



*"This ancient land, for all our relations"*

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October 1, 2018

*tiri hira:ra hira:wis hakitata:ri:arkwe?ekih*



Teaching with TCU's Land  
Acknowledgment and  
Native American Monument

7 | 18 | 2022

## Review

For land acknowledgments to be effective and not merely performative, they must be used to advance and instill the values embedded within them. To that end, TCU is dependent on its faculty, staff, students, and administrators to implement its Land Acknowledgment in relevant and meaningful ways.

While reading it at university events and placing it on syllabi are important first steps, teaching with it is especially effective. TCU's Land Acknowledgment and the closely related Native American monument are powerful tools, particularly when used within specific courses. They can provide entry points into course topics, while also guiding and shaping student engagement with course concepts.

Teaching with TCU's Land Acknowledgment and Native American monument will vary from course-to-course and according to the vision of individual professors, but below are some general suggestions that can be adapted to enhance your teaching.

## Resources and Background

The Land Acknowledgment and monument represent broader ideas and experiences that go well beyond the text's words. TCU, therefore, developed the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Initiative [webpage](#) to make readily available the Acknowledgment's text, expanded explanations of the text, and supporting documents. Especially relevant documents are:

- ["TCU's Native American Monument: Lessons in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion"](#)
- ["A Guide to Engaging Native American Perspectives in Courses and Programs"](#)
- ["TCU and May 24, 1841"](#)
- ["Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Understanding the "TCU" in TCU"](#)

It is always best to bring in Native American perspectives, either by assigning readings and viewings by Native American authors or consulting directly with Native American communities and individuals. TCU's Native American Nations and Communities Liaison can assist you in making these community connections or in brainstorming

possible ways of incorporating the Land Acknowledgment and monument into your courses. It is also important to be aware of and avoid stereotypes and implicit biases. The document produced by TCU's Native American Advisory Circle, ["A Guide to Recruiting Native American Employees and Students at TCU,"](#) addresses these in multiple places. Devon Mihesuah's book, *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* may also be helpful.

TCU's Land Acknowledgment developed within the context of other Native American initiatives on campus. The idea for a Land Acknowledgment first arose in 2014 and efforts were made to identify on which Native American nation's lands TCU resided (a complex situation given that many nations have connections to the area). By 2016, TCU began working on an equal basis with the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes to develop a Native American monument that was erected and dedicated on campus in 2018. Also, in October 2016 a verbal land acknowledgment was made at TCU's first annual Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day symposium:

"While many Native American peoples were and continue to be present in North Texas, we pay special respect tonight to the Wichita tribal people, upon whose historical homeland TCU sits." Once the monument was completed and dedicated in October 2018, the monument's text served as a sort of unofficial university land acknowledgment, with many people on campus using it as such. When TCU's Native American Advisory Circle was established in Fall 2020, it almost immediately recommended creating an

official university Land Acknowledgment. The Circle created a draft text which was sent to the administration. In April 2021, the Chancellor's Cabinet approved it without changes. The university's Land Acknowledgment incorporates the monument's text, reflecting how the two are connected both historically and textually.

## Teaching Suggestions

### 1. DIVERSE FIELDS:

TCU's Land Acknowledgment and Native American monument are relevant to many disciplines taught at TCU. Their relevance is not confined only to those fields directly related to Native American Studies. With some forethought, they can be effectively integrated into wide-ranging course assignments and discussions. Some general examples include:

- The Land Acknowledgment can be used to guide **Business** students in understanding how Western values, systems, and processes have shaped how we interact with the land. It can also be used to introduce students to other ways of understanding and interacting with the land and with peoples who hold different views. Given the land's centrality to human existence, students going into any fields that interact with the land (such as Real Estate or Energy) will find the Acknowledgment particularly instructive.
- **History** students can use the Land Acknowledgment to uncover the historical processes and powers at work in what we now call the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and how these processes and powers shaped this land and, in turn, were shaped by the land. For example, students might study

the centrality of the land in shaping interconnections between Native Americans, white colonizers, Black and Mexican American peoples, and how different powers exerted control through systems related to land redistribution and cultivation, slavery, religion, education, law formation and enforcement, and policing entities such as the Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. armies, Texas militia, and Texas Rangers. See, for instance, the Texas Observer's article on the Lipan Apaches, "[Labeled 'Hispanic'](#)" (July 6, 2022).



