

Presidential Remarks

Land Acknowledgement Plaque Ceremony

April 1, 2022

- Thank you for being here and participating in the formal adoption of the Land Acknowledgement Statement at Oakland University.
- We gather today to honor our Native American ancestors whose ways of knowing demonstrated reverence and respect for the land on which Oakland University now stands.
 - And by our statement, we are committed to elevating our ways of knowing to better reflect the sustainable practices and peaceful coexistence at the heart of Native American culture...values that will sustain and help our beloved university to thrive.
- The statement was approved by the OU Senate on February 18, and the OU Board of Trustees at their April 8 meeting.
- And, as many of you know, universities around the state and country have issued similar land acknowledgement statements.
- But let me be clear: The words etched in this plaque at Oakland University are by no means simply words.
 - The statement is a step.
 - But it cannot be the only step.
 - The statement cannot be seen as our attempt to “check a box” when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion.
 - It must be backed up by an honest and intentional strategy to further transform the diversity at Oakland.
 - Quite simply, the Land Acknowledgement Statement must be about policies, not politics.
 - And... it must be considered as more than a statement, it is an implicit challenge.
- The statement references the past, but the statement must reflect our actions in the present, and our commitment to

honoring and acknowledging Native peoples who have been historically marginalized from American institutions, politics and academic curriculums.

- Making a college education more accessible and affordable to Native communities is part of showing our commitment... and so, too, is supporting Native American students in their higher educational journey.... And also including Native Americans among our faculty...and developing indigenous studies programs.
- Thank you to the faculty, students and administrators who collaborated to draft the Land Acknowledgement Statement.
- This statement is the work of many passionate and dedicated people. I know I'm going to miss a few – and I apologize for that – but I'd like to call out a few for their effort and commitment:
 - Andrea Knutson (Assoc. Professor, English Dept.)
 - Ashleigh Dubie (Cherokee, English/STEP, student)
 - Megan Peiser (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Asst. Professor, English Dept.)
 - Mozhgon Rajae (Asst. Professor, Health Sciences)
 - Kevin Corcoran (former Dean, College of Arts and Sciences)
 - Cynthia Miree-Coppin (Faculty Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee)
 - Joi Cunningham (Provost's Office)
 - ...and the OU Senate committee chaired by Jason Wasserman
- Again, thank you to the faculty for driving this initiative, pushing for greater recognition and equity for Native peoples, engaging in our broader community, and for being invaluable partners in the ongoing development of our university.
- And, as we strive to make sure the words in the Land Acknowledgement Statement are backed by actions...I'd like to announce the designation of an Anishinaabe historical site for Oakland University.....The parcel of land is located on south campus near Library Drive, south of Pioneer Drive.

We are honored that we can designate the site, and look forward to an ongoing friendship with the Anishinaabe people.