

Faculty and Staff Diversity Mini-Grant Final Report

Project title: *"Imaginary Indians" as an Artifact of Power*

Grant Recipients: Bonnie Wright; Scott Herron; Circle of Tribal Nations RSO

Date Project Started: February, 24th, 2014

Amount of Money Funded by the Mini-Grant: \$2,700

1. How was the grant used to address a diversity or inclusion related goal?

This grant was used to address diversity and inclusion under the framework of utilizing historical racist artifacts that were collected by Dr. Brian Baker, Bad River Band of Ojibwe faculty member at California State University, Sacramento, to educate Ferris State students and community members about stereotypes and the impacts of these misconceptions on modern American Indians. Specifically, Ferris State University has a world class museum on racist memorabilia (Jim Crow Museum), and a small collection of artifacts that depict American Indians, housed outside the museum in a display case. Ferris State has struggled to create a campus environment that is safe and welcoming to tribal (American Indian, and other) individuals and community members, as demonstrated by the meager student numbers (<100 for the past 10 years) and nearly invisible faculty numbers (<5 for the past 10 years). The Circle of Tribal Nations has struggled to alone recruit American Indian students into its organization or to the university in general, yet continues to find ways to help our university become the diverse institution its mission and diversity plan strives for. This grant was used to highlight and address these problems by addressing the racist depictions of American Indians, discuss those depictions, and attempt to replace them with realistic, modern images and understandings of who American Indians were in the past and who they are today.

2. Describe the audience that was impacted by the grant's implementation.

Provide quantitative data, if available. The impact of this grant was significant. Specifically, during the month long timeframe of this project,

three main events were organized, surrounding the time that Dr. Brian Baker was visiting campus at the beginning of the exhibit. These events are described in the attached file labeled “Imaginary Indians” flier. The first event I will describe was the class visit on Tuesday February 25, 2014, where Dr. Baker guest lectured in a FSU class entitled Sociology of Community Studies. This class had completed a segment on the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe previously, and now had the opportunity to see a slide show from our tribal expert, Brian Baker, and ask questions. The event had its 18 enrolled students, along with approximately 15 other campus guests engaging with this project in a meaningful way that opened students’ eyes and minds to the power of imagery, assumptions, stereotypes, and racism.

Later that day, Dr. Baker delivered a campus-wide presentation hosted by the FSU RSO, Circle of Tribal Nations in their meeting room that semester. The event turned out to be a “standing room only” packed event with 60 students packed into IRC 104. (See Sign-In Sheet). This ended up being the RSO’s most successful event of the 2013-2014 academic year, exceeding even the counts for Native American Heritage Month events. Many questions were asked by the crowded, yet captivated audience. An example of a student reflection written by Dr. Scott Herron’s student is attached as “Imaginary Indians Writeup” by student-athlete Ashley Rando.

Another special event that happened was the gathering of Drs. Baker, Wright, Herron, along with tribal members from the Circle of Tribal Nations in a FLITE computer lab, where the group attempted to summarize what impacts the exhibit Dr. Baker had set up, and apply that to the permanent collection of American Indian memorabilia outside the Jim Crow Museum. The group did not come to a consensus on what should be written up for the didactic panels that this grant proposed to create for those objects. The students, many of whom were tribal from other cultures than American Indian, had a hard time finding the right words to describe these racist objects, and the organization had a hard time getting American Indian students to respond to their request to participate, both on that day, and with follow-up emails.

