

# Land Recognition Committee Memorandum

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To: Glenn Cummings, President of USM, and the President's Cabinet  
From: Land Recognition Committee  
Date: June 7, 2021  
Subject: Addressing Equity and Justice for Native People at USM

## Background

In the winter of 2021, USM established the Land Recognition Committee (LRC) to make recommendations for an aesthetic representation of land acknowledgment for the new buildings on the Portland campus. The eight member, Native-led committee met from Feb 18, 2021 to June 3, 2021 and collectively decided that the effort of the committee would be dedicated to advancing USM's stated commitment to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students and the creation of an environment to fully support that goal.

In addition to the aesthetic land acknowledgment, the committee also developed the policy changes necessary to actually realize the land acknowledgment, without which any acknowledgment would be inconsequential. For Wabanaki land acknowledgment to be authentic and bolster the stated goals of lowering barriers for Indigenous students, attracting and nurturing Indigenous scholarship, and supporting the restoration and preservation of both written and spoken Wabanaki languages it must:

- Honor the basic rights of Wabanaki community members and students through increased Wabanaki educational offerings, freedom of spirituality and religious practice on the territory that USM sits on, support Native community connections, infrastructure, and financially support the work of addressing Native needs at USM through a Native Needs Committee
- Continue Wabanaki language class offerings and support for Wabanaki language revitalization through Wabanaki studies minor, a Wabanaki language minor, and a language major with Wabanaki language as the focus
- Make USM a welcoming space for Native families that supports community healing
- Increase Indigenous cultural visibility on USM campuses

The following are both structural recommendations for the new Career & Student Success Center (CSSC) as well as associated policy changes necessary to bring to life the realization of CSSC's aesthetic vision for Wabanaki land acknowledgment.

## **Aesthetic and Space Recommendations:**

### *Audiovisual Digital Mural (\$10,000 budget)*

- A rolling introductory tutorial that explains the concepts of decolonization on Wabanaki territory, Wabanaki history, and Wabanaki presence for educational purposes for the entire USM community. Words in Wabanaki languages must be spoken as well as written.
- Stewarded by the Native student group and Indigenous USM community members who retain sole domain over the content it displays and sole ownership of that content. Never used for other university events, signage, or advertising unless specifically approved.
- Native students and Native community members retain sole authority to change the content and the display to accurately reflect Wabanaki history, culture, and present-day existence.
- The display may include but is not limited to: audio of all Wabanaki tribal languages (creation stories, glooscap, etc.), healing through the language content, advertisement of local Native community opportunities and workshops, art and poetry from Indigenous/Wabanaki scholars, etc.

### *Additional Aesthetic Recommendations with Increased Budget:*

- A water sculpture on the wall incorporating a map of territories with waterfalls for rivers
- Revolving art exhibits of local Indigenous artists
- Naming a new residence hall “Wabanaki Hall” or securing a donor that will allow for this name for the building
- Linguistics Learning and Teaching Space - Wabanaki Language Center/Language Labs
  - Seminar type classroom (Kiosk) 30-50 seating capacity for teaching and learning, aside from a hangout space
- A large circle of seating area outdoors on the USM Portland campus that can be used all year and will work well for a Native gathering (e.i. wooden benches made by local artists, wood or metal sculptures)

## **Policy Changes Necessary to Realize the Land Acknowledgement**

*Full Room & Board grant reinstatement for all Native students regardless of Estimated Family Contribution/Student Aid Index. This is how land recognition can truly be honored considering the university sits on unceded Indigenous territory.*

- Moving the Room & Board grant out of Financial Aid and back to the original structure of Native American Waiver Educational Program (NAWEP) where room & board is part of the waiver - the room and board fees would again be waived instead of calculated through Federal Financial Aid eligibility.
- Focus on what the NAWEP has produced (ie: number of Native graduates, academic and career achievements and service to their communities and the State) rather than only on

how to reduce the University's investment in the program. It is strongly recommended that the next UMS review of the program includes data on these metrics.

- Conduct regular evaluations of how well the program is meeting the goal of recruiting and retaining Native students and make long term investments in continuous improvements.

*To include Natives in USM's goal of "Leading in Diversity" over the next five years and to achieve "a more diverse and inclusive student body, faculty, and staff", the following is needed:*

- Hire and retain at least three full-time, tenure track Indigenous/Wabanaki Faculty
- Hire and retain a Native Coordinator
  - A point of contact for Natives, to support students socially, academically, etc. (Natives working with Natives)
- Development of USM's overall commitment to welcome Native students and continue to support overall Native student success
  - Potential community service/internship component involving the tuition waiver that supports Native communities

*USM commitment to make things right with Native peoples through:*

- Decolonizing of structures
  - Removing barriers to openly welcome Native people back to USM and the land the university sits on
  - Direct line of communication to senior leadership/President Cabinet members
- Restoration
  - Fostering a university environment that creates a sense of belonging for Native students, faculty, and staff - the attraction (hub) that will bring Native peoples together with community support
  - Ceremony to honor all Native scholars, past, present, and future

*Native Needs Committee to be financially supported by USM*

- The Committee will report to the Vice President of Equity & Inclusion, Idella Glenn, and/or President Cabinet members on identified institutional changes that are needed to provide continued support for Native people at the university
- Committee recommendations will include but are not limited to the following areas:
  - Institutional Policies
  - Hiring and retention of Native Faculty, Staff, and Students
  - Programming/Events
  - Curriculum
  - Use of space
  - Native Community building initiatives

- The Committee will provide guidance and help the Native Coordinator liaise between the university and Wabanaki community

*Use of Space by Native Students & Native USM Community Members on Campus:*

- Ability to advertise Native presence with banners, flyers, etc. of local community opportunities and workshops throughout the new building and throughout the campuses
- Selection of residence halls and specific dorms available for Native students
- Access to space for all Native people/students, alumni, and non-students/community members with the ability to hold powwows at the USM Portland campus and an annual community Powwow
- The ability for a statewide Wabanaki community gathering to be held at USM Portland campus where Native crafters, storytellers, artists, singers, and dancers could be celebrated - with financial support from USM to the Native Needs Committee for the recruitment and launch of the event.