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UNH FACULTY SENATE MOTION # XXVI-M25 Faculty Senate Approves the Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement Report

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Faculty Senate, "UNH FACULTY SENATE MOTION # XXVI-M25 Faculty Senate Approves the Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement Report" (2022). *Faculty Senate Motions*. 14. https://scholars.unh.edu/faculty_senate_motions/14

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**UNH FACULTY SENATE
MOTION # XXVI-M25**

3/28/2022

Faculty Senate Approves the Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement Report

1. **Motion presenter:** Ivo Nedyalkov on behalf of the Research and Public Services Committee
2. **Dates of Faculty Senate discussion:** 3/28/2022 and 4/11/2022
3. **Motion:** Faculty Senate Approves the Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement Report (appendix 3.1)
4. **Senate action:** The motion passed with 54 in favor, 0 opposed and 1 abstention.
5. **Senate chair's signature:**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Foley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "y" at the end.

Appendix 3.1

Report on Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement

Introduction

The University of New Hampshire (UNH) must be held accountable for its role in inflicting generational trauma as a result of Indigenous land dispossession for its own profit. Therefore, UNH should continue its efforts to seek out ways to boost its Indigenous student population, relationships with local tribes, and development of curriculum highlighting Indigenous heritage in the state and beyond. Endorsing Land acknowledgment is only one action in an array of possible conciliatory and restorative justice efforts.

As a step toward conciliatory and restorative justice, UNH Faculty Senate must endorse the Land, Water, and Life Acknowledgement Statement to create and honor the relationships with and history of Indigenous Peoples and take further action to support Indigenous sovereignty and advocate for land reparations. In the Spring 2021, the Associate Vice President of Community, Equity, and Diversity and Chief Diversity Officer at University of New Hampshire, Nadine Petty, convened a committee, which included Indigenous tribal leaders, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, staff, and administrators, to craft a land recognition statement in order to recognize the importance of Indigenous heritage, acknowledge the dispossession of Indigenous

land, and continue focusing on building a better future for everyone, including local Indigenous populations. Approved by Tribal Elders, the statement reads as follows:

“As we all journey on the trail of life, we wish to acknowledge the spiritual and physical connection the Pennacook, Abenaki, and Wabanaki Peoples have maintained to N’dakinna (homeland) and the aki (land), nibi (water), lolakwikak (flora), and awaasak (fauna) which the University of New Hampshire community is honored to steward today. We also acknowledge the hardships they continue to endure after the loss of unceded homelands and champion the university’s responsibility to foster relationships and opportunities that strengthen the well-being of the Indigenous People who carry forward the traditions of their ancestors.”

The Morrill Act

Like other land-grant universities, UNH’s history is forever intertwined with the taking of Native American land. Proposed by Vermont Senator Justin S. Morrill, and signed into law by President Lincoln in July 1862, the Morrill Act set aside federal lands to create colleges that encouraged agricultural education and mechanical arts. The Morrill Act worked by turning land expropriated from tribal nations into seed money for higher education; it granted each state 30,000 acres of western land, to be distributed by each senator and representative, and funded the construction of agricultural and mechanical schools (Morrill Act). However, the so-called federal lands the Morrill Act was granting to each state were not federally owned to begin with. The lands that were and still are at the forefront of this legislation were expropriated from tribal nations and turned into seed money for higher education (Lee & Ahtone 2020). “In all, the act redistributed nearly 11 million acres – an area larger than Massachusetts and Connecticut combined. But with a footprint broken up into almost 80,000 parcels of land, scattered mostly across 24 Western states, its place in the violent history of North America’s colonization has remained comfortably inaccessible” (Lee & Ahtone 2020). Hence, the land-grant universities were built not just on Indigenous land, but with Indigenous land. Some of these grants were as big as major cities and were often located hundreds or even thousands of miles away from their beneficiaries.

The Morrill Act turned Indigenous land into college endowments through two ways: first, all the money made from land sales must be used in perpetuity, meaning those funds still remain on university ledgers to this day. Second, at least 12 states are still in possession of unsold Morrill acres as well as associated mineral rights, which continue to produce revenue for their designated institutions (Lee & Ahtone 2020). “To extinguish Indigenous title to land siphoned through the Morrill Act, the U.S paid less than \$400,000. But in truth, it often paid nothing at all. Not a single dollar was paid for more than a quarter of the parcels that supplied the grants – land confiscated through outright seizure or by treaties that were never ratified by the federal government” (Lee & Ahtone 2020). UNH is one of the public land grant universities, which profited from the Morrill Act.

