

## Addressing HSU's Polytechnic Designation

Friday, November 19th, 2021

To Chancellor Dr. Joseph I. Castro, President Tom Jackson, Provost Jenn Capps, and all leads on the Prospective Polytechnic Working Groups:

We would first like to acknowledge that Humboldt State University sits on occupied Wiyot land in Goudi'ni. This letter is from current Humboldt State Graduate students and Undergraduate students who want to provide input and voice in Humboldt State University's transition to a Polytechnic University in the California State University system. Throughout the polytechnic proposal, implementation process, and publicity, we have read there is an immense focus on and centering of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The proposal also highlights the long history of work local Indigenous peoples have done in advocating for and centering Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as the creation of programs that have supported all students, such as Native American Studies (NAS), the Indian Tribal & Educational Personnel Program (ITEPP), the Indian Natural Resources, Science and Engineering Program (INRSEP), the Food Sovereignty Lab, and Critical Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies (CRGS).

It is clear from HSU's Polytechnic Prospectus, dated September 1st, 2021, that Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous communities are key parts of what elevates HSU's development into a polytechnic university for the next century. Tribes are mentioned over 75 times in the prospectus, while "Indigenous" and "Native American" are mentioned 39 and 37 times. In total, the prospectus engages with terms like "tribe", "Indigenous", "Native American", "Indian", and Traditional Ecological Knowledge 198 times. Contrast this with other terms: sustainability (98 times), STEM (161), or even "applied" (125). It is evident from an overview of the prospectus that HSU has demonstrated the importance of TEK and Indigenous knowledge, and as graduate and undergraduate students, we want to emphasize this importance as we are currently experiencing climate change at an unprecedented level due to the persistence of settler colonialism and capitalism. We firmly believe that it is Indigenous peoples knowledges, ways of knowing, and relationship to land that will save our communities and Mother Earth.

We want to inquire and understand, specifically, how HSU and the polytechnic transition is going to support, uplift, and provide funding for the sustainment of departments and programs such as Native American Studies (NAS), the Native American Center for Academic Excellence, Indian Tribal & Educational Personnel Program (ITEPP), Indigenous Natural Resources Sciences and Engineering (INRSEP), the Food Sovereignty Lab, Ethnic Studies, and Critical Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies (CRGS). If TEK and Indigenous knowledge are integral to this transition, how is the university funding, staffing, and filling positions to aid these core programs? Where are the cluster hires and faculty positions for Native American Studies and Critical Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies? Where are the funding initiatives that support Indigenous students and all students within these programs?

TEK is a Native American Studies discipline. The integration of TEK into the Western educational and scientific framework should not be further appropriative and extractive of traditional knowledges without Indigenous peoples leading the way, and without the structures, people, and programs that have been long-standing, and have advocated for TEK, and have pushed forward critical thinking to protect Indigenous sovereignty on the HSU campus and community throughout many years.

The Native American Studies department was started in 1969 in response to the settler-colonial institution's genocidal tactics and exclusion of Indigenous peoples' knowledge and history. The Native American Center, ITEPP, a 50-year-old program, along with INRSEP were created by Indigenous leaders to support Indigenous students and the local Native community. The Council of American Indian Faculty and Staff has been around for over 30 years. These programs and organizations have tirelessly fought for representation and inclusion on matters that advance Indigenous knowledge, culture, and Tribal sovereignty on this campus, while actively supporting all students in their academic journeys.

“It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments.”

— Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

As graduate and undergraduate students, we work each day to dismantle all colonial structures and hierarchies that work to uphold white supremacy, settler colonialism, and tactics of erasure and genocide. The future we see and want is a future where Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge are centered, even as we understand how extractive and performative this settler institution has been and continues to be as showcased within the polytechnic proposals. Given the active emergence of widespread attacks against CRGS education, anti-racism frameworks, and curriculum that challenges the status quo of inequity and white supremacy, our university must center and support these departments and programs from every angle. These programs have supported countless students to this day and will continue to do so forever. From the time that colonizers hit these lands, it has always been important to respect and center the very peoples who were created in these lands, and who hold immense knowledge and reverence for all relatives.

Native American Studies and CRGS programs have been instrumental to the success and overall well-being of our student body and community as a whole. There is a fundamental need for all students to find a connection to the world in a holistic and healthy way. Students who enroll in NAS classes or work with ITEPP or INRSEP leave the University with not just a degree - but a better understanding of their connection to the world, their communities, and themselves.

With the support of these departments, students create lasting relationships with community partners who also work towards the health and improvement of our community.

These programs are also consistently being threatened in multiple ways. Departments, programs, staff/faculty, and students can never fully feel safe within this institution when these programs are constantly being impacted by shrinkage, elimination, and a consistent lack of funding. In 2015 the unified students of Humboldt took over the Native forum in protest of the Indigenous faculty that were fired, who were integral in pushing forward the same centering of TEK this institution claims to put at the forefront in these polytechnic proposals. This same unified student group brought up within their demands exactly what we are bringing forth in this letter today. Their list of demands, which can be found [here](#), included key points for supporting students, programs, faculty, staff, and Tribal sovereignty. If TEK is truly integral to the next steps of the HSU polytechnic undertaking, then here are our demands, and what we expect to see as graduate students and undergraduate students:

- (1) We demand more hires in the Native American Studies and the Critical Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies departments. We also demand Masters programs be made and offered in each of these disciplines. We want these departments funded **indefinitely**, and for Indigenous programs like NAS, and other important programs such as CRGS to be staffed with full, tenure-track faculties and administrators, as these are programs that create scholarships that support Indigenous students, projects, and research. We want to see a long-term operations budget plan for these departments (NAS, CRGS) and programs (ITEPP, INRSEP, and the Food Sovereignty Lab). These programs are inherently interdisciplinary, as TEK and Indigenous knowledges do not exist in a silo.
- (2) Neither the recent Indigenous Science nor the Fire Resiliency cluster hire included NAS. If TEK is integral to these cluster hires, then NAS positions are **at least as** necessary and important as other hires for the programs' development and administration. It is dismissive and myopic to continue with an Indigenous Science or Fire Resilience cluster hire without NAS. We request that the cluster hire decisions be reconsidered and redone.
- (3) We need to make sure that the Indigenous programs have prominent space on campus. We support the planning of a Native Programs building and space on HSU's campus. It would be very powerful to enter campus and see an Indigenous community, programs, and gathering space. In addition, off-campus space in Indigenous communities will further support the work that the university plans to carry out, such as a Fire Resiliency campus/building in Karuk territory.
- (4) We demand full, effective participation in the transparent hiring process for HSU staff, faculty, and administration. We, as students, demand equal voting power on hiring, promotion, tenure committees, and dismissal procedures in selecting and

dismissing HSU staff, faculty, and administration in order to ensure greater diversity at HSU. We demand the adoption of 1/3 students, 1/3 faculty, 1/3 administration models for these procedures. Faculty, staff, and students who operate and participate in programs should have the ultimate say in the fate of their programs. (Adopted from United Students of Humboldt Demands 2015)

- (5) We are in support of the Council of American Indian Faculty and Staff's "Statement on Polytech University Development and Indigenous Knowledge/Indigenous Science/ Traditional Ecological Knowledge," dated April 29th, 2021. HSU should commit to the recommendations made by CAIFS in this document, beginning on page 5 including:
- Support the creation of a Vice-President of Tribal Affairs office
  - Provide additional support for Indigenous students:
  - Support the continued enrollment and growth of Indigenous students and Indigenous student-focused programming on campus:
  - Provide support for the Native American Studies Department
  - Provide support for active leadership of CAIFS
  - Reconstitute the Center for Indian Community Development (CICD)
  - Develop incentives for a cluster-hire of Native faculty across campus
  - Provide ongoing funding for Native-focused community and student-centered programs.
- (6) We would like to see an Indigenous Strategic Plan at HSU that is co-created with tribal nations, HSU faculty, staff, students, and the HSU administration. The HSU administration should be willing to sign on to this document as guiding principles and goals for implementing polytechnic programming and funding alongside tribal goals.
- (7) We advocate for Indigenous voices throughout the university. Right now, there is no representation of Indigenous peoples at an administrative level. HSU does not currently have a tribal liaison or tribal affairs office. Other university campuses that have a tribal liaison include: SDSU, CSUSM, Chico State University, amongst others. The Council of American Indian Faculty and Staff have previously recommended the creation of a Vice-President of Tribal Affairs office, which we support.
- (8) We need to maintain representation of the Council of American Indian faculty and Staff on university committees, and as part of the Native American Advisory Committee to the President. Use this existing framework and create voting powers in the President's Advisory Committee that consists of representation from the local tribal communities, Native faculty and staff, Native students, and programs. HSU stands out as a university with multiple tribal peoples working across the

campus. This means that there are many community members who work at HSU, and who also have expertise in tribal governance, tribal community development, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

- (9) Tribal leaders rely on Native faculty and staff as their ongoing connections with HSU. We do not want to see an isolation of tribal leaders in the community. We need to maintain representation of the Council of American Indian Faculty and Staff on university committees and as part of the Native American Advisory Committee to the President.
- (10) When TEK is part of curriculum or university goals, that must include a dedication of the university to tribal sovereignty and self-determination, as well as a demonstrated commitment to tribal peoples in higher education. We need to see an increase in funding for ITEPP, INRSEP, and the NAS Department. We also need a dedication to providing service and outreach to tribal communities that prioritize their needs. This includes support for on-campus programs such as the Food Sovereignty Lab and the reconstitution of the Center for Indian Community Development, as well as off-campus community partners, providing funded internships for various roles that support Native-led organizations and programs. There is tremendous value in utilizing polytechnic funding for securing and building infrastructure and research priorities for tribal nations.
- (11) The Food Sovereignty Lab (FSL) is not currently funded by the university. The FSL is a *student-designed* and community-guided project. The FSL Steering Committee is made up of tribal, community, student, faculty, and staff representatives. We would like to see a clear budget line item for the Food Sovereignty Lab included in the polytechnic budget that demonstrates a dedication to this interdisciplinary and community-guided lab.

Native American Studies, CRGS, on and off- campus Native Programs, and Indigenous faculty, staff, community, and Tribal Nations are essential in the development and future of the university and the future of our society as a whole. These programs are not only rooted in social justice, but are committed to fighting systemic racism and bringing the world back into balance. We will not stand idly by and witness this university harp on all of the successes of Native programs and their faculty and students, and preach about the importance of its relationship to Indigenous and Tribal partners while it simultaneously - and continuously - refuses to take action when it comes time to do so. Since the University is so committed to improving its relationships with Indigenous communities, why is it that it is often these programs and organizations are at threat of shrinkage or elimination and raising money themselves or by students for projects and initiatives not funded by the university? The relationship begins first when you respect, center, and fund the work that has tirelessly been done by local Indigenous peoples and communities.

Let's remember that HSU sits on unceded Wiyot land, as do all CSUs, and universities across the nation. If this university is going to continue to work towards decolonization and therefore *rely* on Indigenous Peoples and their Traditional Ecological Knowledge, the first step is to return the land. They have supported us, listened to us, fed us, taught us, and bettered us as students as we learn on traditional Wiyot lands, and that's where relationships truly begin. As students, we expect the university to support us in our journey to obtaining our degrees, and beyond. We are tired of feeling left out and left behind in these important changes and conversations.

Signed,

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