

# NAU NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER (NACC)



**Location:** Flagstaff, Arizona  
**Architect:** Studio Ma  
**Completed:** 2010  
**Size:** 12,295 square feet  
**Client:** Northern Arizona University  
**Function:** Indigenous Student Support + Success



**For More Information:**  
<https://in.nau.edu/native-american-cultural-center/>  
<https://studioma.com/projects/northern-arizona-university-native-american-cultural-center/>



# NAU NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER (NACC)



NAU NACC was approved for a 7 million dollar budget to build a 12,540 square foot facility.



A 2 million dollar donation from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, which was then matched by NAU.



Tribal officials from all 22 Arizona tribes as well as 44 other tribal communities offered input. Two former NAU Presidents, as well as faculty, staff and students were involved in the design process.



Spaces were planned around a holistic model of care including social, work and event space, a kitchen, story/prayer room, and outdoor interpretative landscape. Services include academic support, networking, and counseling.

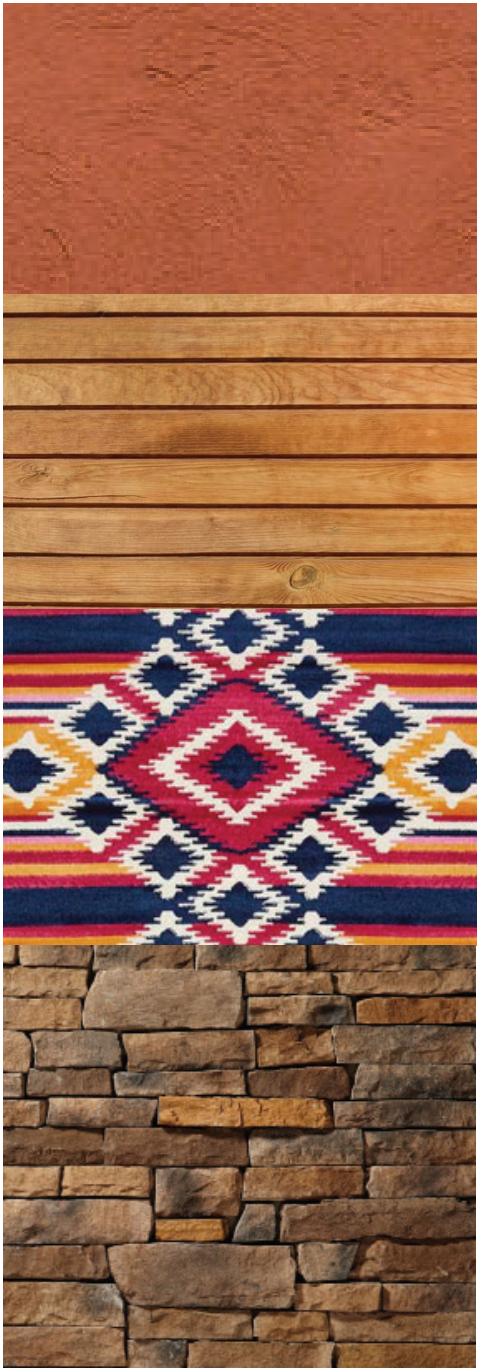
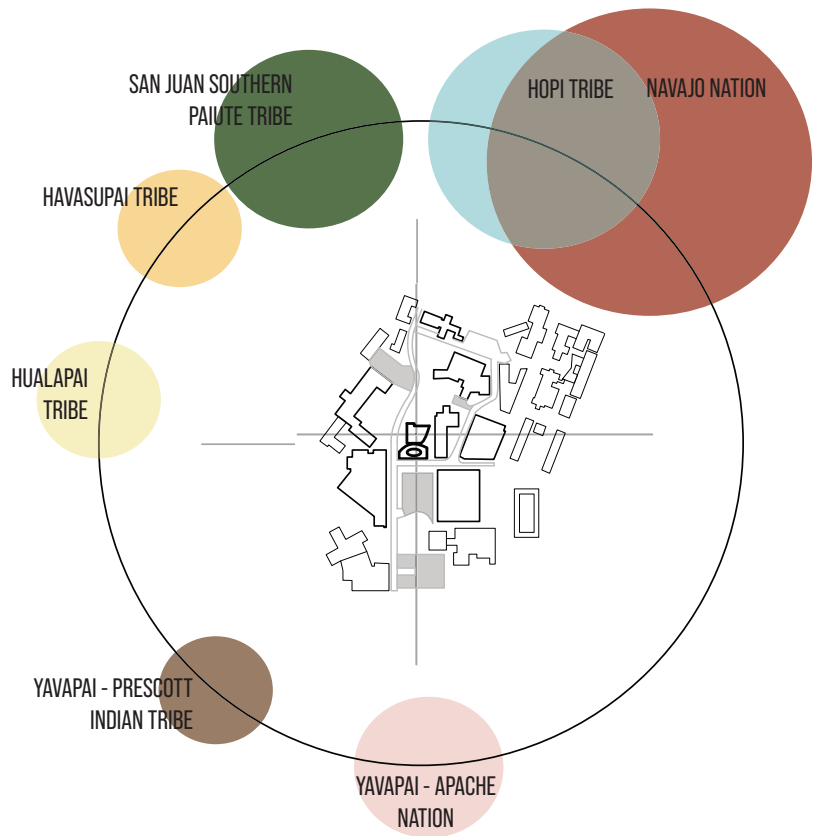


