

## **2010 Engaged Scholars Academy Project Information Report**

*First Nations, Lasting Nations: Community/University Partnerships in Indigenous New England*

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&

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### Project Description:

Over the course of the academy we have focused on planning the University of New Hampshire's first Indigenous New England Conference. There is a growing recognition across the New England states of the need to make the region's contemporary Native American people and concerns more visible, and to create increased dialogue between Native and non-Native American communities. The objective of hosting this conference at UNH is to build on existing working relationships between scholars at UNH and local Abenaki communities and to give coherence to our many overlapping research, teaching, and service interests in Native American Studies at UNH. Two non-profit groups focused on Native New England with whom we have extant relationships are co-organizers of the conference, Gedakina and Winter Center for Indigenous Traditions. Together, we aim to use this conference as a means for building long lasting and mutually beneficial relationships between UNH and local communities that enhances scholarship at UNH as well as makes UNH more responsible to and accessible by local Native communities. This project will directly further the new Strategic Plan's initiative for Inclusive Excellence.

## Background and Statement of the Issues

As we said above, there is a growing recognition across the New England states of the need to make the region's contemporary Native American people and concerns more visible, and to create increased dialogue between Native and non-Native American communities. Maine and Massachusetts have passed laws requiring public schools to teach about regional indigenous cultures; New Hampshire is currently undergoing a legislative effort to establish an Indian Commission like those in Vermont, Maine and Massachusetts.

Within this context, public universities in New England have increasingly asked themselves about their responsibility to local Native communities. Models of the answers developed from this inward examination of the place of Native peoples in universities come from Maine and Massachusetts. UMass-Boston established the pioneering Institute for New England Native American Studies, which seeks to let Native American communities, in the words of its mission statement, "connect with university resources and advocate for their own research agendas." UMaine's Wabanaki Center was modeled after this program and has been promoting, among other things, new Native American playwriting and community performance.

Over recent years, the University of New Hampshire has seen an increase in Native American Studies curriculum and events. Gedakina, Inc., an Abenaki-operated nonprofit based in Milford, NH, has worked with UNH on several occasions to provide Native American programming, including a film screening with the famous activist John Trudell in Fall 2009, another film screening with documentary film Maker Malinda Maynor-Lowery, and a Native American women's poetry festival. The Winter Center for Indigenous Traditions, in Hanover, has built a relationship with UNH for several years now, working in official capacity as

consultants on repatriating the human remains in the university's archaeological collections under NAGPRA. However, UNH has yet to undertake the same kind of inward examination as the aforementioned schools in neighboring states and the initiatives have been somewhat piecemeal. Consequently, we have yet to develop the institutional space, in a physical but also a deeper structural way, for a sustained **engagement** with local Abenaki communities and Native American Studies scholarship.

### Project Details

Our conference will begin the hard work of formalizing what sustained engagement with local Native communities should look like at UNH by creating an opportunity for interested academics and Native community leaders to come together to discuss mutual needs, opportunities, and long-range goals and planning. The three partners in this project, ourselves (and UNH more broadly), Gedakina, and Winter Center for Indigenous Traditions, have simply not had enough opportunities to sit down all together to discuss initiatives in Native studies at UNH. We feel the time is ripe for mutual conversation with other Abenaki community members and regional Native American Studies experts where we can both learn from other examples and identify ways to build this engagement suited to the unique needs of local communities in New Hampshire. We also plan to gauge whether this one-day conference might serve as a pilot for an annual interdisciplinary conference on Indigenous New England which could potentially frame the broader project of Native scholarship and presence at UNH.

