Alisa Ciulla [00:00:00]:

I was taught that a land acknowledgement is like literally acknowledging the land because in our spirituality, we acknowledge the plants around us, the bodies of water, as people, as mothers, as brothers, as sisters. So when I think of a land acknowledgement, I think of something different. Like I think of singing a song to the water. I think of offering a prayer, putting down tobacco. That's what I really see, and I feel like that's what we're truly missing.

Chisa Uyeki [00:00:26]:

Welcome to the Mount San Antonio College Podcast. I'm Chisa Uecki, a Mount Sac professor and librarian, and I'm pleased to be your host for this season. Our goal is to keep you connected to our campus by bringing you the activities and events you may not have time to attend to share the interesting things our colleagues are creating and innovative ways they are supporting and connecting with Mount Sac students. Join me as we explore Mount Sac.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:00:59]:

What does it really mean to acknowledge land? In this episode, we have an insightful conversation with Primavera Resa Nakonechny, director of Mount Sac's First Peoples Native center and a descendant of the Tarahumara or Ramuri peoples. They are joined by Alyssa Chula, a Mount Sac student of Pueblo descent as well. And our conversation is going to be led by our host, Chisa Uyeki, guiding us through a conversation on the importance of language, the practices and meaning behind land acknowledgments how Mount Sac is working to craft a land acknowledgement with tribal input, and how we can go beyond statements into meaningful actions. In addition, our guests are going to share the importance of our spiritual connection to the land, honoring ancestors, plants and animal kin alike. They also touch on how our daily lives, policies, songs, and prayers can honor the earth that we live on. So join us as we explore what it means to go from acknowledgement to meaningful action. Enjoy.

Chisa Uyeki [00:01:56]:

A land acknowledgement is a statement that gives recognition and respect to the indigenous persons who have been and continue to be stewards of the land that you are on, acknowledging that the lands are unceded. By that I mean that the lands were not transferred to those who may now hold deeds, but rather were procured through colonization, genocide, forced relocation, and other violent actions. So could you share the current land acknowledgement that we have at Mount Sac?

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:02:29]:

So Mount Sac right now we don't have a formal land acknowledgement. We have one that was borrowed from ucla, and we have one that I'm going to read and that was created by Dr. Francis Barela and myself for commencement this past commencement in 2020. What are we 2024 now? Part of the NASP grant that the first peoples that we have with the grant is we need to create a formal land acknowledgement with input from tribal community members. So that's something that I'm working on, and I want to be very intentional in that, in that saying I am putting together a group, an advocacy group with native American faculty and staff that we already have here at Mount Sac, and then also connecting with native American tribal leaders in our community. So we do have some folks already that have wanting to be a part of this. For example, we have Tongva input. We have Ohlone in Pomona, Ohlone tribe.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:03:29]:

We have Kuia peoples. So we do have some tribal members that are very much interested. It's just more of us getting together as a coalition. And like, most importantly is what does the tribal members want to see? The chancellor's office does have a land acknowledgement, and there are some guidelines from the community college chancellor's office that they would like to see in land acknowledgements. So, for example, one of the things is saying that recognizing the tribal members who were here before. So we have that. But another one is saying that it's in time and memorial. So we need to kind of adjust our land acknowledgement that Dr.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:04:09]:

Francis Burrell and I had created to include some of those guidelines. Another one is recognizing, you need to say the colonization has happened. I think arsa say that. And then recognizing, like, where are we going forward? Like, understanding the practices and understanding that tribal people had the resiliency piece and how they have contributed not only to the land, but have contributed to culture and where we are as people moving forward. And then the last one, most importantly is, is there something else that the tribe wants to see? So that's something that we're getting input and we're learning from tribal members and that relationship and seeing what makes sense for Mount Sac. So we don't have one finalized right now. We a working draft. And I do want to mention that if anyone at Mount Sac has a land acknowledgement that they're currently using, that's fine.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:05:00]:

That's okay. Because we're working on the official one with tribal input, And I'm hoping that that to be finalized by next year's commencement. It's a big ask. So I don't know if we'll have it ready in time again, because we just have a lot of people, you know, coming together. But that is the internal goal of minds. Okay, so I will read the land acknowledgement that we have that we did say in their past commencement and the working draft that we have, and this is the one that Dr. Francis Barela and myself, we had created. And again, Dr.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:05:31]:

