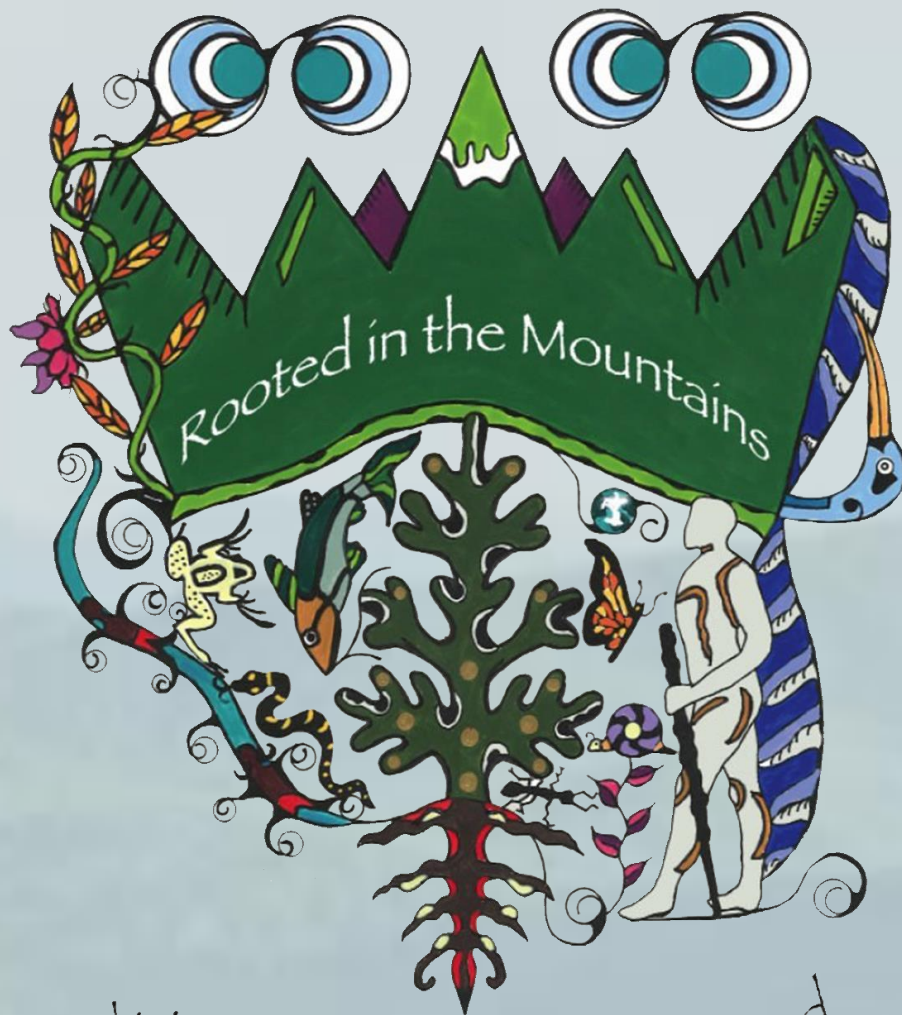


Rooted in the Mountains Symposium

September 25-26, 2025



Valuing Our Common Ground

Matrilineal Worldmaking (Vision of What's Possible)

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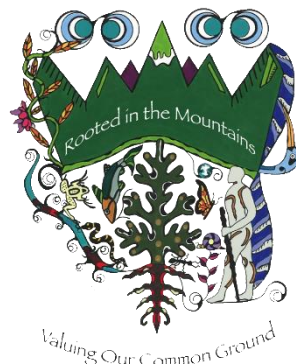
Translation: To acknowledge and give thanks to our mothers for our life/lives

Land Acknowledgement

Western Carolina University is situated within the ancestral homelands of the Cherokee people, twenty miles from present-day Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian communities of the Qualla Boundary. The campus occupies Two Sparrows Place (Tali Tsisgwayahi, (ᑎᑦ ᑕᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ), an ancient principal town with a mound and council house where Killian Building now stands. Cullowhee, the university's home, is Tsul'kalawi (ᑕᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ) or Judaculla's Place. This giant being was the Great Teacher and steward of the natural world, and ancient stories about Judaculla tell of the Creator and creation, the origin of humans, and the proper way to be Cherokee. We at Western Carolina University inherit these stories so that we may better understand the deep significance of this beloved place and our role here.

We are dedicated to supporting the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and all indigenous tribes throughout the world in achieving futures of their own making. We will continue to collaborate with tribal nations to address the challenges at hand, and we want each of you to accept the charge of learning and supporting our relationship with indigenous people during your time at WCU. This work acknowledges our sense of place and reinforces our mission at Western Carolina University.

Rooted in the Mountains is designed to raise awareness of the integration of traditional knowledge with health and environmental issues. It is our hope to provide participants with an Indigenously oriented paradigm of how we are all interconnected with the world around us, and how that is reflected in health. Participants will go away with a new sense of urgency and tools to use in valuing our common ground.



