

A Community for All

Indigenous Student Initiative Committee Statement

Spring 2019

(Updated September 2019)



EMORY
UNIVERSITY

Understanding the Needs

An ad hoc committee composed of Emory faculty, students, alumni, and administrative staff, along with CDC scientific and program staff, has been exploring Indigenous student issues at the university over the past two academic cycles. As a committee, we are united by a conviction that Emory has not met all of its responsibilities in the areas of Indigenous issues.

Why do we believe Emory should increase its attention to Indigenous student issues?

Ethics. Emory University’s vision is to be ethically engaged. Emory University does the right thing. Yet we have never fully considered how our university’s history, and the very land upon which university activities take place, are connected to injustices that have been committed over time. Emory was founded in 1836, during a period of sustained oppression, land dispossession, and forced removals of Mvskoke (Creek) and Ani’yunwi’ya (Cherokee) people from Georgia and the Southeast. Emory University owes an immense debt to the Mvskoke, Ani’yunwi’ya and other original peoples who have cared for and inhabited these lands and to their descendants.

Emory University is an institution settled on the traditional and ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples. A just institution should acknowledge such injustices within its past as well as its present. Emory must acknowledge the descendants of all the Indigenous peoples whose homelands are now the present-day United States.

Voices not heard. The quality of education and scholarship of a university suffers when communities are not represented. We know that a diversity of perspectives is of great value within a scholarly community. Indigenous perspectives—particularly when shared by students with fellow students and by faculty and staff—are voices heard not often enough at Emory. In an otherwise remarkably diverse community, our students often arrive and graduate without any direct experience with Indigenous students, faculty, or staff.

Craig Womack (Muscogee Creek), Associate Professor at Emory, shares a blessing before the meal.

Mission of Emory. The purpose of Emory University—its calling—is to sustain a community where members work for “positive transformation in the world through teaching, research, scholarship, health care, and social action.” The Indigenous student community is an underserved population in our nation (economically, educationally, medically), and Emory can begin to fulfill its mission by engagement with more Indigenous students and Tribal Nations.

Our committee quickly came to consensus about these motivations. All three reasons illustrate the need for immediate action from Emory.

What specific, feasible measures can we take in the short term to ensure that our community lives up to its calling?

The question we wanted to explore further with the Native American Student Symposium (NASS), held in November 2018, was not why Emory should act, but how? How should Emory proceed in the future? What does best practice with respect to our Indigenous community look like? What should we hold as aspirations for Emory over the long term? And what specific, feasible measures can we take in the short term to ensure that our community lives up to its calling?

To explore these questions, we invited six distinguished scholars and admission and college recruiting professionals to campus for the NASS. The symposium budget was fully supported by Emory’s Office of the Provost, and we are grateful to the university for acknowledging the merit of this initiative.

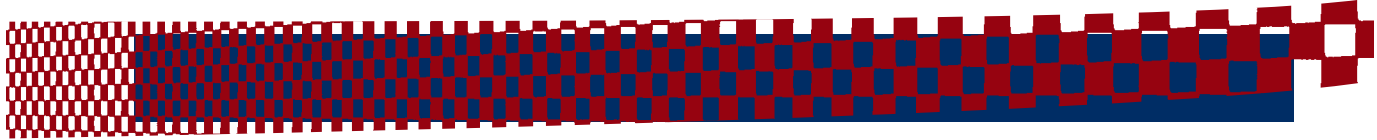
Our guests, as a group, brought expertise in academic, campus life, enrollment, and Tribal Nation relations. The



NASS events were primarily offered through panel and discussion format targeting a lay audience. The campus community was invited to discuss Indigenous student issues with our guests over three days of robust conversation, in any of six sessions. The sessions were well attended by Emory students, faculty, staff, and administration, as well as by Indigenous colleagues from the CDC and else-

where in the state of Georgia.

Compiled below are recommendations from our panelists and attendees, in categories following the structure of the symposium itself. Within each category we offer “best practice” advice. Following these four sections we offer a small number of feasible first steps for an Emory community beginning to move forward on an Indigenous student agenda.



