is perhaps even more considerate than she already has been in her reply to this question. “I think that there are ways that we can coordinate. We don’t but we probably should. For instance, how could our classes fit in and contribute to a minor or major in NAS at Bozeman? How could a student move from an (Associate’s degree) here to a Bachelor’s at Bozeman?” Dr. Pease finishes her reply graciously by paying the university, and probably the department, a compliment. “We do benefit from the scholarly work done at MSU.”<sup>55</sup> This last statement may lend credence, from this tribal college faculty member, to those comments made by MSU-NAS faculty referring to the “abstract” relationship between MSU-NAS and Montana’s tribal colleges. Once more this question begs another such as: How does FPCC benefit from the scholarly work done at MSU? Once more I did not ask this question at the time of the interview.

Mr. Salois replies by saying, “One thing is just contact. Having this discussion (and also) video-conferencing. You could identify an area in the tribal communities that

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<sup>55</sup> Dr. Jeanine Pease, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

is unique to your area of study.”<sup>56</sup> The sentiment expressed by Mr. Salois, regarding simply having discussions and contact, or coming to the table evolved as a theme in this project. The challenges faced logistically required that I temper my expectations as to what the final results of this paper might be. This theme becomes more evident in the final chapter of this paper.

Question #5a.) Do You Have Any Ideas as to How MSU-NAS Grad Students Could Provide a Service to the Fort Peck Community?

Dr. Pease had many thoughts regarding this question and seemed to be enthusiastic that I had asked it. I found it interesting, however, when I asked this question she initially responded with her own question. “How can we help you (at MSU-NAS0)? Or what can we do for you?” I absorbed her initial response while she continued. Her response is considerate and confident. “There is an almost innate need to be connected to the Native community, particularly for Native students and faculty. We would love to have MSU-NAS students at Fort Peck. We have community service efforts run through the tribal college. Because we are a land grant college, we are out in the community doing a lot. We have a dorm set up with 20 beds set up for this at \$20 a night. (When I returned to Fort Peck the following year, the Fort Peck administration waived the fee for my three-night stay.)

“There is probably every part of our college that could use assistance. We are undermanned. We could use help everywhere. American Indian Studies is at the heart of things. A lecture series going both ways could be very beneficial for both institutions.

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<sup>56</sup> John Salois, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (June 2010).

We used to have that with Rocky Mountain College.”<sup>57</sup> (This could be done either in person or through video-conferencing.) After absorbing Dr. Pease’s response to this question, I altered my interview question for Mr. Salois slightly in wording yet significantly in meaning. I thought that the phrase “mutually beneficial” was appropriate as it pertained to MSU-NAS grad students entering into Native communities. This thought has been continuously reinforced throughout this project.

Question #5b.) Do You Have Any Ideas as to How MSU-NAS Graduate Students Could be Placed in the Blackfeet Community in a Mutually Beneficial Relationship?

Mr. Salois seemed to welcome this question as he is also thoughtful and enthusiastic in his response. “We could work as a liaison to create placements in tribal council, Heart Butte, Browning, and East Glacier. All these places are unique. Placements could be in (places such as) the school district or the Elder Center. These placements could be worked through our student services. If it is a graduate program we could specialize the experience to meet someone’s interests. One thing we haven’t spoken about is the spiritual or medicinal which students could experience.”<sup>58</sup> What Mr. Salois meant by the “spiritual or medicinal” I am not entirely sure, but I feel that it was a very gracious comment. Unfortunately, as aforementioned, Mr. Salois is no longer at BFCC, so if a relationship is to be nurtured with BFCC, it will have to be through another contact.

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<sup>57</sup> Dr. Jeanine Pease, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>58</sup> John Salois, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (June 2010).

Question #6.) Does MSU-NAS Serve  
the Fort Peck Community?

I did not pose this question to Mr. Salois because I replaced it with question #5b. As previously stated, the notion of a mutually beneficial relationship had seemingly replaced the idea of MSU-NAS serving tribal communities by the time that I met with Mr. Salois. Dr. Pease answers the question. “I think that they do, though I think we could probably do a better job. Maybe I should stop talking.”<sup>59</sup> I take her last statement simply as a reluctance to overstep her own personal boundaries of respectfulness. Dr. Pease was particularly complimentary of MSU-NAS throughout the interview. What she did not know when I posed this question to her is that the MSU-NAS faculty had already expressed to me that they collectively shared this same sentiment.

