

# Native Nations and Land-Grant Universities at the Crossroads: The Intersection of Settler Land Acknowledgments and the Outreach and Engagement Mission

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## Abstract

This reflective essay addresses the nexus of two recent events in the United States: (1) the public scrutiny of the relationship between land-grant universities and the expropriation of Indigenous lands and (2) the often uncritical and rapid uptake of settler land acknowledgments at public college and university events. We argue that written land acknowledgment statements need to accompany actions that align with declarations of respect and honor. Specifically, we offer readers three concrete ideas through which institutions may further land acknowledgments: challenging their historical legacies, fostering meaningful partnerships with Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples, and materializing resources for this highly underserved, long-neglected, often ignored community.

*Keywords: land acknowledgment, land-grant university, outreach, engagement, tribal engagement*



**A**mong land-grant universities (LGUs), outreach and engagement activities have historically been tied to the institutional mission (Meyer, 2000). Such efforts with and for communities are seen as the centerpiece of an overall “foundational practice” for LGUs, largely due to the presence of Cooperative Extension Services (Burkhart-Kriesel et al., 2019; Ostrom, 2020). Although the initial reasons surrounding the creation of Extension Services may have been more politically based (cf. Sorber, 2018), the provision of services to communities—especially rural communities—has been an important component of the land-grant mission since the Smith-Lever Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1914. More recently, however, land-grant institutions have invested in more urbanized issues, as well as becoming increasingly concerned with their worldwide footprint (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). In fact, concern around climate change and racial and social equity in the United States and the world has required a more robust expansion of en-

agement activities beyond what Extension typically offers (Kopp, 2021). This reflective essay considers the outreach and engagement activities between LGUs and Native Nations, specifically how institutions can take actionable steps that reckon with past injustices regarding the engagement aspect of the institutional mission.

Although LGUs have been celebrated for providing access to an affordable college degree (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018), recent scholarship has started eroding the distinguished origins of these public institutions of higher learning, placing institutions under increased public scrutiny (R. Lee & Ahtone, 2020; Nash, 2019; Stein, 2020). In March 2020, for example, *High Country News* released the *Land Grab Universities Report* (LGUR; R. Lee & Ahtone, 2020), which exposed in detail the various ways that the 1862 Morrill Act—sponsored by Vermont Senator Justin Morrill and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln—“gifted” states with scrips or vouchers of land that had been taken from Native Nations,

typically by brute force or lopsided treaties. Specifically, states were gifted 30,000 acres of public lands per congressional representative, with more populous states such as New York receiving upward of 990,000 acres and smaller states receiving 90,000 acres at a minimum. In essence, this research challenged the seemingly virtuous legacy of land-grant institutions to uncover a history steeped in violence and removal. The resulting transfer of wealth from Native Nations to universities has contributed to the ongoing exclusion and disenfranchisement of those dispossessed peoples (Roediger, 2021). For some, this was news. However, for Indigenous Peoples, the exposé was a sobering reminder of the depth of dispossession in the United States for the benefit of the settler state—that is to say, public education.

The *LGUR* provided exact details regarding the amount of land taken from Native Nations. This compendium meticulously documented the precise sums of monies raised in the sale of these territories. The painstaking picture painted by this database challenged LGUs to respond both to this ignoble history and the present life circumstances of Indigenous Peoples (Ahtone & Lee, 2021). In reaction, several LGUs formed committees to attend to their tripartite mission while simultaneously reckoning with their university's past. For example, internal funds from The Ohio State University (OSU) were used to create the Stepping Out and Stepping Up (SOSU) Project, an initiative aimed at reaching out to the leaders whose lands were taken and sold in service to the establishment of Ohio State (Williams et al., 2022), as well as fostering partnerships among Tribal Colleges and Universities and LGUs (Williams et al., 2021). Likewise, the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at Cornell University launched the Indigenous Dispossession Project after the *LGUR* highlighted the institution as having received the most land of any U.S. university under the Morrill Act across 15 states because of the number of New York congressional representatives at the time (Jordan, 2020). Institutional responses also included the quick adoption of settler land acknowledgment statements (Gavazzi & Low, 2022), a practice that is being popularized across the United States.

We find the nexus of public scrutiny and quick uptake of settler land acknowledgments to be an ideal entry point into a

conversation among land-grant leaders and practitioners regarding university outreach and engagement with Native Nations. Drawing from our study of and involvement with fostering tribal community-university partnerships, we offer several ideas about the deployment of settler land acknowledgments in LGUs: efforts that can move an institution of higher learning beyond performative theater and toward more meaningful truth-telling and reparative activities. We also raise questions about the degree to which university outreach and engagement activities can and should be an effective means for LGUs to connect with dispossessed Native Nations.