Progress Requires Action

Recruitment and Financial Aid

Universities have much to gain by enrolling Indigenous students, for they bring perspectives that otherwise may not be heard. Recruiting Indigenous students is not like recruiting other minority student populations; we cannot use identical techniques. In approaching recruiting and supporting of Indigenous students, we must consider the vast diversity of Indigenous populations.

There are many ways to define “Indigenous.” It is not a matter of a simple check box and can be based on self-identification, varying levels of ancestral heritage, tribal enrollment, and federal or state recognition of tribal nation. We should be prepared to deal with context and nuance. The complexity includes geographical diversity, and we must be willing to take time and travel long distances, both urban and rural, to engage students.

Furthermore, we must be conscious of, and prepared to accommodate, inequities in K-12 preparation in some cases. Recruiting and supporting Indigenous students presents an opportunity for universities to help “fill in” gaps in educational opportunity in some communities.

When speaking with Indigenous populations, we should focus on college awareness as much as recruiting for our own college. Emory should consider the student’s decision to attend may be influenced by how informed their family is on higher education and the resources available to their student. We may want to address not only the students but also their parents and even grandparents.

In addition to the role of extended families, it is import-

ant to note the role of the Tribal Nation in decision making for educational opportunities. Each has an education department that serves students, manages financial aid resources and promotes opportunities to students. Without a relationship to the tribal education office, we will not achieve our student enrollment potential.

Having related academic programs (e.g. Indigenous Studies) helps with recruitment. This is also the case with student organizations. Showing that Indigenous populations are valued inside and outside the classroom increases a given campus’ attractiveness to students.

Universities that lack a strong Indigenous tradition and community should recruit students who want to change things and support those students in multiple ways. Indeed, serving Indigenous students cannot be one single person’s responsibility but must be a shared commitment among faculty and staff. Furthermore, hiring an Indigenous colleague to lead enrollment efforts is very helpful.

There are many ways to define “Indigenous.” It is not a matter of a simple check box.

Section summary

- Produce targeted and specific communications material for prospective Indigenous students and their families.
- Find organizations to partner with to help with recruitment. Consider more group (i.e. consortium-based) travel to engage students.
- Conduct fly-in programs for admitted students.

- In the selection and application process, gathering a deeper context about individual students and their tribal heritage and connection can be helpful. Some universities request optional further context of applicants.
- Consider hiring an Indigenous admission officer.
- Financial aid—quality and clarity—is incredibly important.
- Develop financial aid programs targeted to citizens of federally recognized tribes and not based on “race.”



Above: Invited experts Jason Youker (Coquille Nation) and Carmen Lopez (Navajo Nation) during the opening reception.



Right: Klamath Henry 19C (Shasta Tribe of California, Tuscarora Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) shares her perspective as an Indigenous student.

Student Academic Experience

Supporting Indigenous students must be accompanied by broader educational programs in Indigenous history and culture. The general student populations coming into universities have significant misunderstanding of American history, particularly with respect to Indigenous populations, as well as regarding their treatment. We should not deprive any Emory student of a solid knowledge of history, and we should consider how to teach Indigenous perspectives to non-Indigenous students, which can be of enormous educational value for all. These topics could be taught in more courses at Emory and could be addressed with a general education requirement relating to diversity.

Students who are animated by social justice issues and by contemporary issues of diversity and inclusion want to see more courses addressing diversity in the United States, as well as more faculty, staff, and students from underrepresented minorities. Having that option within the general education requirement (e.g. a multicultural requirement) would also contribute to creating an overall campus environment that is more conducive to Indigenous student recruitment and support. Indeed, Indigenous students thrive in environments where their experiences are known, heard, and validated, and not ones in which they are written out of the history books or broader curricula.

Section summary

- Increase the representation of Indigenous faculty members. Students want to work with Indigenous faculty. Monetary and institutional support for faculty are essential.
- Offer academic opportunities in Indigenous studies, either within traditional departments as areas of research and teaching, or ideally as an academic department or program.
- Take advantage of partnerships with tribal colleges and university (TCU) communities; e.g. student exchanges.



Below: Debra Vidali, Associate Professor at Emory, shares a welcome message.

- Take advantage of partnerships with federal agencies, such as the CDC, and their partners.
- Show intentionality by including indigenous studies in general education requirements.