Frances Barela is a Native American faculty member and has been doing great advocacy work at Mount Sac for over 26 years. We at Mount San Antonio College acknowledge that the land which we occupy is unceded ancestral territory of the Gabrielino Tongva people, indigenous to this region for thousands of years. We recognize the Gabrielino Tongva people have suffered an immense loss of their people, culture, lands, water, and other natural resources due to the theft, murder, kidnapping, and enslavement. These injustices started with colonization, and most Indigenous people consider colonization a current and ongoing process. The Gabrielino Tongva view this land as a source of healing, nourishment, and protection. As students, faculty, staff, and alumni of Mount San Antonio College, we honor the Gabrielino Tongva by acknowledging their legacy and current lived experiences. We recognize this land acknowledgement as an opportunity for Mount Sac to advocate for Indigenous students through through support of the First Peoples Native center and continue learning and shared knowledge for Native American and Indigenous peoples.

Chisa Uyeki [00:06:51]:

Thank you so much for sharing that and for working to develop it. I know that there has been some controversy about land acknowledgements, mostly that they can be performative in that some might think the work of decolonization or justice begins and ends with giving a land acknowledgement. Can you both share what you think of land acknowledgements?

Alisa Ciulla [00:07:14]:

Well, the first thing that I want to say is that I was unaware that the Chancellor's office actually had guidelines for land acknowledgements. But as it goes, like, land acknowledgments are starting to be more recognized, more popular, especially in college spaces that are more inclusive. So I'm actually very, very pleased to hear that. Like, I didn't even know. And also the requirements, like, I'm listening, right? And I'm like, that makes perfect sense. I love that. I love how we're making sure to include that we're moving forward in the land acknowledgement. Not just to bring everybody down, you know, and bring up the past, but actually, like, how are we going to use this trauma to go forward? And especially like, that being one of the goals of the NASA, like, to help us not only acknowledge the past, but to move forward.

Alisa Ciulla [00:07:54]:

So that makes me really excited. This is my first time reading this draft, and I really like it, and I really agree with it. I was having lots of conversations with people about the performative aspect of these land acknowledgments, and I'm just wondering, who are these even written by? Was this appropriate for this event even, like, you know, if a tree falls and no one's around here, like, what's the point? Like, if you're saying a land acknowledgment to a bunch of people who, you know, don't care or have no knowledge, then it kind of like, it falls on deaf ears. So I'm just debating that with some people. But I'm really pleased with this land acknowledgement. I'm very, like, excited for you guys to get the input from the tribal members. But one thing that I was taught was that land acknowledgements are not actually, you know, a long paragraph or, you know, mentioning which tribe. And also, by the way, names of the tribes that were given by Spanish colonizers, not even the proper name of the tribe in the first place.

Alisa Ciulla [00:08:51]:

Okay? So that will always bothered me. Always. This is a land acknowledgement that's inclusive for people, but you're putting the label that was given to them by their oppressor, which is crazy. But I was taught that a land acknowledgement is like, literally acknowledging the land, because in our spirituality, we acknowledge the plants around us, the bodies of water, as people, as mothers, as brothers, as sisters. So when I think of a land acknowledgement, I think of something different. Like, I think of singing a song to the water. I think of offering a prayer, putting down tobacco. That's what I really see, and I feel like that's what we're truly missing.

Alisa Ciulla [00:09:27]:

This is beautiful, and I appreciate that it was written by you. I am so excited to hear all of these new developments and how we're going to be making these. I'm excited to hear that they're. There's requirements, like, we're holding people accountable for doing everything they're supposed to. And there's lots of different land acknowledgements from different regions and how we're going to honor those specific people to those lands. But that's the thing, that land acknowledgement is missing for me. I need some traditional songs to not only mention the name of these people, but to actually perpetuate the spreading of their culture. I want to see some real adding the flavor of these people to the situation.

Alisa Ciulla [00:10:06]:

And I feel like we can achieve that through sharing a prayer, speaking native language, acknowledging, like, literal land. And I feel like that's what I want to see.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:10:15]:

That's very cool. I don't know how I can follow that with Alisa. That's beautiful. So Dr. Francis Barela and I, when we created this land acknowledgement, I want to firstly say, like, I'm so proud that Mount Sac has a land acknowledgement and that folks were giving a land acknowledgement because in spaces across higher education, not everybody is there yet. I think that that's just so great and so beautiful and powerful and that again is thanking the advocators who have been here before and doing the great work. I think at this point we can move a little bit more and go a little bit deeper and do a bit more with the land acknowledgements. So that's what we were doing when the one with Francis and I, with Dr.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:10:54]:

Francis Sprell and I created at the end. I wanted to say we need a course of action. We need them do something. So it's great that we're acknowledging the folks, but what else can we ask of them? Is it to donate to a cause? Is it to understand whose land? Indigenous land that you're on with some land acknowledgements. And we did review a few from different community colleges and universities and see what is an ask that other land acknowledgments are asking of folks as well. So some of them will say, you know, know whose indigenous land you're on. And there's a great website called Native Land Ca and it's Native. And that's a beautiful website because it shows indigenous land on a global aspect across the world, you can see who's indigenous land and what indigenous languages that they're speaking there as well.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:11:44]:

So first we were going to go with that, and then we were like, well, we want them to recognize here for Mount Sac. Like, how does that make sense for Mount Sac? So we're like, what if we recognize the First Peoples Center? So the First Peoples Native center is still grant funded. And ultimately the goal is going to be to institutionalize the center. And so we wanted to put that in there as a course of action. So that's what we have. We recognize this land acknowledgement as an opportunity for Mount Sac to advocate for Indigenous students. Because the Native center is new. It's fairly new, about two years.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:12:14]:

And so we wanted that to continue going forward. And then also the way that Mount Sac can support first is through support of the First People's Native Center. And so as Mount Sac continues to support the First People's Native center with eventually, you know, the goal, I think, across shared spaces is to institutionalize the center. And then we also understand that if we say the First Peoples Native center, that acts as a recruitment tool. Because when we say this at commencement or in other public spaces, the community around Mount Sac will then start to hear, there's a Native center here. Then that hasn't existed before. Right. So we understand that that'll be utilized as a recruitment tool and advertising to Walnut and the neighboring community saying, hey, students, there's a Native center here.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:13:01]:

And we understand already that the Native population is looking for colleges and universities that are in support of indigenous representation. So when they hear a land acknowledgement and they hear that there's a Native center, that's going to drive more of that recruitment piece and that support. Right. For students to understand exactly that there is a Native center here. And for our current students to also know that there is a Native center because it's so new, so maybe not everybody's aware yet. And so that's kind of where we were going with that. And we also wanted for the community to understand the First Peoples Native center as a cultural and educational hub. So because we partner very intentionally with other cultural centers and also with faculty and staff, we wanted the community to understand that they can come here to Mount Sac because it's a community college.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:13:51]:

So community college services the community. So in that way, the community can also see the First Sepals Native center as an educational resource, as a cultural hub for them to have to expand on their learning if they wanted that. A way to find community here, a way to find education, a way that Mount Sac is in that way for them to embrace and welcome Native presence for the students that are currently attending here, but also for the community at large. And so that's why we had put the support of the First Peoples Native center. And that was our course of action. It may change later on as our needs change, but where we are right now, because the First Peoples Native center is so new and where we have the objectives of the grant and again to that awareness piece, that's why we had created this action. And that's where the land acknowledgement is where it is right now. That's why it was really important for us to also put current students, faculty, staff and alumni as the target audience and who we were specifically speaking to.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:14:52]:

Because we also believe that as alumni, they serve as wisdom leaders at the next level. And we wanted them to remember that they still have community here at Mount Sac and in that mentorship piece as that wisdom leaders to still connect with us and the current students that are here so that our current students know that they know someone at the next level, if they are, you know, either transferred to the four year or if they're in their career, they have a wealth of knowledge, our alumni, and we want our alumni to be able to still connect with the current student population here at Mount Sac and to still connect with our current Native population.

Chisa Uyeki [00:15:29]:

I love that. And I had not heard the alumni part, but I think that's so important when we think about our community and as we change and grow as a college, to include the alumni in that kind of change and growth. So when I was reading about land acknowledgements, one of the things I was reading came from the Native Governance center in Minneapolis, and they have put together a list of tips for those who are interested in creating an indigenous land acknowledgement. And I really love their first step that they recommend is self reflection, which I think is so powerful. So I do wonder about, as a college, how we do self reflection around things like embracing a land acknowledgement.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:16:20]:

I can say that, you know, especially with practices like this, where folks kind of ask, usually when I'm doing land acknowledgements, they'll say, can you elaborate a little bit more on the purpose and meaning behind a land acknowledgement? And so I'll divide a little bit more into indigenous ways of knowing. And in the indigenous ways of knowing, just like as Alyssa had, you know, so beautifully had mentioned that, you know, first and foremost, as indigenous people, we give thanks to the land. And at the core of it is the land is what we believe. You know, we protect, we love, we give thanks to. But not only the land, we give thanks to our ancestors because we believe that we're all interconnected and we all connect with the land. And so what that looks like is not only our people ancestors, we give thanks to our plant ancestors and animal ancestors, and to so birds, insects, animals, cells, organisms, everything is interconnected, and we give thanks to that. And in that way, when I speak on indigenous ways of knowing and kind of go a little bit deeper, like, expand on what that means a little bit, it gives opportunity for self reflection, and it kind of gives in that way, that holistic perspective and understanding. What does the self mean in the larger scope, in looking at it that way, in how does that person resonate with the world, right? And the earth? And we speak also about planning for seven generations.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:17:51]:

So planning for seven generations is understanding the decisions that we make. Has our previous ancestors, our current ancestors here now and then our future ancestors? So in that way, it also invites students to say, what kind of ancestor do you want to be? What kind of legacy do you want to live, right, or do you want to leave behind? Excuse me. And in that way, we're hoping that we are creating peoples that are becoming leaders in their community. And also just like, really great Humans. Right. Because again, at the center of it is that to be indigenous is to be loving and is to be healing. And so in those practices, that is how we're honoring Mother Earth and then preparing Mother Earth for our future generations.

Alisa Ciulla [00:18:35]:

Something that I always take with me is that I do not allow the land to live. The land allows me to live. And that's what so many people neglect with when they litter, when they pollute, when they do all of these things like over industrialized, they forget that you are not allowing the land to live. The land allows you to live. And between humans and animals and plants, we. Well, specifically between humans and plants, we literally come from the same organism. Okay. Eukaryotic cells are related to prokaryotic cells in that we both have a double membrane, which points to the fact that we come from the same place.

Alisa Ciulla [00:19:10]:

So we literally come from the same place according to my biology class that I'm taking at Mount Sac. So which is so perfect to me because it aligns very much with my beliefs. And so when I have this relationship with the land around me, it's so different than other people. Like, I literally reflect on that and I always take time to show that respect. And like the fact that a tree will sit there for generations and generations and they will watch everyone, they will live beyond you, and they are your elder. So when we talk about land acknowledgements, I think that's the thing that is missing. The fact that we're not literally like acknowledging the living organism, which is our land, which is our ancestor.

Chisa Uyeki [00:19:53]:

So I so appreciate those ideas and how we can add more complexity to the land acknowledgements and build understanding, as you were saying earlier with songs and with prayer and with building real understanding about the cultures. So I wanted to ask, because it sounds like when you hear a land acknowledgement or you know that one is going to be given, that that's affirming for you.

Alisa Ciulla [00:20:19]:

Yeah, I feel that it is affirming to me, but it depends how it's done. Like, if there is a land acknowledgement, it depends on the quality of it. Like if it is a low quality land acknowledgement, I will get the opposite reaction. I will feel unwelcome and I will feel like my culture is treated with disrespect and, you know, with carelessness. And of course, if you're going to do it, then you might as well execute it to the best of your ability. It's not a good idea to do something half. Never a good idea. And I didn't talk at all about self Reflection.

Alisa Ciulla [00:20:50]:

And even when I was deciding to come on this podcast, I had to reflect on myself. And myself is made up of everyone in my community, which is how Native American people see it. So I had to think, are my ideas aligned truly with what people have taught me? And when I come and I share my opinion about land acknowledgements, does that reflect those who have taught me? And so I had to sit with that, and I had to think, well, how do people in my community or in spaces that I've been, how do they conduct a land acknowledgement? And what I found is that in schools, land acknowledgements are usually like the paragraph and everything. But when I've done land acknowledgements with other Native people, like staying overnight, camping, things like that, you know, because I'm very like, with the community, especially with the camping. Native American people love to go camping. So whenever we wake up, we literally would wake up at the crack of dawn at 6 o'clock, go run down the hill and go greet the ocean with a song. Literally go greeted with a song and bring our instruments, seeing everybody. And that's something that's missing here.