Our intent is to urge LGUs, particularly university leaders, to move beyond the adoption of settler land acknowledgment statements and implement practices that transform higher education institutions, including their outreach and engagement activities. We want to clarify that our intent is not to give institutions a script or answers on *how* to adopt acknowledgment statements, as we believe that institutions need to be critical of their commitments to such practices (and hence scripts ultimately are defeatist in such efforts). Moreover, numerous toolkits and guides outlining the elements of a “good” acknowledgment authored by and with Indigenous Peoples and organizations can be referenced in these efforts (for sources see, for example, Native Governance Center and California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center). Finally, drafting an acknowledgment statement also needs to occur in conversation with Indigenous communities named in the statement. Therefore, our goal is to call on institutions to think and act more deeply, concretely, and tangibly regarding how these statements relate to the long-celebrated, publicly professed, and politically ascribed land-grant mission.

To accomplish our objectives, first, we briefly explain our positions in this work. Next, we offer background information on tribal engagement and settler land acknowledgment practices, as well as our present orientation to these innovations. Finally, we offer readers three concrete ideas: that land acknowledgments should compel institutions to challenge their historical legacies and colonial inheritances, foster meaningful relationships with Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples, and materialize resources for an extremely underserved, long neglected, and often ignored community.

These reflections stem from ongoing social critique by Indigenous Peoples activists and scholars, the existing research on tribal engagement, and our experience working with Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations.

Throughout this essay, we borrow from Stewart-Ambo and Yang's (2021) use of settler land acknowledgments, which describe the recent and rapid uptake of rhetorical practices by settler institutions to "acknowledge the land that a university occupies or that a gathering takes place on through naming the people who are in Indigenous relationship to that land" (p. 21). We intentionally adopt the phrasing "settler land acknowledgment" to highlight the performativity tied to the uncritical adoption of these statements as part of a campus social justice or equity initiative, not as an Indigenous relational practice. We also use the terms *Indigenous*, *Native*, *American Indian*, and *Native American* interchangeably to refer to the peoples indigenous to what is known as the United States, to be inclusive and make appropriate references when necessary. Finally, we preference the term *Native Nations* to denote the inherent sovereignty of Native Nations in the United States and use the terms *tribe* or *tribal* in accordance with their use in policies, laws, and scholarship.

### Author Introductions

Before proceeding, we want to acknowledge where we live and work, how we position ourselves to this work, and how we came together to write this essay. I (Theresa) am a Tongva woman living in unceded, ancestral homelands of the Payómkawichum, territory shared with the Kumeyaay Nation. I am also an assistant professor in education studies at the University of California, San Diego, located on Mat-koo-la-hoo-ee (known as La Jolla, California). Before arriving at UC San Diego, I was born and raised in Tovaangar (known as Los Angeles, California), the homelands of my Tongva ancestors and community. After years of struggling on my own higher education journey, I was called to work in the field of education and focused my energy primarily on supporting Indigenous students on their academic journeys. My research mainly focuses on historical and contemporary relationships between public universities and local Native nations.

I (Stephen) am a White settler of Italian-Polish descent and a longtime professor of

human development and family studies at Ohio State University, a campus that occupies the ancestral territories of the Delaware, Miami, Ojibwe, Peoria, Potawatomi, Seneca, Shawnee, and Wyandotte Peoples. Although the primary research focus of my career has been issues pertaining to adolescents and their families (I am a family therapist by training), more recently, my scholarship has turned to higher education concerns. This includes my having coauthored a book on the future of LGUs (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018), as well as coediting another volume on the modern-day mission of LGUs (Gavazzi & Staley, 2020).

In late 2020, we were invited to submit individual contributions to a special section of the journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) that responded to the *LGUR*. The special issue resulted in a session at the 2021 NAISA Annual Conference where we met, albeit virtually. Then, in October 2021, OSU hosted a symposium as part of the SOSU initiative, which brought us together again, this time in a more focused and personalized effort to unpack the ramifications of the land-grab legacy. Subsequently, we sustained our dialogue to probe more deeply into our individual and collective efforts to advocate for institutional change. Eventually, we concluded that our conversation could be helpful to others doing the same work or grappling with the *LGUR*, so we decided to coauthor a paper that would bring together specific Native and non-Native perspectives on land acknowledgments at LGUs.

### Tribal-Focused Engagement

There is a noteworthy scholarly record on LGU history (including works written by the second author). Significantly less scholarship exists on university engagement efforts and initiatives by LGUs with Native Nations. Among this literature is a record of engagement between Native Nations and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), institutions receiving land-grant designation in 1994 under the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act. These land grants were traditionally developed by Native Nations, thus historically serving more significant numbers of American Indian and Alaska Native students. A core part of the mission of TCUs is fortifying the sovereignty and self-determination efforts of Native Nations, mainly those sponsoring the TCU, but also Native Nations more broadly

(Carney, 1999). Said differently, TCUs proactively address the needs of tribal citizens as part of their inherent mission instead of reacting solely to historical obligations that are now coming to light (Gavazzi, 2021).

