

NAIS NEWS

People, News, and Events in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Indiana University

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NAIS NEWSLETTER

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"IT'S THE SENSE OF RELATIONSHIP":

BECOMING AN ANCESTOR FINDS LIFE IN DEATH IN JUCHITAN

Interview by Sarah Gordon

Professor Anya Peterson Royce recently released a new book called *Becoming An Ancestor: the Isthmus Zapotec Way of Death*. The book draws on extensive fieldwork with the Zapotec of Juchitan in southern Mexico. She agreed to discuss her new book for the NAIS newsletter.

Dr. Royce is Chancellor's Professor of Anthropology, Chancellor's Professor of Comparative Literature, and Adjunct Professor of Folklore, Russian-East-European Studies, and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. She is also a member of the NAIS committee.

This seems like a radical departure from much of your past work on movement and dance.

Not really. I've written three books on dance and three on ethnicity and field research, so that's about even. But this will be the first ethnography of Juchitan that I've written since my dissertation. I've written short articles on different topics about this place, but actually writing a full-length monograph--this is it.

That's especially striking given how much time you've spent down there. It's a lot of time.

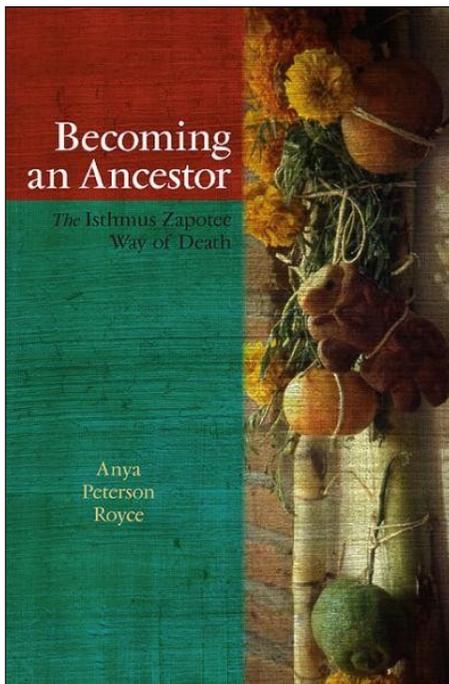
Yes, 43 years is a long time! It translates to roughly 37 different research trips, varying in length from a year to two weeks.

In this book, you use death as a lens through which to view so many of elements of Zapotec culture: syncretism, interpersonal relationships, cosmology, rituals, aesthetics, and even linguistics. What inspired you to use death as a way to write about these things?

I realized that I was spending a lot of my time on each of these visits on things that had to do with death. I've got notes on death and funerals and cemeteries going back to my first work in 1968. So I had been collecting the material, but I hadn't thought of it as a way to frame anything.

When I looked at it more, I saw that one of the striking things about Juchitan and the people who live there is the

sense of relationship that matters more than anything else. You see it in the idea that community provides continuity. In the book, I use the analogy of a big river. In the center of a big river, the current runs deep and smooth, and is continuous. That's kind of the way they, and I, see community: it binds



(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1: *Becoming An Ancestor*)

people together over time. Along the edges of the river, it encounters obstacles: trees, rocks, whatever. And you have to be able to adjust to those encounters. If some new thing comes in, like VCRs or Facebook, you want to be in a position to say "This looks interesting, let's go for it," or, "This is not going to work, so let's just ignore that."

So you have those two things going on, in terms of people's willingness to be transformed and to transform their community when the opportunity comes along. And also, they have a commitment to continue this community that goes on. And you see that in death, because there's no separation, really, between the community of the living and the community of the dead. The relationship and the connection continues. So every week, people go and spend time at the cemeteries, talking to their ancestors. And they bring them things, like the flowers they need for their particular part of their journey.

I saw a pre-wedding ceremony where a person who speaks well in Zapotec brings the couple to the bride's house. The first thing they do is to go to the home altar, where he addresses the ancestors and describes what's happening, and asks for their blessing on behalf of the couple. So here, people who have been dead quite awhile are brought literally into the contemporary ceremony.

In the same way, in the living community, once you're part of a family or a community, they're committed to you and you're committed to them. It's the sense of relationship.

