



[Back to Volume One Contents](#)

The Last Indian Standing: Shared Governance in the Shadow of Historyⁱ

By Cary Nelson

The call went out from Bacone College in 1932 to the Nations for pieces of the earth—stones, to be specific—that were steeped in Native American history. From Big Fish Place in Tennessee came a stone evoking the place identified with a traditional Cherokee story: Long ago a great fish overturned a warrior’s canoe, swallowed him, and coughed him up onto that Tennessee shore. Tennessee also provided a stone from Tuskegee in recognition of the birthplace of Sequoyah, the leader who created the Cherokee syllabary. From New England came stones from the Deerfield and Mohawk Trails. From Manitau, Colorado, a stone arrived from the old quarry on the Ute Pass Trail, once used by Utes, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Kiowas in very different times. A sandstone block bearing the image of a Katchina figure hailed from Walpi, oldest of the Hopi villages. From old Fort Yates in North Dakota came a stone from Sitting Bull’s grave.

War and peace were balanced in the gifts: The battlefield where Custer met his end was represented, but so was a Pima village in Casa Grande, Arizona, commemorated with a grinding stone used to crush grain. As Rose Henderson reports in a journal published by Virginia's Hampton Institute, no stone was available to honor a parallel racial struggle, so a brick from John Brown's fort at Harper's Ferry was added. Five hundred stones in all, a weave of history and place, were assembled to create the fireplace in Bacone's new Art Lodge in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Above it were pine beams cut and hewn by Cherokees from the Ozark Hills.

In the 1930s, the Art Lodge helped inaugurate one of the college's golden eras, as founder of the Bacone School of traditional Native American art. In the Bacone style, nostalgic, sometimes mythical, historical subjects were given stylized representation within clearly outlined areas of often brilliant color. In the process, what for earlier artists had amounted to a form of historical notation and religious expression evolved into a modern graphic style that influenced Native American art for the rest of the century.ⁱⁱ

Founded in 1880 by members of the American Baptist Church, the Five Civilized Nations (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole), and the Delaware Nation, Bacone is the oldest college in continuous operation in Oklahoma and an institution historically devoted to educating Native Americans. By 1922, students from twenty-four tribes were in attendance (Williams and Meredith, 57). Bacone has a rich history of important accomplishments, but its recent, deeply fraught story—a story in part about challenges to academic freedom and shared governance and in part about financial crisis—has never been told to a national audience. That is my purpose here.

My sources for this essay include a 7,000-word resolution issued in April 2004 by the Bacone College AAUP chapter, an organization that no longer exists, most of its remaining leaders having been fired or driven to resign after the resolution—accusing the administration of instituting “a dictatorial reign of terror at the College”—was circulated on campus. The document, “A Resolution for Condemnation of Bacone College's Senior Administrators and

Board of Trustees," was adopted and endorsed by the Oklahoma state conference of AAUP chapters the same semester.ⁱⁱⁱ I have also been supplied with a later leaflet, "Where are the Indians at Bacone College?"^{iv} Meanwhile, I have been in repeated communication with former Bacone faculty and staff over a period of years.^v





Top, Native American men students at Bacone University, 1907–08. Bottom, women students, 1906–07. Photos courtesy of the E. N. Collette Collection. Oklahoma Historical Society.

My contacts with current Bacone faculty have been far more limited. Not that I haven't tried, but their unmistakable fear of talking exceeds that of any faculty members I have met over four decades in higher education. Even among former employees, the fear of retaliation led them to ask me to withhold their names, which I assured them I would, and I have done so. This essay, I should add, makes no pretense of being the equivalent of a full "Committee A" report on academic freedom or one on shared governance by the Governance Committee.^{vi} It is an investigative project by one faculty member. To understand why this story matters, one should begin by telling some of Bacone's history. Indeed, my technique in what follows will be to move back and forth between the present and the past.

