



Indigenous Students at Syracuse, Native Student Program,
Onkwehonwe Alumni Association
Haudenosaunee/Indigenous Alumni Representatives Program
Undergraduate and Graduate Indigenous Student Concerns and Solutions
December 3, 2019

In regard to the recent racist and hateful attacks on marginalized groups on campus including African American, Asian, Jewish and most recently, Indigenous people, we would like to discuss necessary changes required to secure the safety and continued academic success of Indigenous Students at Syracuse University. We understand and recognize the struggle of the students of the #NotAgainSU Movement and we are also deeply hurt by the incidents that have unfolded over the last few weeks. This has especially come to light in the recent report of an “anti-Native American” note found in Flint Hall. Students have also found vandalized banners in Haven Hall on the Indigenous Living & Learning Community for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and an SU junior publicly posted racially insensitive images on social media (Instagram and Twitter), labeling images of her Thanksgiving celebrations as “Cultural Genocide.” These kinds of actions and language towards Indigenous people does not align with the university’s statements of support and respect for its Indigenous students. Our concern over our futures at Syracuse University, however, goes beyond these very immediate issues. We understand that the #NotAgainSU Movement also shares concerns that are broader than these particular incidents. As Indigenous students in higher education, we repeatedly find ourselves forgotten and left out of important narratives and conversations that inevitably lead to misperceptions and miseducation of our peers, colleagues, and teachers regarding our history and presence at this university. Ignorant comments and disrespectful remarks are consistently experienced in residence halls, classrooms, and often stem from curriculum and pedagogy that promotes the erasure of our people. This contributes to the growing problem of both our erasure in university spaces and repeated microaggressions and macroaggressions. As a result, Indigenous students carry the responsibility of educating others about our history and our presence here on this campus on their shoulders. It is exhausting for us to be away from our families and communities, and to feel the weight of this responsibility at the same time.

We recognize that Syracuse University has installed Haudenosaunee Confederacy flags throughout campus, implemented the use of a land acknowledgment before all major university events, and recognizes Indigenous People’s Day. While these gestures are steps in the right direction, they were done because of the commitment of Native university and community members to make change. Additionally, without dedication and systematic change for the betterment of Indigenous students’ experience at this institution, they can often become performative platitudes. Research shows that supporting marginalized students requires making institutional changes, not merely strategies that do not

change operations and which are often rooted in *gradualism* (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Duncan-Adrade, 2009) in which the improvement for impacted communities never gets realized (Castagno & Lee, 2007; Robinson, 2019). The recent incidents on campus evidence now more than ever that the issue is deeply embedded in Syracuse University's curriculum and pedagogy, which lacks support systems for Indigenous students. We do not want our people to be welcomed into a university that is not prepared to support their unique needs. We do not want students to study at a university that does not adequately represent them in its curriculum and pedagogy. We do not want future Indigenous students to struggle as we do to be seen and to be heard while they pursue their education at a predominantly white institution. Syracuse University should celebrate Indigeneity not only as a part of Native Heritage Month or Indigenous Peoples Day, but as a piece of its own history as an institution that sits on Onondaga territory at the heart of Haudenosaunee country. As the first university to offer unique scholarships recognizing Haudenosaunee citizenship, Indigenous faculty, staff, and students should be a core part of the school's narrative.

Through Syracuse University's commitment to Indigenous education, it is actively engaging in Nation building. The Promise and Honor Scholarships represent more than a mere source of financial aid; they also serve as an opportunity for change in our communities. They create pathways for Indigenous students to not only succeed, but excel in a world that attempts to erase them. Our Indigenous students pave the way for the next generation of scholars. They resist faculty and classmate dismissals or belittlement of their worldviews and epistemologies. They uphold Indigenous critical thinking skills and values so the next student will not have to fight as hard. They set examples and prove to themselves and the outside world that they are fully capable, that they have exactly the qualities the university says it wants on campus. They are doctors, artists, entrepreneurs, writers, educators, nutritionists, and partners with the university in creating the next generation of Indigenous intellectualism. Now is not the time for us to be taking steps backward. In a time where marginalized communities are facing senseless hatred, it is imperative that the university not only listens closely to its students, but also actively, materially, and publicly supports these campus communities.

As Indigenous people, we know that these issues stretch far beyond Syracuse University. Our struggle to be recognized exists nationwide and even internationally. We call on Syracuse University's administration and Board of Trustees to take this opportunity in this current national and campus climate to create a long-term partnership with its Indigenous community to address these issues and become a leader in supporting Indigenous education. Our most immediate concern to address is the recent plan to remove the Native Student Program (NSP) from of our longtime home at 113 Euclid Avenue for consolidated space in the renovated Schine Student Center. While we recognize that it is valuable and important for Indigenous students to develop relationships with other marginalized groups, and we understand the positive outcomes envisioned for uniting all of OMA under one roof, this can have the inadvertent effect of leaving Indigenous students with no dedicated space that reflects our traditional values of community, where sensitive discussions and culturally relevant work, such as identity workshops, guest lectures, and the Ionkerihonniéni:ni Mentor Program, can occur. Indigenous people have a long history of displacement and removal that have had negative and often violent consequences. Native higher education scholars, including Syracuse University graduate Dr. Stephanie Waterman (2012) highlights the importance of Indigenous student spaces for not only Indigenous student well-being, but also academic success and achievement. Dedicated spaces offer students opportunities to discuss issues that support Indigenous student learning and safety and that are sensitive in nature. In addition to these

studies, students report that the sense of community fostered in this space has been the key to their academic success and overall growth at Syracuse University. Studies such as settler colonial studies (Wolfe, 2006) and coloniality (Masta, 2018) also show that colonialism is the foundation of forms of oppression that all marginalized people experience and therefore *centering* Indigenous student experiences has the positive impact of benefitting all marginalized students. Having a dedicated space does not work against coalitions and intersectionality, but rather creates a space for Indigenous students to thrive and therefore have the ability to engage in relationship-building and coalitions with other students of color in meaningful ways.

