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# Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs

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Volume 4  
Issue 2 *Research in Briefs*

Article 2

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2019

## Colonized and Racist Indigenous Campus Tour: Research-in-Brief

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### Recommended Citation

Minthorn, R. S. & Nelson, C. A. (2018). Colonized and racist Indigenous campus tour: Research-in-brief. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, 4(2), 7-11.

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Volume 4, Issue 2

Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs

# Colonized and Racist Indigenous Campus Tour

RESEARCH-IN-BRIEF

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ISSN 2377-1306

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**A**s the title of the article demonstrates, our conceptual contributions are modeled through a campus tour. By framing our contributions through a campus tour model, non-Indigenous administrators and staff who work on college campuses can begin to better connect to how Indigenous students may feel when seeing a campus that overtly glorifies colonial conquest narratives. Throughout the colonized and racist campus tour, we do not highlight the colonialist triumphs of the institution; rather, we uncover the embedded racist and genocidal values that are often cherished through dominant campus tours. To do this, we seek to provide an Indigenous community narrative (Gilmore & Smith, 2005; McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006) to problematize how administrators and staff see their campuses and how they may be centering colonial histories while silencing Indigenous histories and students in the process. The motivation to develop this conceptual project is directly influenced by our daily interactions with Indigenous students, and witness to their interpretations of their experiences on a university campus. Therefore, it is imperative to assert the value of Indigenous methods and to emphasize storytelling as in Deloria and Wildcat's definition of power (2001). Each portion of this paper holds energy that informs subsequent sections.

### **An Incomplete History of Higher Education Institutions**

Typically, when describing the student population that has connections to the land now known as the United States of America, the term American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) is ascribed by administrators, policy makers, and political leaders. We purposely avoid referring to this student population as AI/AN to push back against the colonial constraints of this term. By erasing the connotation of what it means to be Indigenous, the meaning of, and the connection to the land that Indigenous students and communities have is ignored and replaced with the oppressive value systems that are in place today. The term Indigenous

is not meant to homogenize the unique aspects of each tribal nation, as there are currently over 560 different federally-recognized tribes in the United States; rather, it is used in recognition of their commonly held values and connection to the land. In relation to campus climate and inclusive environments, the word "Indigenous" privileges the connection of the first peoples of this land to place and space. Evidence of this argument can be witnessed through Indigenous value systems and theoretical paradigms (Tuck & Yang, 2012). To further justify the use of "Indigenous" we employ one such framework, called Power and Place, to name, criticize, and dismantle the oppressive system of modern higher education institutions through a more complete historical positioning.

### **An Indigenized Theory of Space and Place (and Broadly)**

In the more developed article, we highlight theory on space and place broadly and how that is conceptualized, and then provide an Indigenous thought on space and power. Highlighting this is essential to understanding how space, specifically on college campuses, impacts Indigenous student experiences.

#### **Space and Place Broadly**

Important to mention in this conversation, are the ways space and place are often conflated to mean the same thing. In our view, space and place are relational. Space is primarily the physical location, while place is the point of interaction and the ability to process the meaning of those interactions. At times these interactions may be linked to a physical space, but not always. Sites of Indigenous genocide and assimilation within the United States, particularly the Southwestern part of the United States, are beginning to acknowledge how discursive spaces are central to understanding the unique historical and contemporary struggle of Indigenous populations, especially in relation to higher education settings. There is a growing body of research exploring the historical and present-day struggle over, and conceptualization of,

Indigenous spaces within and outside of formal education. Meanwhile, there is also a growing acknowledgment that space and place inform the educational experiences of Native American college students. Minthorn & Marsh (2016) conducted a photo elicitation study which sought to understand the lived experiences of Native American college students, and found that the experiences of Native American college students deeply connects place to emotions. These emotions include positive and negative experiences of higher education institutions, demonstrating the importance for campuses to understand how to create positive spaces and acknowledge the role of colonization in the narrative of the institution's success.

### Indigenous Lens – Power and Place

Indigenous scholars Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat (2001) articulate the relational aspects of the world through an Indigenous framework called Power and Place. In an abbreviated version of Deloria and Wildcat's (2001) contribution, we articulate how power and place complicate and expand upon common higher education buzzwords, like sense of belonging, campus climate, and inclusion.

It is through the concepts of Power and Place that a campus environment is no longer a collection of inanimate objects (e.g. buildings, parking spaces, dorms, libraries), but a space that consists of energies constantly interacting. The energies that animate and inanimate objects produce is what Deloria and Wildcat (2001) call *Power*. Power, through their approach, is not about domination. Rather, it recognizes that all entities contribute a force to the human experience. *Place* is where those energies interact and engage with each other. Once again, Deloria and Wildcat (2001) do not recognize place solely as a physical space, but a space that considers the historical, emotional, and socio-political contexts that ultimately create and inform experiences. In terms of studying the context of higher education at the intersection of Indigenous student experiences, Power and Place offer an opportune lens to unpacking the implicit biases and

domination of settler colonialism.

## The Colonized and Racist Indigenous Campus Tour

The Colonized and Racist Indigenous Campus Tour begins to overtly name the systemic and oppressive values that college campuses perpetuate at the expense of Indigenous students, and other students from communities who have a troubling past with colonization and genocide. While hypothetical, the campus tour stops are substantiated by historical resources and images found on the University (UNM) campus. At each stop, we offer a critique by centering perspectives that challenge settler colonial values and genocidal undertones.