TCUs were established as land-grants in 1994 and have their own rich history of engagement activities that should not be conflated with commitments of land-grant universities (Benham, 2002). On the 10th anniversary of the founding of these Tribal College land-grants, Phillips (2003) noted that “the 1994 land-grant institutions represent models of community engagement that have implications for mainstream universities, foundations, and government agencies” (p. 34). Fast-forward a decade and a half later, we find Crazy Bull and White Hat (2019) pointing toward the growth and development of engagement activities among TCUs, especially in areas that focus on the sustainability of land and water resources. For example, the development of direct connections between university personnel and Native peoples was described as an “imperative” form of engagement at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (Stortz et al., 2003). Similarly, the creation of the 2+2+2 Project (Kayongo-Male et al., 2003) at South Dakota State University—programming that provided career training to American Indian students through partnerships with local Tribal Colleges and Native-serving high schools—was couched in engagement terminology first articulated by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1999). The Native Youth Exchange in Old Harbor, Alaska Project (Richmond et al., 2010) illustrates how a LGU (in this case, the University of Minnesota) can cross state boundaries in the pursuit of important engagement opportunities.

McCoy et al. (2021) have asserted that improved associations among the 1994 and 1862 LGUs were among the most critical restorative actions that could be taken in response to circumstances surrounding the founding of the “land-grab universities.” While documenting that such 1994–1862 partnerships have emerged over the last three decades, Williams et al. (2021) argued that there is so much more that the 1862 LGUs can and should be doing to help support the 1994 Tribal Colleges, especially through various engagement activities that represent “low-hanging fruit” for institutions and communities alike. Taking this

thinking a step further, we would encourage 1862 LGUs to consider what they can learn from the ethical commitments of TCUs to serve Native Nations to support fortifying tribal sovereignty and forwarding relationships beyond partnerships with TCUs alone.

### Land Acknowledgments

Similar to scholarship on university engagement with Native Nations, literature on land acknowledgments practices in the United States is limited, albeit rapidly growing. Given that the practice is rapidly evolving as it spreads across higher education institutions, it is difficult to determine what specific circumstances have led to the increasing adoption of settler land acknowledgment statements in the United States. These practices were likely imported from Australia and Canada, where they were adopted following significant social and political movements around truth, reconciliation, and national apologies (Keefe, 2019; Keptwo, 2021; Kowal, 2015; Merlan, 2014). In these countries, land acknowledgments practices hold a variety of names, including *Indigenous or territorial acknowledgments*, *Welcome to Country*, *Welcome of Country*, and *acknowledgment of country* (Kowal, 2015; Merlan, 2014). In Australia, for example, acknowledgments and welcomes gained traction in the 1990s as part of institutionalized reconciliation efforts, including a public apology by then Prime Minister Keating to Australia’s aboriginal communities (Merlan, 2014).

Similarly, it is understood that acknowledgments practices in Canada came following two significant events. The first of these events surrounded the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history. This settlement led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada in 2007, the second significant event in the emergence of land acknowledgment practices. Between 2007 and 2015, the TRC of Canada collected accounts from those impacted by the legacy of the Indian Residential School system. The final Truth and Reconciliation Report contains 94 “calls to action” or recommendations to move reconciliation between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. In Australia and Canada, land acknowledgments are not legally mandated, and there is no consensus on how the practice should be engaged (Keptwo, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019). It has been observed



that land acknowledgment practices started to be imported into the United States around 2015 (Beckmann & Wilson, 2021; Stewart-Ambo & Rocha Beardall, 2023).

Settler land acknowledgments in the United States are viewed as a social justice practice adopted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples to recognize the land on which an event is taking place and the people who are Indigenous to those lands (Stewart-Ambo & Yang, 2021). When reciting acknowledgments, speakers have numerous intentions, all valid but not without issue. For some, acknowledgments recognize the enduring relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their ancestral territories, often unceded. For others, acknowledgments represent opportunities to correct or disrupt colonial narratives that have been suppressed, or to create momentary discomfort around settler privilege and complacency. Most often, land acknowledgments come at the beginning of events, and the intentions around the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples often and ironically fade into the background. This performance, as it is often referred to, explains why the uptake of this practice is surrounded by critique and tensions. In fact, in higher education institutions, the insertion of acknowledgments can be viewed as a multicultural or social justice practice, a part of a “checklist,” if you will, that is void of real or meaningful political, legal, or structural change impacting local Indigenous Peoples, faculty, staff, or students.

Rightfully, Indigenous activists and scholars publicly critique the practice for its superficiality and performativity, in large part because such actions are not grounded in reciprocal relationships or material commitments. In alignment with this critique, Wilkes et al. (2017) and Stewart-Ambo and Rocha Beardall (2023) examined the presence and patterns of acknowledgment statements across universities in Canada and the United States, respectively. Both studies found two prominent characteristics across institutions: (1) adopting informal statements and (2) using past tense phrasing and multicultural language in statements that erase Indigenous Peoples. Critiques emphasize the need to “move beyond” empty and rote gestures; land acknowledgments can be intervening and open conversations that (with hope) reduce harm and repair relationships between Indigenous communities and institutions.

## Relational Accountability

In general, our position is that words without action are worthless. And yet, what actions are meaningful, and how do we label such efforts? “R words” such as reparation, restoration, remediation, reconciliation, restitution, and redemption have long been associated with addressing past wrongs through various activities intended to reduce the pain and suffering of victims (Ashworth & von Hirsh, 1993). Often, but not always, these terms have been used in juxtaposition with retributive actions designed to inflict punishment on perpetrators for the offenses they have committed (Daly & Proietti-Scifoni, 2011). In some very real ways, these concepts represent a continuum by which justice can be sought.

