

2016 Indigenous Peoples Day Symposium

On October 3, 2016, TCU's first Indigenous Peoples Day symposium was held, having been organized by Drs. Theresa Gaul and Scott Langston. By all accounts, it was overwhelmingly successful.

Goals and Objectives

Planning for the symposium began during the Fall 2015 semester, with the overall goal of bringing to campus several Native American speakers to address Native American and Indigenous perspectives related to the observance of Columbus Day, as well as explore the ramifications of subsequent Western colonization and assimilation of Native peoples and lands. Given that Native American and Indigenous voices are rarely heard at TCU, bringing representatives from these communities to campus would help the university in its efforts to increase diversity and inclusion. The symposium had three objectives:

1. To create opportunities for students and faculty to learn from and dialog with Native American and Indigenous peoples regarding their cultural perspectives and values, as well as the ongoing impact of Western colonization and assimilation.
2. To build trust with Native individuals and communities in order to create a more robust and meaningful Native presence and influence on campus which, in turn, will aid in the university's efforts to create a more diverse learning environment. The symposium will be an important step toward future collaborative efforts with Native peoples and efforts to hire Native scholars.
3. To advance discourse on Native and Indigenous Studies on campus in preparation for the development of a minor as part of the Comparative Race and Ethnicity Studies program.

To assist in meeting these objectives, the following speakers participated in the symposium:

Chebon Kernell—a citizen of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and Executive Secretary for Native American and Indigenous Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries for the United Methodist Church, as well as a traditional Seminole ceremonial leader. He received the Westar Institute's 2016 Advocate for Public Religious Literacy award.



Edyka Chilomé—an orator, writer, and spiritual activist of diasporic indigenous descent (Salvadorian and Mexican). She received a B.A. in social and political philosophy from Loyola University, Chicago and an M.A. in Multicultural Women's Studies from Texas Woman's University where her research focused on the decolonial power of spiritual [Art]ivism. Her book of poetry, *She Speaks*, was published in 2015.



Peggy Larney—a citizen of the Choctaw Nation and retired director for the American Indian Education Program for the Dallas Independent School District. Along with her son, Brian, she worked to establish American Indian Heritage Day (AIHD) in Texas (designated by the 2013 Texas legislature as the last Friday in September). Peggy and her husband began the preliminary work for AIHD, while Brian and others helped with the legislation.

Brian Larney—a Choctaw/Seminole artist who works as a Creative Director in the advertising world. He has served as an art instructor for special programs sponsored by various organizations such as the Texas Commission of the Arts, the American Indian Education Program of Dallas Public Schools, and the Dallas Museum of Art. His art has been exhibited in a variety of places, including the Family Place in Dallas, the Mississippi Choctaw Museum in Choctaw, Mississippi, the Choctaw Nation's Capital Museum, and the Oklahoma Choctaw Nation Headquarters.



A local drum group, Comanche Thunder, and a local dance group, Tribal Traditions Arts & Education, also performed during the symposium's evening session.



Description of the Symposium

The four speakers addressed approximately 225 **students in seven classes** from English (Theresa Gaul, Chantel Carlson, Rachel Johnston), Religion (Mark Dennis, 2 classes), Social Work (Jennifer Martin), and Advertising (Bill Galyean). Carl Kurtz, a TCU alum and current employee who is also a member of the Citizen Band Potawatomi Nation, spoke to approximately 97 students in three classes from Religion (Scott Langston, 2 classes) and History (Todd Kerstetter); Morgan John, a current TCU student and member of the Coushatta Nation, also spoke in one of the classes in which Mr. Kurtz spoke. On Tuesday, October 4, Albert Nungaray, a current TCU student of Puebloan ancestry, spoke to approximately 75 students in two Religion classes (Scott Langston). In total, almost 400 students during daytime classes engaged in dialog with the symposium's four speakers and Native American members of the TCU community.

Carl Kurtz set up a **tipi on the Commons** and three classes held their regularly scheduled sessions inside it. Many people from the TCU community stopped by throughout the day to look at the tipi and talk with Mr. Kurtz. It served as a visible expression of Native American presence at TCU and became one of the most photographed aspects of the symposium.

Ammie Harrison, Humanities and Theatre Librarian for the Mary Coats Burnett Library, curated a small **exhibit featuring the Indigenous peoples of Texas** that was displayed in the west lobby of the library. The exhibit featured documents, photographs, and exhibit pieces from the tribal communities that lived in the surrounding areas and Texas. The items came from the collections of TCU and the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.





A **luncheon** was held for the speakers and TCU students, faculty, and staff of Native and Indigenous ancestry. Six students (Albert Nungaray, Morgan John, Kendra Hall, Franciso Marcano-Santos, Jordan Baird, and Lawrence Grubbe), one faculty member (Keith Whitworth), one staff member (Carl Kurtz), and two alumni (Scott Stafford, Yuchi, classes of 2005 and 2006, and Tabitha Tan, Navajo, class of 1999) attended, along with the four speakers and Drs. Gaul and Langston. All participated in an informal discussion on navigating university life as a Native student.

