

**A Resolution of the
Associated Students of Western Washington University**

“Viking Mascot Change”

The Associated Students of Western Washington University (ASWWU) recognizes the diverse backgrounds represented in our campus community. We recognize that in order to create an environment that makes steps towards the Western Washington University (WWU) Strategic Plan Core Theme of “inclusive success,” we have to be sensitive and honor the needs and values of all students, staff, and faculty. In recognition of our values of accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion, the ASWWU is advocating for a Viking mascot change.

WHEREAS, The WWU Strategic Plan and Mission states, “Western sees equity, justice, inclusion, and diversity as fundamental principles calling for authentic engagement. Western acknowledges that, as an institution, it has failed to meet the needs of people of many races, ethnicities, creeds, socioeconomic classes, gender identities, sexual orientations, and disability statuses. WWU will contribute to redressing these inequities by transforming policies, structures, and practices to ensure meaningful inclusion;” [1] and

WHEREAS, According to the 2021 Western Washington University (WWU) Legacy Review Task Force Report, “A strong majority of the Task Force recommends removal of the name ‘Viking’ from the Viking Union;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “The Task Force was concerned about the harm caused by asking all members of the Western community to identify with a figure that is potentially exclusive on the basis of both ethnicity and gender;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “The Task Force found names idolizing conquest as out of line with the university’s contemporary values around honoring local Indigenous communities;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Some Task Force members reflected on the ways in which the icon’s symbolic relationship to histories to conquest make it especially harmful to celebrate on Coast Salish land occupied by the US military during the 1850’s;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Some members of the Task Force were especially concerned about the fact that, in recent decades, Vikings have been romanticized by white supremacist groups as icons of conquest. Such concerns seemed particularly timely given recent activities by white supremacists on WWU’s campus;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “While the Viking mascot itself is a key aspect of Western’s brand, identification with it varies across the community. The logo is particularly significant for those involved in intercollegiate athletics but has less appeal amongst the broader campus community;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Unlike many gender-neutral mascots, WWU’s Viking is stylized as a man in a way that neither reflects the reality of Viking society nor the many accomplishments of women, who have been educated and educating at Western since its founding;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “In considering possible harms of removing the name: First, no individual namesakes are at risk of being disrespected by removing the word ‘Viking’ from the Student Union. Second, the centrality of the feature on campus including that it is the site of the Ethnic Students Center is one barrier to options to mitigate the harm caused by the retention of the iconography;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Debates over mascots have generated a great deal of attention locally and nationally in recent years... The Task Force also notes that the overwhelming direction of these mascot debates across the country in recent decades has been towards changing older mascots regarded as potentially exclusionary and the creation of exciting new icons with which the whole community can identify;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Six Task Force members voted to recommend the removal of the name ‘Viking’ from the Viking Union. The three members who voted against recommending removal of the name believe that the building name should be reviewed by a separate Task Force in concert with the wider use of the Viking mascot;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “In their view, removing the name from the building [Viking Union] might give people a false sense that the mascot had already been reviewed and addressed;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Despite these differing opinions on procedure The Task Force was unanimous in agreeing that the building name and mascot should be addressed and evaluated in some manner;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The WWU Legacy Review Task Force consisted of a variety of esteemed constituents from across the WWU community, including the Executive Director of American Indian/Alaska Native and First Nations Relations & Tribal Liaison, two Professors, a Professor and Dean Emerita, the Chief of Staff, a former Trustee, an Alumni and WWU Foundation Representative, and two Student Representatives.

WHEREAS, Two years have passed since the WWU Legacy Review Task Force submitted their report to President Sabah Randhawa; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, the first Black woman to serve as ASWWU President received death threats from white supremacists for simply contemplating initiating a discussion about changing the mascot; [3] and

WHEREAS, In an article published by *The Western Front*, “Student leaders had proposed changing the mascot after getting a letter from a communication studies professor... that questioned whether the mascot reflected the school’s ‘commitment to diversity, our commitment to create a more safe and attractive and inclusive environment on campus;” [4] and

WHEREAS, A former WWU Student Trustee and ASWWU Vice President for Diversity stated, “[The mascot] doesn’t portray students of color on this campus and it can be very exclusive to students who are potentially looking at coming to Western;” [4] and

WHEREAS, *The Seattle Times* stated that white supremacists on 4 Chan, a digital-message board, used racial slurs to refer to the ASWWU President and advocated for the murder the student leaders of color who were participating in the Viking mascot change discussion; [5] and

WHEREAS, Two days after the 4 Chan posts, a WWU student posted death threats on the anonymous social media app Yik Yak about the ASWWU President; and [5]

WHEREAS, WWU cancelled classes the day after the Yik Yak post in response to the death threats and concern for the safety of students of color on campus; [3] and

WHEREAS, Former President Bruce Shepard released a statement, “Yesterday, we observed social media being used for hate speech targeted at Western students of color... With disturbing social media content continuing through early this morning, students of color have advised me of their very genuine, entirely understandable, and heightened fear of being on campus... So, I have decided to cancel classes today;” [3] and

