

Dear USF Community,

On Monday, Oct. 10, the University of San Francisco will honor Indigenous Peoples Day. This day is an opportunity for us to celebrate the lives and cultures of those indigenous to the lands that we live and work upon. It's a call for us to challenge the structures that have long supported Indigenous erasure, and to replace them with those that uplift Indigenous sovereignty.

As a university, and as individuals, we must actively engage in efforts that honor the land and its original peoples as we participate in creating a more just society. We honor Ramaytush Ohlone, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Southern Pomo, the Tamien Nation, Patwin Wintun, Tongva, Acjachemen, Nisenan, Southern Maidu, and the Wilton Rancheria people on whose land our university's campuses sit. We are committed to co-creating work that honors their presence and their legacies, and that forges pathways for greater understanding and collaboration.

Last year, in order to make this commitment a lived reality, the provost's office and the Lane Center for Catholic Social Thought and the Ignatian Tradition launched a project to explore USF's historical relationship with Native American peoples, and to research best practices in building relationships between Jesuit universities and Indigenous communities. I am grateful to Associate Professor of Politics Kouslaa Kessler-Mata (Chumash and Yokut) and Lane Center Executive Director Erin Brigham, who spearheaded the project, and to the following individuals who provided vital support along the way: Fian Sweeney MA '22, Keanna Patague-Ward '22, and Stephanie Felton, program coordinator of the Lane Center. The outcome of this year-long journey was a white paper titled "**A Year of Discernment: Indigenous Engagement at USF**" in which project co-directors Kessler-Mata and Brigham propose five recommendations to strengthen our support and programming on campus, as well as to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities.

Moving forward, the provost's team will take action on many of the recommendations in the white paper, including:

- Conducting outreach and relationship-building with the local Ramaytush Ohlone leadership
- Funding a research and publication project on historical relationships between the Jesuits in California, USF's early days, and Indigenous peoples
- Working with faculty, staff, and deans to establish community-engaged learning (CEL) and research protocols
- Reviewing data, recruitment, and retention of Native American faculty and staff
- Establishing an advisory committee, co-chaired by Associate Professor Kessler-Mata and Associate Vice Provost Sabrina Kwist, to oversee these efforts

In keeping with the USF 2027 Strategic Plan's call to reimagine Jesuit education, the provost's office will also provide support for a curricular transformation initiative that will empower and resource faculty to center antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) principles in our students' learning experiences. Contributing to these efforts, 13 faculty will come together throughout this year in a faculty learning community (FLC) titled "Knowledge Sovereignty and Indigenizing Universities" facilitated by Associate Professor Kessler-Mata under the auspices of the Tracey Seeley Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). The FLC is part of a broader arc of activities centered in Indigeneity and culturally competent teaching that CTE is hosting this year and will consider questions related to decolonizing teaching and learning. These include: "What does it mean to integrate Indigenous knowledge into university instruction? How can we do this responsibly and respectfully in a way that does not replicate inequitable, extractive practices that harm communities?" I look forward to the FLC's insights on these topics and their suggestions on how we can integrate these considerations into our curricular development.

We aim for all of our community members to find forms of connection to this day, and to examine their relationships with Indigenous peoples. We encourage you to review the **Indigenous Peoples Day Resource Guide** that has been revised by the USF Cultural Centers, attend an event in your community that focuses on Indigenous peoples or our campus event **Jews and Indians on Turtle Island: Between Colonialism and Justice**, or engage in personal reflection while viewing our newer campus murals that incorporate Indigenous history and concerns. These include a mural located on the first floor of the University Center (Native American occupation of Alcatraz) as well as a University Ministry mural located outside of Toler Hall (an ode to *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*).

Our recognition of this day would not be complete without naming that our Indigenous students, faculty, and staff are a vital part of our university community. For Indigenous students who are seeking involvement and community, the Culturally-Focused Clubs Council invites you to **contact them** as they aim to shepherd connections between Indigenous students. The **Pacific Islander Collective** is also available as a space for Indigenous Pacific Islander students.

Please join us in recognizing this day as an opportunity to focus our attention together and as a reminder of the ways we can center Indigenous knowledge and peoples in our daily work.

Warmly,

Chinyere Oparah, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Erin Echols, Director of the Cultural Centers

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