Sarris awarded first endowed chair

Greg Sarris, acclaimed author, screenwriter and scholar, joined the SSU faculty last fall as Sonoma State’s first recipient of an endowed chair.

Sarris holds the Endowed Chair in Native American Studies within the School of Arts and Humanities.

“With Dr. Sarris as the endowed chair, SSU continues on its path of leadership in the field of Native American studies, both in terms of scholarship and in terms of community and social policy impact,” said Eduardo Ochoa, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

An endowed chair is a faculty position funded in perpetuity from the earnings on a gift and is filled by a prestigious scholar. These highly regarded positions help colleges recruit and retain the best professors in the nation. SSU’s endowed chair focuses on writing and Native American studies, and is the only funded endowed chair in the University’s history.

“Greg Sarris is an incredibly talented teacher who will inspire our students to reach out to young Native Americans in the community. I am delighted that he will be holding an endowed chair in the School of Arts and Humanities,” says William Babula, dean of the school.

A Santa Rosa native and most recently a professor of creative writing and literature at Loyola Marymount University, Sarris has published several books, including the widely anthologized collection of essays, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts, Watermelon Nights* and *Grand Avenue*. Just recently, he finished his seventh book, a novel for Viking/Penguin. His earlier book, *Grand Avenue*, was made into an HBO mini-series, which Sarris wrote. Robert Redford was executive producer.

“I want to teach small classes as much as possible. It is one of the things that attracted me to Sonoma State. One of my hopes is that the love I have for literature will be contagious,” says Sarris.

Sarris holds a Ph.D. from Stanford University and was the Fletcher Jones Endowed Professor of Creative Writing and Literature at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles before joining SSU. Prior to teaching at Loyola Marymount he taught at UCLA where he was a full professor for 10 years. He currently serves as chairman of his tribe, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

“I am glad to have come home to Sonoma County and that I have something to bring with me, which is the experience I have gained while working, writing and living in other places. It is a remarkable opportunity to work with the faculty at Sonoma and play a part in the University’s intellectual life. I was a Sonoma County student once, too, at Santa Rosa Junior College. It was teachers and writers who put me on my path and I return that gift by teaching what I learned. Writing is my life. I owe teaching that love of writing to the younger generation,” says Sarris.

The purpose of the endowed chair is to foster greater understanding of the Native American culture and communities of California. This endowed chair was made possible through the $2.5 million donation from the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

“We are extremely pleased that the search committee chose such a fine example of excellence in writing, teaching and breadth of experience. This appointment will augment the growth of our small but excellent Native American Studies program and serve our students far into the future,” said Ruben Armiñana, SSU president.

Greg Sarris, who holds the Endowed Chair in Native American Studies, talks with the students in his contemporary Native American fiction class this spring.