Campus Life and Community

Supporting students once enrolled is even more important than getting them to enroll. It is imperative that Indigenous students have a positive experience on campus. Some of the greatest challenges these students will face are invisibility, a lack of faculty and mentors, and a lack of dialogue that affirms their experience.

A person in student affairs, whose role is to work with Indigenous students, is of clear importance. Having Indigenous staff in other areas of student support, CAPS, Student Success, etc. is also important. Remember that Indigenous women are increasingly aspiring and rising to positions of power, and there is an opportunity for the university to support that movement. Work to build traditions and legacies, as these will matter over the long term. Make Emory a place



Above: Seh Welch (Blackfeet of Montana), Davina Campbell (Choctaw nation of Oklahoma), Beth Michel 12PH (Tohono O’odham citizen, Hopi and Navajo), and Delight Satter (Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde) join with guests from the Emory community, the CDC, and local businesses to engage on the topic.

where Indigenous students and other community members will thrive and transform the university in positive ways. This happens with so many other constituent groups of the university, and it is important for Emory to cultivate new perspectives.

Section summary

- Services should be centralized (i.e. for all Indigenous students at the university, not just by unit).
- Support for an Indigenous student center as a gathering place and community space (like Centro Latinx) is very important.
- Consider how programming (athletics, performing arts, fine arts) can support the Indigenous community, educate others, and attract students to the university.
- Fund an artist-in-residence program.
- Offer special orientation programs or pre-orientation events for Indigenous students and families.
- Offer micro-aggression training to all students and staff.
- Account for our history. Ensure compliance with Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAG-PRA) regarding collections on campus, and take steps to acknowledge history in the campus environment.
- Engage with our Indigenous alumni population. They are a significant asset.
- Leverage existing campus and regional resources: libraries, museums, people, and research and community organizations.
- Appoint a standing Indigenous advisory council, liaising with university leadership, to assist with program review, community engagement, and tribal relations (see University of Minnesota, the oldest standing Native American Elders council advising a university board).

Tribal Nations Relations

Remember that Tribal Nations in the United States are sovereign nations. Indigenous peoples and governments “have inherent rights and a political relationship with the U.S. government that does not derive from race or ethnicity” (National Congress of American Indians).

A university should not assume it is needed by Tribal Nations. The university has an important contribution to make, but first we listen, understand, and then connect Indigenous priorities to our capabilities. We need to build such relationships, and that is done over time, and by being a reliable partner.

Tribal Nations often see universities as willing to talk about guilt and shortcomings in other contexts, such as slavery and the civil rights movement, but not about the forced removal that came before. Reciprocity with Tribal Nations is important. Acknowledging this at the beginning of a planning process is important, not as an afterthought or later down the line.

Section summary

- Strive for greater honesty and visibility about Emory’s relation to Mvskoke (Creek) and Ani’yunwi’ya (Cherokee) Nations and people.
- Establish a land acknowledgement statement to be used at appropriate events and gatherings held on campus (i.e. first-year student orientation, commencement, etc).
- Participate in the life of, and programming in, Indigenous communities.
- Go to Indigenous communities, and ask them what they need. Communities connected to the particular campus land of a college or university are appropriate places to begin.
- Have a dedicated staff member appointed to represent the university and take leadership in Indigenous relations.
- Attend existing tribal advisory committee meetings (e.g. with the CDC) to observe engagement processes which will be similar to high-level engagement for academic partners and tribes.

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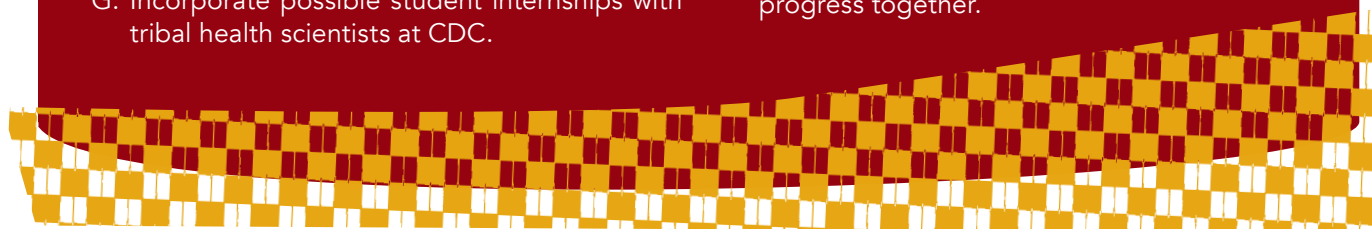
Emory's First Steps