There are two big community-wide ceremonies during the year: the Day of the Dead and then Holy Week. For the Day of the Dead, the living invite the dead back to their homes. They build an altar and they make frames of flowers to guide the spirits there, and then they have nine days of prayers for them. And then, during Holy Week, the dead invite the living to their homes, the tombs. So that kind of reciprocity, that kind of acknowledgement of relationship, continues.

So you can basically see everything that matters to Zapotec in the way they deal

with death and see death. And the fact is, they call it death. They don't say, "So-and-so passed away." For Juchitecos, death is a part of life. It's part of what goes on.

One of the things that I found really interesting about this is, where Americans differentiate death from the ritual surrounding it, it seems like for the Juchitecos, it's all part of the same thing, the same journey that the dead must take and that the living must help the dead to take. Is that a fair assessment?

Yes. Another thing that's important: you mentioned syncretism. I like to think of the Roman Catholic elements and the Zapotec elements as going on side by side, as opposed to being somehow brought together. It's a fine distinction, but important because there are so many elements of Zapotec belief that have nothing to do with Roman Catholicism. In the book, I describe the flower body that's created after the person is taken to the cemetery. It's called a "fresh body," in Zapotec. But if you're speaking Spanish, people would say, "una cruz," a cross. Because it looks like a body, but it also looks like a cross, if you're Roman Catholic.

But they don't see it as a cross at all. It's the flower body that gives the spirit a home until it can make its way to the cemetery. But some people writing about the Zapotec have talked about it as a Catholic influence.

It seems to me that the Zapotec and Roman Catholic belief systems must have pretty conflicting ideas about afterlife?

Totally conflicting ideas about afterlife! And you hear it in prayers and things like that. People can be reciting the Our Father talking about purgatory, and they do that. They do that in Spanish, because there aren't comparable prayers in Zapotec. The prayer leading is really Catholic.

In fact, when I first started working

there, Easter Sunday was just a Mass like any other Mass. There was no resurrection. Because there isn't any resurrection, right? Christ dies, and you celebrate that, and then he's taken to his place in the land of the dead. When a new priest came in, maybe 15 years ago, he decided that they really needed to come to grips with the resurrection. So there was a society formed, and they bought an image of the resurrected Christ, and they have, now, a huge mass, with a procession that takes the Christ to the church early Sunday morning.

The Juchitecos are all nominally Catholic, except for the evangelicals, and they know the liturgy. For them, still, the most important part of Holy Week is Good Friday, when Christ is brought down from the cross, put in his coffin, and taken to a place where he's surrounded by flowers of the wild, and incense, and candles. He's treated like a family member who has died.

And also, in Holy Week, after the Catholic liturgy, the Priest leaves and then the Zapotec do their own thing. On Holy Thursday, twelve men sit facing each other in front of the altar on chairs that are woven with green willow branches which symbolize wetness and

healing. They say prayers, and read some things in Zapotec as well. But in between these chairs is a flower body. And I always think, "This is really nice. The priest can think of it as a cross, but for every Zapotec in the church, this is the flower body of

You can basically see everything that matters to Zapotec in the way they deal with and see death... For Juchitecos, death is a part of life..

Christ."

I was struck by the story about Don Silain. You mentioned that his was the first funeral that you attended on your first trip to Juchitan. He was somebody who had outlived all his family, but because he had fulfilled his social obligations, people carried out the death rituals for him for awhile. But eventually, people stopped visiting him. Do people

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A SUCCESS STORY: LETTER FROM DR. KIM MARSHALL, INDIANA UNIVERSITY GRADUATE

Kim Marshall is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. She received a dual Ph.D. in Anthropology and Ethnomusicology from Indiana University in 2011. As a Native Studies scholar who has been successful in the job market, we asked her if she had any words of wisdom for NAIS graduate students. Here is her reply.

Thanks for the opportunity to touch base with the Native Studies folks back at IU. Although I was not specifically affiliated with the NAIS program while at IU (it was formed after I had finished my coursework), I have always been excited by the potential of this program for encouraging research in collaboration with and beneficial to native communities.

