When the sun rises it warms the east end of MSU’s Centennial Mall gradually extending its rays westward across campus, the outlying fields and tops of the Spanish Peaks. In the timeless tradition of the Great Plains Sun Dance, the rituals of indigenous tribes make local space sacred as a setting for renewal of the people’s relationship with the land itself and with all the beings in their “life-world.”

These traditions, native to Montana’s first peoples, remind us that the sun has warmed this land for thousands of years and that there is a deep history steeped in the ground beneath our feet.

Shaping the future of our state, nation and world, as Montana’s land grant university, we seek to connect the threads that represent the culturally and historically rich and diverse community we call home.

It is with this timeless tradition in mind, that we ask you to help us create the American Indian Center.

A SETTING FOR CELEBRATION AND LEARNING

Imagine, one early morning, walking onto the land east of the Centennial Mall that has been blessed by native elders, and into a new building dedicated to the celebration and educational support of the original residents of Montana. Instinctively you feel drawn into a harmonious space designed to nurture and uplift the human spirit.

Moving through the building, curved walls and spherical elements seem to embrace you as indigenous art surrounds you in color, design and story-telling. You notice spaces clearly designed for collaborative learning, alcoves for conversation and seating areas intended to foster discussion and for facilitating teamwork. You can see and feel how these spaces support and encourage learning among students while also inviting the general public to engage with Montana’s tribal communities.

Each space within the building, you realize, is inviting you to understand how the beauty and wisdom of Montana’s first peoples informs how we educate students, how we prepare them as citizens and how we celebrate the history and culture of people and place.

Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people.

Great Spirit Prayer
DISCOVERING LESSONS IN EVERY LEAF AND ROCK

MSU has been named one of the nation’s top institutions for awarding degrees to Native American students. This recognition comes as a result of more than 40 years of thoughtful program development designed to help American Indian and other minority students succeed. Programs like Indian Leadership Education and Development (ILEAD), American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), McNair Scholars, Indian Education for All, Caring For Our Own Program (CO-OP in Nursing), Creative Nations (mentoring in Arts and Architecture), and American Indian Research Opportunities (AIRO) reach students across disciplines in spaces throughout campus.

The American Indian Center will create an informational hub for MSU’s wealth of student success programs where students can ask and learn about where to get help or how to become more involved. And it will be a place where American Indian students and their families can share traditions.

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE ON THE STRENGTH OF THE PAST

The American Indian Center will further engage the MSU community through its natural synergy with our Native American Studies Program—a leader in the scholarly exploration of Native American research and education since 1974. Its curriculum and unique course offerings build awareness and appreciation for Indian heritage, culture and current affairs and encourage participation with the wider community.

We envision the American Indian Center providing space and technology that will enable faculty to collaborate and link students with tribal colleges and communities, as well as other Native American scholars, artists and leaders from around the state and nation.