NACC is LEED Gold, which certifies efficiency in energy and water usage, ventilation quality, environmental impact, human health, and community quality of life.

The Native American Cultural Center (NACC) is a “home away from home” for Native American and Indigenous students, tribal communities, staff, faculty and local organizations. And like a home, the facility cares for its community in a holistic way, proving for physical, mental and spiritual needs; social, academic and career support; advocacy and safety. To accomplish this, the facility operates as a centralized hub, housing a variety of spaces, resources, programs and services. The offices for the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP), Institute for Native-Serving Educators (INE), the Office of Native American Initiatives Development Program (ONAI), and the Tribal Leadership Initiative (TLI) are all housed in this location. The NACC runs four programs of its own including the Cohorts of Care, Elders Program, Resources for Success Program and the Indige-Jacks. Social and cultural events are held regularly here to connect students with the greater tribal community and to educate the larger NAU community on the histories, cultures, and issues facing Native American/Alaskan Native/ Native Hawaiian and Indigenous communities today.

## Regional Influences

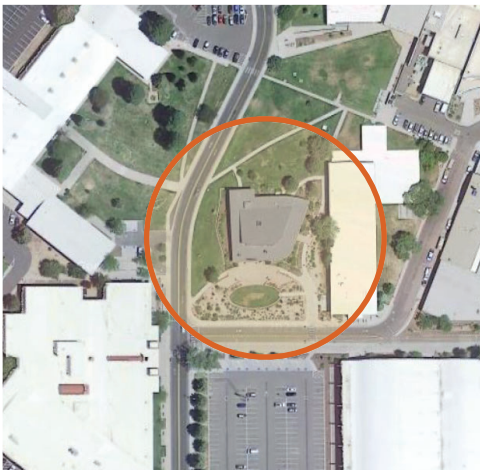
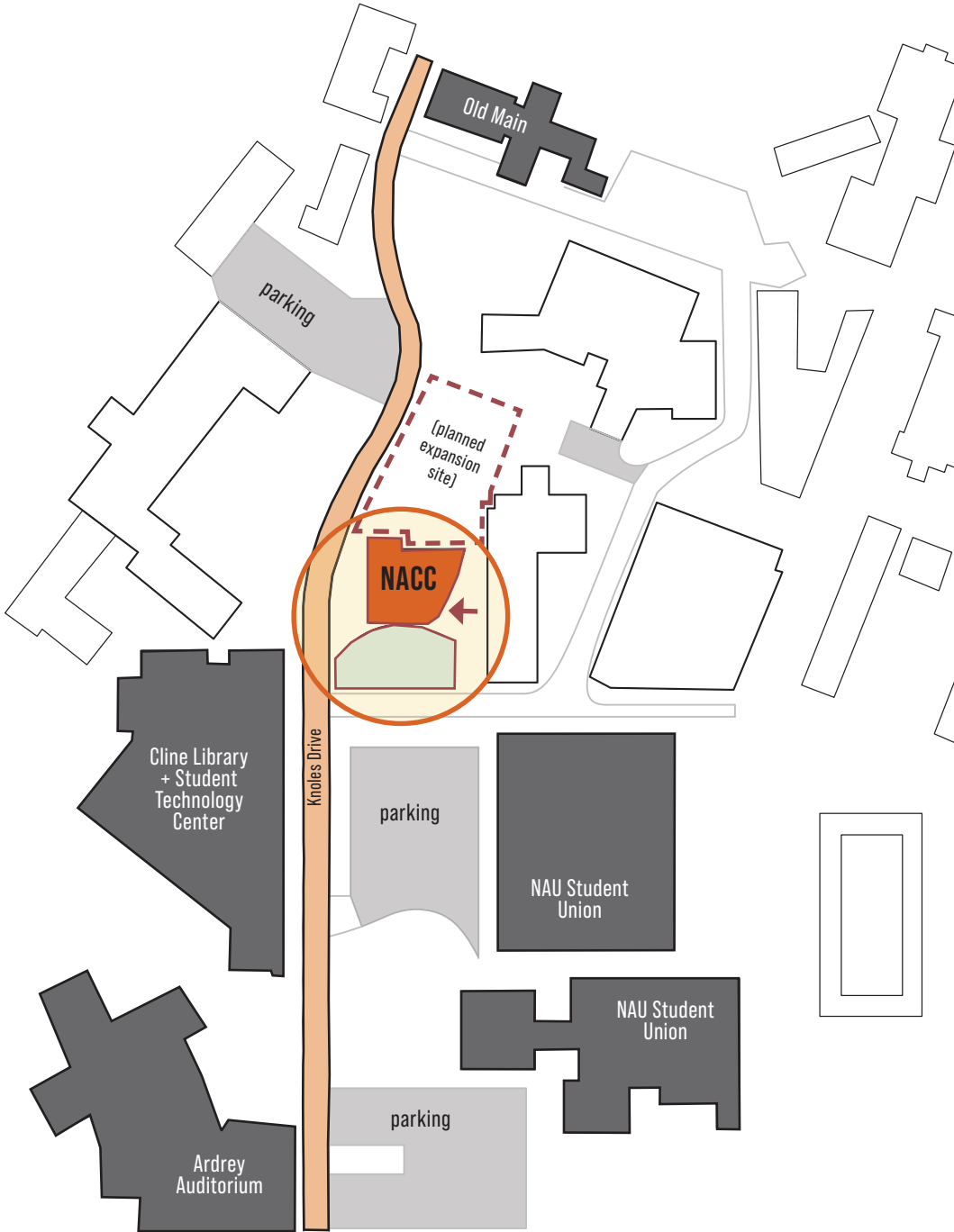
The diagram below shows the relation to the tribes that surround Flagstaff. The size of the circle references the proximity to the NAU NACC and NAU campus, with the bigger the circle representing tribes the closer to the campus placed in their respective traditional lands. Design of the NACC is represented as a blend of forms inspired from traditional dwelling and ceremonial space recognized by Arizona’s local tribal community. The design’s strength is that this is implemented in a manner welcoming to all, thus brining together NACC students coming to NAU from more than 115 tribal nations worldwide. NAU currently serves more than 1500 indigenous students.