The Art Lodge still stands on the Bacone campus. It is now known formally as Ataloa Hall, in honor of Ataloa McLendon (Chickasaw), the Bacone faculty member who was the driving force behind its construction. Considerable local and national history was embodied in the surrounding buildings at Bacone College when the Art Lodge went up in 1932, for local Native

American history in Oklahoma stretches back across the continent. Bacone College's Baptist founders included some of the last Cherokees to abandon the fight to hold onto their traditional homeland and set out on the Trail of Tears, arriving in Indian Territory in February 1839.^{vii} Founded as Indian University in 1880 and renamed Bacone Indian University (in honor of Almon Bacone, its first president) in 1910, then later Bacone College, the institution has been buffeted by nearly overwhelming historical forces ever since. Even holding onto the college's original 160 acres would prove a challenge, as non-Indian settlers took up illegal residence in the Indian Territory in the late 19th century. There followed a relentless federal and state assault on the tribal foundations of Native life and sovereignty. Indians were to give up their communal lands, to be turned into individual land owners and assimilated. After Oklahoma became a state in November 1907, the Native American schools that had originally fed students into Bacone were closed and replaced with a state system of public education that, ironically, treated Native American children as unwelcome aliens.

Somehow, its survival repeatedly threatened, Bacone College persevered, enduring multiple challenges, a number of them financial. The most recent financial crisis came to a formal head on April 20, 2009, when the North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission placed Bacone on its Financial Panel Referral list, essentially a warning that the school is on life support. A progress report is due in December 2010 on the "extent of achievement in implementing the Financial Recovery Plan." But financial crisis has been in the background for years, giving the current administration an unacknowledged opportunity to eliminate its more outspoken Indian faculty members while retaining those who accepted administration edicts. As the administration's 2005 institutional self-study reports, Bacone did not purchase a single book for the library during the 2003-2004 academic year.^{viii} Bacone was placed on the Financial Panel Referral list in 2009 despite its president's assertion in 2005 that it had "overcome the financial and enrollment challenges that almost forced the college to close its doors in 1999" (Krug). As so often happens at institutions where shared governance has deteriorated, Bacone's

administrators proceeded without involving the faculty sufficiently in the fundamental decisions necessary to deal with the college's problems.

Bacone opened in 1880 with an enrollment of three students: one black, one white, and one Native American, an ethnic or racial mix more typical of the best American aspirations, rather than of any American institution's material conditions. In the fall of 1975, Bacone had 603 students. In the 1970s, despite financial difficulties, Bacone maintained a retention rate for Indian students of 65 percent between freshman and sophomore years, while the retention rate for Indians at other colleges and universities was only 25 percent (Williams and Meredith, 120). Since 1907, Bacone had operated as a two-year college, but in the 1990s it began again to offer selected baccalaureate degrees. By the fall of 2007, the four-year liberal arts college, accredited by the North Central Association, had an undergraduate enrollment of 884. According to IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System), the graduation rate for those full-time, first-time undergraduates who began the program in 2001 was 8 percent. The retention rate from freshman to sophomore year for full-time, first-time students who arrived at Bacone seeking bachelor's degrees in 2006 had fallen to 29 percent.

The college mission, adjusted in comparable ways to cultural and political forces, remained fundamentally Indian education on a Christian basis, but exactly what that meant changed over time. Bacone has been subject to all the constituencies that have struggled over what Indian education can and should be, including the church. As one frustrated scholar put it, "From the get-go, Bacone has been run in the missionary position: good white father on top." Interestingly, part of Bacone's funding has come from the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) since 1947.^{ix}

At first narrowly conceived as a training ground for Native American missionaries intending to work among their own peoples, by the 1930s the college had become devoted to promoting Native American culture and educating Native American leaders so they could control their own destinies. That meant hiring more Native American faculty, adding courses in Indian history, and developing a program to archive and disseminate Indian songs, traditions,

and history; all of this was added to the Bacone program in the 1930s and maintained until the year 2000. At that time, the art program was still going well. Classes in American Indian literature, religion, and dance were still held. Powwows were scheduled regularly, and medicine men were invited to campus. Tribes sent representatives to give performances.

Originally located in the city of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the capital of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, the college moved to Muskogee in northeastern Oklahoma in 1885, after the Muskogee–Creek Nation granted land in the tall grass prairie of rolling hills and lush green grasslands for its use. Trees were brought in from the nearby Arkansas River and planted in the shape of a heart. An ancient live oak is now the campus centerpiece. Since then, college holdings have been reduced to forty acres, and some of the historic buildings have been destroyed or are in disrepair. Sacajawea Hall was demolished to build a gymnasium. Wacochi Hall, perhaps the loveliest of the buildings whose names reflect the college’s Native American history and mission, is neglected and shabby. In retrospect, a decision made earlier this decade symbolized the vulnerability of Bacone’s historical commitments. Once, the college buildings were connected by native stone sidewalks, laid by student workers in 1937 and intended to symbolize the linkages between the Nations forged at the college (Williams and Meredith, 81); they were torn up and replaced with concrete under the Madsen administration. It wasn’t a consciously malicious decision, merely a thoughtlessly practical one to fix the walkways in the least expensive way. But faculty were not consulted and given an opportunity to advocate for the cultural significance of the stone pathways.

