PROPOSAL: Adoption of a Land Acknowledgement Statement for Western Michigan University

Background

Land acknowledgement is a process by which individuals are prompted to consider the history of the space they currently inhabit. In January 2019, a group of graduate students in the Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) program were challenged in Dr. Kahler Schuemann’s class to explore issues facing higher education through a lens of history, culture, and student access. Collaboratively the students advocated for the idea of Western Michigan University adopting a Land Acknowledgement statement that recognizes and honors the indigenous people who occupied the land upon which Western Michigan University is located.

Dr. Schuemann presented the students’ idea to the President’s Cabinet and Dr. Candy McCorkle, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, volunteered to be the champion for this project. Dr. McCorkle and the HESA students have worked diligently in collaboration with the tribes of the Three Fires Confederacy in crafting this statement and gathering community support and historical evidence. The tribes collaborating in this effort are: Pokagon Band of Pottawatomi, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi (Gun Lake Tribe), and the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Pottawatomi. The students led by Becky Huntley also worked with a WMU Archivists who specialized in local history and cross referenced the proposal through the WMU General Counsel.

In adopting a University Statement, WMU will display leadership in fostering an environment of diversity and inclusion. The campus support is and will be evidence of our commitment to encouraging exploration of cultures and life experiences as part of a successful higher education journey. The University will recognize the importance of identifying the history of the indigenous peoples and celebrate it as part of our own.

The adoptions of this statement is supported by the following campus constituents: Western Student Association, Faculty Senate, Lee Honors College, Athletics Department, WMU American Association of University Professors, WMU Professional Instructors Organization, Teaching Assistants Union at WMU, Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations, Administrative Professional Association at WMU. The following tribes have also indicated value and support: Match-e-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi (Gun Lake Tribe), Pokagon Band of Pottawatomi and the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Pottawatomi.

While public reading of the Land Acknowledgement Statement is not required at activities, it is recommended the Statement be read at commencements and convocation while also made available for consideration with other campus events. The Statement will also be posted on the Western Michigan University “About WMU” webpage https://wmich.edu/about/mission-history, and again while not required, encouraged for inclusion on other WMU webpages.
Recommended Action

It is recommended the Board of Trustees adopt the proposed Land Acknowledgment Statement to recognize and honor the Indigenous people who inhabited the land upon which WMU is located:

We would like to recognize Western Michigan University is located on lands historically occupied by Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodewadmi nations. Please take a moment to acknowledge and honor this ancestral land of the Three Fires Confederacy, the sacred lands of all indigenous peoples and their continued presence.