We prefer the term “relational accountability,” which has been employed in Indigenous scholarship (see, e.g., Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Wilson, 1998) to describe connections among individuals that are based on a different set of “R words,” including respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Wilson (2008) extended the use of relational accountability to a research perspective to privilege the relationship between storyteller and listener (e.g., participant and researcher). Here, such relationships do not simply shape the reality that exists between scholar and reader: They are the reality. Relational accountability is strongly connected to the “relational justice” approach that scholars have utilized to conceptualize various social justice efforts (Dankoski & Deacon, 2000; Magistro, 2014; van der Meiden et al., 2020).

The relational justice approach is built on the work of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and colleagues (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973), who created a modality of clinical work known as contextual therapy. Several constructs within this relational justice approach seem to have direct application to the past, current, and future relationships between Native Nations and LGUs, including concepts such as posterity, ledgers, and multidirected impartiality. Simultaneously, we recognize that using relational justice frameworks as an orienting framework falls short in many ways. Nevertheless, it is offered here as a starting point for long-overdue dialogue.

Relational accountability between LGUs and Native Nations rests on the inher-

ent propensity for people to care for and about others, which the relational justice framework asserts is the prime directive of all human life. If someone needs care, they are ethically entitled to receive what they require. In turn, if someone notices another individual in need of assistance, they are ethically bound to deliver support to them. From the standpoint of posterity, the expectation is that there is a “fair give and take” among individuals, which leads to a balanced “intergenerational ledger.” This balanced ledger is the manifestation of fair treatment and therefore is equated with relational justice. In contrast, an imbalanced ledger is associated with dysfunctional relationships—characterized especially by distrust—resulting from unjust (and unresolved) situations.

It is axiomatic to note that the intergenerational ledger between Native Nations and LGUs is extraordinarily imbalanced at present. From a wealth standpoint alone, the *LGUR* estimated that the 10.7 million acres of Native territories seized and sold to fund these institutions of higher learning are worth approximately \$500 billion in today’s dollars (R. Lee & Ahtone, 2020). In addition, LGUs are underperforming in their efforts to enroll and graduate American Indian and Alaska Native students compared to similar universities (Feir & Jones, 2021). Further complications in Native Nations–LGU relationships involve the “legacy of mistrust” that directly results from improper and/or culturally insensitive research practices aimed at Native American families and communities (Crump et al., 2020).

To create any sort of meaningful action to accompany the words contained in land acknowledgments requires a recognition of the gross imbalance in the intergenerational ledger, a disparity that may very well never be restored because of continued dispossession and ongoing harms endured by Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, this imbalance complicates matters in dialogue and action that ideally would be predicated on finding a starting point that allows LGU representatives to work through and own their present-day blameworthiness. For example, there is incontrovertible evidence that LGUs were and are the beneficiaries of stolen goods in the form of territories that were taken—often as not through broken treaties or violence—from Native Nations across the continent. Even so, colonial inhabitants often find culpability difficult to

grasp because of the long interval between confiscation of those lands by the federal government and their sale for the benefit of states under the 1862 Morrill Act. In fact, what seems so far away in time to White settlers is the present-day reality of members of Native Nations.

In any event, one might assume that facilitation of the role of a benefactor from the get-go for LGU representatives will lead to much more productive outcomes from a relational accountability perspective. This is where the concept of “multidirected partiality” from the contextual approach comes into play (Coppola, 2020). In the classic therapeutic approach, the clinician takes everyone’s part—one at a time—in the search for the proper “crediting” due to each member involved. This search for mutual acknowledgment among members of both obligations sets the stage for rebuilding relationships that are more balanced. We recognize that the obligations of LGUs toward Native Nations are complex and often irreconcilable; nonetheless, one of our aims is to identify these obligations in relation to outreach and engagement.

### **Beyond Settler Land Acknowledgments and Engagement Activities**

Bringing together the civic mission of LGUs and the emergence of acknowledgment practices, we seek to offer three specific ideas for LGUs on how to move beyond the performativity of settler land acknowledgments to take up activities of relational accountability meaningfully: acts that deliberately work toward balancing the ledger while simultaneously recognizing the inability to ever restore justice in any complete sense. Many scholars argue that settler land acknowledgments can be an important starting point in building relationships with Native Nations. We agree. We also contend that settler land acknowledgments do not need to, nor should they, be the first and only mechanism to address relational accountability. Our intent here is to emphasize that written statements need to be met with actions that align with those statements; otherwise, they are empty and merely rote gestures. We also impress here that now is a unique opportunity for institutions to address their historical legacies, foster meaningful relationships and partnerships with Native Nations, and make commitments to programs, services, and initiatives that ben-

efit the present and futures of Indigenous students and communities, both on and off campus.

### Address Historical Legacies and Colonial Inheritances

First, we urge LGUs to contend with their historical legacies and colonial inheritances by deeply examining the social, political, and historical circumstances that allowed for the establishment of their campuses and develop mechanisms for publicly recognizing and atoning for their institution's role in the violent dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples. This work should be used not to generate excuses or alibis, which land acknowledgments often do, but to paint an accurate and factual accounting of this history.

