Indigenous People and Wisconsin Idea

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The University of Wisconsin-Madison is constructed on the ancestral lands of the Ho-Chunk Nation. The University recognizes the importance of acknowledging and respecting Indigenous cultures, histories, and contributions. Subsequently, UW-Madison has made an effort to acknowledge, celebrate, and honor the Indigenous peoples who have called this land home for generations. In this article, we will explore the various initiatives and practices that the University of Wisconsin-Madison has implemented to try and honor Indigenous people and retain the integrity of their heritage on its campus.

Student activism has often been the source of reform and change at UW-Madison. In 1968, a group of twenty Native Americans students formed a group called “The Coalition of Native Tribes for Red Power” or the CNTRP for short, to create a list of demands to better support and honor indigenous students and their heritage within the university system.  One specific aim of this group was to get the University to create an American Indian studies program, which they later succeeded in the fall of 1972. In the process, the CNTRP presented four challenges pertaining to Native students’ academic experiences, pressuring the university to be more inclusive and resourceful towards Native American students and the university still evidently bears the fruit of this labor today. They asked the university to hire at least four Native Americans to work with students on campus, increase the amount of Native American students on campus, give more resources to Native American communities, and for the language requirement for Native students to be changed such that Native student who spoke their native tongue would be accepted on the basis that their English classes would fulfill the foreign language requirement.

In 1973 CNTRP rebranded as “Wunk Sheek” which still operates on campus under the same name. As in most recent news, UW-Madison has stated that they will be [covering the full cost of tuition](https://news.wisc.edu/uw-madison-to-cover-full-cost-of-undergraduate-degree-for-students-from-wisconsin-indian-tribes/) for undergraduate, law (J.D), and medical (M.D) for students from Wisconsin Indian tribes. This initiative is being called the “Wisconsin Tribal Educational Promise”. Chancellor Mnooking said that, “the feedback from tribal leaders and Native students was invaluable in designing the program.” Tribal leaders shared how their academic experiences were affected by financial insecurity, even sleeping in his car while attending and taking classes at the university.

For our media project, we took inspiration from UW-Madison’s recent efforts to display Ho-chunk heritage on everyday sites on campus, [such as hanging banners on Bascom Hill](https://news.wisc.edu/artists-bring-ho-chunk-beadwork-imagery-to-giant-banners-on-bascom-hall/). Looking at the previous logos over the course of UW’s history, we combined the typical “W” logo along with the Ho-Chunk seal. While the effects of settler colonialism cannot be reprimanded with mere changes in aesthetics, acknowledging and honoring the Ho-Chunk nation in more aspects of university life will bring awareness to the history of the land our university is built upon.

New logo:

A red and black logo with a white and black text

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Inspired from:

A logo of the university of wisconsin

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