These physical changes are unfortunately emblematic of a shift in Bacone’s effective mission over the last decade. An institution once dedicated to hiring Native faculty has been frequently dedicated to firing them. A residential student body that was once primarily Native American is increasingly primarily Native no longer. Bacone’s connections with the community are in jeopardy, in part because the college’s commitment to participation in the Upward Bound program, which served about 50 area high school students from mostly low-income minority families, was terminated. × Endorsed in the Bacone administration’s 2005 self-study, Upward

Bound was abandoned a few months later. The college president wrote to the Department of Education in the fall of 2005 to say that “the College no longer considers the Upward Bound program to directly and adequately support the Institution’s mission.” The historic campus atop a low rise now evokes not only its history but also the risk that its historic mission will be abandoned. Bacone’s history deserves commemoration before it is forgotten. The devastating changes at Bacone were possible only because shared governance was ignored or suppressed and faculty were treated as at-will employees, actions for which there is no justification.

The 2004 AAUP chapter resolution begins by citing “Senior Administrators President Robert Duncan, Dean of Faculty Robert Brown, and Special Assistant to the President Mike Chiesa” for actions which are then detailed.^{xi} The Bacone Board of Trustees, unsurprisingly, supported the administration in all its actions.^{xii} Needless to say, the authors of the resolution should have been protected from retaliation both by academic freedom and shared governance guarantees. One might add that the Christian values Bacone espouses—and touts as its “Christian futures” planning methodology—might have mandated thoughtful discussion rather than retaliation.

Problems at Bacone began, according to Bacone’s AAUP chapter, in the fall of 2000, when Robert K. Brown arrived in the capacity of Academic Dean; he convinced the board to change his title to Vice President for Academic Affairs and began to assume unilateral authority for key “academic operations from the trivial to the important, from the process of book ordering to hiring,” according to the AAUP chapter resolution. The Faculty Senate, which had traditionally handled faculty pay raises and set pay scales, and which regularly sent four delegates to Board of Trustee meetings, was systematically undermined and displaced. The 1998 Faculty Handbook “designates the duties of the Faculty Senate,” but Brown “ignored these stipulations,” according to the resolution, when he created a series of new committees that took over duties previously handled by the senate and made himself an ex-officio member of each of them. “The Faculty Handbook allowed for this designation, but Academic Vice Presidents in the past were discreet and did not involve themselves in all aspects of faculty governance. They allowed the faculty its space,” the resolution reads. Administrative control of faculty salaries

meanwhile introduced wide disparities in compensation. The 2004 resolution describes a “staggering disparity in faculty pay,” while the anonymous community/faculty leaflet, “Where are the Indians?” charges that “Indian faculty are among the lowest paid of any full-time faculty, with some making less than \$32,000 per year.”^{xiii}

Although, as the Resolution points out, “the Faculty Handbook delineates approved reasons for dismissal of faculty... when Duncan and Brown began to fire faculty, they paid no attention to due process as defined” in the handbook. Having ignored key provisions of the existing Faculty Handbook, Brown and Duncan then appointed a committee to revise it in the fall of 2003. Free discussion was impossible because Brown attended all meetings, faculty noted. Then an outspoken Native American member of the committee was fired, and Brown was able to complete the revision with input from handpicked faculty and without the required approval of the faculty as a whole. Among the significant changes was the deletion of the sick leave policy.

During Brown’s first two years, according to the resolution, his opposition to shared governance was somewhat moderated by then-President Norman Madsen. But when Robert J. Duncan arrived after being appointed as president at the end of 2002, the opposition to academic freedom increased, shared governance essentially disappeared, and an atmosphere of intimidation reigned.^{xiv} (It did not help that Duncan was never seen without a pistol in the holster under his arm.) Staff and faculty members were vulnerable to reprisals. All were considered at-will employees, and any expressions of differences of opinion led to termination. Among the Native American faculty listed in the resolution as having been fired by 2004 were a Potawattomi religion professor, a Cherokee business professor, and a Cherokee literature professor. Others were placed on probation in preparation for subsequent termination. The AAUP resolution also regards the demotion of the Native American Humanities and Math–Science chairs as retaliatory.

