




COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

April 27, 2026

To: Kenneth Barish, Chair  
Riverside Division Academic Senate

From: Esra Kurum, Chair   
Committee on Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Re: [Systemwide Review] (Report Review) Draft  
Report of the UC Tribal Lands Workgroup

This report represents a long-overdue effort to address the UC system’s harmful relationship to California Indian peoples, tribes, lands and ancestors/human remains since its inception. Though it makes some attempt to standardize previously fragmented practices across campuses, notes historical context, and provides concrete tools such as checklists, agreement elements, and process flowcharts as “living documents” while signaling openness to refinement, it ultimately represents a grossly hierarchical framework that exacerbates historically uneven relationships between the UC system and tribes whose lands we have occupied since the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862 when a “land grab” created the conditions under which the UCs were founded.

The report reads primarily as an internally developed top-down operational framework that is now being opened for feedback, rather than as a set of tools co-developed with Tribal partners from the outset. While theoretically understandable given the UC workgroup’s structure, it is indefensible considering the topic of the workgroup and the history surrounding the UC, Indigenous nations, and the issue of Tribal lands. The report notes that it is being circulated for input from advisory groups and stakeholders; however, it is clear there has been little to no involvement from existing avenues capable of providing Indigenous voices including Indigenous studies scholars; community leaders; tribal representatives; liaisons; or entities, including former and current Elders/Tribal Scholars-in-Residence, Native American Student Program staff and students, Chancellor’s Native American Advisory Councils (CNNAC), community members who have already weighed in on UC’s illegal and harmful collection, storage, and treatment of human/ancestral remains. Explicitly ensuring Tribal partners are provided with clear and direct opportunities to review and provide feedback on the core proposals in advance of other stakeholders is the minimum necessary to approach an appropriate framework for the management of shared resources. Beyond this, the committee recommends putting together a new work group that explicitly involves indigenous staff, faculty, and students at the ground level ensuring meaningful developments that integrate tribal systems, ways of being, and ways of doing to strengthen the credibility, relevance, and effectiveness of these materials.

Independent of these recommendations, the following are several areas where further clarification and development that are vital to starting the process of the work group over in ways that reflect collaboration, knowledge and resource sharing, and frank, open dialogue:

1. **Tribal partner involvement.** At this stage, the report needs to state with clarity on when, how, and which Tribal partners will be engaged in providing feedback on the core frameworks, including the process flowcharts, authority and its delegation, and agreement structures. While input through advisory bodies is valuable, it is important to ensure this workgroup does not infringe upon the work already being done by existing Indigenous entities in this realm. Clarifying the role of this workgroup and its outcomes within the larger landscape of tribal partners and organizations is necessary to strengthen the alignment of these tools with Tribal priorities and perspectives. To not do so at the outset of such a discussion that has real cultural, philosophical, environmental, and spiritual stakes is unethical and does not address harm reduction.
2. **Outreach.** reactive vs. sustained relationship infrastructure. While the outreach guidance emphasizes respectful, repeated, and flexible engagement, much of the framework appears tied to specific projects or agreements. The report could be strengthened by outlining a more proactive and sustained outreach infrastructure, including baseline communication practices, ongoing relationship maintenance, and institutional accountability that extends beyond project-specific interactions from the work group's inception through its completion.
3. **Balancing internal compliance with co-working structures.** The report incorporates required administrative and legal considerations from the UC (but not Tribal) perspective; however, the framework often presents as more aligned with internal compliance and approval processes within the UC systems than with co-developed governance approaches. Additional emphasis on how Tribal perspectives will inform these structures would help better align the operational design with the report's stated relational principles.
4. **Flowcharts and process completeness.** Some components of the process framework within the flowcharts remain under development (e.g., criteria yet to be determined). Clarifying or completing these elements prior to implementation is necessary to improve consistency and reduce ambiguity across campuses.
5. **Confidentiality and data governance.** While the report appropriately recognizes the sensitivity of Tribal information and relevant legal constraints, it could be strengthened by more clearly articulating systemwide expectations and safeguards for confidentiality, documentation practices, and data governance, particularly in light of public records requirements and the historical violation of California Indian data, confidentiality, and principles of consent by settler colonial entities such as the UC system.
6. **Funding and capacity.** The report encourages campuses to provide financial and logistical support for Tribal engagement where possible; however, the largely discretionary framing may lead to uneven implementation across campuses. A clearer list of expectations regarding baseline support would help promote more consistent and equitable practices, particularly as they pertain to the uneven ways funding is allocated across the system.
7. **Implementation and accountability.** The report would benefit from additional clarity regarding implementation and accountability. Specifically, it would be helpful to outline how adoption of these practices will be monitored, how consistency across campuses will

be ensured, and whether systemwide tracking or evaluation mechanisms will be established.

8. **Further reading:** We humbly and respectfully suggest that the work group members consider engaging more deeply with Indigenous-centered best practices for universities and academics, including Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi), *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*; Memorial University, Civic Lab for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR Lab); Michigan State University and the Native American Institute, *Reciprocal Research: A Guidebook to Centering Community in Partnership with Indigenous Nations*; the California Housing and Community Development's *Tribal Nations Engagement Handbook*; or any other text that outlines frameworks for good relations.