

## **Department of American Studies Statement in Support of American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS) at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill**

The Department of American Studies (AMST) at UNC offers our full support to the Native graduate and undergraduate students who authored the [change.org petition](#) to save American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS) at UNC – Chapel Hill. AMST acknowledges our role in creating the need for the petition and the value to Native students and communities of the possibility for UNC students to earn a degree in AIIS.

Although several departments in the College of Arts and Sciences and across the university offer courses in AIIS, AIIS as an undergraduate degree has been offered as one of five concentrations within AMST. Each of these concentrations specifies a distinct set of requirements for a major or minor. In Fall 2021 AMST faculty voted to eliminate the concentrations in favor of offering a single AMST major. We sought to simplify students' path toward a degree, increase students' flexibility to pursue their own interests among the varied courses offered by department faculty, and promote conversation among students with overlapping interests. This change would not involve discontinuing any of the current AIIS classes or faculty positions. Nevertheless, the effect of AMST's decision was to eliminate the opportunity for students to earn a degree specifically in American Studies with a concentration in American Indian and Indigenous Studies. We acknowledge that, while our intentions were not malicious, our actions have been detrimental to students, the University, and to many other stakeholders in the state, region, and beyond.

We also call attention to the difficult circumstances that prompted AMST to propose curricular reform. AIIS has lost several well-regarded faculty members over the last few years without any corresponding plan from the administration to replace those faculty and/or retain those who remain. The American Indian Center – a valuable partner to the faculty and students as well as UNC's strongest connection to Native communities across the state and the region – remains underfunded and in a perpetual state of flux. The administration has declared support for AIIS, has attracted Native students with the promise of their being able to study AIIS at UNC, and has recently made symbolic gestures – such as the Chancellor's declaration on Indigenous Peoples Day and the renaming of a building on campus after Henry Owl – to suggest the university's commitment to Native people. These promises, however, ring hollow without concrete support to maintain AIIS as a viable course of study and an integral part of the University. A commitment by the University to hire permanent faculty to teach the AIIS curriculum would be an important form of concrete support.

In short, the conditions that impelled AMST to act remain unresolved. The issues that AIIS faces are bigger than a single department and cannot be solved by a single department. This University must demonstrate a stronger, more consistent, and more properly resourced commitment to the first peoples of this land, their descendants, and to the tribal nations of this state and region. Our hope is that we recognize this moment of crisis for the opportunity that it is and that our great University will rise up and do what is right not just for AIIS but for the whole of North Carolina.

The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences has paused implementation of the new AMST curriculum for the 2022-23 academic year. We look forward to working with the Dean, AIIS faculty in other parts of the university, Native students, and other stakeholders to find creative and sustainable solutions to Native students' needs.

Again, we stand in full support of the AIIS students and encourage you to [sign the petition](#).