Arizona State University’s American Indian Studies (AIS) program affords students the opportunity to study issues of American Indian nations within domestic and international contexts.

Supported by the histories, languages, cultures and arts, the program encompasses these areas of emphasis: legal, policy, community and economic development; and arts, languages and culture. AIS graduates are prepared for careers on the tribal, state and federal government levels. Protecting the uniqueness of the indigenous people of North America, the AIS program constructs a learning environment encouraging critical and creative thought, which is crucial in our current era.

In the wake of the Trump administration, the 19th annual American Indian Studies Association Conference looks to answer how American Indian nations can persevere through these challenging times and address the political, environmental and social turmoil, with respect to the diversity and promoting equality on behalf of everyone with your help. The organizers of the AISA Conference welcome proposals for paper and panel presentations, posters, roundtables, film screenings and workshops, with consideration given to other topics that relate to American Indian issues.

Led by interim director, Dr. James Riding In, AIS is striving to not only be important and relevant to Native nations, organizations and peoples, but also to society as a whole. Riding spoke with TBJ about ASU’s AIS department and its programs.

**WHAT IS THE ASU AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES PROGRAM AND HOW WAS IT ESTABLISHED?**

Arizona State University offers one of the most comprehensive American Indian Studies (AIS) programs in the nation. In 1993, myself and another faculty member in the school of justice studies, Carol Chiao Lujan (Navajo), established the American Indian Justice Studies Certificate Program to enable students to learn about American Indian sovereignty and federal American Indian law and policy. Because of the certificate program’s success, the Native faculty decided to push for the establishment of a stand-alone AIS program. Achieving this status in 2001, AIS began the process of building its curriculum and hiring a faculty. AIS offers both a bachelor of science degree and a minor in American Indian Studies.

**The Facts**

- **Location:** 250 Lemon St., Tempe, AZ 85287
- **Director:** Dr. James Riding In
- **Established:** 2001
- **Mission:** To prepare scholars who are proactive and critical thinkers grounded in the histories, languages, cultures, arts and contemporary realities of American Indian nations and peoples through an academic program designed to protect the integrity, identity and sovereignty for the Indigenous populations of North America and the World.

The essence of AIS is expressed in its paradigm: The American Indian Studies paradigm is grounded in the experiences of American Indian nations, peoples, communities and organizations from American Indian perspectives. Its principles are rooted in the concepts of sovereignty and indigeneity. It recognizes that disparate worldviews, literatures, knowledge systems, political structures and languages characterize American Indian societies within the United States, but

**ASU’s American Indian Studies program board**
that they share commonalities that link them with other indigenous peoples of the world. It acknowledges that colonialism has impacted the sovereignty, human rights, health, welfare and cultural integrity of American Indian nations.

AIS focuses on the protection and strengthening of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, self-sufficiency and human rights. AIS faculty must view their teaching, research and service as a sacred responsibility to American Indian nations undertaken for the sake of cultural survival. AIS provides a curriculum for the intellectual, ethical, and social development of students so they will acquire a comprehensive and practical understanding of U.S. Indian law and policy, colonization/decolonization and nation building.

AIS privileges oral history and traditional knowledge while promoting collaborative community-based research methods that transcend disciplinary boundaries. It calls for partnerships with Indian nations, communities and organizations that seek tangible and sensible solutions rooted in indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge to address problems facing American Indian nations. It acknowledges that American Indian concepts of living in a balanced, harmonious and reciprocal relationship with our Earth Mother have a place in dialogues concerning sustainable communities, climatic change, environmental degradation and justice. It trains future leaders and intellectuals to meet challenges of an ever-changing world.

WHAT WAS GOING ON IN INDIAN COUNTRY THAT INFLUENCED THE CREATION OF THE ASU AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES PROGRAM?

American Indian nations, organizations and peoples face unique challenges that require the implementation of extraordinary efforts. These challenges mostly stem from the subjugation of American Indian nations under U.S. colonial domination in the 1800s to the present.

