

The M.C./Native Voices Degree

Program Description

Native Voices, the premier Native American media training center in the United States, in cooperation with the Department of Communication and the Center for American Indian Studies at the University of Washington, offers a Masters of Communication degree program in Native American documentary production.

In the popular media, who decides what stories are significant? Mainstream media institutions do not consider important the everyday stories and the commonplace histories of the Native Peoples of North America. The vast majority of documentary histories that are produced center on the brief period known as the “Indian Wars.” Documentaries dealing with tribal communities today focus on social problems or reinforce new age stereotypes about Native people. Media institutions and mainstream media producers simply do not see Native people as a part of everyday life. They are reduced to Other status. Unless their stories can be portrayed as exotic and aesthetically different, they are ignored.

Open dialogue among all Americans is critical if we are to heal the historic wounds that divide us against one another. But too often the Native American perspective has not been heard. Native Voices offers graduate students the opportunity to explore the documentary tradition from an Indigenous perspective, and to produce documentary programs that speak to critical personal, social, and political issues in their lives. We encourage intimate, personal films and new media from an individual’s tribal point of view.

In the Native Voices degree program, Native American students are given the support to study, research, and produce documentary films and digital media that are relevant both to the Native American communities from which they emerge and the nation as a whole.

Native Voices offers students an opportunity to develop their voices in the media, in conjunction with focused study of communication theory and research. The degree allows for a great deal of flexibility, and it allows students with backgrounds and interests in communication, history, the environment, law, and other subjects to explore these subjects through documentary expression. To ensure a rich learning environment, Native Voices encourages applications from individuals from diverse interests and backgrounds.

Overview of Degree Requirements

To obtain the Masters of Communication, you must complete 45 credits of course work and pass an oral examination on the Native Voices Final Project.

Coursework

During the first year in the program, studies focus on indigenous media and the documentary form. In this year, students also develop their voice and technique in media through a series of course-centered and faculty-mentored projects. The program culminates in ten credits of a final project in which students will produce an original documentary or new digital media. The required coursework includes the following:

20 credits in the Department of Communication:

1. COM 500-593: 10 credits of 500-level communication courses. This is typically two 500-level seminars.
2. COM 600: 10 credits in Documentary Research and Production. To be taken for the completion of the final project.

25 credits in American Indian Studies/Native Voices

1. WOMEN 443 - Representations of Native Americans in the Media and Popular Culture. (5 credits)
2. AIS 501 - Documentary Film/Video Research Methods in American Indian Communities. (5 credits)
3. AIS 502 - Documentary Production in American Indian Communities. (5 credits)
4. AIS 503 - Documentary Form, Theory, and Practice. (5 credits)
5. AIS 504 - Survey of Indigenous Media. (5 credits)

The Native Voices M.C. Final Project

Study in the Native Voices program leads to the production of an original documentary or new digital media. This final project must be produced at a high professional level capable of broadcast distribution, exhibit originality in both form and content, and make a significant contribution to the documentary field from a Native American perspective.

Satisfactory completion of the project will culminate in an oral defense, typically lasting 1½ hours. To earn the M.C., a student must successfully defend the project at this meeting or make revisions required by the committee. At least two committee members must be present for the oral defense. Students often defend their project in the Spring or Summer quarter of their second year.

To graduate, students must fill out an on-line masters degree request with the Graduate School. The Department of Communication's Graduate Program Assistant, Patty Fortine, can assist students with this and other Graduate School procedures.

Additional Policies and Requirements

Time to Completion

It is expected that a student can earn the Native Voices M.C. in the Department of Communication in two years (six quarters, not counting summer), but it is common for students to remain in the program for up to three years. In accordance with University rules, there is a six-year time limit to completion of the M.C. degree.

Supervisory Committee

Every Native Voices M.C. student has a supervisory committee that oversees the progress of their graduate studies. This committee must have at least two members, although a three-member committee is strongly recommended. The committee chair must be regular or adjunct faculty in the Department of Communication, American Indian Studies, or Womens Studies. The Department of Communication Graduate Program Assistant must be notified of Chair and Committee selection by the end of the 3rd quarter of study.

Program of Study

Native Voices M.C. students must file with the Graduate Program Assistant a Program of Study signed by all committee members by the end of the 3rd quarter of study. Typically, a student's supervisory committee does not convene a meeting to review the Program of Study. Once approved by the committee, the Department of Communication Graduate Program Coordinator will conduct a final review of the Program of Study to ensure that it meets all of the program requirements.

