

UNC MIRROR

Finding that balance

By Tara Spencer

Issue date: 12/3/08 Section: News

Media Credit: Tara Spencer



Michael Welsh, a professor of history, gave a presentation Tuesday evening about the Middle Ground Project, which emphasizes hands-on learning to teach about both American and Navajo cultures.

Michael Welsh, a professor of history, gave a presentation Tuesday evening about the Middle Ground Project, which emphasizes hands-on learning to teach about both American and Navajo cultures.

More than 60 students and faculty members gathered in Columbine B at the University Center to listen to the "Balancing American Indian and Western Perspectives: Native American Education Projects and Research at UNC" panel discussion.

There were five presenters who participated on the panel Tuesday night, and they each spoke about issues facing the Native American population and history.

Michael Welsh, a professor of history, presented information about multiple grant projects he is involved with, including the Middle Ground Project.

The Middle Ground Project features a curriculum that includes hands-on learning experiences and national assessment rubrics to weave the stories of America and the Navajo people.

Welsh said he wants to teach people to teach better.

"There is more than one path of knowledge," Welsh said. "The trick is how to find that path and how to use it."

Tears welled in the audience members' eyes when Sally McBeth, a professor of anthropology, began her part of the presentation.

McBeth focused on the emotional ties Native Americans have with their ancestral sacred grounds.

She began with a short clip called "A Trail Home," which portrayed a member of the Ute tribe returning to the sacred grounds in the Rocky Mountains for the first time in her life.

"I can definitely relate to the woman in the clip because I am from that part of the state," said Daisy Davis, a junior elementary education major. "I know what it is like to be connected to a landscape."

Davis plans to return to the four corners to teach on a Navajo reservation.

McBeth continued to speak about various projects that she is involved with, including government-to-government relations between the National Park Service and the Navajo Tribal Council.

Linda Vogel, an associate professor of educational leadership and policy studies, spoke about a grant in 2005 from the Office of Indian Education to develop an online masters degree program leading to principal and special education administrator licensure for Native American educators.

"We have students who span the country, including Alaska, who are part of this program," she said.

Interest in this program is growing substantially.

"Four students graduated from this program last year, and we are planning on 21 graduates this year," Vogel said.

Other topics that were presented included information about the Navajo Nation Teacher Education Consortium and the future for Native American educational programs at UNC.

A common goal of the presenters was to create a Native American Center on campus to serve as a cultural Mecca.

"UNC should provide a place to study Native American history, but it shouldn't be 'the' place because all universities should also do it," Welsh said.