



A Guide to Engaging Native American Perspectives in Courses and Programs

TCU's Native American
Advisory Circle (11/12/21)

UNDERSTAND WHY BRINGING NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES INTO TCU'S COURSES AND PROGRAMS IS IMPORTANT

Engaging respectfully with Native Americans and learning their perspectives and experiences is something that virtually all courses and programs at TCU can do in ways that are relevant to specific needs and goals. It can be as simple as including the university's [Land Acknowledgment](#) on syllabi, webpages, and other appropriate settings. Or there can be more complex engagements. To help you do this more effectively, TCU's Native American Advisory Circle offers these suggestions:

- Understand why bringing Native American perspectives into TCU's courses and programs is important
- Recognize how colonization might be present in your course, program policies or procedures
- Respect Native American community knowledge as the best teacher for Native American perspectives
- Develop healthy relationships with Native American communities, organizations and individuals
- Create a strategy for intentionally increasing Native American presence in your course, department, college or program
- Understand, use, and incorporate TCU's Land Acknowledgement into your courses and programs
- Do not be afraid to ask for help
- Keep crucial fundamentals in mind: avoid stereotypes and misinformation

Learning from and with Native Americans raises the academic standards and quality of education offered by our university. Native American communities are caretakers for knowledge that has been developed over millennia. When engaged in respectful and appropriate ways, TCU's students and faculty will learn ways of understanding and living in the world that cannot be learned through Western methods and theories.

Native American knowledge and expertise are relevant in addressing many of the most pressing issues facing the contemporary world. The success and sophistication of Native American individuals and communities attest to this.

Students who understand Native American perspectives and experiences will help TCU fulfill its mission of educating individuals to think and act as ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the global community. Students will be better prepared to take their place in the world.

“ Invisibility is the modern form of bias against Native Americans.
- Dr. Stephanie Fryberg ”

Engaging with Native Americans throughout our campus is essential to attaining Inclusive Excellence. Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts are stronger when Native Americans are included equally at all levels of our university.

“
When you play with our identities, when you use them and demean them, it has implications.
”

- Dr. Stephanie Fryberg

Dr. Stephanie Fryberg (Tulalip; William and Ruth Gerberding University Professor of Psychology and American Indian Studies, University of Washington) points out the compelling imperative to include Native Americans at all levels of our efforts at TCU.

([Reclaiming Native Truths: How the Psychology of Omission Fuels Bias Against Native Americans](#),

presentation at the National Museum of the American Indian, November 9, 2018, quotes found at 15:24 and 8:45 respectively)

RECOGNIZE HOW COLONIZATION MIGHT BE PRESENT IN YOUR COURSE, PROGRAMS, POLICIES, OR PROCEDURES

Learning from and with Native Americans is appropriate. “Studying” Native Americans, however, is harmful and a continuation of centuries of colonization.

The term, “colonization,” refers to the ongoing attitudes, methods, goals, and systems associated with non-Indigenous individuals and nations, especially those rooted in Western worldviews, seeking to take and control Indigenous lands and resources. This includes controlling and destroying Indigenous peoples, nations, societies, and cultures.

Colonization frequently manifests itself in the following ways:

- Through efforts to control the images and histories of Native Americans, while silencing or limiting Native American voices and perspectives, especially when they challenge Western, Christian, and non-Native power and portrayals.
- By assuming the superiority of Western, Christian, and non-Native knowledge, methods, and values. Native American peoples, knowledge, methods, and values are often considered inferior, simplistic, irrelevant to the modern world, or only of value when studied for Western purposes and through Western methods.
- By creating policies and procedures that only reflect Western values and goals and fail to consider Native American perspectives and experiences.
 - For example, course attendance policies that only recognize and make allowances for the nuclear family fail to recognize the close relationships and roles played by “extended” and multi-generational family members in Native American societies. Those considered as cousins in Western families may be brothers and sisters in Native families; aunts and uncles may be related to as mothers and fathers.

Western education and its methods, goals, and institutions were birthed from colonization. The priorities and ways of knowing that originate in these contexts often distort and misappropriate Native American knowledge and peoples.

Consider the words of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith: “The term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity.” (*Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1999, pg. 1)

These questions raised by Smith not only apply to research, but also teaching: “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Smith, 10)

Avoid forcing Native American peoples, knowledge, methods, and values to fit Western goals, standards, practices, and theoretical models. Interpreting Native American ways from non-Native perspectives is an expression of colonization and should be recognized as such.

Consider reconceptualizing or broadening your teaching, research, and program approaches and goals. For example, Kristen Bos (urban Métis), Assistant Professor of Indigenous Science and Technology Studies in the Historical Studies Department at the University of Toronto Mississauga and Co-Director of the Technoscience Research Unit, explains: “In universities, conventional research is extractive. From the conceptualization of research questions, to the chosen methods and the write-up, it is normal to see a project in which a researcher arrives, extracts data from their research “subjects,” “interlocutors,” or people from communities that the researcher often and overwhelmingly does not have a relationship with, and then leaves and does whatever they deem appropriate with their data.”