I work with Navajos who participate in an indigenously-led Pentecostal style of Christianity. I am very interested in investigating the appeal of this movement as well as its broader implications on Navajo identity, language, revitalization and expressive culture (specifically music). These interests are part of a broader research agenda investigating the way this Navajo Oodlání (“Believers”) movement fits into the spread of Charismatic Christianity both in Native North America and throughout the world.

When you start grad school, you think, “I could never work harder than I am right now.” But then you do.... That ever increasing challenge is what makes academia such an exciting (if a bit terrifying) place to work.

This is my first year as an Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma. I absolutely love my job. I am

currently teaching “the class that made me decide to major in anthropology” and “the class I never thought anyone in a



(photo courtesy of Kim Marshall)

million years would pay me to teach.” But this year has been very challenging as well. I can honestly say I have never worked harder in my life. Of course, that’s how this career path works. When you start grad school, you think “I could never work harder than I am right now.” But then you do. That feeling of ever increasing challenges doesn’t stop with your exams, or with finishing your dissertation, or with your first year teaching. But that ever increasing challenge is also what makes academia such an exciting (if a bit terrifying) place to work.

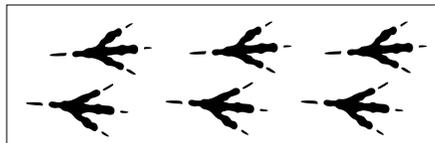
Teaching Native Studies courses at the University of Oklahoma presents its own challenges. Oklahoma is certainly a unique place in Indian Country, and for Americanists with expertise outside Oklahoma that uniqueness can be disorienting. It certainly has been a steep learning curve for me. But the flip side of those challenges is that there are few places in the world with the synergy of Native students that Oklahoma has, and I have learned a lot from my students this year. My favorite story from last

semester is that I was teaching a “Contemporary Issues in Native North America” class to a mixed group of Native and non-Native students (a challenge in and of itself). In my course evaluations, one student commented that I seemed to be a little intimidated by my Native students, but that I shouldn’t have been because I teach from a Native perspective. As a first-semester white professor with little background in Southeastern tribes teaching in Oklahoma it *was* intimidating, and would have been even if one of my students hadn’t been a 6’2”, 300 pound fluent Cherokee speaker. But it gets easier.

Some final thoughts about the job market right now and getting a job in academia. We all know that the job market is very tough. I feel that my success in getting the coveted “tenure track” job came down to a number of factors: not least among them luck and being a good fit for what they were looking for.

I am currently teaching “the class that made me decide to major in anthropology” and “the class I never thought anyone in a million years would pay me to teach.”

There are many factors you may just not be able to control. Surrounding yourself with a good team of advisors helps, as does understanding that while your advisors are there to help you, it is ultimately you that is responsible for managing your career and asking for the help you need. ||



NAIS Professor Profile:

Laura Scheiber,

Archaeology

Interviewed by Sarah Gordon, NAIS News Editor.

Let's start with an introduction.

I am an associate professor in Anthropology and the director of the William R. Adams Zooarchaeology Laboratory. I've been here at IU for ten years. I moved here from Berkeley, CA, which is where I did my Ph.D., and I was originally hired as a one-year, temporary replacement for Dick Adams, who was the former director of the lab.

The zooarchaeology lab was started in the 1940s, pri-

marily as a repository of modern animal skeletal remains to help archaeologists identify bones. Dick had built up a collection of thousands of animal skeletons, but he was a permanent lecturer and not a tenure-track faculty member. When he was quite elderly, the university and the Anthropology department realized that such an important collection needed at least a temporary director. So I came here expecting to stay for a year or maybe two. But it was always the department's intention to try to convert this one-year visiting position into a tenure-track job. And thanks to a lot of support from the department and the deans, my job became tenure-track the year after I arrived.

In terms of research, my focus is on the North American Plains and the Rocky Mountains, and Indigenous histories and Indigenous archaeology. I use animal bones as a methodology to think about the way that people interacted with their daily lives in the past. Animal remains can indicate what people were eating and food is also a reflection of cultural identity.



Photo courtesy of Laura Scheiber

I am also concerned with doing archaeology that's engaged with the present. When I arrived at IU, I was excited to learn that there was a program called Archaeology in Social Context that explicitly deals with this. How do we look at archaeological remains in the contemporary world? I had no idea that I'd be so fortunate as to be asked to join a program with so many like-minded archaeologists that make that goal so explicit.

