

American Indian Cultural Garden – Overview

The American Indian Cultural Garden (AICG) will **create a gathering place to celebrate American Indian cultures and Indigenous ecological knowledge**, support American Indian students in adjusting to life on campus, and serve as a teaching tool for the greater community. This garden space **affirms American Indian identity, culture, and Indigenous ecological knowledge** for American Indian students, UNC campus community and local Triangle community, honoring Tribal Nations state- and nation-wide.

Elements will include native and **culturally relevant plants, ceremonial space** to enable Native cultural use, **event gathering space** for educational programs, **quiet spaces** for small group and individual healing, and the **inclusion of water and a firepit for cultural purposes**. The garden will also feature **art designed by Native creators, seating** throughout, and a **prayer tree** envisioned by an Elder. The feel of the garden centers culturally-significant native plants, trees, water, stone, wood, and natural elements.

Campus and Community Events

This space will provide **crucial space for events and gatherings**. The American Indian Center currently uses the lawn area for many events and programming throughout the academic year. Having a dedicated space designed to host gatherings will expand possibilities and create a much more presentable aesthetic. Annual programming events include:

- **Welcome Extravaganza** – a celebration at the beginning of the school year to welcome Native students to campus,
- **American Indian Heritage Month** – multiple events through November
- **Healthy Native North Carolinians Network** - gatherings for statewide Tribal leaders
- **Elder in Residence** – annual program that brings esteemed Native Elders to campus
- **FDOC/LDOC Breakfast** for students
- **Cherokee Coffee Hour** – a weekly language immersion meet-up
- Native ceremony and **private cultural moments**

Students

Students were involved during the planning process. There was **an overwhelming call** for the need for quiet, private space for students to engage in **self-care**. **Student mental health** is an important conversation on campus, and students feel that the AICG provides meaningful, affirming space for self-care in an environment with familiar cultural and natural elements. Students especially reported wanting quiet space for reflection, spiritual wellness, and smudging, an important cultural practice.

Academic and Educational Elements

The design also incorporates elements for academic use – including **space for outdoor classroom** events, a regular meeting location for Cherokee Coffee Hour and other academic events. Interpretive signage and public events will also serve as educational elements for the general public. COVID-19 has showed us the importance of outdoor gathering space, the AICG will expand possibilities.

For more details, see the full vision outlined by the Community Charette:

https://americanindiancenter.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/376/2020/11/AICG-Final_11_16_2020_full.pdf

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