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# Performativity, Possibility, and Land Acknowledgments in Academia: Community-Engaged Work as Decolonial Praxis in the COVID-19 Context

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Article abstract

At the intersection of dance, performance, and Indigenous studies, this essay reflects on how an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles—with the support of a graduate student researcher—has aimed to put an Indigenous land acknowledgment into praxis through community-engaged work. In academic settings, land acknowledgments are often given prior to an event and may circulate on written materials, such as event programs, syllabi, letterhead, departmental and research centre websites, and email signatures. Based on Indigenous protocols, these statements typically identify the original Indigenous peoples whose land the university currently occupies; they should also be created in collaboration with Indigenous leaders from the tribe(s). Indigenous land acknowledgments can be important because they directly combat the injustice of settler-capitalist, mainstream discourses that often obscure Indigenous peoples and practices or relegate them to the historical past. Yet, Indigenous people and Indigenous studies scholars have critiqued non-Native land acknowledgments as “performative.” Without direct material benefits to Indigenous peoples, land acknowledgments can serve as empty gestures that “perform” university commitments to anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion. In contrast to the “performative” as an empty gesture, the fields of performance and dance studies frequently theorize “performativity” as a material action that can function both hegemonically and subversively. This essay argues that community-engaged research, teaching, and service—which the authors view holistically—are key ways to begin or further the process of putting a university’s land acknowledgment into action.

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## FROM PRO FORMA TO PERFORMATIVE

### Performativity, Possibility, and Land Acknowledgments in Academia: Community-Engaged Work as Decolonial Praxis in the COVID-19 Context

Sammy Roth and Tria Blu Wakpa

[We]<sup>1</sup> acknowledge the Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands) and are grateful to have the opportunity to work for the taraaxatom (indigenous peoples) in this place. As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to Honuukvetam (Ancestors), ‘Ahihirom (Elders), and ‘eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

—UCLA American Indian Studies Center

Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of [people]<sup>2</sup> upon their world in order to transform it.  
—Paulo Freire

At the intersection of dance, performance, and Indigenous studies, this co-written article reflects on how an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles—with the support of a graduate student researcher—has aimed to put an Indigenous land acknowledgment into praxis through community-engaged work within and beyond the COVID-19 context. Community-engaged work typically seeks to counter academia’s historically extractive methods by nurturing reciprocal relations with off-campus community partners (Mahoney et al. 2021; Wallerstein and Duran 2017). Regarding land acknowledgments, Harmeet Kaur writes, “While Indigenous peoples have practiced land acknowledgments for generations, [‘]Westerners[‘] have adopted the custom relatively recently as they attempt to reckon with the harms brought on by colonization. Land acknowledgments are now routine in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and are becoming increasingly prevalent in progressive spaces in the U.S.” (Kaur 2021).<sup>3</sup>

At least several US universities, research centres, departments, and/or programs have recently adopted Indigenous land acknowledgments. In academic settings, land acknowledgments are often given prior to an event and/or may circulate on written materials, such as event programs, syllabi, letterhead, departmental and centre websites, and email signatures. These statements typically identify the Indigenous peoples whose land the university currently occupies and *should* be created in collaboration with Indigenous leaders from the tribe(s) who have often cared for that land since time immemorial. Universities sometimes invite Indigenous leaders to give land acknowledgments prior to events as well and may—read *should*—compensate them with honoraria for their expertise, time, and travel. Indigenous land acknowledgments can be important because they directly combat the injustice of settler-capitalist (Speed 2019), mainstream discourses, which often obscure Indigenous peoples and practices and/or relegate them to the historical past.<sup>4</sup> In other words, by bringing visibility to Indigenous peoples in the present day, Indigenous land acknowledgments can be a critical first step towards decolonization.

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Yet, Indigenous people and Indigenous studies scholars have also critiqued non-Native land acknowledgments as “performative” (Robinson et al. 2019; Wark 2021; Kaur 2021; Wood 2021).<sup>5</sup> That is, without direct material benefits to Indigenous peoples, land acknowledgments can serve as empty gestures that “perform” university commitments to anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion. In the context of this critique, “performative” and “perform” have negative connotations. Such “performativity” of land acknowledgments in university settings has led Dylan Robinson to “[propose], paradoxically, . . . that we decolonize acknowledgement—or more exactly what acknowledgement has become—in its formalization, bureaucratization, and rote presentation” (Robinson et al. 2019, 22).

In contrast to mainstream uses of “the performative” as an empty gesture, the fields of performance and dance studies frequently theorize “performativity” as a material action in the world, which can function both hegemonically and subversively (Austin 1975; Derrida 1988; Butler 1990; McKenzie 2001). Indeed, regarding the possibilities of land acknowledgments from a performance studies lens, Selena Couture has articulated, “This is key to land acknowledgements—they should not be about performing anti-racist declarations regarding the self; instead, they need to be an intervention in the way the world has been shaped through colonial policies” (Robinson et al. 2019, 28). Couture’s suggestion offers the possibility of aligning non-Native land acknowledgments more closely with the long-standing Indigenous practice, which Mishuana Goeman has described as building “anti-colonial networks” that combat the destruction of relational epistemologies by positioning speakers in a “lived relation requiring responsibility” (2020, 57).

In this article, we build on these scholars’ articulations of land acknowledgments as ongoing actions. Specifically, we take up Robinson’s suggestion of approaching land acknowledgments as “an honest acknowledgement of how much decolonizing work [we] have done over the past month or past year” (Robinson et al. 2019, 21), while recognizing this work as an ongoing *process* which can always be strengthened in a predominantly settler-capitalist society and institution whose very structures obscure and subordinate Indigenous people(s).<sup>6</sup> We are in the University of California, Los Angeles’s Department of World Arts Cultures/Dance. Sammy Roth is a White settler scholar pursuing her PhD in culture and performance, whose research focuses on the intersections of popular performance, White settler violence, and new media technologies. Of Filipino, European, and tribally-unenrolled Native American ancestries, Tria Blu Wakpa is an assistant professor in dance studies whose research often collaborates with Indigenous people and communities, uses decolonizing methodologies, and analyzes how movement modes—such as dance, theatrical productions, athletics, martial arts, and yoga—navigate the confines of social structures and institutions.