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<sup>59</sup> Dr. Jeanine Pease, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

## CHAPTER 3

RETURN TO FORT PECK  
PRELIMINARY TRIP PLANNING

Once it became evident I should continue working with the two colleges with which I had already established contact, BFCC and FPCC, I wanted to ask both Dr. Pease and Mr. Salois if I could return to their communities to continue our discussions. I also wanted to request if I could perhaps observe some classes or participate in a community service project. I wanted to make it clear that in no way did I want to be a burden while I was a visitor to these communities and that I wanted to provide a service, upon their approval, if that was deemed appropriate.

Dr. Pease replied, via email, that “this was great news” and that she was delighted that I would be returning. I took this as a very encouraging sign with regard to returning to Fort Peck, but I was having trouble getting in touch with Mr. Salois. I had emailed him several times and had not received a reply. Finally, I called the offices at BFCC and that was when I was informed that John Salois was no longer at BFCC. As I mentioned previously, I was given no information as to how I might contact him, nor was any explanation offered as to why he was no longer there. I didn’t feel that it was my place to ask, so I didn’t.

While this was frustrating, it was not completely surprising to me at this point of the project. I had tried in vain to connect with other tribal colleges, such as Salish-Kootenai and Little Big Horn but simply could not establish solid correspondence. If I was not persistent enough in my efforts, it may be because I was exercising a calculated

respectfulness. I did not want to intrude or press where I was not welcome or invited. It is my understanding, through many people who either are currently, or have previously been employed at tribal colleges, that the faculty at these institutions are typically very busy people. I do not find it strange that the faculty and administrations at these institutions may not make it a priority to correspond with me. I may have been perceived as an outsider or worse, an intruder from the outset, and certainly a stranger.

When I contacted Dr. Pease to try and establish some dates as to when it might be convenient for me to return to Fort Peck, she informed me that she had left her position at FPCC and had returned to a position back home on the Crow Indian Reservation. She was kind enough, however, to give me Dr. Florence Garcia's contact information. Dr. Garcia replaced Dr. Pease as Vice President of Academic Affairs at FPCC. While I was somewhat discouraged that both of the contacts I had established at tribal colleges had since moved on, I decided that my best chance of enhancing the relationship between MSU-NAS and any tribal college was to try and contact Dr. Garcia at FPCC.

I began by sending Dr. Garcia an email. She did not respond and so I sent another. I received no response and so after several days I called her office. I was able to get in touch with her this way, and while she was attentive to my end of the dialogue, she also seemed hesitant. She, in a later conversation, willfully admitted this hesitancy and asked if I had noticed it. I replied that I had noticed her reluctance or hesitancy. Again, I was not necessarily surprised and was careful not to be perceived as intrusive, paternalistic, insistent, or disrespectful in any way. She related that she would be willing to work with me because Dr. Pease had previously done the same. I appreciate this very

much, and it seems to me that she acted with grace and integrity, when she would have been no less respected, and perhaps a bit less burdened, had she chosen not to do so.

During our phone conversation I related that I was examining the relationship between MSU-NAS and FPCC. I explained that I was hopeful that we could perhaps improve upon any existing relationship and that I simply wanted to return to FPCC to have some discussions regarding this topic. I was hopeful that maybe my visit and our ensuing discussions could potentially lay the groundwork for a student exchange program between the two institutions. I expressed that, by no means, was that my sole intention or idea, but more of an initial thought of how MSU-NAS and FPCC could enhance mutual communication and collaboration. I explained that while I was there, I would be very appreciative if I could maybe observe a couple of classes and/or conduct a few interviews. I also expressed that it was important to me that I was not a burden or hassle to the FPCC faculty in any way and that while I was there, if possible, I would like to provide a service, determined by FPCC. I suggested maybe grading papers or if there was another community service project happening to which I could contribute manpower, I would very much appreciate the opportunity.

At some point, Dr. Garcia noticed my email address, [colin@greatsouthernfood.net](mailto:colin@greatsouthernfood.net), and I explained that I was indeed a professional cook, by trade. Dr. Garcia inquired as to whether I would be willing to cook for a Cultural Luncheon that they conduct every week, and I replied that I would love to. We decided upon a few days that I would return the following month, in March of 2011, and we remained in contact via email over the next several weeks.