Bos and her colleagues are “turning the tables on research” in this way: “Instead of having university researchers coming into an Indigenous community to study colonialism, pollution, and its health effects, our project has Indigenous researchers studying polluters and holding companies like Imperial Oil—a historic and important company in Canada and Chemical Valley—responsible for creating pollution, harms to health, dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land, and maintaining Canadian colonialism.” See, [Turning the Tables on Research](#).

- Ask yourself how you can “turn the tables” on your research and teaching.
- See also, [A Diné Perspective on Education](#): What Would Changing Woman Do?; the University of Denver’s, [Native American Pedagogies](#) webpage; Okanagan College’s [Indigenization](#) webpage, and the series of presentations made in 2018 at the National Museum of the American Indian’s symposium on [Transforming Teaching and Learning About American Indians](#).

Be aware of false assumptions:

“Colonization is something that ended in the past.” **It didn’t.** While it began in the Americas in 1492, it continues today. We all live in systems created by colonization.

“Those who possess Western academic degrees are the most qualified to understand, interpret, and present information about Native Americans.” **They aren’t.** While Western academic degrees are important and have value, they do not validate Native American knowledge or qualify someone to teach about this knowledge. Native American knowledge and experiences are rooted in communities and understandings of the world where skilled individuals and groups have been trained for millennia in ways that are not the same as Western ways.

“No Native Americans hold or practice colonized attitudes, methods, and goals.” **Some do,** either embracing them by personal choice or through non-Native efforts to assimilate them.

RESPECT NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AS THE BEST TEACHER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

Native American communities should be respected as the ultimate caretakers of their knowledge. Their permission and guidance should be respected.

Native Americans who have learned their community’s knowledge are skilled teachers with high levels of relevant expertise and should be respected as such. They are not simply sources or resources for non-Native scholars and teachers.

Allow Native American perspectives to speak and be understood from their own understandings and experiences of the world. Don’t impose non-Native views.

Avoid privileging Western knowledge and experiences by subordinating and interpreting Native American community knowledge and experiences within Western frameworks. Humility and openness are essential for learning Native American perspectives.

Avoid presenting or using information that does not engage Native American communities and individuals who are connected to their communities and cultures. Any research, publications, or presentations that do not engage, credit, and partner with Native American communities at some level are more likely to transmit colonizing goals, values, and distortions.

DEVELOP HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES, ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

Engaging Native Americans and their perspectives and experiences is rooted in relationships and communities, rather than in isolation and individuals. You cannot adequately understand Native American perspectives and experiences by reading books and articles in seclusion.

Developing relationships takes time and effort. So, be patient. Once trust and respect are established, this can lead to relationships with other Native American communities, organizations, and individuals. Each community has different knowledge and experiences.

Attending events organized by Native American communities and organizations that are open to the public is a great way to educate yourself and meet people. If appropriate, volunteer to help with the work that must be done at these events. Perhaps your department or program can collectively volunteer. Get to know the communities, organizations, and individuals, and let them get to know you. These relationships can lead to meaningful partnerships. If you are fortunate, you may even find mentoring relationships for yourself and others. Organizations in the DFW metroplex include: [Urban Inter-Tribal Center of Texas](#), [American Indian Heritage Day in Texas](#), [Indigenous Institute of the Americas](#) and [MMIW TX Rematriate](#).

CREATE A STRATEGY FOR INTENTIONALLY INCREASING NATIVE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN YOUR COURSE, DEPARTMENT, COLLEGE OR PROGRAM

Sustained, direct Native American presence is best and can be achieved through full-time, permanent positions. Begin by taking a census of how many Native Americans are in “power positions,” such as university trustees, deans and other high-level administrators, and faculty. Is there no representation or only token representation? Why?

Only 1% of TCU’s 2020 faculty self-identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, as compared to 8% Asian, 5% Black/African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, and 77% White.

From 2015-2020, hiring of Native American faculty at TCU continued to fall further and further behind hiring of faculty from other underrepresented populations. During this period, 3 Native faculty were hired compared with 25 Asian, 17 Black/African American, 13 Hispanic/Latino, & 22 White.

See the Native American Advisory Circle’s, [“A Guide to Recruiting Native American Employees and Students at TCU”](#) (housed on TCU’s Native American and Indigenous Initiative webpage, scroll to the bottom of the page and look for “Recruiting Resource Guide”).