We met in Winter 2020 when Roth took the “Dance: Colonization and Confinement” course created by Blu Wakpa. Subsequently, Roth began working as Blu Wakpa’s graduate student researcher, which she has done for a total of eight quarters. Additionally, in Summer 2020, Blu Wakpa acted as Roth’s mentor for a university program in which graduate students conduct research for their dissertation with the support of a faculty member and has continued to support Roth’s work. In part because of Roth’s sustained support with Blu Wakpa’s work, and in particular Blu Wakpa’s community-engaged work with California tribal people(s), Blu Wakpa offered to co-write an article with Roth as an expression of her gratitude and a continuation of their mentor-mentee relationship. While this article could be conceived of as “performative” in the negative sense because we may professionally and personally benefit from publicizing our process and publishing this academic article, we believe that sharing our process further combats “colonial unknowing”

(Goeman 2020, 52–53) by providing one model for moving beyond the land acknowledgment as a superficial statement.

Some versions of the UCLA land acknowledgment imply a commitment to implementing the land acknowledgment beyond the “performative,” understood as an empty gesture. This version reads, “we are grateful to work for the taraaxatom (indigenous peoples) in this place” (UCLA American Indian Studies Center). Like Goeman’s description of the Indigenous practice of “land introductions”—rather than a “land acknowledgment”—this language “moves us forward into a relationship of accountability and gain” (Goeman 2020, 56). Such a framing of the practice, which is grounded in place and positionality, then directs us toward a decolonial “praxis”—or, in the words of Paulo Freire, “the action and reflection of [people] upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire 2005, 79).

Specifically, we argue that community-engaged research, teaching, and service, which we view holistically, are key ways to begin or further the process of putting a university’s land acknowledgment into action. While this thesis may seem obvious to some, it will certainly *not* be self-evident to all. Land acknowledgments are often created—or *should* be created—in collaboration with the Indigenous people(s) whose lands a university currently occupies, and a single department or centre (often American Indian, Native American, or Ethnic studies) may take on the majority or even the entirety of this community-engaged work. However, if the university then adopts a land acknowledgment at the institutional level, this can obscure the specific context from which the statement arose and the necessities of relationship building and redistributing “resources.”<sup>7</sup> Without relationships and action, land acknowledgments can certainly operate as superficial statements.

The process by which universities adopt and implement land acknowledgments is often not available in the public sphere. This is perhaps because, as we have described, land acknowledgments are contested for several reasons, including acting as empty gestures (Kaur 2021). Describing the process of writing and implementing a land acknowledgment can also open up institutions and individuals to more critique, which many seek to avoid, particularly in the context of contemporary “call-out culture.” However, receiving criticism for such work is virtually inevitable due to: 1) the limitations that settler-capitalist structures and institutions impose; 2) multiple and conflicting conversations in and beyond academia about the meaning of “decolonial” action and its best practices; and 3) the potential for misreading fluid actions that can be interpreted in different ways, especially by those lacking contextual awareness, which may not be disclosed for a number of reasons, including protecting Indigenous communities. There may also be a dearth of scholarship at the convergence of land acknowledgments and community-engaged work because Native peoples are not a monolith, and there is *not*—nor should there be—a one-size-fits-all approach (Robinson et al. 2019, 22). Further, the collaborations between faculty and the Indigenous peoples whose land the university occupies should be understood as a sustained and ongoing process.<sup>8</sup> Most of the existing literature about land acknowledgments instead describes these statements, the Indigenous and settler colonial contexts from which they emerge, their purposes and limitations, and how to perform them in a way that is largely disconnected from the praxis and process of enduring community-engaged work with Indigenous people (Asher et al. 2018; Robinson et al. 2019; Goeman 2020; Robinson 2020; Wark 2021).

We depart from such scholarship by delineating some of the work we did with Indigenous community partners throughout the 2020–21 academic year and foreground the ways that we utilized flexibility in our decolonial praxis, both by choice and out of necessity. In the next section,

we situate community-engaged work in the academy within longer histories of anti-colonial and decolonial praxes, describe our decolonial approach to community-engaged work, and provide a caveat on doing community-engaged work with Indigenous people(s). Then, we discuss the value of flexibility in nurturing good relationships with Indigenous people(s) and navigating settler-capitalist structures. Following this, we describe some of the decolonial work we have been doing in collaboration with California tribal people(s), which has provided a strong foundation for our community-engaged work to continue and develop. We close with a short reflection on how we hope to further this work in the future and the ongoing constraints leveled against those liberatory dreams.

## **A Decolonial Praxis of Community-Engaged Work**

Our process of putting UCLA's land acknowledgment into action is made possible by the community-engaged work of visionaries who came before us. Scholars have described community-engaged research emerging in a variety of disciplinary contexts under several different terms, such as participatory action research, community-based participatory research, collaborative action research, and so on (Warren 2018; Flores et al.; Wallerstein and Duran 2017, 27–29); many have also identified a strain of this broad category emerging through internationalist, anti-oppressive politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Mahoney et al. 2021, 12; Flores et al. 2020; Wallerstein and Duran 2017, 27–29). Yep and Mitchell trace the origins of community-engaged pedagogy in the US to the 1968 Third World Liberation Front and the emergence of Ethnic studies in the California Bay Area (2017). The Third World Liberation Front was a “broad coalition of African American, Asian American, Chicana/o, Latina/o, Native American and white students,” who were “inspired by anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America” (Yep and Mitchell 2017, 294). As Yep and Mitchell write, “organizing under the umbrella of ‘to serve the people,’ ethnic studies offered some of the first courses with political engagement that centered community and indigenous knowledges, ontologies, cosmologies, and epistemologies” (2017, 294). Following this push for research models aimed toward liberation, community-engaged pedagogy has brought community-engaged research into the classroom, often for the explicit purpose of supporting students to become more civically engaged (Rubin et al. 2012). Additionally, community-engaged research has been described as a particularly apt approach for conducting decolonizing research with Indigenous communities due to shared values of reciprocity, respect, and challenging Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies (Smith 2013, 125; Gaudry 2015; Mahoney et al. 2021, 12).

Building on this legacy, a decolonial praxis of community-engaged work can holistically integrate the categories of research, teaching, and service, which are the three primary criteria used to evaluate faculty. When these categories are perceived hierarchically, with research prioritized over teaching and service (Schimanski and Alperin 2018), it can particularly disadvantage faculty of colour and women who bear disproportionate service burdens (Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group 2017). In contrast, like the decolonial possibilities of land acknowledgments in university settings, community-engaged research and teaching can challenge settler colonial discourses by illuminating the contemporary presence of Indigenous people(s) as well as their knowledges and ongoing struggles for sovereignty. Such holistic work could then be understood as a form of “service” that counters settler colonial structures and discourses. Further, community-engaged research and teaching can also be conceived of as “service” when they leverage university “resources”<sup>10</sup>—such as the university’s prestige and its platforms, faculty and student labour, and funding in the form of honoraria—to support and strengthen off-campus individuals and

communities and further the projects that matter to them. At the same time, it is critical to recognize that providing “honoraria” for Indigenous people is no substitute for a living wage and structural change, including working toward more Indigenous faculty and students, who remain severely underrepresented groups (Tippeconnic Fox 2005, 51).

