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160 Years at
Oregon's Pacific

Then & Now



Native Training School ▼ Pacific's Dr. Phil ▼ Erector Set Inventor

Time for Reconciliation Over Native School

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WE EXPECT students at Pacific to expand their horizons, to reach out to the larger world, to grow as human beings and become functioning, productive adults who contribute significantly to their society.

We don't give any of this a thought. It's a given. This is what happens at a university. It would seem to be an unconditional good.

But it hasn't always worked this way. For half of a decade in the late nineteenth century, Pacific University administered the Forest Grove Indian Training School. More than 330 Native American youngsters were brought, sometimes unwillingly, to this training school—one of several across the country—from 40 different tribes in several western states and territories as the US government sought to “educate” an entire generation of tribal children, forcing them into a certain socially accepted image, with a preferred religion, Anglo-European clothing, hair styles, gender roles and life skills.

The ominous line that dominated this national effort was articulated by Captain Richard H. Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Training School: “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” Needless to say, this sentiment would be totally unacceptable to those today who work diligently to foster a certain image of Pacific, to “brand” it in order to make it even more attractive to prospective students.

What was worse, far worse, at the Training School was that 43 of those young tribal children did indeed die while attending.* Many are buried at a nearby cemetery. It would be accurate to say that at other educational institutions in Oregon at the same time that 13 percent of their students were not dying in a few short years.



At least some students were forced to attend the military-run school. Students were not allowed to wear native clothes or practice native customs.

Surely, it was not the intention of those in responsible positions to have such a brutal mortality rate. Nevertheless, that is what happened. As a result, Pacific University is not high on the list as a destination for a college education among tribal youth today.

Tribal memories are long lasting. I wish to submit that Pacific University has an obligation to these tribes' descendants to extend its sincere sense of regret and a desire to heal the ancient wounds.

Professor Alfonso Lopez-Vasquez, assistant to

the Provost, seeks to foster the conditions on campus where a healing ceremony could bring together tribal representatives and the University community. I would hope that such a ceremony would create a change of consciousness so that a much greater number of Native American students would see fit to come to Pacific where, I hope, they would make an important contribution to the life of the university, both as students and as contributing members of the alumni body.

Pacific has established a powerful working relationship since 1993 with the Navajo nation in our Lukachukai outreach program, thanks to the leadership of Stan and Doug Uentillie. Well more than 100 Pacific students have worked at the Lukachukai boarding school with its students and helped tribal elders who need assistance to get through tough winters. Virtually all participants recognize the wonderful learning experience this program offers.

Such results should happen on our campus. But in order to achieve that lofty goal, we need to attend to our long overdue institutional obligation to the relatives of those who left tribal life to come here—never to return. ☼

*Cary C. Collins, “The Broken Crucible of Assimilation,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 101:4 (Fall 2000), p. 472.