By late 2004, as a result of “very real intimidation of both faculty and staff,” according to the resolution, fear became a dominant emotion among current and former Bacone faculty: “Anyone who is critical of the administration loses his job, so no one is willing to speak.” A

once relatively unified cohort of Native American faculty and staff developed splits and antagonisms, as shared governance speech and job security became increasingly incompatible principles. At first this produced divisions within the existing employee ranks; now it is largely a split between those who were fired and those who weren't.^{xv} Fear of retaliation still reigns; faculty members who were fired years ago are afraid to speak, even off the record.

Having fired several Native Americans with PhDs, despite a commitment in the self-study to "significantly [increase] the percentage of full-time faculty with terminal degrees," my faculty informants tell me Brown then told those remaining faculty with MAs that they would need doctorates—an oral policy, they assert, to this day only applied selectively. By 2009, some forty-eight Native American faculty and staff had been fired or forced out without due process, a clear violation of AAUP policy. (The aggregate number of forty-eight illustrates the preference of the former Bacone faculty and staff to see themselves as one community.) Duncan appointed himself religion professor after firing his predecessor. Of staff members arbitrarily fired, a Cherokee grant writer and former vice president was the first. (I am also honoring the wishes of Native American faculty in withholding their names, though that is not my preference.)

The fate of due process and shared governance at Bacone is exemplified in the faculty resolution's account of the February 2003 firing of the Dean of Education, Jewell Linville (not a Native American), for insubordination after she insisted that athletes fulfill the state requirement for education majors to meet with their advisors for an hour each month. Following the procedure specified in the Faculty Handbook, Linville asked for a grievance hearing with the Senate's Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee. That committee found she had been fired without just cause or due process and that her contract had been violated. The following year, all faculty contracts were revised to specify that they could be fired without cause.^{xvi} Faced with such administrative contempt, faculty morale plummeted. Most no longer bothered to seek a grievance hearing. Duncan also tried to deny Linville unemployment compensation, but the state found in her favor and awarded the payments after a complaint was filed (Hales, March 4, 2005).

The fact that what amounted to the inaugural faculty firing involved a white faculty member introduces a fundamental ambiguity into the Bacone story. Is it a story about yet another imperial administration at a small college targeting its critics, or is it another chapter in the long assault on American Indians? Was Bacone targeting Indians, or just targeting administration critics? Did the college actively seek to discourage Indian students, or simply to reduce enrollment by children of the poor? Those attuned to American history know that distinguishing between racist intent and racist effects is secondary to the reality of victimization. My own view is that both racism and a general antagonism toward shared governance played leading roles.

Disrespect for due process was also apparent in promotion decisions, as administrators reversed both positive and negative recommendations from the academic affairs committee. Professional development funds appear to have been awarded inconsistently. In 2003, Duncan and Brown told the local AAUP chapter it could no longer hold its meetings on campus (Hales, March 2, 2005). Meanwhile, the Academic Affairs Council, a major policymaking body, was being stripped of its Indian members. As the anonymous faculty pamphlet points out, two Cherokee professors—one from literature and one from math—were forcibly removed in 2002, leaving only one Indian among its twelve members. Three subsequent vacancies left openings that could have been filled with Indians. They were not.

The aftermath of these administrative decisions has been brutal. Most of the fired faculty have had to leave Muskogee and their homes.^{xvii} Health problems linked to stress have befallen some; one had a heart attack the day after she was fired. Some of the younger staff members who were fired landed on their feet and found acceptable jobs, but few faculty feel they found comparable employment. Their fates sent an unmistakable message to those faculty who, understandably, made holding onto their jobs their first priority. One fired faculty member resorted to teaching high school in another state. One now works in her husband's used car lot. Another pieced together adjunct teaching in several different cities, traveling back and forth across the Oklahoma prairie. Two never found any employment and are now nearly destitute.

