

**Final Report of Pedagogical Improvement Grant:
“Acknowledging Land, Teaching Dispossession”
June 25, 2021**

Participants: Eunice Blavascunas, Nina Lerman, Camilo Lund-Montaño, Kisha Lewellyn Schlegel, Nicole Simek, Stan Thayne, Lisa Uddin, Zahi Zalloua

Timeframe: June 1-11, 2021

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Overview: The PIG grant allowed eight faculty members who teach against settler colonialism to unpack the issue of land acknowledgements through group readings, one exhibition, and visiting educators from the CTUIR. We met 6 times for 2 hours each over zoom and, finally, in person for our last session. These discussions were historically and theoretically rich, focusing on land acknowledgement practices as a departure point for thinking about the forms and horizons of decolonial pedagogy. They were also productive for connecting to our original project goals of a) connecting with members of the CTUIR and regional Native Studies scholars, and b) developing cross-disciplinary assignments and campus-community programming that is responsive to our topic.

What was the outcome of your project and how did it align with your original goals as stated in your application?

Our project developed one useful shared bibliography that guided, and exceeded, our scheduled reading on the topic. This bibliography included approaches from the fields of critical race and ethnic studies, indigenous studies, North American history, anthropology, performance studies, art history, and creative nonfiction, reflecting our own disciplinary orientations. We were able to evaluate existing teaching experiences with some of these texts, and discuss the use of others in the near future.

Our project also benefited from a second bibliography shared by our visiting educator Roberta Conner, Director of Tamástslíkt Cultural Institute, who identified the absence of regionally-focused and produced scholarship on our first reading list. In response, we added two major texts to our scheduled reading that grounded our study with contributions about and from the Cayuse, Nez Perce and Walla Walla homelands. Coupled with our 4-hour conversation with Conner and Jennifer Karson Engum, cultural anthropologist for the CTUIR, these readings became a site of connection for now and future work.

Additionally, our group began compiling a compendium of land acknowledgements that are currently used in campus email signatures, syllabi, and other public spaces and events, which developed into a brainstorm for a land acknowledgment student assignment and an assignment that asks students to locate themselves in relation to the land in which they currently live.

Finally, though not exhaustively, a shared outcome of this project was an emerging sense of the serious limitations of land acknowledgements as they are currently practiced at Whitman College and other places of higher education. While our goal was never to adjudicate the content or form of Whitman’s official land acknowledgment statement, it was difficult to not assess the risks of this cultural act in the regional and global contexts of indigenous

dispossession, and to imagine how land acknowledgements might become more situated by and responsive to their target audiences and material outcomes. In other words, our group was able to both critique the now normative practice and reflect on other modes of settler-arrivant-indigenous engagement and repair. These are lessons we plan to bring into our teaching in myriad ways.

What sense do you have at this point that your project has enhanced student learning and what will you be looking at in the future to know whether the project was successful?

The most promising and immediate measure of this project's positive impact on student learning are the 5 related (and inter-related) projects that exceed the narrow subject of Land Acknowledgements and open out into the larger issues animating that practice.

1. "You Are Here," a Fall 2021 exhibition of contemporary Indigenous Art at the Sheehan Gallery (Lisa Uddin)
2. Land Water Justice co-taught course Spring 2022 as part of the Mellon "Just Futures Initiative" (Eunice Blavascunas, Stan Thayne)
3. Black and Indigenous Studies program development (Nicole Simek, Zahi Zalloua)
4. Changes to the history department curriculum (Nina Lerman, Camilo Lund-Montaña)
5. Land Acknowledgment student writing projects and student location exercises (Eunice Blavascunas, Nina Lerman, Camilo Lund-Montaña, Kisha Lewellyn Schlegel, Nicole Simek, Stan Thayne, Lisa Uddin, Zahi Zalloua)

We anticipate these projects building on the faculty work that predates them, while sharpening the possibilities of teaching dispossession in ways that are both regional and global, place-based and cosmopolitan, self-reflexive and oriented towards learning indigenous points of view.

What were the limitations or failings of this project, and how, in retrospect, might they have been better addressed or remedied?

The project was necessarily limited by the remote exchange of our discussions – we were unable to consider the land on the land's terms, as it were. On the other hand, we were able to meet with two remotely located visiting educators, which would not have otherwise been possible given our schedule. We benefited from their digital presence.

How do you envision sharing the results of your work with other colleagues at Whitman (or elsewhere)?

Any sharing out of our results feels temporary at this point; our work is ongoing. We would be open to doing a faculty forum talk in early Spring to share not only the activities of our PIG, but what emerged pedagogically from it in the months that followed. The faculty are the most appropriate audience for our work, given that so much of it centers on issues of teaching and our positionalities as educators at, and beneficiaries of, a settler colonial institution with reparative intentions. We are learning what might constitute rigorous, just, and lively pedagogies as a response to these conditions.