The Rooted in the Mountains logo was designed by
Paula Nelson, EBCI member

Thursday, September 25th

8:30 am to 9:30 am	Registration
9:00 am to 9:30 am	15th Anniversary Video Opening Prayer: Onita Bush Welcome and Announcements: Dr. Kelli Brown, WCU Chancellor Dr. Lisa J. Lefler, WCU CBNHP Dr. Amber Albert, Director, WCU Mountain Heritage Center Dr. Mae Claxton, WCU English Professor <i>Honoring of Britnee Arch</i>
9:30 am to 10:30 am	Introduction of Theme Cherokee Elders: Dr. Tom Belt (Cherokee Nation) Onita Bush (EBCI)
10:30 am to 10:45 am	Break
10:45 am to 12:00 pm	Keynote Address: <i>You are Creation and Resilience from our Roots</i> Beverly Cook Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook You Are Creation and Resilience from Our Roots describes the role we play in creating and supporting life. Understanding the delicate balance that exists between physiology and spirit gives us a way to think about and actively participate in Creation and healing.
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	Lunch (boxed lunches for those who purchased)
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	Panel 1: <i>Anitsihi Daniwonisgv (The place where their mothers speak)</i> Roseanna Belt Onita Bush Bernice Bottchenbaugh Marie Junaluska Louise Goings

	This panel highlights the work of the Mother's Council in guiding CNH's efforts to reclaim traditional birthing knowledge and practices. Their discussion will highlight lived experiences, cultural wisdom, and leadership of Indigenous mothers. The Council serves as a vital advisory body shaping programming and advocacy grounded in ancestral ways of knowing.
2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	Panel 2: <i>Cherokee Language, Birth, and Parenting</i> Amber Ledford Savannah Brigman Kelly Murphy This panel features three Cherokee women who support Native mothers and families through birth, parenting, and language. Their discussion will highlight how cultural knowledge and language revitalization are woven into family life, strengthening bonds across generations and nurturing community resilience.
3:00 pm to 3:15 pm	Break
3:15 pm to 4:15 pm	Panel 3: <i>The Circle HV Project: Providing Mental Health Services for Young Cherokee Mothers</i> Dr. Terri Durbin Dr. Angie Trombley Robin Callahan WCU's School of Nursing is partnering with the EBCI Nurse Family Partnership program housed in Cherokee Choices, in a Circle HV grant project to provide mental health assistance to young Cherokee mothers who are at risk for mental health needs. The project is being developed to provide culturally informed services.
4:15 pm	Closing
5:00 pm	Cherokee Supper at Apodaca Science Building – Terrace Meal prepared by the NIAWA chapter of Cherokee women Presentation about Cherokee Cosmology: Dr. Jane Eastman Dr. Brett Riggs Dr. Tom Belt <i>*Must have submitted an RSVP during Registration to attend*</i>

Friday, September 26th

8:30 am to 9:30 am	Registration
9:00 am to 9:30 am	Opening Prayer: Onita Bush Welcome and Announcements: Dr. Lisa J. Lefler, WCU CBNHP Dr. Lori Anderson, Dean of WCU CHHS Denise Drury Homewood, Executive Director of the John W. Bardo Fine and Performing Arts Center <i>Honoring of Onita Bush</i>
9:30 am to 10:30 am	Keynote Address: <i>Reproductive Sovereignty: Reawakening Our Reproductive Knowledge</i> Dr. Danielle Dominique Lucero Reproductive Sovereignty: Reawakening Our Reproductive Knowledge calls us to remember and reclaim the teachings our ancestors carried about birth, child rearing, and community care. This keynote centers Indigenous knowledge and lifts up the work of doulas, birth workers, and caregivers who are guiding the way in bringing these practices back into our homes and communities. Introducing the concept of Reproductive Sovereignty as a key strategy for policy makers, community organizers, and academics to advocate for the reproductive futures of Native Nations.
10:30 am to 10:45 am	Break
10:45 am to 11:45 am	Panel 4: <i>Fatherhood in a Matrilineal World</i> Dr. Tom Belt Catuce Tiger Kevin Jackson Three Cherokee fathers discuss the roles, challenges, and cultural teachings related to fatherhood in a matrilineal world.
11:45 am to 1:00pm	Lunch (on your own)
1:00 pm to 2:00pm	Video Screening: <i>Sacred Beginning: Revitalizing Indigenous Birth Work</i> (PBS Documentary)

