

Campus members gather as Indigenous elders mark the new academic year at Sunrise Ceremony

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With the sun shining down on the Mall, more than 70 students and faculty and staff members formed a circle as two Indigenous elders led the annual Sunrise Ceremony on Thursday to mark the beginning of a new academic year.

"It was very powerful," said **Nichol LeBeau**, a mental health clinician with Campus Health's Counseling and Psych Services and the embedded counselor for Native American Student Affairs.

The blessing ceremony, she said, achieved its goal of bringing communities together in a spirit of renewal.

"We need to come together. We need to build a community that supports people of color, trans and queer folks, all of these communities," LeBeau said. "When we come together for ceremonies like this, we're building a stronger community for Tucson and the University."

The ceremony was led by Miguel Flores Jr., a member of the Tohono O'odham Nation and Pascua Yaqui Tribe who serves on the community advisory board of the University's **Native American Research and Training Center** ^[1] and the participant engagement board for the **All of Us Research Program** ^[2], and **Alberta Arviso**, director of diversity, equity and inclusion for the College of Veterinary Medicine and a member of the Navajo Nation.

After the elders led a ceremonial prayer and "smudge" ceremony – in which smoke from burning cedar is gently blown over participants using a fan made of eagle feathers, a ritual believed to bring physical and spiritual strength – Flores sang a traditional song about human connection.

"It's about a family walking down a dirt road, and they come across an elderly man," Flores explained. "The man asks everybody in the family the same question, 'Where are you going?' Each replies that they don't know. Later, they find out that the elderly man was the Creator in the shape of a man. The song reminds us that, regardless of the path we walk on, we don't walk it alone."

The ceremony, which returned to an in-person format after being held virtually last year, was followed by a community breakfast and an open house at the Robert L. Nugent Building. The building houses **Native American Student Affairs** ^[3] and **Asian Pacific American Student Affairs** ^[4], which partnered to organize the event.

Source URL: <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/campus-members-gather-indigenous-elders-mark-new-academic-year-sunrise-ceremony>

Links

[1] <https://nartc.fcm.arizona.edu/> [2] <https://allofus.nih.gov/> [3] <https://nasa.arizona.edu/> [4] <https://apasa.arizona.edu/>