After the luncheon, Drs. Gaul and Langston, Chebon Kernell (symposium speaker), and Albert Nungaray (TCU student), met for approximately one hour with Andy Schoolmaster, dean of AddRan College, and Max Krochmal, director of the Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies initiative. A positive and beneficial discussion ensued on a variety of topics including the development of a Native American and Indigenous Studies program and/or minor, and issues related to Native American and Indigenous students at TCU.

Nearly 600 people, including 400 students, as well as members of the local Native American community, attended a **panel discussion** held that evening from 7-8:30 PM.

Approximately fourteen professors offered students in one or more of their classes extra credit for attending the discussion.



After introductions by Dr. Gaul and Provost Nowell Donovan, **Comanche Thunder** sang two songs, the Comanche flag song and Comanche code talker song. During Dr. Gaul's introduction,

the Wichita people were acknowledged with the following statement: “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.” Chebon Kernell then gave a keynote address on the observance of Columbus Day, followed by brief responses from the other three speakers. After a few questions from the audience, Morgan John and Albert Nungaray presented the speakers with small gifts. The evening session then adjourned to the Commons where Comanche Thunder and the **dancers from Tribal Traditions Arts & Education** sang and danced for about thirty minutes.

The panel discussion was videotaped, as well as reported on in tcu360 ([TCU explores Indigenous People’s Day at inaugural symposium](#)) and the Skiff ([Celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day](#)).

Cost of the Symposium

The Indigenous Peoples Day symposium was sponsored by an Instructional Development Grant and the AddRan College of Liberal Arts. The total cost of the symposium was \$5008.94, with \$3521.26 being funded through the Instructional Development Grant and the remainder from AddRan.

Accomplishments of the Symposium

The symposium achieved all three of its objectives. Regarding the first objective—to create opportunities for students and faculty to learn from and dialog with Native American and Indigenous peoples—the symposium provided numerous situations for learning and discussion. These included class visits, the luncheon, the meeting with the AddRan dean, the panel discussion, and the library exhibit, as well as numerous informal discussions.

In this regard, one student concluded, “The symposium allowed me to connect the ideas I have been learning in class with people who are alive today that still feel the effects of the tragedies from long ago.” Another student wrote, “I found the symposium very powerful. It’s one thing to learn and hear about what happened to the Native American peoples, but it’s way different to have a firsthand account talk about it.”



The second objective—to build trust with Native individuals and communities—was one of the most promising accomplishments of the symposium. The fact that TCU even held such a

symposium and addressed the observance of Columbus Day was received positively by many. James Yellowfish, the leader of the Comanche Thunder drum, expressed his gratitude in an email: “Thank you, for invite, We enjoyed and we feel your sincerity, may we all come to understand more in this sharing.” One of the symposium’s speakers, Peggy Larney, also

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conveyed similar ideas in an email: “Thank you for organizing a very productive event, "Indigenous Peoples Day" at TCU! I have been to many similar events and your event is up there in the "top" of my list.” TCU alum and member of the Navajo Nation, Tabitha Tan, wrote, “This is only the beginning and great to see the direction this is going. I was glad to be a part of it.” Since the symposium, Scott Langston has been invited to four events held by the local Native American community, including the opportunity to distribute information about TCU on November 19 at an afternoon session on the Indian Child

Welfare Act to be held at the Oak Cliff Community Center. Bridges of trust and mutual sharing are being built between TCU and Native American communities as a result of the symposium.

The third objective—to advance discourse on Native and Indigenous Studies on campus—is already evident. Since October 3, a group of TCU students have applied for and received approval to form a Native and Indigenous Student Association. Other faculty are exploring and planning for future events, including bringing Native Americans to campus to discuss Native American women’s health issues and spirituality, as well as hosting Matika Wilbur, a professional photographer of Swinomish and Tulalip (Washington) heritage, who has undertaken a project to photograph every federally recognized tribe in the United States in hopes of building cultural bridges, abandoning stereotypes, and renewing and inspiring Native American national legacies.



Awareness on campus of Native American and Indigenous presence and perspectives has also been raised. One student offered this reflection: “I must admit, I honestly did not realize the true extent of the different worldviews that exist within the Native American culture. I now understand I have been influenced by the wrong notions and stereotypes that seem to permeate American culture as it is today.” Another student commented, “Honestly, I had never really thought about Columbus day that much, but now, after learning about it in class and hearing the

people speak at the symposium, I have a much better grasp of the impact on Native Americans, but also how they have remained strong through it all and still celebrate their traditions and culture to this day.” Yet another student gave this evaluation: “Before coming to TCU, I was greatly opposed to the idea of dethroning Columbus Day. Even being here at TCU for four years I still didn’t like the idea of replacing Columbus Day. It’s a combination of this class and the symposium that weakened my stance. In this class I’ve learned a lot about Native American values and beliefs.”

