

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

“WWU 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 need 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.

Please refer to these two documents for more information:

<https://tinyurl.com/WWUVikingMascotChangeQuotes>

<https://tinyurl.com/WWUVikingMascotChangeTimeline>

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, In 2015, the first Black woman ASWWU President and other student leaders of color received death threats from white supremacists for initiating a discussion about changing the Viking mascot; [2] and

WHEREAS, White supremacists on 4 Chan used racial slurs to refer to the ASWWU President and advocated for the murder the student leaders of color who participated in the mascot change discussion; [3] and

WHEREAS, A WWU student also posted death threats on Yik Yak about the ASWWU President; and [3]

WHEREAS, WWU cancelled classes in response to the death threats and concern for the safety of students of color on campus; [2] and

WHEREAS, *The Seattle Times* stated, “A suspended Western Washington University sophomore was charged with first-degree malicious harassment” for their threatening post; [3] and

WHEREAS, The public conversation about the mascot change dissipated until student leaders of color 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, President Sabah Randhawa and the Board of Trustees created and charged the 2020-2021 WWU Legacy Task Force formed to evaluate the names of the Huxley College of the Environment, Mathes Hall, Haggard Hall, and Viking Union; [4] [5] 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;” [5] 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;” [5] 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;” [5] 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;” [5] 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;” [5] 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;” [5] 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;” [5] 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 WWU Trustee, an Alumni and WWU Foundation Representative, and two Student Representatives; [5] 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 released 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 Vice 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 May 24, 2023

PASSED AND APPROVED by the 2022-2023 Associated Students of Western Washington University Executive Board at their regular meeting on May 26, 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]: *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-racially-charged-threat-and-another-college-cancels-classes/>

[3]: *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/>

[4]: WWU Black Student Organizations’ (BSO) Demands

<https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-06/BSO%20DEMANDS%20June%202020.pdf>

[5]: 2021 WWU Legacy Review Task Force Report

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