Faculty and staff were not the only ones facing change. Students suffered as well. As the termination of participation in the Upward Bound program suggests, the college administration was not interested simply in marginalizing or eliminating outspoken Native American faculty. As both the AAUP resolution and the faculty pamphlet document, college policies also resulted in a diminished commitment to Native American students and in turning the institution into a top-down, authoritarian, and business-oriented enterprise. The combination of these aims makes partly comprehensible what might otherwise seem inexplicable, and marks part of what is distinctive about the Bacone story. Exactly why, according to the AAUP resolution, chief administrators since 2000 were either indifferent or hostile to Bacone's Native American mission remains something of a mystery, since they would not admit they were and have indeed claimed otherwise. Moreover, not every Indian student at Bacone has felt ill-served. Those who found and established good relationships with faculty mentors often benefited from their time there. Nonetheless, Bacone over the past decade has not only consolidated administrative power and disenfranchised the faculty. If that were the case, this essay would read like any number of accounts of rogue administrations under financial pressure, which frequently detail a series of assaults on faculty shared governance and academic freedom. The Bacone of the last decade is also about a steadily smaller number of Indian students in residential degree programs.

The practices that have helped make Bacone less hospitable to some of its Indian students—the population it was founded to serve and for which it was granted its land and the donated funds for most of its buildings—became manifest with unexpected fees appearing on students' account statements without prior notice or current explanation (Ruckman).^{xviii} They included such petty items as fees for parking on an undeveloped grass field near the college, along with damages to dorm rooms for which the students were not responsible. When students questioned such charges, "A Resolution for Condemnation" reports, they were simply told the charges were levied by order of the Board of Trustees. But Native American student billings have also been occasions for public humiliation, as when, as reported in the resolution, Mike

Chiesa, special assistant to the president, and a business office employee “came over to the health science building to take students out of class and escort them to the business office to take care of their financial obligations.” Funds authorized for the Native American Student Association have been withheld.

Meanwhile, the college has had a long-term problem of dwindling Indian student enrollment. Bacone’s self-study lists Native American enrollment at 75 percent in 1956, 63 percent in 1970, and 44 percent in 2004. The IPEDS national database lists the combined American Indian and Alaskan Native undergraduate population at Bacone at just 36 percent in 2007. Those numbers, along with the removal of key Indian faculty and the depletion of a once-rich Indian curriculum, sent a still more definitive message about the institution’s mission and commitments.^{xix} The administration was not, however, just indifferent to its founding mission. Like so many other administrations, Bacone, propelled in part by financial pressures, preferred a profitable curriculum that focused on business and criminal justice. The Native American humanities curriculum was sacrificed. Other changes were more subtle, as when Brown changed Indian presentations to multicultural events, thereby diluting the college’s historic focus. These changes follow four decades in which Bacone faced a far more competitive recruiting environment than it confronted earlier in its history, when there were far fewer Indian colleges available.^{xx}

First-generation college attendees from disenfranchised minorities often require support from a thriving cultural community of their peers to succeed, but that has proven especially true for Indian students. Cultural necessity thus fueled rapid growth in tribal colleges since the late 1960s and other institutions founded Native American studies programs.^{xxi} Bacone maintained such a community for decades. One can read through old editions of the yearbook, *The Bacone Chief*, as I have. Those with access can study the campus newspaper, the *Bacone Indian*, which opens “The Redskin Philosophy” in 1928 with this motto: “One arrow is worth a thousand words.” Or you can read *Bacone Indian University: A History* (1980) by John Williams and Howard L. Meredith, to see the myriad forms that community took—from literary societies

and choirs to baseball teams and group work on a farm—and understand why Bacone mattered and why Bacone faculty and staff saw themselves as not only committed to, but indeed the living embodiments of, a history and a series of traditions. And that is why the recent assaults on shared governance and academic freedom at Bacone echo through so much of American history and the long history of Native Americans.

Contrary, however, to what faculty reports and statements argue—that these traditions have been compromised and severed—a visitor to the official Bacone Web site might well conclude that the college remains fully dedicated to its original mission and maintains a thriving Native American Studies program. Bacone recruitment brochures are a photographic show of the commitment to Native Americans, replete with photographs of Indians in regalia. But the photographs of campus events do not actually prove a deeper commitment. The 2006 anonymous leaflet, “Where are the Indians?” is particularly hostile: Bacone “is a White college run by White administrators. It has White teachers who serve mostly non-Indians, but uses Indians both for show and also to raise money.” It operates “with a linear, from-the-top-down management style, instead of an Indian council model with input from the bottom up.”

One may read a strikingly different account in the extensive self-study report Bacone administrators submitted to North Central’s Higher Learning Commission in 2005: “Bacone’s system of shared governance has been revised to a more balanced governance system enabling opportunity for faculty to continually provide input that funnels to the administration and board of trustees. Moreover, under the leadership of President Duncan, Bacone’s administrative structure has moved towards a horizontal approach with more people involved in decision-making processes.” Brown also gets his share of credit in that study: “With his leadership, the College has a stronger system of faculty governance.” However, the administration’s own list of “HLC 2005 Comprehensive Self-Study Task Force Members” includes, without comment, the names of Native American faculty members who had already been fired and were no longer on campus in 2005. They had participated in the self-study when it began at the end of 2003 and then were gone.

