

Native American Heritage Month: A roundup of recent efforts advancing Native communities

University Communications
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November is Native American Heritage Month, a time when we honor the contributions and culture of Native American students, faculty, staff and community members.

"While we recognize and honor the contributions of our Native American community every day, in November, we actively support, engage and celebrate the impact of our Native American and Indigenous communities through engagement and academic programming," said **Ivy Banks**, associate vice provost for diversity and inclusion. "I challenge every Wildcat to not only engage in programs across our campus community but to amplify the rich voices of our Native American and Indigenous communities here on our campus and beyond."

Supporting and advancing the Native American community is a year-round priority for the University, as evidenced by many recent initiatives and events.

Among this year's efforts to honor the community is a new name for the Native American Research and Training Center, honoring Arizona's first Native American physician. The **Wassaja Carlos Montezuma Center for Native American Health**^[1] was dedicated last month.

Montezuma was the second Native American to earn a medical degree from an American university (after Susan La Flesche Picotte). He was born in the Four Peaks, Arizona, area around 1866. His parents named him Wassaja, which means to "signal" or "beckon."

"I think it really aligns to the life and example that Carlos Montezuma, or Wassaja, actually lived," **Nathan Levi Esquerra**, senior vice president for Native American advancement and tribal engagement, said in a video produced by the University of Arizona Foundation. "We are excited for the opportunity to rename it because of the life he lived and how we'd like to use that as an example in our service and opportunities to collaborate with tribal nations going forward."

The center was established in 1983 to serve as a resource in health-related research and training for Native American communities nationwide. It is housed in the **Department of Family and Community Medicine**^[2] at the **College of Medicine – Tucson**^[3].

The center's mission is to conduct health-related research and training projects that will improve the quality of life for Native Americans. In the future, the center will build on Montezuma's legacy by improving health care for Native American communities in Arizona. Other areas of focus will be fostering research, increasing the numbers of Native American medical students, health researchers and health care professionals.

Manuscripts, letters, speeches and correspondence related to Montezuma's career and work with the federal government and reservations are contained in the **Carlos Montezuma Papers collection**^[4] at Special Collections.

Other recent initiatives and events are listed below.

- **Native American Heritage Month proclamation**^[5] – A proclamation declaring November as Native American Heritage Month at the University, signed by President **Robert C. Robbins**, has been updated. The proclamation is displayed in the Arizona BookStores at the Student Union Memorial Center.
- **Medical training for Native American healers**^[6] – A gift to the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine will support training for practitioners of Indigenous healing traditions and those working in underserved communities.
- **Land acknowledgement**^[7] – The University crafted a new statement acknowledging its location on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. The statement lays a foundation for meaningful partnerships and continued support for Native American students and communities.
- **Sunrise Ceremony**^[8] – In September, more than 70 students and faculty and staff members took part in this annual ceremony to mark the beginning of a new academic year.
- **Indigenous Resilience Center**^[9] – Launched this fall, will work on projects and partnerships with Native American nations to advance tribal communities' efforts to respond to environmental challenges and become more resilient.
- **Indigenous Teacher Education Program expansion**^[10] – Thanks to \$2.4 million in state and federal funding, ITEP, housed in the College of Education, aims to bring more Native American teachers to schools that serve Native American students.
- **Tribal Leaders Summit**^[11] – The summit, held at the University on Oct. 21-22, brought together nearly two dozen tribal leaders from throughout the U.S. The first of what is intended to be an annual event focused on finding ways that University scholarship and programs can better serve tribes and tribal students.
- **Indigenous health program** – The Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health created a graduate certificate in Indigenous health. The program is set to begin in the spring.
- **Most doctorates awarded**^[12] – The University is the top doctorate-granting institution for American Indian/Alaska Native students, according to the National Science Foundation's **most recent survey (see Table 9)**^[13] of earned doctorates.
- **Native American Heritage Month merchandise**^[14] – A holiday ornament and other items celebrating the month are available at the Arizona BookStores.

Source URL: <https://uatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/native-american-heritage-month-roundup-recent-efforts-advancing-native-communities>

Links

[1] <https://nartc.fcm.arizona.edu/> [2] <http://fcm.medicine.arizona.edu/> [3] <http://medicine.arizona.edu/> [4] <https://speccoll.library.arizona.edu/collections/carlos-montezuma-papers> [5] <https://view.comms.arizona.edu/?qs=5d3ed94ed22c5f99cf0c1dcdcf2434e498c04f3862a866ea92b2d8ed6fe3f313fe0abba3ba344cfb63daba1b6d93b64799c6dbe30856cce4a53bf7f3f2fce17b3321bb5b36d4fc57> [6] <https://news.arizona.edu/story/gift-andrew-weil-center-integrative-medicine-will-support-medical-training-native-healers> [7] <https://news.arizona.edu/story/uarizona-land-acknowledgement-illustrates-commitment-indigenous-students-communities> [8] <https://uatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/campus-members-gather-indigenous-elders-mark-new-academic-year-sunrise-ceremony> [9] <https://news.arizona.edu/story/uarizona-launches-center-advance-resilience-native-nations-address-environmental-challenges> [10] <https://news.arizona.edu/story/uarizona-program-indigenous-teachers-will-expand-new-federal-state-funding> [11] <https://news.arizona.edu/story/uarizona-welcomes-tribal-leaders-across-us-two-day-summit-education> [12] <https://news.arizona.edu/story/uarizona-ranks-no-1-doctoral-degrees-awarded-native-americans> [13] <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsl22300/data-tables#:~:text=Top%202020%20doctorate-granting%20institutions%20ranked%20by%20number%20of%20minority%20U.S.%20citizen%20and%20permanent%20resident%20doctorate%20recipients%2C%20by%20ethnicity%20and%20race%3A%205-year%20total%2C%202016%E2%80%932020> [14] <https://shop.uabookstore.arizona.edu/main/wildcats/collection/Native-Heritage>