

Partnership Spotlight: Virginia Tech University (VT)

Virginia Tribal Education Consortium (VTEC) encourages spotlighting people and organizations that are instrumental in advancing opportunities for Indigenous Citizens and community members. For colleges, we ask the following question: “What is your institution doing to support and welcome Indigenous students?” Below is the response from Virginia Tech University (VT):

- In August of 2016, a physical space was dedicated for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to utilize as a [community center](#) and gathering space.
- In 2017 VT held its first inaugural [powwow](#) and this has continued since then as an annual tradition organized by the [center](#) and [Native at VT student organization](#).
- Virginia Tech also has an active chapter of [AISES \(American Indian Science and Engineering Society\)](#). They attend conferences each year.
- On Feb. 18, 2019, history was made at Virginia Tech as the University Council approved a formal resolution to observe **Indigenous Peoples Day** on campus. **A full day of campus programming now takes place each year on the second Monday of October**. The full resolution can be found [here](#) and was written by Virginia Tech's Indigenous students.
- While the campus has done [land acknowledgements](#) for several years now, research on campus history was conducted over the last several years in order to contribute to a more formal land acknowledgement that could be adopted as official university language. Monacan community members, like Vicky Ferguson, contributed to this process as well as VT history faculty, American Indian Studies faculty, and our Indigenous faculty Staff Caucus. In the Spring of 2023, this language was officially approved and adopted by University council. It can be found [here](#).
- Virginia Tech has an [Indigenous faculty/staff group](#) to build community among Native employees and help retain them. They also advocate for issues on campus that impact Native students, faculty, and staff.
- The center does a full month of **heritage month programming each year**, but also has programming throughout the year. **There is a program in the center at least once a week**. This can include cultural workshops, talking circles, Indigenous research talks, community nights, student leadership and professional development, student led programs, etc. These programs often include food which helps to **combat food insecurity** when their meal plans run low. They also provide awareness and education to the broader campus community.

- Each May we host a **Native grad ceremony**. This is not in place of the larger graduation or departments graduations. It is an addition to those which offer a more intimate recognition ceremony for grads and their families. Cultural components are woven into this ceremony such as storytelling and spiritual messages from leaders of Virginia's tribal nations. Folks like Chickahominy Chief Stephen Adkins have been invited to give this message in the past. Students receive a Native stole at the ceremony as well.
- The center also does **1:1 advocacy and advising**, assisting students with whatever challenges they are trying to navigate while in college.
- There is an [American Indian Studies minor](#) which students can pursue; it requires 18 hours.
- There are currently multiple grant programs which support Indigenous students on campus. One is a USDA funded grant that has engaged peer mentoring, Indigenous leadership education, provides internship opportunities, and has funded an elder-in-residence week for the last several years. This summer it will also fund a Native College Access week on campus (free to students and families). We have a Department of Education grant that can support conferencing travel costs for Native students and has allowed us to offer additional holistic wellness programming. There is a more recent grant project that will focus on increasing the recruitment and retention of diverse students in Agriculture through various resources.
- There is an [Indigenous Community garden](#) that regularly plants and harvests, engages programing, and engages with the tribes of Virginia around seed saving and heirloom plants.
- Along with the Native Faculty Alliance and other faculty on campus, VT engages **in tribal outreach** activities when there are requests from tribes regarding special assistance on projects in their communities. This is an effort to help tribes leverage university resources in ways that benefit their communities, their own goals and initiatives, and their sovereignty. We have assisted with tribal grant applications that were successfully funded, hosted grant writing workshops, consulted on land-use projects, assisted with digital storytelling projects, etc.
- **Solitude-Fraction** is another area on campus that often engages indigenous programming. A contested historical site on campus, it is run by [Victoria Ferguson of Monacan Nation](#). The site is intertwined with legacies of slavery in the area. Victoria can very eloquently educate on not so pleasant histories that interconnect the institutions history, European contact history, Indigenous and settler relations, and legacies of slavery.

- Grad student Desiree Shelley and others recently organized a **native language conference** in summer 2023 which was well attended.
- We have an [Indigenous Alumni group](#) which has become more active in recent years.
- We currently have two **Native scholarship opportunities**
 - [The tribal match scholarship](#)
 - [The Lockee Scholarship](#)

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