

**Self-evaluation letter by Laura Tohe, Associate Professor
August 16, 2008**

Research and Creative Activity

Since earning tenure in 2000, I have published three books: *Sister Nations: Native American Women on Community* (2002), *Dancing in the Wind* (2004), and *Tséyi', Deep in the Rock, Reflections on Canyon de Chelly* (2005). *Sister Nations* is a co-edited anthology of poetry and short stories by Native American women writers from across the U.S. Published by the Minnesota Humanities Council in 2002, it was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award in 2003 and was listed as one of their best sellers. It includes nationally distinguished writers such as, Louise Erdrich, Kim Blaeser, and Elizabeth Cook Lynn, with a Foreword by Winona LaDuke. In recognition of Native writers, co-editor Heid Erdrich and I were invited interviewees on the National radio program, Native America Calling. *Sister Nations* continues to be widely read in high schools, college literature courses, and women's studies courses. It is distinguished as one of the few books written and edited entirely by Native women that celebrate the rich and complex diversity of women within their own communities and in modern society speaking for themselves on a wide range of topics with humor, sadness, and perseverance.

Tseyi, Deep in the Rock, Reflections on Canyon de Chelly published by the U of Arizona Press won the 2007 Glyph Awards for Best Poetry and Best Book awarded by the Arizona Book Association and was selected as a Southwest Book of the Year in 2005 by the Tucson Pima Library from among 275 entries. *Tséyi'* is a collaboration of my poetry and photography by award winning photographer/astronomer, Stephen Strom, who invited me to write the poetry. It contains bilingual poetry in Diné (Navajo) language and is one of a handful of books of its kind. While I am a speaker of my native language, I prepped myself to write the text by taking three summers of Navajo literacy courses at Diné College in Tsaile, AZ. I am one of a few indigenous writers who speaks, reads, and writes my native language. Thematically, *Tséyi'* speaks of the importance of indigenous social, historical, aesthetic, and cultural values rooted within place and language. It is widely read in university courses on Indigenous and Navajo literature and creative writing. It is also available in museums, state parks, and cultural programs focused on interpretations of land and place. *Sister Nations* and *Tséyi'* make important and influential contributions as indigenous and multicultural texts within the scope of national and international literatures.

In 2004 I was invited by ArtsReach, a community outreach program from Tucson, AZ, to edit and write the Introduction for a collection of children's stories and poems. I am committed to these kinds of outreach programs where students, parents, and writers come together to celebrate children's writing. *Dancing with the Wind* is a trilingual text utilizing Spanish, Tohono'odham, and English languages. It was a required text in creative writing courses at the U of Arizona's American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) that offers courses, seminars, and programs devoted to the preservation and retention of Indigenous languages in the northern and southern hemispheres.

My second collection of poetry, *No Parole Today*, winner of the Wordcraft Circle of Native American writers for Best Poetry, will go into a third printing as of 2009. Extensively used by colleges and universities all over the U.S., it expresses the impact of assimilation and colonization during the boarding school era. It is included in the Children's & Educational Programming Thirteen/ WNET of New York as part of the PBS/Annenberg multicultural literature series among noted writers such as, Langston Hughes, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Judith Ortiz Cofer. *No Parole Today* was also nominated in 2003 for the esteemed Pushcart Prize awarded to outstanding literary publications.

In addition to my published books, I have published or have reprints of over two dozen poems that appear in prestigious national journals such as *Ploughshares*, *New Letters*, *Cream City Review*, *World Literature Today*, *Arizona Highways*, and in international publications as translated text in *Parole Dall'Orlo del Mondo II*, *Met Rode Inkt*, and *Poesie Amerindienne Contemporain USA et Canada*. Through invitation, my work appears in student-based

publications such as *Southern Griot* from the U of Southern Florida, *Coyote Brings Fire* from ASU West, and *Red Ink* from the U of Arizona. Recently, my short fiction mystery, "Tom Snag" was accepted in the forthcoming 2009 anthology, *Phoenix Noir*. In recognition of my work as a writer for over two decades, I was nominated for a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Native Writer's Circle of the Americas, an honor bestowed on outstanding Indigenous writers of the 20th and 21st centuries that include Scott Momaday, James Welch, Joy Harjo, and Simon Ortiz.

Since coming to ASU in 1994, my work as a poet has grown from local to an international presence. I have given over 50 poetry readings since 2001 at such venues as the U of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio; the prestigious Tucson Poetry Festival in the company of Gerald Stern and Juan Felipe Herrera; Novissima Verba International Poetry Festival in Lima, Peru; Shakespeare and Co., Paris, France; and was part of the 2006 Words from the Edge Tour II in Italy with Indigenous writers Lance Henson and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm. I am an invited writer for the 2009 Reynolds Series in Kearney, Nebraska among the company of Louise Erdrich and Maxine Hong Kingston

In the 2007 I completed a series of annotations for a DVD to accompany *The Bedford Anthology of American Literature* as part of the Native American Cultures Annotations published by Bedford/St. Martin's Press, one of which was my photograph "Petroglyph in Tséyi' (Canyon de Chelly)." This series expresses Indigenous interpretations of oral literatures and tribal narratives for college courses on American literature.

