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THE DAILY UTAH CHRONICLE on September 19, 2006 at 12:00 am

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In previous years, the U has had a good relationship with the Ute American Indian Tribe from which the school gets its nickname-the Utes-but lately, that relationship has been in turmoil.

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Tribal leaders from the Utes have been less than pleased with the U after U administrators failed to follow through in providing scholarships for tribal members, they said.

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Last year, the majority of tribal leaders supported the U when the NCAA ruled that the U's use of the Ute nickname was offensive to the tribe and had to be changed.

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The NCAA dropped the U from its list of schools with offensive mascots, but some tribal leaders said that in discussions regarding the nickname, U officials said they would provide scholarships for Ute students attending the U.

Now some of the same tribal leaders are saying the U skipped out on its promise.

Cameron Cuch, former education director for the tribe, said while the U has provided one new scholarship for a Ute student this year, officials originally told him that scholarships would be provided for all Ute students.

"We were told there was a person that would support scholarships for Ute students," he said.

Cuch said that since only "three or four" Ute tribal members go to school at the U, providing funding for them should not be difficult.

"You would think that the U, which carries the (Ute) name and makes a great deal of money off of it, would want to fully support its tribal students," he said.

U administrators said they have had talks with the tribe about scholarships since the two agreed to a memorandum of understanding in 2003, but that scholarships were not a bargaining piece for

use of the nickname.

“We did not then and are not now trying to purchase the right to use the name,” said Fred Esplin, vice president for university relations. “We didn’t see it as a financial transaction.”

Esplin said he did not discuss scholarship opportunities for tribal members with Cuch until after the name controversy was over.

Although Cuch disagrees with Esplin’s account of their discussions, he said the tribe hopes to maintain a good relationship with the U and said tribal leaders plan to meet with U administrators soon.

“We’re not looking to have a fight with the U administration,” he said.

Esplin said Ute tribal members have a number of diversity scholarships open to them; however, Ute leaders said they think scholarships should be allocated to the tribe separate from other minorities.

Forest Cuch, director of the Utah Division of Indian Affairs, said the university should provide tuition for all eligible Ute tribe members. He said the Utes are different from other minority groups because they are indigenous to the state.

“I’m disappointed they keep lumping us in with everyone else,” he said. “(The Utes) are not like other minorities; they have a political relationship with the state and national government.”

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