

Indigenous Directions Leadership Group

Territorial Acknowledgement at Concordia University, Tiohtià:ke/Montréal

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Indigenous Directions Leadership Group, Concordia University
Territorial Acknowledgement – February 16, 2017

English:

I/We would like to begin by acknowledging that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtià:ke commonly known as Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present, and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Français:

J'aimerais / Nous aimerions commencer par reconnaître que l'Université Concordia est située en territoire autochtone, lequel n'a jamais été cédé. Je reconnais/Nous reconnaissons la nation Kanien'kehá: ka comme gardienne des terres et des eaux sur lesquelles nous nous réunissons aujourd'hui. Tiohtià: ke / Montréal est historiquement connu comme un lieu de rassemblement pour de nombreuses Premières nations, et aujourd'hui, une population autochtone diversifiée, ainsi que d'autres peuples, y résident. C'est dans le respect des liens avec le passé, le présent et l'avenir que nous reconnaissons les relations continues entre les Peuples Autochtones et autres personnes de la communauté montréalaise.

History

Throughout our history, Concordia has sustained relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities on the Island of Tiohtià:ke or Montréal and its surrounding area. The Concordia Indigenous Directions Leadership Group is currently developing a history section on the **Indigenous Hub** to depict and celebrate many of the occasions and collaborations that we have shared. The following is a brief history and explanation of the territorial acknowledgment upon which we hope to build.

The Concordia community has developed many versions of territorial acknowledgements, practices, and gestures that continue to foster meaningful and respectful relationships with Indigenous community members, knowledge keepers, and collaborative partners. The territorial acknowledgment that we are practicing today is grounded in that history. Many members of Concordia's staff, faculty, students, and community partners have made a contribution to the discussion, wording, and rationale behind it. Our acknowledgment is built from cumulative efforts of many minds from diverse backgrounds and we hope to keep an on-going dialogue with all of our stakeholders.

Rationale (*How and why we worded the acknowledgement this way, line by line*)

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This specific version of the territorial acknowledgement was primarily authored by Shiann Wahéhshon Whitebean and Dr. Karl S. Hele, with significant contributions at the final stages from Dr. Louellyn White. The final draft was agreed upon unanimously and passed by the Indigenous Directions Leadership Group on February 16, 2017.

1. *“I/We would like to begin by acknowledging that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands”.*

We debated and discussed variations of this statement that included naming a number of First Nations and Indigenous communities that are rooted in the Island of Montreal and surrounding area. Many First Peoples claim the land and waterways as a homeland, traditional territory or birthplace of their people since time immemorial. This includes, but may not be limited to, the Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg (Algonquin). It is not our role to offer a determination of claim, instead we offer recognition and support of all Indigenous peoples and Nations who have and continue to make these lands and waters their homes. We kept the word “unceded” since there no agreements or treaties that have transferred title from any Indigenous Nation to Settler ownership or control; the land was occupied without permission. This also demonstrates that we recognize the injustices that are part of the colonial history of this place and that Concordia boldly supports and stands in solidarity with the Indigenous members of our community.

2. *The Kanien’kehá:ka Nation are recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today.*

Many Indigenous peoples, communities, and Nations helped to build the foundation of Tiohtià:ke. However, it is understood and widely supported that the Kanien’kehá:ka have a strong historic and ongoing presence in the territory with two communities bordering Montreal: Kahnawà:ke and Kanehsatá:ke. This is also in consideration of the oral tradition/history of the island that the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation has passed from generation to generation. We must recognize the role of the Kanien’kehá:ka in protecting and caring for the lands and waters that we share and enjoy today. Their stewardship is a model for how we must collectively respect our natural environment and community as a whole.

3. *Tiohtià:ke commonly known as Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations.*

The historic and current presence of two Kanien’kehá:ka communities is acknowledged by the use of the place name “Tiohtià:ke”, an abbreviation of “Teionihiohtià:kon” which loosely translates as “where the group divided/parted ways”. It is here “where the group divided/parted ways” that formed a natural stopping point for First Nations’ travellers. Thus the region since time immemorial has served as a gathering place which marked the area a key site of diplomacy, as well as for the exchange of culture, language, and goods. It is this centrality and importance of the region that drew the first settlers to the island. The importance of Montreal/ Tiohtià:ke for First Nations and Settlers was demonstrated in

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1701 when a Great Peace was negotiated and signed thereby ending a series of destructive wars among various First Nations.

4. *Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples.*

It is important to include our vibrant urban Indigenous community as well as the many peoples from diverse backgrounds that now reside here.

5. *We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.*

This is similar to a gathering of the minds. We are weaving together the past, present, and future of the entire Montreal community that is built on an Indigenous foundation. This is a reminder to anyone that is not Indigenous to this place that the history/past enabled us to be here, that Indigenous peoples and communities are still present and vital to our prosperity, and that we all must be engaged and invested in our collective future to move forward together.

Convocation (Graduation Ceremonies)

Spring Convocation ceremonies in 2017 included a territorial acknowledgement at the start of the proceedings, stated publicly by a lead member of Concordia's administration. The Indigenous Directions Leadership Group will continue to work with the Convocation planning committees and Concordia's administration to modify and adapt future convocation ceremonies in a way that includes and supports Indigenous identities, cultures, and languages. Our goal is to develop an inclusive and open environment for all Concordia students, staff, faculty, and community members. Concordia also supports the choice of any Indigenous peoples to wear regalia/cultural dress at Convocation ceremonies in addition to or as an alternative to formal academic attire.

