

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GRADUATE  
THESES IN NATIVE STUDIES**

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Today several hundred graduate theses are produced in Native Studies in the U.S. and Canada each year: Anthropology alone produces about one hundred doctoral dissertations and four hundred masters theses in Native Studies each year. A study of large samples of the graduate theses produced in Native Studies in the last ten years has made me quite critical of the role of theses in Native Studies research and career development. The following are some of my findings.

1. There is a strong tendency for topical narrowness, regionalism, and nationalism in the theses. For example, 95% of the theses I studied that were produced in the U.S., are about U.S. Indians, and 97% of those produced in Canada are about Canadian Natives. According to citations of sources, there is a strong tendency for graduate students in Native Studies to be fairly ignorant of the Native cultures, scholarly issues, and academic sources outside of their own country.

The consistent lag of Canadian Native urbanization, acculturation, and government policies behind those of U.S. Indians and Indian affairs, is an extremely useful phenomenon for predicting problems and suggesting solutions in Indian affairs, but Canadian students are focused down on narrow issues just in their own province, region, or country. There is a similar rarity of comparative studies of the tribes and regions across Canada, which would show for example, that Indian cultures and Indian-White relationships became markedly different in French and British Canada.

2. There is very little consistent career development on the part of graduate students. Thus, for example, outside of archaeology, it is rare for a student to do both a masters thesis and a doctoral dissertation in the field of

Native Studies. The discipline of Native Studies is in need of people who will take on life-time careers in the field, to build up a great breadth of knowledge and expertise, rather than just do a single thesis project and then turn to other interests. Based on conference papers and publications, I estimate that only about 15% of the authors on my Canadian list of 429 recent theses are still actively involved in Native Studies. We need to do more on promoting the development of teaching and research positions to provide career opportunities in our field, and to counsel students about the values of staying in Native Studies.

3. Several sub-fields of Native Studies are still poorly covered in Canada, particularly the fine arts (6% of my list), economics (3%), literature (3%), medicine and psychology (3%), politics and law (4%), and sociology and social work (4%).

4. We need more students to go on to the doctorate level in certain sub-fields, particularly education (where only 7% of the theses are at the doctoral level), medicine (9%), literature and media studies (15%), and history and ethnohistory (17%).

5. While women students are in the majority in undergraduate courses in Native Studies, few of them go on to the graduate level. I find it difficult to get women students to do career-oriented research. They prefer to do projects they see as fun or relevant to themselves as women, without much thought about careers after they graduate from university. Only 31% of the theses were by women and their high level was in fine arts (64%), rather than history (15%) or politics and law (17%).

6. In advising students about Native Studies programs, it is important to distinguish between the undergraduate and graduate course offerings, because some of the largest producers of graduate degrees, such as Toronto and the University of British Columbia, have relatively few undergraduate offerings in Native Studies. Several small schools, such as Trent, Brandon, and Lethbridge, have excellent undergraduate programs. Then, in advising for the graduate level, certain universities are very well prepared to direct work in specific sub-fields of study. Thus, for example, Toronto ranks high in facilities and degrees in physical anthropology and archaeology; Calgary and Simon Fraser also excel in archaeology; and most of the theses in Indian education came from the Prairie universities. York's major Native Studies program is in Indian policy and administration, does not require a thesis, and has a good record of employment for its graduates.

7. In advising graduate students about future employment potential, there has been a recent high level of successful placement of PhDs in archaeology and the few people who have combined Native Studies with such fields as business, economics, law, and medicine. Based on trends and comparisons with Native Studies in the U.S., I project that we will see an increasing demand on the part of students for courses, and therefore university teachers, in the fine arts and literature sub-fields of Native Studies. In my sample of theses, the major producing provinces were Ontario (31%), British Columbia (22%), and Alberta (19%), but I suspect that many of the future positions in Native Studies will be

areas where few theses were produced, such as Saskatchewan (3%) and the Atlantic provinces (4%). In terms of its population, Quebec also had a low production of theses (12%), which is in line with my findings in an earlier study (Price, 1983) in which I found that Quebec had by far the fewest professional anthropologists per 100,000 population of any province; 1.0 or less than half the national rate of 2.2.

8. There is a lot of duplication in Native Studies research simply because people are unaware of, or do not bother to acquire copies of completed theses. I looked at the record of use of graduate theses at York and found that while some undergraduate students do read local theses in preparing their course papers, use by graduate students and professionals is rare. A similar pattern shows up in citations of theses in the literature: 2.5% of the citations in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 0.9% in the new *Handbook of North American Indians*, and almost no citations in books.