The character of the current incarnation of Bacone's historic mission took an odd new turn in 2009 when a wealthy member of the board of trustees, who had made a substantial bequest to the college, died. The will included a condition that Bacone revive its Native American programs. Bacone promptly hired a special assistant to the president to design a hypothetical Center for American Indians. The Web page is headed with photos that give the appearance of ongoing activities. Four-year American Indian degree programs are listed with their starting dates: AI Studies (Fall 2009), Art Degree with AI Concentration (Fall 2010), and AI Museum Sciences (Fall 2011). Multiple staff positions are listed. But the college admits that "the center will not be a physical location during its pilot phase" and that the staff positions are dependent "upon securing appropriate levels of funding," presumably including the bequest. Meanwhile, other resources are listed as though they already exist, such as *Indian University Journal*, which appears to be issued thrice yearly but in fact remains unpublished. The frequently unfunded Native American Students Association is also textually revived on the site.

Former Native American faculty, staff, and students who either were run out of town or left in alienation find it extraordinarily painful to see Bacone's historic mission reduced to a public relations campaign, yet it has been difficult to get their views heard. Several of the dismissed faculty filed lawsuits. Bacone settled out of court, and the settlement agreements include not only the usual confidentiality provision regarding monetary awards but also the following stipulation, offered to me by one former Bacone faculty member as an explanation of why he or she could not talk: "The Plaintiff will not discuss or disclose [his/her] perception of facts, or [his/her] opinions, regarding the College or the College's administration." This unusual restriction of course replicates the historical silencing of Native American voices.

Publication of this essay cannot assure full justice for those faculty members and staff dismissed without due process, but it will shed some light on their stories^{xxii} — and they do want their stories told. The Bacone story is not just about an assault on shared governance and academic freedom. It is about the meaning of those abuses when they are carried out in the shadow of a long and shameful national history. History does indeed repeat itself. The

colonialist attitudes of Bacone administrators, with their willingness to exploit the college's Indian heritage while undermining it, link the American present with its past. The new Bacone story is about the continuing historical legacy of the Trail of Tears. It is about a new form of Native American removal, about treaty betrayals reborn as betrayals of mission. It is about Americans living still in the long national nightmare of racial bias. "Basically," remarked one Native American faculty member who would say no more, "they killed us all."

Citations

"A Resolution for Condemnation of Bacone College's Senior Administrators and Board of Trustees" (Muskogee, OK: Bacone College AAUP Chapter, 2004). Available online at

<http://cary-nelson.org/nelson/AcademicFreedomIssues/bacone-college-faculty-report.pdf>.

Bacone College IPEDS data (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?id=206817>.

Hales, Donna, "Bacone's boss gets bad news," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* (March 2, 2005), A1, 4.

___, "Bacone director claims sexual harassment," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* (March 4, 2005), A1-2.

___, "Group hears Bacone concerns," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* (March 23, 2005), A1.

___, "Sex bias suits plague Bacone College: Several women employees claim job loss due to gender, race," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* (March 4, 2005), A4.

Henderson, Rose, "Indian Education at Bacone College," *The Southern Workman*, 63:5 (May 1934), 143-148.

Higher Learning Commission Comprehensive Visit Self-Study Report (Muskogee, Oklahoma: Bacone College, February 2005), Volumes 1 and 2. Available online at <http://www.bacone.edu/documents/2005volume1.pdf> and <http://www.bacone.edu/documents/2005volume2.pdf>.

Jones, Ruthe Blalock, "Bacone College and the Philbrook Indian Annuals," in Lydia Wyckoff, ed., *Voices and Visions: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Tulsa, OK: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1996), 49-58.

Krug, Christopher R., "Bacone set to get 4-year nod again," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* (March 24, 2005), A1.

Martin, Jeff, "Faculty taking up slack," *Tulsa World* (March 14, 2004), A-15.

Nelson, Cary, *No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

Reyhner, Jon Allan and Jeanne M. Oyawin, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

Ruckman, S. E., "Indian concerns expressed to Bacone College trustees," *Tulsa World* (March 12, 2004), A-13, 15.