Please click [here](#) to access the M.A. program of study form in Microsoft Word format. [See Program of Study Template at the end of this document.]

Thesis Project Prospectus

Typically in the Autumn quarter of the second year, Native Voices M.C. students develop and seek committee approval of a thesis project prospectus. The prospectus is a narrative description of the project research and production that the student intends to undertake, and it is usually developed in close consultation with the chair of the student's supervisory committee. Different committee chairs have different expectations for the precise preparation of the prospectus, so each student should discuss prospectus requirements directly with his or her committee chair. The prospectus must be approved by at least two committee members, though it is strongly recommended that all members review and approve the prospectus. An approved thesis prospectus is due by the end of the 4th quarter of study (excluding summers), but it may not be submitted until a student has removed any outstanding incompletes (prior courses in which the student has not yet received a grade).

Click [here](#) to access the M.A. thesis prospectus approval form in Microsoft Word format. [See the form at the end of this document.] This approval form should be signed by the M.C. supervisory committee and attached to the front of the prospectus. After all signatures have been secured, the student should turn in a copy of the cover sheet and prospectus to the Graduate Program Assistant.

Procedures for Continuing to the Ph.D.

Native Voices students may discover that they wish to obtain an academic Ph.D. in communication or another discipline after completing the M.C. Application procedures vary from one program to another, but students who wish to be considered for acceptance to the Ph.D. program in the Department of Communication are encouraged to talk directly with the Graduate Program Coordinator. This meeting gives the student a chance to learn more about the Ph.D. program and how to prepare a high-quality application.

To apply for the Ph.D., a student must provide the Graduate Admissions Committee with the following: a letter of intent; a confidential letter of recommendation from the supervisory committee chair to the admissions committee; a transcript of courses taken during the M.C. program; a curriculum vitae; and a copy of the M.C. project prospectus or other project-related material (e.g., a rough-cut of a documentary or other material demonstrating progress toward completion of the final project). You must also include with your application a sample of scholarly writing that demonstrates research competence (e.g., a seminar paper). In addition, any acceptance to the Ph.D. program is conditional upon final completion of the M.C., including the final project and oral defense.

M.C. students must meet the same application deadlines as all other Ph.D. applicants: February 1 for those seeking assistantships and April 1 for those seeking admission without assistance. Those deadlines are real. Don't miss them.

Summary of Key M.C. Deadlines

- Selection of Supervisory Chair and Committee by the end of the 3rd quarter in the program.
- Program of Study due by the end of the 3rd quarter.
- Final project prospectus due by the end of the 4th quarter in the program (excluding summer).

List of Required Courses in American Indian Studies/Native Voices

WOMEN 443 Representations of Native Americans in the Media and Popular Culture (5 credits) - This course will examine the representation of Native people in film, television, and other popular media. The course will evaluate how and why images are created and recreated, and the impact of stereotypic representations. Critical attention will be given to the intersection of systems of oppression (race-ethnicity, gender, and class) within the context of colonialism and image production.

AIS 501 Native Voices Seminar: Documentary Film/Video Research Methods in Native Communities (5 credits) - This seminar explores the theoretical, methodological, and aesthetic issues faced when researching documentary film and video projects in Native American communities. Utilizes readings, screenings, discussions, and a major research project to explore issues of documentary representation, ethics, and historiography. 1st part of a two-quarter documentary production sequence.

AIS 502 Native Voices Seminar: Documentary Production in American Indian Communities (5 credits) - This course is a continuation of the Native Voices Seminar, Documentary Research Methods in American Indian Communities. Students will gain hands on experience in documentary production and editing as they complete the projects begun in the Research Methods course. 2nd part of a two-quarter documentary production sequence.

AIS 503 Native Voices Seminar: Documentary Form, Theory, and Practice (5 credits) - This seminar explores documentary theory and practice, utilizing readings and documentary filmmaking exercises while investigating traditional and more experimental ideas about non-fiction form; theories of representation, subject ethics, documentary authenticity, the intersection of fiction and non-fiction forms, documentary and performance, documentary and historiography.

AIS 504 Native Voices Seminar: Survey of Indigenous Media (5 credits) - This course explores the use of media -- film, television, radio, print journalism, and new digital media -- by indigenous people from around the world. The course will examine the uses of media in terms of personal, political, and social expression. Additionally, an analysis of the relationship between tribal sovereignty movements and the use of media will be explored.