Through our email correspondence we came up with a menu that I would cook and Dr. Garcia also created a schedule of sorts for me. I was to arrive on a Monday night and leave Thursday morning. She arranged for me to stay at the Fort Peck Visitor's Dormitory and also informed me that FPCC would waive my fee for the three-night stay that I was there. She arranged for me to observe a Fort Peck Tribal Code class taught by Bob McAnally and also a Dakota Language class taught by Abigail Red Door. I was scheduled to meet with the librarian, Anita Scheetz, and also Rhonda Mason, the program coordinator for the FPCC TRIO program.

Perhaps most helpful and hospitable, Dr. Garcia arranged for her brother Dr. Joe McGeshik to act as a host and show me around FPCC and Poplar, all the while introducing me to people and making sure that I was feeling welcome. Dr. McGeshik spent several hours with me and contributed immeasurably to my positive experience at Fort Peck.

All of my meetings and observations were arranged for the Tuesday and we agreed that on Wednesday I would cook for twenty – thirty faculty and administration at FPCC during the Cultural Luncheon. Dr. Garcia remarked that if I had some free time after the luncheon, maybe I would want to visit the FPCC branch in Wolf Point, approximately twenty miles down the highway. She did ask that I confirm my meetings and observations with the individuals that she had contacted on my behalf. “After all, you are a grad student,” she stated. I acquiesced to Dr. Garcia's request and was able to confirm with most people. I sent an email to all that had an electronic address. With my

schedule finalized, it was time to make the journey to Poplar, Montana on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana.

### Poplar, Montana: Fort Peck Indian Reservation

The drive from Bozeman, Montana to Poplar, Montana is approximately 750 miles and a roughly 7-hour duration. It is a relatively long drive but a very pretty one, in my opinion. The drive takes me east on Interstate-90 over the mountains, through Livingston, and on through Billings. In Billings, I merge onto I-94 for a couple of hundred miles until I reach Glendive. I then head northwest on MT-200, eventually north on MT-13 and then east for a few miles on MT-2 into Poplar, MT. I arrive in the early evening. I have a little trouble finding the dormitory but not much and when I finally do, I retire quickly, looking forward to the next couple of days.

Dr. Garcia had asked that I meet her around 8:30am or 9:00am in her office at FPCC. I arrived around that time to meet a very welcoming if somewhat reserved lady. She had prepared to visit with me for a while and our meeting was an informal one. I thanked her for her willingness to work with me despite not knowing me. I also expressed that I had already identified a collective desire within MSU-NAS to be more connected to Montana's tribal communities. I stated that I was not sure how this could best be achieved and that I was there to gauge interest at the tribal college and to acquaint myself further with FPCC, through faculty and administration.

Dr. Garcia replied that while she liked my idea regarding enhancing the relationship between FPCC and MSU-NAS, she was "hesitant to provide significant

personal resources” such as time and energy, for instance. She did not want to invest in something that would not sustain itself and grow for the benefit of both entities. Dr. Garcia then made a simple but seemingly very astute suggestion. “This needs to start small and simply,”<sup>60</sup> she said. She explained that she has all too often seen well-intentioned projects have too lofty goals, and end up fizzling, ultimately proving detrimental to the original goal. This notion resonates as it occurs to me that simply having a face-to-face discussion with Dr. Garcia is a step in the right direction. It is a step that I would prefer not to have to retrace, necessarily, and so I hope that I leave a positive impression behind when I depart from Fort Peck.

After our brief, yet warm and thorough introduction, Dr. Garcia introduced me to her brother Joe McGeshick, who acted as a host and guide for me the two days that I was there. I cannot be more complimentary of Dr. McGeshick. His hospitality and kindness were instrumental in ensuring that I had a truly enjoyable experience at Fort Peck. Dr. McGeshick took hours out of his time each day that I was there, in order to introduce me to people, show me around the Fort Peck campus and community, share a couple of meals with me, and also provide needed assistance while I cooked for the faculty and administration of FPCC. The discussions that I had just being with Dr. McGeshick and sharing lunch, and later a couple of beers with both President James Shanley and himself, were some of my most enjoyable moments while I was in Poplar.

Dr. McGeshick introduced me to Rhonda Mason who is the head of the TRIO program at FPCC. Rhonda took an hour out of her day to talk a little about her work and also listen to my reasons for coming to Fort Peck. She expressed interest in having a

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<sup>60</sup> Dr. Florence Garcia, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2011).

better relationship with MSU-NAS and even offered to assist if, in fact, a student exchange program could be implemented. Ms. Mason informed me that her program could help provide transportation to students who wished to visit MSU-NAS.

