For decades, Boston University has closed on the second Monday of October in observation of Columbus Day, established as a federal holiday in 1937 to celebrate the 1492 landing of Christopher Columbus in the Americas. This year, the University will again close on the second Monday of October—this time, in observation of Indigenous Peoples' Day.

The change in the University's calendar comes at the recommendation of BU's Antiracism Working Group. We made this change amid debate about U.S. history and the efficacy of an observance that overlooks genocide, violence, forced removal, and oppression toward Indigenous populations in North America. We advocated for this change to the academic calendar following intense discussion and campus-wide focus groups.

Commemorating Christopher Columbus’ “discovery” of America dismisses the reality that native people were already present when Columbus and his European crew landed on these shores. Pioneers are better feted for the first humans to populate the Americas around 10,000 BC, or possibly earlier according to recent discoveries. By choosing to commemorate Indigenous Peoples’ Day instead, BU joins an international movement to redefine relationships with indigenous populations and to honor and preserve their rights and culture.

I grew up in a small town in Massachusetts, where many of my classmates and friends were members of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, which has inhabited present-day Massachusetts and Rhode Island for more than 12,000 years. Today, I still feel proud to see students of all races embrace their identity.

Commemorating Indigenous Peoples’ Day reflects an important step toward acknowledging the true history of North America. Native Americans have a right to be heard and their culture is an important part of our educational programs. All students at the BU community need to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences and heritage of indigenous peoples and foster advocacy for those issues.

Hopefully, acknowledging Indigenous Peoples’ Day, reflecting on this history and reaching out to tribal youth who may be interested in our educational programs, will inspire the BU community to seek a deeper understanding of the customs and history of indigenous people and to become advocates for their future. Providing our first people the attention and investment they deserve is long overdue and will enrich us all.

Andrea L. Taylor
Senior Diversity Officer

Recommended events and resources for observing Indigenous Peoples’ Day:

- Why Did BU Rename Columbus Day Indigenous Peoples Day?
  - Podcast exploring BU’s shift from Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples’ Day, featuring Adrienne Young (SSW’21)

- Caution: Cultural Emergency
  - October 8 to October 25; BU’s George Sherman Union Plaza
  - Art installation by Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), part of the Indigenous Voices in the Americas series sponsored by the BU Arts Initiative

- Raven Reshapes Boston: A Native Corn Garden at the MFA
  - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1
  - Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

- Developing Stories: Native Photographers in the Field
  - DINNER WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7
  - Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

- The First Americas Museum
  - Newly opened museum in Oklahoma City, built to honor the 39 tribes in Oklahoma today. The FAM is the country’s largest single-building tribal cultural center.

- Recommended Reading:
  - The Wampanoag of Martha’s Vineyard by Thomas Dresser (DGE’67, CAS’69, Questrom’83) is one of many perspectives on the Wampanoag’s tribal history.

- Recommended Events and Resources for Observing Indigenous Peoples’ Day:
  - For more information, visit the BU Arts Initiative website.

- Copyright © 2021 | Trustees of Boston University, Privacy Statement.