- The Land Acknowledgment can be an entry point for **STEM** students to consider how different understandings of the land shape interactions with it, as well as how Native American and Western understandings and technologies can collaborate to solve pressing contemporary issues. Remember, Native Americans have for millennia been leaders in what we now call the STEM fields.
- The Land Acknowledgment can lead **Environmental Science** students to learn how traditional Native American ways of understanding and relating to the environment are relevant in addressing serious environmental issues, especially regarding sustainability challenges. It can also lead to creating respectful collaborations with Native American communities.
- The Land Acknowledgment can be used by **Fine Arts** students to stimulate artistic thoughts and expressions. For example, students could analyze the visual and material symbolism of the monument and think about how it connects to traditions in Native American artistic expressions.
- The Land Acknowledgment can guide **Political Science** students to understand the various political structures and expressions reflected in it, as well as the politics of acknowledgments. It can also help students understand why “Native American” or “American Indian” is first a political classification, rather than a racial or ethnic one. The Land Acknowledgment and monument provide opportunities to study the meaning and importance of tribal sovereignty and associated issues such as the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions in [McGirt v. Oklahoma](#) (2020) and [Oklahoma v. Castro Huerta](#) (2022).

- The Land Acknowledgment can guide **Education** students in developing culturally relevant and sensitive curricula, while understanding the historical roles and impact of Western education in the forced assimilation of Native Americans. Students can also learn from Native Americans different educational philosophies and methods.
- **Language** students can use the Land Acknowledgment to reflect on the role played by languages in transmitting culture and how teaching the English language contributed to efforts to destroy Native American communities and cultures. They can also learn how and why Native American language revitalization efforts have become essential to Native American nations and communities. TCU’s Native American monument, which contains a line in the Wichita language, reflects these efforts and issues.
- The general traditional Native American ideas reflected in the Land Acknowledgment can introduce **Religion** and **Philosophy** students to different ways of understanding and living in the world. It can also lead students to probe the roles played by Euro-American Christianity and Western thought in the attempted destruction of Native American nations and communities.
- **Medical, Nursing, and Social Work** students can be led by the Land Acknowledgment to understand the background and impact of historical or intergenerational trauma, epigenetics, and forced assimilation, as well as the land’s importance in bringing about healing in conjunction with specific Native American communities’ cultures and ceremonies. These skills are essential for providing quality health care for and with Native American patients and communities. See the TEDx talk, [“All my relations -- a traditional Lakota approach to health equity.”](#) by Dr. Donald Warne,

Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as the Director of the Indians Into Medicine (INMED) and Public Health Programs at the School of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of North Dakota.

- **Student athletes** can learn why Native American mascots are offensive and inappropriate by understanding experiences referenced in the Land Acknowledgment. Native American mascots grow out of and are expressions of experiences such as colonization, forced assimilation, and violent taking of land. Reading or posting the Land Acknowledgment before athletic competitions and events helps create a positive environment for discussing and understanding these experiences.
- The Land Acknowledgment can help **English, Literature, and Theatre** students better understand issues and viewpoints in works by Native American authors, critique works by non-Native authors, analyze the rhetoric of the monument, and prompt creative expressions that are culturally aware and sensitive.
- **Women and Gender Studies** students can use the Land Acknowledgment to explore how Native peoples' relationships with the land and non-human world are expressed in gender roles. They can also study how colonization impacted/changed understandings of gender and identity and, therefore, relationships to the land.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

It may be helpful for students to have a general introduction to land acknowledgments, including the benefits and criticisms related to them.

If so, you might have students read and discuss or reflect on the following:

- "[Honoring Original Indigenous Inhabitants: Land Acknowledgment](#)" and "[Making Land Acknowledgment Meaningful](#) Additional Resources" [which features TCU's Land Acknowledgment] (National Museum of the American Indian)
- "[What are tribal land acknowledgments?](#) Native American leaders say words and actions are needed" (USA Today, October 3, 2021)
- "[What's wrong with land acknowledgments, and how to make them better](#)" (CBC Radio-Canada, October 21, 2021)
- "[Beyond Land Acknowledgment: A Guide](#)" (September 21, 2021, Native Governance Center)

## 3. CONTEMPLATION AND INTROSPECTION

TCU's Land Acknowledgment and Native American monument reflect ideas drawn from traditional Native American worldviews and experiences. There is a spiritual quality to the Acknowledgment and monument, and they can be used to prompt individual and institutional contemplation and introspection.

- Have students develop a reflection meditation/contemplation/prayer/poem visual image/musical expression/material object based on each line of the Land Acknowledgment. For those interested in developing a meditation based on the Land Acknowledgment and monument, contact the TCU CALM Meditation Group at [www.contemplativefrogs.com/](http://www.contemplativefrogs.com/).

