Implementing a Trauma-Informed Practice Training Module

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO | Gleeson Library | Geschke Resource Center

Annie Reid (she/her), University Archivist

In partnership with the 2022 Reparative & Inclusive Description (RID) Survey Scholar, we developed a new set of guiding principles for addressing how we approach processing and collection development in the Special Collections & University Archives (SCUA) department at Gleeson Library. These principles include cultural humility, radical empathy, trauma-informed practice, and others. Of the various principles, SCUA decided to focus on utilizing trauma-informed practice in the work that we share with department student assistants as a follow up project. Inspired by the RID internship curriculum and the experiences of the student assistants, we wanted to implement a trauma-informed approach to not only our descriptive practices, but also to our internal training.

In the spring of 2023, we created a new trauma-informed practice (TIP) training module for student assistants that aims to bring awareness to how to engage with potentially traumatizing collections and the potential for vicarious trauma experienced through processing. Also discussed are future plans to implement a trauma-informed practice more broadly to our department policies and research services.

RID Working Group

Central site for the Reparative and Inclusive Description (RID) Working...

About
Principles
Projects
Members

Guiding Principles

In fall 2022, we worked with inaugural Reparative and Inc... develop formal guiding principles for which we base our r... principles informed by course readings during the semes...

• **Cultural Humility**

The principle of cultural humility demands that we denou... impossibility in archival practice and instead engage in a... (Tai, 2020). There are three dimensions to cultural humili... recognizing and challenging power imbalances; and (3) in...

• **Radical Reimagination**

Frick and Proffitt (2022) defined radically reimagining de... foundations of librarianship and the archival profession to envision the systemic chan... word "reimagine" is used to acknowledge the need for creativity in breaking down th... embedded in current descriptive practices and transforming these workflows in way...
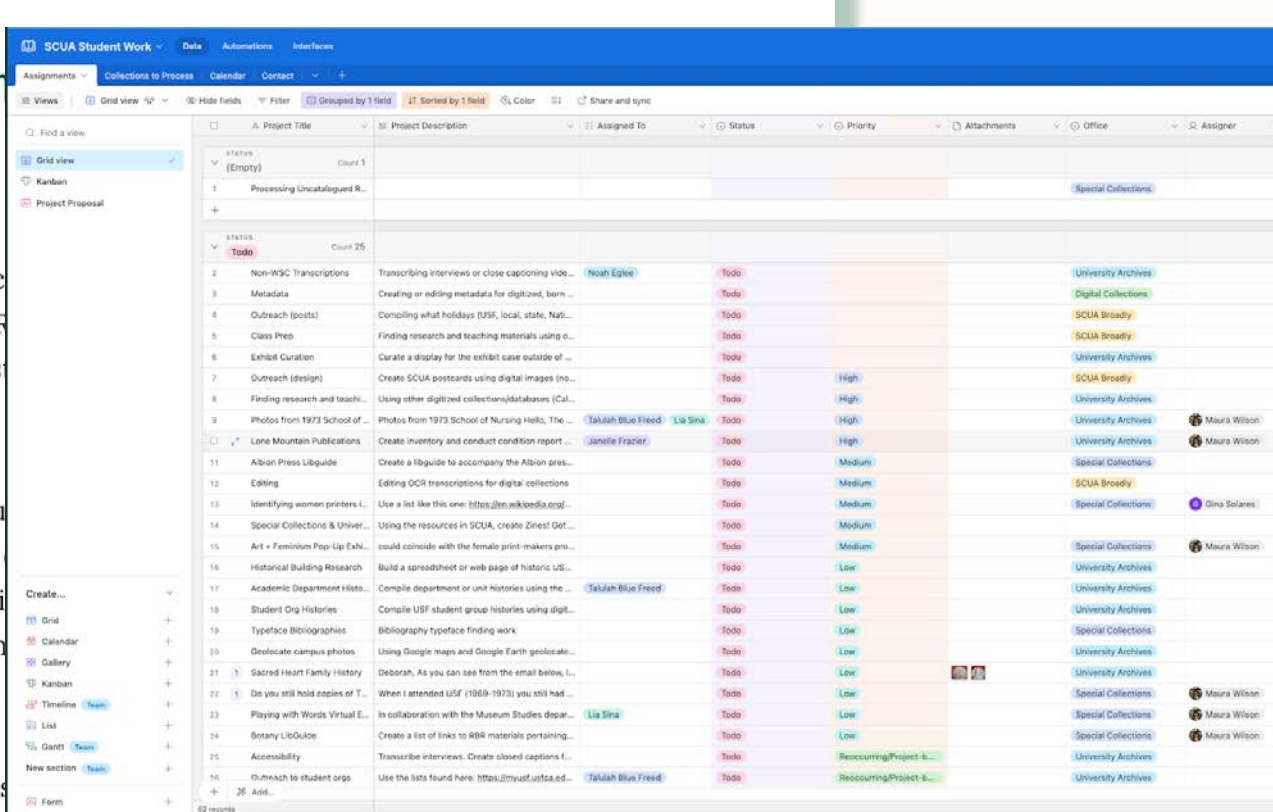
Ask A Librarian

