

November 7, 2008

Students, faculty, and staff associated with the Native American House and American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois are dismayed about plans by other members of our campus community to bring back the university's offensive former mascot, which the Board of Trustees retired in 2007.

The planned event represents a step backwards in the process of changing the climate of intolerance, insensitivity, and dehumanization that Native American people experience at Illinois. Those who have planned the upcoming event and those who participate in it are heading in the wrong direction by promoting a caricature, a stereotype, and an insult.

Events like the one planned for November 15 increase the hostile and abusive learning environment that the NCAA has cited in its sanctions against Illinois and other educational institutions that have persisted in using such images. Scores of other governmental and national organizations, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the American Psychological Association, and the National Congress of American Indians have made clear statements that any continued use and promotion of these images is wrong. We continue to urge people of conscience to join us in opposing such events and working toward eliminating the attitudes that lead to them.

Most importantly, we call on the leaders of our university who are responsible for creating a climate on campus that allows all students to pursue their educational goals to speak up for the rights of Native students as strongly as they have spoken up for the free expression rights of students and others who insist on creating a racially hostile environment. The Trustees, President, Chancellor, Provost, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and many others can and should speak out against these actions that undermine the highest and most basic purposes of our university.

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