Intermittent, direct Native American presence is also valuable. Possibilities include: Invite Native American speakers and consultants who are connected to their communities and cultures. They can provide valuable insight into your course or program. Team teach a course or course segment with a skilled Native American individual. Include Native American authors in assigned readings and viewings. Hold workshops on relevant topics. Expand your on-boarding processes to include Native Americans. Develop formal mentorship/apprenticeship programs with Native American communities and individuals.

If you have developed healthy relationships with Native American communities, your ability to create meaningful opportunities for direct engagement will be enhanced.

You should always pay Native American speakers and consultants a fair honorarium for their time and expertise. It's also appropriate to give a small, useful gift as an expression of your gratitude.

Develop partnerships with the major Native American academic or professional organizations in your field. Consult with them regarding how Native American peoples and perspectives can be integrated into your courses and programs. Some of these organizations include:

- [Native American Journalists Association](#)
- [American Indian Science and Engineering Society](#)
- [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science](#)
- [Native American and Indigenous Studies Association](#)
- [National Indian Education Association](#)
- [American Indian Higher Education Consortium](#)
- [National Native American Human Resources Association](#)
- [American Indigenous Business Leaders](#)
- [Americans for Indian Opportunity](#) (advancing from an Indigenous worldview, the cultural, political and economic rights of Indigenous peoples in the United States and around the world)
- [Association of American Indian Physicians](#)
- [National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association](#) (NANAINA)
- [American Indian Film Institute](#)
- [National Native American Bar Association](#)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#)
- [Native American Rights Fund](#)
- [American Indian Library Association](#)
- [Native American Art Studies Association](#)
- [National Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [First Americans Museum Oklahoma](#)
- [Native American Financial Officers Association](#)
- [National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development](#)

Stay informed of current issues important to Native Americans. Having students or program members regularly read and report on particular issues can raise sensitivities and help your course or program become more relevant and responsive on many levels.

- The following news outlets reflect Native perspectives: [Indian Country Today](#), [Native News Online](#), [Indianz.com](#), [Native America Calling](#), [National Native News](#), [High Country News](#), and [APTN National News](#).
- Some tribes and Native organizations have their own media outlets. For example, [Cherokee Phoenix](#), [Akwasasne TV](#), [Mvskoke Media](#), and [Lakota Times](#).

UNDERSTAND, USE, AND INCORPORATE TCU'S LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT INTO YOUR COURSES AND PROGRAMS

Including TCU's Land Acknowledgment on syllabi or departmental/program websites and events is a great way to begin to raise awareness. Linking to the university's Native American and Indigenous Peoples Initiative [webpage](#) will provide insight into the meaning and significance of the Land Acknowledgment.

The university's Land Acknowledgment can be an effective tool to evaluate how well your course or program embodies the benefits, responsibilities, and relationships TCU has as a result of the colonizing processes that led to its existence and location. It's also an effective way of identifying how colonizing mindsets, values, approaches, and systems may be influencing your course or program. Remember, taking Indigenous lands and resources is at the heart of colonization. Thoughtfully engaging the Land Acknowledgment, therefore, is a good place to start.

DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

We are all learning. We all need help. We all need understanding.

Use the available resources on campus. These include attending on-campus programming and programming by local Native American organizations. TCU's Native American Nations and Communities Liaison can work with you to integrate Native American perspectives in appropriate and respectful ways. Talk with TCU's Native American faculty, staff, and students, as well as informed non-Native allies.

KEEP CRUCIAL FUNDAMENTALS IN MIND: AVOID STEREOTYPES AND MISINFORMATION

For a good explanation of basic information and protocols, see the Native American Advisory Circle's, "[A Guide to Recruiting Native American Employees and Students at TCU](#)" (housed on TCU's Native American and Indigenous Initiative webpage, scroll to the bottom of the page and look for "Recruiting Resource Guide").

2021-22 Native American Advisory Circle:

- Annette Anderson (Chickasaw and Cherokee), Indigenous Institute of the Americas, Plano, TX; licensed clinical social worker; Adjunct Instructor at the University of Texas at Dallas in the Early Childhood Disorders program
- Wynema Morris (Omaha), Board member, Nebraska Indian Community College, Macy, NE, and adjunct faculty in Native American Studies
- Amber Silverhorn-Wolfe (Wichita/Kiowa/Cheyenne and Arapaho), Education Services Administrator, Education Department, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes
- Melanie Battise (Alabama-Coushatta), Tribal Council Member and Member, Higher Education Committee, Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas
- Nathan Elliot (Chickasaw), Executive Officer for the Chickasaw Nation Division of Education
- Chebon Kernell (Seminole), Executive Director, Native American Comprehensive Plan, The United Methodist Church
- Cynthia Savage (Choctaw), Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor of Professional Practice in the College of Education, TCU
- Haylee Chiariello (Cherokee), TCU student, Interdisciplinary Inquiry major in Native American Advocacy, recipient of TCU's 2020-21 and 2021-22 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Scholarship, TCU Feature Twirler