

GRADUATE LEVEL
Indigenous Approaches to Peace
A Master's Degree Curriculum
designed for the
The University of Peace, Costa Rica
by Paula Underwood

Just as Indigenous approaches to human compatibility with the environment constitute in many ways multiple object lessons for Western society, so do Indigenous approaches to peace offer us an opportunity to creatively compare and contrast options.

Western governmental forms are more broadly based on Native American concepts than many of us realize. Let's look for a moment at only one such creative cultural interface -- the extent to which the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace provided a conceptual base for many elements in the U.S. Constitution. In turn, the U.S. Constitution has provided a conceptual framework for a number of other constitutions around the world . . . thereby spreading such concepts as checks and balances, limits to power to prevent abuse of power, and impeachment around the world.

Given this widely spread, if not always in-depth, influence of the Great Law of Peace; may we not wisely explore this connection further? Examine more closely the elements that enabled and still enable this Agreement for Peace to function effectively for over a thousand years? And look at other Indigenous options? May we not learn from Indigenous compatibility with the Earth and all her elements a new approach to compatibility with each other?

This program is designed to contain strong academic standards. In studying Indigenous ways, it would be counterproductive to move so far away from Western academic requirements as to bring into question the viability of the program in that context.

At the same time, there must be adequate inclusion of Indigenous approaches to life and learning, a greater emphasis on experiential learning, so that Master's candidates can have the opportunity to understand these approaches from the inside out, rather than only from the outside in, in lecture course form. In other words, candidates will have many opportunities to become what they learn.

With these academic and Indigenous foci, each candidate will have two Advisors, one with excellent Western academic credentials and one with the equivalent experience and training in an Indigenous approach to learning and human decision-making. The candidate will consult with both Advisors, separately and together, at appropriate times during each academic year. In case of a lack of resolution between these two Advisors and the Candidate, a third party trained in Consensus building will be routinely assigned by the University to encourage agreement.

Basic academic requirements for consideration as a candidate under this Master's degree program include a Bachelor's degree in Education, Political Science, Government, (Anthropology?), Psychology, Cross-cultural, or Multicultural Studies. Candidates must have a good college level grade average or equivalent and must show proficiency at the Bachelor's degree level in analysis and comprehension, as well as clear indications of a meaningful level of cross cultural sensitivity, and a capacity to learn in varying contexts. Credit will be given for appropriate extra-academic experiences.

Courses may be taught in both English and Spanish. Portuguese may also be

included. Language facility will be emphasized, but full bilinguality will not be required. Courses provided by and included in this two-year Master's program are:

First Year

Indigenous Approaches to Peace, a Survey Course in Literature with special emphasis on broad-based North American Peace Agreements. One semester.

Indigenous Peace Agreements - Lecture/experiential course featuring representatives of ongoing Indigenous cultures which grew out of such agreements and, perhaps, still maintain them. One semester. Prerequisite - Survey Course in Literature.

Language and its Impact on Human Thought - A survey and experiential course on various human methods of communication and their impact on human thought processes. Alternative forms of communication used in Indigenous cultures -- such as sign or Hand, being of One Mind, communication without speech -- will be studied. Selected experiences in each will be offered in the second semester. In this course there will be a special emphasis on the nature of changes in the thinking of Western science over the last hundred years on various forms of communication and brain functioning. Aspects of psychology, anatomy, and biology will be included. One year course.

Community and Consensus 201a - Overview study of nature and application of the consensus process, identifying both areas in contemporary society that already use this process and other Earth cultures for which the consensus process provides a base. This course will also focus on searching out additional areas where the consensus process might enhance our potential for amicable accord. One semester.

Community and Consensus 201b - Training and skills practice in identifying circumstances in which consensus may resolve issues effectively, providing training to potential participants in the consensus process (training in how to train), on-campus practice in resolving issues through consensus involving previously untrained participants. One semester.

The Great Web of Life - A study of the contrasts between Western compartmentalization and the Indigenous sense of wholeness, the Great Web, and the effects of each on local and global community. First semester will include lecture, guest lecturers, a reading survey, and on-site visitation. Second semester will extend to a study of additional cultures and will include forms of experiencing wholeness directly. One year course.

Summer Study

Vision Quest - Over the summer each candidate will select an approach to perceiving the wholeness of life and each individual's place in that wholeness which has been developed by an Indigenous People over hundreds, thousands of years. The University must consider that some of these approaches use halucinogenics. Others do not, using only what is called in English 'fasting and meditation' to accomplish this goal. The candidate will not be required to 'succeed' in this experience. Rather, the candidate will consider this an exploration of possibilities and an experiential learning. A number of organizations are available to cooperate with this learning. For instance, Coyote Gathers His People in New Mexico has an on-the-land experience in Community Building. The Earth Restoration Corps (ERC) is developing a training program for young people focused on learning the Natural Laws or Attitudes which engender a healthy Earth. This choice will be made in consultation with the candidate's Advisors. In the Fall the candidate will discuss this experience orally with his, with her Advisors.

Second Year

Survey Course in Indigenous Economic Structures - prerequisite:

One year of Basic Economic Theory. Course studies many broadly-based economic systems among North American indigenous peoples. Candidate reports on one such system, comparing and contrasting it with Western economic systems usually covered in Economics 101. Many of these Indigenous economic systems extended over thousands of miles and encompassed broadly varying peoples. Impact of various systems on group and individual psychology will be analysed. One year course.

Community and Consensus 202 - Applied consensus. Individual candidates will identify an off-campus group with minimal skills in consensus and one or more serious issues to resolve, work out an agreement with that group whereunder they will participate in the program, provide consensus training to participants, and sit back and watch the process function. Candidate will provide supervising professor with an analysis of the process and of the results which may be used by others encouraging consensus in the community as a way marker or as a warning. One semester to one year, depending on candidate.

Human Compatibility With the Earth - This course will study and consider the effect of human compatibility or incompatibility with the Earth and its effect on individual, group, and global potentials for peace. Must we make peace with the Earth in order to make real and lasting peace with each other? Prerequisite - Great Web of Life. One year course.

Indigenous Approaches to Learning - This course will use the Western disciplines of Education and Psychology to compare and contrast various cultural learning styles, analysis their efficacy in various contexts and for different individuals. One year course.

Study and Application - Candidate internship in an area chosen in consultation with candidate's Advisors. Special study may be recommended by Indigenous Advisor. This internship will be chosen as a precursor to the candidate's proposed Master's thesis.

Master's Thesis

Both the area of consideration and the manner of presentation will be selected in consultation with the candidate's Advisors. Presentation may be in the form of a written thesis, a film, or other media in which the subject of focus and its application will be presented and considered. Analysis may or may not be appropriate at this point. Recognition of Indigenous ways of thinking and of presenting experience will be considered in this selection and in the process itself.

As a result of this training, candidate will show an advanced understanding of Western and non-Western, especially Indigenous, approaches to broad-based community and nation building, as well as a cross-cultural understanding of the essential element in Peace Agreements that last. Candidate will be prepared to participate in negotiations, train participants in consensus processes, and/or teach these basic approaches to others.