

Pat Pitney
Interim President

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Today we recognize Alaska's Indigenous tribes with celebrations across our university system in honor of Indigenous Peoples' Day. The University of Alaska upholds Indigenous Peoples' Day with culturally relevant events in honor of the Indigenous people of this land who have thrived and survived in Alaska for more than 10,000 years.

On this day we also acknowledge the history of violence, forced assimilation, discrimination and injustice inflicted upon Alaska Natives, and how that trauma and stigma is still felt. At the university, we come together in our commitment to the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages, cultures and traditions, and recognize the critical need for integration of traditional knowledge into our curriculum and pedagogy. It is vital for all of us to do our part to re-examine what we have been taught to believe about our history, and to recognize the contributions of the First Alaskans to the past, present and future of our state.

This commemoration was first discussed in 1977 at a United Nations-sponsored conference where the issue of discrimination against Indigenous populations in the U.S. was raised. Thirty-eight years later, former Governor Bill Walker issued a proclamation making Alaska the first state in the nation to officially celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day rather than Columbus Day. The Alaska Legislature made it official in 2017 when it passed HB 78, permanently establishing the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples' Day. While the legacy of Italian explorer Christopher Columbus has been celebrated on the second Monday in October, Alaska chose to recognize our Alaska Native ancestors who as explorers, inventors and leaders built Alaska.

Today is about more than remembrance, it is a day of solidarity. Please join me in coming together to celebrate the rich culture, heritage, and achievements of Alaska's Indigenous Peoples.

Sincerely,
Pat Pitney
Interim President, University of Alaska