### Stop 1: “Welcome to Hodgins Hall, UNM’s first building”

By building institutional legacy, campus tour attendees can begin to sense the pride in attending this university. Additional facts deemed relevant by campus administrators would further establish the long-standing nature of the institution. There continues to be a lack of inclusion or acknowledgment of the Indigenous peoples of the area when trying to instill a sense of institutional legacy. Campus tours continue to embody the notion that the historical founding of UNM occurred on barren land, and from a need for a higher educational institution to serve the needs of the people. Often the people who the institution sought to serve did not include the Indigenous populations and people whose connection to these lands were there for centuries prior to colonization. This is a settler narrative of UNM and one that continues to impact the Indigenous students and communities today.

### Stop 2: Viewing the Dorms

The experience of viewing student housing is often the selling point of the campus tour and is meant to entice young people and their families with the wonderful amenities offered on campus. However, it

is during this stage of the campus tour where appropriation and misuse of Indigenous tribal names are normalized and strip the Indigenous community of their ability to assert agency on college campuses. In the case of UNM, the current and historical practices normalize genocide and colonization, as evidenced by the Indigenous appropriation of building architecture and names. The full-length article highlights institutional practices that continue to be enacted in today's context.

### Stop 3: Touring the Library

The library tour is at the epicenter of conveying the university's prowess in creating and transmitting knowledge. However, upon further investigation, there continues to be a trend of hostility toward Indigenous students in spaces. The UNM Zimmerman library is highlighted to demonstrate how institutional practice actively engages in cultural appropriation and oppression through architecture and artistic murals.

### Stop 4: Visiting the President's Office

Throughout a campus tour, it is common for the tour guide to mention institutional leaders to draw upon the sense of pride and prowess an institution embodies, as is the case with UNM. Evidence of this has been established by previous campus tour stops. This section continues the thread of erasure of Indigenous energies and power through colonialism, but rather than focus on how the dominant narrative has removed and appropriated Indigenous energies and power, we focus on the actions Indigenous students have taken to reclaim an Indigenous community narrative that pushes back against the organizational forces that are imbued with colonial and racist tendencies.

## Next Steps

Through the colonized and racist campus tour, it is evident that representations on campus are powerful, yet oppressive. As institutional leaders strive to make postsecondary institutions more inclusive, it is

imperative to begin the process with the relationship between place and space. Though many of the buildings and images are inanimate from a western viewpoint, an Indigenous lens demonstrates that each of these items carry energy.

### Acknowledging Settler Colonialism within Higher Education Historical Narratives

We encourage administrators, practitioners, and researchers to familiarize themselves with settler colonialism paradigms and use them to expand historical analysis on their respective campuses. In terms of campus tours, we recommend that each campus evaluate the (un)intended messages embedded in the history and lore told during prospective students' first experience on their campus.

### Acknowledging Indigenous Populations

It is imperative that each higher education institution begin to formally acknowledge the Indigenous populations that reside within the proximity of their campuses, and to also acknowledge those whose lands traditionally occupied these spaces in ceremonies, events and activities held by the institution, particularly when physical and visual representation of these populations is absent from the campus and surrounding community. Acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples also creates a space to discuss the level of visibility of Indigenous people and their traditions on campus.

### Revisit Building Name Policies and Existing Names that Promote Colonialism

Institutional policy needs to be rewritten to formalize the role of community voice when developing and amending campus building names. A formal process would create consistency and honor an institution's commitment to be inclusive of Indigenous communities. The failure to institutionalize processes and protocols allows institutional leaders and administrators, particularly those in residential life, to continue the oppressive practices that are rooted in settler

colonialism. For institutional leaders to tout inclusivity, we recommend that policies related to physical campus space be assessed for inclusivity of Indigenous peoples. After all, all institutions of higher education reside on traditional Indigenous land.

### Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, we offer this piece as an entryway to beginning to tell the untold stories of Indigenous peoples within historical narratives, symbolism and present-day stories. There is an intimate connection that Indigenous peoples hold and value regarding space and land, that is not tied to ownership, rather, it is ancestral and spiritual. We hope that by bringing the perils of history and current stories of UNM to light, it will encourage others to investigate how settler colonialism pervades almost every aspect of institutional memory and life. Let us not forget that what seemed to be “barren and desolate” actually held centuries of connections to plants, medicines, creation stories and other meaningful connections that are forgotten in the current narratives of higher education institutions.

### Author Biographies

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Nez Perce/Apache and Assiniboine), is an Associate Professor at the University of New Mexico in Educational Leadership and Native American Studies. Dr. Minthorn is the coordinator for the Native American

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**Christine A. Nelson, Ph.D.** (Diné and Laguna



Pueblo), is an Assistant Professor at the University of Denver’s Morgridge College of Education – Higher Education Department. The research she engages with challenges the status quo of higher education

for Indigenous students and communities. Her primary research interest focuses on finance in higher education, which ranges from student experiences to policy. Chris also infuses Indigenous perspectives and methods to explore the long-term impacts of pre-college access programs. Ultimately, as first-generation college student, she works for underserved communities and their students, who deserve every chance to access, persist, and complete a higher education degree.

#### Recommended Citation:

Minthorn, R. S. & Nelson, C.A. (2018). Colonized and racist Indigenous campus tour. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, 4(1), 73-88.