Her co-worker Mrs. McAnally sat down with us for a bit as well, and touched on three elements very central to this thesis: trust, time, and relationships. Her statement, essentially, was that it takes time to build trust to build a relationship. That may be true in many instances, and it seems this is especially true when building relationships between essentially Indigenous and non-Indigenous entities, such as FPCC and MSU, respectively. There is a history of academics entering into Native communities and exhibiting less than ethical behavior. The notion of the “white anthropologist” knowing how best to “save the Indian” may seem a bit cliché in 2011. [Vine Deloria Jr.’s Custer Died For Your Sins, in which he famously criticizes anthropologists was published over 40 years ago in 1969.] However, to understand the real basis for this cliché, one need look no further than the highly publicized 2010 Supreme Court case involving Arizona State University and the Havasupai tribe. This case regards the extraction and use of the tribal members’ DNA. The tribe felt that their trust was breached by researchers at ASU and that they were lied to regarding how their DNA ultimately was used. A settlement was reached and according to *The New York Times*, Arizona State University has agreed to “remedy the wrong that was done.”<sup>61</sup> Tanya Roth, writing for the legal blog FindLaw.com notes “*The New York Times* notes this case has possibly raised the question of whether the Arizona State scientists had taken advantage of a vulnerable

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<sup>61</sup> Amy Harmon, “Havasupai Case Highlights Risks in DNA Research,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/22/us/22dnaside.html>

population, an issue that could create an image problem for a university hoping to be considered a center for American Indian Studies.”<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, this is unwanted press for ASU. It seems that this is an example of the type of experience or perception that MSU-NAS wants to avoid at all costs, even if it means having no, or a limited, relationship with Montana’s tribal communities. The Havasupai-ASU case raises some pertinent issues and the one that most relevant to this particular thesis is the notion of communicating respect before information, such as Tanya Roth suggests in her legal blog, but this consideration will be returned to in the final chapter.<sup>63</sup>

I sat in on two classes during my visit to Fort Peck Community College: Dr. Rober McAnally’s Fort Peck Tribal Code class and also a Dakota Language class taught by Abigail Red Door. There were only two other students in Dr. McAnally’s class and he explained to me that after Spring break it was always difficult to get students back into the classroom. That comment led to an explanation of the priority that family takes on the reservation. He explained to me that students travel long distances, and for extended durations, for sick relatives, causing them to miss extended periods of school. He also explained that students are gone for a week or more for a funeral, and that this is common. Dr. McAnally explained that, in contrast to other mainstream American colleges and universities, that these extended absences are acceptable at FPCC. His class

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<sup>62</sup> Tanya Roth, “True Blood: Havasupai Tribe and ASU Settle Dispute over DNA,” *FindLaw*, April 22, 2010, <http://blogs.findlaw.com/decided/2010/04/true-blood-havasupai-tribe-and-asu-settle-dispute-over-dna.html>

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

was interesting and I really appreciated his brief explanation as to the importance of family and how it is prioritized in the Fort Peck community.

Abigail Red Door's class was interesting to me as I had never before been exposed to the Dakota language. Ms. Red Door was not aware that I was visiting her class, but she was very hospitable and welcomed me there. I was given a standard worksheet with Dakota words, pronunciations, and sentences on it, that we went over in class, repeating after the teacher and asking questions as we went. Once more, while the class and her instruction were quite interesting, I was most intrigued by her personal account of how she learned Dakota.

Ms. Red Door explained that she grew up on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation and that her father was an evangelist so she learned the language through hymnals. I asked if they were Dakota hymnals or Christian and she explained to me that they were Christian. She related how she used to have to clean the lantern mantles to read by them. She then told me that to get water, she would lead a team of horses down to the Missouri river and load up big barrels of water to take back to her residence. "The water tasted good!" she exclaimed.<sup>64</sup> The starkness of this comment was evident, as I had already been cautioned against drinking the tap water in Poplar.

A man whose name I cannot recall entered the room for the second half of class, and he had a set of about 200 or so flash cards with Dakota words on them and their appropriate hand signs. He demonstrated 50 of these cards and the hand motions that coincided with the appropriate words. This was unexpected and I am very appreciative that I got to witness his presentation.

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<sup>64</sup> Abigail Red Door, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview. (March 2011).