## Location + Context

The orientation and placement of the NAU NACC is intentional and respects Indigenous cultural beliefs. It is also prominently placed along the main access through campus, in the heart of the NAU campus, near major campus resources. It acknowledges the four cardinal directions through entryways and views; the main entrance is to the east to greet the morning sun, another entrance to the south for ease of access, and cultural spaces have orientation open to the sky, place in the landscape, or in view of the sacred San Francisco Peaks.

The materials used at NACC are critical in creating a recognizable and comforting space. The material images above illustrate the ways in which this is applied. The red colored stucco represents the local earthen plaster and adobe traditionally used to construct dwellings and ceremonial spaces connected to the earth. The wood and rock are symbolic of vernacular materials gathered from the site and used for sheltering. The woven rug is displayed to show the beautiful merging of art, expression and storytelling embedded into an object of utility. All together, these materials create a warm and recognizable environment to the Indigenous students and faculty. These materials help distinguish a group of people without specifically addressing a single tribes.

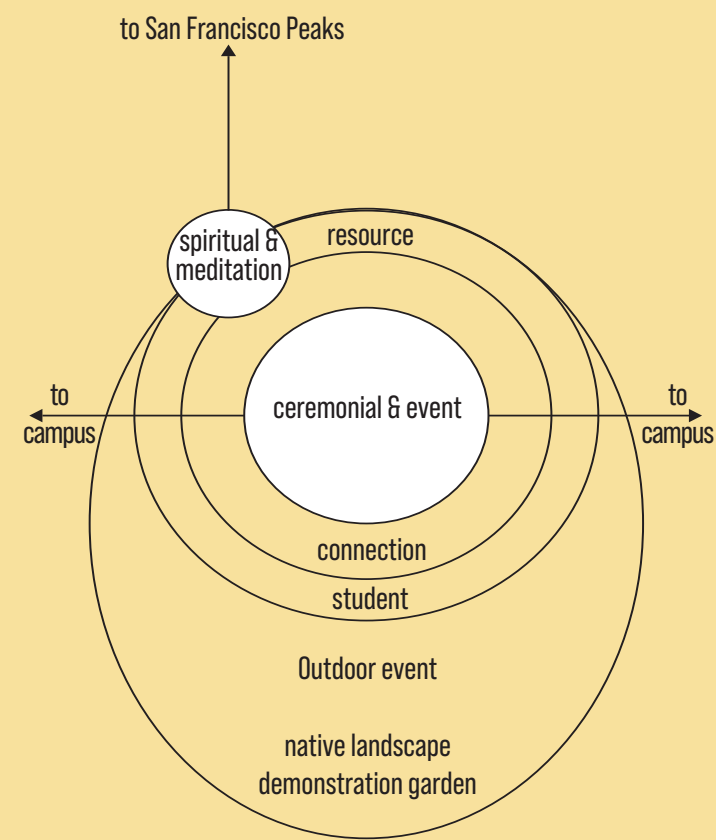




# NAU NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER (NACC)

## Design & Program Goals

- Create a **“home away from home”** for Indigenous students
- **Celebrate** cultural heritage & diversity
- **Strengthen** indigenous student community
- **Support** community, traditional/spiritual, & academic events
- **Recruit, retain, and develop** Native American students