In my continued evolution as a poet, I was commissioned to write the libretto for the oratorio, *Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio*, in celebration of The Phoenix Symphony's 60th anniversary in collaboration with Mark Grey, Composer-in-Residence. Performed by a full orchestra, 120 member chorus, the baritone voice of Scott Hendricks, and the remarkable images of Deborah O'Grady, *Enemy Slayer* made its world premiere in February 2008. One of the few oratorical works that affirms and conflates Indigenous oral tradition and language with the European oratorio, it evokes a masterful and deeply moving meditation on war and its aftermath. The 70-minute oratorio received rave reviews and was a sold out concert. In July 2008 the Colorado Music Festival in Boulder, Colorado gave 2 performances which also received positive reviews. *Enemy Slayer* is slated for performances by the Utah Symphony in May 2009 and the Brooklyn Philharmonic in fall 2009, and will appear on CD in 2008 on the Naxos label, the largest distributor of classical music.

Growing interest in my work as a poet and cultural consultant generated over 30 interviews nationally and internationally, including interviews on NPR's "Morning Edition," KBAQ (classical music station) and was featured in the Emergent section of *Paste: Signs of Life in Music, Film & Culture* (2nd in circulation to *The Rolling Stone*), a nationally circulating pop culture magazine, in connection with *Enemy Slayer*. In 2004 the BBC radio interviewed me for "The White Stuff," a program on the importance of rain for desert Indigenous peoples which was re-aired in 2005. French filmmaker, Jean-Louis Nizon, invited me to appear in his 60-minute documentary on Diné People, *Navajo Springtime*, which aired on Paris public television in 2003.

My recent creative research at ASU was highlighted in *Marginalia* "Q & A: Denise Duhamel, Dinty W. Moore & Laura Tohe" and *Accent on English*, the ASU English department's newsletter. My work as a poet has been cited in a growing number of doctoral dissertations, interviews, and articles on Navajo poetics, and as a topic at the Modern Language Association meeting. Anthony Webster, Ph.D., has written extensively on Navajo poets, including my work and devotes a chapter to "'To all the former cats and stomps of the Navajo Nation:' Performance, the Individual and Cultural Poetic Traditions" in *Language in Society*, a 2008 Cambridge publication and in a circulating article with *Wicaso Sa: A Journal of American Indian Studies*. "Decolonizing Poetics: Linguistic Subversion in the Work of Laura Tohe" by Billy Stratton published a critical work on *No Parole Today* in *Red Ink*. Recently I completed a long interview of my work as a poet for Salina Bookshelf's publication on noted Navajo writers. I am in the process of completing a longer interview with Professor Jeff Berglund at NAU.

In addition to my poetry publications, I have contributed creative non-fiction essays that speak of Indigenous aesthetic and intellectual expression. "It was that Indian: Simon Ortiz, Activist Poet" appears in *Studies in American Indian Literature* (SAIL) and will be reprinted in a UNM press publication in 2008. "See Real Indians," an essay on cultural exploitation and tourism in border towns near Indian reservations, appears in *Beyond the Reach of Time and Change*. With an ASU Women's Studies grant I researched the impact of captivity and survival of Diné women incarcerated at Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner, NM in the 1800s. This research led to a conference paper given at the Navajo Studies Conference in 2006 and an article, "Hweeldi Beehahniih: Remembering the Long Walk" published in 2007 in *Wicaso Sa*. In recognition of my work as a scholar, I was invited by Professor Marie-Claude Strigler to write the preface for her *Histoire des Indiens des Etats-Unis (A History of North American Indians)* which was translated into French and published in Paris, France in 2007.

My current book contract with Rio Nuevo Press of Tucson focuses on the Navajo Code Talkers who used the Navajo language to efficiently and accurately pass secret military codes during WWII. Uniquely, the text will include photographs and bilingual text of interviews with the Code Talkers who have received highest honors and recognition for their service. Also in progress is an anthology of creative non-fiction essays on border towns near Indian reservations. *Border Towns: Margin as Place*, co-edited with Simon Ortiz, makes observations about towns that border Indigenous homelands where racism and violence often explode. The range of my work makes important contributions to indigenous studies in language, culture, and literature for Indigenous communities and for ASU's vision as a New American University that supports multiculturalism and the Indigenous intellect in the academy.

