

Grace L. Dillon

Narrative Statement of Purpose

Promotion from Associate Professor (indefinite tenure) to Professor
Portland State University

Thank you for taking the time to read the materials provided in this portfolio. It includes a narrative statement of purpose, my current c.v., and appendices containing supporting documentation on scholarship and professional development activities, service, and teaching.

Scholarship and Professional Development

My scholarly agenda unites Indigenous (or Native) Studies and Science Fiction Studies. The premise that has guided my work and has gained me a bit of scholarly notoriety is that Indigenous epistemologies, or what we might call “Skin Thinking” after a concept attributed to Joy Harjo (Muskogee Creek) and popularized by Robert Warrior (Osage), resemble precisely the modes of imagination that are commonly valued (as both intellectual and commercial properties) within mainstream scholarship on science fiction (sf). My primary contribution has been to bring together the scholarly communities of both Indigenous and sf studies to show how Indigenous authors have been excluded from the mainstream sf canon, why that oversight warrants attention, and why Indigenous, Native, First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal writers ought to embrace the genre of science fiction as an appropriate “weapon of choice” in fighting for the sovereignty of Skin Thinking. Despite the martial yet ironic metaphor in that phrase, “weapon of choice,” I carry forward this agenda in the spirit of “Biskaabiiyang” and “Mino bimaatisiwin,” Anishinaabowin words from my particular culture that roughly translate to a “Returning to Ourselves” and “Living in a Good Way,” respectively. My work asserts Native sovereignty in a scholarly activism that can best be contextualized within the growing interdisciplinary theory of Decolonizing Methodologies, which ultimately seeks to unite diverse scholarly communities in a shared search for social justice.

The success of my recent book, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (University of Arizona Press, 2012) has brought positive national attention to my scholarship in this area. This point requires emphasis, if only briefly. Each piece featured in the anthology is preceded by a detailed context grounded in Decolonizing Methodologies. As one reviewer puts it, “the book’s approach—including excerpts as well as self-contained stories, along with a scholarly, but not inaccessibly jargon-filled, apparatus—makes it a perfect course text,” while the editor of University of Arizona Press writes, “The wonderful success of *Walking the Clouds* underscores this book’s outstanding scholarship and writing.”

Featured as part of the University of Arizona Press's SunTracks series, *Walking the Clouds* sold out the first 1,500 print run in five months, and the Press immediately completed a second run.

Positive reviews commonly include both commercial and academic venues. For example, *Publisher’s Weekly* begins, “Dillon’s superb anthology, the first devoted to indigenous SF, highlights long-overlooked authors alongside better-known figures,” and goes on to conclude, “Every piece is a perspective twister and a thought inducer built on solid storytelling from

ancient and newer traditions, and the anthology will encourage readers to further investigate indigenous speculative works.”

The reviewer in *Science Fiction Studies*, one of the premier journals in my area, writes,

This new anthology is noteworthy for a number of reasons, not the least of which is its scholarly apparatus...But *Walking the Clouds* is not just a book by Natives for Natives; while Dillon may be seen as an activist promoting Indigenous sf, she also seeks to share it. Precisely because this anthology ‘confronts the structures of racism and colonialism and sf’s own complicity in them’ (10-11; emphasis in the original), this is a book that all of the sf community should read.

The full text of several national (and uniformly positive) reviews, including those cited above and others (e.g., *Indian Country Today*, *Fantasy Matters*, *Reference and Research Book Reviews*, *Curled Up with a Good Book*) are provided in an appendix.

In addition to completing this well-received and scholarly-driven anthology, my plans have included, from its inception, a companion piece, currently entitled *Seeding the Stars*. During initial negotiations with the University of Arizona Press, I lobbied for a strategy of proving that Native sf already exists by showcasing examples in an anthology, given the very fact that its presence has been overlooked. The anthology, then, would prove the case, prior to my completing a monograph that can unpack the theory established in *Walking the Clouds* without needing to use the full texts of stories. This seemed like a fine plan to them, and based on the success of *Walking*, they are now committed to the development of the second book. From March 12, 2013, Editor Kristen Buckles writes:

I am writing on behalf of the University of Arizona Press to enthusiastically express interest in your book project. We are very proud to have published your book, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, and we are extremely interested in publishing the companion volume to the anthology. The wonderful success of *Walking the Clouds* underscores this book’s outstanding scholarship and writing, your editorial prowess, and the wide appeal the book has had.