- Provide for student's **spiritual needs**
- **Educate** non-indigenous peoples on Native American culture



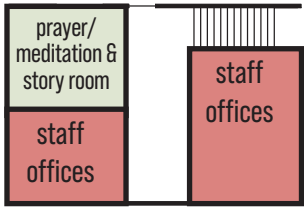
The skylit inner event space which can be closed off for ceremonial purpose or for speakers or banquets.



The circulation space wrapping around the event space is oversized to accommodate study nooks and serve as an informal gallery to showcase art and artifacts.

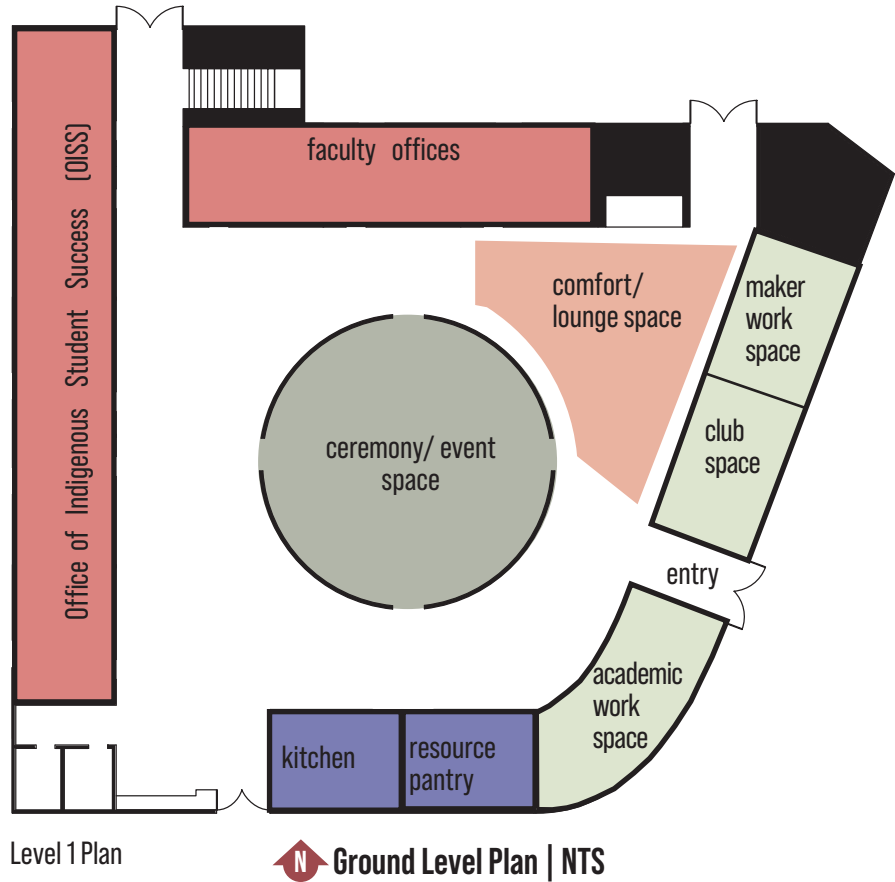


A special exhaust system allows for burning of medicine in the prayer, mediation and story room. The room can be reserved for private use. A local artist painted the mural.



Level 2 Plan

- business / administration / faculty
- cultural and indigenous community
- indigenous student activity space
- indigenous student amenity space



Level 1 Plan

Ground Level Plan | NTS

The living room, with fireplace and furniture upholstered in rich, warm, textiles. Celestory lighting above brings soft, natural light. Wood is used for structural and aesthetic warmth.



Outdoor event space for celebrations and informal gatherings.

## Cultural Connection

The design concept and building organization is based on a circular form with the center removed to allow connection to the sky and earth. While the design is not specific to any one tribe, the circular form is incorporated in various ways into the art, spaces and references of many Indigenous peoples. This creates a sense of familiarity and identity for the center. Openings are placed with to the cardinal directions, and frame views into the landscape, near and far. Program areas are divided between student-centered and resource areas to allow for different activities to take place while respecting varying degrees of privacy.

