

# TRAVEL GRANT REPORT: VISITING SCHOLAR AT NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY – FALL 2012 TERM

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**Recreation & Tourism**



*“The West is the location of the American creation myth, the national sipapu, the figurative hole in the earth from which Pueblo Indian people emerged in their story of the beginning of the world... [Natives] must guard themselves, their souls and their places from people who less appreciate its special traits”*  
Hal K. Rothman (1998)

## STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIP AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE: CONNECTING BOTH NATIVE STUDIES PROGRAMS AND NATIVE PEOPLES

The 2012 fall term as a Visiting Professor at New Mexico State University grew out of a successful North American Mobility Project (2007-2011) focused on building indigenous community connections between schools in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. Through the program, the VIU First Nations Studies department conducted a successful field school to visit NMSU and study indigenous communities in the state during 2010, NMSU reciprocated with a field school to VIU and island communities in 2012, and two indigenous NMSU students spent terms on exchange in our First Nations Studies program. Faculty involved at both institutions felt we should

continue to deepen our relationship, and the visiting professorship was arranged.

NMSU proved to be outstanding hosts, with office space, network access, invitations to ongoing campus events, inclusion in the indigenous faculty caucus on campus, and meetings with a number of supportive senior administrators all arranged. I was fully embraced by the faculty and graduate students in Arts & Humanities and was given opportunities to engage in their classrooms, discuss their research, and share in discussions about the evolution of their programs. They also provided introduction to leaders within many of the state’s indigenous communities,

and in some cases accompanied me on community visits.

In the Navajo, Apache and multiple Pueblo nations, I made contacts and friendships, which I expect will continue to develop, with future exchange around the growth of aboriginal tourism in both the Southwest and here in B.C. Community people in both regions are hungry to learn from each other as they seek to balance the economic opportunities present in the tourism industry, with the strong community desire to protect culture and use tourism as a vehicle for revitalization, and to build stronger bonds with other indigenous peoples.

### PARTICIPATION IN PUEBLO & NAVAJO COMMUNITY EVENTS

I was fortunate to receive multiple invitations to witness community feast day celebrations and other cultural/religious ceremonies from indigenous students and faculty at NMSU. I would spend the days with their extended family members, listening intently to the cultural teachings and history they had to share, and discussing the various ways nations have held on to their beliefs and practices in the face of over 400 years of successive colonization by Spanish, Mexican and U.S governments.



## PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

During my time in New Mexico, I gave three public presentations to the university community.

### Oct 1- “The Doctrine of Discovery”

I was part of panel responding to a keynote by Dr. Robert Williams (Arizona) on the persistence of this doctrine in North American legal discourse and in government dealings with indigenous nations, and on the potential for the UN Declaration to counter the doctrine’s affect. Dr. J. Luna and Dr. J. Graham from NMSU were the other respondents.

### Oct 18 – “Gazing Across the Medicine Line: Aboriginal Peoples’ Lives within Canada

I gave the audience an overview of the aboriginal peoples in Canada, of the imposition and evolution of government policy, of the current social conditions in both urban and reserve aboriginal communities, and of the various ways aboriginal peoples have resisted the state and at the same time renewed their cultures.

### Oct 24 – “Bordering the Blackfoot World: Neighbouring Tribes Across and Astride the Medicine Line”

Using the Blackfoot territory, which sits astride the Canada-U.S. border, as the case study, I spoke of how the Métis, Cree, Nakoda, Saulteaux, Ktunaxa and others shared portions of the territory, with resulting fluid boundaries of identity and widespread relational networks. I then focused on how the imposition of the boundary disrupted those relations and in some cases split nations themselves, to differential and sometimes disastrous effect.



## LIVING AND LEARNING IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

Though I had been to the American Southwest as a tourist on a number of occasions, the fall provided the first opportunity to live there for an extended period. I was fortunate to find accommodation close to the Las Cruces campus of NMSU, yet within the historic and separate Mexican-American community of Mesilla. Residence in the village, distinctly different in language, adobe architecture, and customs from the American norm, allowed me to learn as much about life in a Mexican milieu as it did about life in an American college town. When strolling the *zócalo* after Sunday mass, listening to mariachis, participating in the Day of the Dead candlelight procession to the cemetery and later celebrations, or visiting a Penitente *morada* to watch ceremony, I could almost believe I was on the opposite bank of the Rio Grande del Norte.

The fall also allowed me to spend time in a large number of indigenous nations, including the Navajo and Apache reservations of Arizona, the Mescalero and Jicarella Apache homelands in the south and north mountains of the state, and in 15 of the 19 Pueblo Nations of New Mexico. In some cases, I was fortunate to spend several days as a guest of family members of a faculty member or student, while in others I was only able to visit as a tourist.

Though the imposition of a reservation system, and federal Indian policy in each country, has led to similarities in living conditions and histories between Canadian aboriginal peoples and our U.S. relations, I was more fascinated by what has emerged as differences. In New Mexico I observed much greater levels of language retention, on reserve residency, community spiritual practice and overall cultural vibrancy than is common in our communities. I attribute that to the greater degree of tribal sovereignty and authority exercised under U.S. law. Tribes control their membership, unlike the external validation of status that occurs under our Indian Act.

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Tribes also control their territory and have clear legal jurisdiction for making and enforcing laws on their territory. Their legal right to establish casinos provides a level of economy unknown to most Canadian reserves. Even the B.C. success example of Osoyoos Indian Band under Chief Louie pales in comparison to the economic vibrancy found on all but the smallest Pueblos.