For years, American Indian leaders have been struggling to preserve our sovereignty, cultures, lands, religious freedom and human rights. During the late 1800s, visionary American Indian scholars such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn [Crow Creek Sioux Tribe], Vine Deloria Jr. [Cahuilla; the late founder of the American Indian Congress of America], Alfonso Ortiz [Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo; the late president of the Association on American Indian Affairs], and Bishop Matinez, Gila River Pima; Michelle Hane, Navajo, Laguna, Ottawa; Leo Killsback, Northern Cheyenne; Temnille Marley, White Mountain Apache; Mary Eunice Romero-Little, Coctiti Pueblo; Cheryl Bennett, Navajo, Comanche; and Jolyana Begay, Navajo. The AIS faculty consists of myself, James Riding In, Pawnee and interim director; Myla Vicenti-Carpio, a sacred responsibility to American Indian nations must view their teaching, research and service as integral to that campus’s intellectual environment.

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA?

The University of Minnesota was providing the support to enable their AIS programs to become integral to that campus’s intellectual environment. Our location, in a state and geographic area central to the needs of Indian Country. We have established an interdisciplinary program that encourages the free exchange of ideas and research. Until 2014, ASU hosted the annual AISA conference, but now the Native American Studies Program at the University of New Mexico holds the conference every other year.

The 19th annual AISA conference will be held at ASU in Tempe on February 1st and 2nd, 2018. The theme is “Unsettling American History: American Indian Studies in the Time of the Trump Administration, White Supremacy and Settler Nationalism.”

WHAT IS THE ASU AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES PROGRAM’S VISION FOR THE FUTURE?

AIS plans to grow by changing from a program to a School of Indigenous Studies, establishing several endowed chairs, and developing a doctoral program. We seek to provide meaningful service to American Indian nations, organizations and people. For more information about the University’s American Indian Studies Program visit the website at https://americanindian.clas.asu.edu.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CURRENT AIS INITIATIVES AND HOW WILL THESE EFFORTS BETTER THE STUDENT BODY AND BEYOND?

AIS uses its limited resources to promote faculty research and development, enhance the intellectual environment with guest speakers, initiate collaborative projects with other ASU units and Indian nations while supporting student development and community activities. Our location, in a state and geographic region with one of the largest U.S. American Indian populations, makes our mission even more important and we must reach out to the needs of Indian Country.

AIS' distinguished speaker series features alumni whose works are making a difference in Indian Country. We have established an interdisciplinary certificate program and degree programs with other ASU academic units (Politics and Global Studies, Leadership & Management and Public Administration Programs) at the Tempe and downtown Phoenix campuses. We provide internship opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students across American Indian and Washington, D.C.

AIS is also the home of Wezo So Revise: A Journal of Native American Studies, a leading interdisciplinary periodical devoted to publishing new thought in AIS and to disseminating original research concerning historical, contemporary, political, legal, religious, environmental and other matters.

Our faculty conducts research on health issues, human rights violations, language revitalization, border town violence, self-governance, leadership, intellectual history and urban histories from an American Indian perspective. They have served as expert witnesses in legal cases about sports mascots, sacred places and religious freedom.

The AIS faculty consists of myself, James Riding In, Pawnee and interim director; Myla Vicenti-Carpio, a sacred responsibility to American Indian nations must view their teaching, research and service as integral to that campus’s intellectual environment.

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE AND WHAT CAN ATTENDEES EXPECT THIS YEAR?

During the early 2000s, AIS faculty played a leading role in the development of the American Indian Studies Consortium, later renamed the American Indian Studies Association (AISA). This association’s annual conference brings together over a hundred scholars, graduate students, undergraduates and community members in a series of sessions that encourages the free exchange of ideas and research. Until 2014, ASU hosted the annual AISA conferences, but now the Native American Studies Program at the University of New Mexico holds the conference every other year.

The 19th annual AISA conference will be held at ASU in Tempe on February 1st and 2nd, 2018. The theme is “Unsettling American History: American Indian Studies in the Time of the Trump Administration, White Supremacy and Settler Nationalism.”

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES PROGRAM’S VISION FOR THE FUTURE?

AIS plans to grow by changing from a program to a School of Indigenous Studies, establishing several endowed chairs, and developing a doctoral program. We seek to provide meaningful service to American Indian nations, organizations and people. For more information about the University’s American Indian Studies Program visit the website at https://americanindian.clas.asu.edu. ♦