

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS  
CENTER FOR CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES  
164 University Park Bldg., Fairbanks, AK 99775-6730

2007 FALL SEMESTER COURSE SYLLABUS

**CCS F608 - INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS**

Tuesday, 5:15 – 8:15 PM    Sept 11 – Dec 11

Course to meet by audio conference and at 164 University Park Bldg., 1000 University Ave., Fairbanks

Instructor:    George Owletuck  
Office:        317 Brooks Building  
Mailing addr: Alaska Native Studies, UAF POB 756300 Fairbanks, AK 99775-6300  
Office Hours: By email or telephonic appointment  
Telephone:    (907) 474-7181    Fax: (907) 474-1957    Email: George.Owletuck@gmail.com

**Course Purposes:**

1. To examine the knowledge systems, ways of knowing and worldviews indigenous people have constructed and drawn upon in relation to the cultural context in which they are situated.
2. To explore the ways in which indigenous knowledge systems have been adapted to meet contemporary imperatives by Native people around the world.
3. To review the epistemological structures and properties that distinguish indigenous knowledge systems from other contemporary knowledge systems.
4. To examine characteristics and features associated with the indigenous knowledge systems of Alaska Native people.
5. To examine some of the cultural considerations that come into play as indigenous people become involved with Western bureaucratic Institutional forms.

**Course Description**

The course will provide students with a comparative survey and analysis of the epistemological properties, worldviews and modes of transmission associated with various indigenous knowledge systems, with an emphasis on those practiced in Alaska.

**Course Requirements**

The course will utilize an audio-conference/seminar format and will rely primarily on readings, practical exercises, written assignments and group discussions led by the instructor, students, and occasional guest speakers. Students are expected to read the assigned materials before each audio-conference/seminar and participate in the subsequent discussions.

## Course Design

The course is designed to acquaint students who are located at sites distant from the UAF campus with the same course content they would be exposed to if they were enrolled in the course on campus. In addition, the course attempts to capitalize on field-based learning opportunities available to off-campus students by incorporating exercises that engage students in on-site data gathering and issue analysis. Since the primary focus of the course is centered in Alaska, many of the readings use examples drawn from Alaska Native and rural school situations, though the issues addressed are relevant and readily generalizable to other cultural contexts as well. If students find an assignment inappropriate to their particular situation, they are invited to contact the instructor to explore a more suitable option. (Please note that the last assignment requires a fair amount of advance reading, so check it out and get started early in the semester).

## Course Administration

The course will be administered through readings, practical exercises, written assignments, and audio-conferences. Students are expected to read the assigned materials before each audio-conference and participate in subsequent discussions. The bridge number to call for the audio-conferences is listed inside the cover of your syllabus.

Students will work independently, with academic assistance available from the instructor and administrative support offered through the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies (474-1902), [fycxcs@uaf.edu](mailto:fycxcs@uaf.edu), or the local rural campus. Course assignments should be sent to the instructor, addressed as follows:

Alaska Native Studies  
University of Alaska Fairbanks  
P.O. Box 756300  
Fairbanks, AK 99775-6300  
Ph: 907-474-7181  
Fx: 907-474-1957  
Email: [ffgno@uaf.edu](mailto:ffgno@uaf.edu)

## Course Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on the basis of the written material turned in to the instructor (please stay within the page length of each assignment). The material will be read, evaluated and returned to the student as soon as possible after receipt. The assignments are worth a total of 100 points, with an additional one to five points available for bonus assignments.

Grades for the course will be assigned on the basis of the following point/grade scale:

90-100 = A  
80-89 = B  
70-79 = C  
60-69 = D  
0 -59 = additional work

**Course Materials - The following readings are required for this course and are in Moodle (contact [sean@ankn.uaf.edu](mailto:sean@ankn.uaf.edu) or 907-474-5897 for access to Moodle):**

Attla - "K'etetaalkkaanee: The One Who Paddled Among the People and Animals"

Nelson - Make Prayers to the Raven

ARCUS - "Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research"

ADF&G - "Subsistence: Adapting Ancient Ways to Modern Times"

Juneau Empire - "Between Worlds: How ANCSA Reshaped the Destinies of AK Native People"

Kawagley - "Alaska Native Holotropic Mind and Science"

Kawagley/Norris-Tull - "The Indigenous Worldview of Yupiaq Culture"

Kawagley/Barnhardt-"Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality"

Barnhardt - "Domestication of the Ivory Tower: Institutional Adaptation to Cultural Distance"

Barnhardt - "Culturally Responsive Institutions for Minority People"

Ermine - "Aboriginal Epistemology"

Scollon - "Bush Consciousness and Modernization"

Bielawski - "Inuit Indigenous Knowledge and Science in the Arctic"

Bielawski - "Cross-Cultural Epistemology: Cultural Re-adaptation Through the Pursuit of Knowledge"

ANKN - "Native Values for the Curriculum"

AEPS - "The Participation of the Indigenous People..."

