Awareness Points for Interacting with Native American Students

from http://www.as.wvu.edu/~equity/native.html#sect3

- Do not persistently look directly at Native American students when speaking to them, or expect them to look directly at you. This is seen as a sign of defiance and hostility in many native cultures. Often Native Americans will look off in the same direction, not at each other, when speaking.

- Observe and ask questions that show genuine caring and concern.

- Do not put too much pressure on time. Traditionally, native cultures have relied on weather or other conditions to determine when something must be done, rather than using a clock. Many cultures do not even have words for time, or past and future tenses.

- Promote relaxed communication, native students need to be able to ask questions without hesitation and feel that they can discuss problems freely and without emotional upset. Many students have been taught that they should not express an opinion and that they should not make a statement unless they are sure that they are correct.

- Make learning more of an interpersonal activity than goal oriented and impersonal.

- Show students that many times learning is gained from trial and error, rather than criticizing mistakes and failures.

- Use a warm and personal teaching style.

- Be sensitive to non-verbal cues.

- Provide students with opportunities to discuss information in a noncompetitive atmosphere.

- Allow a longer times for response after asking a question.

- Accept silence.

- Listen as well as talk.

- Avoid excess verbalization. Be direct and to the point.

- Be aware of proximity and other nonverbal preferences.

- Emphasize cooperation and sharing. In Native cultures, status is gained by generosity and cooperation, not thrift and competition.

- Use group problem solving to emphasize that the work is broadly group oriented rather than task oriented.

- Use deliberately diverse peer tutoring. Students boost their self-confidence by teaching each other and often the best tutors are those who have had difficulty and then finally come to understanding. They are better able to understand the difficulties that another student may have and not be impatient with him/her.

- Emphasize the improvement of each student rather than competition for grades.
• Encourage classes that use the oral and story telling traditions as the basis for creative writing, reading skills, speaking, listening, and dramatics.

• Identify and emphasize positive Native American values; one cannot assume that any student believes in or follows what might be considered "typical Indian culture".

• Do not single out any one student for praise, criticism, recitation, etc.

• In personal interactions, be very sensitive to non-verbal cues.

• Do not freely give personal advice. Respect for the students’ privacy and minding one's own business are highly valued in Native American cultures. Native Americans may seem aloof and reserved and may perceive Euro-Americans as superficial and untrustworthy if they are too open.

• Do not expect students to look you in the eye when you are speaking to them. This is a sign of trust and respect in the dominant culture, but a sign of defiance and hostility in many Native American cultures.

• Do not persistently look directly at Native American students when speaking to them, this can be perceived as hostile, intrusive, and/or disturbing. Often, Native Americans look off in the same direction, not at each other, when speaking.

• Give Native students assurance that they can live in the dominant society without rejecting the culture of their families and community.

• Be sure to prepare yourself to show native students that learning is trial and error, rather than criticizing mistakes and failures.

• Show that you are really listening and interested in their ideas.