We specify our praxis as “decolonial” because far too often, Indigenous people(s) are excluded from discussions of collective “liberation,” and even more specifically, “decolonization” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2–3, 19, 21). In the context of this article and our community-engaged work, we define “decolonial” as collaborating with Indigenous peoples and centring them and their practices, acknowledging ongoing Indigenous sovereignty while working to shift power dynamics and the distribution of “resources” (including returning land)—which is inextricable from securing Indigenous futures (Wolfe 2016, 387)—and challenging longstanding, settler-capitalist, academic conventions and hierarchies. In this co-written article, we particularly strive to combat academic conventions and hierarchies, at times field-specific, through methodology and subject matter. For instance, in dance studies, unlike some other fields, it is atypical for a graduate student and professor to co-write an article. This is perhaps because, at least at some universities, co-written articles are worth significantly less than individually authored ones in terms of their value for promotion and tenure. Further, given settler colonial and institutional hierarchies, graduate student knowledge can be devalued and/or under-supported in academia (Patterson 2016).

In co-writing this article, we have made deliberate choices to counter norms in dance studies by engaging in the collective process of knowledge production from our respective positions and seeking to reduce power differentials. For example, our writing process has entailed multiple brainstorming sessions, writing and editing each other’s work, dividing labour according to our skill sets, experience, and expertise, and explicitly making the least senior person who could benefit most from the publication, Roth, the first author. In this article, we also intentionally refer to the work Blu Wakpa initiated and undertakes with California tribal people(s) as “our work,” because Roth’s labour as Blu Wakpa’s graduate student researcher has been vital in supporting this process, including relationship building with our California tribal community partners. Conceiving of this work as communal also supports our intentions to counter academic conventions, which promote possessive logics and individualize knowledge production (Smith 2013). Conversely, we maintain that knowledge is always created in relationship to humans and more-than-humans.

As a part of our decolonial praxis, we are explicitly sharing our process and opening it up for critique, knowing that others may adapt, expand, and refine this work. *Although we believe that decolonial work is for everyone, not everyone is for decolonial work.* For instance, not all university faculty will have the skill set, political and ethical commitments, or time to do community-engaged work with Indigenous people in a good way (Risling Baldy 2018, 23–24). Community-engaged work can often be more time-consuming than hegemonic approaches to research, teaching, and service in the academy (Jacquez 2014). Considering the at times vexed relationship between Indigenous people(s) and universities who occupy their land and at times imprison thousands of their ancestors (Public Affairs 2021),<sup>11</sup> community-engaged work must be handled with the highest standards of ethics, professionalism, and care, including cultural sensitivity. For this reason, we recommend a “start from where you are” approach to decolonial praxis (brown and Sheppard 2021). This could include the first steps, as Goeman describes, of “knowing your positionality and holding yourself accountable” (2020, 37) and learning the names of the Indigenous peoples on whose land you live and work. Importantly, to move beyond the negative connotations of the “performative,” initial steps also

come with a responsibility to share this information with your community, including relatives, friends, colleagues, and, if you are an educator, your students.

**CALIFORNIA TRIBAL DANCES GATHERING**  
**THURSDAY, APRIL 8 - 12:00pm-1:30pm | Registration: <https://bit.ly/3wnZvV2>**

At the California Tribal Dances Gathering, Tina and Jessa Calderon (Tongva and Chumash), Deborah Sanchez (Chumash), Carla and Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe), and Pom Tuiimiyali (Winnemem Wintu) will share about dance practices from their tribes. Panelists will present dances, contextualize each dance's history, and discuss the methods they are using to reclaim these dances after generations in which their cultural practices were legally prohibited on their own lands. Panelists will foreground the significance of their dance practices for the perpetuation of Indigenous lifeways and decolonial futures. The panel discussion will be followed by Q&A.

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Flyer from “California Tribal Dances Gathering,” a 2021 public presentation planned in collaboration with and featuring our community partners. Photo provided by Deborah Sanchez; flyer created by Roth.

Before drafting this article, we asked for and were granted permission from the California tribal individuals and representatives with whom we work to write about our experiences collaborating with them. Due to historically extractive relationships between scholars and Indigenous peoples, as well as the critical intervention of a politics of “refusal” (Simpson 2014), asking for and receiving permission multiple times throughout our process has been an indispensable part of our decolonial praxis. In addition to requesting permission to write this paper, we have sought our community partners’ informed consent for initially sharing their contact information with Roth, the language we used (including listing partners’ names and tribal affiliations) in various materials—such as grant and course proposals, syllabi, promotional materials, and this paper—and our continued collaborations. Requesting permission throughout this process has added another safeguard against pervasive “colonial unknowing” (Goeman 2020, 52–53), which can mean that non-Natives are at times unaware of the ways in which their well-intentioned efforts may perpetuate colonial harms (Tuck and Yang 2012). In fact, perhaps the first step in flexibility as it pertains to decolonial praxis and land acknowledgments in university settings is recognizing that the Indigenous people(s) whose land your institution occupies may not want to undertake community-engaged work with you for whatever reason. If this is the case, you should respectfully accept their self-determination.

The ongoing dynamics of such “colonial unknowing” extend to our field of dance studies, in which Eurocentric bias has often led scholars to overemphasize “Western” concert dance and on-stage performances and to overlook Native American dance and how Native American pedagogy can inform dance studies, though there are notable exceptions (Shea Murphy 2007, 2017; Johnson and Recollet 2020). In contrast, several of the Indigenous community partners with whom we work often dance in Native and non-Native community settings. Additionally, there has been relatively little work at the intersection of dance studies and decolonial, community-engaged work in the academy (Loots 2021). Yet, the foundational principle for our field—that dance is valuable knowledge—is uniquely suited for decolonial praxis. This is because, unlike almost all fields, a primary methodology in dance studies, “choreographic analysis,” conducts close readings of bodies and their movements, including kinesthetic experiences. That is, we read the connotations of bodies and their movements in a performance akin to how scholars might analyze a poem. Such an approach combats the Eurocentric construct of Cartesian dualism, which views the mind as separate from and superior to the “body.” Given the challenges of physical distancing and online teaching and learning in the COVID-19 context, then, this article also suggests that dance studies can further “destabilize Eurocentric academic and pedagogical norms, which are reinforced during remote learning” (Shaffer 2022), by attuning us to bodily knowledge even when sitting still in front of a screen. In the next section, we discuss how flexibility—a form of bodily knowledge—can be a key tool for decolonial community-engaged work.

