April 1, 2015

Dear Ms. Horowitz and The Cavalier Daily Managing Board,

We write to you to address two articles that appeared today in The Cavalier Daily’s April Fool’s Special. We are deeply disheartened and disappointed by these articles. They do not serve to make our University more inclusive or welcoming.

The article “ABC Agents Tackle Native American Student Outside of Bodo’s: University Students Decry Trail of Schmears” invokes hurtful stereotypes about alcoholism, treaty violations, Native names and culture, and low numbers of indigenous populations which are a direct result of genocide, among other issues. This article reflects widespread misconceptions held about Native peoples, and also makes light of the recent arrest of U.Va. student Martese Johnson, which was a highly traumatic event. The article is especially insensitive considering that “Native Day at U.Va,” the first event of its kind in U.Va. history, was held this past weekend. This inaugural event featured the Native American Student Union’s first annual powwow at Nameless Field, hosted over fifty youth and families from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and welcomed over four hundred guests, many from surrounding local tribes to Grounds. The Native American Student Union worked tirelessly to make this event a success and to make our Native guests feel welcomed into our community. We are highly disappointed that rather than cover this historic event and its impact, The Cavalier Daily decided to publish a poorly timed April Fool’s joke. In addition, U.Va. is currently hosting our Arts Administration Artist-in-Residence on Grounds this week, renowned Diné (Navajo) weaver D.Y. Begay. This is no way to provide her with a warm reception to our community.

The article “Everybody Move to the Back of the Bus: Zeta Psi hosts ‘Rosa Parks’ Party,” though referencing a similar Zeta Psi party that occurred in February, makes light of rape culture and the ongoing struggle for Civil Rights. Again, the timing of this satirical article proves callous as our community continues to struggle with the alarming number of cases of rape and sexual assault on Grounds. In an attempt to find healing surrounding the tragic events that occurred last semester, the University held several events this January that focused on the intersecting issues of racism and sexual assault as part of the 2015 Community Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. During this time, members of our community joined the nation in commemorating the 50th anniversaries of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and examining how they apply to injustices still facing the nation today. The struggle of the Civil Rights Movement should not be reduced to April Fool’s satire.

These articles do not contribute to efforts of inclusion across the University. They further alienate historically marginalized segments of our population. These types of microaggressions will not help us attract more students to our Grounds, but will discourage them from applying and will continue to perpetuate a legacy of exclusivity and racism that many at the University are working hard to change.

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We have included feedback below, received today from University students and employees. We invite the members of The Cavalier Daily Managing Board to participate in a facilitated discussion with your peers. We encourage you to listen (at a time and date to be determined) to the perspectives and concerns of those who have expressed hurt and anger about these articles. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue to increase understanding and promote healing within our community.

Sincerely,

The Office of the Vice President and Chief Officer for Diversity & Equity

Cc: Teresa Sullivan
    Pat Lampkin
    Allen Groves
    Gregory Roberts

“April Fool’s Day or not, today’s front page article in The Cavalier Daily lacked sensitivity to issues that have plagued the University in recent months and, more broadly, everything I feel a modern inclusive university should hold dear: heritage, history, diversity, unity, and equity. I found the article contemptuous, misguided, and anything but humorous. It makes light of Martese’s recent experiences, demeans the Native/American Indian/First Peoples experience over the past 450 years, and marginalizes key fringe subgroups that deserve nothing less than our compassion and protection during this troubling time. It seems to me University leadership should soundly condemn this article and apologize to ALL of the beautiful people who live, study, work, and play here.”

“This is disgusting and an embarrassment. You should be ashamed for your cheap and hurtful attempt at humor, Cavalier Daily. You have reduced HUNDREDS of culturally-distinct tribes throughout all of the Americas to crude, insensitive generalizations and STEREOTYPES. DY Begay, a world-renowned Diné (Navajo) weaver is an artist in residence right now, showcasing her art all over Grounds this week--how is this welcoming her?! How is this creating a safe space for Native students?! IT IS NOT. On Saturday we had the FIRST EVER powwow at UVa, so this should be a time of celebration. Where is an article about the powwow? It’s certainly not on the front page of the website. I could go on and on, but I am tired. I am tired of telling people, that yes, there are Native students at UVa. I am tired of explaining why UVa needs a Native Studies minor, and you know, maybe at least ONE Native professor. This is why. SHAME ON YOU CAVALIER DAILY.”

