

The ISG Endorses the Kingfisher as the Mascot of the UIUC

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SPONSOR(S):

ENDORSEMENT(S): Kingfisher Taskforce, Illinois Alumni Association for the Kingfisher

WHEREAS, Mascots serve as a unifying symbol of school spirit for many aspects of the University’s mission and our University has not had an official mascot¹ since 2007, which has impeded the development of a fulfilling University experience and hindered the creation and maintenance of traditions that promote enduring bonds with the institution; and,

WHEREAS, The addition of a mascot will not detract from the existing traditions, but rather augment and guide the creation of new traditions for both current and future students; and,

WHEREAS, Researchers comparing University of Illinois to similar universities noted institutions which “communicated clear institutional signals by replacing the mascot with an alternative” experienced greater success in community inclusion initiatives, and would generate more positive results for prospective students researching college campuses²; and,

WHEREAS, While the University has officially disavowed use of the prior mascot, the absence of a replacement has permitted unofficial channels to continue to use and profit from the officially retired Chief Illiniwek imagery^{3,4}; and,

WHEREAS, The continued use of Native American stereotypes in Illinois athletics and student sections detracts⁵ from the University’s ability to create a culture and climate that is welcoming to Native American students, staff, faculty, and community members, as well as undermining recent efforts by the University of Illinois to combat systemic racism; and,

¹ The UC-Senate acknowledged Chief Illiniwek as a mascot of the University in Senate Resolution EQ.97.04 on March 9, 1998 (“Resolution to Retire Chief Illiniwek”), thereby confirming that Chief Illiniwek was indeed seen as a mascot by the University at large and not a symbol

² <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.04.008> (University of Illinois, Yale University, Study 1b, Dr. Michael Kraus)

³ <https://thespreadissue.com/2017/03/01/where-to-buy-your-unofficial-gear/> (see former mascot imagery)

⁴ <https://www.gamedayspirit.com/illinois-chief-illiniwek-apparel>

⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.04.008>

WHEREAS, The American Psychological Association has compiled research that shows the negative effects of cultural appropriation⁶ of American Indian imagery on not just indigenous students but all students⁷ in that these mascots are “psychologically detrimental Native American students”, “associated with negative stereotypes of Native Americans”, and “undermine intergroup relations by increasing negative stereotyping of Native Americans”⁸; and,

WHEREAS, Respect for the views of the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma should be of central concern to this land grant university as it is the only federally recognized tribe consisting of the descendants of the original Illinois Indians, Confederation, or Tribe of Native Americans, who once lived on the land now occupied by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign⁹; and,

WHEREAS, Recent national events have raised issues of race and systemic racism to the forefront of the national consciousness about symbolism in both sports and higher education, thus creating a climate where many institutions are making concerted efforts—including efforts to completely replace former mascots with alternatives—to advance beyond imagery that can be harmful among their traditions^{10,11}; and,

WHEREAS, The Chancellor’s Critical Conversations Report on Native Imagery section “Moving Forward - Major” emphasizes that “[r]epeatedly, stakeholders stated that in order to bring closure the University should introduce a mascot or develop new traditions”¹²; and,

WHEREAS, In March of 2020, a majority of students voting (4,222 of 7,819) voted yes to a student referendum question asking “Should the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign adopt the Belted Kingfisher, an orange-and-blue bird native to Illinois, as the mascot for the University?”¹³ thus identifying the first widely-supported candidate for a new mascot among students on campus; and,

⁶ The Cambridge Dictionary defines cultural appropriation as “the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture.”

⁷ <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/mascots.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13613324.2020.1772221>

⁹ <https://www.senate.illinois.edu/20180924senate/rs1901rev.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/13/us/washington-redskins-nickname-change-spt/index.html>

¹¹ https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/07/29/retired-university-of-illinois-mascot?fbclid=IwAR2jl2tYs_F2m1VjQ3GZn_BD_2Wxq7QgzJuAfB353XbN9hTD58c4XVx_JPg

¹² <https://files.webservices.illinois.edu/8075/nativeimagerycriticalconversationreport.pdf>

¹³ <https://uofi.app.box.com/s/5kpcz4b5o75nc2ykn7zk4w6axfv3qull/file/631059370269> CSEC Preliminary Election Results released March 9th

WHEREAS, Belted kingfishers are native, predatory birds of Illinois, which have not yet been used as a mascot by any major American business, notable sports team, or university in America—thus offering a possible mascot that would have strong brand recognition with no chance of confusion with any collegiate competitor; and,

WHEREAS, The Kingfisher that is naturally true to the “Orange and Blue” — thus perfectly resonating with other branding and symbolism already associated with cherished Illinois traditions; and,

WHEREAS, The UC Senate passed a resolution in support of the Kingfisher at a vote of 105-2-4 thus indicating that the Kingfisher is becoming more widely recognized and accepted as a mascot concept; therefore,

LET IT BE RESOLVED, The Illinois Student Government as an organization will publicly endorse the Kingfisher as the mascot of the UIUC and actively pursue its adoption as a mascot; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Illinois Student Government strongly urges the Chancellor and all appropriate Administrative Officials to immediately commission a plan for the implementation of a new mascot for the University this academic year; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Illinois Student Government requests any and all committees, commissions, task forces, working groups, etc. working on any issues related to University symbols, mascots, traditions, student life, athletics, and alumni outreach consider the adoption of and design implementation plans for a new mascot as it relates to their purview, and to consider the Kingfisher as a possible mascot; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Illinois Student Government urges the University administration to actively include the student voice as represented by the Illinois Student Government on all committees, commissions, task forces, working groups, etc. regarding campus culture, the creation of new traditions, and school spirit; and,

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, The Senate requests the President direct the Executive to take any action necessary and proper to carry out the provisions of this resolution, including but not limited to issuing press releases, social media campaigns, funding Kingfisher Task Force efforts, and any other efforts related to the goal of the adoption of the Kingfisher as a school mascot.