"Where are the Indians at Bacone College?" (Muskogee, OK: anonymously distributed collaborative faculty/community leaflet, circa 2006). Available online at <http://cary-nelson.org/nelson/AcademicFreedomIssues/Where-are-the-Indians-at-Bacone-College-scanned-8.14.09.pdf>.

Williams, John and Howard L. Meredith, *Bacone Indian University: A History* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1980).

Notes

ⁱ I would like to thank Bryan Brayboy, Amy Carroll, Eric Combest, Maggie George, Seigfried Heit, Daniel McLaughlin, Robert Parker, Gary Rhoades, Martin Snyder, William Tierney, Paula Treichler, Cat Warren, Kathi Westcott, Stephanie Waterman, and others for their suggestions and comments on drafts of this essay. They are not, of course, responsible for its arguments and conclusions.

ⁱⁱ For a narrative account of Bacone's art program, see Ruthe Blalock Jones, "Bacone College and the Philbrook Indian Annuals." Acee Blue Eagle chaired Bacone's Art Department beginning in 1935, followed by Woody Crumbo and Dick West.

ⁱⁱⁱ "A Resolution for Condemnation," a copy of which was provided to me by the Oklahoma State Conference of AAUP chapters, was written and distributed before any of the faculty members involved in drafting it had signed settlement agreements with Bacone. See Cary Nelson, *No University Is an Island*, for an account of the Bacone faculty's relationship with the AAUP. Some of the faculty's complaints were aired at a public meeting with representatives of the North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission in 2005 (Hales, March 23, 2005). The Oklahoma State Conference of AAUP chapters first became involved when its representatives met with Bacone faculty in Muskogee in October 2003.

My practice has been to seek confirmation of allegations in the report before citing them here. Also, while the report is an important source, I am not endorsing all of its conclusions. In the deteriorating collegial atmosphere for dissident faculty members at Bacone, some standard administration edicts were experienced as harassment. At one point, the report complains about a new requirement that faculty support fully the case for student awards, whereas previously they had just forwarded the names. While faculty members may have been annoyed, the requirement is completely conventional. Less conventional were administration objections to the number of awards given.

^{iv} "Where are the Indians at Bacone College?" (four pages) is undated and unsigned, but I am estimating it was distributed in 2006, because it refers to events in late 2005. After a number of their colleagues were fired in 2004, some faculty members began communicating anonymously or with pseudonyms. Unlike "A Resolution for Condemnation," which was approved by the Bacone AAUP chapter and includes contributions by more than one faculty member, I cannot say with certainty whether one or more than one faculty or community member was involved in writing the anonymous leaflet.

^v I have also been in regular contact with faculty from other Oklahoma institutions who have followed events at Bacone.

^{vi} The differences between this essay and an official investigation will be obvious to anyone familiar with AAUP procedures, but it is worth putting some key points on the record here. An official AAUP investigation is a collective action regularly reviewed by the staff; it is launched only after a meeting attended by staff and the president. As part of an official investigation, a faculty investigating team is appointed; its members visit the campus and, in the case of Bacone, would likely have had more success than I at interacting with current employees. Unlike this essay, their written report is a group project. I have substituted numerous readers, but they were not involved in my Bacone research.

^{vii} Not all Cherokees set out on the Trail of Tears. There were also those who moved to the hills in the East and maintained their ways.

^{viii} Failure to provide a sufficient budget for library acquisitions has been a recurrent problem at Bacone. Although funds have not been provided to buy books for the library, money was budgeted to remodel the office suites occupied by the president and the dean of faculty, which were appointed with flat-screen TVs. Bacone's financial problems received some unusual publicity in 2004 when Jeff Martin reported in *Tulsa World* that faculty were performing janitorial services.

^{ix} The national office of the DAR provided me with the date of its first award to Bacone.

^x Bacone's Upward Bound program was the context of one of several discrimination complaints former Bacone faculty members filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The EEOC did not issue a finding of discrimination in this or the other complaints, but it ruled the suit could go forward (Hales, March 4, 2005).

^{xi} Mike Chiesa was relieved of his responsibilities in August 2009.

