

Addendum
History 110 (variable topics) History through Film—American Indian History Through Film and
the U.S. Racial/Ethnic Diversity Course Guidelines

Beginning in Fall 2014, for a course at UWW to be considered for a U.S. Racial/Ethnic Diversity designation, the course proposal must state how Course Objectives 1, 2, and 3 are met. In addition, it must state how at least one additional Course Objective (4 and/or 5) is met.

Course Objectives

1. Examines how the interaction and contributions of at least one historically underrepresented racial/ethnic group has shaped and continued to shape United States society.

The story of the lives and experiences of American Indian people are at the foundation of American history. There is no American history without American Indian history. Scholars like Renard Strickland have even gone so far as to describe American Indians as the “miner’s canary” of American history, society, and certainly democracy. This course tells the story and calls out the “mis-story” of American Indian history as portrayed in films by and about American Indians. Too often students (and larger American society) take what they see on the movie screen as reality because they either want to or mistakenly believe the voice-over or introductory film page telling them “the events contained in this film are true...” This course will contrast and correct the story told about American Indian people through film by dismantling the myths and stereotypes wrongly marketed as an authentic story and by employing previously hidden or silenced Indian voices to correct that story. This will include many films either by American Indian writers or filmmakers, or films in which Indian people themselves had a larger hand in telling the story, or at least in ensuring the story was told properly and faithfully to their understanding or experience. Popular and documentary films are an excellent vehicle to help students understand the truths and misconceptions in the many American Indian experiences that are at the foundation of American society, both then and now.

2. Relates the core of the course content to at least one historically underrepresented racial/ethnic group within in the United States.

This survey course focuses exclusively and in total on the experience of American Indian people through United States history from the earliest period of colonization to the present. The films are arranged both by theme and chronology (though both categories overlap) and touch on all generalized regions of the United States in both place and time. Further, the films selected for use in this semester’s offering of the course were selected to include as many different regional or tribal voices, stories, and experiences as possible.

3. Examines how the cultural practices of at least one historically underrepresented racial/ethnic group in the United States are expressed and how a group’s differences in relation to the majority group and/or other minority groups evolve, overlap, and intersect in a variety of contexts, and how the key diversity concepts of power and privilege, and access, impact one’s life and the lives of others.

The films and required readings selected for this semester’s offering of History through Film—American Indian History—will demonstrate how Indian people were either ignorantly or willfully misrepresented by many non-Native filmmakers. This experience continued for

decades (and continues today in many instances, though more subtly or obsequiously) in popular films. As an example, the story of the American West—at least through the 1990s—could not be told, so it seems, without inserting either the “noble savage,” or angry, violent, or simply foolish Indian people into the narrative. American popular films used Native people as the obstruction against which American strength, will, or authority could be exercised. Too often, filmmakers portrayed Indians as the canvas upon which “manifest destiny” was painted. Those false, and expressly hurtful images have remained unchallenged in the public eye and in American society far too long. Sadly, many of those stereotypes form the basis of Indian imagery in American society today—“Chief Wahoo,” “Redskins,” or simply “Indians” as mascots or team names clearly derive from a story too-oft told by Hollywood, and too rarely challenged by good scholarly analysis, history, experience, or perhaps (more bluntly), reality. This course exposes the power and privilege cultivated by these mistaken myths and baseless stereotypes. Further, and though the use of scripts written by Native writers or through films created or directed by Native filmmakers, a more realistic understanding of American Indian historical or contemporary experiences will be developed by students. The direct inclusion of Indian first-hand voices, either in a modern, or historical (oral traditions) form, will demonstrate how old histories can be re-told from different, more culturally sensitive and appropriate perspectives using the same media and similar methods as those used against them. Perspective, understanding, and experience are central to the exploration engaged in this course.

The films used in this course highlight the significant, lasting (surviving) differences between Native peoples and a society that sought for hundreds of years to directly assail them through repeated assimilation attempts. The centrality and priority of family, traditional and syncretic spirituality, connections to the land and environment (whether in a historic/wilderness sense or a more modern/urban sense), and importance of a distinct political/ethnic identity in the United States will be explored both historically and in a more contemporary sense or reality.

There are over 560 federally recognized Indian tribes and bands in the United States today. 11 federally recognized (and 1 not recognized) tribes and bands exist today in Wisconsin. No other ethnic/political group has received the attention in film, for good or ill, as have American Indians. This course will contextualize that attention.

4. Engages students to participate in multicultural activities (for example, travel study, guest speakers, experiential learning) of historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups of the United States.

The course requires attendance in participation in discussion related to films created by American Indian writers and directors. Further, students enrolled in this course are required to participate in on-campus activities related to the *Conversation on Race: A 50 Year Retrospective* program on campus in the Spring 2015 semester (the semester the course is offered). Students are also required to participate in the *Native Pride Lecture Series* on campus in the Spring 2015 term. They are asked/required to bring those experiences back to the classroom and relate those experiences to their discussion of films through the “Film Analysis Reviews” due each week.

5. Fosters the skills and abilities of students which demonstrate intercultural competence. These may include the ability to reflect on one’s own perspectives, to relate to and empathize with others whom we perceive as different from ourselves, and to use appropriate language and

behavior while interacting across differences among historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups within the United States.

Students will develop and demonstrate intercultural competence by participating in the class, engaging in the weekly discussion, and reflecting on the real or manipulated (it is a skill and objective to be able to tell the difference) Indian voice or voices in each film's story. This process is built upon chronologically through the term with increasingly complex films and analyses. All students, whether native or non-Native, will be exposed to, and grow to understand the many different experiences of Indian people in the United States. Native students will learn to appreciate and understand the experiences of other tribal groups in different regions of the United States. Beyond "Indian voice," students will develop an understanding and appreciation for the positive ways in which imagery, music, language, and traditions have been used to protect tribal and individual identity, while and encouraging the growth of respect for the place Indian people have had in both a historic and contemporary American society. This, most certainly, only comes with an understanding of how those qualities had been diminished by Hollywood over time. These experiences and skills will be evaluated and measured weekly through the Film Analysis Reviews and the several examinations scheduled in the course.