#### Finding and Ordering Graduate Theses

In Canada, the basic source of theses is by purchase from Canadian Theses on Microfiche Service, Collections Development Branch, National Library of Canada, Ottawa, K1A 0N4. The National Library has an annual list called *Canadian Theses*, and also now does a five year summary. In 1978 the National Library stopped subsidizing the production of microfiche for masters theses, so unless the university or the author paid that cost for the National Library, you have to write for a copy directly to the library of the university where the thesis was granted. Most libraries have a photocopy service for their university's theses. The microfiche service by the National Library is less expensive, and continues to be subsidized for all doctoral dissertations, except the University of Montreal which has its own service.

The basic source for PhD theses produced in the U.S. is by microfilm (currently \$10 U.S.) or photocopy (\$20) from University Microfilm International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106, U.S.A. They publish an annual *Dissertations Abstracts*, and for \$15 will do a topical search and printout from their data base of up to 150 citations on a topic of your choice (call 1-800-521-0600 for toll-free information on their services).

For theses done prior to 1973, the standard list is *The American Indian in Graduate Studies*, which has 7,446 theses. A catalog of U.S. doctoral work between 1904 and 1976 called *North American Indians: A Dissertation Index* by University Microfilms, is particularly useful because items listed can be ordered from their company. There are also lists by discipline. In U.S. and Canadian anthropology, the standard source at the doctoral level is the annual *Guide to Departments of Anthropology by the American Anthropological Association*. The Canadian Historical Association has both masters and doctoral level work in its annual *Register of Post-Graduate Dissertations in Progress in History and Related Subjects*.

## Analysis

I did an analysis of the 274 graduate theses (all except ten at the doctoral level) from U.S. universities between 1979 and 1983 listed in the University Microfilm catalog on *Ethnic Studies in North America*. Since the catalog is a selection specifically on ethnic studies, the catalog excludes most of the work in archaeology and traditional cultural anthropology. A final cautionary note is that you cannot assume that counts of graduate theses include all the graduates in a field because certain programs do not require theses. For example, at York University one can get a masters degree in either anthropology or Native/Canadian Relations by doing a series of small papers rather than a formal thesis. At the University of Toronto, some students are allowed to skip the masters level and go directly for their PhD, particularly in physical anthropology.

TABLE 1: Doctoral Dissertations in Native Studies From U.S. Universities Listed in *Ethnic Studies in North America*

	Number	%
1. Education, Educational Psychology	79	29%
2. History, Ethnohistory	46	17%
3. Anthropology, Archaeology	29	11%
4. Medicine, Physical Anthropology	27	10%
5. Politics, Law, Economics	21	8%
6. Linguistics	20	7%
7. Art, Dance, Music	15	5%
8. Social Work, Sociology	14	5%
9. Literature, Media Studies	12	4%
10. Religion, Philosophy	11	4%
Totals	274	100%

In content analyses of *Books in Print* and audio-visuals (Price, 1982), I found that first of all, there was a strong nationalism at work so that people generally publish books and make audio-visuals about Natives in their own country. Secondly, the frequency of material on a Native society was roughly correlated with the modern population size of that Native society within the country, except that the Eskimo (Yuit and Inuit) and Navajo tend to be over-represented, and the Metis to be underrepresented. These same patterns of nationalism and tribal importance seem to be true of the tribal orientations of doctoral dissertations in the general field of U.S. ethnic studies. Only 14 of the 274 dissertations, or 5%, were about Canadian Natives, and the majority of those (8 of 14) involve the Inuit.

A more representative sample that includes the majority of graduate theses produced in Native Studies at Canadian universities in the past ten years was

TABLE 2: Tribe or Area Orientation of U.S. Dissertations

Non-U.S.A. Orientation .. 14 (5%)  
 Not oriented by tribe or area- 107  
 Regions- 6  
 States- 40  
 Tribes in the U.S.A. - 119

Navajo	33	Eskimo	18	Cherokee	10
Sioux	9	Pueblo	8	Iroquois	4
Apache	3	Cheyenne	3	Choctaw	3
Ojibwa	3	Crow	2	Menomini	2
Metis	2	N. Athabascan	2	Arapaho	1
Blackfoot	1	Caddo	1	Catawba	1
Chickasaw	1	Kiowa	1	Massachusetts	1
Miami	1	Nez Perce	1	Paiute	1
Papago	1	Pawnee	1	Sauk-Fox	1
Seminole	1	Ute	1	Warm Springs	1
Yakima	1				