We believe the following recommendations—inspired by the discussion of best practice at the NASS, and also cognizant of the assets currently in place at Emory—comprise an excellent first step for Emory University. By taking action

now and over the coming 2019–20 academic year, Emory can make significant progress toward becoming a university that lives up to its ideals, promotes academic excellence, and contributes to the public good.

10 Key Steps to Indigenous Engagement

1. **Begin with knowledge** that the road ahead takes commitment, but it is not complicated, and it is rewarding.
2. **Be prepared** for painful conversations. Approach the conversation with a goal of healing.
3. **Acknowledge** that the land that Emory University sits on is the homeland of the Mvskoke (Creek) people, and that the Mvskoke (Creek) people were dispossessed of their land in this region during the 1820s.
4. **Overcome** current lack of Indigenous student community at the university:
 - A. Establish a full-time employee in the Office of Admission to oversee outreach, guide selection, and serve in the short-term as mentor for enrolled students.
 - B. Focus outreach initiatives on Indigenous students around the country.
 - C. Conduct on-campus recruiting events for Indigenous students.
 - D. Connect prospective students to members of the university and CDC community.
 - E. Expand partnership with CDC and its experts in Indigenous populations:
 - F. Create a network of personal mentors and community for Indigenous students (e.g., with Indigenous colleagues at CDC; Monika Ponton-Arrington, UNFPIL delegate, of Indigenous Womens Knowledge, Inc.).
 - G. Incorporate possible student internships with tribal health scientists at CDC.
5. **Engage** with Mvskoke (Creek) and Ani'yunwi'ya (Cherokee) tribes, both with tribal leadership in Oklahoma, Alabama, North Carolina, and Georgia-based programming (e.g. New Echota reunions each July).
6. **Assess** university collections for treatment of funerary remains and objects in accordance with NAGPRA.
7. **Preserve** current faculty lines involved in teaching and scholarship in Indigenous topics. These currently exist in the departments of English, Anthropology, and History.
8. **Engage** with all members of the Emory community doing related work (e.g. Dr. Lori Jahnke, from the Woodruff Library, who has degrees in Anthropology and Indigenous Indian Studies and can represent our collections). Consider the role that non-Indigenous faculty, students, and staff—and the institution as a whole—can play in the fostering of a supportive climate for recruitment and support.
9. **Consider** a cluster hire of Indigenous faculty. A postdoctoral position might also help create momentum.
10. **Continue dialogue** with the engaged and committed group that has come together (this ad hoc committee). Treat doing so as a responsibility of current and future university leadership. This can be an annual conversation tracking our progress together.



INDIGENOUS STUDENT INITIATIVE COMMITTEE

Membership Roster, 2018–19 academic year

EMORY FACULTY

Megan E. O’Neil, PhD
Assistant Professor, Art History Department
Faculty Curator, Michael C. Carlos Museum

Dawn Peterson, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of History

Christine Ristaino, PhD
Senior Lecturer, Italian
Department of French & Italian

Mandy Suhr-Sytsma, PhD
Lecturer, English
Department of English
Director, Emory Writing Center

Debra Vidali, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology

Craig Womack, PhD
Muscogee Creek
Associate Professor
Department of English

EMORY STUDENTS

Klamath Henry 19C
Shasta Tribe of California, Tuscarora Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy
M.L. Brittain Award

Tangier Lisjak 19C

EMORY STAFF

William Canon 110X 13C
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Office of Undergraduate Admission

Timothy Fields, MEd
Associate Dean
Office of Undergraduate Admission

John Latting, PhD
Associate Vice Provost of Enrollment
Dean of Admission
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COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Beth Michel, MPH 12PH
Tohono O’odham citizen, Hopi and Navajo
Project Delivery Specialist II-Human Capital
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Delight Satter, MPH
Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
Senior Health Scientist
Office of Tribal Affairs and Strategic Alliances
Center for State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Support
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

INVITED GUESTS OF NASS



Jonathan R. Burdick has contributed to the field for 33 years with a focus on increasing campus inclusiveness and internationaliza-

tion. While delivering enrollment success at Cornell, he has also traveled worldwide on behalf of the College Board, Educational Testing Service, and the International Baccalaureate Organization. He is a frequent speaker at numerous annual national and international conferences and has been widely cited in both the press and social media, and was awarded the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC’s) Inclusion, Access, and Success Award in 2016.



