

Syllabus: Indigenous Philosophies of the Americas

Phil 352 – 1002

Fall 2023

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30-12:45pm

CBC C328

Professor: Amy Reed-Sandoval (She/Hers)

Email: amy.reed-sandoval@unlv.edu

Office hours: TBA

Course Description:

We begin this course by asking not just *what*, but also *where*, we are studying. As it turns out, we need Indigenous philosophies of the Americas to help us answer this question. In *Indigenizing Philosophy Through The Land*, Brian Burkhart writes that “one of the most remarkable features of settler colonialism is the level of maintenance of sublimation that it requires on the part of the settler colonial state, not only in erasing or removing the Indigenous people from their land and setting up the settler state but even more in maintaining it psychologically.”¹

This course introduces students to Indigenous philosophical ideas, currents, and traditions of the Americas (*Abya Yala*), and to key themes in contemporary Native American and Indigenous Studies. In so doing, it also aims to provide students with conceptual tools with which to critically interrogate “settler epistemologies,” which are often understood as “racialized, anthropocentric, and capitalist understandings of places”² that sustain various forms of Indigenous erasure. We will explore how Indigenous systems of metaphysics and ethics are inextricably linked to land, kinship, and relationality, and we will further discuss how these ideas are currently being used by Indigenous thinkers and activists to resist enduring coloniality while building more ethical futures.

This course is divided into three units. In **Unit 1**, we will explore key themes in contemporary Native American and Indigenous Studies (of which Indigenous philosophies are a part) to orient students who may be entirely new to this academic area. In **Unit 2**, we shall explore metaphysics of the Americas which, as we shall see, are often intimately connected to Indigenous ethical practices. Finally, in **Unit 3** we will delve into readings in Indigenous ethics in the Americas, including applied ethics. While this is undoubtedly a reading-and-writing-intensive class, it emphasizes “low stakes” writing assignments and takes a supportive, scaffolding approach to developing final research papers on topics of students’ choosing. There is no midterm or final exam in this course.

Course Requirements:

- **Class preparation and participation** – you are expected to complete all readings in advance of the class session/date beneath which they are posted. You are expected to attend class meetings and be an active participant in class discussions (note: one can be an “active participant” in different ways, depending on one’s individual learning style).
- **Reading “check-ins”** – each class meeting will include a form of graded “check-in” to ensure that you are completing the readings for class. These “check-ins” may take the form of short

¹ Brian Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures*, Michigan State University Press (2019), page 29.

² Gardner Seawright, “Settler Traditions of Place: Making Explicit the Epistemological Legacy of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism for Place-Based Education,” in *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, vol. 50 no. 6, pp. 552-772.

quizzes, discussion questions you prepare in advance of class, and/or discussion board posts when class is held online.

- **In-class “free write” assignments** – during each class meeting you will complete a short, low-hand-written writing assignment on a prompt announced in class.
- **Larger assignments** – you will also complete a series of “larger assignments,” most of which are designed to support you in developing your final paper. Due dates for the different assignments can be found in the course schedule below. These assignments include:
 1. **An annotated glossary of key course terms** (to be turned in after Unit 1, and again at the end of the course)
 2. **An artistic depiction of Aztec/Mexica/Nahua conception(s) of the universe** (note: “artistic talent” is not required for success on this assignment!)
 3. **Two-page reaction paper on Professor Brian Burkhardt’s guest lectures** (*dates and talk titles forthcoming*)
 4. **Student presentations on final papers**
 5. **In-class peer review of peers’ final paper drafts**
 6. **Two-page reaction paper on Professor Joseph Miller’s guest lectures** (*dates and talk titles forthcoming*)
- **Longer final paper – due Saturday, December 9th at 8pm**. *Note: you must complete all preparatory assignments listed on the syllabus below prior to turning in your final paper.* You will prepare an 8-10-page final paper on a topic that you will choose in consultation with your professor. Further instructions will be distributed in class. -Or-
- **Final paper with community service outreach**: in consultation with your professor and community partner, you can develop a community service project with the [Nuwu Art Gallery + Community Center](#), and write a somewhat shorter final paper that discusses and analyzes your experience.

