

## **A Summary of Native American Activities and Relationships at TCU 2017-18 Academic Year**

*"I am part Yaqui. My maternal great-grandmother was full Yaqui . . . Where is the rest of my tribe? What happened to the rest of the descendants? How can I regain my connection to my Native American heritage? How did the Yaqui become so few?"*

TCU Student (RELI 10023.035, Fall 2017)

*"I will be sharing a little of my native culture with TCU this week. I am submitting a paper in regards to the Mississippi Band of the Choctaw Nation on Tuesday as well as sharing a "non-American" dish on Monday in Cultural Geography. I have yet to decide between Fry Bread or Pashofa."*

TCU Student (Spring 2018)

During the 2017-18 academic year, TCU continued its efforts to engage Native American peoples and communities, guided by the following goals:

1. To raise awareness of and respect for Native American peoples, cultures, and perspectives
2. To learn from and incorporate Native American knowledge throughout all levels of the campus community
3. To create a welcoming and respectful environment on campus for Native American students, faculty, staff, and visitors
4. To build healthy, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with Native American peoples and communities

We seek, in the words of Indigenous scholars Elizabeth Sumida Huaman and Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, "to continually work alongside our [i.e., Indigenous] community members, Indigenous colleagues, and allies to identify and create spaces where Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies can be cultivated" (*Indigenous Innovations in Higher Education*, 4). Our activities centered on education, student support, student recruitment, and community engagement.

### **Educational Efforts**

1. **Symposium:** TCU held its second Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day symposium (formerly called Indigenous Peoples Day) on October 2, 2017, organized by Drs. Marie Schein, Theresa Gaul, and Scott Langston, and supported by a grant from Discovering Global Citizenship. The symposium's theme was *Changing the Way We See Native America:*

*Dismantling Native American Stereotypes*, and its main speaker was Matika Wilbur, a Swinomish and Tulalip photographer from Seattle, Washington who is photographing citizens from every federally-recognized tribe in the United States in an effort to dispel stereotypes (called Project 562). Ms. Wilbur interacted with students, faculty, and staff at a luncheon, spoke to students in a combined meeting of three Journalism classes (JOUR 20003, “Diversity and the Media”; JOUR 40553, “Issues in News”; and JOUR 40203, “Newscast”), and gave a keynote address that had approximately 650 people in attendance. Twenty-one professors offered extra-credit to students in thirty-three classes for attending this session. People from the DFW Native American community also attended, along with students from Paschal High School and the Grand Prairie Independent School District.

During the evening session, Provost Nowell Donovan announced that Chancellor Victor Boschini had designated the first Monday in October as Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day at TCU. The day will now be observed annually with relevant programming. This is a very significant development for which we are extremely grateful for the Chancellor’s vision and support.

Other symposium activities, with approximately 325 total students attending, included:

- A panel discussion between a TCU Native American graduate student (Shara Francis-Herne; Mohawk), alumnus (Albert Nungaray; Puebloan), and employee (Sarah Tonemah; Comanche and Kiowa) addressing their experiences with Native American stereotypes.
- A lecture sponsored by Women and Gender Studies on Intersectionality in Miss Indian Pageants by Dr. Farina King, a Diné historian and Assistant Professor of History at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.
- Traditional singing by the drum group, Comanche Thunder, and dancing by Tribal Traditions Arts & Education.
- A traditional lodge (tepee) erected on the Commons by Carl Kurtz, a TCU employee, alumnus, and member of the Citizen Band Potawatomi Nation. Kurtz talked with people throughout the day, as well as met with four different classes, plus seventy children, ages 6-12, from the Starpoint Academy.
- Six photographs from Matika Wilbur's Project 562 were displayed for a few weeks prior to the symposium in the north bridge/walkway connecting the Mary Coats Burnett Library and Rees-Jones Hall, and later moved to the BLUU. The pictures are now hanging in the northwest corner of the library’s first floor.
- Approximately 1000 fact sheets were distributed throughout the day. The sheet contained basic information about Native American peoples and their communities, and their relationships to the United States, Texas, and TCU.

TCU 360 published two articles on the symposium: [TCU aims to dismantle stereotypes as it hosts Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day Symposium](#) (October 2, 2017) and [Symposium challenges Native American stereotypes](#) (October 3, 2017). TCU News & Events also published a story on September 18, 2017: [Photographer who works to remedy Native American stereotypes to speak at TCU](#).