From its inception in the United States, higher education has been deeply entrenched in the exploitation of Indigenous Peoples and lands. Colonial Colleges, such as Harvard University, William and Mary, and Dartmouth College, are highly referenced examples. These institutions began under the auspice of "serving" Indigenous students only to extract financial resources (Carney, 1999; Wright, 1991). For instance, it has been well documented that Harvard revised its original charter in 1650 after financial difficulties forced the institution to draw funds from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, a charitable organization focused on the assimilation of Indigenous youth. Similarly, Dartmouth College was established by Eleazar Wheelock with charitable funds collected by exploiting the labor of Samson Occom, a member of the Mohegan Nation (Wright, 1991). Carney (1999) pointed out that "virtually every instance of professed devotion to Indian higher education by the colleges during the colonial period was an exercise in fundraising or access to funds requiring an Indian mission" (p. 3). Relatedly, the *LGUR* clearly illustrates how LGUs financially benefited from Indigenous removal, dispossession, and lands under the 1862 Morrill Act, which coincided with the Pacific Railroad Act and Homestead Act of the same year to demonstrate a deliberateness by the U.S. government to settle on Indigenous lands.

The process for addressing these histories is necessarily determined by the political climate of each state and each institution, but whatever form it takes, this recognition is vital to fostering relational accountability.

In multiple U.S. higher education institutions, scholarship highlighting the relationship between higher education, Indigenous dispossession, and chattel slavery has led to implementation of strategies that can serve as important models. For example, Harvard University, Northwestern University, the University of Colorado, and Rutgers University have each examined their financial connections to settler colonial events (Fuentes & White, 2016; Wilder, 2014). Some of these historical studies have prompted institutional atonements and reconciliation efforts, including apologizing and providing scholarships to descendants of enslaved people. We also turn to several ongoing efforts at our institutions as examples of how LGUs can engage this recommendation.

In October 2021, in response to the *LGUR*, University of California (UC) Berkeley hosted The University of California Land Grab: A Legacy of Profit From Indigenous Lands, a forum held with the intent of examining the 150,000 acres of Indigenous lands that funded the University of California, how this expropriation is intricately tied to California's unique history of Native dispossession and genocide, and how UC continues to benefit from this wealth of accumulation today (Joseph A. Myers Center, 2021). Concurrently, research teams at UCLA and UC San Diego began conventional historical studies that examined the movement of communally stewarded Indigenous lands over three waves of colonialism. "From Tovaangar to the University of California, Los Angeles" (Stewart-Ambo & Stewart, 2023) examined the connections between the university and illegal seizure of lands by Spanish missionaries to construct Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in 1771, the privatization of lands into ranchos under Mexican governance after 1821, and the subdivision and sale of lands under U.S. rule after 1850. Likewise, (Un)mapping UC Mot-koo-la-hoo Project is a participatory research project that extends previously mentioned research to examine the cultural significance of Mat-koo-la-hoo-ee, a known village of the Kumeyaay Peoples. The 5-year study was launched in January 2021 in partnership with five Kumeyaay community scholars with expertise in culture, archaeology, history, theater, and teaching. In addition to rewriting the existing narrative of the university from the Kumeyaay perspective, the research team has codesigned and coinstructs an undergraduate community-engaged learning course.



The Stepping Out and Stepping Up (SOSU) project at the Ohio State University has, to date, invested almost a quarter-million dollars of internal funds in search of truth and reconciliation efforts connected to the dispossession and subsequent sale of Native territories used to establish LGUs. This initiative was designed to push these LGUs to “step out” of their comfort zones and “step up” to the responsibilities inherent in the ignoble roots of their foundational finances. In partnership with First Nations Development Institute, the SOSU Project Team set out to accomplish two main objectives: (1) establish connections with the 108 tribes and bands whose land was used to fund Ohio State as per the *LGUR* and (2) interview tribal leaders of those affected communities to determine an appropriate path forward. In so doing, the SOSU Project Team aimed to develop an initial understanding of what specific reparative actions would most benefit the Native American communities impacted by this land dispossession, particularly with respect to food security and sovereignty, and the process by which reparative actions could be jointly designed through Tribal–University dialogue.

We want to express two important realities when considering debts and relational accountability. First, all U.S. colleges and universities occupy stolen Indigenous lands. All. Although most institutions of higher learning may not have financially benefited on the same terms as 1862 LGUs, they are beneficiaries of past and ongoing Indigenous dispossession. Second, many LGUs benefited from the lands of Indigenous Peoples in states other than their own. Cornell University, for example, received land scrip across 15 states and financially benefited from the dispossession of several Native Nations outside New York (Jordan, 2020). Most LGUs east of the Mississippi River were, in fact, primarily given vouchers or scrips to lands elsewhere. The perceived lack of Indigenous presence and proximity to Native Nations because of dispossession and distance creates abstraction regarding institutional responsibilities to Native Nations and their members. We find this especially true in states like California, where Indigenous removal was and is severe and federal recognition remains contested. Through various complex circumstances, LGUs are implicated in Indigenous dispossession elsewhere and must also address this reality.