When Ms. Red Door dismissed us it was late in the afternoon. I decided to take a drive across to Wolf Point on Highway 2. I simply wanted to see the countryside, which was beautiful. I returned to my dormitory, made a few preparations for the lunch that I was to cook the next day, and went to bed so that I would be rested. The bed was quite comfortable and the room was clean and I slept soundly listening to the night air, passing trains and traffic, and an occasional dog bark through a barely cracked window. It was a good day and I was glad that I had come. Tomorrow, I thought, I hope that I can return some of the hospitality.

### Cultural Luncheon

I awoke around 7:30 am and arrived around 8:00am at the building where the luncheon was to be held. The kitchen I would be working out of was in this building and Dr. McGeshick told me that the building should be open by 8. He also told me that he would meet me there in the morning to help out in any way. I was thankful for this as Dr. Garcia had explained to me that Dr. McGeshick was quite a cook.

The menu I planned to serve had a Southern flavor to it, as it seemed I had an opportunity to provide more than my Southern accent to the Cultural Luncheon. It consisted of BBQ Chicken, Hoppin' John (a traditional Southern dish of rice, black eyed peas, and turnip greens, Succotash (a traditional Southern medley of lima beans, corn, onions, peas, etc.), Cucumber Salad, and Corn Bread. I really wanted to have a grill flavor on the chicken so I brought my own outdoor grill. I reasoned that grilled food reminds people of summertime and backyard BBQ's, which in turn puts smiles on their

faces. I figured that the folks at Fort Peck were as tired of the Montana winter as I was by the middle of March. In hindsight I believe that I was correct in this assertion.

Dr. McGeshick showed up at some point and asked how he could help. I explained that if he could make the corn bread that I would appreciate it very much. My time and oven space were limited. He immediately took to the task and, with some help, made fantastic corn bread in another kitchen, generously leaving me plenty of space to work.

I had the meal ready by 12:00 pm, which is when the Cultural Luncheon began. People immediately began coming through the impromptu buffet line and seemed genuinely thankful and pleased to have somebody new cooking for them. The looks on the peoples' faces and their expressions of thanks pleased me. After thirty or so people had served themselves and I had cleaned a bit, I sat in on the Cultural Luncheon meeting. The agenda for the day was to discuss how to best facilitate a Native language conference or symposium that Fort Peck is hosting in May. There was active video technology so that the members at Fort Peck were able to view and speak with members at the Wolf Point campus. Questions concerning topics arose such as the dialect presented by the sign cards that I had been exposed to the day before; ways to best preserve Native language in general; whether total immersion is the best method of language preservation; lodging for guest speakers at the conference; and whether Fort Peck should hold the conference annually. The conversation was dynamic and at times heated. It was clear that this is an impassioned topic for the community and a project that many people are investing a lot of resources in. I couldn't help but think that MSU-NAS might really

benefit by contributing to a project, such as this. The phrase “mutually beneficial” returned to my thoughts.

Mention was made of the food as compliments and thanks were expressed. At this time I was asked to come to the podium and address the audience for just a few minutes. I began by thanking them for having me in their community and expressing the warmth and hospitality that I had experienced while there. I explained that I am currently a graduate student in the MSU-NAS department at Bozeman. I stated that, while I have really appreciated my education in the program, and that I am proud to be a student of one of the few graduate programs specializing in NAS in the country, I had identified an absence of a tribal community connection in the program. I was visiting Fort Peck to have some discussions and hopefully listen to some ideas about how we could improve our relationship with FPCC. I thought there might be resources at both institutions that could be utilized in a mutually beneficial capacity. I noticed a few heads nod in agreement. I welcomed any responses, thoughts, or ideas on the topic and thanked them once more for their hospitality and time.

After the meeting I was approached by Tom Black Eagle. Mr. Black Eagle is in charge of the visitor’s dormitory and asked if everything was acceptable to me at my lodge. I replied that I was very comfortable and thanked him. He expressed his pleasure in the Hoppin’ John dish and related to me that his father had eaten something quite similar while stationed in Virginia in the army. When his father left Virginia he had insisted that Mr. Black Eagle’s mother learn to make it. As a result Mr. Black Eagle had

grown up eating a similar dish and was pleased to see it on the buffet. His story pleased me.

Mr. Black Eagle then told me that he too found it “surprising” that MSU-NAS graduate students were not required to spend any time in Montana’s tribal communities. He explained that he would be willing to assist in lodging, for future graduate students wanting to enter Fort Peck in an internship or student exchange capacity.<sup>65</sup> I take his offer to be both considerate and sincere.

