Resolution for the Fair and Dignified Representation of Native American Culture at the University of Rochester
Senate Resolution No. 40

SUBMITTED BY: Rebecca Mooney ‘18, Senator
CO-SPONSORED BY: Natalie Ziegler ’18, Senator
SPONSORED BY: Native American Students’ Association
Modern Languages and Cultures Undergraduate Council
Students’ Association Government Student Life Committee

WHEREAS, the University of Rochester is built upon Algonquin tribal grounds and possesses ties with the Seneca people, a nation of the Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy;

WHEREAS, this connection is historically ingrained within the identity of our campus grounds, being that, “long before white people penetrated into the Genesee country, Algonquin tribesmen used the future River Campus as a rendezvous and habitation... around 1500, they were pushed westward [by Seneca Indians]... [and] during the War for American Independence (1779), the Senecas were whipped by patriot troops and the Indian forces fled westward”;

WHEREAS, in an online survey made available to the University of Rochester student body¹, only 8.3% of respondents report awareness of the history between Rochester and the Algonquin and Haudenosaunee people;

WHEREAS, 90.9% of survey respondents report being unaware or uninvolved with Native American Heritage Month, which has been celebrated at the University since 2011 and was officially recognized by the Students’ Association Government on November, 11, 2015,² a decision which was then publicized to the student body on November 17, 2015, through the SA Government blog³;

¹ University of Rochester River Campus Libraries. “University of Rochester History: Chapter 22, Oak Hill Becomes River Campus.” http://ribscp.lib.rochester.edu/2218.
² Report on the Native American Awareness Survey
WHEREAS, the survey results also demonstrate that 90.8% of respondents have neither heard of nor been to the Ganondagan Seneca Arts and Culture Center, which is located less than a half hour away from River Campus;

WHEREAS, the University of Rochester’s neighboring institution, the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), has created a formal partnership with the Seneca Indian Nation, a specialized academic track called the Native American Future Stewards Program, an American Indian Science and Engineering Society, and in 2012, they committed to a $200,000 federal grant for the Seneca Language Revitalization Program;

WHEREAS, for seven years, RIT has been recognized by the Winds of Change magazine as one of the Top 200 Colleges for Native Americans, but the University of Rochester has never once been featured on this list, despite being located four miles away from RIT and sharing a similar historical connection with the Haudenosaunee people;

WHEREAS, Syracuse University has created a page on their admissions website devoted to Native American resources, including information on a Native American Outreach Day as well as six tabs labeled, “Quick Facts,” “Scholarships,” “Culture and Community,” “Other Resources at SU and Beyond,” “Native Alumni,” and “Contact Information,” all of which pertain to Native American resources and outreach;

WHEREAS, despite the self-proclamation of being “proudly centered near the Western Door of the Seneca Nation,” the University of Rochester’s efforts to establish a connection with the Seneca population currently residing in upstate New York are minimal;

WHEREAS, the University of Rochester’s Admissions Office website does not include a page on Native American outreach or resources, let alone a page on general student and alumni diversity;

WHEREAS, the University of Rochester’s main website has neither a current Diversity Annual Report (the most recent accessible report was made in 2014) nor an updated History of Diversity page (it was last updated in 2011), despite claiming to portray the University’s “most recent reports on Diversity.”

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WHEREAS, the only information available on the University of Rochester’s main website regarding Native American history, outreach, and resources is limited to mentions of the Native Peoples Scholarship, the Haudenosaunee Nations Scholarship, and a connection between the University and College Horizons;

WHEREAS, the University of Rochester reports having established formal partnerships with “community-based organizations” including Latinas Unidas and Puerto Rican Youth Development, but it has failed to make any formal partnerships with the local Haudenosaunee community;

WHEREAS, according to the aforementioned student survey, only 1.5% of respondents believe that the Admissions Office does a good job recruiting Native American students to apply to the University;

WHEREAS, a similar 1.5% of survey respondents feel that Native American culture is adequately represented at the University of Rochester, expressing concern over a lack of course offerings related to Native American history and culture, a lack of both institutional and public commemoration, as well as a lack of culturally engaging resources provided by the University and the University’s website;

WHEREAS, Jonathan Burdick, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, is quoted at the University of Rochester summit on Native American Education in 2010 saying, “I’d certainly be happy to see more Native American voices on campus… One of the richest things [students] can learn while they’re here is to learn about the native peoples who are here and to learn about the background and history that has informed so much of American life and culture.” He also acknowledged that other colleges are doing a better job accommodating native students than the University of Rochester, including RIT;

WHEREAS, in a Campus Times article published on November 4, 2010, Dean Burdick is quoted again saying, “We need to build a bridge between UR and the Native American population in Central and Western New York. We want to increase efforts, not only in suburbs and cities, but reservations and other regions throughout the nation”;

WHEREAS, despite the illusory efforts made in 2010 to increase the Native American undergraduate population at the University of Rochester, the percentage of the undergraduate student body that identifies as Native American has failed to increase over the past six years and unsuccessfully remains below 0.5%.

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WHEREAS, the University of Rochester’s Native American Student Association (NASA) was granted preliminary SA recognition on February 11, 2016, and final SA recognition today, April 11, 2016; and,  

WHEREAS, the approval of NASA demonstrates that despite prior unsuccessful efforts to establish a Native American Student Association, the student body is now invested and excited about increasing education and awareness regarding Native American culture as well as furthering the relationship between the University of Rochester and the Haudenosaunee people;  

WHEREAS, in the aforementioned survey, when asked to gauge their interest on a scale of 1 to 5 regarding whether or not they would be interested in learning more about Native American culture in Rochester, 91.7% of respondents report an interest level of 3 or higher; and,  

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Rochester Students’ Association Senate directs the Executive Branch, the Student Life Committee, the Academic Affairs Committee, and the Campus Services Committee for the 2016-2017 academic year to work in conjunction to advocate for the fair and dignified representation of Native American culture at the University of Rochester on the basis that the University holds a responsibility to honor the history of our campus grounds as well as the present day community of Haudenosaunee people,  

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that these efforts should include the creation of more informational signs or plaques to be placed around campus commemorating Rochester’s Native American roots, annual shuttles available for students to the Ganondagan Seneca Arts and Culture Center (accessible during Native American Heritage Month), a more comprehensive approach to Native American outreach and resources on behalf of the University of Rochester Admissions Office and the University’s website, as well as more course offerings at the University of Rochester pertaining to Native American culture.

Signature of Confirmation
Ethan Bidna
Speaker, Students’ Association Senate

Signature of Approval
Grant Dever
President, Students’ Association Senate

Senate Votes: Yes: 16 No: 0 Abs: 1 Date: 04/11/2016

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