TABLE 3: Graduate Theses in Native Studies From Canadian Universities 1972-1983 by Subject

	Number	% of Total	Female Author	Doctorates
1. Archaeology	122	28%	20%	29%
2. Cultural Anthropology	51	12%	25%	37%
3. History, Ethnohistory	46	11%	15%	17%
4. Education	29	7%	45%	7%
5. Linguistics	28	7%	36%	39%
6. Physical Anthropology	27	6%	41%	56%
7. Religion, Philosophy	27	6%	41%	26%
8. Art, Dance, Music	25	6%	64%	20%
9. Politics, Law	18	4%	17%	22%
10. Sociology, Social Work	18	4%	39%	22%
11. Economics, Economic Anthropology	14	3%	36%	21%
12. Literature, Media Studies	13	3%	38%	15%
13. Medicine	11	3%	55%	9%
Totals	429	100%	31%	27%

TABLE 4: Tribe or Area Orientation of Canadian Theses

Non-Canadian orientation- 14 (3%)					
Not oriented by tribe or area - 37					
Regions - 41					
Provinces- 148					
B.C. 33: Alberta 26; Saskatchewan 11 Manitoba 18; Ontario 29; Quebec 9;					
Atlantic 9; Yukon & N.W.T. 13.					
Canadian Tribes- 191					
Eskimo, Inuit	43	Cree	18	Ojibwa	17
Iroquois	16	Metis	11	Huron	8
Kwakiutl	5	Montagnais	4	Beaver	3
Chilcotin	3	Chipewyan	3	Sioux	3
Tsimshian	3	Bella Coola	2	Blackfoot	2
Carrier	2	Halkomelem	2	Micmac	2
Nootka	2	Okanagan	2	Petun	2
Squamish	2	Stoney	2	Abenaki	1
Bella Bella	1	Beothuk	1	Cowichan	1
Haida	1	Haisla	1	Hare	1
Kutchin	1	Kutenai	1	Nishga	1
Passamaquoddy	1	Shuswap	1	Slavey	1
Tlingit	1	Tutchone	i	Salish	9
N. Athabaskan	6	E. Algonquian	4		

compiled for a similar analysis as the U.S. material. The results of these studies are presented in Tables 3 and 4, on subjects and area or tribe. Table 5 is on the universities where these theses were produced. Some 60% of these theses are actually in the discipline of anthropology, which includes archaeology, physical anthropology, and subfields which cover much of the academic spectrum in the arts and social sciences. While traditional subjects of anthropology, such as archaeology and physical anthropology, continue on at a healthy level, the important new trend in Native Studies is the expansion in such subjects of study as history, religion, education, fine arts, and literature.

The Canadian sample shows the same area-tribe patterns as the U.S. data. That is, nationalism is strong, and only 14 of the 429 theses (3%, compared to 5% in the U.S. sample) were primarily about Native people in another country. Also, the frequency of materials on a Native society is roughly correlated with its modern population size within the country, except for the overrepresentation of the Inuit (23% of theses where tribe was indicated), and an underrepresentation of the Metis (6%).

I will send a copy of my list of 429 recent Canadian theses in Native studies to anyone who writes me or calls to leave their name and address with the Anthropology Secretary at York University, (416) 667-2355.

TABLE 5: Theses by University

British Columbia- 96 (22%)		Ontario- 133 (31%)	
U.B.C.	52	Toronto	56
Simon Fraser	27	York	18
Victoria	17	Carleton	15
Alberta- 82 (19%)		McMaster	10
Calgary	53	Ottawa	9
Alberta	29	Western	8
Saskatchewan - 15 (3%)		Queen's	5
Saskatchewan	14	Trent	5
Regina	1	Waterloo	4
Manitoba- 33 (8%)		Guelph	2
Manitoba	33	Wilfrid Laurier	1
Atlantic- 19 (4%)		Quebec- 51 (12%)	
Memorial	9	Montreal	21
New Brunswick	5	McGill	14
Dalhousie	3	Laval	13
Acadia	1	Concordia	1
St. Francis Xavier	1	Bishop's	1
		Quebec	i

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