What does that mean, "engaged with the present"?

"Engaged with the present" can have multiple meanings. I can think of many examples of archaeological practices that aren't necessarily engaging with the present. For instance, for my dissertation research in north-eastern Colorado, I was an archaeologist coming from another state. I set up all of my logistics, my crew, my research questions, my budget, and everything. For several summers, I would drive to the area where I was working, down into a canyon. Everyone would set up their tents and we would set up the kitchen, and we would bring in all of our food. We would get up in the morning and do whatever we were

doing on the site: excavating, mapping, recording information. We often work in ten-day segments, so at the end of the ten days, we would drive back home.

And maybe in the middle of our stay, we would run out of ice. So we might drive into town to buy some at the one store in town. Occasionally I would talk with some people at the store, and they would ask "what brings you here?"

I'd explain, "We're scientists, we're doing this archaeology project." And they would answer, "What are you doing, can we come see?" But often I had to say, "No, you can't, because I have permission to work there, but the landowner doesn't want anyone else there."

And people would ask, "I want to know what you're doing!" and I'd reply, "Well, we're digging up buffalo bones."

And they'd say, "Oh, I knew it. Burials. They've got human graves down there."

And I'd try to be really polite and say, "No, no, actually, we're just digging up buffalo bones. There's this really interesting owl regurgitation process we've been monitoring..." And they would say, "Not human graves!" And I'd answer, "No, that's not what we do."

And that was the extent of my interaction with the people who lived in the community. I'd return to the site with my ice, finish my work, and go home. That's pretty typical of archaeological projects in which our interactions with the public are somewhat minimal and we do not have (or make) opportunities to involve local community members.

A different way to do that would be to consider very explicitly, from the beginning, the context of what you're doing.

I talk about the Crow names for the landscape, so the students start thinking from the beginning that they are in Indian country, whether they are on the reservation or off the reservation.

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NAIS Student Profile:

Katie Burnett,

Archaeology

Interviewed by Sarah Gordon, NAIS News Editor.

Tell me a little about your academic background.

I am a fourth year Ph.D. student in the archaeology and social context program in the Department of Anthropology. My background is in historical archaeology, mountain archaeology, and plains anthropology. I started at the University of Delaware during my undergraduate years, working on the Read House and Gardens Site, an 1804 mansion in New Castle, Delaware. While I was there, I became interested in the presence of Caribbean coral at various sites along the East Coast and conducted research on how and why the coral got to these sites. This led me to take my first archaeological field school in Barbados, where I participated in excavating a pottery waster pile which was part of a pottery run by slaves on a sugar cane plantation. My experiences in Barbados made me realize how closely archaeology is connected with living communities, and how tensions created in the past still heavily affect the present.

Since I've been in Indiana, I've been involved in a diverse array of research from mapping tipi rings and working with the Crow in southern Montana, to researching the Mountain Shoshone in the Absaroka Mountains just east of Yellowstone National Park, to investigating a turn of the twentieth century stage stop southwest of Thermopolis, Wyoming. The common thread of this research has been a dedication to writing untold stories and working with a variety of stakeholders.

All of my work at Indiana University has been made possible by Dr. Laura Scheiber and the Exploring Historical and Social Landscapes of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Project.

What is the focus of your research?

My dissertation research is focused on the Nostrum Springs Stage Station on the Red Canyon Ranch, southwest of Thermopolis in central Wyoming. I am interested in combining the traditional methods of historical archaeology with theories and methods derived from indigenous archaeology, New Western History, culture contact research, and borderlands history in order to more deeply understand the importance of transportation in the history of the American West, as well as what it was like to both ride on a stagecoach and run a stage stop. The Nostrum Springs Stage Stop was run by a family of immigrants from



Photo courtesy of Katie Burnett

Sweden and first generation Swedish-Americans, so I'm also interested in bringing greater attention to the diversity of the American West. This is particularly important since the Nostrum

Stage Stop is on land that was ceded by the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho to the United States by treaty in 1896, and it is right on the border between the Red Canyon Ranch and the Wind River Indian Reservation. I am

interested in exploring the idea of the stage stop as a borderland, a place where extremely diverse groups and individuals came together and interacted, exchanging ideas and materials in the process.