Alisa Ciulla [00:21:52]:

And if we're to be able to create something like that here at Mount Sac, not only would it help to spread those things that are, you know, our songs, our language, our culture, the way that we practice is dwindling, like, every day. So if you're able to sing a song and it's, you know, people are able to absorb that, it's literally carrying on the culture by that small act, very small act. And that's basically what I would like to see. I feel affirmed when a land acknowledgement is done correctly, but when it's done incorrectly, it can cause me to, you know, feel even worse than if there was none at all.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:22:27]:

I think for me, land acknowledgements is just so sacred. And so I just really would appreciate when folks are intentional about delivering the land acknowledgements instead of it being, right, performative or feeling like it's a box that they check off and that's it. When I started doing land Acknowledgements, a previous institution I used to work at, and I had asked if I can start doing the land acknowledgements. And the elder there, a Cahuilla elder, had mentioned, you know, like, you're not ready yet. And so after I had served an apprenticeship with him and really understanding more the community and the service to protecting and preserving the earth, and once students had started accepting me and calling me an elder is when the students had said, like, you know, you're ready. You can start doing the Land acknowledgements. And so amongst like Native communities, people have different opinions on who should be delivering the land acknowledgements. So for me, it was.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:23:26]:

It was a Native person who would do the land acknowledgement. But it's someone who really lives this as their ontology. They live every day. They protect the land, preserve the land, really understand the epistemology that we are all interconnected and we come from the earth. Right now doing this work here, the chancellor's office, again has guidelines. And so within the chancellor's office, it does say that the highest ranking person in the hierarchy does the land acknowledgement. So I think that that's something around putting it back on who is the highest level, senior level position person that they need to recognize that that institution is on the natural caretakers of the land and maybe moving forward towards helping Native people overall. Doing this work, you connect with a lot of Native persons.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:24:17]:

And sometimes the rhetoric is Native people already know that they have been oppressed. Native people already know that this is their land. So therefore we need to have others kind of clue them in into the conversation. Folks who don't understand this work, and they can start through the land acknowledgement, start reconnecting and understanding that because Native people already know. And so therefore the tax shouldn't be placed back on Native people. For me, I can see both sides. Again, I came from a place where delivering the land acknowledgement is a huge privilege. It's a huge sacred act.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:24:52]:

It is a rite of passage into the Native community. So it's not something to be taken so lightly. I think where we are at Mount Sac, once we have that group solidified a little bit more and we have input from the Native community on who they would like to see delivering the land acknowledgements, that's when we'll come together as a group to say what makes sense for Mount Sac. And then that's where we'll go forward. But right now, we don't have any of that solidified just quite yet. At least for me. The biggest things that I want to see is that it not be performative. At least someone who delivers a land acknowledgement, they understand it with care.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:25:26]:

For me, I have a personal preference for Native folks just because for such a long time, again, we were under threat of erasure. And anytime we have an opportunity to highlight Native presence that's very sacred, you can tell that the other person had intentionality behind it to really center at the forefront, Native presence, Native voices, Native experiences, like, we need to see that more. But again, we will decide as a group like who will be delivering the land acknowledgments at Mount Sac, I feel.

Alisa Ciulla [00:25:56]:

Like it's a non negotiable request to have a Native American person do the land acknowledgement. I feel like an individual who is not a part of our culture, not a part of our community, would not be able to accurately deliver a land acknowledgement, especially in the way that I want it to be delivered, which is just my opinion. I went on a camping trip with some Native youth and of course I spoke to my mom. She's my number one teacher, my number one elder. And I said, mom, like, is the way that I feel about land acknowledgements, right? And she said, yes, it is right? And we do want these types of things. And she tells me, like, how on earth can someone who's not Native give a land acknowledgment in the first place? Like, how are they supposed to sing that song? And I said, well, mom in school, land acknowledgments are a little bit different than singing a song. And she goes, what? And, you know, she's telling me all these things. And I talked to my friends and said, how do you feel about land acknowledgements on campus? And they're like, you know what? They're performative.

Alisa Ciulla [00:26:50]:

Like, I don't really feel. And I asked them for their suggestions. So when I come here, I don't say that I speak for everybody, but I did listen and I did come hopefully to represent them.

Chisa Uyeki [00:27:00]:

Thank you so much. Thank you both so much for your time and sharing your experience and your thoughts. It's powerful and I'm so thankful to have been able to be in this space with you and to share what you've had to say with our Mount Sac community. So thank you.

Primavera Reza-Nakonechny [00:27:19]:

Thank you for inviting us again, Chisa. It's a huge privilege, huge opportunity. Thank you so much.

Chisa Uyeki [00:27:26]:

Thank you for listening to the Mount San Antonio College Podcast, brought to you by Mount Saks POD Office and created in partnership with Avant House Media. Original music created and edited by Neera Azira. Be sure to check out our growing library of over 230 episodes and let us know your thoughts. You can reach me, chisa Uecki at cu y e k I@mountsac.edu. wishing you an amazing year and happy listening.