I finished cleaning the kitchen and as I was packing up Dr. McGeshick invited me to join President Shanley and himself for a beer later on that afternoon before we parted ways. I happily accepted the gracious invitation. I finished cleaning and packing and decided that I should stop by Dr. Garcia’s office to try and have a formal good-bye. I was fortunate that she was there and I actually caught her in the middle of writing me an email. She was pleased that I stopped by and decided to just read the email. It reads....

*Colin,*

*Okay, so you really lived up to your email address (greatsouthernfood). Thanks for exceeding our expectations in that regard-- I heard nothing but great comments about the meal--and we are pretty good judges of food here--esp Joe. In addition, the faculty and staff whose offices and classes you visited really appreciated your respectfulness and interest. It has been a pleasure to host you and I hope you gained a worthwhile educational and personal experience here. Good luck in your master's degree. Consider yourself unique and blessed to have been part of our Native community these past few days. Safe travels, and I'm sure we'll see you again.*

*Florence*

*P.S. Tell Walter we gave you an "A".<sup>66</sup>*

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<sup>65</sup> Tom Black Eagle, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Dr. Florence Garcia, message to the author, Email. (March 2011).

While it is true I take Dr. Garcia's email as a compliment as well as an endorsement that I behaved appropriately while a visitor at FPCC, I post this e-mail at the risk of appearing vain. I think it essential to this thesis that goodwill be created, specifically between MSU-NAS and FPCC. Dr. Garcia also expressed to me in our final meeting that she was very pleased that I demonstrated commitment on my end and that while she still remained hesitant (this is when Dr. Garcia asked me if I had noticed her initial hesitance over the telephone), she is hopeful that perhaps something could grow between MSU-NAS and FPCC as a result of my visit to Fort Peck. Dr. Garcia reiterated her belief that it is useful to start simply, with small actions and ideas, so that a relationship might grow to sustain itself over a long period. This theory makes sense to me and I agree that it is a theory that should be considered and applied moving forward.

That evening I followed Dr. McGeshick to a roadside bar between Poplar and Wolf Point where President Shanley joined us. Over a couple of drinks, we discussed the relevance of technology with regard to education and specifically with regard to places as isolated as the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. The conversation was interesting, wide-ranging, and enjoyable. It's content, however, will remain at the bar, as it does not necessarily pertain to this thesis. We parted ways amicably and I returned to the Fort Peck Visitor's Dormitory where I had promised to cook dinner for the other dorm occupants. I shared yet another enjoyable meal with the other guests and then packed and went to bed. I rose early and drove the 7 hours back to Bozeman, taking advantage of a short cut that my new acquaintances at Fort Peck had informed me of. As I drove across

the Montana Plains, experiencing the sunrise, I was content, pleased that I had made the trip and pleased that I had made new acquaintances.

## CHAPTER 4

## SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MSU-NAS

The challenges posed to the completion of this thesis have been largely logistical. The initial intention consisted of visiting all seven Montana reservations in order to gauge interest in enhancing the relationship between MSU-NAS and the respective tribal colleges on these reservations. It was difficult to establish contacts at these places and when I finally did, these contacts ended up leaving their respective positions at BFCC and FPCC. I have managed, through two visits, to begin a relationship with FPCC. I cannot agree more with Dr. Garcia's assessment that, "this needs to start small and simply;"<sup>67</sup> otherwise, the suggestions and recommendations of this thesis could prove to be regressive as opposed to progressive with regard to FPCC's and MSU-NAS' collective interests.

It seems clear from this thesis, however, that a collective desire to have a stronger, more practical, and perhaps more meaningful relationship has been expressed by both MSU-NAS as well as FPCC. Two options that can potentially create better communication, more collaboration, and stronger cooperation between MSU-NAS and FPCC are a student exchange program and also a tribal community service requirement in the MSU-NAS curriculum.

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<sup>67</sup> Dr. Florence Garcia, interview by Colin Miler, personal interview, (March 2011).

Student Exchange Program between  
MSU-NAS and FPCC

Lark Real Bird Paz has returned to the Crow Indian Reservation as an instructor at Little Big Horn College. She earned her Master's in NAS from MSU. When asked how she would like to see the program develop, she responded that, "I would like for tribal people to come in (to MSU-NAS) and share their tribal experiences. I want you guys (non-Natives) to understand us from the inside and understand our struggle as Indian people."<sup>68</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel exclaims in her interview that, "I think where we can become better (as a department) is engaging the reservation communities."<sup>69</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein states that "keeping connected to tribal communities"<sup>70</sup> is a challenge for the department. Rhonda Mason, the head of the FPCC TRIO program, recently sent me an email on the topic.