WIPCE - "Indigenous Ideology and Philosophy"

RuralCAP - "Alaska Native Traditional Knowledge and Ways of Knowing Workshop"

## **Course Requirements**

The course is organized around the following topics:

Unit 1 – Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Worldviews (10 points –Due September 25)

Unit 2 - Indigenous Epistemologies (20 points – Due Oct 9)

Unit 3 - Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Alaska (20 points – Due Oct. 23)

Unit 4 - Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science (15 points – Due Nov. 6)

Unit 5 - Indigenous Adaptations to Bureaucratic Systems (15 points – Due Nov. 20)

Unit 6 – Indigenous Contributions to Contemporary Knowledge (20 Points –Due Dec. 11)

Bonus Optional – (1-5 points – Due Dec. 11)

## **UNIT 1 – Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Worldviews – 10 pts (Due Sept. 25)**

Required Reading:

WCIP - Indigenous Ideology and Philosophy

Kawagley – Alaska Native Holotropic Mind and Science

Kawagley/Barnhardt – Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality

In recent years, indigenous people around the world have been reasserting the right to be indigenous that is to maintain an identity as peoples indigenous to the land in which they live. This assertion was reinforced in 1993 when the United Nations declared 1993-2003 to be the International Decade of the World Indigenous Peoples, out of which came numerous initiatives by indigenous peoples to articulate their rights and role in the new world order. One of the major components of this effort has been the articulation of the makeup and sustainability of indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems, as they relate to the dominant systems under which they have been struggling to survive for the past 500+ years.

In this first unit you will be considering some of the issues that arise from such an effort, drawing upon examples from both the international and local arenas. Based on the readings outlined above, your task is to respond to any five of the nine questions outlined on the first page of the document titled, *Indigenous Ideology and Philosophy*, prepared by WCIP National Aboriginal Conference Secretariat. Using the Kawagley, Kawagley/Barnhardt and WCIP articles along with your own experience as resources, prepare one-page responses to each of the five questions you select, for a total of five pages to be submitted when you are completed. Try to identify some of the characteristics that distinguish indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews from those embodied in Western society. In what ways are they similar or different? Include examples from your own experience to illustrate your points where applicable.

## **Unit 2 – Indigenous Epistemologies – 20 points (Due Oct. 9)**

Required reading:

AEPS – The participation of Indigenous Peoples...

Ermine – Aboriginal Epistemology

RuralCAP – Alaska Native Traditional Knowledge and Ways of Knowing Workshop

Bielawski – Cross-Cultural Epistemology: Cultural Re-adaptation Through the Pursuit of Knowledge

In this unit you will extend the ideas addressed in Unit I to look more specifically at some of the underlying structures and meanings (i.e. epistemologies) associated with indigenous knowledge systems and their implications for the lives of indigenous people today.

Your task for this unit is to read the articles listed above and review again the articles in Unit I, and then reflect on your own knowledge system and ways of making sense of the world to identify and describe three instances (one page each) from your own experience that illustrate how different cultural outlooks can lead to conflicting points of view on the same issue. To do this you will have to take some time to think about situations that go beyond differences of opinion within a particular worldview, and try to come up with examples that illustrate deeper differences in ways of thinking. Following the three examples, prepare a one-page summary of some of the qualities that you would consider important in describing your own personal 'epistemology' and how they influence your thinking and behavior. The authors will give you plenty of ideas to reflect on, so draw on the readings to help you with your analysis and discussion. When you are done, you should have four pages to submit for this unit.

### **Unit 3 – Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Alaska – 20 points (Oct. 23)**

Required Reading:

Attla – K’etetaalkkaanee: The One Who Paddled Among the People and Animals

Nelson – Make Prayers to the Raven

ANKN – Native Values for the Curriculum

In this unit, we will be taking an in-depth look at one indigenous knowledge system in Alaska (Koyukon) from a couple of different perspectives. While each cultural region is unique and distinct in many ways, they also share common beliefs and values in other ways, so you will need to be careful about the degree of generalizing you do from region to another. Read/review the above publications and then write a one-page paper in response to each of the questions listed below (5 pages altogether). Please keep each paper to one page, and back up your responses with references to the readings as well as your own examples,

For those of you interested, KUAC, 907-474-7491 (or <http://www.alaskaone.org> after Aug. 24) has the five-part series of *Make Prayers to the Raven* on DVD for \$99.95 (not sold individually). The UA Museum, UAF Campus, has a limited supply of the five-part video series on *Make Prayers to the Raven*. Video # 2 is sold out at this time but others can be ordered individually (\$29.95 each) by calling the museum at 474-7505, or email [museum@uaf.edu](mailto:museum@uaf.edu). Note: UA Museum offers 10% discount to members.

