

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE**

THE ACADEMIC SENATE SUPPORTS THE ADOPTION OF A NEW MASCOT AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN AND ENDORSES THE PROPOSED
AND STUDENT-SUPPORTED KINGFISHER AS A POSSIBLE MASCOT

WHEREAS, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has demonstrated its leadership as a world class academic and research institution through its groundbreaking advances in COVID-19 testing and prevention, and can continue to commit to its social responsibility by recognizing now as the appropriate time to make positive change for its community; and,

WHEREAS, the University’s strategic plan for the next 150 years states: “We will be leaders in advancing diversity and equity that will contribute to creating an institution committed to excellence in discovery, teaching, and research, and a climate where all can achieve their highest aspirations in a safe and welcoming environment”¹; and,

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 mascot² 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, this resolution does not seek to change the “Fighting Illini” moniker; 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 (Appendix B); and,

¹ <https://strategicplan.illinois.edu/>

² 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

WHEREAS, many academic institutions faced with the decision to replace offensive mascots with a new mascot often did so³, with notable successes with subsequent student-created, inclusive traditions⁴; 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 campuses⁵; and,

WHEREAS, a campus survey in 2011 revealed that 85% of 11,440 student respondents were in favor of some form of mascot change⁶ and both the Illinois Student Government (ISG) and the Academic Senate recommended the exploration of a new mascot in 2016⁷; and,

WHEREAS, the Critical Conversations on Native Imagery Advisory Committee reaffirmed this recommendation in 2018 and urged a clear plan of next steps towards moving forward⁸; 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^{9,10}; and,

WHEREAS, the continued use of Native American stereotypes in Illinois athletics and student sections detracts¹¹ 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,

³ <https://jayrosenstein.com/pages/honormascots.html>

⁴ <http://thewestgeorgian.com/from-braves-to-wolves-the-changes-of-west-georgia/>

⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.04.008> (University of Illinois, Yale University, Study 1b, Dr. Michael Kraus)

⁶ <https://will.illinois.edu/news/story/u-of-i-mascot-survey-released>

⁷ https://www.senate.illinois.edu/gp1604.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1ol3SmJJDE3DYOYcVy4nuU2d0f_yFZR3sDzWWXSBdDbYm4PMBqIqbytvc , p. 2

⁸ <https://chancellor.illinois.edu/files/diversityreview/nativeimagerycriticalconversationreport.pdf>

⁹ <https://thespreadissue.com/2017/03/01/where-to-buy-your-unofficial-gear/> (see former mascot imagery)

¹⁰ <https://www.gamedayspirit.com/illinois-chief-illiniwek-apparel>

¹¹ <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 appropriation¹² of American Indian imagery on not just indigenous students but all students¹³ 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”¹⁴; 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-Champaign¹⁵; 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^{16,17}; 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”¹⁸; and,

¹² 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.”

¹³ <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/mascots.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13613324.2020.1772221>

¹⁵ <https://www.senate.illinois.edu/20180924senate/rs1901rev.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/13/us/washington-redskins-nickname-change-spt/index.html>

¹⁷ https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/07/29/retired-university-of-illinois-mascot?fbclid=IwAR2jI2tYs_F2m1VjQ3GZn_BD_2Wxq7QgzJuAfB353XbN9hTD58c4XVx_JPg

¹⁸ <https://files.webservices.illinois.edu/8075/nativeimagerycriticalconversationreport.pdf>

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?”¹⁹ thus identifying the first widely-supported candidate for a new mascot among students on campus; and,

WHEREAS, a new mascot idea, the belted kingfisher, is gaining widespread grassroots support and its adoption would resolve many of the issues aforementioned; and,

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” (Appendix A)—thus perfectly resonating with other branding and symbolism already associated with cherished Illinois traditions; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that without expressing disapproval of alternatives that may gain widespread support, the Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign endorses the adoption of the Kingfisher as a new mascot for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 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 University administration continues to publicly condemn any public display of the former mascot and condemn or combat unofficial uses; and,

¹⁹ <https://uofi.app.box.com/s/5kpcz4b5o75nc2ykn7zk4w6axfv3qull/file/631059370269> CSEC Preliminary Election Results released March 9th

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 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 University administration works 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 FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign requests periodic updates from relevant administrative bodies, starting at the November 2020 Senate Executive Committee meeting, on the status of the implementation of a mascot; and,

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign acknowledges this measure to be more than thirteen years overdue.

Spencer Hulseley
Creator of the Kingfisher

Dana Yun
Chair of the Kingfisher Task Force of the ISG
ENGR Student Senator

Susan Zhou
Senator Emeritus of ISG
Former SEC Student Representative
Former Speaker of the Senate of the ISG

Vikram Sardana

Senator Emeritus of the ISG

Former SEC Student Representative

Member of the Chancellor's Commission on Native Imagery

Deniz Namik

Senator Emeritus of ISG

Former Chair of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion of the ISG

Former Member of the Chancellor's Diversity Leadership Council

Student Senator Endorsements:

ACES Senator Tyler Swanson

ENGR Senator Cody Bainbridge

ENGR Senator Jessica Nicholson

ENGR Senator Yousuf Ahmad

FAA Senator Ari Kelo

GRAD Senator Abby Fogarty

GRAD Senator Ander Beristain

GRAD Senator Chris Ackerman

GRAD Senator Sara Saez Fajardo

GRAD Senator Vivek Bangalore Shyamasundar

LAS Senator Alissa Xiao

LAS Senator Arnoldo Ayala

LAS Senator Aynur Namik

LAS Senator Nataly Esparza

LAS Senator Sofia Sinnokrot

LAS Senator Tyeese Braslavsky

MDA Senator Vada Gregory

SSW Senator Sudarshana Rao

Faculty Senator Endorsements:

AP Senator Brian Farber

AP Senator Kelli Harris

ENGR Senator Elaine Schulte

ENGR Senator Scott Willenbrock

LAS Senator Aleks Ksiazkiewicz

LAS Senator Bruce Rosenstock

LAS Senator A. Naomi Paik

LAS Senator Mimi Thi Nguyen

LAS Senator Ralph Mathisen

Other Endorsements:

UC-Senate Student Life Committee

Student Body President Alexis Perezchica

ISG Chief of Staff Katrina Rbeiz

ISG Treasurer Hannah Buzil

ISG DGS Senator PJ McLaurin

ISG LAS Senator Abe Sun

APPENDIX A: IMAGES OF THE KINGFISHER & SAMPLE MASCOT IMAGERY



APPENDIX B: NEW TRADITIONS

ISG Kingfisher Taskforce: New Traditions Report

In this report, the University of Illinois Student Government Mascot Task-Force reviews anticipated new school traditions and opportunities for student and alumni involvement. While methods of student engagement are rarely predictable and will often grow organically from change, we foresee several possibilities for both courtside and community participation. In addition to considering our own university's growth, we analyze the successes of similar universities and colleges who were faced with replacing their mascot.

Incorporating a new Mascot into Student Life

A mascot is more than just a representative of its University's sports teams; it is a [Swiss-army knife](#) for public relations, student interactions and recruitment events.

New Traditions Opportunities

New student section traditions are a vital part of integrating a new mascot into our community. For example, as kingfishers are diving birds²⁰, a student could do a simple, dive-bombing hand motion that ends with a “splash” noise or explosion of hands when our team scores a touchdown or a free-throw.



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²⁰ The kingfisher is capable of diving [20 to 40 feet](#) into the water, and can reach speeds of over 45 mph in flight.

²¹ <https://mdc.mo.gov/blogs/discover-nature-notes/bird-fishes>

²² https://www.flickr.com/photos/koolpix_nature/49022900953

As a court-side character, our mascot will be able to humorously interact with our student section and the other team's mascot. While she'd mostly be active at football and basketball events, she'd definitely hold a special place for our women's diving team!

New Merchandising

As a unique and highly-specialized species of bird, belted kingfishers feature distinct traits that will distinguish them from the more "commonplace" songbird, eagle and hawk mascots. Most notably, the bird has a prominent crest, perfect for new game-day "kingfisher crest" hats. These hats can be foam or knitted, an example of which is shown below:



A knitted "Kingfisher Crest" hat

In addition to this, rather than student section sports towels, students can have long, narrow orange banners, or "belts", (imitating the bird's own orange belt), or smaller ones that can be worn as a headband.

As a spearfishing bird, the kingfisher has a long, pointed beak. This feature is not unlike the shape of a kazoo; an instrument that is lightweight and easily mass-produced. Noise-makers, such as grey and black (or orange and blue) "kingfisher kazooos" could be used at (permitting) university events and parades.

As these instruments are inexpensive, they could make for great visitor items to be included in the orange bookstore bags handed out for tours. As no other academic institution uses this specific animal, all "kingfisher" traditions would be unique to the University of Illinois.



Student-created kingfisher merchandise and artwork—shared on Facebook, Twitter and other social media forums—showcases the excitement in the future of this mascot. RSOs, such as the Illinois Badminton sports club and the UIUC Geology club, have already begun to incorporate the kingfisher into their logos. We expect more traditions and items to be invented with time.

Student-Inclusion Initiatives for Design and Name

With the support of relevant University Administration, the ISG Kingfisher Taskforce wishes to utilize the creativity of our community through competitions for the bird's name and official design. This process can include submissions from students, faculty, alumni, and community members. We intend to have several rounds of selection and approval, involving a committee of alumni, professors, administration, athletic departmental staff, and other university staff. The exact plan for voting timelines will be decided when the Senate decides to move forward with this mascot. We have looked towards other Universities faced with comparable circumstances for mascot design competition structures and will present these as possible options to administration should this resolution pass.

Other student-inclusion initiatives have been scheduled by the ISG Kingfisher taskforce to better hear student and student athlete voices on the mascot. This list includes Q&A sessions for students, a presentation to the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) in November, and various online opportunities for questions through social media platforms.

Mascot Changes with Other Institutions

While adopting a new mascot will be a definite first for *our* University, it is hardly a first in the world of sports. Other academic institutions, having been in similar situations to ours, experienced great success with newly-adopted mascots. Miami University, which went by the name “the Redskins” up until 1997, [successfully](#) switched to a new mascot, a red tailed hawk. Eastern Michigan University switched from the EMU Hurons to the EMU Eagles in 1991, adopting a new mascot, [Swoop the Eagle](#). Indiana State University had used mascot Chief Quabachi up until 1989. Six years later, college administration invested into a new mascot, [Sycamore Sam](#) (a blue and white fox-like creature) who still serves as a positive community liaison and their college representative to this day. Success stories like these can be seen on college courtsides across the country.

While some colleges ultimately decided to change the team's name in addition to adding a new mascot, this mascot proposal is NOT intended to serve as a team name change. Rather, it is a singular yet critical step in the right direction of creating new, inclusive traditions for students and our entire community.