Grades:

- **Grade scale:** A = 94-100, A- = 93-90, B = 84-89, B- = 80-83, C = 74-79, C- = 73-70, D = 64-69, D- = 60-63, F = 59 and below
- **Reading check-ins** – 20% of final grade
- **In-class “free writes”** – 10% of final grade, graded pass/fail
- **Larger assignments** – 60% of final grade (10% each)
- **Final paper** – 10% of final grade

Books and Articles:

You are not required to purchase a textbook for this class; all assignments have been made available to you for free, generally via UNLV Libraries, unless otherwise stated on the syllabus. You are responsible for doing online library searches to find the various readings that have been listed on the syllabus. If you are having trouble and/or have questions, please feel free to contact the UNLV Philosophy Librarian Priscilla Finley at priscilla.finley@unlv.edu.

You are required to bring a notebook and (hand) writing utensil to class each day for your in-class writing assignments.

Here is a list of many of the books we will be reading from in class, in the event you would prefer to purchase them (though again, you are not required to do so):

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

Brian Burkhardt, *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures* (Michigan State University Press, 2019).

V. F. Cordova and Katherine Dean Moore, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova* (University of Arizona Press, 2007).

Vine Deloria, Jr., *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader*, edited by Vine Deloria, Jr., Sam Scinta, Kristin Foehner, and Barbara Deloria (Fulcrum Publishing, 1999).

Alex McLeod, *Philosophy of the Ancient Maya: Lords of Time* (Lexington, 2017).

Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, ed., *Ways of Being in the World: An Introduction to Indigenous Philosophies of Turtle Island* (Broadview Press, 2023).

James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World In Motion* (University of Colorado Press, 2014).

Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014).

Anne Waters, ed. *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (Cupples, Upham & Co., 1998).

Other Academic Publications of Possible Interest:

You may wish to consult these resources in developing your final paper:

[The NAIS Journal](#)

[APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy](#)

[Journal of Mexican Philosophy](#)

[Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies](#)

[Inter-American Journal of Philosophy](#)

[Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl](#)

[Additional resources compiled by the University of Toronto Centre for Indigenous Studies](#)

UNLV Academic Policies:

Available [via this link](#).

Course Schedule:

Unit 1: Native American and Indigenous Studies: Introductory Concepts

Tuesday, August 28

- **Introduction to Course**
- **Confronting Indigenous Erasures**
- **Watch or Listen:** Bert Johnson, “Northern Nevada lithium mine draws Native resistance from across the West,” for *KUNR Public Radio*, January 23, 2023, accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** “Erasure,” in *The Decolonial Dictionary*, accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** Etanda Arden, “Writing Myself Into Existence: An Essay on the Erasure of Black Indigenous Identity in Canadian Education,” in *Yellowhead Institute*, 28 January 2020, accessible [here](#).

Thursday, August 30

- **Land Acknowledgements and Questions of Allyship**
- **Read:** Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, "Relations and How Allies Acknowledge Land," in the *APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 11-13, accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, "Empowering Relations: An Indigenous Understanding of Allyship in North America," in *Journal of World Philosophies*, Vol. 10 no. 1, June 20, pp. 30-42.
- **Read definition:** [Abya Yala](#)
- **Guest presentation (via Zoom):** Dr. Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and President's Indigenous Peoples Scholar, University of Windsor.

Tuesday, September 5

- **Settler Colonialism**
- **Read:** Brian Burkhart, "Philosophical Colonizing of People and Land," in *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures*, (Michigan State University Press, 2019), pp. 3-57.