Carmen Lopez, Ed.M. (Navajo Nation), is Executive Director of College Horizons, one of the nation’s leading

nonprofit organizations dedicated to increasing the number of Indigenous students succeeding in college. Carmen assumed the directorship of College Horizons in 2009 after serving for five years as the Executive Director of the Harvard University Native American Program (HUNAP). At HUNAP she oversaw the operation of the university-wide Interfaculty Initiative which focused on American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian recruitment and student support; interdisciplinary teaching and research projects on Indigenous issues; and community outreach. Carmen also served as a member of

the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Committee on Ethnic Studies, The Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations, Admissions Reader for the Harvard Kennedy School’s Masters in Public Policy program, and a Reader and Site Visitor for the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development’s Honoring Nations Program.



Alyssa Mt. Pleasant (Tuscarora) grew up in Syracuse, NY. She received her Ph.D. in History from Cornell University. Currently a

member of the faculty at the University at Buffalo (SUNY), she works at the intersection of American Indian history and Native and Indigenous Studies. Mt. Pleasant’s research focuses on Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) history

during the colonial period and early American republic. She is completing a book about Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people in the post-Revolutionary War period that focuses on the history of the Buffalo Creek Reservation near today's Buffalo, NY. She has published many articles and book chapters about Indigenous education, Indian-missionary relations, material culture, Indigenous biography, and the early American republic. Her scholarship has been supported by numerous fellowships, including a year at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. Beyond her work as a faculty member, Mt. Pleasant serves as founding Program Director of the Native American Scholars Initiative at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. She has also served on the elected council of the Native and Indigenous Studies Association and was recently elected to the Council of the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture.



Richard A. Shaw, M.A., began his tenure as Stanford's dean of admission and financial aid in 2005. Upon his appointment,

Stanford Provost John Etchemendy said, "Rick Shaw offers proven experience in several areas of vital importance to Stanford, including creating a diverse student body. He also knows the challenges involved in selective admissions, in making the case for the liberal arts and for ensuring that higher education is accessible to everyone." Dean Shaw led Yale's undergraduate admissions and financial aid office from 1993–2005. Prior to joining Yale, Shaw served as Director of Admissions at the University of Michigan from 1988 to 1993, Associate Director of Admissions and records at the University of California-Berkeley from 1983 to 1988 and in various admission and residence positions at the University of Colorado-Boulder from 1972 to 1981.



Jace Weaver, Ph.D. (Cherokee), is the Franklin Professor of Native American Studies and the Director of the

Institute of Native American Studies at the University of Georgia. As director, he serves as advisor for all students in the undergraduate and graduate Native American Studies Programs. He holds two doctorates, a J.D. from Columbia Law School of Columbia University and a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. He is an established leader in Native American Studies, specializing in cultures, literature, and law. He is the author or editor of fifteen books.



Jason Younker, Ph.D. (Coquille Nation), is the Assistant Vice President and Advisor to the President on Sovereignty and Government-to-Government Relations at the University of Oregon and a citizen of the Coquille Indian Tribe. He received his PhD in Anthropology from the UO (2004) and returned to Oregon after teaching at Rochester Institute of Technology for a decade. Younker received the prestigious Ely S. Parker Award from the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (2014) for his work with tribal governments and students in higher education. He is the Past-President of the Association of Indigenous Anthropologists and is originally from Coos Bay, Oregon.

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A Note of Thanks

The Indigenous Student Initiative Committee thanks the Office of the Provost for underwriting the Native American Student Symposium, supporting our invited experts and guests, and investing in the ongoing work of the committee.