^{xii} The board of trustees was put on notice about Indian problems with the Duncan administration as early as 2003. Members of the American Baptist Indian Caucus met with Bacone staff at the Bacone Orphanage early in fall 2003, then attended the November 2003 board meeting along with Bacone faculty and staff. There the Caucus reported complaints by Indian faculty and staff at Bacone and gave the board members a written memo. Unfortunately, the Indians had to wait hours before they were allowed to speak. During the March 2005 public meeting with representatives of the HLC at Bacone Inn, a Caucus member characterized the 2003 board response as an accusation of "meddling," at which point the board chair, who was also in attendance, apologized (Hales, March 23, 2005). One Bacone faculty member, a veteran of federal agency work on behalf of Indians in Washington, pointed to one source of the problems: "There are no Indian administrators. The board is mostly non-Indian. The student population is well below 50 percent Indian" (Hales, March 23, 2005).

^{xiii} A number of Bacone faculty have seen no cost-of-living increases in recent years. Some qualify for free school lunches for their children.

^{xiv} Reading from a copy of Duncan's 2002 curriculum vita, distributed to the Bacone board of trustees and later supplied to me, he reports his terminal degree as a 1999 Doctor of Ministry from Drew University's Theological School. He was, his vita states, the "director's award recipient" as the first graduate of the school's "Global Online" program, where work is primarily online. He was at the same time, again according to his vita, acting director of admissions for the Theological School. He held that position from 1997 to 2000, at which time he became director of admissions, a position he held until he was appointed president of Bacone. He began teaching online courses at Drew in January 1999.

Duncan's arrival at Bacone made running the school—to a limited but notable degree—a family affair. Duncan's daughter is the bookstore manager, her husband an assistant baseball coach, and Duncan's son owns the private security firm that provides campus security. I am told that Duncan's daughter-in-law works part-time in campus publications.

^{xv} Although the Bacone AAUP voted unanimously to ask the Oklahoma State Conference of AAUP chapters to endorse the 2004 resolution, some Bacone AAUP members broke ranks and withdrew their support once more people began to be fired.

^{xvi} After Linville, firings were immediate. No faculty input was sought. Terminated faculty members were escorted off campus.

^{xvii} While leaving the state in search of another job is common in academia, it held special significance for some Bacone Indians. Despite the fact that Oklahoma was the end point of the Trail of Tears, the destination of historical removal from ancestral lands, it developed its own meaning. In some political venues, the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma takes precedence over the Eastern Band of Cherokees. New history has been made there, some of it anguished. Oklahoma is the place where the Apache warrior Goyathley (Geronimo) was murdered.

^{xviii} As S. E. Ruckman reports, in 2004 meetings with the board of trustees, "several Indian students questioned additional fees charged to their accounts."

^{xix} Bacone's self-study, prepared in advance of a visit from the HLC, lists five full-time Indian faculty members in fall 2004. The 2009-2010 comprehensive course catalogue includes some six hundred different courses, forty-eight of them in American Indian Studies. Among the courses hypothetically offered to prospective students are ambitious four-course sequences in each of four Indian languages: Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Pawnee. This course catalogue represents more of an ideal than a reality. The 2001-02 catalogue, which is somewhat more realistic, lists only eighteen courses in Native American subjects, but faculty members teaching then report that most of them were never taught. They taught Cherokee in a two-course sequence occasionally, but could never find anyone to teach Creek. Choctaw and Pawnee were not included in the earlier catalogue and were not taught. The prospective fall 2009 course schedule listed 16 different courses in American Indian Studies, plus three additional sections of "Introduction to American Indian Studies," a plan that overstated what would actually end up being taught. While many colleges have untaught courses that linger in their catalogues before they are removed, they also should have practices in place that guarantee that new courses are staffed before listing them and that untaught courses are deleted.

^{xx} Bacone's Baptist identification probably does not itself hurt the school's recruiting potential. There are many Baptist Indians in the South and throughout Oklahoma. Elsewhere there are deeply religious Native peoples, some connected to other Christian faiths, some of whom would find a Baptist school acceptable, some not. It is possible in Native culture to be both Christian and spiritual in a traditional sense.

^{xxi} See Reyhner and Oyawin for a general history of American Indian education.

^{xxii} Because I have been in touch with former Bacone faculty for years, including face-to-face conversations, I have been able to gain a sense of their experience. Not so reporters. The local newspaper, the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, has given repeated coverage to the story, and *Tulsa World* gave Bacone's problems some coverage, but the story never broke into the national press. After it received the 2004 Bacone faculty resolution in 2008, *Inside Higher Education* assigned a reporter to the story, but he could not persuade current or former Bacone faculty to talk on the record.