

The University of Arizona: Inciting Change

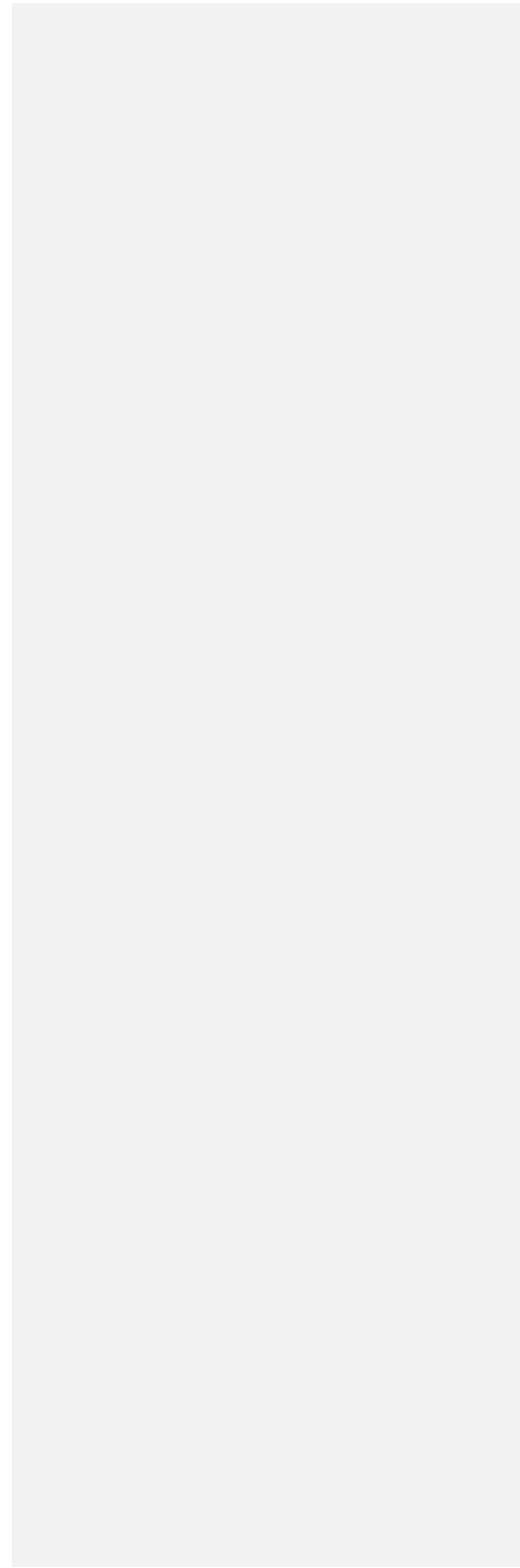
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HEA616: American Higher Education

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Land-grant universities serve an important role within higher education. The role is to make their history transparent and acknowledge what being a land-grant institution means for how the institution has affected the Indigenous American tribes that once occupied the land and how they continue to affect Indigenous people in the current day. Making this history accessible is an integral part of an institution's obligation to the community it serves along with upholding the values of the institution.

The University of Arizona holds the land grant status, making it irrefutably linked to the diaspora and colonization of Indigenous American people and their land. To analyze the history of this institution is to acknowledge and intentionally place focus on the voices of those who were harmed and dehumanized by the establishment of this school while acknowledging that it is those voices that are often missing in the official university archives.

Territories, Land Grants, & Colonization

Arizona sought to be a U.S. territory between the years of 1853-1863, largely through the Mexican-American War which ended due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. By the year 1863, the Territory of Arizona was officially established, meaning that this land was operating under U.S. laws. During the formation of this territory, the U.S. government initially recognized Indigenous nations and the laws they held while acknowledging their lawful occupation of the land. Due to the land being recognized as pre-occupied, the U.S. government would make attempts to expand into new land by using treaties and negotiation with Indigenous nations; in Arizona only 3 treaties were ratified (1 with the Apache and 2 with the Navajo Nation) (Jr. et al., 2025). Treaty making was no longer happening as of March 3, 1871, at which point Congress stopped recognizing Indigenous nations as independent nations. The new process of claiming

Commented [DH1]: A very long sentence. I suggest breaking up.

Commented [DH2]: I appreciate the general direction, this just reads a bit wordy and unclear. Revise. Additionally, it feels disconnected from the role of land grant institutions.

Commented [DH3]: This reads a bit incomplete and unclear.

Commented [DH4]: Interesting. I am curious how you are connecting land grant to the colonization process. I think this is good, but some ground work needs to be laid before stating such. How? Why? To what degree is this link situated? I think there is just two different ideas currently at work 1. Displacement of Native communities and 2. Land grant institutions. Without clear ideas on these pieces, connecting them hastily feels incomplete.

Commented [DH5]: Nice job. So I am curious if this is your narrative statement? Is this the direction you are going? If so, be much more direct.