### **The Value of Flexibility in Decolonial Community-Engaged Work**

Although flexibility as a commitment to change or accommodation can be understood as interlocking with reciprocity, which many Indigenous studies scholars have highlighted as necessary for decolonial, community-engaged work (Smith 2013; Mithlo 2012; Wilson 2008), we believe it is worth highlighting flexibility separately. We imagine that as universities continue to adopt land acknowledgments, more academics will consider the importance of conducting community-engaged, reciprocal, and sustained work with Indigenous communities beyond the mainstream, negative connotations of the “performative” (Barajas 2022). Yet, because of the fluidity of overlapping social structures, settler colonial strategies and decolonial tactics are not dichotomous but rather entangled and can even be contradictory (Blu Wakpa 2021; Robinson et al. 2019). This illustrates the challenges of resistance within dominant social structures and institutions in which false binaries—such as claims that land acknowledgments are only “performative” in the negative sense or “superficial” (Wood 2021)—can discourage people from decolonial modes of resistance with vital material benefits for groups who are structurally marginalized. In fact, writing about the need for an expanded repertoire of activist tactics within oppressive infrastructures, Keller Easterling notes, “righteous ultimatums or binaries of enemies and innocents that offer only collusion or refusal might present a structural obstacle greater than any quasi-mythical opponent” (2014). Relatedly, Selena Couture emphasizes, “educational settings are not neutral; they are actually central to the history of violence and exclusion of Indigenous people” (Robinson et al. 2019, 28); yet she also underscores that land acknowledgments in university settings can have decolonial possibilities that challenge and expose hegemonic power structures.

Given the entanglement of settler colonial strategies and decolonial tactics, we have found that being flexible in our praxis without succumbing to reductive binaries has increased opportunities for decolonial community-engaged work. For example, applying for university grants to conduct community-engaged work with Indigenous peoples could also be critiqued as reifying the settler-



capitalist system. Yet, building on Easterling’s and Couture’s observations and our experiences doing decolonial work, we offer that mobilizing funding from universities and philanthropic organizations for community-engaged work with Indigenous peoples can be used tactically and critically while working toward structural change.

Leveraging academia’s shifting policies and politics for decolonial ends also requires contending with the ways that flexibility can be demanded by oppressive systems for hegemonic aims. For instance, as Anusha Kedhar has identified, institutions can exploit individuals by forcing them to be flexible, and they often impose increased demands for flexibility on people who are the most impacted by structural oppression (2020). Conversely, individuals working for these institutions have not always received the same flexibility in return. This is perhaps especially evident in the COVID-19 context, which, for instance, has required that faculty, instructors, students, and staff be flexible in adapting to online learning. At least some universities have unethically denied accommodations to individuals who are/were facing life-and-death circumstances (Hammontree 2021). In other words, these institutions refused to be flexible with the individuals willing—or coerced—to be flexible for them.

UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance Presents

## POWWOW IN THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE CONTEXT

THURSDAY, APRIL 29 - 3:30pm-4:50pm | Registration: <https://bit.ly/2PdQBbS>

Pan-Indigenous gatherings, such as powwows, can provide powerful spaces of cultural exchange rooted in Indigenous epistemologies. At the same time, California Native people can also be obscured on their own lands at such gatherings, particularly in what is frequently referred to as Los Angeles, the city with the largest Indigenous population in the U.S. To date, there has been little attention to how California Native people have navigated and contributed in critical ways to powwows on unceded tribal lands in California. This presentation will center Tina and Jessa Calderon (Tongva and Chumash) and Deborah Sanchez (Chumash) as they share about their experiences participating in pan-Indigenous powwows and how the politics of these gatherings have shifted over time. The panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A.



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Flyer from “Powwow in the California Native Context,” a 2021 public presentation in Blu Wakpa’s “Dance: Colonization and Confinement” course, planned in collaboration with and featuring some of our community partners. Photos provided by Tina and Jessa Calderon and Deborah Sanchez; flyer created by Roth.

Flexibility as a counter-tactic (Kedhar 2020) has been indispensable for us in building good relationships with community partners, which requires recognizing that Indigenous people(s) will have other commitments and priorities that at times trump their work with university faculty, staff, and students. This has been especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted Native American communities (Givens 2020; Morales 2020; Power et al. 2020). The inordinate spread of COVID-19 to Indigenous communities due to the US government's neglect is situated within a long history of genocidal colonial violence, which includes the manufactured contagion of infectious disease (Hedgpeth 2020). These histories serve as potent reminders of the ways flexibility has been a vital tactic that Indigenous people(s) have relied upon to bring an Indigenous future into being. At one of the public presentations that we curated as a part of our community-engaged work in 2021, Tina Calderon (Gabrielino Tongva, Chumash) shared, "We kind of had to be chameleons in order to survive" (Calderon et al. 2021). This metaphor powerfully implies how Indigenous people(s) have tactically negotiated surface-level shifts while their commitments to Indigenous futures remain consistent.

In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility has been deeply necessary, particularly in recognizing and sometimes publicly acknowledging that people might be grieving or caretaking their loved ones as well as experiencing other challenges resulting from a lack of in-person interactions, including in online learning. Understandably, confirming attendance for a university event is not always a top priority in these moments, which has necessitated flexibility in preparation for public presentations, including planning for an alternative event should a guest be unable to show. Although failing to confirm attendance may seem "unprofessional" by settler-capitalist standards, being flexible and empathetic is necessary to maintaining good relationships. This also aligns with a dance studies approach that can illuminate the hard work and discipline required to enact flexibility (Kedhar 2020). Thus, relationships with community partners have been built on flexibility and understanding—not requiring that our guests adhere to strict university timelines.