The last component of the grant, was the most significant, longest lasting, and possibly most impactful one, the exhibit of approximately 150 artifacts from Dr. Baker's personal collection of "Imaginary Indians". We might never know the complete impact of this temporary exhibit on the FSU and BR communities, since it was impossible to know how many people stopped by to observe, read, and contemplate about what they saw in the basement of FLITE during February and March, 2014. During that time the Big Rapids Community Library was housed in the basement of FLITE, increasing the foot traffic past the display cabinets housing this exhibit. What we have to quantify this impact is only a few student completed worksheets (attached) entitled "The Americana Indian" that some students voluntarily filled out and placed in a box next to the exhibit. Of the 11 student completed worksheets I have reviewed the, the viewers appeared to agree upon the depiction of American Indians as "feather wearing, alcoholic, face painted, savages who are aggressive, primitive, simple, dirty, expendable and promiscuous". Sadly, but intentionally, the viewers recognized the differing ways that Indian men and women were depicted by dominant society...**Indian men** were "savage, violent, wild, crazy, warriors, hunters, aggressive, strong, chief, illiterate, dirty, naked, and free". **Indian women** on the other hand were "sexualized, less clothed, child caretakers, sexual, maids, hardworking, slaves, beautiful, primitive, domestic, illiterate, promiscuous, gatherers, mothers, cooks". In the final question asked of students, the responses to the question, **How does a person play Indian?** the answers centered around the depictions shown of white people playing Indian, with common answers as "wearing buckskins, making war whoops and crying noises, having painted faces/bodies, primitive tools, acting crazy, wearing feathers and lots of jewelry, dancing and playing drums, wearing little clothes, hunt animals, have teepees, ride horses."

3. Grant recipients are required to provide a short narrative that details the specific efforts each of the collaborators made to the implementation of the grant. The primary applicant and leader of this grant was Bonnie Wright, who took the responsibility of drafting the application, with editorial review provided by Scott Herron. Dr. Wright also initiated contact with the individual contracted to set up the display and educate our campus on this topic, Dr. Brian Baker. Bonnie worked with Brian to arrange his travel, pick him up from the airport, house him at her home to both save costs and provide a welcoming environment while Brian visited Michigan from California. Bonnie went on to transport Brian from Grand Rapids to Big Rapids several days consecutively during the set up and for on-campus events. Dr. Wright with the help of Dr. Baker drafted the flier of activities, and with the help of Dr. Herron editing, and securing the campus wide event, produced the advertisements on campus. Dr. Herron worked with the Circle of Tribal Nations, utilizing Facebook, OrgSync, Twitter, and campus-wide postings to inform the campus of the events, as well as distribute images, video, and provocative questions about the exhibit across social media. Dr. Herron arranged to have students and his other RSO advisor, Andrea Lodholtz help with the setup of the exhibit in FLITE, so he, they, and Brian and Bonnie, along with her daughter set up the exhibit, and tore it down after the month of exhibition in FLITE basement. Bonnie developed the worksheet with Brian Baker that accompanied the exhibit. Scott Herron compiled all the student worksheet data, organized images, and compiled this report, while Dr. Wright is on medical leave from the university.

4. What is your overall assessment of the project's impact on the Ferris community? How did this impact compare to what you expected? Our overall assessment of the project impact on Ferris was significant yet subdued. Due to the location of the exhibit and the timing (Spring Recess occurred during the month long run), we may have not reached as many people as we hoped. Our expectations were to draw 100 people to the speaking event and over a thousand to the exhibit display. Since the display

was in a non-monitored hallway outside the Jim Crow Museum and former Big Rapids Community Library location, we had regular traffic, but had challenges quantifying that or its impact. We were pleased to see the Diversity and Inclusion Office highlight the project on the front and back cover of the 2014-2015 Faculty and Staff Diversity Mini-Grant Program brochure.

The project impacts were substantial for the following reasons. This grant allowed FSU to host an outside exhibit of racist memorabilia that started an ongoing dialog on campus about how people are depicted and the implications on current faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Engaging over one hundred students directly during the month and likely countless more had/has an impact on the safe and inclusive environment we are shaping at Ferris State. It can not be overstated how important it was to have Dr. Brian Baker here to show PowerPoint presentations, answer questions, and help replace stereotypes with actual facts of successful tribal role models, including himself.

5. Present a final budget including all funds received and spent related to the project, with special focus on the funds received via the Diversity Mini-grant.

Grant awarded \$2700.00

Speaking fee \$1000.00

Travel \$590.00

Shipping \$290.27

Supplies \$224.24

Total Spent **\$2104.51**

6. Primary Grant Recipient's Signature: Scott Herron (for Bonnie Wright)

Date: 12.10.14

Images of Exhibit Display (Courtesy of Scott Herron).