Student observations about the symposium illustrate its impact. One student commented:

“Modern generations of students, like myself, were taught about Native Americans as a small unit of our “Colonizing America” chapter in our social studies book. Teachers talked about them as people in history, people from the past. There was never any mention about Native Americans who live in our society in modern times. Therefore, it never crossed my mind that Native Americans are still alive today and are regular people like the rest of us . . . Matika’s presentation opened my eyes to a new perspective on the world we live in . . . She even made it a great point to make us realize that ‘we are on indigenous land.’ Native Americans are always around us, either in person, or through their Native land.”

Another remarked, “I thought that a predominant number of Native Americans would have browner skin or a darker complexion, like myself. What I came to see during the presentation was of course all shades of the spectrum, however, I saw way more fair-skinned Indians than I anticipated.”

A third observed:

“One of Matika Wilbur’s messages that has been circulating in the back of my mind is, ‘There could be a loss of culture, but there could also be a resurgence.’ In order to actualize such resurgence, small steps of eliminating stereotypes of Native Americans must be taken first. Although we may not always see Native Americans in our everyday life, we are on indigenous land. Thus, it is time we stopped bending geographical distances into an excuse to justify our laziness and indifference, or to free ourselves from guilt.”

This last student actually has identified what, according to Indigenous scholar, Marie Battiste, is one of the fundamental challenges confronting Western educational institutions: perpetuating “the idea that Indigenous peoples are primitive, uneducated, justly conquered people who would have been assimilated long ago but for their cultural backwardness” (*Decolonizing Education*, 32). The symposium reflects one way TCU is responding to this challenge.

2. **Film screening of *Neither Wolf nor Dog*:** On January 31, 2018, this film was screened as part of the KinoMonda World Cinema Project, followed by a dialogue between Shara Francis-Herne (Mohawk), Albert Nungaray (Puebloan), Dr. Scott Langston, and Dr. Kenneth Roemer (Professor of English, University of Texas at Arlington). John Singleton and Drs. Mark

Dennis, Dave Aftandilian, and Scott Langston organized the screening, which was financed by a grant from Discovering Global Citizenship. Approximately 110 people attended.

The film tells the story of a white author who travels to meet and write the life story of a Lakota elder who has experienced racism and violence while living on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. As the story unfolds, the author is forced to confront the history of Native American oppression and contemporary reservation life and, in the process, reexamines his own life. The ensuing dialogue addressed Native and non-Native experiences and perspectives on issues such as cultural appropriation, ethnicity, and identity.

3. **Film screening of *More Than a Word*:** On February 19, 2018, this film, which addresses the growing movement to change the name of the Washington Redskins football team, was screened. The filmmakers, John and Kenn Little, who are members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, were present and discussed the Native American mascot issue after the viewing. Approximately 310 people attended the evening screening, including members of the DFW Native American community and students from Paschal High School.

Earlier in the day, the Littles also met jointly with four classes (SOCI 30223, “Contemporary Topics/Soci—Race & Racism”; SOCI 30583, “Tech, Social Media & Society”; and two sections of STCO 16103, “Diversity”), totaling about 125 students. A small group of faculty, staff, and students also got to dialogue with the Littles at a luncheon. The Athletic Department funded the luncheon, while the Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies program financed the day’s other events. We appreciate the support of Max Krochmal and other CRES members, as well as Jessica Hazard in Athletics. A DVD of the film has been placed in the Mary Coats Burnett Library and it can also be accessed through the Kanopy database. TCU 360 published an article about the film screening: [‘More Than a Word’ screening addresses Native American based mascots – TCU 360](#) (February 22, 2018).

4. **New Course:** A new upper-level course—RELI 30693, “Native Americans, Religion, and Contemporary Issues,” which explores Native American and Western-Christian perspectives on religion, community, and the environment—was taught by Dr. Scott Langston during the Spring 2018 semester. Designed as a pilot course aimed at giving students extended opportunities to interact with qualified Native American speakers, Provost Nowell Donovan’s office provided funds to finance the following speakers:

Chebon Kernell, a member of the Seminole Nation, a traditional leader of a Muscogee (Creek) ceremonial ground, and the Executive Secretary for Native American and Indigenous Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries for the United Methodist Church, spoke in three classes regarding Seminole and Muscogee (Creek) cultures and experiences. Jodi Voice Yellowfish, a local activist of Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), and Oglala Lakota heritage, addressed her experience of growing up as a Native American in an urban environment, as well as someone who has mixed tribal ancestries. Shara Francis-Herne, a

TCU graduate student and member of the Mohawk Nation, offered perspectives from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

One student aptly expressed the great need for incorporating Native Americans who have cultural expertise into courses: “The point that there is only so much that a non-Native can teach about Native culture was made a myriad of times throughout the semester, and though Professor Langston does an incredible job with conveying concepts and teaching us (especially since has such a close relationship with Native communities and can draw from those experiences), learning from Native Americans themselves has greatly added to our learning. They touch on aspects that we might have never emphasized, such as being an urban Native, and were consistently straightforward and honest and answered our questions to the best of their abilities. I do not think that my understanding of the overall Native culture, in respect to past, present, or future, would be as developed without these conversations.”

