



UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

LATINX CENTER



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THE INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH INCUBATOR  
FOR THE STUDY OF (IN)EQUALITY

Attn: Chancellor Jeremy Haefner  
Provost Mary Clark  
University of Denver Board of Trustees  
University of Denver Students, Faculty, Staff and Alumni

Colleagues and Community,

As faculty, staff, and students affiliated with the Interdisciplinary Research Institute for the Study of (in)Equality (IRISE), the Latinx Center @ DU (formerly known as DULCCES), and the DU Center for Immigration Policy and Research, we renounce Chancellor Haefner's October 21st email response to the students of Righteous Anger. Healing Resistance. (RAHR) and the Native Student Alliance (NSA). As a community of scholars whose scholarship, teaching, and community-engaged work focuses on understanding inequities, exposes power, privilege, and oppression, and condemns systemic racism and the violence of colonization, we are appalled at the degradation of communities of color promoted by Chancellor Haefner's rationale to [protect the DU moniker, "Pioneer."](#) This decision reflects a blatant disregard for the culture of diversity and inclusion that the university claims to promote as a central value.

The decision to keep the "Pioneer" moniker is disheartening. Perhaps the surprise rests in the need for the Chancellor to listen "with great care" to arguments that juxtapose a desire to keep an emblem versus eliminate a symbol of the genocide and erasure of Indigenous People. The inherent message is that the University of Denver determined that an emblem supersedes the value of human lives. The reduction of the tremendous loss of life and culture to semantics is not only disrespectful but repeats the same cultural violence which is concretized in the words of the monument at the Sand Creek Massacre Historical Site declaring it the "Sand Creek Battle Ground" rather than the massacre it is known to be. Indeed, the Chancellor uses the same tools in his email, controlling the historical narrative to obfuscate true responsibility for reprehensible acts. As scholars, we also understand, based on historical facts, that the buying, selling, and displaying of the body parts of Indigenous People, the distribution of disease-infested blankets, and the marching of Indigenous men, women and children to their deaths to take their land was the innovation of colonization by genocide. That is the very essence of the "pioneering spirit" the Chancellor asks us to embrace and no amount of justification will change that.

Furthermore, the subsequent commitments from the Chancellor to Native and Indigenous communities amount to little more than tokenism. Notably, the Chancellor's commitments of needs-based tuition for Native Students (not active recruitment and support), a Native American and Indigenous Studies Center (without an indication of funding or implementation date), target of opportunity hiring of diverse (not specifically Indigenous) faculty, and a fundraising plan (among several University fundraising plans) require an enormous amount of unearned trust from communities of color. They also ignore the fact that, without changing the moniker and, therefore, changing the campus climate, these and other diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives will fail, particularly in the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff, which may be the intention: Promising things knowing full well they will fail. Perhaps that is the "pioneering spirit" the Chancellor is promoting.

We also take issue with the Board of Trustees soliciting input from faculty of color, seemingly with the intention of recruiting more diverse Board members, while simultaneously endorsing decisions that cause harm and re-inflict trauma to Indigenous People. We have no doubt that the decision to keep the moniker was a financial one and the Trustees and senior leadership made it clear that they value donor dollars over people, which is especially egregious given the current moment the country is grappling with and, in many cases, proactively responding to the legacy of racism. Indeed, one day after the Chancellor's email was sent to the DU community, South High School announced it was retiring the "Rebel" mascot given its racist connotations. Although University of Denver prides itself on being "innovators and front runners," this decision cements the institution in the past while the city and country move forward, grappling with racial injustice.

Finally, Chancellor Haefner's response to divesting from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) provides little protection for the Latinx community regardless of citizenship status. Latinx people in our families and communities are terrorized by their experiences with ICE as their families are torn apart by raids and detention center policies. Several of our students have been left to raise their younger siblings while attending DU because of the incarceration and deportation of their parents. Currently, 545 children who, in 2017, were separated from their parents in immigration detention are lost to their families because the U.S. government is unable to locate their deported parents. The University's position regarding the "protection" of its community but still allowing ICE on campus (job fairs, recruitment efforts, and invited speakers), ignores the trauma and anxiety of our Latinx students, staff, faculty and communities created when the University invites them to campus. The mere knowledge that the agency responsible for real violence to our families are on campus interferes with the educational process of our Latinx students.

The rationale for keeping "Pioneer" and the dismissal of the request to divest from ICE is a prime example of the ease to which one act of dehumanization supports other acts of dehumanization. We could do better. We can do better. We should do better. But we choose not to do better because, ultimately, not every person involved with DU is seen as equal in our humanity. Until this is resolved, we will remain a DU community of the dominant, wealthy, and powerful. The rest of us will remain the marginalized others included when it benefits the institution and excluded at the behest of the powerful.

As a community of scholars dedicated to racial justice, we stand in solidarity with RAHR and NSA student groups as they demonstrate the critical thinking and will toward a better, more inclusive DU.

Respectfully,

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