

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Understanding the “TCU” in TCU
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For those of us who routinely wear purple and express our enthusiasm for Texas Christian University in so many different ways, we work hard to make TCU a great place to work and to receive a stellar education. Our university’s recent efforts to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to the forefront of everything we do is a vital step in the right direction. As DEI spreads throughout the university, it will undoubtedly take on a variety of shapes and will hold diverse implications. From the perspective of our work with Native American and Indigenous communities, DEI has its own possibilities and challenges, starting with understanding the three elements of our university’s name—Texas, Christian, University.

Texas stirs great pride for most of us who are Texans (either by birth or by choice). We are known for our exuberance—sometimes to a fault—over our state’s many fine qualities. If, however, we view our state from Native American perspectives, things look a little different. To cut right to the heart of the matter, Texas in its various iterations as a province, republic, and state, has been one of the most destructive forces that the Indigenous peoples of this land have ever known. The examples are myriad, but one only has to look to the Alamo. While native Texans like me have been taught to revere this place as an expression of independence and freedom, we must remember that the Alamo is first an expression of European attempts to colonize this land and its Native peoples. Or, to put it bluntly, the Alamo, which was established in 1718 as a Spanish mission to convert Native Americans, represents European, and later American, efforts to take possession of this land, exploit its resources, and erase Native peoples. So, what does this mean for TCU? It means that the “Texas” in TCU carries with it this colonizing heritage—a heritage that has not ceased (note the recent Indigenous struggle over the Trans-Pecos Pipeline and the Lipan Apache’s and Carrizo/Camecrudo’s fights against the border

wall). In other words, TCU is the offspring of colonizing powers and came into existence through these powers' actions. These powers made it possible for us to work and learn and cheer on our Horned Frogs on what was—and continues to be—Indigenous land. A deep commitment to DEI is a commitment to come to grips in all of our courses, departments, programs, and activities with the “Texas” in TCU. A good place to begin is by acknowledging both our university's colonizing heritage and the resulting privilege we enjoy, while recognizing the counternarratives of Texas' Indigenous peoples and histories.

The “Christian” and “University” in TCU also represent colonizing powers that worked to remove and erase Native Americans physically and culturally from this land. Christianity and education have made many wonderful and positive contributions, but they also were two of the primary tools used by Europeans and Americans to eradicate Native Americans. It's a harsh truth. One of the oldest strategies employed by these foreign powers was to erase Native Americans by forced conversion to Christianity and assimilation to Western cultures. This, of course, would then lead to possession of Indigenous lands and resources. How do you erase an entire people's way of life? Missions and schools took up the task. For most of American history, it was essentially illegal for Native peoples to practice their spiritualities—it wasn't until 1978 that the United States passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act—and state and federal governments worked in concert with Christian denominations to force religious and cultural conversion. Generations of Native children were forcibly removed from their communities and sent to boarding and day schools all across America where they were compelled to learn Christianity, English, and other elements of the American way, while being forbidden to practice their own cultures and speak their own languages. Universities have played a leading role in this process by making Native Americans objects of study. In the quest to create fields of study,

control knowledge, grant degrees, publish books and articles, and teach classes, universities dispatched generations of scholars to harvest Indigenous knowledge(s), artifacts, and even bodies, including skulls, bones, and DNA. This process and these forces are still at work today. Indigenous knowledge(s) continues to be colonized. In most circles, Indigenous knowledge(s) is considered legitimate only if it is filtered through and approved by a person holding a Ph.D. from a non-Native institution of higher learning and used primarily for the purposes of the academy. The Indigenous people who have produced this knowledge(s) and understand it best are typically only considered sources, not teachers and scholars accorded the same respect and authority as those holding Ph.D.s. TCU can take steps to acknowledge and respect this knowledge(s), and in so doing, raise its academic standards, by creating avenues for learning from skilled Indigenous teachers.

Texas Christian University. While for many of us these words evoke great pride, for others, they represent something else. If we who are enthusiastic about TCU want to engage those who may hear and experience these words differently, we have a lot of work ahead of us. Here is where a deep commitment to DEI can help us. Such a commitment means first coming to terms with the heritage of Texas, Christian, University. We must be willing to admit that Texas, Christian, University have caused a lot of harm and that as Texas Christian University we bear some of the responsibility. No excuses. We must individually learn and teach the truth of Texas, Christian, University in our classes and acknowledge it throughout our university's programs and physically on our campus. TCU's 2018 acknowledgement of its location on lands originally inhabited by many Native American peoples, especially the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, is a good start. Kudos to TCU and its administration for having the courage to do what many institutions have not! We must continue to build on this positive action. An acknowledgement of

our place on Native American land must be followed up by hiring Native American administrators and faculty, the positions through which the power to shape our university is enacted. Native Americans must be included in the power structures of TCU. We must also look deep within our policies, procedures, core principles and values, DEI efforts and allocation of resources, hiring and promotion requirements, class and departmental structures, and course content to see if colonizing and exclusionary attitudes, priorities, language, categories, and requirements remain rooted in the way we function. Kim Tallbear, an anthropologist and Native Studies professor at the University of Alberta and enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, has observed that “the social sciences and humanities are, like the natural sciences and engineering, born of colonialisms” (*Native American DNA*, 18). We at TCU must grapple with this fact and this legacy and how it shapes what we are doing and teaching. Just as we can be blind to the harsh realities standing behind Texas, Christian, University, we can also be blind to how our colonizing heritage is still at work in the way we do our business. This is uncomfortable, painful, and difficult—sometimes it’s hard to see what you’ve grown used to looking at—but this is what a deep commitment to DEI, rather than to a veneer of DEI, requires. This will begin to transform Texas Christian University into a place of meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially for Native American and Indigenous peoples.

Author: Scott M. Langston