Research by Ambo (2017) has demonstrated that, when possible, university leaders resist opportunities to account for their complicity and complacency in Indigenous dispossession. Relatedly, the lack of response or acknowledgment by certain LGUs to the *LGUR* is indicative of this motive (R. Lee & Ahtone, 2020). LGU leaders have offered the rationale that events occurring before the establishment of the United States are irrelevant to their current institution. As a matter of equity, leaders also contend that if concessions are made for one group, they must be made for others (Ambo, 2017). We do not take a position on how institutions should take up matters of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) that account for past and ongoing injustices impacting other communities, as it is not our place to press for these concerns. However, we do argue that injustices cannot be wholly addressed without acknowledging that they have occurred and how LGUs have benefited from the violent and coercive dispossession of Indigenous Peoples. In brief, such truth-telling remains a central part of accountability to both the past and the present.

### **Actualize Relationships**

Second, we contend that the recognition and atonement of the historical and continued dispossession of Indigenous Peoples should materialize tribal community–university partnerships between Native Nations and LGUs to serve as another mechanism of relational accountability beyond settler land acknowledgments. Such collaboration is not a simple or easy task given the ongoing neglect and harm endured by Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples at the hands of LGUs, especially regarding the historic and ongoing resistance by institutions and faculty to repatriation of Native American ancestors. Drawing from our understandings of relational justice and accountability, we recognize that the ledger can never fully be balanced between LGUs and Native Nations. We acknowledge the impossibility of having ethical relationships with someone who stole your land, extracted knowledge, unethically studied your ancestors, and so on (C. Pewewardy, personal communication, April 23, 2022). We draw from the words of Indigenous colleagues and communities we collaborate with, who invariably have stated that we “cannot fix the past” but “can do what is right moving forward.”

We impress upon LGUs the need to develop and fortify government-to-government



relationships with Native Nations. Stewart-Ambo (2021a) defined tribal community-university partnerships as the external, economic, curricular, and cocurricular relationships and partnerships between Native Nations and universities that recognize, reinforce, and respect tribal sovereignty and self-determination. This term builds on scholarship about community-university partnerships, a robust area of study and readily understood institutional practice, to emphasize the importance of centering tribal communities and decentering universities. Community-university scholars and practices primarily focus on the “interactions between faculty, students, administrators, or other professional staff members on a given campus and [members of] the geographically delineated communities primarily located external to the university” (Ward & Moore, 2010, p. 39).

Typically, building relationships with Native Nations is a responsibility delegated to or taken up by Indigenous staff, faculty, and even students, whose job duties are intended to support other functions of the institution (Stewart-Ambo, 2021b). Research indicates that most of these relationships are formed because of personal relationships with communities; they are often housed in Indigenous studies or cultural centers instead of being situated in institution-wide efforts (Stewart-Ambo, 2021b). A survey of literature gives further evidence of such partnerships (Ambo, 2023). Absent from scholarship, yet observable at institutions such as Arizona State University, University of Arizona, University of Washington, and more, is the fortification of institutional relationships between the elected and hereditary leaders of Native Nations and universities that honor and respect the inherent sovereign authority of tribes. Again, we turn to ongoing efforts at our institutions as examples of how LGUs can follow through on this recommendation.

Although relationships have slightly changed over the last few years, UC San Diego does not have long-term sustained or collaborative relationships or partnerships with the Kumeyaay Nation. Instead, relationships are tenuous, reflecting decades of legal contention for ancestral remains unearthed during renovations of the chancellor’s residence in 1976, when several archaeologists conducted excavations and collected burials and other cultural material for study. In December 2011, the Kumeyaay Cultural Repatriation

Committee (KCRC) won the legal battle, though the physical return of these ancestors did not occur until 2016. This history resurfaced during the 2019–2020 academic year, with the passing of California Assembly Bill 275 and 2836 and the subsequent drafting of the new University of California Policy on Repatriation and Cultural Affiliation, all of which intend to bring the UC System into compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and CalNAGPRA. Over the last several years, UC San Diego has responded to these new policies by hiring a full-time repatriation coordinator and subsequently developing a campus infrastructure to attend to repatriation. In April 2022, the chancellor sat down with representatives of KCRC to discuss concerns regarding repatriation, land management, and institutional relationships. In his opening address, the chancellor acknowledged the past and gestured to the future, remarking, “We are all here to share, to listen, to learn, and to work together with the goal of building upon our relationships” (P. K. Khosla, personal communication, May 2, 2022). Upon leaving, attendees remarked this meeting was a critical turning point in fostering relationships between the community and university. Each committed to meeting quarterly to discuss the Kumeyaay Nation’s educational needs and UC San Diego’s institutional obligations.