“With the success of our 1st annual powwow last weekend and the large turnout of UVA students who were genuinely interested in learning more about Native American culture, I was proud to call myself a Wahoo. And then I wake up today to this [expletive] and realize that despite our strongest effort to enlighten students about Native American culture and our presence here at the university it clearly did not reach enough ignorant people. To the inconsiderate individuals affiliated with The Cavalier Daily who wrote this offensive article as an "April Fool's Joke," you
won't break our spirits. We are a strong and beautiful people and will only use this ridiculous nonsense as ammunition to have our small but powerful voices heard!"

I know that this was part of an April Fool’s issue, the slogan being "most days we take ourselves seriously. Today is not that day". WHEN are Native people taken seriously??? What day of the year do racist stereotypes like "dances with wolves" NOT infiltrate our culture? American cultural attitude towards Native people is already a joke. We take this seriously.”

“So instead of writing about the history we made they want to use it as satirical inspiration? ”

A statement issued by the Native American Student Union:
“The Native American Student Union (NASU) would like to express a profound sense of disgust at the recent articles “ABC agents tackle Native American student outside Bodo’s Bagels” and “Zeta Psi hosts ‘Rosa Parks’ party” in the April Fool’s Day edition of The Cavalier Daily. There are few words, other than racism, that could describe this blatant lack of respect for both the African American and Native American communities here on Grounds and in our nation as a whole. Not only do these articles encourage insulting and damaging racial stereotypes of minorities, they satirize serious recent and historical events regarding civil rights and violence against minorities.

As an organization, our goals are to provide support for Native students at UVa, inform the university community about the diversities within Native cultures, and to encourage more Native students to attend the University of Virginia. This article does the exact opposite. Reducing the experiences of millions of indigenous American individuals to a few insulting, racist remarks and relegating any news of our community to an April Fool’s joke shows how little care is given to us as an organization and as an entire people.

Last weekend, the Cherokee Wolftown Indian Ball team from North Carolina traveled to Charlottesville to proudly educate the University community about their culture at both a varsity men’s lacrosse game against Richmond and the 1st Annual UVa Powwow. The powwow, hosted by NASU, gathered over 400 people from both the Charlottesville community and all over the East Coast to celebrate Native cultures despite minimal funding and time. This incredible achievement, the first of its kind at UVa, was covered by the local news but not by the university’s own publication.

Contrary to what the writers of this article publication seem to believe, we are not a joke, we are not stereotypes, and we are not going to stand idly by while our heritage is being insulted.”

A statement issued by the Black Student Alliance:
“Today The Cavalier Daily posted in its "April Fool’s Day" edition this article (http://issuu.com/cavalierdaily/docs/040115) which, at best, can be described as a horribly insensitive and ill-timed, ignorant joke, and at worst can be viewed as a continuation of the prejudice against and dismissal of the importance of the lives of people of color. In this edition, the newspaper published one article entitled “Everybody Move to the Back of the Bus (page 9 on the link)” and another with the heading “ABC Agents Tackle Native American Student Outside Bodo’s Bagels (page 1 on the link)”. In one fell swoop, The Cavalier Daily has made a mockery
of both past and present struggles for equality and justice. Not only did [The Cavalier Daily] re-victimize Martese, they also victimized the already marginalized Native American student population who JUST successfully hosted the University's First Annual Powwow. This is a clear indication that this is #NotJustUVa, not just The Cavalier Daily, but this is the harsh reality of the experiences students of color have in spaces that were not built for them. So let us be as clear, just as they were when they made light of racial violence and inequity endured in this country: we are not laughing, and this is not funny. We demand a public written apology from The Cavalier Daily, acknowledging the harm and backwardness of these articles. We ask that all who are concerned email The Cavalier Daily Editor-In-Chief, Julia Horowitz (j.horowitz@cavalierdaily.com) demanding this apology.”