Course Outline

Museums and cultural centers can play a significant role in the reemergence of cultural autonomy in Indigenous societies and the perceptions of those same communities by the general public. This course examines the museum as an institution in which museum professionals, scholars and Native communities produce and represent histories. Students are introduced to museums to text their own museum literacy, that is: their ability to engage critically in object and text-based learning, to explore the ways in which historical memory and/or identity is created and represented and to further develop and refine their own museum experiences.

Course Requirements

Students will create a portfolio composed of five writing assignments and a series of in-class writing assignments.

In brief, the written work includes:

1. An initial “reading” of a museum/cultural center of our choice
2. A “reading” of a specific exhibit from a museum/cultural center visit
3. A critique of a guided tour given by a trained docent in a museum/cultural center of your choice.
4. A final “reading” of the first museum visit
5. A summary of the articles we have read in class, offering your thoughts about which were most beneficial to you as a student of Native American museum studies.

Each of these assignments should be no less than 2 pages in length. The final portfolio itself should be a minimum of 15 full written pages. It will be in your best interest to write approximately 3 pages for each assignment to insure you reach the minimum page requirement by the end of the quarter.

Weekly reading question Each class session a question will be given on the assigned readings for that day. Students will be asked to write on the question in class. The purpose of the question is to help you prepare for class discussion and to allow you the opportunity to share your thoughts on the readings. The responses should be no less than
one page long. These Grading of the responses will not be based on a “correct” answer, but rather on how they reflect your knowledge and understanding of the readings. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Describe several ways that museums function in our society today.
2. Analyze a museum or exhibit, paying close attention to what is on display, how it is being presented and what is assumed on the part of museum personnel.
3. Consider how and why museum/cultural centers represent Native American history, art and material culture(s).

**Final Exam**

For the final, select a specific exhibit about Native American culture, lifeways, history or objects. Using the required texts from this course and three additional references (interviews with museum staff, video, periodicals and academic journals), you will produce a review-critique of the exhibit. The location and/or exhibit must be pre-approved by the instructor and support documents from the exhibiting institution must be submitted with your paper. We will discuss more details about this project as we approach the midterm.

**Required Texts**

Joy Hendry *Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous People and Self-Representation*

Miriam Charir *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations*

Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

Richard West *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian*

**On Reserve in the American Indian Studies Library**

*The American Indian Quarterly*. Vol. 29, Summer/Fall 2005, Nos. 3 & 4
   Special Issue: The National Museum of the American Indian
   Guest Editor: Amanda J. Cobb

*Spirit of Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*
   Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004

*Caring for American Indian Objects: A Practical and Cultural Guide*
   Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004