

Use of Sage, Sweetgrass, and Cedar in UND Residence Halls

Spiritual Activity

Spiritual activities on college campuses have a long and respected role in education. UND is a strong and proud educational institution and values the diversity of views, religion, and backgrounds of its students, faculty, and staff.

Consistent with educational law, the University has developed restrictions to safeguard the rights of all. Commonly referred to as “time, place, and manner” restrictions, the purpose of these restrictions is to narrowly¹ and reasonably² limit activity for the safety and enjoyment of others³.

- Only a recognized University organization may sponsor activities on University property on behalf of a specific candidate for local, state, or national political office. An organization may not co-sponsor these activities with a person or group of persons who are not students, faculty, or administrative staff members.
- Students, groups, and organizations associated for religious purposes may not co-sponsor religious activities on University property with a person or group of persons who are not students, faculty, or administrative staff members.
- Persons wishing to conduct spiritual activities in residence halls must register that intent in writing with the Complex Director at least three days in advance of that activity. The Complex Director will refer the individual to the hall council for approval of main lounge usage for such activities.
- Spiritual activities may be conducted only in the residence hall main lounge between the hours of 9 am and 10 pm (see page 2, # 5).
- Spiritual activities cannot be conducted on a door-to-door basis in the residence halls.
- Spiritual activities shall comply with safety and community living expectations.

Use of Sage, Sweetgrass, and Cedar in Residence Halls

In support of the spiritual lives of American Indian/Alaska natives, UND Housing Policies allow the spiritual use of sage, sweetgrass, and cedar smoke, when its use is for the purpose of purification and prayer; is consistent with time-honored cultural, traditional, and spiritual observances; and complies with the protocols outlined in this document.

History, Tradition, and Context

Ancient and profound traditions concerning the use of plants abound within every American Indian/Alaska native tribal culture. The uses of these plants address a variety of medicinal and spiritual purposes. Long before Europeans arrived to North America, hosts of sacred plants were used in spiritual and ceremonial contexts. Today, well-established sacred patterns of plant use continue to be a part of tribal and intertribal ceremonial traditions.

Personal Spirituality and Religious Freedom

The basic right of all Americans to religious freedom is strongly protected by the U.S. Constitution. The 1978 American Indian/Alaska native Religious Freedom Act further and more explicitly protects Indian peoples’ rights to religious practice. The University of North Dakota recognizes that religious traditions demand respect and protection. As members of this educational community, UND students are encouraged to recognize and respect the religious rights of all persons.

Using the smoke of sage, sweetgrass, and/or cedar is an important element in American Indian/Alaska native purification and prayer ceremonies. When used in a spiritual manner, they are considered sacred within American Indian/Alaska native spiritual traditions.

¹ *Clark v. Community for Creative Non-Violence*, 468 U.S. 288 (1984).

² *Papish v. Board of Curators of the University of Missouri*, 410 U.S. 667 (1973).

³ *United States v. Albertini*, 472 U.S. 675, 689 (1985).

Respect for the Rights of Others

Those who use sage, sweetgrass, and cedar within the American Indian/Alaska native ceremonial traditions carry the responsibility for maintaining sacred ways of their people. This is a responsibility seldom taken lightly by those practicing these traditions.

Within a residence hall or apartment setting, the religious rights of American Indian /Alaska native students coexist beside the comfort and safety of all residents. Importantly, American Indian/Alaska native traditions have always taught a strong respect for the rights of other people. This general principle can and should guide the use of sage, sweetgrass, and cedars are.

Benign Impact

Recognizing that university housing is a smoke-free environment, this policy recognizes and respects the rights of students to use these sacred plants, but also recognizes and respects the rights of other students to smoke-free air. Neither non-practicing persons or the building structure or furnishings should be exposed to excessive smoke. Student(s) wishing to celebrate, purify, or use smoke as generated from the burning of sage, sweetgrass, and cedar must control seepage of ceremonial smoke by exercising positive steps for ventilation such as: sealing doors, opening windows, and purchasing or utilizing air purifiers, to contain all smoke in the specified area.

Safety

American Indians/Alaska natives wishing to use such smoke as generated from the burning of sage, sweetgrass, and cedar may not use open flames in UND Residence Halls which is strictly prohibited, but rather follow the usual and customary practices of lighting the material and allowing it to smolder. This should be carefully done in a sufficiently large, non-flammable container, exercising caution and good safety practices.

Checklist for the Use of Sage, Sweetgrass, and Cedar in Residence Halls

American Indian/Alaska native students wishing to use sage, sweetgrass, or cedar smoke for spiritual purposes in the UND Residence Halls must exercise extreme care to ensure the safety of other students and of the University structure and furnishings, and exercise positive prevention to diminish the impact of smoke, such as that generated from the burning of sage, sweetgrass, and cedar.

Protocol

1. In a private room:

- discuss the use of these items with your Residence Hall Director or Residence Life Coordinator. This person is trained to understand the importance of your request and the value of respect, diversity, and confidentiality. Among the questions the RHD/RLC will ask is the frequency with which you expect to use these plants for ceremonial/purification purposes.

