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Woods says.

NSU's recent initiatives are targeted at teaching young people more about the Cherokee culture and, specifically, its language. The product of a joint agreement between the Cherokee Nation and the university, NSU's Cherokee language degree program was launched in fall 2005 in response to a U.S. Administration of Native Americans survey grant.

Through the survey, the Cherokee Nation assessed the state of the Cherokee language in northeastern Oklahoma, says **Wyman Kirk**, NSU associate professor of Cherokee.

“We knew the language had been getting weaker and was facing a serious loss of speakers,” he says. “The survey found that most Cherokee speakers are 40 or older. Very few young people know and use the language, and if they do, it's isolated to only specific families.”

Fortunately, the survey also found that many Cherokees are eager to learn or relearn their native language. The Cherokee Nation responded by outlining plans for a Cherokee immersion school in Tahlequah, modeled after a Hawaiian immersion program. NSU's Cherokee language program was designed, in part, to train teachers for the school.

Although the Cherokee language has several thousand fluent speakers, the International Wordpath Society, a Native American language preservation organization, estimates that one-third of Oklahoma's Native languages are already extinct.

“We are very blessed to have so many speakers today, but if nothing is done to retain the language, it will go by the wayside,” NSU's Oosahwee says. “With the language will go the life ways of the Cherokee people.”

Other state universities have similar programs with the purpose of revitalizing Native American languages and culture. The University of Oklahoma's Native American studies program includes courses in history, tribal economics, philosophy and several languages. Oklahoma State University offers an American Indian studies minor.

Woods says anyone, no matter his or her heritage, can appreciate the material taught in Native American studies courses. He says he hopes that interest in Native cultures and languages will continue to grow in Tulsa and the surrounding areas.

“It's important that Native Americans recognize their cultures are as worthy of study as European, Asian or American cultures,” he says. “For non-Natives, learning about another culture helps teach respect and tolerance. It promotes understanding.” ■

## “Good Morning America” Visits OSU-Tulsa



OSU-Tulsa student Cindy Downes was featured on ABC's "Good Morning America" for her ambitious return to college. Cindy put her college career on hold to raise a family. Now, she's working on a degree through the Tulsa Community College/OSU-Tulsa partnership.

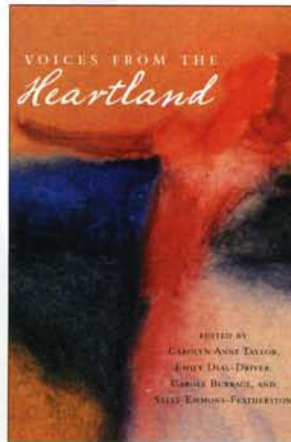
It's never too late to realize a dream of earning a college degree. Just ask Cindy, who now begins her days saying, "Good morning, OSU." To learn more, visit [www.osu-tulsa.okstate.edu](http://www.osu-tulsa.okstate.edu) or call 918-594-8000.



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