

October 26, 2020

Re: Chancellor Haefner's Oct. 21, 2020 Email "Response to students; commitments to Native and Indigenous communities"

We have outlined how we have personally been “othered” on campus, and how being this voice of the “other side” has been met with trauma, campus safety brutality, racism, and campus violence. At the same time, we have NSA Alumni who are still paying their debt to DU. We want to take a step back in advocating for Native American students to come to DU until we confront the cycled violence within the campus environment.

Simply put, there is no way to reconcile the history of the word Pioneer. In the Chancellor’s email, he tried to say that the way DU uses the word is separate from its history — but as a university that is literally founded upon the genocide of Cheyenne and Arapaho people, that is not possible. By keeping the Pioneer moniker, DU is telling its Native students, alumni, staff, and faculty that they are not willing to reconcile its violent legacy, and that in fact, they want its legacy of genocide and harm to continue. Pioneers killed Native people and stole Native land. That is the beginning and end of the word. And it is not on non-Natives to claim that they are reappropriating a word that continues to harm Native people. It is not their decision, so any justification that the word can be reconciled is simply not okay and continues to harm DU’s Native community.

This harm against Native people is not unusual for DU. Besides their violent legacy, there is a consistent pattern of anti-Native rhetoric that has circulated within the DU culture for the past decade. The NSA co-chairs have felt the brunt of this harm and labor the most institutional trauma. We want to remind the BOT and DU community this has been a long time conversation that NSA has been laboring for the campus community for “educating the other side”.

terminology to describe DU. We also know a memorial site dedicated to Sand Creek, within Pioneer Nation, will not bring justice to our community as we will continue to be reminded each day of a painful past without first healing or visioning a hopeful future. We ask that you reevaluate your dedication to upholding your violent legacy of colonialism, and to create true healing from past harms for your former and current Indigenous students. Most importantly, we ask that you create a safe space for Native students currently attending DU, and for the Native students to come.

Part of learning is also through activism and larger dialogues. We also know realistically under the structures of capitalism and settler society, in order for the University to change the mascot name, money will have to follow. Given the structure of inequality we do not possess this capital. However, it is within the right of an individual to protest, which is a fundamental right within American society and is our constitutional right. For alumni who do not understand that this is part of what conversations of different opinions will look like, in fact, it is not about bashing or condoning students for having a different opinion than you. It is also not about suggesting that Dr. Ramirez or faculty who don't agree with you should be fired. Facilitating greater conversations and educating through activism is a form of learning and is part of academic learning. Which is a role an educator and intellect should do. Social change in America has been accomplished through social movements and collective voices. Students have the ability to learn these skills which is imperative to the realities of today's social climate. We stand by Dr. Ramirez.

We want to contextualize our timeline experiences in the following letter. There is a reason the NSA has consistently gone to the front lines of these discussions not trying to be confrontational but there has been no other way we have been heard by administration. Our No More Pio Campaign Powerpoint was given in front of USG, and been told to Administration has been met with inaction. We are the smallest body on campus therefore, our voices are restricted and we have consistently been told that not enough of us will make a difference. Higher Administration always argues that Native Students are a small population of students whose voices don't matter because of numbers. They have used this argument to weaponsize their power over NSA and dismiss anything our group has to say because we are insignificant in numbers and in money to support the University. That argument alone shows where the power lies in the University and where the value of Native students are within the University. We ask that if you continue to read from here to understand and learn about the history of DU from an NSA perspective.

2016-2020 — NSA Elk Era: #NoDALP and #NoMorePios

In the same year as the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in Standing Rock in 2016, DU agreed to host the annual [Pipeline Leadership Conference](#) on campus — a conference that included the company responsible for the Dakota Access Pipeline, [Energy Transfer Partners \(ETP\)](#). This was a slap in the face to Native students on DU's campus, and Native students had to take time from their studies to quickly plan a protest against the event.

At this protest, DU Campus Safety and the Denver Police Department (DPD) threatened students with arrest, and labeled the group as “out of control.” Community members and DU students were [met with riot gear, mace guns, and other weapons](#) used to intimidate students. Yet in the same light, during the DU Pioneer game Frozen 4, [DU students lit a mattress on fire and blocked evans and were later congratulated for their win](#). “Pioneer Nation” got to walk away with DPD tweets of support and 0 conduct cases, while Native students were met with threats from Campus Safety, and members in our protest were pushed and regulated. In addition, our retired Native American Faculty from Illiff, Dr. Tink Tinker, was called “a jerk” during the protest by DU Director of Campus Safety, Don Enloe, after Don seemed to imply that he womMer

As more people showed up, the organizer for the video called security and stated that Amanda, Jozer, and Julia were disrupting and not allowing the video to be filmed. Campus Security then came and all three were then questioned if they had “permits” or “authorization” to be on Driscoll Green because the organizer of the video had a “permit” to video. We then learned that there were no permits or authorization given to the organizer of the video and the claim that he had them was false. We were the only students asked to provide student ID to prove we were students and were escorted off campus by Campus Safety because one of us did not have our “Pioneer Card/ID Card” to “prove” we were DU students, even though two of us did have our IDs. We were placed on student conduct alert and were not able to register for courses until Chancellor Coombe made a phone call to the Student Conduct Office to release our records, because we did not do anything wrong.

During this time Jozer Guerrero received threats from former DU Alumnae about how they would physically find out where he lived and harm him. Guerrero said that while they tried to “reason with” the filmmakers and guards, the guards were “rude and disrespectful” and used “excessive force” on the shoulders and arms of the students during the incident. DCS Public Information officer, Sgt. Banet said the policy surrounding use of force in escorting students is a use of “reasonable necessary force.” There were [over 100 students](#) (apart from us) there for the video, and many of them shouted racial slurs at us as we were forced off the Driscoll Green.

During our meeting with the Chancellor after the event, and in an email following the meeting, we requested that the security cameras with footage of Sturm and Driscoll Green be reviewed to visually show what happened that day. We also requested the footage from the officer’s body cam. These requests were repeatedly denied. Notably, the following year when there was an issue with another student organization on the same Driscoll Green and they requested to review the security camera footage, their request was immediately approved and the footage was provided to them to personally review. Jordan Ames, the administrative manager of the University’s marketing and communications department, also lied to the Westword and [said](#) that the Harlem Shake group had a permit, and that Campus Safety was not aware of any complaints, despite the several made in writing by us following the event

During this time, there were also efforts to change the mascot. The University attempted to create a new mascot by forming several University mascot focused groups (Mascot Steering Committee, Mascot Task Force, etc.). These groups were alumni, undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. The discussions and information within these groups, combined with the press surrounding the NSA and Harlem Shake video led to many conversations throughout DU regarding “controversy surrounding Boone,” resulting in conversations had on campus Facebook groups and alumni blog sites. Offensive comments were made by fellow undergraduate students and alumni, such as: “Amanda, Jozer, and Julia should go fuck themselves;” “These students should go back to the reservation where they came from;” “They should go and get drunk on their reservation;” “Don’t worry, this won’t be an issue anymore once all of the Native Americans die off.” These types of comments were made by the USG senior class president at the time, who also went on to make senior t-shirts with Boone on them.