1. What are some of the characteristics that distinguish Catherine Attla’s description of life in the Koyukuk River area from that of Richard Nelson? To what extent are their descriptions of the Koyukon worldview similar or different?
2. What are some of the implications of the different ways in which Catherine Attla and Richard Nelson come to know what they know?
3. In what ways does a subsistence lifestyle influence a worldview and knowledge system? Or is it the other way around?
4. What similarities and/or differences do you see between the various lists of Native values?
5. Select one of the lists of values in your packet and review it with an Elder in your community. What was his/her reaction, and to what extent do you see those values reflected in the everyday life of people in the community?

### **Unit 4 – Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science – 15 points (Due Nov. 6)**

Required reading:

Kawagley/Norris-Tull - The Indigenous Worldview of Yupiaq Culture

Bielawski – Inuit Indigenous Knowledge and Science in the Arctic

All indigenous people have developed their own systems of thought to suit their needs in the context of a particular physical and cultural environment. To the extent that “science” consists of systematic observation to make sense of the world in which we live, all people have practiced a form of science, though in Western contexts the term is used to refer to a particular set of prescribed practices. What happens when people from different cultural backgrounds with different systems of thought come in contact with one another? After reading the above articles, and reviewing some of the previous readings, please address the following tasks.

1. Write a one page critique of each of the two articles as they relate to some aspect of life in your community. Give examples from your own experience to illustrate your points where possible. (2 pages)

2. After reading the articles, take a stroll around your own community and talk to some local people about their understanding of where the knowledge they use on a day-to-day basis originates, as well as the role that “science” plays in generating that knowledge. How they determine what knowledge is valid and what isn’t? Then, write up a summary of what you have learned and offer some thoughts with regard to the above questions. (2-3 pages)

### **Unit 5 – Indigenous Adaptations to Bureaucratic Systems – 15 points (Due Nov. 20)**

Required Reading:

Barnhardt – Domestication of the Ivory Tower: Institutional Adaptation to Cultural Distance

Scollon – Bush Consciousness and Modernization

Barnhardt – Culturally Responsive Institutions for Minority People

Juneau Empire – Between Worlds: How ANCSA Reshaped the Destinies of AK Native People

The articles by Barnhardt and Scollon describe some of the ways in which Western bureaucratic institutional structures impact people from non-Western orientations. Based on the issues raised and examples presented in the Juneau Empire publication, write a 3-5 page paper in which you identify some of the consequences for Native people of having to work within Western corporate, bureaucratic and legal frameworks to represent and protect their own identity and interests, as well as some of the alternatives that are available to offset the limitations of those systems.

### **Unit 6 – Indigenous Contributions to Contemporary Knowledge – 20 points (Due Dec. 11)**

Required Reading:

ADF&G – Subsistence: Adapting Ancient Ways to Modern Times

ARGUS – Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research

Indigenous people around the world, including Alaska Natives, have been actively seeking ways to re-integrate their own beliefs, values and ways of knowing into the daily life of their communities in culturally appropriate ways. As you read through the materials you will find many common themes with regard to the application of traditional cultural practices in arenas ranging from education to research to resource management. Examples of the latter are described in the collection of articles put out by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In all arenas, there has been a clear and consistent shift toward recognizing the validity and contributions of indigenous knowledge systems in the contemporary world. The need to adapt research priorities and practices to better reflect indigenous points of view has led to the development of a set of “Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic,” as presented in the ARCUS publication.

Your task for this unit is to review the Principles of Conduct of Research in the Arctic, as well as the articles in the ADF&G publication on traditional and contemporary knowledge related to subsistence, and then conduct a mini research project of your own to prepare a case study on some topic or issue comparable to those in the ADF&G publication. Be sure to adhere to the principles of conduct in carrying out your research, including sharing the results with those involved (especially Elders) and pursuing publication in a local paper or newsletter. You should have a topic in mind by the time we get to the midpoint of the course, so that you can share your ideas on the Audioconference scheduled for Oct. 23. The final paper for this unit should be in the 6-8 page range. Give the assignment some careful thought and where appropriate, make use of any of the ideas we have covered in this course.

### **Optional Bonus Assignment – 1 point (Due Dec. 11)**

Please write a one page critique of this course, including critical comments on both the format and the content, as well as your assessment of the readings. This assignment is worth one point no matter what you say, so say what you think, I won't read it until after the other assignments have been graded.

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This is the alternative response to Unit 6 – Indigenous Contributions to Contemporary Knowledge. This should be typewritten, double-spaced, using font 10, and six to eight pages long. This could be the most contribution from indigenous societies to the modern world in my estimation. Read the statement carefully and be aware of it during your readings, interviews, discussions, and media reports.

PLACE/COMMUNITY IS AN EXPERIENCE THAT IS CREATED.

The following are some guiding questions:

What part does the Native language and culture play?

Changing one's self-image takes a paradigm shift for it to be more active. What does this say about the relatedness between one's consciousness and one's actions?

What changes need to happen in one's life to bring this about where place becomes an experience?

Good to have you aboard this short odyssey in another's eyes. To learn of another's worldview is to learn more about your own.