Context

- Processing and handling materials like, racist, oppressive, or harmful metadata, images, and documents can involve trauma and vicarious trauma of library staff
- Wanted to apply guiding principles developed for RID to processing, research, and collection development
  - Cultural Humility, Radical Reimagination, Radical Empathy, Slow Archiving, Trauma-Informed Care (Practice), Critical Race Praxis, Collaboration
- Inspired by the RID Survey Scholar curriculum - which included a TIP module of readings and short reflective questions to precede and contextualize confronting traumatizing materials and description in collections
- Past student assistant experiences with traumatic materials - where previous training only addressed issues after they happened was helpful, we wanted to develop a more formalized TIP Training Module used in on-boarding
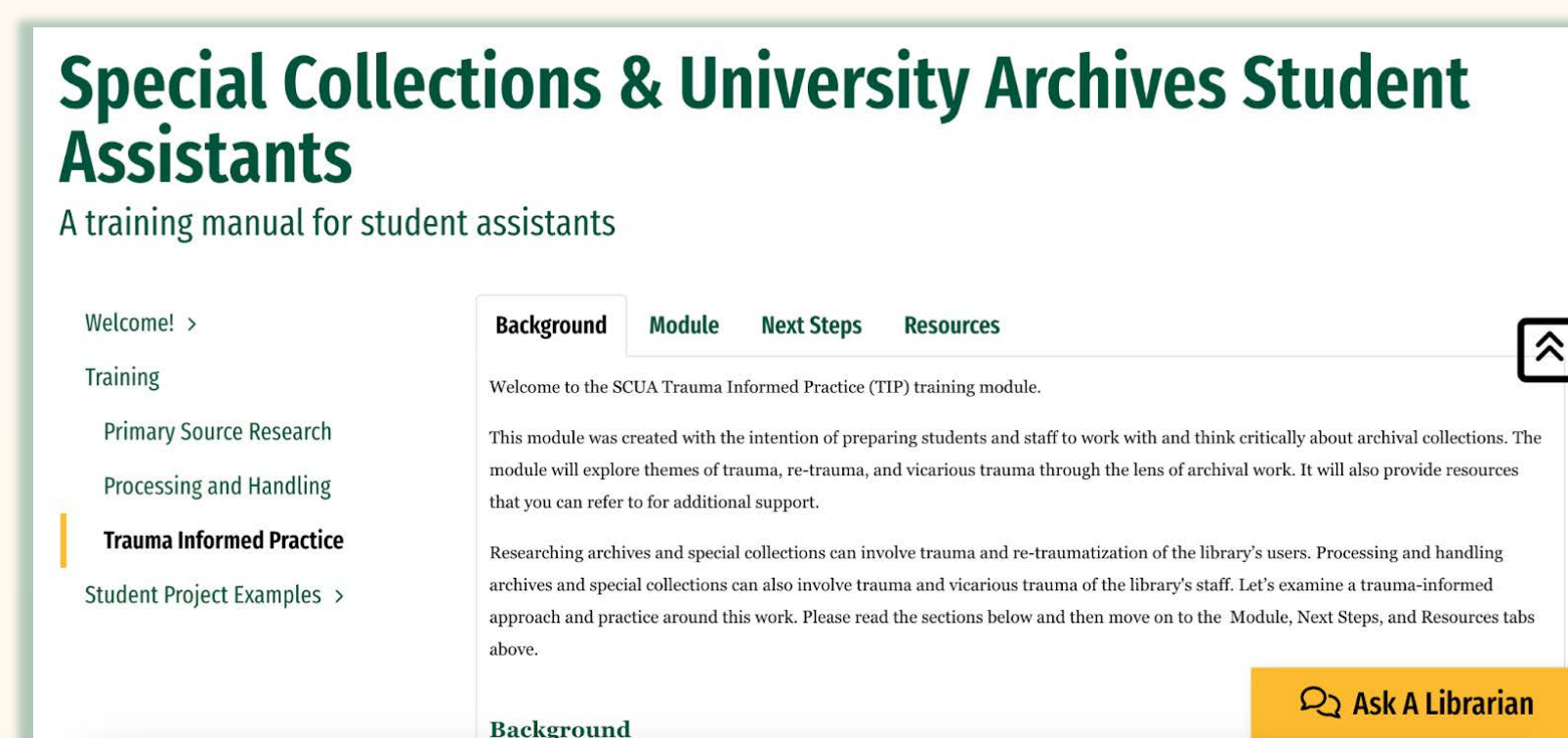
Trauma-Informed Practice

Defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

- **Trauma**, "results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."
- **Vicarious Trauma** or secondary trauma is "trauma experienced by people who are exposed to traumatic material or by working with trauma survivors. Vicarious trauma can also have a cumulative effect if one is exposed repeatedly over time. Symptoms could be either physiological or psychological and include things like emotional exhaustion, guilt, helplessness, or loneliness, among others."

- **Trauma-informed Practice (TIP)** is a framework for responding to and resisting trauma (and re-trauma) experienced by patrons or staff by employing these key principles:
  - Safety
  - Trustworthiness and transparency
  - Peer support
  - Collaboration and mutuality
  - Empowerment
  - Addressing cultural, historical, and gender issues

TIP Module

- Goal to prepare students to work with and think critically about archival collections
- Explores themes of trauma, re-trauma, and vicarious trauma through the lens of Trauma-Informed Practice and archival work
- Added to an existing training Libguide and consists of **Background Information**, an anonymous **LibWizard Survey** (readings, reflective questions and additional comments), **Next Steps**, which outlines what students can do if encountering traumatizing materials, and a **List of Resources** relevant to student mental health for additional support
- Outlines actions like, contacting their supervisor, utilizing weekly check-ins and debrief meetings to discuss concerns, requesting to be reassigned to a different project, and a list of coping strategies
- Instructions on how to notify us about the location (collection title, box number, or folder title etc.) of traumatizing materials we are not aware of, so we can update our accessions database and finding aids

Special Collections & University Archives Student Assistants

A training manual for student assistants

Welcome!
Training
Primary Source Research
Processing and Handling
Trauma Informed Practice
Student Project Examples

Welcome to the SCUA Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) training module.

This module was created with the intention of preparing students and staff to work with and think critically about archival collections. The module will explore themes of trauma, re-trauma, and vicarious trauma through the lens of archival work. It will also provide resources that you can refer to for additional support.