Another striking difference was in the level of engagement and integration with local and state governments. On reservation schools, delivering tribally controlled curriculum, were part of local school boards. Tribal members filled the ranks of political parties and ran as successful candidates for county

and state positions, from district attorney to senator. In Canada, many aboriginal people have distanced themselves from the political process, at times even refusing to vote, as they attempt to reinforce distinctiveness from the mainstream and are forced to assert sovereignty denied by the state.

New Mexico also provided a window into the western ethos that lingers in the U.S. psyche. I encountered cowboy culture everywhere I went, in both urban/ rural and aboriginal/non-aboriginal spaces. I saw more non-aboriginal people wearing Indian design clothing than anywhere else I've encountered. Cowboy boots were ubiquitous. Weathered wood dominated streetscapes and interior decor. The mythic West flourishes and continues to represent individualism.



## INVOLVEMENT IN NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES

During the Fall 2012 term, I fully immersed myself in the Native Studies department at NMSU, joining two graduate level classes as resource person and discussant. 1) ANTH 508: Ethnohistory of the Blackfeet and 2) ANTH 543: Indigenous Ways of Knowing. I gave one guest lecture in each class, as well as contributed to seminar discussions on the topics each week.

Since the Native Studies program at NMSU resides within Anthropology, I was also invited into many other classrooms. I was part of a panel discussing the place of photography in our communities, and of another on tribal relationship with archeologists.

I joined the Tribal Voices Working Group, a collection of all aboriginal academics working on campus, for monthly meetings and informal gatherings arranged when aboriginal speakers or artists came to campus. John Trudell, noted AIM activist, poet and musician, was one such speaker. We had several discussions about how aboriginal students and academics are best supported within the academy, often comparing the approaches at our own institutions.

Finally, I was able to participate in a number of on campus cultural events e.g. a hand games workshop, a Piki bread (Hopi paper thin cornbread) baking demonstration, an Apache mountain spirit dance performance, and the opening of a new exhibit on pueblo pottery.



## Researching Aboriginal Tourism

During my time in New Mexico, I was able to visit the following indigenous nations to tour their tourism facilities and speak with tribal members involved in representing their cultures to visitors: Mescalero Apache, Jicarilla Apache, San Carlos Apache, Navajo Nation, Hopi Nation, Jemez Pueblo, Taos Pueblo, Picuris Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Santa Clara Pueblo, Acoma Pueblo, Zuni Pueblo, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo; Pojoaque Pueblo and Sandia Pueblo.

The research resulted in a paper titled *"Bounding Engagement, Bordering Identity: Cultural Centres and their use by Indigenous Nations"* which is being presented at the American Indian Studies Association conference, Feb 7-8 in Tempe, Arizona.

The stories gathered and photographs taken will also augment class materials for my courses in First Nations Studies and Recreation & Tourism Management.

## FINAL REFLECTION...

When visiting Sandia Pueblo, I heard this comment. *“If the State of New Mexico promotes Indian people, sites or places, there needs to be a substantial return for that intrusion in our lives”*. I'd call what happens more than an intrusion. The state is relying on aboriginal lives as the core of its brand, and that reliance should be compensated with increased say in brand usage and with transference of a portion of the resources that brand generates. B.C. is no different.

I think the same could be said of universities like VIU. We increasingly trade on aboriginal lives and presence at the institution as a central part of our brand, without the substantial 'return' that should accrue to the people and communities. Universities sell our aboriginality, splash our faces and motifs across websites, and mount art throughout our campuses, yet we under resource Indigenous Studies programs, fail to mandate that all students take courses designed and taught by aboriginal faculty and continue to have small presence serving the research and development needs of local aboriginal communities. At NMSU the Native Studies program had only 1 full-time faculty member and the American Indian Student Center had little money for programming. At VIU the earliest First Nations Studies program in the province was slowly starved of resources, and the number of aboriginal faculty at the institution is still no greater than it was in the mid-nineties. *Shq'aphth* continues to operate with little programming money and thus fails to deliver the aboriginal community presence on campus that it promised. NMSU aboriginal faculty and I both agree that there is still a lot of work to do to balance what we've contributed to the academy and what we have received.



An Apache Mountain Spirit dancer from White Mountain performs at the Pueblo Indian Cultural Center



## APPRECIATIONS

*I would like to thank the following individuals who made my stay in New Mexico a life altering opportunity for personal growth and learning: David Hansen (NMSU International Outreach & Engagement), Mariam Chaiken, Tom Conelly, Fumi Arakawa, Mary Alice Scott, Lois Stanford, Rani Alexander, Beth O'Leary, Barb Burell (members of the NMSU Anthropology Dept), State Senator Ben Shendo and his family (Jemez Pueblo), Joe Graham, Justin McHorse, Jennie Luna, Jeanette Haynes Writer, Joe Gladstone, Michael Ray, Christina Chavez Kelly (NMSU Tribal Voices group members), Ben Shendo Jr., Candace Quam, Heather Curley, Damien Charley (indigenous students who visited VIU in spring and continued friendship in fall), Clyde Vincenti (Jicarilla Apache), Vernon Lujan (Pojoaque Pueblo), Debora Torres (San Ildefonso Pueblo), Curtis Quam (Zuni Pueblo) John Trudell (AIM activist and speaker), and numerous graduate students.*

*A special thank you to Pikani (Blackfoot) friend and mentor, Don Pepion (Native Studies at NMSU), who taught me much about working with indigenous students, sharing one's culture, and moving wisely as an indigenous person within the academic world.*

## RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

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