Of course, not all students found the symposium to be a positive experience. According to one, “All the times the Natives spoke about Christopher Columbus [they] act as if they blame him for their path road to extinction; however when do the Indians bring up the bad things that they did to the Europeans? I never once heard them bring up bad Indians, they only talk about all the bad that has happened to them. I am very religious, but I do believe in the



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natural selection and if the Indians’ techniques are no longer needed to benefit the community around them and they refuse to teach others. What are we to do? There are many answers to this in which are too detailed to go heavily into. In short, natural selection will slowly eat away at the weak group or people that no longer can survive with the evolved breed of species.” As disturbing as this sentiment may be, it highlights that much work remains to be done.

Future Planning and Recommendations

“Monday’s event was a beginning, now it depends on how we all move forward.”

This assessment of the Indigenous Peoples Day symposium, given by Peggy Larney, aptly summarizes and places it in context. The symposium was not merely a singular event unto itself. Rather, it hopefully is the first of many future shared learning experiences between TCU and

Native American and Indigenous communities. Looking ahead, we make the following recommendations:

1. Officially designate and observe Indigenous Peoples Day at TCU on an annual basis.

Officially designating an annual recognition of Native and Indigenous peoples at TCU would send a powerful signal to Native American and Indigenous peoples and communities that TCU values and is committed to understanding, learning, and engaging their histories and perspectives. TCU has an opportunity to build a Native American studies program that significantly collaborates with Native American communities in mutually beneficial ways. However, doing so will require TCU to build trust with these communities. Declaring an annual recognition of Native and Indigenous peoples would be a major step in this effort. We recommend that future observances be held in conjunction with the American Indian Heritage Day proclaimed by the Texas State Legislature to fall on the last Friday of September. The statewide effort to establish this day of recognition was led by Peggy and Brian Larney, two of our speakers this year. Moving the event to the week of American Indian Heritage Day will allow us to honor the work of Native people in the local community, like the Larnseys and many others, who have worked to achieve this recognition in Texas. We will be able to plan our observance in collaboration with other events in the Metroplex related to this day of observance.

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2. Obtain permanent funding for future American Indian Heritage observances.

Secure and stable funding will insure an ongoing major campus-wide event that will support teaching on Native American-related topics, raise awareness across the campus, signal TCU's commitment to and value of Native American cultures and perspectives, and help TCU achieve its goal of diversity and inclusiveness by insuring that Native American voices are heard on campus. Without permanent funding, however, planning is slowed and future symposia remain in doubt. An event of this size requires significant advance planning, especially when being carried out by faculty who are doing it above and beyond their normal duties. The delay created by first having to find funding causes the loss of valuable time. These issues could be resolved with permanent funding.

3. Acknowledge the Wichita tribal people and TCU's location on their historical homeland with a permanent marker placed in a prominent location.

As stated previously, the importance of TCU building trust with Native American and Indigenous peoples and communities is vital to its ability to build a strong program. Without

this trust, TCU will find it difficult, if not impossible, to engage these communities. In addition to designating an annual event recognizing Native and Indigenous peoples, acknowledging the Wichita tribal people in a meaningful and lasting manner would also create strong, positive relationships. When discussing this idea with Peggy Larney, she commented, “The possibility of recognition of the importance that Wichitas played in the area will be very honorable and respectful.” The earth in general and specific tribal lands in particular play exceedingly important roles in Native American cultures. The trauma of being removed from these lands continues to negatively impact these peoples. A meaningful, respectful, and permanent recognition by TCU that it is located on the historical homeland of the Wichita people would help heal generations of trauma and be a strong step in overcoming distrust of non-Native institutions.

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- Peggy Larney

4. Support curriculum development in Native and Indigenous Studies. This may include the following initiatives: 1) Actively recruiting Native scholars as faculty hires; 2) Offering financial support for the team-teaching of courses on Native Studies topics, pairing a TCU faculty member with a qualified member for the metroplex Native communities. For example, in an English course the Native team-teacher might be a storyteller or a writer; in other courses in other disciplines the Native team-teacher may have expertise in food sovereignty, religious traditions, health care, social work, political activism, etc. This option would show TCU addressing the absence of Native faculty members in a proactive way to enrich students’ educations; 3) Supplementing courses on Native Studies topics with a modest budget allowing for honoraria to bring Native people in to speak to classes on several occasions. With non-Native faculty members currently teaching Native Studies courses at TCU, the need to bring in Native people to share their perspectives and to engage in dialogue with students is crucial and essential to broadening students’ understandings.

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- TCU Student

We wish to acknowledge the essential and important financial support given by AddRan Dean Andy Schoolmaster and the opening comments by Provost Nowell Donovan. Furthermore, many people in the TCU community provided an array of help and support without which the symposium would not have been possible. We are grateful for all of these efforts.

Respectfully,
Scott Langston
Theresa Gaul