FAQ

1. Q: Why does Concordia have a territorial acknowledgement?

A: Concordia is committed to fostering positive and mutually respectful relationships with local Indigenous peoples and communities, many of whom are students, staff, and faculty members. A territorial acknowledgement is a means of recognizing that Indigenous Peoples have a long history with the land and waters that we gather upon today and that this is their home and territory. This creates a space for dialogue, community building, and exchange in the true spirit of Tiohtià:ke/Montréal by drawing on its deep-rooted history as a place of diversity, diplomacy, and economic significance. This is also a way that we embrace our role within the territory to ensure the long-term prosperity of our diverse community and the longevity of the lands and waters for future generations.

2. Q: When/Where can the acknowledgement be stated/read aloud?

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A: Typically, the acknowledgment would be stated **at the beginning** of any event, meeting or gathering happening at Concordia or sponsored by the university within the territory. The objective of stating it at the beginning of an event is to situate the events and its participants. It also serves as a means of reaffirming the type of relationships that we, as an institution, collective, or individual, are establishing with the place and Caretakers of the lands and waters. Therefore, the intention set in the territorial acknowledgement should be stated consciously.

*In an effort to foster positive relationships with Indigenous peoples across Canada, a similar territorial acknowledgements should be stated elsewhere when visiting the territory of another Nation/People. This gesture respects local Indigenous peoples and communities outside of Concordia and the Montreal region when hosting or participating in events within other territories. Simply put, an acknowledgement of people, territory, or space should not be limited to the Concordia campus or Montreal area.

3. Q: Who can state/read aloud the acknowledgement?

A: A territorial acknowledgement can be read aloud/stated by anyone (it does not have to be an Indigenous person). The acknowledgement is particularly designed to assist people that do not identify as Indigenous to situate themselves within an Indigenous place/territory. It is also designed to remind people of a deeper history that is often forgotten or neglected.

4. Q: Can the territorial acknowledgement be added to publication materials, websites, or a syllabus?

A: Absolutely! We ask that you include a reference to the Indigenous Directions Leadership Group (and the date: February 16, 2017) anywhere that you use the territorial acknowledgement so that any questions or comments will be directed to the appropriate person or group at Concordia. Furthermore, the territorial acknowledgement is a good starting point for deeper conversations about our relationships with the Caretakers of the lands and waters on which we are situated. It is appropriate to open these discussions in a class, or in any event, as pedagogical opportunity to learn about history, culture, politics, and think critically about our institutional and personal relation with Tiohtià:ke and the diverse peoples who live here today.

5. Q: If I personally/my group, or department already has a territorial acknowledgment, do I have to replace it with this one?

A: Of course not! There are many acceptable ways to acknowledge the territory and local Indigenous peoples and communities. As our knowledge, experience, and relationships develop and change, so will our ways of acknowledging and collaborating within Tiohtià:ke/Montréal's Indigenous community. We have also developed a few principles to help guide the process of practicing or developing a territorial acknowledgement as a starting point (below).

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6. Q: What's the difference between a territorial acknowledgement and an opening or welcoming by an Indigenous Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community member?

A: Indigenous peoples and communities have diverse ways of knowing and cultural protocols that guide how they acknowledge each other and recognize the territory they are visiting or residing within. Being Indigenous to a broad area such as Turtle Island (North America) is not the same as being part of a specific community, Nation, or Territory that has ancestral roots and a relationship to particular place. A welcoming or opening may happen in a variety of ways, here are some examples:

a) Indigenous visitors: When visiting the traditional territory of another Indigenous community, Nation or People – an Indigenous person may draw on their own cultural knowledge and protocols to acknowledge the local Indigenous community to the best of their ability. They may refer to the relationship or history between the two communities, or their personal experiences.

b) By making an offering/gift of: tobacco, medicines, food, seeds, personal belongings, words, and/or songs.

c) Opening: Ohén:ton Karihwaterhkwen “Matters/Issues that come before (all else)”. This is sometimes referred to as a “Thanksgiving address” or “gathering of the minds”. It is the formal way that Kanien’kehá:ka (People of the Flint, Mohawk) open and begin all types of gatherings. The words and the length of the address vary according to the speaker. It is typically done in Kanien’kéha (Mohawk language) and may or may not include a tobacco burning.

7. Q: What is more appropriate for a gathering at Concordia, an opening or territorial acknowledgement? Can we do both?

A: Yes, you can do both. However, the preference of an Elder/Community member that has agreed to open an event takes precedence. Ask them how they prefer to be introduced and if they are comfortable with a territorial acknowledgement being part of their introduction or the opening. If the event includes Indigenous peoples from many territories, the representative from the local Indigenous territory takes precedence. Respect how they wish to proceed. If at any point you feel you must choose between an opening or a territorial acknowledgement, go with an opening as it has more significance to the territory and to the community. We are currently developing a comprehensive guideline that explains the appropriate protocols when working with Indigenous peoples and communities.

See also: Guidelines for Practicing or Developing a Territorial Acknowledgement.