Further, flexibility has been essential to promoting Native sovereignty within our field while attending to the complexities that have emerged due to settler colonial policies. Native studies scholarship often places Native nations' legal sovereignty at the heart of discourses surrounding decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012). While this is critical because settler colonial policies and discourses often override and obscure Native nations' legal sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson 2020), supporting the sovereignty of Indigenous people(s) can be much more complex. For example, settler colonial policies have often operated to deny sovereignty, detach Native people(s) from their tribal communities, and pit Native tribes and individuals against one another (Peltier 1999). Thus, flexibility—in terms of being open to working with tribal individuals and/or representatives of a Native nation—can help one navigate such friction.

Indigenous studies scholars have also delineated other forms of Indigenous sovereignty, such as "intellectual" (Warrior 1994), "visual" (Raheja 2015), "embodied" (Hokowhitu 2014), and "dancing" sovereignty (Dangeli 2016). Collaborating with Native individuals and/or tribal representatives can be a way of illuminating such expressions of Native sovereignty, which are interlocking with legal sovereignty (Blu Wakpa 2022; Dangeli 2016).<sup>12</sup> Foregrounding Native sovereignty in community-engaged work also combats a central critique of the superficial "performativity" of land acknowledgments. As Graeme Wood writes, "land acknowledgments are just words, and words can distract from real issues, in particular, the ultimate one, which is Native tribal sovereignty" (Wood 2021). However, Wood fails to recognize the fluidity of land acknowledgments and the active

“performativity” of language, in which words can also be an entryway into illuminating and addressing “real issues,” including Native tribal sovereignty, by (re)mapping settler geographies for decolonial means (Goeman 2020). In the next section, we provide an overview of the decolonial community-engaged work we conducted throughout the 2020–21 academic year, sharing how these flexible practices have helped us promote Native sovereignty in institutional contexts.

### **Leveraging a University Land Acknowledgment to Promote Native Sovereignty**

In this section, we describe the background, context, and logistics of our decolonial community-engaged work, which some might view as dispassionate and dull. However, activist and writer Victoria Law has clarified that “organizing is a longer-term commitment that isn’t always visible, glamorous or fun” (Law 2014). Following bell hooks, we also maintain that “love is an action” (hooks 2018, 235), so it is precisely because of our passion for social justice that we do this seemingly unglamorous work, which continues the efforts of those who came before us. The Third World Liberation Front’s achievements and their enduring repercussions in university settings nearly fifty-five years later have undoubtedly shaped Blu Wakpa’s community-engaged work and decolonial praxis (Yep and Mitchell 2017). As a doctoral student in the University of California, Berkeley’s Ethnic Studies Department, Blu Wakpa was introduced to community-engaged work as a Chancellor’s Public Fellow leading undergraduate coursework under the mentorship of a professor. This legacy has continued through structural and financial support offered within the UC system to support professors’ community-engaged initiatives and graduate student learning, now with Blu Wakpa as the professor and Roth as the graduate student aid. Specifically, university support, including grant monies and faculty, student, and staff labour, has enabled workshops in the 2020 “Dance: Colonization and Confinement” course, public presentations often shared in its 2021 iteration, and private Zoom meetings focused on continuing and expanding this work in a 2023 course, which we discuss in this section.

In the context of our work together, Blu Wakpa has received pilot funding and the Chancellor’s Award for Community Engaged Research from UCLA’s Center for Community Engagement, which provided the resources necessary to begin and continue relationship building with Tina and Jessa Calderon (Tongva and Chumash). The Calderons are a mother and daughter pair of cultural artists and practitioners who have been our primary partners in projects since 2019. In 2019, as a tenure-track assistant professor in UCLA’s Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance, Blu Wakpa began discussing potential collaborations with the Calderons for her “Dance: Colonization and Confinement” course, an upper division undergraduate and graduate level course in which Roth met Blu Wakpa in Winter 2020. An explicit aim of this course, which Blu Wakpa shared with students at the time, was to put the land acknowledgment into action through collaboration with the Calderons. In Winter 2020, the Calderons and Blu Wakpa hosted a series of four workshops on “Illuminating Tongva Embodied Knowledge and Sovereignty,” which were well attended by the public. Specifically, these workshops were titled “Introduction to Native California in the Tongva Context,” “Grass Skirt,” “Clapper Stick,” and “Dance.” Following these workshops, students wrote reflections on their experiences learning about these topics, which were shared with the Calderons. Blu Wakpa dedicated the entirety of the pilot funding she received to provide honoraria for the Calderons to compensate them for their time and expertise.

“I was struck by the way the action of yucca rope making for [Tina and Jessa Calderon’s] grass skirt regalia altered my perception of time. As we learned how to wrap the pieces of yucca together and I began the repeated action of twisting and wrapping, my internal sense of time slowed down. [This process] created space to breathe, to let my mind wander, to talk with the folks around me, to in essence experience the moment while building community. Simultaneously, I was shocked when we were told it was time to finish the session. As time slowed down for me, it sped by on the clock, which was a further reminder of the ways colonization has sought to regulate collective understandings of time, especially to place these understandings of time under the framework of economic use. This led me to think about the ways this process of making the grass skirt refuses the framework of capitalist use value through its relationship to time. The skirt itself and the process of making exceed these colonial parameters, offering a different conception of value, time, and being-with [others] through the construction of sacred regalia.”

- Excerpt from Roth’s student reflection paper from the 2020 “Grass Skirt” workshop with Tina and Jessa Calderon in Blu Wakpa’s “Dance: Colonization and Confinement” course.

The series of workshops on “Illuminating Tongva Embodied Knowledge and Sovereignty” from the 2020 course and continued conversations the Calderons and Blu Wakpa had outside the class built a strong foundation for their ongoing working relationship. In 2020, Blu Wakpa received the Chancellor’s Award for Community-Engaged Research for a proposal developed based on experiences and discussions with the Calderons about what community-engaged research and teaching might offer Tongva and other California tribal people(s). The proposal leveraged the land acknowledgment to articulate why structural and financial support for community-engaged work with the Tongva and other California Native people is critical. Specifically, she discussed the valid critiques of land acknowledgments as “performative” in the negative sense and argued that community-engaged work with Tongva and other California tribal people(s) could be a powerful way of building reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people(s) whose land the university currently occupies. Importantly, this demonstrates how faculty can use university land acknowledgments to remind the institution of its stated commitments, which also require a redistribution of “resources,” such as the university’s prestige and platforms, faculty and student labour, and funding in the form of honoraria.