Commented [DH6]: Cite.

land that was occupied by Indigenous nations was to act on executive order from Congress or the president which stated to take possession of the land and set aside reservations of land for the Indigenous people to stay on (also restricting these Indigenous people to solely these reservations) (Jr. et al., 2025). This resulted in the forced removal of Indigenous people through military action and violence. Strategies such as destroying the Indigenous tribe’s weapons, livestock, crops, etc. would be utilized to force Indigenous people into submission. These efforts a referred to as a scorched-earth campaign (Smithsonian, 2019). Different horrific tactics were used throughout Arizona to relocate Indigenous people so that the U.S. could build on the stolen land.

The University of Arizona was initially granted \$25,000 in 1885 to begin building upon Arizona territory to work towards establishing itself as an institution focused on agriculture and science to produce an educated workforce (University of Arizona Graduate College, n.d). Morrill Act of 1862 included the University of Arizona in their land grants to expand public education within the United States. The Morrill Acts were enacted under the primary guise of “establishing higher education to make it more accessible to everyone”, but this failed in a sense as it simultaneously became a part of the massive dispossession of Indigenous lands (University of Arizona CALES, n.d.).

The University of Arizona was founded in 1885, with 160 acres of public land purchased by Artemas Fay from the U.S. government. This land patent was authorized with no record of treaty, act of congress, or executive order (Jr et al., 2025). More land was transferred to the university through several different deals and other modes of bargaining; no treaties or recognition of the Indigenous people were in any way considered during the establishment of the

Commented [DH8]: Reads like a run-on sentence. Revise and clarify.

Commented [DH9]: Cite.

Commented [DH10]: Avoid this in formal submissions and writing.

Commented [DH11]: Clarity and concise language needed. You might say “ The University of Arizona was initially granted \$25,000 in 1885 to establish a curricular focus on agriculture and science in an effort to educate a growing workforce.

Commented [DH12]: Cite.

Commented [DH13]: Curious why there is another quotation mark here and above. Just something to address. I like the general sentiment and direction.

University of Arizona, aside from guidelines given by the U.S. government. The first class of students was welcomed to the campus in 1890 (Jr. et al., 2025).

Land-Grant Project

In the year 2018, the University of Arizona decided to take their position as a White House-designated Native American/Alaskan Native serving institution more intentionally. This means that the institution began to implement a specific strategic plan which would provide Executive positions to Indigenous people who would be focused on the success and advancement of Indigenous students who are enrolled at the university (University of Arizona Strategic Plan, 2018). This initiative led to more representation, support, and focus on Native American voices, giving them a voice within the university.

Part of this shift to incorporate and amplify Indigenous voices at the University of Arizona, The Land-Grant Project was created by the Daniel F. Crachiolo Law Library in the James E. Rogers College of Law (University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law, n.d). As stated by the University of Arizona's Land-Grant Project website (2025), the two aims for this project are,

“(1) to research, share and begin to understand how the University of Arizona has been enriched from the 19th century dispossession of Native nations’ land in Arizona; and, (2) to provide students, faculty, researchers and Arizona residents with an authoritative source of information and documentation about our history which will serve as a launching pad for further investigation, ground-breaking research and original scholarship.”

Commented [DH14]: Overall, nice job with this section. I might suggest inserting your voice a bit more to help make direct points and narrative themes...but again, nice job.

Commented [DH15]: Revise for concise language.

As this is a foundation for the University of Arizona’s mission to serve and support a diverse, growing student population, the expectation of centering student voices was placed onto the institution.

Recent Institution Action

From 1863 to the present day, the University of Arizona has thrived off lands which did not belong to them, in an attempt of reparation they have created several implementations to initiate an integration of Indigenous culture to their campus. These efforts signify the beginning of a much-needed conversation for providing support to students and staff who come from Indigenous backgrounds. Some of these efforts include intentionally hiring Indigenous people into executive administration positions and providing scholarships for Indigenous students, which are all commendable gestures. On paper, there have been various strides towards supporting Indigenous communities, but how have recent developments contributed to this narrative? It would be amiss to report on the improvements that the University of Arizona has accomplished without acknowledging the recent diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) changes that have been executed within the last year, creating frustration and feelings of betrayal from the student population.

The University of Arizona welcomed a new president, Suresh Garimella, to serve the university beginning the spring semester of 2025. Garimella had already begun making changes to the university’s operations within the first month of the inauguration to comply with President Donald Trump’s request for universities to modify their DEI initiatives to align with the government’s definition of DEI (House, 2025). Donald Trump filed this executive order, which

Commented [DH16]: I am missing your voice here. So instead of just stating this information, take it and then add some additional narrative (your voice) to make direct connections. Why is important? Is it enough? Is it something you believe separates UA from other institutions and efforts? Here is where you can offer your analysis.

Commented [DH17]: Good! This is your voice and offers insight and a narrative.