Researching archives and special collections can involve trauma and re-traumatization of the library's users. Processing and handling archives and special collections can also involve trauma and vicarious trauma of the library's staff. Let's examine a trauma-informed approach and practice around this work. Please read the sections below and then move on to the Module, Next Steps, and Resources tab above.
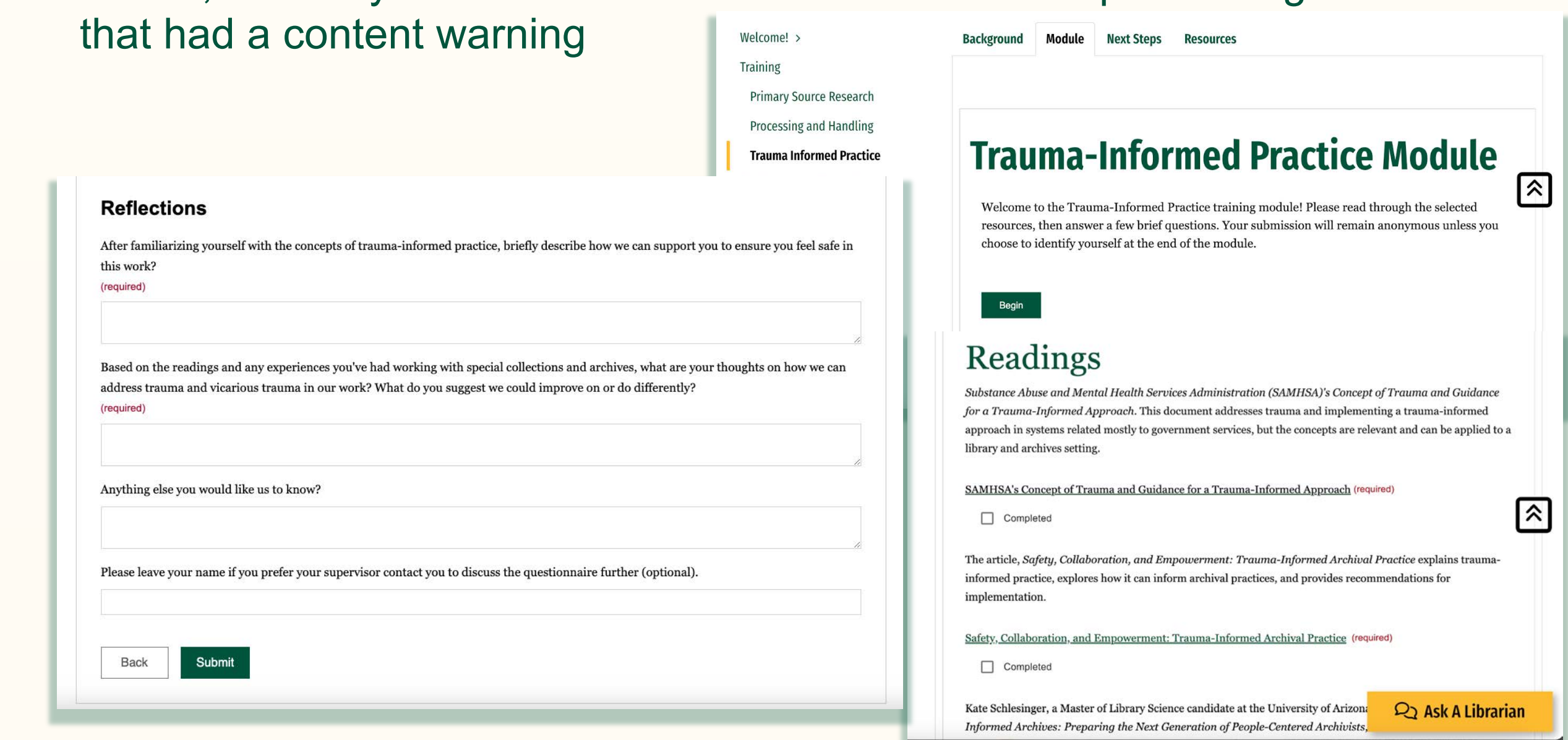
Background

