

**National Child Welfare
Workforce Institute (NCWWI)**



American Indian/ Alaska Natives

CURRICULUM CONTENT EVALUATION GUIDE



NCWWI



Purpose

In keeping with the Council on Social Work Education's competency-based education standards and social work competencies (Council on Social Work Education Commission on Accreditation and Commission on Educational Policy, 2015), this curriculum content guide provides general information that social work educators should know when working with American Indian/Alaska Native populations.

The guide includes:

- **Foundational concepts and basic essential understandings:** These are not exhaustive explanations because there are many multi-faceted underpinnings and distinct nuances relevant to American Indian/Alaska Native Nations. Users of the guide can find additional information on these concepts in the links provided.
- **Information on minimizing education bias,** a common challenge due to centuries of misnomers, addressed in four points aimed at eliminating prejudice toward American Indians/Alaska Natives.
- **An educational resource evaluation checklist** along with examples of selected infographics, one-page summaries, and microvideos that meet the checklist standards.

Foundational Concepts and Basic Understandings

The following essential concepts provide the basis for understanding the nation-to-nation agreements between the United States federal government and federally recognized tribes.



Tribal Cultural Diversities

1. There are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States; all have experienced similar historical and present-day traumas (e.g., genocide; land-stealing; forced removals; child removals from homes and communities; poor socioeconomic, education, and health outcomes). These tribes carry common cultural beliefs and relative values such as believing in a Creator/Creation, honoring elders, and respecting nature. However, there is great diversity among tribal nations' languages, cultures, histories, and governments. *Each* tribe has its own distinct and unique cultural heritage, which supports the foundation of their government structures (Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Units, n.d.).
2. The ideologies, values, and pathways of Indigenous traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern-day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian/Alaska Natives and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are believed sacred and are considered as valid as written histories. These histories predate explorers and colonists' "discovery" of North America. Tribal histories predate Columbus by many millennia (Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Units, n.d.).

Treaty-Making

1. The political relationship between tribal nations and other governments, including the federal government, was established and reinforced between 1778 and 1871 when 370 treaties were [signed](#).
2. United States treaties with tribal nations have the same status as United States treaties with foreign nations, and, because they are made under the U.S. Constitution and are "the supreme law of the land," they take precedence over any conflicting state law. These contracts represent an exchange and acknowledgement of certain existing rights, not a granting of rights, because tribal governments and peoples already held those rights.
3. Treaties established the principles of the federal "trust responsibility" to protect both tribal lands and tribal self-government and to provide federal assistance to ensure the success of tribal communities. The federal government has never adequately funded these treaty provisions. These treaties do not have an expiration date.

The trust responsibility can be broadly divided into two interrelated areas:

- I. Property Protection: Mandating that the federal government protect tribal property and assets where the title is held in trust by the United States for the benefit of the tribal nation.
- II. Self-Government and Land Preservation: Federal obligation to guarantee tribal lands and resources as a base for distinct tribal cultures (permanent tribal



community requires a secure land base to govern and develop, water to irrigate the land, access to fish and game, and income from natural resource development).

4. While the nature of tribal-federal agreements has changed since 1871, the federal government still negotiates contracts and compacts with tribal nations to this day. These agreements follow a similar formula and have a similar legal effect to the treaties the Senate ratified prior to 1871. In that sense, a form of treaty-making continues to this day.

Tribal Sovereignty

1. Federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native tribal nations are inherent sovereign nations that possess sovereign powers separate and independent from federal and state governments. However, under the American legal system, the extent and breadth of the self-governing powers are different for each tribe as they are carried out by each tribe's distinct design and purpose.
2. Tribal nations are [sovereign nations](#), and tribes have not relinquished their inherent sovereignty. Tribal nations continue to exercise their sovereignty today (Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Units, n.d.).
3. Generations of tribal peoples have been living in North America for millennia. Designated reservations are lands that have been retained for tribal nations to be used as exclusive, permanent homelands. Some reservations were created through treaties while others were created by federal statutes and federal executive orders. The principle (McCoy, 2000) that land should be acquired from tribes only with their consent and with treaties involved three assumptions (Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Units, n.d.):
 - I. Both parties (tribal and federal governments) participating in the treaty-making were sovereign powers.
 - II. American Indian/Alaska Native tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.
 - III. Acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists or states.
4. The federal government did not "give" American Indian/Alaska Native tribes their homelands or reservations. Instead, the federal government negotiated with tribes for their land on a nation-to-nation basis. Differences in tribal governments can predate the 100 years (late 1700s to late 1800s) of treaty-making (government-to-government compact agreements) between individual tribal nations and the United States federal government. It is important to note that land negotiations seldom resulted in benefits for the tribal nations. Tribes were frequently subjected to failed treaty agreements resulting in encroachment of non-American Indians/Alaska Natives, perpetual removals, and



reductions in earlier agreed upon tribal land bases (Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Units, n.d.).

