

NDSU NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

NDSU NEWS

Dakota Studies Initiative receives Impact Award

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The President's Diversity Council has given the NDSU Dakota Studies Initiative the 2010 Impact Award, which recognizes individuals, groups and units campus and community-wide that have demonstrated a significant contribution to advancing diversity as related to the President's Diversity Council Strategic Plan via positive interactions with others, a respect and value for differing backgrounds and points of view inside and outside of NDSU.

Dakota Initiative Team members include Craig Schnell, Thomas Riley, Clifford Canku, Dale Sullivan, John Cox, Jeanne Hageman, Paul Homan, Daniel Klenow, John Peacock, Bruce Maylath, Kelly Sassi, Tim Kloberdanz and Joy Sather-Wagstaff.

In Elizabeth Birmingham's letter of nomination, she wrote, "The Dakota Initiative originated several years ago in the English department under the direction of department head Dale Sullivan and came to fruition this fall when NDSU hired Dr. Clifford Canku, an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate. John Peacock, an enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Dakota Oyate and professor of language, literature and culture at Maryland Institute College of Art, was instrumental in helping to identify and recruit Dr. Canku to our campus."

Working with Peacock to help keep the Dakota language from becoming endangered further, Sullivan, Maylath and Sassi of the English department, with support from Schnell and Riley, took the initiative to lead other departments in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to provide support for an assistant professor of practice position in Dakota Studies and attendant course offerings.

Canku taught courses during the 2009-10 academic year in Dakota Language I & II, Dakota Tribal History, Dakota Tribal Culture and Dakota Religious Studies. According to Birmingham, doing so has helped NDSU retain its American Indian students, like Teresa Black Cloud, an English education major from Bismarck, N.D., and an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Lakota Oyate, who is taking Canku's course in Dakota Religious Studies. "Learning the traditions and language of the Sioux people is important to me as a Lakota student and woman. I hope I will be able to share what I have learned from Dr. Canku's class throughout my life and become more involved with my identity as a Native American," Black Cloud says. "I feel like I have been given a great chance to become closer to my culture."

The recipients are provided with a \$500 award, which they donate to a charity of their choosing. The Dakota Studies Initiative has chosen to donate the money to the Gladys Ray Emergency Shelter in Fargo.

The mission of the Gladys Ray Emergency Shelter is to provide a safe and comfortable place for people who cannot access other shelter options in the community. The emergency shelter also helps connect people to permanent housing and services in a welcoming and non-judgmental environment. The shelter can serve 25 men and 10 women per night. It is open from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. Once fully operational, the facility will be open 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The shelter is located at 1519 1st Ave. S.

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**CLIFFORD CANKU AND NDSU GRADUATE STUDENTS' PROJECT
DETAILS NATIVE AMERICAN PRISONERS' EXPERIENCES**

Clifford Canku and NDSU graduate students' project details Native American prisoners' experiences

Clifford Canku is unveiling history of North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa Native American prisoners and their families by translating letters written by prisoners of the 1862 Dakota Conflict that took the lives of hundreds of Native Americans settlers and soldiers.

The project has allowed graduate students a rare opportunity to work as editorial assistants to earn publishing credits for their field experience work. Rebecca West and Stashenko Hempeck, doctoral students in rhetoric, writing and culture, helped organize, format and keep an account of the historic documents. "This was a profound experience. It was the first time I had the opportunity to work with the people native to this area and working with the POW letters was surreal, like being transported in time," said West. "Reading the letters had an emotional effect on me."

The letters were written in Dakota language and offer a glimpse into the experiences of the prisoners in 1866. Canku (pronounced "Chan-koo") is one of very few people capable of translating the letters to English. "I am a representative, a forerunner of the people who can come here and do this work for their people," he said.

The original letter collection is housed at the Minnesota State Historical Society. Funded in part by the NDSU Gunlogson Fund, the project has taken more than 10 years for Canku and his team. When finished, the group will publish 50 of the 150 hand-written first-person letters in a book that will include content from the original Dakota language, a translation and an explanation in English.

Because the population of the Dakota tribe is so small, Canku and other translators recognized names of ancestors while reading the letters for the first time and realized that descendants of the letter writers are alive today. Many of the letters detail the experiences of prisoners in Minnesota and Iowa prison camps. The letters raise questions for historians. Canku says the content of the letters may be controversial and could upset Dakota people since they identify prisoners who collaborated with the U.S. Army.

For Canku and his students, the project is about uncovering history, telling the truth and allowing the prisoners' voices to be heard. He says the letters offered prisoners the opportunity to "make right" things they had done in the past.

"This project means I have to be true to what is in those letters. I want this project to be an archetype of research done by Native American students. A lot of our history is in museums and no one knows what to do with it. I hope this project will open the flood gates for research... representing the people," Canku said.