The primary aim of the award was to provide the infrastructure for each faculty recipient to create a community-engaged course, including building the relationships necessary to conduct community-engaged work. This further illustrates how the impacts of Third World Liberation Front organizing endure in select university initiatives that can structurally and financially aid professors in designing

and implementing community-engaged courses, while also enabling graduate students to support this work and develop skills as community-engaged scholars. In the proposal stage, the Calderons helped Blu Wakpa to identify California tribal individuals and representatives with whom they thought it would be beneficial to work. Allowing community partners to determine the topic for collaborative work is another way of being flexible and ensuring that the relationships are reciprocal and a good fit for community partners. In addition to the Calderons, the community partners gathered for work supported by the award in 2020–21 include individuals and/or representatives from three other California tribes, including the Chumash, the Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe, and the Winnemem Wintu. In working with Tongva individuals and other California Native people(s), Blu Wakpa’s collaborations aim to acknowledge the debts the UC system has incurred as a land-grant institution in which the 1862 Morrill Act literally dispossessed California Native peoples from multiple locations throughout the state to provide land-as-wealth for establishing the university and continuing to grow its profits (Goeman 2020, 43–51). This points to the necessity of attending to specific local histories, not only of the land one is on but also of the settler-capitalist constructed geographies (such as California) and institutions (such as the University of California) within which one works.

Again, Blu Wakpa dedicated the entirety of the award funding to community partners’ honoraria, which allowed Blu Wakpa to deepen her relationship with the Calderons and nurture relationships with other California Native peoples throughout 2020–21, including developing a future course with all of the community partners. The award also came with faculty support in the form of regular cohort meetings hosted by the Center for Community Engagement that included opportunities to discuss what community-engaged research is and why it matters, share about the process of planning for a community-engaged course, troubleshoot, create a draft of a new course syllabus, and receive feedback. By including Roth and the California tribal partners in the planning process for this work, Blu Wakpa then extended the cycle of graduate student mentorship afforded by such institutional initiatives and foregrounded Indigenous self-determination in each stage of the process.

In particular, the planning process was carried out in a series of private, monthly meetings in which we organized 2020–21 activities and developed the 2023 community-engaged course together. In the original vision, Blu Wakpa and our California tribal community partners aimed to host an in-person gathering with the four tribes, open to the public at select times when appropriate. This gathering would have followed California Native tribes’ tradition of intertribal gatherings and provided an opportunity to be in community and celebrate the revitalization of each tribe’s dances. This structure became impossible due to the pandemic’s health risks and accordingly forced all of us to be flexible in how we imagined gathering and moving together. Thus, given the necessity of physical distancing to ensure the safety of our collective communities, we shifted this work to an online format using a holistic model of research, teaching, and service that included viewing “service” as central to research and teaching and rendered the boundaries between them flexible.

The flyer features a dark header with white text. On the left, there are logos for the UCLA Center for Inequality and Democracy, the UCLA Center for Indian Studies, and the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance. The main title is 'Contextualizing and Revitalizing California Tribal Dances' in a large, bold font, followed by 'Panel Discussion and Q&A' and the date and time: 'Thursday, November 12 12pm-1:30pm'. Below the title, it says 'Register on Eventbrite:shorturl.at/coY14' and 'Free and Open to the Public'. The main body of the flyer has a light background with a photograph of a woman in traditional Indigenous dress standing on a beach looking out at the ocean. Text on the flyer describes the panel discussion, listing the panelists and their tribes. At the bottom, there is a small text block acknowledging the traditional land caretakers of the area.

**UCLA CENTER FOR INEQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY**  
**UCLA CENTER FOR INDIAN STUDIES**  
**UCLA DEPARTMENT OF WORLD ARTS AND CULTURES/DANCE**

## Contextualizing and Revitalizing California Tribal Dances

### Panel Discussion and Q&A

Thursday, November 12  
12pm-1:30pm

Register on Eventbrite:shorturl.at/coY14

Free and Open to the Public

This panel discussion brings together seven California tribal individuals from four nations: the Tongva, Chumash, Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe, and Winnemem Wintu. Each of the aforementioned tribal nations has a traditional territory beside an ocean or another large body of water and practices connected to the water. Panelists will contextualize the enduring impacts of settler colonialism on their lifeways, and in particular, their dance practices. With implications for Indigenous peoples and practices worldwide, the panelists will then discuss the methods that they are enacting to revitalize their dances and the powerful possibilities of this ongoing work. The panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A.

Featuring: Tina and Jessa Calderon (Tongva and Chumash), Deborah Sanchez (Chumash), Chief Caleen Sisk and Pom Tuimiyali (Winnemem Wintu), and Carla and Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe)

Photo credit: Eric Melendez. Performed: Jessa Calderon

UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA acknowledges the Gabriellino Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands) and are grateful to have the opportunity to work for the taraxaxatom (Indigenous peoples) in this place. As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to Honnukevatom (Ancestors), 'Ahihirom (Elders), and 'eyoohinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

Flyer from “Contextualizing and Revitalizing California Tribal Dances,” a 2020 public presentation planned in collaboration with and featuring our community partners. Photo provided by Jessa Calderon; flyer created by Lynn Tatum.

Specifically—with support from Roth as her graduate student researcher—Blu Wakpa organized a series of ten public presentations on Zoom, which featured Indigenous artists, dancers, activists, and scholars, including our community partners.<sup>13</sup> Evidencing the entanglement of research, teaching, and service, the public online gatherings were usually presented in the 2021 “Dance: Colonization and Confinement” course and often discussed the relationship of tribal dance practices to Indigenous sovereignty with a focus on contemporary revitalization efforts. Native cultural revitalization is salient, given the detrimental impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous dance and other practices. Blu Wakpa often invited California tribal guests and/or community partners to speak for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes about an area of their expertise in relation to broad topics such as Indigenous dances or the revitalization of Indigenous dances in their community. By not requesting that participants speak about a specific dance form, Blu Wakpa was able to learn, alongside other panel attendees, what the panelists thought was most important for participants to understand. This approach also allowed community partners to navigate the complexities of what information to share, given that some knowledge is not appropriate to share with outsiders. Specifically, public access to these presentations placed additional demands to be flexible on our Indigenous partners to ensure tribal secrets were not disseminated without permission due to the legacy of settlers co-opting Indigenous knowledge for their own ends. Thus,

we aimed to mitigate the challenges public presentations might pose for our community partners by allowing them to select the topics and content they discussed.