### **Student Support, Student Recruitment, and Community Engagement**

- 1. Acknowledgment of Wichita and Affiliated Tribes:** We made tremendous progress this year in erecting a plaque on campus that acknowledges TCU’s location on the historical homeland of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes. A committee consisting of Drs. Theresa Gaul, Dave Aftandilian, and Scott Langston and TCU alumnus Albert Nungaray (class of 2017; Puebloan), worked with TCU’s administration, Native American allies, and the Wichita Tribe to develop a bronze circular plaque with the following wording:

“We respectfully acknowledge all Native American peoples who have lived on this land since time immemorial. TCU especially acknowledges and pays respect to the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes upon whose historical homeland our university is located. October 1, 2018”

This acknowledgment will be surrounded by the following phrase supplied by the Wichita Tribe both in English and Wichita:

“This ancient land, for all our relations.

ti?i hira:r?a hira:wis hakitata:rira:rkwe?ekih”

After the plaque is installed on campus, likely by late summer or early fall 2018, a dedication ceremony that includes a delegation from the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes will be held.

We appreciate the support and work of Darron Turner and Aisha Torrey-Sawyer in bringing this project to fruition.

This is yet another extraordinarily important action taken by TCU and we are again grateful for the Chancellor’s vision and support. Given the importance of the land to Native American peoples, along with their experiences of dispossession, a respectful acknowledgement by a

non-Native university will help bring about healing and create trust. It will be one of the cornerstones of TCU's efforts to develop mutually beneficial relationships with Native American peoples and communities. The text of the acknowledgement is beginning to be used across campus as well, appearing on a few syllabi, being read at the Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies 2018 Awards banquet, and being incorporated into Freshman orientation. We are grateful to Ebony Rose and Lindsay Thomas Knight for their help in the latter two instances and we hope its use in public events and ceremonies will increase.

- 2. Native and Indigenous Student Association (NISA):** During NISA's second year it helped sponsor the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day symposium and the film screening of *More Than a Word*, held a traditional Blessing Ceremony to begin the Spring 2018 semester, and held three meetings in each of the Fall and Spring semesters. One of the most popular meetings consisted of an introduction to traditional beading, led by Shara Francis-Herne. Members also worked at the American Indian Heritage Day in Texas annual celebration and the University of Texas at Arlington's annual powwow. NISA president, Kendra Hall, received the Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies program's Student Legacy Award, where it was noted that, "Her biggest contribution related to the goals of CRES is her service as the president of the Native American student organization--she's helped to provide a meeting space and inclusion of that community on our campus, while also working with faculty advisers to plan and support programming that helps the broader campus learn more about Native Americans." NISA's membership is composed of both Native and non-Native individuals, with members representing the Nanticoke, Mohawk, Choctaw, Comanche, and Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.
- 3. Blessing Ceremony:** On January 22, 2018, the Native and Indigenous Student Association held on campus its first blessing ceremony for its members, as well as any TCU student, faculty, and staff with Native American ancestry. Members of Paschal High School's Native American Club also attended. TCU alumnus, Albert Nungaray (class of 2017) led the ceremony and TCU's campus minister, Angela Kaufman, gave opening remarks.

Held outdoors in front of the Robert Carr chapel, the ceremony was a traditional Puebloan blessing, adapted for use outside the tribe and family unit. It involved telling and explaining an origin story of the Pueblo peoples, giving thanks to the ancestors and the spirits for all the gifts received in life, and asking them for their protection. It also included spreading of tobacco as a gift of reciprocity, smudging with smoke of sacred herbs (sage, sweetgrass, cedar), and drawing of a sacred sun symbol and a Pueblo Cross on the ground (with corn meal). TCU's student association and Paschal High School's Native American club exchanged gifts as expressions of support and connection.