- Have students write response essays throughout the semester on each line of the Land Acknowledgment, or on its two major sections, or on it as a whole. Students can be given the freedom to write and reflect in any way they want, be required to connect their reflections to specific course concepts and ideas, or put the Land Acknowledgment in dialogue with texts they have read.

#### 4. ANNOTATION

Have students annotate the Land Acknowledgment based on what they have learned in your course. This can be done either as an assignment completed outside of class or it can be an in-class exercise. Assignments can be as simple or elaborate as you wish.

#### 5. DISCUSSION AND ASSIGNMENT TOPICS:

The following topics reflect possible ways each line of TCU's Land Acknowledgment and monument can be used in courses. Depending on your course, particular lines of the Land Acknowledgment could be used at appropriate times during the semester to guide in-class discussions or shape assignments. Students, for instance, might reflect on particular lines by answering the associated questions or more relevant questions developed specifically for your course. Or, students can look for connections with TCU's Land Acknowledgment by reading it alongside an assigned reading(s) in a course and then generating ideas about how the texts speak to each other. The following might spark an idea for discussions or assignments and can be adapted to fit your needs:

**Line 1:** *"We acknowledge the many benefits we have of being in this place."*

- What are appropriate and meaningful ways of making acknowledgments?

- What benefits does TCU gain by residing on this land? How has the land been integral to TCU's existence and success? What benefits do we gain by being part of TCU? How did we at TCU come to possess these benefits? See also line 4.

- **Financial:** For example, how does TCU's possession of land once inhabited by and violently taken from the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and other Native peoples benefit TCU?

- **Perspective:** For example, how does being part of a university founded on Western and Christian values and outlooks benefit TCU? How has TCU portrayed and taught about Native Americans, who has done this teaching, and who has that benefitted?

- **Power and Presence:** For example, how does being at a university which has largely been closed to Native Americans empower non-Natives? What power and presence do non-Natives have on our campus that Native peoples do not?



- **Appropriation:** For example, how has TCU used Native American lands and cultures to further its own goals and those of its employees and students?

**Line 2:** *"It is a space we share with all living beings, human and non-human."*

- What humans (individuals, groups, communities) do we share this space with now and historically? How has this space historically been shared by humans? What are appropriate ways of sharing this space among diverse groups of humans?
- What non-humans (animals, plants, insects, rocks, water, etc.) do we share this space with now and historically? How has this space historically been shared with non-humans? What are appropriate ways of sharing this space with non-humans?
- If we share this space with humans and non-humans, do we share its benefits? Have students examine the specific systems and processes that create and distribute the benefits of this space and place.
- What constitutes a living being? Who makes this determination? How do Native Americans traditionally understand what constitutes a living being and how does this compare with Western notions?
- See also lines 4, 5, and 6.

**Line 3:** *"It is an ancient space where others have lived before us."*

- What do we know about those ancient ones (human and non-human) who have lived in this space before TCU?
- What is the relationship or connection between the ancient and the contemporary in this space?

As relative newcomers, how have we transformed this ancient space into a modern one?

- How do Western ways of understanding and relating to the ancient compare with traditional Native American ways? What roles do elders, stories, community knowledge, history, and science play in shaping our understandings? How do Western linear notions of time influence our relationship to the ancient nature of this space?

**Line 4:** *"The monument created jointly by TCU and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes reminds us of our benefits, responsibilities, and relationships."*

- Have students develop a model for working with the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes or other Native communities based on relevant course topics or related fields and professions. What knowledge and skills will students need to successfully work with Native American communities and individuals?

#### **Benefits:**

- How do Native Americans, in general, and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, in particular, benefit from the place and space inhabited by TCU in comparison to non-Natives? What does this suggest about the nature of social, political, and economic power? Connect this discussion with line 1.

#### **Responsibilities:**

- TCU was founded in 1873 and its residence in its three historic locations (Thorp Spring, Waco, and Fort Worth) was made possible by actions and processes put in place prior to its existence. On May 24, 1841, General Edward H. Tarrant led a group of Texas militia who attacked Native Americans living along Village Creek (located in what became Arlington) and drove them from this region. Soon colonists arrived and began developing what became the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, including creating systems to redistribute these lands to non-Natives.

TCU has benefitted from this violent removal and subsequent land redistribution. Does TCU, therefore, have responsibilities to Native Americans? If so, what are those responsibilities? Or, does the passage of time lessen its responsibility as a beneficiary of violent processes predating its existence?