*Hi Colin,*

*We have several community cultural activities throughout the year. Our Cultural Committee plans these events. We always need help for these activities and enjoy sharing what we know. I think your idea about a student exchange program is great. MSU students could attend classes like you did. Another good idea is that the MSU students could attend a few Tribal Council meetings, visit Tribal Housing, and the BIA. They are all entities of this reservation. It would be up to Florence and Dr. Shanley about the exchange, but I think it would be a great idea, the student/students could stay in the Visitors dorm like you did, so that would help with costs. Thanks again for visiting FPCC and I wish you success in all you do.<sup>71</sup>*

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<sup>68</sup> Lark Real Bird Paz, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (April 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Dr. Kristin Ruppel, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Wayne Stein, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (February 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Rhonda Mason, message to the author, Email, (March 2011).

According to the government website for TRIO, “The Federal *TRIO* Programs are educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.”<sup>72</sup>

Video-conferencing may be one way in which MSU-NAS can stay connected to tribal communities, but to truly engage these communities, it is the author’s opinion that visiting in person is the best way to create good will. Joe McGeshick served as a very welcoming host while I visited Fort Peck. This thesis argues that MSU-NAS would serve itself well by extending this same hospitality to students from Fort Peck. Rhonda Mason, from FPCC, offered to assist with travel and I have spoken with Liz Grant in Family and Graduate Housing at MSU. She expressed interest in providing lodging for any tribal college students wishing to visit MSU and remarked that a discounted rate may be an option. Understandably, Ms. Grant needs more details regarding specificity of dates and duration, as well as number of students who may be visiting. However, the initial conversation offers encouragement moving forward.

Dr. Fleming suggested recently that a Memo of Understanding be drafted outlining a more formal relationship between MSU-NAS and FPCC. This memo has not yet come to fruition; however, it seems to this author to be a very wise gesture, if the department truly wants to encourage more communication, better cooperation, and a stronger element of outreach towards FPCC. A formal memo of understanding, outlining procedures and actions that MSU-NAS would take on behalf of any visiting FPCC students would demonstrate a good faith gesture. These procedures might include providing lodging, a guide, perhaps meals, and information pertinent to any particular

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<sup>72</sup> [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html)

student's interests. This good faith gesture, in a small but meaningful way, exhibits a willingness and desire to demonstrate commitment.

### Tribal Community Service Curriculum Requirement

A tribal community service requirement is yet another way that MSU-NAS might begin to establish a stronger and more trusting relationship with Montana's tribal colleges. This thesis argues that it is a reasonable expectation that incoming graduate students be required to fulfill a thirty - forty hour tribal community service requirement. In most instances, this allows the students 1 – 3 years to fulfill this requirement. The student may fulfill the requirement one hour at a time over three years, or perhaps over the course of one week in the summer. Rhonda Mason's email, as well as the author's conversations with Dr. Garcia, provide evidence that this would be a welcomed project at Fort Peck. Once a more formal model is established, perhaps with FPCC, other reservations may be contacted to gauge their interest in such a relationship. It occurs to the author, however, that it may be the responsibility of MSU-NAS to initiate these relationships. In the same instance, it is the responsibility of MSU-NAS to be as respectful as possible while attempting to improve upon the relationship between MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges.

The author recently had a conversation with Dr. Matt Herman in which he questioned the notion of responsibility, with regard to MSU-NAS engaging tribal communities. "Whose responsibility is it?"<sup>73</sup> he wondered aloud. Dr. Herman also remarked that during his tenure as a professor at MSU he could only recall one instance

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<sup>73</sup> Dr. Matt Herman, interview by Colin Miller, personal interview, (March 2011).

in which a tribal college representative has called MSU-NAS to ask for assistance or advice. Dr. Herman expressed that he finds this both disappointing and troubling. This lack of communication between the two academic entities, MSU-NAS and tribal colleges, is a stark example of why it is the responsibility of MSU-NAS to engage Montana's tribal colleges. While the department expresses a desire to be more connected to the tribal colleges, it may wonder internally as to the reasons that there is not a stronger relationship. The more effective action may be to inquire explicitly how the department might begin to change these circumstances. Dr. Herman's point, it seems, is that MSU-NAS must not intrude, behave paternalistically, or create a perception of the department as the detached ivory tower. This thesis argues that this perception might already exist, which is why Dr. Herman has not observed any meaningful communication, save perhaps one instance, between MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges.