The University of New Hampshire (UNH) & Morrill Act

The University of New Hampshire is a public land grant university with a history of turning Indigenous lands into profit. The main campus, located in Durham, New Hampshire, sits upon Indigenous land of the Pennacook, Abenaki, and Wabanaki peoples. [Benjamin Thompson](#)’s [bequeathed his land](#), which was possibly not his to give, to UNH, and encouraged

use of land grant application. For example, the colonization of Exeter, a town just 20 minutes from UNH, is a result of manipulation and plight of the Pennacook people from settlers like John Wheelwright claiming land ownership (Brindamour 2021). Hence, it is important to re-evaluate the foundation of our university's success, by "identifying nearly every acre obtained and sold, every land seizure or treaty made with the lands of Indigenous caretakers, and every dollar endowed with profits from dispossession" (Lee & Ahtone 2020).

The Morrill Act allowed for eastern states to participate in the "public domain land grab" by granting vouchers, known as scrips, for the selection of western land. UNH not only sits upon lands of indigenous peoples from New England but took advantage of the Morrill Act to gain profit from Indigenous lands out west (the fact not acknowledged on the UNH website). For a good visual representation of various tribal lands funding UNH, please see [this link](#).

Established in 1866 as the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts, UNH received 150,000 acres of seized Indigenous land from 31 different tribes (Curtis 2021). As was common with many universities under the Morrill Act, parcels of land that were granted were often located hundreds of miles away from the actual university campus. The furthest parcel of land UNH was granted is located in modern day Coos County, Oregon (Curtis 2021). The scrip that New Hampshire was allotted was sold for \$80,000 (estimated \$1,431,767 today) and invested in New Hampshire state bonds at 6% for a \$4,800 annual payment (\$85,906 today) (Curtis 2021). Although trustees were not pleased with the "small" sum, the endowment was already 11x greater than what the U.S paid for the land (Curtis 2021). Indigenous peoples, both in private and treaty agreements, were more often than not underpaid -- if paid at all (Curtis 2021). UNH and eventually the University System of New Hampshire continued to receive an annual \$4,800 payments from the land grant until the 1970s. Overall, the fund has raised the university over \$2 million in today's dollars (Curtis 2021). UNH not only built its campus and success upon Indigenous land but used Indigenous land to make it the profitable university it is today.

Land Acknowledgment and Steps Forward

UNH has historically profited off of Indigenous people and their lands. It is the university's duty to acknowledge its role in abiding by the Morrill Act and the subsequent damage it has caused. Endorsing the Land, Water, and Life Acknowledgment Statement to create and honor the relationships and history of Indigenous peoples is a necessary step forward to mitigating the impacts of colonialism. Having a land acknowledgement statement allows for a growing conversation on how non-Indigenous people can back Indigenous jurisdiction. However, a land acknowledgment statement alone does little to support the Indigenous community. We must be sure that our land acknowledgment statement is not just simply a feel-good public gesture.

UNH has made several steps towards conciliatory justice. Partnered with Indigenous New Hampshire Collaborative Collective (INHCC), UNH started the UNH Trails Project in which any unnamed trails, walkways, bridges, and other campus landscape infrastructure would be named with Abenaki names. Alongside Anthony Davis, dean of the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA), INHCC intends to create an Indigenous forage garden around the Spaulding Life Sciences Building. In 2019, with the support of Dean Dillon (COLA) UNH established a Native American and Indigenous Studies minor. UNH is making an effort to rebuild its relationship with the indigenous community. The university can continue this effort by

supporting the growth of this minor and can signal its ongoing commitment by declaring the Land, Water, and Life Acknowledgement Statement frequently, publicly, and with intention. For example, UNH could establish a scholarship, tuition waiver, and/or fellowship for Indigenous students, which could be done through a private fundraising. UNH should also work on hiring and retaining Indigenous faculty and strengthening its support of research collaborations between UNH students and faculty and Indigenous communities.

References:

Act of July 2, 1862 (Morrill Act), Public Law 37-108, which established land grant colleges, 07/02/1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives

Brindamour, E. (2021, March). The obscure history of indigenous exeter. *Indigenous New Hampshire Collaborative Collective*. <https://indigenousoh.com/2021/11/19/the-obscure-history-of-indigenous-exeter/>

Curtis, I. (2021, October 11). Unh profited from indigenous lands out west. *Indigenous New Hampshire Collaborative Collective*. <https://indigenousoh.com/2021/11/14/unh-profited-from-indigenous-lands-out-west/>

Lee, R., & Ahtone, T. (2020, March 30). *Land-grab universities*. High Country News. <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>

Benjamin Thompson's Will <https://library.unh.edu/find/archives/collections/will-benjamin-thompson>