

Dear Dr. Frey –

I write on behalf of the Land Acknowledgement committee to seek support from Faculty Senate for our proposal to incorporate Land Acknowledgement as an institutional practice at Bowling Green State University. As a group, we have been working together over the course of the last year to research Land Acknowledgement as a practice, as well as the tribal histories with and connections to the lands on which Bowling Green State University (including the Bowling Green and Firelands campuses and Perrysburg and Sandusky satellites) is situated. We understand that in order to seek formal support from Faculty Senate, we need to first consult the Senate Executive Committee. I have outlined below, information about our endeavor and request that this item be added to the SEC meeting agenda.

If you need any further information from us, or if there are other steps we need to take to present this to the SEC, please let me know.

Thank you for both your time and your consideration,

Heidi L. Nees
Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre & Film
Land Acknowledgement Committee Chair

What is Land Acknowledgement?

Land Acknowledgement is a way in which we recognize and honor the Indigenous people who have cared for the land on which we reside and work. It is also a way to express gratitude and appreciation to those for whom this area is and was home, long before settler-colonialism irrevocably changed the land and ecosystem. It is important to understand the long-standing history that has brought us all to reside on this land and our places within that history. Furthermore, it is important for us to consider our present situation on this land and imagine futures shaped by respect for and reconciliation with the Indigenous stewards of the land. Land Acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current and ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation in this process. The act of acknowledgement renders visible the oft-ignored and marginalized histories and continued presence of Native American individuals and tribes. It is also worth noting that acknowledging the land is Indigenous protocol.

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Land Acknowledgement statements can take many forms. They are often delivered orally, to open an event or gathering. They can also be shared visually, through plaques or signage within physical spaces, websites, programs, syllabi, etc. We have provided two versions of a Land Acknowledgement statement (one for oral delivery and another for written delivery) later in this letter.

Why is Land Acknowledgement important?

In addition to being a way to honor and thank the Indigenous people of the area, the invocation of a Land Acknowledgement statement encourages individuals to think about what it means to occupy space on Indigenous lands. The acknowledgment of traditional territories ultimately provides a learning opportunity for individuals who may have never heard the names of the tribes that have and continue to live and learn from the land on which they are standing, and those who have and continue to care for the land. As an institution devoted to learning and the public good, this practice can help to educate members of the community, both on- and off-campus. Furthermore, this practice should be a *first* step toward building relationships with the tribes whose histories with and connections to the land inform our own. Land Acknowledgement should not be limited to a statement, but should encompass a set of practices that seek reconciliation and collaboration in the continued stewardship of the land.

Rationale for Inclusion as an Institutional Practice

To put it bluntly, including Land Acknowledgement as an institutional practice is the right thing to do. This is not a groundbreaking practice; an increasing number of U.S. institutions are incorporating Land Acknowledgement as a daily practice, and in Canada, Land Acknowledgement has been commonplace for over a decade. While there has been critique in recent years of the sincerity and utility of Land Acknowledgement statements—that is, critics question what a statement does beyond checking a performative diversity initiative off the “to do” list—this critique rightly points out the need for statements to go beyond words and into action.¹ That is why we hope the adoption of Land Acknowledgement becomes a first step to further practices and collaborations that seek to honor, thank, and serve tribal communities, the land, our regional community of northwest Ohio, and BGSU.

The stated mission of our institution declares that “Through our excellence in teaching, research, and outreach, BGSU builds a collaborative, diverse, and inclusive community where creative ideas, new knowledge, and entrepreneurial achievements can benefit others in our region, the state of Ohio, the nation, and the world.” For the reasons outlined above, Land Acknowledgement can be a way to build a “collaborative, diverse, and inclusive community” that activates “creative ideas” and “new knowledge.” It can do so by initiating institutional practices that build relationships with tribes, through which we can learn from each other in

¹ For one example of this critique, please see [“Land Acknowledgements Accomplish Little” by Alex Small](#) from Inside Higher Ed, 9 January 2020.

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mutually beneficial ways. In bringing visibility to historical and present contexts of tribal relationships with the land, Acknowledgement is an opportunity for us to foster a more inclusive environment and address the educational and historical “vitality of our region, the state of Ohio, the nation, and the world” ([“Mission, Vision, and Core Values”](#)).

Support from other groups

We are currently in the process of seeking support from each of the governing bodies within the institution: Faculty Senate, Classified Staff Council, Administrative Staff Council, College Council-BGSU Firelands, Undergraduate Student Government, Graduate Student Senate, and Student Government-BGSU Firelands. After approaching these governing bodies, we will seek approval by the Board of Trustees.

What would Land Acknowledgement look like on our campus?

As stated earlier, we, as a committee, have researched Land Acknowledgement as a practice, as well as the tribal histories of the area. In terms of “area,” we have looked at the geographic locations of the Bowling Green campus, the Firelands campus, and the satellite locations in Perrysburg and Sandusky. Based on this work, we have drafted the following statements (one for oral delivery and one for written delivery)²:

Land Acknowledgement for written delivery:

Bowling Green State University and its affiliated campuses are situated in the ancestral territory of numerous Indigenous and Native tribes. This space holds many historical and contemporary ties to the Wyandotte, Huron, Kickapoo, Erie, Miami, and Peoria. This area's history reveals an arterial network of complex economic and cultural significance. We honor and recognize the stewardship, dedication, and presence of those for whom the Great Black Swamp and the Lower Great Lakes region is home. Through this statement, we aim to trace the past to the present to inform current conditions. It is within BGSU's responsibility as an academic institution to disseminate knowledge about Indigenous peoples and the institution's history with them. We recognize and further the conversation around decolonizing history to honor Indigenous individuals and communities who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. This type of acknowledgement must not only be through statement, but in action and practice as well.

² *Though we conducted much research, the tribal histories and relationships with this region are complex. Therefore, new information may present itself which would require amendments to the list of tribes recognized.*

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Land Acknowledgement for oral delivery:

The region in which Bowling Green State University and its campuses are situated, inhabit the Great Black Swamp and the Lower Great Lakes region. This land is the ancestral territory of the Wyandotte, Huron, Kickapoo, Erie, Miami, and Peoria. We recognize these historical and contemporary ties in our efforts to further the conversation around decolonizing history and honoring Indigenous individuals and communities who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial.

As a committee, we have envisioned potential ways of incorporating these Land Acknowledgement statements in the daily life of our institution. This is not a finalized list, nor is it exhaustive. Rather, it is a list of suggestions based on research. These include:

Oral Delivery:

- Campus-wide events and gatherings such as Commencement, Convocation, Award Ceremonies
- College and departmental events such as kick-off meetings, orientations, luncheons
- Athletic events
- Performances (theatre, music, etc.)

Written Delivery:

- Plaques/signage in physical spaces such as campus buildings, the stadium, the grounds
- Course syllabi
- Programs for events such as live performances, athletic games, ceremonies
- BGSU website – The statement could exist on various webpages within the website, including the [“About BGSU”](#) page, the [“History & Traditions”](#) page, the [Division of Diversity & Belonging](#) page, the [Office of Multicultural Affairs](#) page, and other individual programs’ and department’ pages. Furthermore, we envision a website presence that includes pronunciation guides, information about Land Acknowledgement in general, an invitation to submit additional information, and links to additional sources of information about Land Acknowledgement and the tribes recognized in the statement.

We thank you for your time in reviewing our request and your consideration on the matter. If you would like additional information, please let us know. We have included below a partial list of sources that provide further information about Land Acknowledgement as a practice, as well as some examples of Land Acknowledgement Statements used by other universities.

Resources on Land Acknowledgement

- U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, [“Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment”](#)
- Native Governance Center, [“Indigenous Land Acknowledgement”](#)

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- American Indian College Fund, [“Why Give An Indigenous Land Acknowledgement \(and How to Make It Matter\)”](#)
- NYU, [“Guide to Indigenous Land and Territorial Acknowledgements for Cultural Institutions”](#)
- [Native Land map](#)

Resources on Land Acknowledgement in Higher Education

- Insight into Diversity webpage, [“Acknowledging Native Land is a Step Against Erasure” by Mariah Stewart](#), December 19, 2019
- American College Personnel Association, [“Centering the Land: The Importance of Acknowledging Indigenous Land and Lifeways,”](#) (from the 2018 ACPA Convention page), February 15, 2018
- [Northwestern University Land Acknowledgement](#)
- [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Land Acknowledgement](#)
- [Goshen College Land Acknowledgement](#)
- [Miami University Land Acknowledgement](#)
- [The Ohio State University Land Acknowledgement](#)

Land Acknowledgement Committee Members

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