

One of the most "celebrated tradition(s) on any college campus" has come under fire. The "Three-In-One," usually performed by University bands at athletic events, has received criticism by members of the American Indian Studies department and the participation in the tradition by student athletes is being watched with a careful eye.

According to documents obtained under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act by University alumnus Ari Cohn, the issue has been a point of contention for over a year, but an online petition has recently garnered attention this week. The petition, titled "Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Stop changes to the 3 in 1 medley" has so far gathered more than 3,600 signatures.

This summer, Robert Warrior, director of American Indian Studies, asked Robert Easter, who was then the interim chancellor, to put an end to the "American Indian themed music" played by University bands.

Chief Illiniwek was officially retired in 2007, and no performance or depiction of the former symbol is permitted by the University at official events, athletic or otherwise. While many argue the history of the Three-In-One is separate from the Chief, Warrior maintains the debates go hand-in-hand.

"Unless campus and University leadership intends to bring back the former mascot, the playing of this music serves no purpose other than inciting the adherents of the retired mascot toward resentment," he wrote. "Every time the bands play that music, you are highlighting the institution's ugly past and pushing the campus backwards."

But Barry Houser, director of athletic bands, disagrees based on his research into the Three-In-One. While Houser was at the University in 2007 for his master's degree, he continued the research of former director Pete Griffin on the history of Illinois Bands.

The Three-In-One comprises three traditional pieces of University lore: "Pride of the Illini," "March of the Illini" and "Hail to the Orange," the Alma Mater song. "March of the Illini" was written by Harry Alford in 1926 and made its debut alongside the Chief at a football game against the University of Pennsylvania. Both "March of the Illini" and "Pride of the Illini" were officially published in 1928, and the performance of the three songs together with the drill formations became known as the Three-In-One.

Houser said he wants to make it clear that two of the three songs in the tradition were in existence before the Chief.

"It is separate when we really look at how history has been written," he said.

In Warrior's letter, he stated that he had spoken with School of Music director Karl Kramer, who had told him that upon direction from the chancellor, the Three-In-One could be replaced by a march written for the University by John Philip Sousa. But Kramer said in an email that he does not "know of any efforts whatsoever to discourage the playing of the (Three-in-One) at athletic events or any other events for that matter."

More debates arose over performance of the Three-in-One when student athletes began leading the singing of the Alma Mater portion of the medley at each of this season's home men's basketball games.

Included in the released documents is an email exchange between retired assistant dean Abigail Broga and Christopher Span, a faculty representative of the athletic administration. Broga said she had attended the Nov. 11 men's basketball game and witnessed the new tradition. She said she was "extremely disturbed" to see the varsity soccer team stay to "join the (Orange) Krush in enthusiastically clapping during the 'chief dance.'"

Span forwarded the email to Vice President and Chancellor Phyllis Wise and Athletic Director Mike Thomas.

Wise replied, "Need to continue to work on this."

In a different email thread between swimming and diving head coach Susan Novitsky and assistant athletics director for sales and marketing Jennifer Larson, Larson asked Novitsky to pass along specific instructions to the athletes for the game.

"It is important that you let your team know that they do not do anything more than singing and swaying to the song," Larson wrote to Novitsky. "We need to be sensitive to not doing anything like the chief would do."

Administration had been receiving pressure to eliminate the Three-In-One at least since November of last year, when vice chancellor for student affairs Renee Romano began receiving multiple copies of the same email via an online petition. From mid-November 2010 to April 2011, Romano received at least 70 of these emails, according to the obtained documents.

While the email focuses on the Chief, there is one paragraph that asks for the elimination of the Three-In-One.

"We demand an immediate end to the band's playing the Chief's Dance music — known as the 'Three-In-One' — at halftime, and to create a halftime show that does not offer an opportunity for the current unofficial 'chief' to perform in the stands."

Cohn echoed Houser in saying the Three-In-One is separate from the issue of the Chief and that arguing against it for that reason is counterproductive.

"It's not really about the Three-In-One, it's about people's reaction to the Three-In-One," he said. "People are going to holler for the Chief whether or not it is played. If anything, (eliminating the Three-In-One) is going to make people more stubborn about letting it go."

Houser said the University's traditions are extremely important to alumni.

"If you multiply it over the years, that's literally thousands of people who have played and marched the Three-In-One," he said. "For something to last this long, it's special and unique in a society where things don't last."