

**Resolution to Observe Indigenous Peoples' Day at Virginia Tech**  
**Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity**  
**Resolution # CEOD 2018-19A**

<b>Approved: CEOD</b>	<b>December 17, 2018</b>
<b>Approved: Faculty Senate</b>	<b>November 30, 2018</b>
<b>Approved: Staff Senate</b>	<b>January 17, 2019</b>
<b>Graduate Student Assembly Review</b>	<b>January 31, 2019</b>
<b>Student Government Association Review Waived</b>	<b>January 30, 2019</b>
<b>First Reading: University Council</b>	<b>February 4, 2019</b>
<b>Approved: University Council</b>	<b>February 18, 2019</b>
<b>Approved: President</b>	<b>February 18, 2019</b>
<b>Effective Date:</b>	<b>October 14, 2019</b>

**Whereas**, Virginia Tech, Virginia's land grant institution founded in 1872, recognizes and honors the Monacan-Tutelo people, the historical stewards and traditional custodians of the land now occupied by Virginia Tech; and,

**Whereas**, race integrity laws in Virginia discouraged American Indians from attaining public education until 1963; and,

**Whereas**, tribes from across the United States and Canada are represented among the students, faculty, and staff at Virginia Tech; and,

**Whereas**, Indigenous students at Virginia Tech study in nearly every college on campus and represent at least 16 Indigenous communities, including the Anishinaabe, Blackfeet, Cherokee, Chickahominy, Coharie, Delaware, Diné (Navajo), Eastern Band of Cherokee, Hawaiian, Lumbee, Monacan, Osage, Peepeekisis Cree, Quechua/Aymara, Shinnecock/Unkechaug, and Tohono O'odham; and,

**Whereas**, the American Indian Studies Program was established at Virginia Tech in 2000 and students from a vast majority of majors enroll in American Indian Studies courses every semester; and,

**Whereas**, the Native at Virginia Tech student organization was formed in 2008 and has been an invaluable community for Native American and Indigenous students at Virginia Tech; and,

**Whereas**, Virginia Tech's motto, *Ut Prosim* (that I may serve), is foundational to many Indigenous cultural identities and it is in the spirit of *Ut Prosim* that the Native at Virginia Tech student organization calls on Virginia Tech to serve and support the Native American and Indigenous community; and,

**Whereas**, in 2017 and 2018, the Native at Virginia Tech student organization hosted the Virginia Tech Pow Wow -- a symbol of cultural survivance that brought traditional

dancers, singers, and visitors from across the mid-Atlantic region to share their culture with the Virginia Tech community; and,

**Whereas**, the Native American and Indigenous Community Alliance was founded in 2012, with a mission of activism, engagement, and support around Native American and Indigenous community issues; and,

**Whereas**, the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center was dedicated in 2016 and serves as a place of relationship building among Native and Indigenous communities at Virginia Tech, the greater Virginia Tech community, and tribal and Indigenous communities across the United States and the world; and,

**Whereas**, Virginia Tech has hosted tribal summits, including most recently in 2017, to strengthen reciprocal partnerships with the eleven tribal communities of Virginia which include the Cheroenhaka [Nottoway], the Chickahominy, the Eastern Chickahominy, the Mattaponi, the Monacan, the Nansemond, the Nottoway, the Pamunkey, the Patowomeck, the Rappahannock, and the Upper Mattaponi; and,

**Whereas**, Virginia Tech's Principles of Community state that "We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others"; and,

**Whereas**, University Council passed a resolution in 2017 authorizing a revision to Pathways General Education Curriculum to require a new core area of Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the United States to increase education and awareness; and,

**Whereas**, in January 2018, Native at Virginia Tech collected over 1,200 petition signatures from the community in support of a resolution for Virginia Tech to officially recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day; and,

**Whereas**, the public recognition of Indigenous Peoples' Day provides an opportunity for education and engagement, and reduces the historical invisibility and erasure of Native American and Indigenous people; and,

**Whereas**, in response to a proposal by Native at Virginia Tech to University Council in May 2018, President Timothy Sands issued a Presidential Policy Memorandum declaring Monday, October 8, 2018 as Indigenous Peoples' Day at Virginia Tech; and,

**Whereas**, Indigenous Peoples' Day was celebrated on October 8, 2018, with cultural programming hosted by Native at Virginia Tech, and the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center;

**Whereas**, the Commonwealth of Virginia has designated the second Monday in October as Columbus Day -- an official state holiday; and

**Whereas**, the Commonwealth of Virginia has not recognized Indigenous Peoples' Day as an official state holiday;

**Whereas**, CEOD acknowledges that it is beyond the scope of the Commission and University Council to call for a change in state law to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day as a state holiday, yet wishes to go on record advocating for such a change in the law;