- 4. Student Recruitment and Community Engagement:** TCU's outreach to the DFW Native American community has continued to expand. The number of people from this community who are attending campus events has grown, as has TCU's profile in the community. Additionally, Cherese Dickerson, an Admission counsellor, represented TCU at the American

Indian Heritage Day in Texas annual celebration in Grand Prairie. Admissions also held a tour on campus in conjunction with Native American and Indigenous People's Day, as well as hosted an All-Area Chamber of Commerce Reception on April 3, 2018, in which two representatives from the Urban Inter-Tribal Center of Texas, located in Dallas, attended. We appreciate the sensitivity and work of Heath Einstein and Victoria Herrera in helping us reach out to Native American communities. Scott Langston continues to work as an ambassador for American Indian Heritage Day in Texas, and also represented TCU and spoke at the Grand Prairie Independent School District's American Indian Education program's celebration of student achievement on May 19, 2018.

## **Future Opportunities**

In the short-term we will continue the kinds of initiatives carried out over the last few years. In the long-term, the following actions would sustain and advance these efforts:

### **1. CONTINUE BUILDING AN INFRASTRUCTURE AT TCU THAT WILL SUPPORT NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENT GROWTH AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT.**

The two students whose comments begin this report reflect some of the challenges and possibilities facing us at TCU. Like the first student, many at TCU who self-identify as "American Indian/Alaska Native" have little, if any, connection to their Indigenous communities or cultures. They may know their ancestral tribe's identity, but often know little else. Overcoming centuries of Euro-American assimilation efforts is not done quickly, but helping students re-connect is an important part of their personal growth. The second student illustrates the possibilities. After two years of being at TCU, this student has developed enough interest and confidence in her own Native American identity to begin sharing it with and even teaching her fellow students. Additionally, the comments of non-Native students contained in this report demonstrate the possibilities in not only making our students more aware of Native American peoples and perspectives, but engaging them in meaningful ways.

Continued curriculum development remains at the heart of these efforts. Increasing our Native American course offerings will enhance student growth, but finding innovative ways to teach with (rather than simply about) Native Americans will pay even greater dividends. This certainly means continuing the kinds of programming we have had, but also creating in-depth opportunities across disciplines for students to dialogue and work with Native Americans and consider how Indigenous knowledge and solutions are relevant to being "ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the global community."

### **2. SEEK OUT MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES**

Learning from and incorporating Native American knowledge throughout all levels of the campus community is best accomplished in relationship with Native American communities. Developing relationships with communities takes time and should benefit both TCU and the

individual community. So, finding ways to partner and work together is important. Two immediate possibilities are with the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and the DFW urban community. The Wichita acknowledgement should not be an end, but a beginning of collaborations. We should also strengthen our relationships with DFW's "urban Indian" community, especially with organizations like the Urban Inter-Tribal Center of Texas.

The following actions will help achieve the previous two items:

### 3. INCREASE THE PRESENCE OF NATIVE AMERICANS AT TCU

With TCU currently employing few, if any, Native American faculty or administrators, hiring culturally-connected Native Americans across disciplines and programs will significantly strengthen TCU's efforts at diversity and inclusion. Native Americans are among the most underrepresented of the underrepresented groups at TCU. Prospective Native American students and their communities want to know how many Native Americans are on TCU's faculty or in its administration and often see it as a measure of TCU's values and concern.

Prospective students, like most, also want to know how they can possibly afford TCU. There are currently no scholarships at TCU specifically designed for Native American students. Creating even one such scholarship will help, especially as we are competing with other colleges and universities that have already taken these steps.

### 4. PURSUE HIRING A TRIBAL LIAISON

Hiring a culturally-connected Native American who can represent TCU and develop relationships with Native American communities would be an innovative and bold step. This person not only would play an integral role in building trust with communities and finding ways to partner with them, as well as assist TCU faculty and staff in planning activities and programs relevant to their disciplines, but also develop relations with tribal educational and other officers. The United States recognizes Native American nations (tribes) as having limited sovereignty, which among other things, means they have governmental structures, including educational departments. Tribal educational officers are important points of contact with prospective students. Having a tribal liaison who is familiar with how tribes work, including culturally significant ways of acting, would have tremendous benefits for TCU.

We are greatly encouraged by the widespread support from TCU's administration, faculty, staff, and students for engaging Native American peoples and perspectives. Important steps were taken during this past academic year and we are eager to take more in 2018-19.

Respectfully,  
Scott Langston (Religion)  
Theresa Gaul (English)