In addition to completing *Walking the Clouds* (2012), I have engaged in the following activities since gaining tenure in 2008: two refereed book chapters accepted for publication (The University Press of Mississippi; MacFarland); two refereed articles published (*Journal of Science Fiction Research*, 2013; *Journal of Science Fiction Film and Television*, 2012); three invited book/film reviews accepted/published (*SFRA Review*, 2013; *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 2012; *SFRA Review*, 2010); two invited encyclopedia entries accepted for publication (*The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*).

Additionally, since gaining tenure in 2008, I have made 15 separate presentations at international or national conferences. I also have made several presentations as a service to the community.

As a result of *Walking the Clouds* and this additional scholarship, I am being invited to share my work on Indigenous science fiction and Indigenous cinema, which allows me to serve as an ambassador for Portland State University. These invitations include, for example, the 2013 Southwest chapter of the Popular Culture Association, which put together a panel based on the book and invited me as a special presenter; Idaho State University, which invited a presentation in spring 2013 sponsored by their Cultural Affairs Council and the Department of Anthropology; UC Riverside, which invited me to come as an Indigenous Scholar in Residence through the California Center for Native Nations and the Science Fiction and Technoculture Studies Programs in Spring 2013.

I am also being invited to contribute articles, chapters, and book reviews to several collections on topics related to Native and Indigenous Studies. In addition to invited work included in the total count given above, other invited work has included two chapters for *First Takes: Indigenous Film in North America*, volumes 1 and 2, eds. Wendy Pearson, Kerstin Knopf, and Ernie Blackmore, Woolyungah (funded by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant on the politics and aesthetics of Indigenous film); an invited book chapter on the *Twilight* series for an essay collection on Native American cinema, eds. Tom Holm and Steve Palik, University of Arizona Press; an invited article for a Special Issue of the *Journal of Science Fiction Film and Television* on transnational science fiction scheduled for January 2014; and an interview with James Tiptree award winner Andrea Hairston for the journal *Paradoxa*.

I also have been asked to provide editorial reviews for manuscripts submitted to journals including *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, and Routledge's Media & Cultural Studies Series.

Service

Community Outreach and Service

Of the numerous community outreach events that I have participated in over recent years (see c.v.) I will draw attention to several that illustrate the continuity of my scholarly agenda.

The first is an annual student writing contest that I began four years ago. Called "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms," the contest is a practical way to put forward the agenda I argue for in *Walking the Clouds*. It invites students from all Indigenous communities internationally to participate in a science fiction writing contest, offering a \$1000 winner's prize, which is judged by a prominent Indigenous sf author. The contest deadline is November 1, and when this year's contest is complete, I will have distributed over \$6,000 in awards and stipends for judging. This funding is strictly from my personal finances and managed through a PSU Foundation account. I contribute these dollars in good cheer knowing that emerging Indigenous authors are gaining support and encouragement to continue writing.

Throughout this narrative, I attempt to reveal the continuity of my work across categories: scholarship, service, and teaching all reflect a scholarly activism that is grounded in Decolonizing Methodologies. Of course, it is beyond the scope of our present discussion to unpack satisfactorily what Decolonizing Methodologies entail, but I believe I've created a fair example related to my "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms" contest. Decolonizing Methodologies seek to promote Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty while engaging the community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, and of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, in an exchange of ideas: exactly the concept of "community" that I believe PSU values. I have found social media to be instrumental in this attempt to build community and I maintain a Facebook page that brings this community together in collaboration and good spirit. If you are interested, you can access "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms" online at Facebook to get a sense of the conversations, camaraderie, and community that I try to facilitate.

