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D-Q University—Davis

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Recommended Citation

González, Deena J., "D-Q University—Davis" (2005). *History Faculty Scholarship*. 5.
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THE OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF
LATINOS AND LATINAS
IN THE
UNITED STATES

Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. González

Editors in Chief



VOLUME 1

Acequias

Dual Nationality

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2005

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D-Q UNIVERSITY-DAVIS. The D-Q University, whose initials stand for the Great Peacemaker (D), of the Iroquois Confederacy, and Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec spirit embodiment, was established in 1971 outside Davis, California, one land once home to the Wintun Peoples (Poowin and Patwin). Site of a former U.S. Army communications relay station, the 643 acres that make up the main campus were awarded to D-Q University in title under provision of the federal surplus property laws. In 1978 the university fell completely under American Indian control, a first. The university enrolled mostly indigenous and Chicano and Chicana students. In 2001 it came under the governance of a board of trustees.

D-Q University represents a site of common struggle for self-determination and control over resources and funding. Established during a period of intense debate about Indian autonomy and following the indigenous takeover of Alcatraz Island in 1969, D-Q began as a tribal college that included Chicanos and Chicanas as tribal people. In the 1990s it lost its accreditation and then regained it. Accreditation was often a topic of discussion. By the late 1970s D-Q University had achieved distinction as one of the most "audited" institutions of higher learning via harassing visits by federal auditors predicated on the belief that no real teaching or true learning was taking place. The volunteer efforts of many educators, some of them indigenous tribal leaders, disenchanted academics, and other friends and allies, secured the position of the university. Sometimes instructors were forced to leave campus and take their classrooms literally to the community, including the fields surrounding the university, where some students worked as day laborers, or the Sacramento city jail, where students were sometimes either wrongly held or incarcerated. These unusual classroom settings characterized the uniqueness of the D-Q experience, drawing as they did from the life experiences of an underserved student population. In the early twenty-first century, exchange and foreign students continued to make up some of the student body, and part-time as well as permanent faculty and staff continued to contribute to this unusual and interesting experiment in American higher education.

D-Q's academic survival and financial survival have been intertwined, as has been the case for most tribally controlled colleges and universities in the United States. Casino tribes and funding have thus far donated only a few thousand dollars of the estimated \$20 million it would take to operate a full-fledged university of this size in its location. D-Q's land base, however, is secure as it has been deeded its site. The university functions as a community college and in 1994 was designated a land-grant institution. Its mission is to educate indigenous people and Chicanos and Chicanas in an environment sensitive to the perspectives and interests of people who

are marginalized or ostracized by mainstream educational systems. American Indian languages are taught regularly, and the university hosts conferences of Indian nations; youth and elder gatherings; statewide meetings of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), a Chicano student organization; powwows; concerts; and other ethnic and cultural activities. Seminars, academic conferences, and workshops are also part of the work D-Q contributes to the surrounding community. Its enrollment includes about six hundred main campus students and an additional nine hundred spread across four satellite campuses. Over one-half of the students are indigenous, and another 40 percent are Chicano and Chicana.

D-Q continues the ongoing dialogues between Chicanos and Chicanas and indigenous (or "enrolled," that is, officially listed as Indian by the U.S. government) people, given that Chicano and other Latino groups also claim indigenous heritage. Authenticating Indianness is not something the university has encouraged. Explaining differences and understanding uses of the Spanish language and of Catholicism and the impact of western European traditions are part of the curriculum at D-Q. For a period of time Dennis Banks, a co-leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and others visited or lived at the campus, thereby allowing younger indigenous students and scholars access to the political organizing AIM had undertaken in the 1970s.

From its atmosphere of cultural tolerance and historical sensitivity to teaching students basic skills that will allow them to transfer into four-year institutions, D-Q occupies a significant and symbolic role in northern California and, as some of its supporters suggest, throughout the land euphemistically labeled "Indian Country." Perhaps it could be argued that all of the continental United States was in fact Indian Country, but D-Q has attended to other needs. D-Q's Sequoyah Library Special Collections and Archives contains several important Native American women's papers, historical documents related to the establishment of D-Q, and first edition books dating to the institution's founding. As an alternative to mainstream educational practices and in fulfilling a valuable need among indigenous and Chicano and Chicana students, D-Q appears to have weathered the worst of times and survived through decades of discontent and renewal.

See also Higher Education.

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