**Therefore be it resolved**, that Virginia Tech recognizes the value and contributions of Indigenous communities and commits to continuing to support the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center and the American Indian Studies program; and

**Be it further resolved**, that Virginia Tech will officially and permanently recognize and designate on the university event calendar ([www.calendar.vt.edu](http://www.calendar.vt.edu)) (and other appropriate materials) the second Monday in October each year as "Indigenous Peoples' Day"; and,

**Be it further resolved**, that Virginia Tech, in consultation with the American Indian and Indigenous community, will support the development and distribution of culturally appropriate materials to educate faculty, staff, students, and the Commonwealth of Virginia about Indigenous Peoples' Day.



Graduate Student Assembly of Virginia Tech (GSA)  
155 Otey St  
25 Graduate Life Center (0186)  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
P: (540) 231-1693 | [gsa@vt.edu](mailto:gsa@vt.edu) |  
[www.gsa.vt.edu](http://www.gsa.vt.edu)

February 9th, 2019

This letter certifies that John Legg's statement — in support of the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity (CEOD) Resolution A, to recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day — is the official statement of the Graduate Student Assembly. The Assembly voted to adopt Mr. Legg's statement on January 31st, 2019.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Fried', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Samantha Jo Fried

President of the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) of Virginia Tech



VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

VT GSA – January 31, 2019

John R. Legg  
M.A. Student  
Virginia Tech  
Department of History

Hello Graduate Student Assembly, delegates, graduate students: My name is John R. Legg. I am a graduate student in the Department of History, where I study nineteenth century indigenous history. It is an honor to come before you as an advocate for proper contextualized history which respects indigenous students of Virginia Tech, both undergraduate and graduate, that participate in our Native at VT organization. But I also lend support for the resolution from the delegates in the Department of History.

On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus set sail to find new possibilities of commerce between the East and West. As the story goes, he stumbled upon the virgin land of North America. That point forever changed the space and place in which indigenous people existed. The legacies of Christopher Columbus are steeped in violence. Not only did his founding of the New World bring colonialism and wide-spread displacement of Native peoples, his legacies inspired some of the most vicious and violent experiences. Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century, such as Hernando de Soto, sought violence during his expeditions of the Southeast, eradicating indigenous populations through the use of the “Dogs of War”— Mastiffs and Greyhounds expertly trained to kill indigenous peoples. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, settler-colonialism brought broken treaty promises, initiated violence between Native and non-Native, particularly in the American West, but also throughout the entire country, at places like Mankato, Sand Creek, Little Big Horn, and Wounded Knee. In the twentieth century, American Indians experienced environmental land management controls by the U.S. government. Settler-colonialism in that century also brought about police brutality and neglect for the Native peoples of the United States. All of these events are broad legacies of Christopher Columbus. His efforts to colonize the New World led to wide-spread eradication, displacement, disease, and death of hundreds of thousands of Native people.

**I ask, is this the legacy that Virginia Tech wishes to celebrate?**

As we sit here with hopes to pass this resolution, changing Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples’ Day, I hope we keep history in mind. The past tells us many things, and can help us understand the present. That story of Columbus finding the Eden-like New World has been proven false. North America was not a virgin land as indigenous peoples have inhabited the land longer than what we teach in our schools. Settler narratives have often, and continue to, portray indigenous peoples with belittling and demeaning characterizations. Through these perceptions, Native American perspectives have been left out of the study of American culture and history.

As Tom Colonesse, the chair of American Indian studies at the University of Washington once said, “By refusing to hear indigenous voices, the country has not only rejected their fellow citizens, they have also failed to hear wise voices, especially at a time where wise voices seemed to be truly rare.” Something that resonates with our nation’s current leadership.

In the 1960s and 70s, American Indian Movement leaders started a discourse over racist treatment

towards American Indians, battling for renewed “treaty rights and reclamation of tribal land.” By using AIM’s inspiration, in 2019, it is our duty to fight alongside Native peoples in the reclamation of their identity and place in American society. By doing so, we must rid white settler narratives from the nation’s historical consciousness. As Confederate monuments create a racial caste system set to hold African Americans back from progress, glorifying Christopher Columbus similarly holds Native people back. Indigenous Peoples’ Day will provide that progress. It is our duty, collectively, to decolonize the white-settler narratives. It is our duty to give students the accurate history, a wholesome history that includes indigenous peoples and their importance to our society. Virginia Tech should pass and recognize Indigenous Peoples’ Day on campus, a message that further solidifies the fact that Indigenous peoples have always been here, they are here now, and they are not going anywhere. Thank you.