Additionally, I am committed to bringing Indigenous authors to the local community when possible and also have funded several guest author readings from personal funds. These have included readings by James Tiptree Award winner Andrea Hairston, multiple award winner Stephen Graham Jones (author of eleven novels/short story collections), and New York Times Best Selling author Daniel H. Wilson (whose novel *Robopocalypse* is being made into a full length film produced by Stephen Spielberg). Beyond such readings that I coordinate and finance independently, I am always eager to help represent Portland State and our Indigenous Nations Studies program at collaborative ventures. For example, I introduced and facilitated a presentation by Leslie Marmon Silko when Portland State partnered with Portland's Literary Arts Inc. to bring her here on a book tour for her recent autobiography, *The Turquoise Ledge*.

In this vein, I also make myself readily available for community speaking engagements when sought out as a representative for PSU. These events might be categorized as "presentations," but because they are public performances typically given to serve the community, as opposed to presentations at academic and professional conferences, I consider them community service. Such events include "Taking Flight: Sherman Alexie's Native Slipstream," an invited presentation to the Portland community through the Everybody Reads program; "The Only Good Indian: Lecture to Accompany the Film by Wes Studi," an invited presentation as part of a Native Film Series coordinated by Washington State University, Vancouver; and a "Teach In" that invited the local community to discuss the growing "Idle No More" movement, which asserts sovereignty and social justice for all Indigenous peoples but began in response to recent legislative actions in Canada.

I would also like to highlight an annual Native Film Festival and Feast that I began in 2004. This event showcases Indigenous cinema and is open the public in an effort to bring together the local community in the spirit of celebration of Indigenous accomplishment. I was sole organizer and funder of this event until a few years ago, when student members of PSU's chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) and the United Indian Students in

Higher Education (UISHE) became (happily!) involved. I now serve as advisor for the festival and help them coordinate these activities while providing the films that are featured.

Finally, various committee assignments included on the c.v. include community-based components; notably, the Native American Student and Community Center Advisory Board, on which I served from 2008-2011; and the President's Diversity Action Council, on which I served from 2004-2010.

Service to the Profession

I touched on several key activities in my discussion of scholarship that I consider as professional service. These include ongoing invitations to provide editorial reviews for manuscripts submitted to journals including *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, and Routledge's Media & Cultural Studies Series; as well as invitations to give special presentations by institutions including the University of California, Riverside and Idaho State University. I have been asked informally to present at the University of Hawaii also, and I am happy to continue serving in this capacity in future as I continue networking with my colleagues at the various conferences that I regularly attend. I have also served as an external reviewer on a promotion and tenure case for the University of Houston, Victoria, Canada.

Additionally, I am a newly appointed member to the Awards Committee of the Science Fiction Research Association, and a long-standing member (2007-present) of the Popular Culture Association's Susan A. Koppelman Award Committee, which annually recognizes a work of distinction that promotes feminist scholarship.

Service to Portland State University

Over the years, my service to PSU has contributed at all levels, from departmental/programmatic to college to university. These years of activity are documented on the c.v. I will highlight what I consider to be significant recent ones here.

My core department is Indigenous Nations Studies, but part of my teaching responsibility lies with the university's nationally-recognized University Studies Program. At the same time, I am an affiliated faculty member within the English Department as well. Thus, my service can be divided into various constituent parts.

For University Studies, I serve as the Coordinator of the Popular Culture Cluster, which offers courses that satisfy vital general education requirements for all PSU students. I have served in this position since 1998. This is one of the larger clusters in the program and I believe is actually larger (in terms of faculty and course offerings) than some actual departments. Cluster coordinators are responsible for a variety of administrative tasks including student advising/petitions, approval of new course proposals, program assessment, and similar duties.

This has been a labor of love for me, but I do wish to mention that I am working with the Director of University Studies to find a suitable replacement so that I can redirect my energies into my (somewhat) fledgling core department, which could use more of my time, and into the newly emerging School of Gender, Race, and Nation, of which Indigenous Nations Studies is a part.