Thursday, September 7

- **Epistemic Injustices: (Mis)Recognition**
- **Read:** Dale Turner, "Oral Traditions and the Problem of (Mis)Recognition," in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, pp. 229-238, edited by Anne Waters (Blackwell: 2003), assessable [here](#).
- **Read:** Marisa Elena Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis, "Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies," in *Cataloguing and Classification Quarterly* vol. 53 no. 5-6, pp. 607-702.

Tuesday, September 12

- **Epistemic Injustices, continued: "Scientific" Representations**
- **Read:** Vine Deloria, Jr., "Ethnoscience and Indigenous Realities," pp. 63-71, and "Indians, Archeologists, and the Future," pp. 72-77, in *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader*, edited by Vine Deloria, Jr., Sam Scinta, Kristin Foehner, and Barbara Deloria (Fulcrum Publishing, 1999) (available on Canvas site).
- **Read:** Tasneem Raja, "A Long, Complicated Battle Over 9,000 Year-Old Bones is Finally Over," in *NPR* (online), May 5, 2016, accessible [here](#).
- **In Class Watch:** *SuliaKaKatigelluta: Community monitoring of plastic pollution in Nunatsiavut* (Dir. Liz Pijogge, Max Liboiron, 2020).

Thursday, September 14

- **Epistemic Injustices, continued: Settler Ignorance**
- **Read:** Shelbi Nahwhilet Meissner and Bryce Huebner, "Outlaw Epistemologies: Resisting the Viciousness of Country Music's Settler Ignorance," in *Philosophical Issues*, vol. 32, 2022, pp. 314-332.
- **Read:** Kyle Powys Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice," in *Environment and Society*, vol. 9 no. 1, pp. 125-144.

Tuesday, September 19

- **Epistemic Injustice, continued: Resisting Injustice**
- **Read:** Sergio Gallegos and Carol Quinn, "Epistemic Injustice and Resistance in the Chiapas Highlands: The Zapatista Case," in *Hypatia* vol. 32 no. 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 247-257.
- **In-class watch:** *A Place Called Chiapas* (Nettie Wild, 1998).

Thursday, September 21

- **Coloniality**
- **Listen:** Buffy Saint-Marie, "My Country 'Tis of 'Thy People You're Dying'," accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," in *International Sociology*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 215-232.

Tuesday, September 26

- **Wrap up and review of Unit 1**
- **In-class discussion of possible questions for research paper**
- **Students submit one-paragraph "statement of interest" on paper topic at end of class**

Unit 2: Indigenous Metaphysics

Thursday, September 28

- **Pan-Native-American Metaphysics**
- **Read:** Viola Cordova, "How It Is: A Native American Creation Story," pp. 87-99, "What Is the World," pp. 100-106, and "The Four Directions," pp. 186-191, in *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova* (University of Arizona Press, 2007).
- **In-class discussion of paper topics**
- **Larger assignment 1: First draft of annotated glossary due for Unit 1 at 8pm on Friday, Sep. 29**

Tuesday, October 3

- **Mesoamerican Conceptions of the Universe**
- **Read:** Miguel Leon-Portilla, "The Pre-Colombian Concept of the Universe," in *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (University of Oklahoma Press: 1990), pp. 25-61.
- **Read:** Raul Macuil Martinez, "The Tlamatque and the Nahua World," in *Mesoamerican Manuscripts: New Scientific Approaches and Interpretations*, edited by Maarten Jansen, Virginia M. Ladlő-Bursan, and Ludo Snijders Brill: 2018), pp. 93-116.
- **Guest presentation (via Zoom):** Dr. Raul Macuil Martinez, investigador y docente, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional 131-Hidalgo.

Thursday, October 5

- **Teotl and Aztec Philosophy**
- **Read:** James Maffie, Chapter 1, "Teotl," in *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World In Motion* (University of Colorado Press, 2014), pp. 21-62.
- **Online Lecture and Discussion Board:** Dr. Reed-Sandoval off campus for talk.

