

October 9, 2015

Indigenous Nations Studies Program support statement regarding the recent proposal to display a Lewis and Clark themed uniform and helmet at UO football game

Dear Native/Indigenous Community at the University of Oregon:

The Indigenous Nations Studies Program (INST) at Portland State University was saddened to learn on Thursday, October 9, 2015 that the University of Oregon football team is planning to wear special football uniforms (including a Lewis & Clark decal on their helmets) called “Oregon Pioneers” by Nike, which may be intended to honor the history of the state of Oregon.

According to SB Nation <http://totalfratmove.com/new-oregon-uniform-has-a-manifest-destiny-themed-duck-on-helmet-theyve-officially-run-out-of-ideas/> each jersey will have a unique topographical map featuring a different part of the state. The football helmet includes 1800s American frontier explorers Lewis and Clark (and The Duck) pointing westward, and the back has a 33-star flag, the number the U.S. flag for two years after Oregon joined the union.

These Oregon Pioneers themed designed football uniforms reflect over 500 years of various European powers invading the North American continent through European settlements in the so-called New World. Indigenous populations in this country suffered drastically in population as the result of European warfare and disease. What is at issue in this special edition UO Duck uniform is the extension across intellectual terrain of the more physically oriented 19th-century premise of Manifest Destiny.

That a sporting event echoes the theme of Manifest Destiny during a nationally televised audience at mainstream public university, we feel a special responsibility to support the Native/Indigenous students, faculty and staff at the University of Oregon in addressing this hegemonic event. Moreover, this regrettable incident has provided an important opportunity for enhanced discussion and action regarding the challenges of inclusion and difference across the U.S.

Racist incidences on college campuses like that earlier this fall at the University of Oklahoma Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity participating in a racist chant and many more similar incidents across the country can and should serve as a catalyst to a collective mindset there is much diversity work to do throughout the nation. Diversity work means providing space for the opportunity to engage in activities that promote empathy, hope, and agency. When we recognize how our words, actions, and thoughts affect others then we understand that we are the problem and the solution. Today is a critical time for Indigenous scholars and multicultural educators to offer pedagogical tools that will give teachers, students, and administrations to stand up to racism and cultural hegemony. Clearly, we once again find our country facing critical cultural crossroads and the road we choose should lead toward more humanity for all.

INST strives to achieve peace, security, respect, and safety for all humanity, not just citizens of the United States. And as this situation emphasizes a pivotal multicultural teaching moment, INST offers our support and guidance through the challenges and opportunities that interculturalism brings about in all of us. In this, we will continue to work not only with local colleagues and educational institutions, but with all who desire to further develop cultural competence on campuses, in classrooms and in ourselves.

Respecting our communities,

Cornel Pewewardy, Professor and Director of Indigenous Nations Studies, Portland State University (representing the core faculty)