THE KATZ FAMILY CHAIR IN NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

By Mike Lynch, Montana State University Alumni Foundation

With the arrival of Joseph P. Gone this fall, another exceptional Native American scholar steps in to hold the Katz Family Chair in Native American Studies. Gone, a Montana native and member of the Gros Ventre nation, is taking leave from his position as an associate professor of psychology and American studies at the University of Michigan to occupy the chair formerly held by Henrietta Mann and Bill Yellowtail.

“The scholars who hold this chair have accomplished a great deal in their respective fields,” said Walter Fleming, department head in MSU’s Department of Native American Studies. “They serve as role models for our students and invigorate our faculty through the perspectives they bring to campus.”

The broad range of perspectives that each chair brings with them to MSU offers students a chance to look at new subject areas or to view their studies through a different lens. Mann, a Cheyenne Indian and once named one of the ten leading professors in the nation by Rolling Stone Magazine, focused students’ attention on preserving Native American language, culture, traditions and land. Yellowtail, a Crow Indian who once served as regional director of the Environmental Protection Agency, challenged students to think in terms of personal sovereignty—the idea of people being in charge of themselves, their family and their future—and to consider the future of Native American peoples in the West.

As the new chair, Gone brings a more cross-disciplinary approach to the department, applying psychology and sociology to better understand the influence a person’s culture has on their mental health. Recently named a Guggenheim Fellow, Gone will also be developing his book, Rethinking American Indian Mental Health, based in part on his work studying substance abuse programs for Native Americans in Montana.

Established in 2000 by Sheldon and Audrey Katz, this partially-funded chair is one of only a few in the nation focused on Native American Studies, positioning MSU as an educational leader in the study and support of Native American cultures and peoples. Fully-funded, this chair will enable MSU to bring more scholars like Gone into the Department of Native American Studies, and provide more opportunities for students across campus to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the enduring impact Native American culture contributes to our region.

Contact Melissa Dulin, Director of Development, at 406-994-3046 or melissa.dulin@musaf.org for more information about growing the capacity of the Katz Family Chair in Native American Studies.

Portions of this article were informed by, Wipf, Breanna. “A terrific Honor: Montana Native Receives Guggenheim Fellowship for Psychology Work.” Great Falls Tribune 6 May 2014: Print.

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