Federal Policies

1. There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that affected American Indian/Alaska Native peoples in the past and continue to shape who they are today. Most of these policies have disenfranchised, not empowered, American Indian/Alaska Native peoples. For example, tribal peoples and allies have perpetually protested [boarding school policies](#) aimed at divesting American Indian/Alaska Native children of their Indigenous languages, cultures, and tribal connections. Other examples of egregious policies include:
 - The [Indian Removal Act](#) of 1830
 - Federal [oppression of tribal spiritual practices](#)
 - The [Indian Termination Policy](#) of 1953
2. American Indians/Alaska Natives have been direly affected by federal policies but have also influenced changes that recognize their standing and rights as sovereign nations, including the passages of the:
 - 1924 [Indian Citizenship Act](#)
 - 1975 [Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act](#)
 - [American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978](#)
 - [Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978](#)
 - [Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013](#)

Indian Self-Determination

In 1970, President Richard Nixon was credited with coining the phrase “Indian self-determination.” In short, this concept refers to tribal nations’ right to be self-determined. This means the tribes have the right and ability to establish contracts and compacts with the federal government regarding, but not limited to, health care, social, and educational services directly administered by federally recognized tribes. Along with self-governance, these policies allowed tribes to have control over their destinies (National Congress of American Indians, 2019).



Federally Recognized Tribes

Today there are various ways people can claim tribal affiliation and/or membership, for example through:

- State-recognized tribes – Some states have what are referred to as “state-recognized tribes,” which reside in their state jurisdiction.
 - Members may meet some type of established criteria such as sharing ancestry, culture, history, or connections to a geographical region to claim this [affiliation](#).
 - State-recognized tribes are not considered federally recognized tribes, but federally recognized tribes can also be state-recognized tribes (Salazar, 2016).
- Federally recognized tribes – “Federally recognized” is a legal term meaning:
 - The United States recognizes a government-to-government relationship with a tribe; and
 - A tribe exists politically in a “domestic dependent nation” status.

Federally-recognized tribes possess certain inherent powers of self-government and entitlement to certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of the special trust [relationship](#). Usually, to be approved for federal recognition, tribes have existing Senate ratified treaties or may be recognized through executive order statutes (The United States Department of Justice, n.d.).

Tribal Enrollment

Tribal citizens of federally recognized tribes are citizens of three sovereign entities:

1. Their Tribal nation
2. The United States
3. The state in which they reside

Federally recognized tribal nations establish the criteria for membership eligibility in their individual tribes. These can be based upon shared culture, language, customs, and [tribal blood](#).



Minimizing Bias¹

1. In mainstream culture, it is common for American Indians/Alaska Natives to be referred to in the past tense. Indigenous cultures are not dead but continue as living, adaptable, and fluid life pathways for American Indians/Alaska Natives that support ongoing resiliency into the 21st century. In spite of being subjected to ongoing historical and current oppression, American Indians/Alaska Natives continue to experience rapid [population growth](#).
2. American Indians/Alaska Natives are often negatively depicted in the media as savages, alcoholics, casino Indians, and/or paternalistic wards of the federal government. More accurately, contemporary Native peoples hold many different types of professional and technical occupations and are not confined to stereotypical roles based upon erroneous historical and contemporary [perceptions](#).
3. Ongoing bias assumes that anything non-Native institutions create to address the specific needs of American Indians/Alaska Natives is better than what the tribes can produce for themselves. Unfortunately, time and again, this has been proved wrong, resulting in extreme poverty and associated poor well-being outcomes for tribal peoples.
4. For centuries, American Indians/Alaska Natives have been portrayed and had their stories told from the Eurocentric perspectives of colonists and others who reside outside Native communities and lack tribal relations. Today, there is an extensive data collection of books, media production, arts, and studies created and produced by American Indians/Alaska Natives. Seeking out materials and information controlled by American Indian/Alaska Native publishers and media distributors whenever possible can help minimize bias in curriculum materials.

¹ Adapted from Almeida, D. A. (1996). *Countering prejudice against American Indians and Alaska Natives through anti-bias curriculum and instruction*. ERIC Digest. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED400146.pdf>; Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Unit. (2019). *Essential understandings regarding Montana Indians*. <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Education%20101/essentialunderstandings.pdf>



Resource Evaluation Checklist for Social Work Educators²

Title of Resource: _____

Type of Resource: Book article video podcast website

General Questions

1. Which tribe or tribes are identified in this resource?
2. If the creator of this resource is not a tribal member, were tribal members, cultural committees, or knowledgeable experts who specialize in and are knowledgeable in Native culture consulted about the American Indian/Alaska Native content in this resource?
3. Has this resource been reviewed by a relevant and/or associated tribal cultural committee, tribal historian, or other well-qualified reviewer? A well-qualified reviewer is a person who has experience, education, and knowledge obtained by working closely with Native communities.
4. Is there anything about this resource that leads you to question the validity, accuracy, or authenticity of the information it presents about American Indians/Alaska Natives?