Teaching

Since tenure I developed several new courses: "The American Indian in Film and Video," "Indigenous Poetry," and "Navajo Literature." Cross-listed with Women's Studies and American Indian Studies, these courses offer Indigenous texts and perspectives on language, race, and gender not usually found in mainstream literature courses. I stepped in to teach new preps, "American Poetry since 1945" and "Twentieth Century Women's Literature" when the department was short on faculty. "American Indian Literature" continues to be a popular course. Students in "Indigenous Poetry" produced a superb anthology of poetry that I deposited in the Labriola Center in the Hayden Library. I am currently collecting the best student papers from "Native American Women's Literature" that will also be deposited in the Labriola Center. The topics include prominent Indigenous women leaders, artists, scholars, and writers. In this way my students create links to the outside communities and contribute to the growing body of work about Indigenous peoples. The CLAS' Advancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education grant enhanced the development of the "Navajo Literature & Cultural Studies" course, while the Women's Studies grant enabled me to research the impact of captivity and survival of Navajo women at Fort Sumner in the 1800s. These results of these grants enhanced the quality of my teaching and mentoring undergraduate, graduate, and Honors students. Several of my students wrote papers that were accepted at conferences. I served on ten committees (Masters and Doctoral), chaired three committees, mentored over a dozen undergraduate students and mentored independent studies with international students. My presence as an Indigenous faculty is a positive reflection on ASU because it helps create a sense of cultural connection for Indigenous students. While I have always worked to do my best in teaching, personal losses and the demands of professional life and outside activities impacted my teaching performances. Women and faculty of color, such as myself, who teach courses that challenge stereotypes and preconceptions about ethnic literature and women's studies have had to face the real possibility that their teaching styles, selection of texts, language dialects, and race affect their teaching evaluations. Nevertheless, I believe courses that are multicultural in content expand the student's knowledge of world literatures and make important contributions toward the student learning about the

world. The challenges, failings, and successes I have faced as an Indigenous poet/scholar have taught me to strive to be a better teacher.

I feel fortunate to have been raised by elders who taught me the Diné language and culture that carries expectations to help fulfill family and community responsibilities. I am often called upon to teach in my tribal and professional communities, give lectures, serve on committees, and teach writing workshops. As a member of the Arizona Humanities Speakers bureau, I have given over 50 state-wide lectures on Arizona Indigenous Studies. In recognition of the positive evaluations and value of my topics for this service, I was awarded the prestigious Dan Shilling Public Scholar Award for 2006 by the Arizona Humanities Council.

For the past six years, I have been invited to the Native American Artists and Writers forum on the Navajo reservation to give poetry writing workshops to high school students and faculty. I have also given workshops to adults at writing conferences. In May 2000 I was awarded Faculty of the Year by ASU's College of Extended Education based on my outstanding public service. Most recently, I have been invited to be a Visiting Professor at Northeastern U in Shenyang, China to teach North American Indigenous literature and to speak at a conference on traditional Indigenous literature in Montpellier, France in May 2009. These activities and awards link me to the outside communities and to the global communities that bring greater visibility to ASU and to the Department as institutions that support social embeddedness and transnational research.

Service

At the department level, I am serving for the second time as the chair of a search committee to hire faculty in American Indian/Indigenous literature. I wrote the target hire letter to bring to the Department's attention, Simon Ortiz, internationally known Indigenous poet/scholar who would help to raise the status of ASU and the Department in course offerings that promote Indigenous courses and research toward ASU's goal of a New American University. Ortiz was hired and shares a post with the American Indian Studies at ASU. I have also chaired the American Literature Sub-committee.

I am an Affiliated Faculty for Women's Studies and American Indian Studies for which I helped the latter in its development toward a department. In the summer of 2007, I was an invited Visiting Professor for AILDI at the U of Arizona. I taught an undergraduate/graduate creative writing course called "Creative Writing for Native Communities" to teachers and students who came from all over the U.S. to study with faculty who are committed to preserving native languages at this nationally known institute of Indigenous language preservation.

On the professional level, I reviewed for cultural and racial biases the ACT (American College Testing). I have reviewed poetry manuscripts for the U of Arizona Press and served as referee for *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. My consultant work for the Department of Education helps determine federal funding to schools on and off Indian reservations. Because of my Diné cultural background and my work as a scholar/poet, I have often been invited to give talks related to Indigenous literatures. Selected highlights include the NEH Institute at Diné College and at Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA; AILDI; and the Arizona Historical Society. Some of my local and national keynotes and talks include "Colorado Woman 2003," Denver, Colorado; "Integrating Native American Literature into the Curriculum," Diné College; and at the Washington statewide Indian Education conference, among others. Service to my tribal nation includes serving on the Board for the Diné College's Diné Teacher Education Program that sets language policy for undergraduates and graduates who matriculate through ASU. This program supports the preservation and revitalization of the Diné language, links with ASU, and proactively supports community outreach programs on the Navajo reservation.

As ASU continues to grow and evolve as part of President Crow's vision of a New American University, it is exciting to be part of that evolution in which my work as an Indigenous poet and scholar also advances. The work I have accomplished since tenure has flourished and is indicative of my commitment to ASU, the English Department, my community, and to my students. My accomplishments so far have brought forth greater national and international visibility to

myself as poet, scholar, and teacher, and to ASU as an institution that strives to continuously evolve. Promotion to Professor would affirm, acknowledge, and accept Indigenous intellectual expression, philosophy, and aesthetic expression within the English Department and the New American University.