

2019 UNCP Grant for Excellence in Teaching & Learning Award
Final Report
Submitted January 7, 2020
Jane Haladay, PhD
Professor, Department of American Indian Studies

Background.

The teaching and learning activity for which this grant was approved supported travel and expenses to bring Dr. Richard Grounds, Director of the Yuchi Language Project in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, to UNCP on September 24, 2019. Dr. Grounds presented to three American Indian Studies and English courses (AIS 1010 [Introduction to American Indian Studies], AIS/ENG 2200 WE/SL [Native American Literature, Writing Enriched and Service Learning], and AIS/ENG 2410 WE/SL [Environmental Literature, Writing Enriched and Service Learning]), and at an evening community event. His presentations discussed the relationship between Indigenous languages, traditional ecological knowledge, cultural identity, and the power of language to resist the erasure of Indigenous peoples. 2019 was designated by UNESCO as International Year of Indigenous Languages to highlight the reality that “Languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person’s unique identity, cultural history, traditions, and memory.”¹ Dr. Grounds, who was an instrumental force in advocating for the designation of 2019 as International Year of Indigenous Languages, highlighted the critical value of Indigenous languages to Indigenous cultural identity during his classroom and community presentations.

Grant implementation.

This grant funded the following: 1) Dr. Grounds’ roundtrip airfare from Tulsa, OK to RDU; 2) Dr. Grounds’ meals for three days and refreshments at his evening community presentation in the Museum of the Southeast American Indian; 3) my mileage to and from RDU to pick up and drop off Dr. Grounds; and 4) an honorarium for Dr. Grounds’ four presentations.

Assessment of grant impact.

Students in each of the three classes in which Dr. Grounds spoke were very positive about hearing directly from him about his work. Each class had also been assigned to read a short article by Dr. Grounds prior to his visit, yet his physical presence and storytelling around his work were what galvanized the significance of what they had read, creating a more meaningful and memorable academic experience. Students learned directly from Dr. Grounds, as well as from his article, that Indigenous languages continue to be spoken globally and are worthy of protection, and that there are historical and continuing reasons resulting from colonization that have caused Indigenous language loss. Additionally, students learned that Indigenous languages are connected to impacts on Indigenous food sovereignty, environmental biodiversity, and community health.

¹ “Indigenous Languages: matter for development, peace building and reconciliation.”
<<https://en.iyl2019.org>>

Dr. Grounds' impact on students was expressed by them both verbally and in written reflections. One male, non-Native student in my online Native American Literature class who attended Dr. Grounds' community presentation wrote a comment in his Final Paper that strongly demonstrates the impact grant-funded speaker activities can have on UNCP students at this historically American Indian university. Ryan wrote:

Before taking this class I honestly did not know much about Native American Literature. I would say slim to none. If you had me describe the course, I would say it is about Native Americans and nothing further. This was because I did not care for it. My view of this course and history of Native Americans instantly changed when I was able to listen to Dr. Grounds speak on the life of Native Americans. [I] listened to his perspective on life, morals, and history which made me realize the value of it. After this presentation I started to really understand what the different readings were about and the importance of making their history known to others. I've learned that there is always more to a story than what the authors let on. There is a deeper meaning to each individual poem, novel and short fiction that the authors try to get across to the reader.

Another student in my on-campus Native American Literature course wrote about Dr. Grounds' classroom presentation in his Final Writing Portfolio Reflection Letter. "One of the most amazing things I was able to do was listen to Richard Grounds as well as read [his] excellent text," wrote Caleb. "Dr. Grounds is an amazing speaker and he really put into perspective the view and importance of Native American culture."

The assessment of the grant impact was also evident in the large attendance at Dr. Grounds' evening community presentation (over thirty people) and the positive feedback expressed in written evaluations of the event. In response to the evaluation question, "Was the presentation informative?" thirty-one attendees responded "Yes," and none responded "No." One attendee wrote, "Absolutely! I loved it! Dr. Grounds was entertaining, and I really enjoyed it!" Another audience member wrote that s/he gained an "[u]nderstanding that Indigenous language is a part of our Native Identity and connects us to our Native heritage." The full list of evaluation responses is attached separately as part of this Final Report.

Reflecting on my growth as a teacher-scholar.