What to watch out for in the resource

Does the resource:

- mix and match cultural attributes or characteristics from different tribes?
- feature generic "Indians" or a vague "American Indian/Alaska Native" identity?
- imply that all Indigenous peoples from North America have the same language, culture, history, spiritual traditions, or way of life?
- promote stereotypes or caricatures of American Indian/Alaska Native peoples, tribes, or cultures?
- imply American Indian/Alaska Native peoples or cultures are inferior or bad?
- use biased language to create prejudiced impressions of Indigenous people or cultures?
- perpetuate blatant inaccuracies about American Indian/Alaska Native peoples, histories, or cultures?

² Adapted from Ferguson, L. (2015). *Evaluating American Indian materials and resources for the classroom*. Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education Unit.

<https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Education%20101/Evaluating%20AI%20Materials%20and%20Resources%20for%20the%20Classroom.pdf>



- omit, avoid, or minimize Indigenous histories, people, or experiences?
- imply that all American Indian/Alaska Native and/or Indigenous cultures are identical or extinct?
- present only a non-American Indian/Alaska Native point-of-view of history or events?
- mention only American Indians/Alaska Natives who were useful to Europeans or Euro-Americans?
- lack respect for American Indian/Alaska Native intellectual property rights and Indigenous knowledge. In other words, has the source been properly credited to the original creator/owner?
- avoid controversial or complex issues or gloss over harm inflicted by the policies, non-American Indian/Alaska Native citizens, the military, or the United States government?
- deny or seek to undermine tribal sovereignty, cultural self-worth, or linguistic value?
- contain any material that would shame or embarrass an American Indian/Alaska Native student?
- contain any material that would cause any student to think American Indians/Alaska Natives or Indigenous cultures are inferior, bad, or unimportant?

What should be included

Does the resource:

- correctly locate and identify tribes?
- acknowledge the cultural, geographic, and linguistic diversity among tribes?
- present information about American Indians/Alaska Natives respectfully and accurately without romanticized imagery?
- acknowledge tribal sovereignty and promote a better understanding of the unique relationship between federally recognized tribes and the federal government?
- recognize and honor the intrinsic value of Indigenous cultures as well as the importance of continued cultural and linguistic survival?
- acknowledge Indigenous contributions to American society, history, politics, and culture?
- include American Indian/Alaska Native perspectives and experiences in a respectful manner?
- address controversial or complex subjects by giving equal voice to all sides, including American Indian/Alaska Native peoples?
- depict the cultural, religious, political, and economic diversity among present-day American Indians/Alaska Natives?



- recognize and honor contemporary and/or historical American Indians/Alaska Natives who are heroes or heroines within their own tribes?
- portray American Indian/Alaska Native peoples as intelligent, capable, trustworthy, and caring human beings?
- nurture cultural and personal pride in American Indian/Alaska Native students?
- provide positive American Indian/Alaska Native role models for all students?
- encourage all students to respect American Indian/Alaska Native peoples, histories, and cultures?
- inspire all students to learn more about American Indian/Alaska Native peoples, histories, and cultures?



Selected American Indian/Alaska Native Curriculum Products

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) Infographics:

Indian Child Welfare Timeline <https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Indian-Child-Welfare-Timeline.pdf>

Reducing Disparities through Indigenous Social Work Education

<https://ncwwi.org/document/reducing-disparities-through-indigenous-social-work-education-ncwwi-1-page-summary/>

Tribal Sovereignty in Practice: The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act

<https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Indian-Self-Determination-Act-and-Social-Work-Practice.pdf>

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) One-Page Summaries:

Active Efforts: Public Child Welfare ICWA Best Practices

<https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Active-Efforts-Public-Child-Welfare-ICWA-Best-Practices.pdf>

Reducing Disparities through Indigenous Social Work Education

<https://ncwwi.org/document/reducing-disparities-through-indigenous-social-work-education-ncwwi-1-page-summary/>

Trauma-Informed Practice with American Indian/Alaska Native Populations

<https://ncwwi.org/document/trauma-informed-practice-with-american-indian-alaska-native-populations-ncwwi-1-page-summary/>

Videos:

Collaborative & Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities: The Roles and Voices of Key Stakeholders

<https://ncwwi.org/document/collaborative-effective-evaluation-in-tribal-communities-the-roles-and-voices-of-key-stakeholders-2/>

Creating a New Narrative: Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities

<https://ncwwi.org/document/creating-a-new-narrative-collaborative-and-effective-evaluation-in-tribal-communities-2/>

Starting the Journey: Initial Considerations for Researchers Working in Indigenous Communities

<https://cncfr.jbsinternational.com/IWOK>



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