

# NEWS

The Evergreen State College

Olympia, Washington 98505

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Spurred by a conviction that some bold changes must be made if higher education is to become relevant to the Indian student, The Evergreen State College has launched a unique pilot study program which will encompass the entire 1973-74 term and, perhaps, move beyond.

The program --- Native American Studies --- is new...so new it has not been listed in Evergreen's 1973-74 Catalog or Supplement describing academic offerings for the new term, which begins October 1. The college's Native American faculty --- Mary F. Nelson, Colville; Cruz Esquivel, Colville; Darrell Phare, Lummi, and Mary Ellen Hillaire, Lummi --- will coordinate the project.

"Native American Studies is FOR Native Americans, BY Native Americans, and OF Native American people who, together, constitute the content and explain the reason for this new approach in educational opportunities," explains Ms. Hillaire, who has devoted her entire Summer to planning the educational project. Enrollment will fall between 30 and 80 students, depending on the success of an intensive admissions campaign.

Native American Studies is planned for Indian students who are enrolled as tribal members from any of the 34 tribes in the Northwest. Primary focus is on the Native American community in the Pacific Northwest, although enrolled members of other tribes in the country are welcome to participate.

"Limiting participation to Indian students is necessary at the present time," according to Faculty Member Cruz Esquivel. "This is due to the many problems and concerns facing Indian people which only they can begin to solve. And, if self-

determination

-more-

Dick Nichols, Director  
Information Services

determination is to become a reality, then the education of Native Americans must be directly relevant to them."

The program will focus directly on Native American-oriented music, dance, talk, and art. It will also involve the creation of student-chosen internships which directly benefit Native American communities.

"We will consider old and new problems as they relate to history, politics, en economics, sociology, philosophy (specifically, the Arts and Sciences) within a context which speaks to the Native American from Pre-Columbian times to the present," Esquivel added.

The key to Evergreen's new venture in Native American Studies stems not so much from the topics of study but from the ways in which the program will function. Ms. Hillaire explains:

"At first, we will gather at Evergreen to identify the three general groups involved in Native American Studies. Specifically, these include traditional people of Indian communities; the transitional people (Evergreen Native American faculty); and Native American students. We'll talk about practical experiences for a deeper understanding of the current Indian situation and identify our position in society now and our future as a people.

"Once we have accomplished that, we can begin bringing students together with the human resources of the program. This will include presentations of slides and lectures, attendance at Indian ceremonies, participation in talks with people from various tribes, going to conferences, visiting Indian communities and private homes (both on and off reservations), inviting local-state-national speakers, dancers, artists, and singers who are representative of the Native American value system.

"And, in the process, we'll encourage cultural exchange between the various tribes upholding their diversity as a necessary element of survival."

The idea for Native American Studies resulted from a request by Evergreen last Spring for the faculty to explore and expand educational opportunities that would be of more significance to Native American students.

Subsequently the four Native American faculty got together and talked about the possibilities.

"We know that throughout the nation many institutions are involved in the design and development of Native American Studies which are academically-oriented and operated to re-instill Native American values and competencies," Ms. Hillaire said. "We also know these programs have had minimal success because they have not recognized the significant differences between peoples (White and Indian), nor acknowledged the human potential of Native Americans."

Ms. Hillaire said the faculty group then wrote a proposal entitled "Native American Studies" for presentation to Evergreen's academic officers, and for sharing with tribal chairmen, Indian clubs, and the general populace of Native Americans on and off Northwest reservations.

"Afterwards, we held a one-day conference at Evergreen, during which about 100 people from throughout the state discussed, and in the process strengthened, the concepts and ideas of Native American Studies," she said. "We then sought and obtained institutional support. Since then, we have been absorbed with putting the program together for its October beginning."

The faculty team describes the program as one "designed around the values of Native American people and, for the first time in a state institution, permitting their traditional problem-solving skills, customs, and philosophies to form the foundation of educational plans." It will also provide a purpose, a situation, and a means for Native Americans to gather together and exchange their ideas as they discuss contemporary issues and analyze ways to achieve self-direction, the faculty team believes.

Native American Studies, then, has a large purpose. Ms. Nelson explains:

"In essence, the idea is to set in motion the process of knowing ourselves as Indians, as Indians among Whites, and as people of the world. Once we've done that,

our students will be much better equipped to deal with educational opportunities and all other skill-training in the area of learning."

Beyond that, an idealism pushes through: "Once we know about ourselves as a unique people --- tribe to tribe and as a nation --- about our culture, and have faced the reality that diversity is not a right but an obligation in a democracy, we will be able to interact with the White culture so that both will benefit," Ms. Nelson says.

"The Indian has survived. Now we want to live."