

UCLA Created A New Job To Recruit More Native American Students BY ADOLFO GUZMAN-LOPEZ

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Mishuana Goeman is the new UCLA Special Advisor to the Chancellor on Native American and Indigenous Affairs (Adolfo Guzman-Lopez/LAist)

It may not seem like a lot compared with centuries of genocide, displacement from their land and separation of their families, but some Southern California Native Americans say they appreciate how local public universities are moving to recruit more American Indian students and faculty and generally improve relations.

UCLA is the most recent campus to reach out to Native Americans. Last fall, Chancellor Gene Block created the position of Special Advisor to the Chancellor on Native American and Indigenous Affairs.

"[The position] is a new way of recognizing that we're a land grant institute, and that the land grant comes from the dispossession of the Gabrielino Tongva peoples," said Mishuana Goeman, a UCLA Native American studies professor who was appointed to the position [in October](#).

The Gabrielino Tongva lived in the L.A. basin when Europeans first arrived.

Goeman will advise the chancellor on how to interact with tribes as sovereign nations, consult with faculty and staff on how to reach out to tribes and work on the creation of policies to improve Native Americans' experience on campus. [There are 14 federally recognized tribes in Southern California](#), and others that don't have federal recognition.

L.A. County has one of the country's largest populations of American Indians — 68,000 in the 2010 census.

RETURNING ANCESTORS

High on Goeman's to-do list is something UCLA and other campuses have been working on for decades: The return to tribes of Native American human remains that are under the university's control due to past archeological practices and donations of artifact collections.

UCLA started handing over its 2,300 remains, including bones and bone fragments, in 1996 to comply with a federal law. It now has only four left, and Goeman wants to finish the task quickly.

"It's hard to say, 'Oh, I want to have a better relationship with you, I want to work with you to solve these environment issues, I want to work with you to solve water issues in L.A.' ... if you're holding people's ancestors and relatives in very disrespectful ways," she said.

Other UC's, such as UC Berkeley, have more remains to return.

TAKING ON STANFORD AND DARTMOUTH

Goeman wants to increase the number of Native American students at UCLA.

The campus enrolled 249 Native American students in 2018, about 1 percent of the student population. That was an increase of 83 students from 10 years earlier.

Native Americans make up 1 percent of [UC's student population](#) systemwide. At the 23-campus California State University, that number is [less than 1 percent](#). In total, there were 2,742 Native American students in the UC and Cal State systems in 2017, out of a population of 764,000.

Private universities like Stanford and Dartmouth are recruiting high-performing Native American high school graduates more aggressively than UCLA, and that's leading many Indians to turn down offers from California public universities, Goeman said.

One way she hopes to increase the number of Native American undergrads will be to increase the number of Native American graduate students.

"I'm hoping, as I move forward, to try to figure out ways to establish more scholarships and more ways to help graduate students come along, because graduate students in these programs can really change the ways which undergrads experience [college]," Goeman said.

Goeman points to UCLA's [Mapping Indigenous LA](#) project as a way to render Native Americans more visible in the dense Los Angeles region. Using interactive maps, the project seeks to show the ancient and modern presence of Native Americans in Southern California. It also challenges the U.S.-centric part of the term Native American by including in the project indigenous peoples who moved here from Latin American countries.

INCLUDING TRIBAL LEADERS

On Feb. 1, UC President Janet Napolitano convened the first meeting of the Native American Advisory Council, a group she created to guide her on important issues facing the Native American community that overlap with those confronting the UC's.

The council is made up of tribal leaders from the San Luis Rey Band of Mission Indians, the Gabrielino-Tongva and several other tribes, along with UC Native American academics and Native American cultural experts. Its priorities mirror Goeman's at UCLA: the return of remains; recruitment and retention of Native American students, faculty and staff; and greater engagement with Native American communities.

Cal State San Marcos has had a Native Advisory Council since 2005, and that's led to increased cooperation with neighboring tribes and Native communities.

Joely Proudfit, the San Marcos American Indian Studies chair and director of the campus' [California Indian Culture & Sovereignty Center](#), put it this way:

"This is a direct result of our intentional effort to listen and learn from the sovereign tribes in our area and make an investment in what tribes and students need."