



DID YOU KNOW

How to Take Part in a Round Dance

Gather in a circle, hold hands and join in this traditional First Nations celebration of life

BY KAREN SHERLOCK

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A round dance is a special traditional event in First Nations culture that brings people together "to heal, to honour and to celebrate life," says Adrian LaChance, a traditional dancer and storyteller.

Every January, First Peoples' House (formerly the Aboriginal Student Services Centre) organizes a round dance at the university, which

<https://www.ualberta.ca/newtrail/how-to/how-to-take-part-in-a-round-dance.html>

LaChance MCs. People come from all around Alberta and as far away as Saskatchewan and the United States.

"One of the biggest things about the round dance is that it breaks all those barriers that sometimes divide us," says **Shana Dion**, '05 BA(NativeStu), assistant dean of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, who helped organize the round dance for many years. "This is the one time we come together and join hands and dance together."

So this year, feel welcome to join in. Here's how.

Everyone is welcome: all ages, backgrounds and cultures. You don't need a special invitation and you can come and go when you want. Traditionally, women wear long skirts, but feel free to wear whatever is comfortable for you, including jeans, says Dion. (Note that alcohol and drugs are not welcome.)

For dancing, gather in a circle. Hold hands with the people on either side of you, with your left hand facing up and your right hand facing down. You can jump in anywhere in the circle and at any time during a dance.

The circle moves to the left. This reflects the way the Earth moves around the sun, says LaChance. "We believe when you're moving in that direction, you're healing."

Step to the beat of the drums. "The beat of the drums is like that of the heartbeat. We acknowledge the heartbeat of Mother Earth," explains LaChance.

Don't worry about your feet. But if you want to get more detailed: step left with your left foot, which represents the male, then slide your right foot next to it. Your right foot, the female, stays close to the ground to represent how closely connected you are to the Earth.

You don't have to dance. You're welcome to come, find a seat and watch. "There's healing in watching, as well," says LaChance.

The U of A round dance is Jan. 26, 2019. Watch for details on the [First Peoples' House website](#).

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