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Group petitions for name change

RICHARD PAYSON on December 9, 2013 at 7:46 pm

Photo by Conor Barry.



Photo by Conor Barry.

A student group is petitioning the U to retire the Ute name and logo.

The Indigenous Students and Allies for Change has gathered 540 signatures in support of dropping the drum and feather for good.

Samantha Eldridge, a Ph.D student, instructor in political science and member of the Navajo tribe, is co-chairwoman of the group. She said students abuse the name and logo in their dress and conduct at sporting events and that American Indian students struggle when they see their culture misrepresented by red-faced

fans wearing eagle feather headdresses.

“Students felt unsafe on campus, and students felt like they couldn’t go to football games,”

Eldridge said. "Personally, I felt that ... I don't think people make a connection with how painting their face red could be harmful."

She compared such fandom to blackface routines and said that although red is the U's color, face painting is offensive and disrespectful when paired with a headdress.

Although the group, which formed in 2011, has emphasized educating fans and students in the past, they now feel that education will not solve the problem.

"This is always going to be an issue as long as the University of Utah associates itself with the nickname and logo," Eldridge said. "The only solution we can see is for the U to retire the logo and nickname."

The petition comes in the midst of ongoing negotiations between the U and the Ute Tribal Leadership Committee, which requested a new drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding between the school and the tribe, which was last renewed in 2005. A public letter from the tribe requested that the U replace scholarships given to Ute students with tuition waivers and create a position for a tribal member that would serve as Special Advisor to the President on American Indian Affairs.

The first meeting between the administration and leadership committee occurred on Friday, Nov. 22 at the Alta Club. Negotiations between the tribe and the U are ongoing, but a joint statement released by both parties on the day of the meeting stated that the event was "fruitful."

"It's a work in progress, and we'll work together from here," said Valoree Dowell, spokeswoman for the U.

In the past, the U has specified that the university uses the Ute name with the permission of the tribe, but Eldridge insisted that U administration has said that it does not need the Utes' support.

"The university has already said on record that they don't need the Utes' position," Eldridge said. "They told us in a meeting that they did not need permission from the Ute tribe."

Dowell said she was not in the meeting that Eldridge referred to, but that the administration would never use the Ute name without the tribe's support.

“The university uses the name of the Ute people only with their permission and full support,” she said. “We do have their support and that’s why we continue and are able to continue using the logo.”

For the Indigenous Students and Allies for Change, the Ute name and logo are not just an issue of permission, but a social issue.

Matthew Makomenaw of the Odawa tribe, director of the American Indian Resource Center at the U, said American Indian mascots and nicknames have been a national issue since Stanford changed their mascot in 1972.

He said he has helped American Indian students cope with the Ute name consistently since he came to the U and cited empirical research showing that the use of American Indian names as mascots perpetuates negative stereotypes of American Indians and low self-esteem in American Indian students.

A Diné student who wished to remain anonymous said he feels that most students at the U do not understand the native experience.

“I feel like they can take it and own it ... like it’s theirs,” he said. “It’s kind of disheartening.”

He added that because less than 1 percent of U students identify as American Indians, there is little visibility for American Indians on campus.

He feels uncomfortable when he sees students dressed in traditional headdresses at games.

“That’s what they see as Native Americans and that’s what I have a problem with,” he said.

Cal Nez, a Navajo who is actively opposing the Washington Redskins’ mascot, came to a student meeting addressing the issue on Friday, Dec. 6 and urged the U to be open about their negotiations on the nickname and logo.

“Everybody feels threatened on both sides,” he said.

An avid fan of the U’s sports teams, he feels confident that the U can arrive at a usage of the name

and logo that will satisfy everyone.

“There’s ways that we can resolve that thing,” Nez said.

Dowell said the Memorandum of Understanding that is in progress now will be made public as soon as it is finished.

a.drysdale@chronicle.utah.edu

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RICHARD PAYSON

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JOSH JOHNSEN on 11 December, 2013 at 13:28

Reply

People aren't mascots. I loved my time at the U, but this always bugged me.



MAMA2ONE on 12 December, 2013 at 09:37

Reply

A curious aside: Why did they have the meeting at the Alta Club, historically a bastion of rich white men? Was there really no suitable place available on the U campus? Or if “neutral” ground was sought... was that really “neutral”?



ANGIE on 14 December, 2013 at 03:34

Reply

Reaffirm the Utes nickname and d & f logo:

http://www.change.org/petitions/university-of-utah-administration-reaffirm-the-ute-name-and-drum-circle-logo-educate-the-university-community-on-how-to-honor-the-ute-tribes-position-and-educate-people-on-native-american-s-history-and-culture?share_id=vtzdtJksax&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=petition_invitation



DINÉ on 17 February, 2014 at 22:23

Reply

The article kept referring to “the Ute tribe” there is more than one Ute tribe. I feel like this low level of awareness (or lack of effort) perpetuated by organizations on campus, is what fuels the problem. The Chroni is doing better, but they have a long way to go in being knowledgeable when covering social issues.

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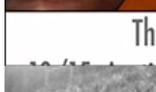
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