Further, in addition to planning these public presentations, with the support of the Chancellor's Award throughout 2020–21, we developed a course titled “Dance and Decolonization: The Politics and Possibilities of California Tribal Dance” in our private planning meetings with California tribal partners. The title was initially decided during conversations between Blu Wakpa and the Calderons for the award application; it was later re-approved during internal meetings with the entire 2020–21 team. These meetings discussed how undergraduate coursework could be put to the most use for our partners and their communities, with a particular focus on the revitalization of their dances and other cultural practices. Roth took detailed notes throughout these meetings, which were shared with community partners for their use and updates in case there were any errors or additions needed. The notes were and continue to be utilized in the development of the curriculum for the course, which was launched in Winter 2023, and future community-engaged research. In the Winter 2023 course, undergraduate students have been gathering, organizing, and reporting on primary and secondary documents, which California tribal individuals from the Tongva, Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe, and Winnemem Wintu nations will then build on to revitalize their dances, which have been detrimentally impacted by settler colonialism.<sup>14</sup>

“In this course, students will gain and strengthen their existing research skills by conducting projects that are based on the interests and instructions of the California tribal individuals with whom the class partners. For example, the California tribal partners with whom we will be working have requested that students undertake literature reviews and archival research. Other California tribal partners have asked that the students organize the research materials, which the tribal partners have already gathered. The California tribal partners will visit the class early in the quarter either in person or via Zoom. They will introduce themselves and their tribes and provide background and context for why they are asking students to undertake a particular project. The California tribal partners will also return at the end of the quarter either in person or via Zoom, so that students have the opportunity to report back to them and receive feedback. Many of the California tribal individuals are also leaders in their tribes, so they will likely share at least some of the information that students provide with their communities. Because tribal dances are typically communal, this knowledge may reach California Native community members in other ways as well, such as directly through the dances.”

- Some background and context for student activities from a grant proposal for Blu Wakpa's Winter 2023 course “Dance and Decolonization: The Politics and Possibilities of California Tribal Dance,” which Blu Wakpa designed in collaboration with Roth, Miya Shaffer (another graduate student researcher), and their California tribal partners.

In this way, the private planning meetings with California tribal partners and panel discussions open to the general public became our way to gather over the year. Though we repeatedly mourned our inability to meet in person, we were able to come together, pray, share, learn, laugh, and, when necessary, grieve together, deepening our connections while physically apart. In the public presentations, Indigenous storytelling was the main mode of sharing knowledge, along with discussing and depicting the movement of different dances through language, photos, movement, and video. With permission, we recorded all public sessions, which has generated an archive of primary source materials for Blu Wakpa's future research with our community partners and videos to share with students for pedagogical purposes in future classes. We have also shared all of the recordings with the community partners for their own use. The COVID-19 context made documenting these events even easier since they occurred on Zoom, where recording is as simple as pressing a button. All of this work sought to deepen decolonial praxis at the university while sharing Indigenous knowledges with on- and off-campus community members through flexible and reciprocal working methods.

Our process also held benefits for undergraduate and graduate students. By hosting the panel discussions during coursework, undergraduate students could learn alongside the off-campus audience members during the public presentations, who were often California tribal attendees. This opened the classroom space to conversations and Q&As directly informed and led by Indigenous people(s). For Roth, her work as a graduate student researcher has been deeply intertwined with graduate mentorship within this process, as Blu Wakpa increasingly gave her more responsibilities in the project and guided her through each phase. For example, conducting administrative work for online programming provided practical opportunities to learn about decolonizing methodologies and navigating institutional bureaucracy. Additionally, Roth often did tasks such as grant writing for community partners and co-creating syllabi with Blu Wakpa's guidance and editing, which strengthened her writing and offered additional experience in course planning and preparation. Roth can also use, adapt, and build on these co-created syllabi for her future academic endeavours. As each added responsibility built on previous work with direct mentorship, Roth repeatedly moved beyond her comfort zone to grow as a student and scholar while strengthening her practical actions for social justice in a context structured for accountability. Thus, our holistic and flexible model highlights how centring service as integral and inseparable from research and teaching and utilizing digital technologies can offer reciprocal benefits for students, professors, and community partners, elevate forms of knowledge historically excluded from higher education, and help build the skills and relationships necessary for creating more just futures.

At the same time, it is imperative not to romanticize this work. We made mistakes, especially in the transition to the Zoom format, which required technological skills that were at times new to us or beyond our skill set. For example, in the first public presentation with the California tribal partners, while rushing to manage all the technological needs at the start of the program, Roth exhibited her own "colonial unknowing" (Goeman 2020, 52–53) by prioritizing logistical needs over presence and reverence toward Indigenous protocols. In particular, she started recording the session during the land acknowledgment, working quickly without remembering that doing so would interrupt the speakers. Such moments required a re-evaluation of our working processes, such as setting a clear order for tasks at the start of sessions, and often included checking in with our California tribal partners about how we could better support them in these events and apologizing and taking responsibility for missteps when appropriate. This points to the reality that building accountable relations comes with moments of rupture and repair, some big and some small. In these moments,



flexibility can help us reorient our approaches to become better accomplices in decolonizing our institutions, as we inevitably all make mistakes. There is always more work to be done.

### **Conclusion: Decolonial Dreaming**

Despite the growing support for land acknowledgments and community-engaged work in academia, faculty can still face many hurdles in implementing a decolonial praxis, particularly in regard to redistributing resources and shifting power dynamics. In other words, although settler-capitalist institutions seem more willing to acknowledge the contemporary presence of Indigenous people(s)—and, in some cases, their sovereignty—institutional norms, often embodied and reinforced by university faculty and staff, can significantly impede a decolonial praxis. For example, while a university may support faculty in their community-engaged initiatives, institutional and community norms and timelines are often incompatible, which can pose barriers to this kind of work. Institutional policies can also apply pressure to partnerships for fast and transactional rather than sustained, reciprocal relations or impose slow-moving timelines, such as payment processes, that can disproportionately impact community partners (Parker et al. 2018, 472).

In some fields, a holistic approach to community-engaged research, teaching, and service and a redistribution of resources can still be considered deviant and even a violation of university policy. For instance, in 2020, a senior scholar in another field wrote to Blu Wakpa that they did not think Blu Wakpa should use her faculty funds for honoraria and would be surprised if it were even allowed. Yet, Blu Wakpa had previously outlined her decolonial praxis in grant proposals funded by the university. The senior scholar's words prompted Blu Wakpa to double-check with administrators at both the departmental and school levels, where they confirmed that her praxis was indeed acceptable and *not* a violation of university policy.