Commented [DH18]: Here we go! Great job. This is the objective of the assignment. To critically analyze information and use it to draw and craft your own analysis and narrative. Nice job here. I suggest some citations to show this is the case (i.e, DEI changes, lack of progress, etc.).

resulted in threatened federal funding to universities that fail to comply, in response, the University of Arizona adjusted their Land Acknowledgement (2021), which originally read as,

“We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O’odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.”

The new Land Acknowledgement voids the section which states, “Committed to diversity and inclusion...” (University of Arizona Land Acknowledgement, 2025). This change was done quietly on February 12, 2025, there was no public statement that occurred from university officials (Silversmith, 2025a).

In addition to the removal of DEI language out of compliance, the University of Arizona terminated the 6 cultural resource center directors (CRC) that served the students of the university, including the Native American Student Affairs (NASA) director (Silversmith, 2025b). This is a part of a 2025 proposal to consolidate all 6 resource centers into one multicultural hub (Sannappanavar, 2025b), which was met with even more frustration from faculty and students. The plan that was put into action during the summer of 2025 which resulted in the termination of 6 CRC directors and stripped the resource centers of their official university resource center title, instead these centers are to be referred to as “student spaces” to further distance the university from associating itself with diversity and inclusion as it cowers towards

Commented [DH19]: Okay this is good information and likely as a result of hoping to fly under the radar of being challenged from outside entities, but I am wondering your thoughts. Here would be a great place to situate this within the larger context you are trying to convey. Does it run counter to the identity of UA, other efforts? Does this feel on par with the way in which UA has operated? Build more here to make a direct statement.

the current presidential administration despite being urged by its very own students to not comply.

Commented [DH20]: Ugh. Far to common in the recent months.

These sudden and large-scale changes left students and faculty feeling afraid and uneasy about what this means for future university action and policy implementation. The removal and dismantling of these student spaces conducted by the University of Arizona raised many concerns as the university itself is a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) while also serving over 2,000 Native American students (University of Arizona Census, 2024.)

and now these students are left with their support spaces facing great hardship. The recent action calls the University of Arizona and its priorities into question. What did all the work of the 2018 Strategic Plan and Land-Grant Project mean for them to take away progress the university made towards supporting their students, specifically those from Indigenous backgrounds.

Commented [DH21]: Address this.

Pressures from the Trump Administration

On October 1, 2025, the Trump Administration emailed nine universities (See Appendix A) requesting that they sign the Compact of Academic Excellence in Higher Education, the University of Arizona being one of those universities. This compact outlines guidelines for universities to follow surrounding policies that faculty and staff should follow when completing procedures such as not including sex and race in admissions/hiring processes, changing gendered bathrooms to align with the Trump Administration’s preference, adjusting the definition and rules for women’s sports, etc. accompanied by having to agree with various statements, one statement being, “academic freedom is not absolute” (Trump Administration, 2025), in order to receive priority federal research funding. Along with this compact, Trump gave the universities

Commented [DH22]: Similar to comment above. I think this is important context to the narrative you are trying to create, but be more direct and draw connection points to help facilitate that narrative. Again, instead of just reporting, report and weave into it your analysis and connection points.

Commented [DH23]: Scary.

until October 20, 2025, to provide a response and the official deadline to sign the compact would be November 21, 2025.

Students have been protesting, petitioning, and organizing to urge the university to reject this compact. There are parts of the compact that are believed to contradict the goals of higher education, this compact impedes on the academic freedom that is offered when entering higher education. On October 6th, 2025, the Arizona Faculty Senate voted to oppose this compact and on October 8, 2025, the Tucson City Council voted unanimously to oppose the compact and encourage the University of Arizona to do the same (Cuellar, 2025). As of October 20, 2025, President Suresh Garimella has put out a statement of rejection to the Trump Administration Compact. Garimella (2025) states that this compact holds a lot of values and policies that the University of Arizona already upholds but argues that research funding should not be given due to special treatment. Additionally, Garimella (2025) states that the University of Arizona will provide revisions along with policies already implemented at the University of Arizona.

Looking Forward

The University of Arizona has encountered a complicated history, from the forced removal of Indigenous people, to creating a plan of support and adding Indigenous voices into operation, to actions that contradict what the perceived mission of the university was. Established by the government and still facing pressures from the government today, the University of Arizona is a powerful institution. Their actions, words, and reputation serve as reminders of how history continues to impact us today. The foundational history of an institution does not ever change, but through proper acknowledgements, transparency, and assessing the needs of the students whom they serve will attest to the true nature of the institution. The country

is looking to the University of Arizona, along with the other higher education institutions being targeted, when it comes to the insistent requests being made by the government in terms of the future of higher education. Garimella may have denied the compact now, but there is damage that has been done to the student body by the repeated defunding and cutting of resources. Looking forward, the University of Arizona should be reminded of who they have harmed throughout history, reflect on how their actions are affecting their student population, and what that means in relation to their land-grant status

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Appendix A

List of Institutions Included in the First Compact Email Request from the Trump Administration

- Brown University
- Dartmouth College
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- University of Arizona
- University of Pennsylvania
- University of Southern California
- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Virginia
- Vanderbilt University