Tuesday, October 10

- **Children's Metaphysical Perspectives**

- **Read:** Amy Reed-Sandoval, “When We Die, We Become ‘Muertos’: Children’s Philosophical Perspectives on Death in Tianguistengo, Hidalgo,” in the *Journal of Mexican Philosophy* vol. 2, no. 1 (2023), pp. 47-70.
- **Read:** Nell Rainville, “Philosophy for Children In Native America: A Post-Colonial Critique,” in *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis* vol. 21 (1 (2001), pp. 65-77.
- **Recommended for Spanish speakers:** Laura Romero, “Niñez, transformación y consumo de maíz entre los nahuas de la Sierra Negra de Puebla” (“Childhood, transformation and corn consumption among the Nahuas of the Sierra Negra region of Puebla”), *Trace* no. 78, 2020, accessible [here](#).

Thursday, October 12

- **Wrap-up of mini-unit on Aztec/Mexica/Nahua philosophies**
- **In-class watch:** *Santo Luzbel* (Miguel Sabido, 1997).

Tuesday, October 17

- **The Popul Vuh and Mayan Ontologies**
- **Read:** Alexis McLeod, “Worlds and the Question of Essence and Truth,” in *Philosophy of the Ancient Maya: Lords of Time* (Lexington: 2017).
- **At Home Watch:** *The Popul Vuh* (Patricia Amlin, 1989).
- **Online Lecture and Discussion Board:** Dr. Reed-Sandoval off campus for conference.

Thursday, October 19

- **Mazatec Metaphysics**
- **Read:** María Sabina, “Chant by María Sabina,” in Miguel Leon-Portilla and Earl Shorris, eds., *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature: Pre-Colombian to the Present* (Norton: 2001), pp. 622-625 (available on Canvas site).
- **Read:** Iván Sandoval-Cervantes, “Re-Territorializing María Sabina: Huautla, Mushrooms, and Politics,” in Editor’s Forum: Hotspots, *Cultural Anthropology*, accessible [here](#).
- **In-class watch:** *María Sabina: Woman of the Spirit* (Nicolás Echeverría, 1978).

Tuesday, October 24

- **Identity, Space, and Place in the Pacific (and beyond)**
- **Read:** Vicente M. Diaz, “No Island Is an Island,” in *Native Studies Keywords*, edited by Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Rehaja (University of Arizona Press, 2015) (available on Canvas site).
- **Read:** Eliza Fawcett, “There’s No Ocean In Sight: But Many Hawaiians Make Las Vegas Their Home,” in *New York Times*, May 20, 2023, accessible [here](#).
- **Listen:** Sara Topol, “The America that Americans Forget,” *The Daily, The New York Times*, July 30, 2023, accessible [here](#).
- **In-class watch:** *Paafu Stories* (Vicente M. Diaz, 2021), accessible [here](#).
- **Larger assignment 2: Artistic depiction of the Aztec/Mexica/Nahua conception of the universe due in class today.**

Thursday, October 26

- **Pachamama and Andean Cosmologies**

- **Read:** James Maffie, "Contact-Period Indigenous Andean Philosophy," *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, & Otávio Bueno (eds). (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), pp. 9-12.
- **Read:** Miriam Tola, "Between Pachamama and Mother Earth: Gender, Political Ontology and the Right of Nature in Contemporary Bolivia," in *Feminist Review*, vol. 118, issue, 1, pp. 25-40.

Tuesday, October 31

- **In class wrap up and review of Unit 2**
- **One-page proposal on final paper topic due today, via Canvas, at 8pm.**

Unit 3: Ethics

Thursday, November 2

- **Environmental Ethics**
- **Read:** Brian Burkhardt, "Everything is Sacred: Iktomi Lessons in Ethics without Value and Value without Anthropomorphism, in in *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures* (Michigan State University Press, 2019), pp. 177-221.
- **Read:** Kyle Whyte, "The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism," In *RED INK: An International Journal of Indigenous Literature, Arts, & Humanities*: 19 (1): 154-169 (2017).
- **Guest Lecture:** Dr. Brian Burkhardt, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of Native Nations Center, University of Oklahoma.