Once again, the notion of being extremely careful not to be intrusive is paramount in establishing any sort of tribal community service initiative. It only takes one rude student to erase the good will that might be created by such an initiative. Ethics training is a suggestion for how to be proactive in this regard. Perhaps 5 - 10 hours of training needs to be mandated, regarding the "do's and do not's" while acting as a representative of MSU-NAS, and also as a guest of, or visitor to, a tribal community. The author recommends that a committee be formed in order to determine what ethics training should consist of.

One criticism of a community service requirement may be that in order for a student to have a useful experience in a tribal community, the experience needs to be at

least a semester in duration. I respectfully disagree with this opinion. My educational and personal experience at FPCC truly added to my overall experience as a graduate student at MSU-NAS. The opportunity to make contacts, while providing a service, is potentially an important benefit of a community service requirement, especially for students who desire to work in and with Indian communities and entities. Such opportunity is currently relatively limited, with only a classroom-based curriculum.

Funding will always be an issue, yet it seems a reasonable expectation that graduate students perform 30 – 40 hours of community service, with no monetary reward or support. It is important that funding not be undermined; however, there are ways to reduce costs, such as car pooling and camping, in the summer months. The Visitor's Lodge at FPCC is also an option that may significantly reduce cost. The graduate program has averaged approximately 10 students per semester while I have been a student. That number potentially amounts to approximately 400 hours of service, approved by any particular tribal community, that MSU-NAS has the opportunity to provide.

Students might be asked to hand out programs at the Tribal Language Preservation Symposium that FPCC is hosting in May as an approved project. This would provide an opportunity for students to be around professionals who are dedicated to preserving tribal languages and who are discussing the best practices and methods of achieving this. The MSU-NAS curriculum does not currently provide such an option. Perhaps the Crow Nation might provide an invitation for students to come to Crow Fair,

if they were willing to pick up trash and hand out programs. It is important that MSU-NAS not make this assumption, yet equally important that the idea be inquired about.

While acknowledging that challenges exist to enhancing the relationship between MSU-NAS and Montana's tribal colleges, this thesis argues that the benefits far outweigh any potential obstacles. The thesis has clearly identified desire at MSU-NAS as well as FPCC to improve communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the two entities. A student exchange program potentially informs MSU students of real, contemporary concerns specific to tribal colleges or tribal governments and also allows first-hand experience, spending time in reservation communities. The potential is there to make academic and other professional contacts. Tribal college libraries are another potential resource for MSU-NAS graduate students visiting tribal colleges.

Tribal college students are provided the opportunity to visit MSU, Bozeman, and specifically MSU-NAS through a student exchange program. This opportunity allows for a student to experience the community and campus in a comfortable, informative atmosphere so that the student may potentially decide to enroll at MSU to continue their education. Once more, the potential is created for contacts and associates to be made that may prove useful in the future.

A tribal community service initiative by MSU-NAS provides an opportunity for the department can improve its presence in tribal communities. This allows the department, through outreach, to potentially create good will among tribal communities, and also provide needed manpower to tribal community initiatives. In the same instance, a tribal community service requirement also provides students real world experience in

Montana's , or other, tribal communities. This thesis suggests that real world experience in tribal communities combined with classroom analysis and discussion forms a more comprehensive, holistic, and useful educational experience for MSU-NAS graduate students. This thesis has clearly identified a collective desire within the MSU-NAS graduate program to implement a stronger element of outreach towards Montana's tribal communities. The thesis has also identified For Peck Community College as a potential partner in improving communication and stronger collaboration between FPCC and MSU-NAS. The author recommends that a formal memo of understanding be sent to Dr. Florence Garcia at FPCC expressing this desire, and a willingness to reciprocate the hospitality, towards FPCC students, that the author experienced while at FPCC. The author also recommends that a formal meeting be held among MSU-NAS faculty in order to discuss ways to improve outreach towards Montana tribal communities, including those mentioned in this paper. This thesis seeks to help bridge the academic with the pragmatic, and with regard to Montana State University-Native American Studies and Montana's tribal communities. Perhaps through the author's observations, suggestions, and recommendations the thesis has helped to lay a foundation for this bridge.

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