At other times, institutional officials may deem a decolonial praxis entirely illegible. In 2020, in collaboration with Roth and their California tribal partners, Blu Wakpa applied for a multi-million-dollar external funding opportunity that sought to support imaginative and bold, community-engaged projects. The proposal sought to move from land acknowledgment to land back. In it, Blu Wakpa wrote, "Settler colonialism is about dispossessing Native peoples from their land, and while the return of that land may seem radical to some, many Native studies scholars and activists agree that it is the clearest path forward for Native peoples." Interestingly, the feedback Blu Wakpa received from the internal committee was that they could not determine whether the project aligned with the purpose of the call for proposals, which asked for radical approaches to equity, so they did not make a final recommendation about whether Blu Wakpa could proceed with the grant or not. Without this recommendation, that particular land back proposal has been left in limbo.

Yet, alongside universities adopting land acknowledgments, land back is occurring (Stock 2021), and in the meantime, we will continue decolonial dreaming and acting in collaboration with Tongva and other Indigenous people(s). When still a doctoral student being introduced to community-engaged work, Blu Wakpa once shared with a professor, "Sometimes I feel like being in Native/ethnic studies is like being a really big dreamer." To Blu Wakpa's surprise, the professor responded, "It can certainly devolve to that." Yet, from many Indigenous understandings, dreaming is a vital way of knowing (Posthumus 2018). Other liberatory movements have also articulated how dreaming is necessary to counter the epistemological violence of white supremacist norms (Kelley 2002), which are integral to the maintenance of settler-capitalist systems. In fact, danced dreams, like the

revitalization of tribal dances that have been detrimentally impacted by settler colonialism, can help bring Indigenous futurities into being (Lefevre 2013). Decolonial dreaming can mean envisioning an end to the settler-capitalist structure, breaking the capital relation, creating spaces of learning that ripple beyond the classroom, integrating and acknowledging community collaboration in academia, and implementing practices and policies that recognize and honour the land as a relative, which includes restoring Indigenous jurisdiction over all land. Such dreams can begin with “performing” and reperforming an acknowledgment of positionality, place, and Indigenous sovereignty, coupled with ongoing, accountable action.

## Notes

1. To open this article, we have adopted UCLA American Indian Studies and American Indian Studies Center’s land acknowledgment. Rather than “we,” the unedited land acknowledgment states, “AIS and AISC at UCLA.” Tria Blu Wakpa, an assistant professor and co-writer of this article, is affiliated with UCLA’s American Indian Studies.
2. The unedited quotation specifies “men and women,” which reifies binary gender norms. In contrast, “people” does not specify gender and is therefore inclusive of people who do not identify as male or female.
3. We have added scare quotes around “Westerners” because here, this commonly-used term—used to describe people living or originating in the West, in particular the US and Europe—problematically obscures the Indigenous people(s) of these lands.
4. Conversely, Kaur highlights that land acknowledgments may overlook Indigenous nations’ sovereignty and “oversimplify [other] issues at hand” by not adequately addressing the history and politics of the land, including that it may be claimed by more than one tribe. For more, see Kaur (2021).
5. People have also critiqued land acknowledgments for other reasons beyond the scope of this article, such as that they “can obscure the actual history,” “oversimplify the issues at hand,” “overburden Native people,” and “be seen as just enough.” See Kaur (2021).
6. We use parentheses in our writing of “people(s)” because our tribal partners are not always representatives of their tribal nations, though some are. Throughout the article, this punctuation marks that we work with both tribal individuals and representatives.
7. We use scare quotes around “resources” because this settler-capitalist construction contrasts with how many Indigenous peoples understand land and other more-than-human kin such as air, water, nonhuman animals, and the cosmos—that is, as relatives. See Marshall (2014).
8. Robinson proposes people “consider how acknowledgement’s form has a place within our lives and work that is always in relationship with the specificity and context of its use” (Robinson et al. 2019, 22).
9. While we use the term “service” in accordance with the categories through which faculty are evaluated, it is important that such “service” does not replicate ideologies of benevolent paternalism or saviorism. In our case, “service” is aimed at challenging hegemonic power relations and addressing the harm institutional structures have caused through accountable relationships that support the ongoing work of our community partners.
10. Changing power dynamics and the distribution of “resources” requires returning land to Indigenous peoples. See note 7 regarding why we use scare quotes around “resources.”
11. We intentionally use “ancestors” rather than “ancestral remains.” For example, according to Linda Rugg, “UC Berkeley holds the remains of more than 9,594 Native American individuals. . . . This is probably a significant undercount because there will be a count that counts a box, a burial site, and there may be several individuals in that burial site, for example. So it’s probably an undercount. Of that 9,594, more than 9,000 were taken from California. So, the holdings of the university, the ancestral remains, are predominantly

California. And more than 2,000 of them come from Alameda County, where the university is sitting. And I should say that about two-thirds of these remains were taken from the counties surrounding the Bay Area, around five counties” (Public Affairs 2021).

12. This is because “within the context of U.S. assimilative policies and institutions, intellectual/visual/embodied/dancing expressions [of sovereignty] have provided crucial opportunities for Lakota and other Native people to perpetuate their physical and cultural survival, and by extension, their enduring fight for Indigenous sovereignty and freedom, including in the legal realm.” For more, see Blu Wakpa (2022).

13. Presentation topics were selected by community partners and included events titled “Revitalizing Ancestral Practices: The Ohlone Tule Boat Project Film Screening and Discussion,” “Contextualizing and Revitalizing California Tribal Dances Panel Discussion and Q&A,” “Powwow in the California Native Context,” “California Native Martial Arts and Masculinities” and more. The presentations were well attended by the public; however, it is important to remember that simply making something “open to the public” does not necessarily enable access to such an event. Given the historical and ongoing settler-capitalist dynamics in universities, wholesale transformations of implicit cultural norms are needed in order to actually welcome in the broader public, including dismantling white supremacy culture (Jones and Okun 2001) and providing much greater accommodations for different (dis)abilities such as live transcription and ASL interpretation. Additionally, not everyone has internet access, which is again disproportionately the case in Indigenous communities (Duarte 2017; Mattingly and Blu Wakpa 2021).

14. Notably, our Chumash community partner determined that the research they needed to complete for their revitalization project was not appropriate to share with outsiders and thus not appropriate for the undergraduate curriculum. Instead, they suggested the weeks dedicated to their project focus on any additional needs for Tina and Jessa Calderon’s ongoing revitalization work, and the curriculum has reflected this request.

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