1. In a public area:

- present hall government with your request to use a common space. You may not proceed with your plans until the hall government approves your request. It may be important to provide a form of education to hall government members surrounding the importance and significance of the action you are proposing. Unless otherwise specified, the request you are making is for one-time permission for the use of the common area.
- 2. provide a one time written statement for each contract term or anytime you are assigned to a different residence hall to the Assistant Director explaining your intent to use, for spiritual purposes: sage, sweetgrass, cedar, or other plant smoke.
- 3. decide upon, secure, and use items that will allow you to safely light and allow to smolder the combustible items.
- 4. determine how best to confine and ventilate the sage, sweetgrass, and cedar smoke that will be generated.
- 5. ensure that your ceremonial/ purification will occur between the specified hours (if using residence hall main lounges).
- 6. upon completion of your ceremony, dispose of ashes or other remains safely.

Specifically Included Materials for Use

1. **Sage:** There are at least three common varieties of sage native to North Dakota and the surrounding regions. American Indian/Alaska native botanical classifications of these types differ considerably from the "official" or "scientific" classifications, but sage in general is easily recognized by its light gray-green color and its distinctive odor. Perhaps the most commonly seen type is the small single stalk sage, which grows in a wide variety of habitats throughout the region. Generally, sage prefers fairly dry growing conditions. For purposes of purification and prayer, the leaves and small stems of the sage plant are lit and allowed to smolder. The smoke is then allowed to circulate around the person who is using it. Inhalation of the smoke is not necessary. The smoke is somewhat pungent, and has a distinctive odor not unlike the taste of sage used as a spice in cooking. (For example, the dressing prepared with Thanksgiving turkeys is often flavored with sage). Of the three plants, sage has the sharpest or most acrid odor when burned. As one becomes accustomed to the odor, it is not unpleasant, and after having repeatedly smelled it in ceremonial use, a person begins to associate it with prayer and sacred events.
2. **Sweetgrass:** Sweetgrass is a particular distinctive type of long grass with a sweet odor. It is commonly used in the form of a braided "rope" of the long stems of this particular grass. Sometimes strips of colored cloth are tied to this rope to represent the four directions. This "rope" is lit and allowed to smoldering much the same manner as sage and cedar, except that a person tends to keep holding the sweetgrass, waving it gently to keep it smoldering. When one stops waving it, it tends to go out. The odor of the smoke impresses most people as being pleasant, and many describe it as a very beautiful smell. When country fields or roadside ditches are burned in the spring, the smoke will sometimes contain the pleasant smell of sweetgrass mixed with the stronger odor of the other types of grasses and shrubs burning. A braided rope of sweetgrass should be used carefully, so that no smoldering pieces can fall onto flammable surfaces. If the smoldering rope of sweetgrass is waved at all, or if it is moved around the room, the non-flammable container should be held under it just in case any smoldering pieces should fall from the rope.
3. **Cedar:** The plant that is referred to in American Indian/Alaska native circles by the English word "cedar" or "flat cedar" grows naturally in some parts of this general region, and types of it are commonly used for landscaping purposes. Sometimes Christmas wreaths are woven from the green boughs. Again, the American Indian/Alaska native botanical classifications differ from the "official" or "scientific" classifications in use today, which may also refer to these plants as types of Juniper or *Arbovitae*. As the term "flat cedar" implies, the preferred variety has flat shaped needles. It is the green needle, which are lit and allowed to smolder. The resulting smoke is quite pleasant to most people, and might remind one of the smell of campfires on a clear cool summer night. It is worth noting that the pleasant-smelling wood of the larger varieties of cedar trees is also universally acknowledged to repel insects...hence, the practice of lining top-quality clothes closets with cedar to protect one's clothes from moths...and this fact may be related in a general way to the American Indian/Alaska natives use of green cedar to purify. Like sage and sweetgrass, cedar is lit and allowed to smolder. This should be carefully done in a non-flammable container. As with sage and sweetgrass, inhalation of the smoke is not necessary, but the smoke may be fanned toward oneself to aid in purification.

Resolution of Possible Conflicts

Further information and/or referrals regarding this policy and its practice can be obtained by contacting any of the following:

1. UND Housing Office
Phone: 777-4251
Address: 525 Stanford Road
2. Indian Studies Department
Phone: 777-4314
Address: Merrifield Hall – Room 219
3. American Indian Student Services
Phone: 777-4291
Address: American Indian Center- 315 Princeton
4. Indians Into Medicine
Phone: 777-3037
Address: Medical Science North – Room 202
5. Recruitment and Retention of American Indians into Nursing
Phone: 777-3224
Address: Nursing – Room 314
6. Indians Into Psychology Doctoral Education
Phone: 777- 4497
Address: Corwin/Larimore –Room 314
7. Other UND Indian student organizations such as:
 - UND Indian Association
 - American Indian Science and Engineering Society
 - American Indian Law Student AssociationPhone: Contact American Indian Center (777-4291)
Address: Contact Student Organization Leaders