- The preceding questions apply to all non-Natives living in the Americas since similar experiences and processes played out throughout North, Central, and South America. This is an opportunity to explore with students what it means to be perpetrators, heirs, and beneficiaries of such actions, and what responsibilities arise from these positions. Non-Natives often refer to themselves as “allies” of Native Americans. What, then, does it mean to be an “ally” to Native Americans? Grounding these discussions in specific places and experiences can make them more robust and pertinent.

### **Relationships:**

- **The Land:** The National Congress of American Indians [website](#) explains, “The relationship between tribes and their land and natural resources is complex, extending from time immemorial to the present day and beyond . . . Tribes look to their land and natural resources to provide and support essential elements of Native life and culture—from subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering, to sources of economic development and tribal sacred places.” How do cultural understandings of the land shape a community’s relationships to it? How has the presence of non-Native institutions like TCU disrupted the relationships of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and other Native nations with the lands of north Texas? See also lines 1 and 2.

- **Wichita and Affiliated Tribes:**

TCU, through its founders, has been in relationship with Native Americans since Joseph Addison Clark, the father of Addison and Randolph, came to Texas in 1839. At the time, the Republic of Texas had initiated an “exterminating war” against Native Americans designed to acquire and make their lands available to colonizing migrants. TCU’s founders benefitted from this war by acquiring land, some of which was later used to sustain TCU through difficult financial circumstances. Have students explain and evaluate the various aspects of this relationship, especially as it relates to the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes. The Caddo Nation also has had a long presence in north Texas. What is its connection to these lands?

- **Native Americans (collectively):** Have students reflect on the following: We all are in some way in relationship with Native Americans, although we may not be aware of it. Think about where you grew up or where you are currently located. Which Native American nations lived there as part of their traditional homelands? Where are they now? If you do not know on which Native nations’ homeland you live, why is that? How did the current non-Native populations living there come to own and possess these lands? How did you and your family come to this place; what factors made it possible?
- **The Past and Present:** At TCU’s fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1923, the faculty and students of the English Department wrote a pageant, [“These Fifty Years.”](#) depicting the university’s founding and progress. It began with “a lone Texas Indian, who tells a legend about the present site of the University” (pg. 7). The legend acknowledged that the prairies and the hill above the river on which the university was located had previously been “the domain of the Tehas,” perhaps

a reference to the term, Tejas, used by the Spanish originally to refer to the Caddo peoples living east of the Trinity River, but later applied to many tribes (The term is derived from the Caddo word, taysha, meaning “friend” and is the basis for the name, “Texas”). The land was now under the protection of a chief whose dying will was, “Let my plains be free and fruitful.”

The pageant asserted its fulfillment because the “look-out on the hill top” was now “T.C.U., thine Alma Mater, Guardian of the Tehas youth!” Later, a fictionalized mayor of Fort Worth said to the school, “Long ages ago it (i.e., the site of TCU’s campus) belonged to a Red Skin of wisdom and vision . . . These acres we wish to give to you” (episode III, pgs. 23-24).

In 1928, under the direction of Mrs. Helen Walker Murphy, Instructor of physical education for women, TCU held a pageant attended by about 4,000 people, transforming its football stadium into a “weird Indian reservation,” with wigwams, Indian costumes, Indian dances, and “haunting Indian melodies.” Approximately 350 white female students from the physical education department presented the “Indian Spring Festival,” a pageant about the Indians’ spring corn dances. TCU’s president, as the chief of the tribe, wore feathers and a blanket. (*Junior Journal* (Skiff) 26.28 (May 9, 1928), pg. 1; *Texas Christian University Interpreter* (April-May 1928) 2.6-7, pg. 8; *The Horned Frog* 1928, pg. 191)

What do these two incidents reveal about TCU’s historic relations with Native Americans? How has TCU and its relationships with Native Americans changed, as well as remained the same, since these incidents?

**Line 5-6:** “We pause to reflect on its words:  
This ancient land, for all our relations.”

- This line reminds us that the land plays a significant role in TCU’s Land Acknowledgment. Everything (i.e., all our relations) begins with the land. What would a land-centered approach to your course’s academic discipline look like? What can the land teach us about our respective disciplines and how can that be incorporated into your course or profession? See also lines 2, 3, and 4.
- This line reflects that our relationships with each other begin with our relationships with the land. How well do you know the land and environment around TCU? Describe your relationship with either the land in what we now call the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex or with the land where you grew up or currently live. What does a healthy relationship with the land look like?
- What is the history of the land in what we now call the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and north Texas and how has it shaped and been shaped by the various people who have resided here?
- How do Native American relationships with the land compare with those embodied by TCU and other non-Native institutions and communities?
- Greg Sarris (Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria) writes in his book, *Becoming Story: A Journey among Seasons, Places, Trees, and Ancestors* (pg. 135): “The landscape was our sacred text, and we listened to what it told us. Everywhere you looked there were sacred stories.” How can the land be compared to a sacred text and what does this indicate about Western ways of knowing in comparison to traditional Native American ways? What stories are associated with specific places where you currently live or grew up? Choose one and identify the

kinds of knowledge it transmits (including what Westerners call science, religion, environmental, history, etc.). Explain how the land acts as sacred text as compared to the land serving as an economic commodity or political possession.