How did you come to be interested in your particular area of study?

I became interested in historical archaeology as a result of my experiences working in a laboratory processing and cataloging artifacts at the University of Delaware. My interest in archaeology and social context was sparked by my experiences in the field in Barbados. I was attracted to working in Wyo-

ming because of my travels in the West as I was growing up, and my research on the Nostrum Springs Stage Station combines all of my interests including Native American and Indigenous Studies.

Why did you decide to minor in Native American and Indigenous Studies?

It was a result of my experiences as a young graduate student working with the Crow in Montana, and reading articles about indigenous archaeology in both my archaeology proseminar and in my Archaeological Ethics class. My initial interest in the Nostrum Springs Stage Station was sparked by its potential connection with the Shoshone. I also had some background in Native American Studies as an undergraduate that I wanted to build upon in order to enrich my research in Wyoming.

How has the minor influenced your research?

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I am interested in exploring the idea of the stage stop as a borderland, a place where extremely diverse groups and individuals came together and interacted, exchanging ideas and materials in the process.

(Continued from page 4: Laura Scheiber)

That it matters to people today, and that some of those people are descendant communities and some of those people aren't—in fact, in many cases, the nearest descendant community might be hundreds of miles away. We can work to involve local people explicitly in our projects.

Can you give me an example of how to undertake that kind of community-oriented work?

Sure. When I finished my dissertation and I started working here, I started a new project outside of Cody, Wyoming. I grew up in Cody, but I had never worked on any archaeology projects there. I was excited to look at my childhood home with fresh eyes.

About that same time, I met an IU graduate student named Kelly Branam who was an ethnographer working on the Crow reservation,

which is quite close to Cody. I told her I had never been to the Crow reservation before, and she invited me to visit with her.

It was a real education for me. I asked Kelly, "Who do you think might be interested in archaeology? Who do you think might want to hear about the kinds of things that I'm doing?"

Working with an ethnographer from the beginning really helped me to develop some good relationships. I started talking to people at the tribal college, I've talked to kids in the elementary schools on the reservation, and I've worked with high school students. I've met a lot of people who have been interested in working with me, and I've had people from the reservation who have been able to join me for several months at a time. These experiences have enriched my teaching and my research and also led to my own personal growth.

And when I bring my students there

from IU, on the very first day, I try to explain the importance of archaeology in this area, to these people. I talk about the Crow names for the landscape, so the students start thinking from the beginning that they are in Indian country, whether they are on the reservation or off the reservation.

I think that this is a different context of archaeological research than one in which you drive down to the bottom of a canyon, you set up your tents, and start digging. It's the overarching foundation of education.

If a student from another department is looking for an NAIS minor adviser, when would you be a good person for them to approach?

Students should approach me who are interested in issues of material culture and materiality; ways to integrate archaeology, ethnography, and ethnohistory; and the indigenous inhabitants of the Plains and Rocky Mountain West. ||

(Continued from page 5: Katie Burnett)

The NAIS minor has been most influential in my research by introducing me to frontier and borderland studies in Christina Snyder's Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies course. I am also very interested in making my research as interdisciplinary as possible in large part because of my experiences in NAIS.

What do you anticipate doing with your degree when you're finished?

My ultimate goal is to be a professor of anthropology. I am also open to working for the US Government in a role as a cultural resource manager. In my experience, taking a position in the National Park Service or the Bureau of Land Management, for example, would afford me opportunities to work with stakeholders on a daily basis and to have a say in the very hard decisions that have to be made when the needs of cultural resources are weighed against other interests. ||

(Continued from page 2: Becoming An Ancestor)

not worry about that? Because it seems there are a lot of stories about how people need to be grieved for, or else they wander.

They do worry about it.

But nobody takes it upon themselves to be responsible for caring for him?

Nobody who's not part of the family would do that, probably. For the first year or so, people would go out and take flowers when they went out to visit their own families, they would stop and take care of him too. They think it's a shame, but they also don't feel a commitment. Because if he's going to wander around, he doesn't have any family, so he doesn't have anybody to bother.

