From:
Oscar Barrau, Department of World Language Studies, Indiana University South Bend

To:
Erika Zynda, Office of Research

Subject:
Final Report of Research Conducted as of June 23, 2010 after earning a Summer Faculty Research Grant in 2009, which was titled “Their Maps, Our Maps, and what to think if they do not have any”

1. Description of grant-supported activity

One sees two distinct corpuses when looking into Native American mapping. On one hand, there is a relatively large and modern, world-area structured geographic corpus where Amerindian “maps” are described as clearly distinct from Western cartography. On the other hand, there is a small corpus of European evidence from the early modern encounters with Native Americans, which suggests that both Western and Amerindian mapping traditions appeared more mutually recognizable than truly dissimilar. The former corpus is based on ethnographic principles of difference and relies on trans-cultural translation. By contrast, the latter speaks of mapping as a human universal, a less linguistically charged medium of communication that requires no special training or culturally specific mapping skills other than what all human posses: the capacity to generate and read mimetic representations of the physical environment. Both former and latter constitute irreconcilable positions about mapping. This essay endorses the latter and looks with suspicion at the former, primarily because despite the major revision that the social sciences experienced during the (post-modern) decade of the 1980s, their discursive logic still shows the prevalence of traditional ethnographic writing practices.

2. Were you able to complete the project? Describe any difficulty you had.

The project is nearly completed as of today. The difficulties I had with this project had to do with its interdisciplinary nature, and with having to study theories and practices outside of my field: geography, experimental psychology, and ethnography. This extra-disciplinary study took several months.

3. Did, or will, the project result in a specific product -- a manuscript, composition, syllabus, etc? If so, please describe and indicate state of development.

This project generated a 25 page manuscript that will be revised and submitted for publication in a top, peer reviewed journal by the end of the summer.