**Line 7:** *"We respectfully acknowledge all Native American peoples who have lived on this land since time immemorial."*

- This line can help highlight the diversity and vibrancy of Native Americans, their cultures, and experiences. Who are the Native American peoples who have lived and are living in what we now call the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and north Texas? How has their presence here developed since time immemorial? What do you know about them and their cultures, values, and experiences? How has TCU interacted with them directly or indirectly through its curriculum and other means? Have students interpret today's Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex within the context of sustained Native American presence here. While it would be difficult to list all Native peoples who have connections to north Texas, these include the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, Caddo Nation, Kiowa Tribe, Comanche Nation, and more.

- What was the [Indian Relocation Act of 1956](#) and how has it contributed to the growth of an urban Native American community in north Texas? How does it reflect continued efforts by the U.S. to assimilate Native Americans? Today, over 70,000 Native Americans from a variety of tribes live in north Texas and many can trace their presence here back to Relocation. Students can learn about the vibrancy of contemporary Native American life by identifying a local or national Native educator, writer, creator, entrepreneur, or leader living today and putting something they have said, written, done, or created in dialogue with TCU's Land Acknowledgment. What commonalities do the two share? What divergences exist in their visions?

- Greg Sarris (*Becoming Story*, pg. 164), reflecting on his tribe's (Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria) long residence on lands located in what is now called northern California, asks, "Time immemorial? The oak trees, along with their bay laurel neighbors, have been here forty million years." Using Sarris' quote and this line of the Acknowledgment, have students study and reflect on the meanings and implications of "time immemorial." There are opportunities here to study Western conceptions of time in comparison to traditional Native American ones, the relationships and interconnections between time and place, and how these are expressed in human societies and cultures. Historic and contemporary maps are an excellent way to study these relationships and expressions. This is also a good place to include the oldest oak tree on campus, which the class of 1912 transplanted from a nearby grove of oaks. See, "[Object Lessons: If This Tree Could Talk](#)" TCU Magazine (Spring 2018) and "[What Trees Are on TCU's Campus?](#)," TCU Magazine (Spring 2021).

**Line 8:** *"TCU especially acknowledges and pays respect to the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, upon whose historical homeland our university is located."*

- Who are the [Wichita and Affiliated Tribes](#)? What has been their relationship to the land we now call north Texas? Where are they now and why do they no longer collectively reside in north Texas?
- What does it mean for TCU to reside respectfully on the historical homeland of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes?

- The Wichita and Affiliated Tribes is a federally recognized tribe in a nation-to-nation relationship with the United States. What is federal recognition and what does it mean to be in a "nation-to-nation relationship"? What does it mean to be state recognized, but not federally recognized? What does it mean to not be recognized by either the state or federal governments? What is "tribal sovereignty" and why is it important?
- After the Native American monument was dedicated in October 2018, a Choctaw man from Dallas reflected on Facebook, "It brings a bitter sweet emotion to me. Is it a great accomplishment of recognition? Yes! It also shows the state we as Native, Indigenous, American Indians are currently in. This speaks volumes as to relocation or removal of original inhabitants. Those are someone's ancestors. Ancestors who probably, like my own Choctaw ancestors, made the decision to somehow keep their people alive. To leave the land that would eventually be settled on by TCU. As I understand it, the monument sits in between the 2 oldest buildings on campus [i.e., Reed and Jarvis Halls]. In my mind I get a visual of the woman standing or praying in front of police at Standing Rock. Or the little girl confronting the bull on Wall Street [referencing a television commercial]. To me it represents something standing in

confidence with strength amongst giants. My people standing for something important. Standing to be heard, standing to coexist, standing to educate." This Choctaw man found the monument to be a symbol of Native American strength and resilience in the face of Euro-American colonization. Have students identify and discuss common portrayals and views of Native Americans present at TCU and in broader society and compare them with the views expressed in the Facebook post. How can TCU's efforts at acknowledgment include Native American strength and resilience? How can TCU hear, coexist with, and be educated by Native Americans? What do we need to change about our portrayals, views, and relationships with Native Americans?

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