This conference builds on efforts already underway at the initiative of each partner: UNH's efforts to increase its Native American programming; the WCIT's efforts in heritage

management (repatriating sacred Abenaki items to their rightful place, inventorying and curating other items for research and education, and archiving the WCIT's own extensive ethnohistorical information); and Gedakina (including increased Native American programming and cultural opportunities for Native youth). One area we hope to address in organizing this conference and launching this broader partnership is the constraints on the pools of funding available to the three partners as individual entities. UNH has offered some support for campus-based Native American programming over the years, but not in any systemic way; it has been largely dependent on individual faculty or staff cobbling together small amounts from various decentralized offices. And like other universities these days, UNH is facing difficult financial times. The WCIT, for its part, is at a pivotal moment in its own fundraising to protect and preserve its valuable collections and must focus its resources there. Gedakina, meanwhile, has been successful in securing large grants, mainly for individual projects. In sum, all of us feel pressured to apply piecemeal to various granting entities for ever smaller amounts of money. This is not unusual in the world of nonprofits, of course, especially today. But with this conference, and the opportunity to define our longer-range goals and partnership, we hope to present a united front, as it were, to apply together for bigger and more long-term funding for critical projects which would mutually benefit all involved.

We have made progress on these goals over the course of the term. We have planned the conference for September 17 and 18, 2010 in Holloway Commons at UNH and secured excellent invited speakers. We expect these invited guests to attract considerable attention. Our plenary presenters are the renowned Abenaki author Joseph Bruchac and his son Jesse Bruchac, who is pioneering Abenaki language revitalization in northern New England. Our keynote speaker is Dr. Jean O'Brien (Ojibwe), one of the best-known historians of Native Americans in New

England and author of the new book, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. In addition to being groundbreaking writers and speakers, all three are experienced brokers between indigenous and university communities and will help guide our dialogue on this topic at the conference. We released a call for papers and have received submissions and are currently reviewing them and creating grouped panels. It looks as if we will have panel presentations and roundtables including the WCIT and other Native American consultants who have worked with New England universities on the repatriation of archaeological collections; Gedakina and other organizations working in language revitalization and youth projects; local Abenaki activists discussing family histories, and the proposed New Hampshire Indian Commission; and faculty, staff and community members connected to Indigenous centers at other universities (like UMass Boston and UMaine) discussing how they built their socially responsive, accessible and scholarly centers at their institutions.

We have applied together (the three partners) for two grants to support the conference costs. We applied to the American Studies Association for \$3000 and are about to submit our grant proposal to the New Hampshire Humanities Council requesting another \$3000. Siobhan is also currently the Hayes Chair in the Center for the Humanities at UNH and funds from this will be applied to the conference. Rick Pouliout, the head of Gedakina, is also committing financial support from his extant grants. We feel meeting with success at this scale will help us envision ways to apply for larger grants together. The conference itself can be understood as a plan to continue our collaborations beyond the single weekend it takes place. This conference is not a one-shot event but hopefully the first of many Indigenous New England conferences to be held either annually or every other year and the formal start of a broader vision and engagement with Native communities and scholarship at UNH.

The connection of this project to our scholarship deserves some discussion. We have both struggled with how we can move this engaged project from outreach to true engaged scholarship. While we do different research, we are connected by our intellectual interest in creating transcultural *space* through our research, space for multiple conversations, engagements, interventions, and critiques centered on writing (for Siobhan) and materiality (for Meghan) and both focused on temporality. We seek to find ways to bring into the fore alternative epistemologies and ontologies. This is a line of scholarly inquiry we are confident can lead to publications in our respective disciplines. We also have discussed publishing on our experiences building this partnership at UNH in venues that are new to us that we have learned about in the academy, such as engaged scholarship academic journals. It is certainly the case that engaging with Abenaki partners makes our work better and we are actively pursuing ways to transform that into focused scholarly work (or as was said in the academy ‘making it count’).

### Evaluation Plan

In the short term, we have a well developed evaluation plan. During the conference we will have large paper boards where people can write out any ideas that come to them during the conference for our long range plans, in an informal brainstorming type fashion (this idea was inspired by our Engaged Scholars coach Karen Graham). In addition to this informal feedback we will hand out formal evaluations at the end of the conference which we will use to help guide our future efforts. As we advance our collaboration, we will continue developing ways of assessing our collaboration that let us understand if and how our work is mutually beneficial and generating new knowledge.