



Accomplice

For the Record

Installment 02: Why Moreau Needs to Change

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Featured Resource: Elsa's podcast Naivete

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/na%C3%AFvet%C3%A9/id1546033416>

What is Moreau?

The Moreau First Year Experience course is a one-credit, two-semester, graded course required of every Notre Dame student during their first year on campus. [Click here for "5 Fast Facts" about Moreau.](#) The course is billed as an essential transition course, helping first year Domers adjust to life on campus and preparing them for their Notre Dame career. It is commonly understood as a much broader life skills course. The knowledge shared in Moreau is relevant far beyond the bounds of Notre Dame's classrooms or campus, representing a rare opportunity to work on ourselves as human beings, not as students.

Notre Dame's Office of First Year Advising describes the course:

Moreau helps new students make a meaningful transition to collegiate life at Notre Dame by integrating their academic, co-curricular, and residential experiences. A collaborative effort between First Year Advising and the Division of Student Affairs, Moreau embodies the idea that Notre Dame's Catholic character should inform all its endeavors; nurture the formation of mind, body, and spirit; enrich the integration of intellectual, extracurricular, and residential experiences; and deepen the potential of cross-cultural engagement.

Moreau is inspired by the pedagogical vision of Blessed Basil Moreau, professor, priest, and founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross. The Moreau syllabus, common to all sections of the two courses, is organized around multiple themes, including orientation to University life, health and wellbeing, community standards, cultural competence, academic success, spiritual life, and discernment. These themes build upon the Five Pillars of a Holy Cross Education as distilled from Fr. Moreau's writings: mind, heart, zeal, family, and hope.

As the only graded course which reaches every student, Moreau has the capacity to facilitate every student's understanding of important topics and skills when the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and presented. You'll notice the course is highly informed by our

University's mission and Catholic identity, which carries with it a long tradition of social justice. It is for these reasons that we have chosen Moreau as our starting place in the campaign for educating ourselves and the rest of Notre Dame, and practicing better acknowledgement, inclusivity, and care for all members of our campus community, especially those Indigenous members who historically and presently do not have a voice.

What is the mission of Moreau?

Every Moreau syllabus begins with an excerpt from a letter the Blessed Basil Moreau (the course's namesake) wrote to the Congregation of Holy Cross priests in 1849:

Even though we base our philosophy course on the data of faith, no one need fear that we shall confine our teaching within narrow and unscientific boundaries. No, we wish to accept science without prejudice and in a manner adapted to the needs of our times. We do not want our students to be ignorant of anything they should know. To this end, we shall shrink from no sacrifice. But we shall never forget that virtue, as Bacon puts it, is the spice which preserves science. We shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart. While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens for heaven.

This excerpt is the closest thing to an explicit mission statement in course documents. The course goals and outcomes read:

Course goals and outcomes are consonant with the Five Pillars of a Holy Cross education in that all students, regardless of their faith tradition, conceive of their education as a holistic, purposeful development. The Notre Dame community nurtures your intellectual life, affective experience, professional aspirations, cultural exploration, and physical well-being.

Valiant goals to be sure, but to understand the shortcomings that we have identified and seek to rectify with our project, reread this critical sentence from Moreau's letter: "We do not want our students to be ignorant of anything they should know."

It is our concern that Moreau has made the all-too-common mistake of prioritizing complacency and comfort over justice. While their mission and goals are inspirational and ambitious, they are also easier said than fulfilled. We understand that teaching a history of colonization and oppression will be difficult and uncomfortable, but the Moreau statements commit themselves to taking on this precise challenge. As Father Massingale taught us in the this semester's first lecture in the Building an Anti-Racist Vocabulary Series, "The Catholic Church is a bystander in white nationalism and white supremacy." Why is this? Because, as sociologist Joe Feagin writes, there exists a "severe reluctance to make white people uncomfortable."

Harmony, in this setting, is continuing to ignore and conceal the existence and suffering of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. This would maintain the status-quo and

student comfort at the expense of Indigenous dignity, and the majority of the unknowing students at Notre Dame would never question the “Notre Dame Story.”

Justice, in this setting, is actually living out the Moreau mission and taking on the humiliating truth. As Blessed Moreau instructed his priests, “We do not want our students to be ignorant of anything they should know.” Notre Dame students deserve to know this.

What is the mission of the University of Notre Dame?