I have known Dr. Grounds for the past 20 years, and I have appreciated watching the development the Yuchi Language Project he directs, Dr. Grounds' scholarship, and his regional and international community activism around Indigenous languages. Bringing him to UNCP during the International Year of Indigenous Languages as part of the Native Speakers Series reaffirmed my absolute conviction as an educator of the power of bringing Indigenous speakers to UNCP students, many of whom have not had opportunities to attend public speaker events or have not been aware of such opportunities. This type of embodied learning makes the authors of readings come alive for students and lets them hear a range of important Indigenous voices directly, especially Indigenous voices from other parts of the country whose ideas, cultural issues, and life experiences are at once distinct from and connected to local Native students' own cultural histories and experiences. As scholar, when I observe and share in my colleague Richard's ongoing commitment to Indigenous language revitalization and see the number of new speakers his work has helped grow in the past 20 years, I am both humbled and energized. Witnessing Dr. Grounds' presentations and interactions with students and community members at UNCP affirms my own ongoing work as an American Indian Studies scholar and educator who is committed to social justice, decolonization, and Indigenous self-determination.

Native American Speaker Series
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Dr. Richard Grounds
September 24, 2019
Evaluations

1. Rate the presentation from 1 – 5 (with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor).

- 5 (26)
- 4.5 (1)
- 4 (2)
- 3 (1)
- Unrated (1)

2. How did you hear about this speaker event?

- Professor (22)
- University Emails (9)
- Friends/word of mouth (3)
- NASO (1)
- Newspaper (2)
- Facebook (1)

3. Was the presentation informative?

- Yes (31)
- No (0)
- Absolutely! I loved it! Dr. Grounds was entertaining, and I really enjoyed it!
- Very informative (5)
- It helped me understand what Indigenous people go through
- the event contained lots of information
- Understanding that Indigenous language is a part of our Native Identity and connects us to our Native heritage
- I learned more than I thought I would

4. What did you learn from this presentation?

- The magic behind Indigenous people's disappearance
- The plights and disappearance of Native cultures in the United States
- I learned that people would kill for selfishness to then honor once they achieved their selfish goal
- United States of Amnesia (4)
- The FSU logo head was named asieola [sic]. He fought for the indigenous rights of his people. The colonists didn't respect his wishes or his bones resting with his people
- Different view on [unintelligible]
- The purpose of the magic trick and the disappearing of indigenous people
- In literature they say that tribes are extinct even though they aren't they try to make indigenous people disappear.

- Indian cultures slowly disappeared
- About origins of Native Americans and how the USA suppressed them
- Yuchi may have Federal Recognition in 20 years right now they have a unique language and ceremonies---end of trail scarf
- Ways US tried to make Indigenous people disappear
- All the magic tricks being done on tribes in the past and now
- I learned about the disappearing act of Native communities
- History of Native people
- American History is starting to delete Native American history from it's history as a way to ignore how the land was stolen
- How USA eradicated NAI in a [unknown] and calculated manner
- How pervasive the erasure of Native people and Native presence is
- A lot of Native American history! How to make people magically disappear
- The importance of revitalization of Indigenous languages. Decolonialization of the Native languages. Decolonialization of the Native narrative of being submissive, barbaric, primitive
- The Yuchi people were pushed to Oklahoma
- What it means to live in the USA as indigenous
- This speaker had a positive way to present a very horrible topic. He touched a tragedy as a magic trick.
- Native tribes have been pushed to Oklahoma due to genocidal assault
- Natives were killed/forced out of their land, but the state is named after them
- States named after natives but yet managed to wipe their people out.
- States were named after Indian people
- I learned a little bit about the Yuchi people and their language along with other indigenous people of the US of Amnesia
- How indigenous people have been made to move from their home lands
- I learned a lot about the purposeful erasure of Native people from the American historical narrative.

5. Did the presenter engage the audience?

- Yes (31)
- No (0)
- Great use of imagery and props
- Dr. Grounds were never boring
- Dr. Grounds is a fantastic speaker and kept the audience's attention throughout the presentation

6. Will you encourage others to attend future Native American Speakers Series events?

- Yes (31)
- No (0)

7. How can we improve the Native American Speaker Series?

- Inform people (students and community) more so others are able to attend
- I thought it was great and people need to know the history of who inhabited this land

- Invite people from the community – the majority of the attendees were UNCP staff and students
- Make it more than one person for the event
- More seating
- Have it filmed
- Advertise in the Pine Needle
- Seating – it was hard to see the front from sitting in the back
- More time
- Better marketing I did not see one flyer for this event and if there were some, they did not catch my attention and I definitely would have been interested since I'm a History major
- Have the presenters name and accomplishments on the board so we can read.
- Maybe if the student's offered extra credit, ensure that they get it granted its done properly and on time.
- Make it longer
- Provide better materials for the speaker to produce images and examples

Additional Comments

- I think the NASS is a wonderful thing we have here at UNCP
- Very informative and engaging
- Bring Dr. Grounds Back!