Ask A Librarian

Challenges

- Module reading selections (number of readings and amount of detail, may need content alerts, new scholarship field)
- Timing of module implementation (level and duration of student experience, check-ins and debriefs, should there be an intro and an advanced module?)
- Unknowns (what is traumatizing and to whom, partially or unprocessed collections)

Reflections

- Important to acknowledge that traumatizing materials may affect different staff or users in different ways
- Feeling traumatized is a normal response, so support students to foreground their well being and actively take steps for their self care
- Recognize that traumatizing materials can be validating for survivors and victims and give voice to their memories or experiences
- Providing access to these materials can give different context to historical, social, or cultural events
- Student feedback included feeling supported and safe by being able to discuss issues, and they would not want to work in isolation if processing a collection that had a content warning

Reflections

After familiarizing yourself with the concepts of trauma-informed practice, briefly describe how we can support you to ensure you feel safe in this work? (required)

Based on the readings and any experiences you've had working with special collections and archives, what are your thoughts on how we can address trauma and vicarious trauma in our work? What do you suggest we could improve on or do differently? (required)

Anything else you would like us to know?

Please leave your name if you prefer your supervisor contact you to discuss the questionnaire further (optional).

Back   Submit

Trauma-Informed Practice Module

Welcome to the Trauma-Informed Practice training module! Please read through the selected resources, then answer a few brief questions. Your submission will remain anonymous unless you choose to identify yourself at the end of the module.

Readings

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. This document addresses trauma and implementing a trauma-informed approach in systems related mostly to government services, but the concepts are relevant and can be applied to a library and archives setting.

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma Informed Approach (required)

☐ Complete

The article, Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment: Trauma-Informed Archival Practice explains trauma-informed practice, explains how it can inform archival practices, and provides recommendations for implementation.

Safety, Collaboration and Empowerment: Trauma-Informed Archival Practice (required)

☐ Complete

Kate Schlesinger, a Master of Library Science candidate at the University of Arizona, Trauma-Informed Archives: Preparing the Next Generation of People-Centered Archivists...

Ask A Librarian

Future Considerations

- Update TIP training module based on student feedback and future scholarship
- Implement TIP and other guiding principles like, cultural humility, slow archiving, and radical empathy into policies and practices in additional areas of work:
  - Safety (add content alerts where needed, internally and externally)
  - Trustworthiness and transparency (publicly publish policies)
  - Peer support (do not process difficult collections in isolation)
  - Collaboration and mutuality (non-extractive work with communities/collections)
  - Empowerment (ensure underrepresented voices are preserved in collections according to their preference)
  - Addressing cultural, historical, and gender issues (catalog and provide access to controversial collections)
- Modify training module for all department staff

Acknowledgements

- The amazing scholarship in the area of Trauma-Informed Practice and Archives by Kristen Wright and Nicola Laurent, which created the foundation for our work
- The scholarship of inaugural RID Survey Scholar, Zoe Hume
- The work and support of SCUA Library Assistant, Maura Wilson
- Support and insight of Gleeson Library student assistants and interns

University of San Francisco (Unofficial) Land Acknowledgement Statement Excerpt:

"The University of San Francisco sits on Ohlone Land. Today, we cannot deny the story of this land and it's truth that is too often untold. Today, we gather on unceded, stolen Ohlone territory. The Village of Yelamu is the territory of the Ramaytush speaking people, one of eight nations now referred to as Ohlone. Even through devastating events, the Yelamu are still here and working tirelessly for their right to remain and evolve in the place we consider San Francisco. Many of us who have come to benefit from this land still participate in the ongoing displacement of its original stewards but we can choose to be better advocates and accomplices in favor of their restoration."

~ Written by Calina Lawrence, fellow guest in Ohlone territory, Suquamish Nation, USF Performing Arts and Social Justice Alumna, Class of 2016

View the full statement here
Consider donating to the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO