

New Native American Studies Initiative at Penn

BY MARGARET M. BRUCHAC

IN JANUARY OF 2013, the University of Pennsylvania welcomed Assistant Professor Dr. Margaret M. Bruchac (Abenaki) as the first Native American faculty hire in the Department of Anthropology. Bruchac served as Coordinator of Native American and Indigenous Studies at the University of Connecticut from 2008–2012, and as the Five College Repatriation Research Liaison at the University of Massachusetts Amherst from 2003–2010. Her research areas include museum representation, oral tradition, colonial history, and indigenous archaeology.

At Penn, I am directing a Faculty Working Group on Native American Studies (NAS) with support from the SAS Dean's and Provost's offices. The proposed NAS Minor reaches across four schools (Education, Law, Nursing, and the School of Arts and Sciences) and eleven departments (Anthropology, Folklore, History, Linguistics, and Religious Studies, among others), to offer crucial foundational understandings of historical and contemporary indigenous peoples. Twenty standing faculty are contributing more than 30 courses, including "Federal Indian Law," "Native American Literature," "Native Peoples and the Environment," and "Indigenous

Education and Language Revitalization." My new courses include "Contemporary Native Americans," "Decolonizing Methodologies," "Performing Culture/ Native Arts," and "Ethnohistory of the Native Northeast."

Penn and Philadelphia have excellent resources for NAS research (e.g. Penn's McNeil Center, the Penn Museum, and the American Philosophical Society), but it is important for Native peoples to be represented throughout the academic world, rather than solely in museums and archives. Penn faculty are particularly



Gkisedtanamoogk (Wampanoag), left, a member of the Native American Studies Faculty at the University of Maine, with Margaret Bruchac. They are shown building a traditional wigwam at the Wabanaki Writers' Camp on the Penobscot River in Maine.

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excited about the opportunity to bridge disciplines by, for example, examining the resonance of colonial relations in contemporary resistance movements, or linking traditional languages with ecological knowledge. The field of NAS is broadening, given the wealth of scholarly engagement with indigenous communities worldwide and the increasing number of indigenous intellectuals in academia. Many of us are members of a new scholarly group, the international Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), which encourages collaborative research that cross-cuts typical academic fields, and approaches that highlight indigenous knowledge systems and cultural recovery.

My vision for raising awareness of NAS at Penn includes plans for a two-part symposium: the first will feature Native American scholars who direct Native American Studies Programs; the second will feature tribal leaders and

Richard W. Hill Sr. (Tuscarora), left, with Bruchac in Ohsweken, Ontario. Hill, Coordinator of the Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic, is holding a reproduction of a wampum belt with five figures linking arms in alliance.

scholars discussing the protocols of “wampum diplomacy.” The symposium is inspired by the traditional Haudenosaunee/Six Nations Iroquois *Guswentá*—Two-Row Wampum—as a material expression of bicultural diplomacy and a metaphor for bicultural education. During the colonial era, Haudenosaunee people constructed wampum belts with two

parallel rows of shell beads, symbolizing the concept that two cultures could co-exist through diplomatic relations that ensured the survival of both. The collaborative ethos embodied in the Two-Row Wampum concept has been key to the integration of academic and indigenous knowledge in the highly successful Native American Studies programs at Cornell and Dartmouth. We aim to inspire similarly collaborative success at Penn. 🇺🇸

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