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NAS 202L.02: Oral and Written Traditions of Native Americans

Kathryn Shanley
University of Montana, Missoula, kathryn.shanley@umontana.edu

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NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES 202L
Oral and Written Traditions in Native America
Fall 2000, Tues. 3:10-6:00, LA 335

Professor: Kathryn Shanley
Phone: 5832 Email: kshanley@selway.umt.edu
Office: NAS 106; Corbin 348 (W 1-3)
Office Hrs: W 1-3 & by appt.

Catalog Description
Analysis of oral traditions of Native Americans including a study of the literary works of leading American Indian writers.

Course Description
Within Native American cultures, literary expression takes a wide range of forms from naming stories to novels, from chants to poems, from jokes to cautionary tales, and from mythic narratives to personal autobiographies. In this course we will survey many different genres from numerous and diverse cultures, paying as close attention as time will allow to the cultural and historical specificity of the literature. Although our approach to the subject matter will come primarily from an indigenous perspective, we will also touch upon theoretical approaches to the study of literature and folklore. We will discuss how differing worldviews are preserved through Native American oral and written literature, looking closely at several tribal traditions.

Course Objectives for Students
• To become familiar with types of Native American oral literatures as well as early Native American written literatures, particularly American Indian autobiography.
• To acquire an introductory knowledge of four or more specific tribal traditions as reflected in their oral and written literatures.
• To increase writing skills through discussion of writing principles, writing exercises, and writing, revising, and rewriting assignments.
• To be able to synthesize information regarding genres and periods in Native American oral and written traditions with particular reference to worldviews and social organization.
• To develop and demonstrate an introductory knowledge level of how different Native American cultures conceive their relation to the natural world and define their responsibilities toward each other and the rest of creation.

Course Requirements
Graded work: Students will be required to write an informal personal essay (4-5 pp.) worth 20% (with a required rewrite/revision), two exams (with in-class and take-home portions) worth 20% each, and a final research paper worth 30% (5-7 pp.). In addition, students will give one presentation in class, worth 10%. More detailed explanations of the assignments will be given as we go along. The two graded writing assignments will be evaluated on both the quality of the writing and on the content, and assignments with a rough draft stage will be graded by averaging the two grades—the rough draft and the final draft. All formal papers must be typed, in 12 font, double-spaced and identified by your name, phone number and/or email address. You are required to make copies of
every paper you submit, and papers are due in class on the designated date. From time to time, reading material will be available on electronic reserve at Mansfield library.

Attendance is required. Please notify me if you know you will be absent, ahead of time, if possible. Excessive absences (more than three hours, or one class) may result in your grade being lowered. (Missing one class is the equivalent of missing a week of class.) The purpose of required attendance is to assure that we will be able to function as a class community, a group in conversation with one another about the subject matter. Contributions to class discussion and overall good class citizenship—good attendance, turning in papers on time, being on time for class—may result in an increase in your grade. Make-up exams will only be given for unavoidable absences. Late work is subject to a grade penalty of up to one letter grade per week.

If you have special needs of which I should be aware, please let me know. Special needs may include differences in learning styles or even shyness in a classroom setting, as well as physical challenges, but are not limited to those things.

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Incompletes and Student Conduct Code

Please see the student handbook for information on incompletes and drops. Both copyright laws and University policies are rigid regarding plagiarism, “the representing of another’s work as one’s own.” Please consult the “Academic Policies and Procedures” section of the current University catalog for details regarding penalties for plagiarism.

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Required Texts

Bol, Marsha C., Stars Above, Earth Below.
Deloria, Ella. Waterlily.
Horse Capture, George, ed. Seven Visions of Bull Lodge.
LaFlesche, Francis. The Middle Five.
Underhill, Ruth. Papago Woman

Recommended Text

Underhill, Ruth. Rainhouse & Ocean: Speeches of the Papago Year

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Tentative Syllabus

**Week One, September 5:** What is Oral Literature & how do we study it?
Introduction to the course and each other. Film: *A Weave of Time.*

**Week Two, September 12:** How does Oral Literature speak to & of geographic space?
*Stars Above, Earth Below*, Chapters 1 & 12, 3-11, 231-254.

**Week Three, September 19:** Given the cultural importance of creation or origin stories, what can we discern about a particular culture’s social organization and spiritual conception of the world by studying their creation or origin stories?
*Stars Above, Earth Below*, Chapters 2, 3, & 4, 15-61. **Essay #1 due, Friday, Sept. 22, noon**

**Week Four, September 26:** How does the oral tradition function within a community over time? How does kinship define the individual’s place within the society? How does Lakota society, according to Deloria engender roles in its members?

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Waterlily, ix-83; 229-244.

**Week Five, October 3:** Are today’s terms such as “environmentalism” or “conservation” appropriate for understanding tribal worldviews?
*Waterlily,* 83-227.  
Essay #1 rewrite due

**Week Six, October 10:** How do oral literatures seek to explain the world as we know it?
*Stars Above, Earth Below,* Chapters 5, 6, & 7, 65-137.

**Week Seven, October 17:** How do oral tales reflect tribal scientific enquiry and methods?
*Stars Above, Earth Below,* Chapters 9, & 10, 167-209.

**Week Eight, October 24:** How does understanding the means of production of an autobiography and material on the cultural and historical context enhance our reading of American Indian autobiographical texts?
*Papago Woman,* 1-96.  
In-class & Take-home Exam #1 Given

**Week Nine, October 31:** How is time differently conceived by desert people; what do they do to make themselves “on time,” and why?
*Papago Woman; Stars Above, Earth Below,* Chapter 11, 211-227.  
Take-home Midterm due

**Week Ten, November 7. No Class—VOTE!**

**Week Eleven, November 14:** Is the trickster figure a culture hero, a bad example of appropriate behavior or both?
Trickster tales (reading assignment available later)

**Week Twelve, November 21:** How do stories of vision questing reflect on the interrelationship between an individual, his/her society, the natural world, and the spiritual realm?
*Seven Visions of Bull Lodge.*  
Essay #2 due

**Week Thirteen, November 28:** How does American mainstream popular culture influence American Indian autobiography?
*Middle Five,* vii-152.

**Week Fourteen, December 5:** Why are cultural clashes between American Indian students of boarding schools and the Christian educators inevitable? What life experiences of American Indian translate well in autobiography?
*Middle Five* (Continue discussion)  
In-class & Take-home Exam #2 Given

**Week Fifteen, December 12:** What is the importance of studying American Indian oral and written traditions? What have you learned?
Last Day of Class. In-class readings (to be arranged). Course Evaluations.  
Take-home Final due