WHEREAS, *The Seattle Times* stated, “A suspended Western Washington University sophomore was charged with first-degree malicious harassment” for their threatening post on Yik Yak; [5] and

WHEREAS, Former President Bruce Shepard posted on his blog that he did not foresee WWU changing the Viking mascot; [6] and

WHEREAS, The public conversation about a Viking mascot change dissipated until currently elected ASWWU student leaders proposed the change once again to WWU administration in 2019; and

WHEREAS, With the release of the 2020 Black Student Organizations’ (BSO) Demands to remove the Huxley name from the College of the Environment, the 2021 WWU Legacy Task Force formed to evaluate the names of the Huxley College of the Environment, Mathes Hall, Haggard Hall, and Viking Union as charged by President Sabah Randhawa and the WWU Board of Trustees; [2] and

WHEREAS, According to the 2021 Western Washington University (WWU) Legacy Review Task Force Report, “A strong majority of the Task Force recommends removal of the name ‘Viking’ from the Viking Union;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Six Task Force members voted to recommend the removal of the name ‘Viking’ from the Viking Union. The three members who voted against recommending removal of the name believe that the building name should be reviewed by a separate Task Force in concert with the wider use of the Viking mascot;” [2] and

WHEREAS, The report states, “Despite these differing opinions on procedure The Task Force was unanimous in agreeing that the building name and mascot should be addressed and evaluated in some manner;” [2] and

WHEREAS, Currently elected 2022-2023 ASWWU student leaders have been discussing the Viking mascot change with WWU administration for four years and have been told it is not “the right time” for change; and

WHEREAS, It has been eight years since the 2015 incidents regarding the Viking mascot change and two years since the 2021 WWU Legacy Review Task Force presented their report. However, no tangible progress has been made toward changing the Viking mascot.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE 2022-2023 ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY (ASWWU):

THAT, The ASWWU formally endorses a WWU mascot change; and

THAT, The ASWWU demands that WWU administration follows their Strategic Plan in their “Commitment to equity and justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of others” by changing the Viking mascot; [1] and

THAT, The ASWWU demands that if the WWU administration, including President Sabah Randhawa and the Board of Trustees, forms a Viking Mascot Review Task Force, they must include multiple Student Representatives as delegated by the ASWWU student government; and

THAT, The ASWWU believes the response of white supremacists to student leaders of color initiating a conversation regarding a Viking mascot change is even more indicative of the importance to review how this mascot affects the sense of identity for white supremacists and the safety of students of color; and

THAT, The ASWWU believes that, after eight years, it is crucial to demand that WWU takes action in changing the Viking Mascot. “It is not the right time” is not an appropriate or acceptable response any longer. We have waited long enough and now we must push for progress that will reflect the values of our community. WWU students of all ethnicities and genders should be able to feel safe, welcome, and represented on campus, especially through the mascot. We hope to honor the legacy of student leaders of color who have risked their safety in advocating for a more accessible, diverse, equitable, and inclusive WWU campus community.

THAT, this resolution be forwarded to the Western Washington University Board of Trustees, President Sabah Randhawa; all Vice Presidents; Assistant Vice President for Access, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Litav Langley; Provost and Executive Vice President Brad Johnson; Associate President for Academic Affairs Jack Herring; Chief Diversity Officer Jacqueline Hughes and the Office of Equity; Director Daniel Records-Galbraith and the Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance Office; the United Faculty of Western Washington; the Faculty Senate; all College Deans; and all Department Chairs to distribute to all Professors.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the 2022-2023 Associated Students of Western Washington University Student Senate at their regular meeting on *insert date here*.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the 2022-2023 Associated Students of Western Washington University Executive Board at their regular meeting on June 2, 2023.

Rahma Iqbal
Chair, ASWWU Student Senate

Sargun Handa
Chair, ASWWU Executive Board

Appendix

[1]: WWU 2018-2025 Strategic Plan

<https://provost.wwu.edu/strategic-plan-2018-2025>

[2]: 2021 WWU Legacy Review Task Force Report

https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-08/LRTF%20Report%20and%20Recommendations_June%202021%20-%20Open%20Links.pdf

[3]: *The Washington Post*, “A debate over a mascot, a racially charged threat and another college cancels classes”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/11/24/a-debate-over-a-mascot-sparks-a-rationally-charged-threat-and-another-college-cancels-classes/>

[4]: *The Western Front*, “Vikings no more? Survey to be created to question Western mascot”

<https://www.westernfrontonline.com/article/2015/11/vikings-no-more-survey-to-be-created-to-question-western-mascot/>

[5]: *The Seattle Times*, “WWU student charged with hate crime for alleged online threats”

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/wwu-student-charged-with-hate-crime-for-alleged-online-threats/>

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[6]: Western Today, “Bruce's Blog: Is Western dropping the Viking as our mascot?”

<https://news.wwu.edu/bruces-blog-is-western-dropping-the-viking-as-our-mascot>