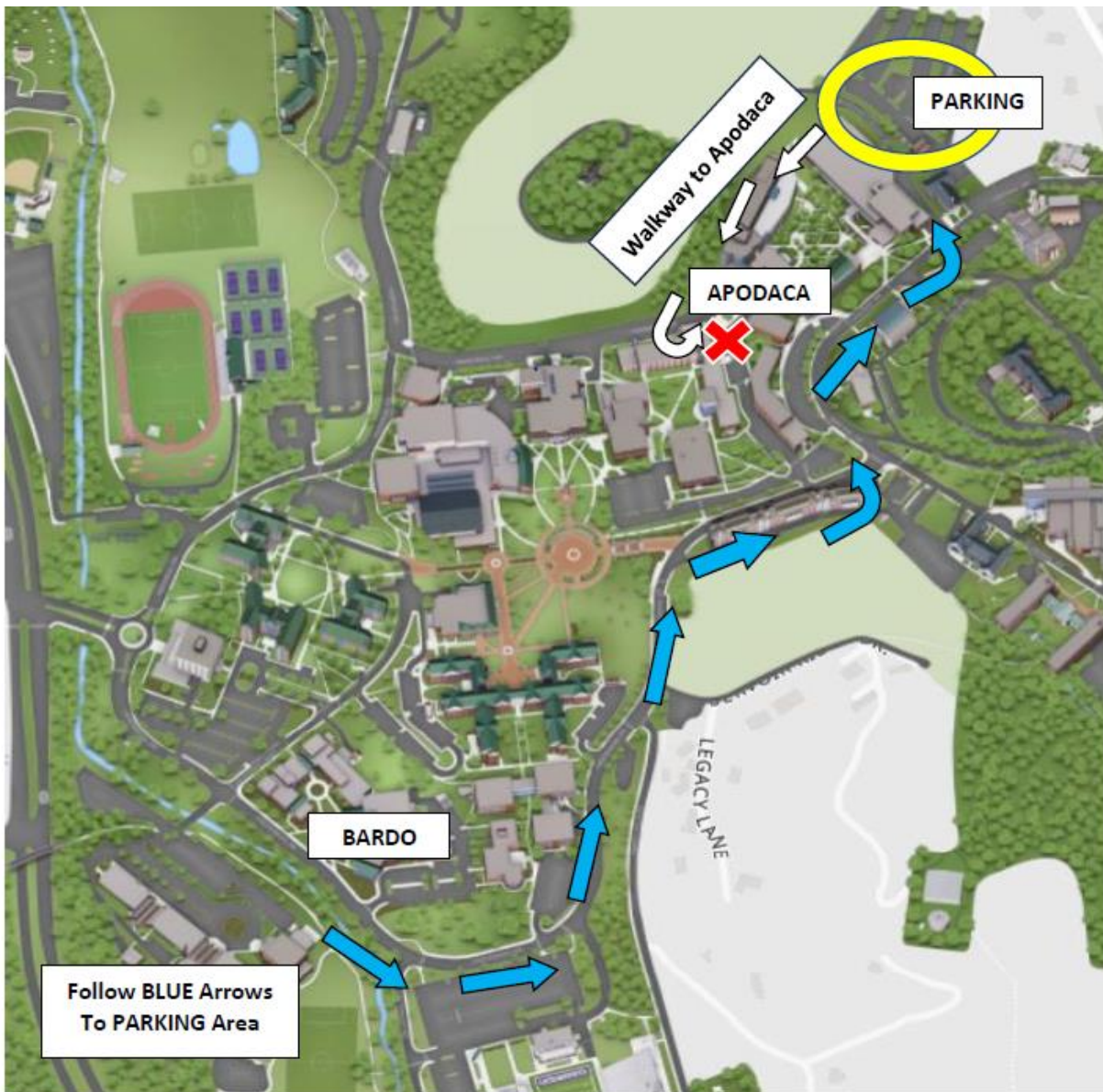
	Group Discussion: Lori Sanders Bonnie Claxton This documentary highlights the vital work of Indigenous birth workers from Las Vegas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota (26 mins). Followed by group discussion.
2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	Panel 5: <i>Continuing a Legacy of Care: The Community-Based Doula Sistas Caring for Sistas (SC4S)</i>
3:00 pm to 3:15 pm	Break
3:15 pm to 5:00 pm	Closing – Reflection on Theme

Biographies of Speakers

Scan the QR code below to view the speaker's biographies.



Thursday Dinner Map & Directions



Directions for Parking: Make a left hand turn out of the Bardo parking lot. Follow Centennial Dr. around to the parking area (see blue arrows below). The white arrows show the walkway to Apodaca from the parking lot.

Directions Inside the Building: Once you enter through the main entrance (as shown on the above map), you will enter onto the second floor. Continue straight until you see stairs on both your left and right. If you can take the stairs, take the staircase on the left-hand side up to the 5th floor. You will enter a common area that has outdoor access to the terrace. If you need an elevator, turn right before the downward staircase, the elevator will be on your left.

Thank You to our Partners!



Dr. Brett Riggs, Sequoyah
Distinguished Professor



Dr. Kelli Brown,
WCU Chancellor

This symposium is in memory and honor of two mountain people of Jackson County, NC who loved the mountains and always shared what the mountains taught them.



Jean Nations Lefler and Dale Nations