

To our campus community,

We are your American Indian and Indigenous peers.

American Indian and Indigenous students have been repeatedly pushed to the sidelines. We are tired of our voices being treated as an inconvenience. We are tired of the lack of representation in university-level academia. We are tired of the lack of initiative taken by university administrators and faculty to aid us in our goal of establishing an American Indian and Indigenous Studies Department. We are tired of being told that our voices, our pain, our struggles, are not enough to warrant real change. We are *tired*. The grotesque history of settler colonialism is one that has transcended into systemic and institutional insufficiency, which is all too relevant here at UC Santa Barbara.

The American Indian & Indigenous Student Association (AIISA) was founded in 1970 to promote cultural awareness to the UCSB's general population and to provide a cultural connection and sense of community for its American Indian and Indigenous students. Founded during the national American Indian Movement, AIISA has connected Native students with each other and established a long-lasting relationship with the local Chumash community. In particular, the Chumash community has been instrumental in welcoming our AIISA students, providing them with a sense of family and a home-away-from-home. Their guidance, love, and support have allowed our community to thrive and we will continue to work to strengthen our bonds to the original people and caretakers of this land and all its inhabitants.

Over the years, AIISA has done many significant things, such as contributing to the creation of a land acknowledgment for the unceded lands of the Coastal Chumash, which is now read at UCSB's convocation and commencement ceremonies. Students and faculty worked vigorously to establish an American Indian and Indigenous Minor, which was housed under Religious Studies due to the presence and guidance of our elder, Inés Talamantez (Lipan Apache and Mescalero Apache), who was a faculty member in the department at the time. The past decade has also seen the creation of an American Indian and Indigenous Academic Council, which manages the courses for the interdisciplinary minor, focuses on internal initiatives that would further the community, and has been consequential to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous students.

Most recently, undergraduate and graduate representatives, faculty, and administrators have been working on creating an American Indian and Indigenous Studies Major as well as an adjacent AIIS department. Through hours of tedious work compiling budgets, classes, senior faculty, and ideas, the plans for the major and department have slowly come to fruition. However, recent meetings with UCSB's administrative deans have proven to be underwhelming and unproductive, to say the least.

Students and council members were told that our carefully constructed blueprints for the creation of a major and department are “solid ideas and plans,” and that and that they [the deans] are “willing to roll up their sleeves to do the hard work,” but have done little to actually move these plans forward in a timely manner. Scheduling a 45-minute meeting with the council, not even affording us an entire hour, and then lamenting that we have such little time to talk about these plans is performative and quite frankly, insulting. These matters require urgency and cannot be pursued through 45-minute meetings every other month. We recognize that these plans will take time, but administrators have done nothing to speed this process up and continue their attempts to pacify us by calling this work “important and so necessary.” If the administrative staff and deans at UC Santa Barbara really believe this work is so crucial, which it is, they would do more to start putting our proposed program in place. The AII-AC has already put in copious amounts of hard work and uncompensated labor, much of which has come from students. It is time for the administration to do away with flowery language and step up to do the actual work that comes with creating a new department and major.

Furthermore, administrators have repeatedly told Native students that our demand for our own space and department needs to be “more aggressive” in order to become a reality. Indigenous students should not *need* to be aggressive and angry to be heard. The UC Santa Barbara administration ought to push these changes forward not just because Native students are angry, which we are, but because *it is the right thing to do*. Additionally, we are tired of being told that the path to our own department must mirror that of other ethnic and gender studies departments. We as Indigenous students face unique struggles and are guided by Indigenous principles outside of colonialism. We will not be told how to perform our own activism and advocate for our people.

Native students are suffering at UC Santa Barbara. At a population totaling around 1% of UCSB’s undergraduate community, and less than 1% on the graduate level, Native students are especially vulnerable. Furthermore, drop-out rates for Indigenous students are the highest of any other ethnic group, with up to 50% of all Native students who enroll in college never receiving a degree. Compounded by a lack of belonging, rampant microaggressions, and Indigenous invisibility, it is more important than ever to work towards the wellbeing of Native students. While UC Santa Barbara has spaces dedicated to inclusion and social justice, most of these spaces are not Indigenous-focused and fail to take into account the specific needs of our population. Therefore, they fail to serve our students as they do other populations. Indigenous student wellbeing requires an understanding of our cultural complexities that must come from centering Indigenous voices. As of now, the university has failed to do this.

In sum, we are absolutely appalled and exhausted by the continued acts of Indigenous suppression and erasure by this university. UC Santa Barbara has done the bare minimum by adopting a land acknowledgment, which is only read sporadically at events such as convocation.

Indigenous students are *more* than just a land acknowledgment It is time for UCSB to move beyond pretense of support and actually act on the needs of the Indigenous community. We will not back down or step to the side. We are Strong, we are Resilient, and above all, we are Indigenous.

Our Demands as the Native and Indigenous students of UC Santa Barbara are as follows:

1. Complete adherence and support for the American Indian and Indigenous Studies proposal as authored and intended. See [here](#).
2. The formation of a fully funded American Indian and Indigenous Studies Department.
3. The formation of a fully funded American Indian and Indigenous research center.
4. The hiring of additional American Indian and Indigenous faculty, career staff, and student staff.
5. Continued funding for American Indian and Indigenous initiatives.
 - a. Such as the American Indian and Indigenous Symposium.
6. The hiring of American Indian and Indigenous-focused admissions officer.