In light of recent displays of violence toward marginalized groups on campus, it is even more imperative that the university continue to support the existence of a safe space on campus for Indigenous students, which currently houses:

1. The office of Regina Jones, Director of the Native Student Program and Assistant Director at the Office of Multicultural Affairs.
2. The shared office of Antonia Monique Roach, graduate assistant to the NSP, Kirk Amarh-Kwantreng, Assistant Director for Multicultural Initiatives at OMA, and Dr. Percy Abrams, Director of the Certificate in Iroquois Linguistics program. *(It had been hoped that a permanent office could be allowed Dr. Abrams and Iroquois Linguistics Program – since the building has been shared with other programs in the past there has been no such space).
3. The Indigenous student lounge, study areas, and programming space.

As Syracuse University moves forward listening to students to better implement necessary change on campus, we submit this list of actionable solutions that will support current and future Indigenous students hoping to pursue their next chapter in higher education at SU:

List of solutions on behalf of ISAS & NSP

Native Student Program

- A. Maintain residency at 113 Euclid Avenue.
 - a. Work towards dedicating a building/center for ISAS and NSP (ex: Akwekon House at Cornell University)
- B. Institute an Elder in-residence program
- C. Create “study abroad/study away” programs in partnership with other Indigenous Nations so all students, not just Indigenous students, can learn about other Nations/territories/histories/cultures; for example: Alaskan Inuk Nations, Hawaiian Nations, New Mexico, Navajo Nation, other recognized Nations within the U.S. and Canada, etc.
- D. Hire at least two Indigenous mental health counselors.
- E. Add two permanent, full time assistant director positions in the Native Student Program dedicated to the recruitment, retention, support, and graduation of all undergraduate Indigenous students.
- F. Reinstate Tadadaho doing the traditional welcome/Thanksgiving address at graduation and the welcoming of all incoming students.

- a. Formally invite Tadadaho to open the sesquicentennial celebration and close it as well.
- G. Intentionally include Indigenous students in University marketing, advertising, recruitment videos, pamphlets, etc.

Academics/Curricular

- A. Mandate all incoming students to participate in the blanket exercise and visit the Skä•noñh - Great Law of Peace Center.
 - a. Make this a part of SEM100
 - b. Expand the Intergroup Dialogue program, a theory and practice-based curriculum, to include courses on colonialism and Indigeneity and requirements for all undergraduates in social sciences fields.
- B. Create and include more Indigenous histories and contemporary realities within current course offerings/curriculums.
- C. Add a recognized language course for one or more of our Haudenosaunee languages.
 - a. Accept high school credits in Indigenous languages.
- D. Create a Native and Indigenous Studies major.
- E. Commit to hiring additional Indigenous staff and faculty in multiple disciplines within the cluster hires the university is currently engaged.
 - a. Our Native faculty currently consists of 1 tenured (Scott Stevens), 2 junior tenure track (Danika Medak-Saltzman and Melissa Chipman), and 1 non-tenure track lecturer (Percy Abrams).
- F. Re-institute the Center of Indigenous Citizenship, Law and Governance in Maxwell/Arts and Sciences and fully staff the Center with Indigenous faculty or at least those with extensive Indigenous Studies research backgrounds
 - a. Offer Indigenous / American Indian Law courses at the undergrad and grad levels

Recruitment and Financial Assistance

- A. Expand the Haudenosaunee Promise & Honor scholarships to cover graduate studies at the same rates as undergraduate Promise and Honor coverage.
- B. Institute Indigenous specific undergraduate and graduate financial aid. (The University currently provides no Indigenous specific financial aid to any Indigenous student matriculating to SU outside of the Haudenosaunee specific Promise and Honor Scholarships).
- C. Institute the same supports for Haudenosaunee Promise/Honor Students as HEOP, Say Yes, & Syracuse Challenge.
 - a. Dedicated tutors, 1 on 1 mentoring/ counseling from Indigenous advisors, parking, child care assistance, book coverage.
- D. Create a position for an Indigenous representative in the Office of Alumni Engagement to connect and network with all Indigenous alumni (There are now over 600 Indigenous alums).

Acknowledgement/Integration of Indigeneity on Campus

- A. Immediately work with the Onondaga Nation to expand the land acknowledgment, explaining the necessity of the statement, providing historical, political, social context to those unfamiliar with Haudenosaunee culture and history.
- B. Install a permanent plaque/sign/statue on main campus to elaborate on the land acknowledgement during the 150th sesquicentennial celebrations over the coming year. Elaborating on the partnership that SU has with its Indigenous neighbors as well as recognition that the school sits on Onondaga Nation land.
- C. Better publicize the above at the times when they are implemented, such that the campus community at large will be aware.

Sources

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