Ohio State University, in contrast, is at the very beginning phase of potential actions designed to actualize relationships with Native Nations. The state of Ohio is one of only seven states (the others being Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire) that have neither state nor federally recognized Native Nations within their borders, which has contributed significantly to an “out of sight, out of mind” perspective on Indigenous Peoples. Publication of the *LGUR* certainly provoked a response from the team of Native and non-Native scholars involved in the SOSU project as described above, at least in terms of prompting a “discovery phase” by university personnel that focused on coming to grips with the history of Ohio State’s foundational monies. The presence of Ohio State’s Newark Earthworks Center (NEC)—focused as it is on the study of some of the world’s most well-preserved mounds built by Indigenous Peoples during the Hopewell Era—has helped these initial efforts by providing a conceptual home for some of this work, especially in terms

of outreach and engagement efforts with Native Nations. Here, NEC personnel have been interacting for years with the leaders and other members of those Tribes who were historically present in Ohio prior to the Indian Removal Act. In essence, even though Ohio's citizens largely have forgotten about these Native Nations, present-day members of those Native Nation communities have not forgotten about Ohio.

As our institutions' experience indicates, institutions of higher learning must take significant and concerted actions in preparation for engaging with Native Nations. We also argue that relationships with Native Nations should not and cannot be "mutually beneficial." Mutuality is often cited as a cornerstone of successful community-university partnerships, with each party benefiting from entering a partnership, albeit not necessarily equally. We challenge this notion in view of the past and continuing financial benefits that institutions realize from Indigenous dispossession. The intent of building relationships should not hinge on "what more" can be taken from Native Nations but must be related to atoning for past and ongoing harms and neglect. Moreover, we argue that tribal community-university partnerships must focus primarily on Native Nation-building goals and address capacity-building across tribal members.

Relational accountability may be most easily accomplished through connections between 1862 land-grants and their 1994 sister land-grant Tribal Colleges. In general, it is fair to state that TCUs are most well-versed in connecting with other institutions of higher learning. The difficulties to be expected in establishing such relationships are best compared to the stumbling blocks encountered in forming government-to-government relationships that must be struck with Native Nations, owing to their sovereignty. Within this context, we believe that LGUs' first concern should be addressing the staggering imbalance of resources between the 1862 and 1994 land-grant universities (and 1890 Historically Black land-grant colleges and universities, for that matter). Gavazzi (2022) has employed the term "structural isolationism" to describe the continuous and compounding impact of differential access to resources in ways that systematically privilege 1862 LGUs over their 1890 counterparts and further benefit both of those groups of LGUs in comparison to the 1994

Tribal Colleges. In general, for every \$100 that the 1862 LGUs obtain from the federal government, the 1890 LGUs receive \$10 (J. M. Lee & Keys, 2013), while the 1994 LGUs receive about \$1 (Martin & Hipp, 2018).

Moreover, we argue that sustained tribal community-university partnerships should be supported by offices of outreach and engagement or government and community relations to ensure greater institutional accountability and sustainability over time (Stewart-Ambo, 2021a). We challenge the idea that EDI offices should provide space for this work or be responsible for its advancement. Although EDI units have important responsibilities on campuses in addressing inequities broadly, such efforts are not often concerned with tribal sovereignty and self-determination; the aims of EDI initiatives often subvert Indigenous community needs and concerns (Smith et al., 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2018). Instead, we argue for the addition of university personnel, such as a tribal liaison or special advisor, to the offices of outreach and engagement and government and community relations. In our experience, this recommendation is often made by Indigenous faculty and staff with a clear understanding of tribal sovereignty and the political nature of government-to-government relationships, and is often resisted by university leaders. The "messes" created when universities and other complex systems interact with one another may require more innovative ways of conducting engagement-oriented activities (McNall et al., 2015).

### **Materialize Commitments**

Our final action addresses the necessity for material resources to enable LGUs to respectfully engage Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples on and off campus. Resource distribution on college campuses is inequitable, with communities with the greatest need often receiving the least support: the smallest budgets for centers, the smallest number of staff, or even the least square footage. Thus, we approach this recommendation from a very practical and ethical standpoint. First, outreach and engagement efforts cannot and do not miraculously happen without structural changes and institutional resources. Even locally, there are expenses associated with supporting travel and respectful hosting of guests, including proximally located Native Nations. Second, we find the redistribution of institutional resources a very practical

and tangible opportunity for LGUs to bring some balance to the ledger. In their 2021 contribution to the NAISA journal, Ambo (2021a) pointed out that “Indigenous people have contributed more to higher education per capita, all the while receiving far fewer benefits” (p. 166). Building off this premise, we argue that material commitments through outreach and engagement activities are one mechanism for redressing past and ongoing injustices, albeit not the only way. We do not believe that institutions should perceive these resources as a form of reparations, restitution, or absolution for the past injustices. Relational accountability does not have a designated endpoint, nor do LGUs have the authority to determine when the harms have been addressed.