In my mind, I'm juxtaposing this against the Catholic perspective. It seems like there's not the same idea that the quality of your after-life is dependent on the quality of your character and behavior dur-

ing your life, except that, if you don't take care of the people around you, you're not going to have anybody to grieve for you.

I think that's pretty accurate.

The first page of the introduction, that description of a funeral procession taking place alongside a Palm Sunday procession, to me that encapsulates everything that matters in the book. You have the Roman Catholic celebration going on at the same time that you have an acknowledgement of a departed person who mattered to people. And at the very end—well, two weeks ago, one of my students asked me, "What does it mean when you say Christ is walking into his own death?" I answered that Jerusalem was the place where they killed prophets, so he knows when he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, it means that his death is coming. So, I like the bringing together of this really powerful, happy celebration of Christ at the same time that death is underneath it all, and death is right next door. ||

ANNOUNCEMENTS, DATES & EVENTS

- **First Nations Educational and Cultural Center Community Night 2012. Thursday 12 April. Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center, Bridgewater Lounge, 6:00-9:00 PM.**

Join the FNECC for an evening of drumming, dancing, singing, and a potluck dinner. Bring your regalia. Guests of honor: Emma and John Henderson (Dine'). Guest Drum: Twigh Twee of the Miami Nation of Indiana. Co-sponsors: First Nations Educational and Cultural Center, Indiana University School of Education, Department of American Studies. For more information, contact the FNECC at fnecc@indiana.edu.

- **Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) Student Youth Program. Deadline April 15.**

SAIGE will host their 10th Anniversary National Training Conference June 3-8 in Denver, Colorado. SAIGE is the only non-profit organization that advocates for American Indian and Alaska Native Government Employees. A scholarship is available for Native students, age 18-25, to attend the conference. Students must be current students at an accredited high school, college, or university, and have an interest in pursuing a career with the federal government. See the "Youth Track" section of the SAIGE website for information: www.saige.org. Questions? Contact Kelly Berry, M.P.H. (Kiowa) at 405-361-2208.

- **Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference 2012. June 3-6. Mohegan Sun Resort, Uncasville, CT.**

Anybody interested in attending this year's NAISA conference should register before April 26 for reduced rates. Online registration is open until May 18. For more information, visit the website at www.naisa.org

- **College of Arts and Sciences Native American and Indigenous Studies Award. Deadline March 16.**

The Department of American Studies invites nominations for the COAS Native American and Indigenous Studies award. Self-nominations and faculty recommendations are welcome. The \$18,000 award includes a fellowship and modest stipend to cover responsibilities as the editor of the NAIS newsletter. There is also a small travel award to promote NAIS degree offerings at a professional development conference. Interested students should include a letter of application detailing their intellectual affiliation with the fields of Native American, First Nations, and/or Indigenous studies, and include a brief dissertation précis. A letter of support from a faculty member is also required. Some preference will be given to students enrolled in the NAIS doctoral minor. Applicants must be at the G901 level.

- **Visiting Lecture: "What Was Native American Literature?" Prof. Melanie Benson Taylor. Tuesday 20 March. IMU Walnut Room, 4:30-6:00 PM**

Dartmouth College's Prof. Melanie Benson Taylor is a literary and cultural studies scholar of Herring Pond Wampanoag descent. Her work explores the effects of capitalist and colonialist logic on the lives, language, and cultural productions of marginalized peoples throughout the Americas.

ACCOLADES!

Congratulations to **Prof. Christina Snyder** for winning an Outstanding Junior Faculty Award. This award is given by the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs and the Office of the Vice Provost for Research to recognize junior faculty who have demonstrated excellence in teaching, research and service. Dr. Snyder is an Assistant Professor of History and American Studies, and sits on the Committee for Native American and Indigenous Studies.

KEEP UP WITH NAIS!

- **Our mailing list** features core announcements, like lectures and talks that we organize. To get on the list, or to confirm that you're on it already, e-mail nais@indiana.edu
- **Our blog** will pass along news from the wider world of Native American and Indigenous Studies. Visit us at <http://iunais.wordpress.com>. You can also sign up to **receive blog updates by email** by clicking on the "email subscription" tool on the right-hand side of the page.
- **Follow us on Twitter.** We are @IUB_NAIS.
- **"Like" us on Facebook.** We are "Native American and Indigenous Studies at Indiana University."