Tuesday, November 7

- **Ethics, Kinship, and Place**
- **Read:** Brian Burkhardt, "The Metaphysics of Morality in Locality: The Always Already Being in Motion of Kinship," in *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures* (Michigan State University Press, 2019), pp. 223-270.
- **Read:** María Elena García, "Killing Kin, Haunting Life: Toward Indigenous Vocabularies of Loss and Repair," in *Indigenous Research Design: Transnational Perspectives in Practice*, edited by Dr. Elizabeth Sumida Huamán and Dr. Nathan M. Martin (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, Women's Press), *forthcoming* (available on Canvas site).
- **Larger assignment 4: reaction paper on Dr. Burkhardt's guest lecture and one of his public lectures due today at 8pm.**

Thursday, November 9

- **Ethics Through Indigenous Storytelling**
- **Read:** Jo-Ann Archibald, "Indigenous Storytelling," in Andrea-Sullivan Clarke, ed., *Ways of Being in the World: An Introduction to Indigenous Philosophies of Turtle Island* (Broadview Press, 2023).
- **Read:** Sarah Winnemucca, "Chapter II: Domestic and Social Moralities," pp. 45-57, in *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (Cupples, Upham & Co., 1998).

- **In-class listen:** Bob McCracken, September 2, 20160, "Coyote Character Central to Southern Paiute Folklore," in *Pahrump Valley Times*, accessible [here](#).
- **In-class watch:** [Paite Tradition: 'The Star That Does Not Move'](#)

Tuesday, November 14

- **Indian Boarding Schools and Western Philosophy**
- **Read:** David Beisecker and Joe Ervin, "American Hegelianism and Support for Indian Boarding Schools," in *Hegel Bulletin*, Special Issue: "Racism and Colonialism in Hegel's Philosophy," available on Canvas.
- **Read:** W.T. Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education, "Indian Education: Introduction," in *Bulletin/Bureau of Education*, 1890-1929, pp. 3-5, available on Canas
- **Guest lecture:** Dr. David Beisecker, Associate Professor of Philosophy, UNLV

Thursday, November 16

- **Indigeneity and the Ethics of Borders**
- **Read:** Audra Simpson, Chapter 3, "A Brief History of Land, Meaning, and Membership in Iroquoia and Kahnawà:ka," in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014).
- **Read:** Gloria Anzaldúa, "The Homelands/Aztlán," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), pp. 1-13, accessible [here](#).
- **Online class/discussion board assignment** – Dr. Reed-Sandoval off campus for talk.

Tuesday, November 21

- **Larger assignment 4: student presentations on final papers**

Thursday, November 23

- **No class**
- **Recommended read:** [Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World](#)
- **Recommended read:** Winona LaDuke, "Thanksgiving is a Time for Reparations," in *The Circle*, December 4, 2019, accessible [here](#).

Tuesday, November 28

- **Larger assignment 5: in-class peer review of final paper drafts**

Thursday, November 30

- **Decolonizing "The Ethical"**
- **Read:** Joseph Miller, "Decolonizing the Demarcation of the Ethical," in *Philosophical Studies* 177(2), (2020), pp. 337-352.
- **Read:** Joseph Miller, "Etemeyaske Vpokat (Living Together Peacefully): How the Muscogee Concept of Harmony Can Provide a Structure to Morality" in *Comparative Metaethics: Neglected Perspectives on the Foundations of Morality*, Colin Marshall, ed. New York: Routledge Press, 2019: 81-101.
- **Guest lecture:** Dr. Joseph Miller, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, West Chester University.
- **Larger assignment 6: reaction paper on Dr. Miller's guest lecture and Friday colloquium talk due on November 30th**

Tuesday, December 5: Study Day

- Final drafts of annotated glossary due at 8pm today, via Canvas.

Thursday, December 7: Study Day

- Final papers due tomorrow (Friday), via Cava, at 8pm.