In preparation for working with Native Nations, we encourage institutions to undertake in-depth assessments to understand the current state of their campus regarding the status of Indigenous student enrollment, staff and faculty hiring, existing campus resources and centers, and sustained community partnerships. This assessment alone will require time and resources. It should not be thrust upon the first and, likely, the sole Indigenous person at the university without appropriate compensation for their time and resources to support the assessment. Indicative of national rates, institutions will likely recognize that Indigenous students, staff, and faculty are grossly underrepresented at every level of higher education, making it likely that resources historically committed to these initiatives have comparatively been less than those allocated to other communities. Again, we are not of the mind nor in the position to speak on how institutions should fund initiatives regarding other marginalized communities. Rather, our position is that current initiatives targeting Indigenous communities are grossly inadequately funded and need to be sufficiently supported to fully operationalize campus and community engagement to a degree that would tangibly impact educational outcomes. For our conclusion, we once more look at ongoing efforts at our institutions as examples of how LGUs can engage this recommendation while simultaneously recognizing that this type of assessment and support is a needed area of improvement for our campuses.

UC San Diego is in the early stages of strategically planning its tribal-engagement activities and grappling with what re-

sources this step will require. UC San Diego has several campus resources dedicated to supporting Native American students. In 2016, the campus opened the Intertribal Resource Center (ITRC) and hired its inaugural director. In May 2020, the Academic Senate Undergraduate Council approved the Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) minor, led by Dr. Andrew Jolivéte. In September 2020, Drs. P. Keolu Fox, Theresa Ambo, and K. Wayne Yang launched the Indigenous Futures Institute (IFI). These programs were initiated in reaction to student and faculty activism and involvement in response to previously mentioned concerns regarding NAGPRA. Aside from the ITRC, the NAIS minor and IFI were initiated and supported by Indigenous faculty and staff at UC San Diego. The current tribal engagement plan brings together these areas of campus as well as other parts of campus, such as enrollment management, government and community relations, and residential life. A committee of faculty are currently discussing the resources (e.g., money and personnel) necessary for fully executing this plan over multiple years to request support from campus leadership.

Work undertaken at Ohio State University surrounding the materialization of resources is even more nascent than at UC San Diego. An American Indian Studies program is offered as an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor degree through the College of Arts and Sciences. Faculty connected to this program are relatively few in number and reflect a mix of Native and non-Native scholars, although recently there has been a decided uptick in the hiring of additional Indigenous faculty members (five new such hires have occurred in the last year alone). The numbers of American Indian and Alaska Native students have fluctuated over the years, ranging from over 150 students a decade ago to less than 40 students at present. The absence of state or federally recognized Native Nations residing in the state of Ohio seems to account for the lack of outreach or engagement actions at an administrative level. Since the *LGUR* was published and the SOSU Project was launched, the university has provided almost a quarter-million dollars in grant support for various scholarship efforts involving Native Nations and Tribal Colleges.

As mentioned, a critical aspect of effectively allocating institutional resources is hiring university personnel for offices of

outreach and engagement and government and community relations. We also encourage individuals within institutions to consider how research and curricular partnerships support building the capacity-building tribal members and governments. For example, Bang et al. (2016) wrote about their successful collaboration with the American Indian Center of Chicago, which has “now successfully managed five large National Science Foundation grants, including the scientific, administrative, and fiscal management and oversight” (p. 37). We also find it necessary to briefly comment on the emerging tendency of colleges and universities to seek support from Native Nations with profitable economic development enterprises—as of 2020, there were 248 Native Nations engaged in casino-style gaming activities nationwide (National Indian Gaming Commission, 2021). This pattern of seeking assistance is notable in California, where 62 Native Nations engage in such efforts. Over the last two decades, Native Nations have made significant financial contributions to higher education for programmatic initiatives, research endeavors, and student scholarships. Again, we are not in a position to speak about how Native Nations exercise their sovereign authority; we have found that decisions about where to allocate resources primarily focus on Native Nation-building goals, including capacity building. With this in mind, we discourage universities from requesting donations from Native Nations and organizations as these actions do not allow institutions to enact their responsibilities.

### Conclusion

The goal of this reflective essay was to call on institutions to think and act more deeply regarding how settler land acknowledgment statements relate to the long-celebrated, publicly professed, and politically ascribed

land-grant mission. We believe institutions without settler land acknowledgments are perfectly poised to deeply engage this practice, as it allows authors of statements to consider how they can intentionally and strategically plan collaborations with Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations. If institutions are morally and ethically compelled to serve Indigenous students and communities, we argue that they should engage in silent efforts of engagement and not use land acknowledgments as performative entry points to strike conversations about collaborations. In these instances, land acknowledgment can come last and follow a long list of demonstrated commitments. We offer three key actions to prepare institutions for meaningful engagement: (1) challenge historical legacies, (2) foster meaningful partnerships with Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples, and (3) materialize resources that support Indigenous students and engage communities. Our hope is that these recommendations for moving beyond land acknowledgments serve as disruptions and amount to profound structural changes to the LGUs' typical ways (where they exist) of engaging Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations.

We close by recognizing the dissonance that readers might be grappling with while reading and that the concepts addressed may be challenging. Outreach and engagement with Native Nations is not easy; it is complex, uncomfortable, and challenging. Our recommendations call on institutions and colleagues to confront generations of individual and institutional complacency toward ongoing injustices. There is an irreconcilable and inconsolable sense that these harms can never be addressed. We do not claim to solely hold the answers; thus we invite you into conversation with us and look forward to hearing from Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers their reactions, challenges, worries, and hopes.



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