My service for the School of Gender, Race, and Nations includes committee work on strategy and planning for governance issues along with curriculum. I have served on the planning committee for our faculty task force that is charged with deploying a Master degree; this has included collaborative work on a “gateway” graduate course, which I will be teaching as part of the college’s offerings in spring 2014.

Other significant university-related service activities (since receiving tenure in 2008) include membership on two search committees for new tenure-line faculty; on three promotion and tenure decision committees; standing membership on the Indigenous Nation Studies Faculty Advisory Committee and on the Planning Committee for the annual Native American Honor Day Ceremony (which recognizes the achievement of our program graduates); and standing membership on the Ronald E. McNair Scholar Selection Committee (to include regular mentoring of McNair scholars engaged in research).

Teaching

Over the years, my teaching has ranged from undergraduate to graduate courses, and across at least three departments. As I write this narrative in Spring 2013, for example, I am currently teaching a sophomore level course in popular culture, a split undergraduate/graduate course on Indigenous science fiction, and a graduate-level course on the Renaissance poet-laureate Edmund Spenser, which I am teaching gratis as a service to students who are interested in the subject. The list of the numerous classes that I have taught and developed is available on the c.v. Again, I will attempt to streamline by highlighting what I consider to be significant recent touchstones.

For example, I have created online versions of the core course “Popular Culture Sophomore Inquiry” for University Studies and “Introduction to Native American Studies” for the Indigenous Nations Studies department. I took this route in light of increasing interest on the part of Portland State University administration, faculty, and students in exploring online teaching and learning. While online teaching/learning is not right for everyone, it offers a viable and forward-looking option for many. I believe that my online offerings are among the more well-received of PSU’s growing online curriculum.

My greatest joy as a teacher is mentoring students who show aptitude for continuing work at the graduate level. I’ve encouraged many promising students to pursue their dreams and know of at least two who, after I got them “hooked” on Edmund Spenser, went on to receive PhDs and tenure-line positions in the field (Tiffany Werth, now an Associate Professor at Simon Fraser

University, who recently contacted me to join a “scholarly network...of humanities research”; and Edward “Mac” Test, Assistant Professor at Idaho State University).

Most recently, I have mentored several students and encouraged them to attend and present at conferences that I frequent, so that I could introduce them to colleagues and “show them the ropes,” so to speak. These excellent young people include Emily Connelly, who accompanied me to the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, and whose presentation gained the attention of competing editors from the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* and from *Science Fiction Studies*, who engaged in a friendly battle to see who could entice her to send her paper to his journal for possible publication; subsequently, the Science Fiction Research Association has asked Emily to be its Publicist. Annie Rose Shapiro, Michelle Stonebraker, and Emily Connelly accompanied me to ICFA, The international Conference of the Fantastic, March 2013; Emily Connelly and Travis West accompanied me to the joint Eaton/Science Fiction Research Association conference, April 2013. Rose Krivulka accompanied me to last year’s WIS CON conference, presented at the 7th Annual Women, Gender, and Sexuality Symposium with Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee) as Key-Note Speaker and will present along with Emily Connelly at the First Annual Portland State University Graduate and Undergraduate Student Research Conference coming up this May 2013 (papers accepted officially now). These are but a few mentored students noted from more recently here but the vitae lists more in better detail. It is a privilege to help aspiring and promising scholars make their way into the world of scholarly activism.

Thus, my teaching seeks to build and maintain a community of scholars beyond the ten-week episode of a single class, a series of classes, or an entire degree program. Teaching is probably my favorite thing to do. Students seem to respond positively to my methods. Representative course evaluations, syllabi, a few notes jotted for class conversations, and unsolicited student letters are included in the appendices.

Conclusion

I welcome questions from the Promotion and Tenure Committee and external reviewers regarding the contents of the portfolio. In sum, I want to emphasize the continuity of my work across the areas of scholarship, service, and teaching; my pride in the opportunity to represent Portland State University, which has become my home; and my gratitude for the time you are investing in reviewing these materials.

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