If the University of Notre Dame seeks to be consistent with its own mission statement, it must heed our proposal. As the University itself proclaims, it seeks to be “dedicated to the pursuit and sharing of truth for its own sake.” The current history of this institution, as told by the University, is a partial truth at best and a lie of omission at worst. To be in the pursuit of truth and to set its students on this correct trajectory, the University must openly acknowledge its history with the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi.

Furthermore, the University aims to promote “intellectual interchange,” which is “enriched by the presence and voices of diverse scholars and students.” Silencing the stories of Native people, especially in the founding story of the University, is blatantly at odds with this assertion. The lack of diversity exemplified by this omission not only fails to enrich dialogue by the University’s own standards, but implicitly condones the omission of marginalized groups in both historical and current conversations. Lack of inclusion of Indigenous culture in the diversity unit in the Moreau curriculum further serves to exclude the remote views of scholars and the present views of Native students on Notre Dame’s campus.

The University also declares a commitment to social justice, rooted in its Catholic identity. In its mission statement, this is expressed as follows:

The University prides itself on being an environment of teaching and learning that fosters the development in its students of those disciplined habits of mind, body, and spirit that characterize educated, skilled, and free human beings. In addition, the University seeks to cultivate in its students not only an appreciation for the great achievements of human beings, but also a disciplined sensibility to the poverty, injustice, and oppression that burden the lives of so many. The aim is to create a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice.

When students’ educational experiences lack true diversity of perspectives, the quality of education suffers, especially in its ability to impart social justice. Silence manifesting in the decision not to make space for Indigenous voices and experience—in this case, those of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi—is a form of oppression, an act of complicity with structures which lead to Native marginalization, exclusion, and inequities past and present. For students to understand the struggles and triumphs, the needs and offerings of all members of their global community, students must have access to their words. Consistent with its mission statement, Notre Dame must be a platform for these words to reach the hearts and minds of its students.

How are we addressing these discrepancies in our Resolution?

Our resolution calls for “the Student Senate of the University of Notre Dame du Lac [to support] that Notre Dame’s Native history and a greater discussion of Native culture be included in the Moreau FYE course curriculum.”

It seeks to provide an impetus for curriculum change which acknowledges a more detailed and accurate account of the University of Notre Dame’s founding story. Furthermore, it requests that material be added in discussions of diversity which allows students to consider Indigenous culture and experiences. Neither request is particularly time-intensive or difficult to implement, nor are we calling on the Senate to produce this new curriculum; we simply call for the current curriculum to be supplemented with resources/discussions which promote Indigenous thought. We aim to assist in creating these resources with the partnership of Pokagon leadership.

It is first and foremost imperative to emphasize that this resolution, and in fact the action it calls for, is merely a small step for the University to take. Truly addressing these historically sanctioned and now deeply entrenched actions and tendencies will take considerable time and effort. Simply including a more accurate version of Notre Dame’s history with the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi is by no means a silver bullet; however, it represents a crucial step in the right direction for many reasons.

The Moreau course has a unique position in addressing these issues. It is mandatory for every freshman at the University, and it promises its students to impart University objectives, resources, and priorities. The failure of the University to consider and include Indigenous perspectives in Moreau a) is at odds with this promise to students and b) suggests that similarly oppressive and exclusive actions are consistent with Catholic principles of social justice, as they claim their own transgressions are. In sum, because this course is understood as a conduit of University principals to students, correcting incomplete or incorrect accounts of Indigenous histories and cultures is deeply impactful.

This resolution and its outcomes represent a concrete step to right this injustice to Indigenous people. The sooner the University acknowledges its shortcomings, the sooner it can act to strengthen its own community, as well as the broader community outside of its campus.

All students in Notre Dame know the [prophecy of Father Sorin](#): “This college will be one of the most powerful means of doing good in this country.” This is a noble and powerful cause, one of which Notre Dame is certainly capable. However, in order to fulfill this vision and its mission, Notre Dame must reflect critically on its engagement with (or lack thereof) Indigenous voices. It can begin to consummate its goals by integrating Indigenous history and culture into its Moreau curriculum.

Contact us!

We would love to hear from you directly if you have any questions, suggestions, comments, or critiques. Email one or both of us, or let us know if you'd like to have a Zoom meeting. Get in touch with Lauren at klein1@nd.edu and Julianne at jdownin2@nd.edu.