

# Transcript: Land Acknowledgement

Chapman Learning Commons



## Introduction

“We would like to begin by acknowledging that the UBC Vancouver campus is situated within the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam) People...”

This land acknowledgement is something I am sure you have heard at the beginnings of meetings, classes, events, or even seen in email signatures. If you are an international student, this may be the first time you are engaging with such a land acknowledgment, or at least that was the case for me when I first moved here.

**Note:** This video is intended to be a short introduction on how to create land acknowledgements and what they mean. We would encourage you to use this toolkit as a stepping stone to helping you delve deeper into reading and learning more about Indigenous Peoples and their land.

## What are land acknowledgements?

Simply put, a land acknowledgement is a formal statement that is usually delivered at the beginning of a gathering, meeting, or presentation to place emphasis on the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their land: the place where we live and work. The acknowledgement is a sign of respect, as it recognises the colonial context of the Indigenous territories on which the event is taking place. Over the last decade, land acknowledgments like this have come into practice more as awareness of reconciliation and Indigenous ways of being have grown.

[Colonial context: European settlers forcefully took land from Indigenous peoples and displaced them. The Canadian government and Christian churches formed residential schools in an attempt to forcibly assimilate Indigenous youth into the new Canadian society. Young children were taken away from their families and put into residential schools, where they were malnourished, abused, and murdered. Their hair was cut, and speaking their language or practicing their culture was forbidden.]

## **What is the land that UBC is situated on?**

UBC, of course, has two campuses: the Vancouver Campus and the Okanagan Campus. The Vancouver Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam) people. The City of Vancouver is on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations territory. The Okanagan Campus is situated on the traditional territories of the Syilx (Okanagan) Peoples. If you are unsure what land you are located on, two popular online tools for finding this information are [Native Land](#) and [Whose Land](#).

Fun fact: The street signs on both UBC campuses are bilingual. The Vancouver campus has signs in *Hul'qumi'num* and the Okanagan campus uses *Nsyilxcen*.

## **Why should we be making land acknowledgements?**

It can be difficult to make an acknowledgement when you are new to the place. However, the choice to make one displays an awareness of what it might mean to study in a university that is built on unceded territory, and a desire to actively participate in decolonisation attempts. Human relationships, I have learned, are at the heart of decolonisation attempts. It is crucial in establishing the kinds of communities we want to build for our future, and to uphold Indigenous sovereignty.

## **The drawbacks of land acknowledgements + making meaningful ones**

Given the increasing popularity of delivering territorial acknowledgments, it can seem commonplace, and not truly intentional. As Lindsey Schneider notes in her TED Talk, speakers are making an acknowledgement of the unceded land, but not actually giving the land back. Taking that into consideration, acknowledgements can become tricky to navigate. To make your own acknowledgment more meaningful, especially if this is your first time making one, the key is to situate yourself, your positionality, and your relationship to the land. Make it personal. You will notice that some individuals situate themselves by mentioning their ancestry, nation, or the community that they are a part of.

## **The three elements of a land acknowledgement:**

1. Name and acknowledge local nations whose lands you are on.
2. Locate yourself in relation to these lands.
3. Make a connection between your positionality (elements 1+2) to your role at UBC, or the topic of the event, or both.

## **Here is an example of an acknowledgement made by a staff member from IKB:**

I'm Rochelle Mazar, I use she/her pronouns and I'm a settler Canadian. I would like to begin by acknowledging that I'm speaking to you today from the traditional ancestral and unseated territory of the hənq̓əminəm speaking Musqueam people. I also want to acknowledge that we are employees of a colonial institution with colonial frameworks, institutional culture, and structures which are often invisible to many of us because they are so normalized in settler society.

## **What to do if you are doing a virtual acknowledgement:**

If it is an event for UBC, acknowledge the land that the university is on. Then state the land that you are currently on, and also recognise that the other attendees of the virtual event may be situated on different territories. You can also invite them to deliver land acknowledgements of their own.

I hope that this becomes your stepping stone into delving deeper into the history and practice of making these acknowledgements. You will notice that your acknowledgments will grow and change with you, as you learn more about the space around you. Trying to gain a better grasp of this practice is your first step to understanding, acknowledging, and locating yourself within the fraught history of the land that will be your home for the next few years.

## **Glossary:**

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2024, September 20). *Reconciliation*. Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc.cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1400782178444/1529183710887>

**Traditional:** Recognizes lands traditionally used and/or occupied by the Musqueam people or other First Nations in other parts of the country.

**Ancestral:** Recognizes land that is handed down from generation to generation.

**Unceded:** Refers to land that was not turned over to the Crown (government) by a treaty or other agreement.

**Reconciliation:** Building a renewed relationship with Indigenous Peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect and partnership.

Vice-President, Finance and Operations, University of British Columbia. (2021, February 11). *What is a land acknowledgement?* University of British Columbia. <https://vpfo.ubc.ca/2021/02/what-is-a-land-acknowledgement/>

**Decolonisation:** The action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent.

**Positionality:** The occupation or adoption of a particular position in relation to others, usually with reference to issues of culture, ethnicity, or gender. (OED definition)