

Resolution 2018-6. On Five Principles for a Safe Way Forward

The Faculty Council endorses the statement on “Five Principles for a Safe Way Forward” dated October 2, 2018.

Submitted by Profs. Michelle T. King and Malinda Maynor Lowery

Full Text of the Statement:

*Five Principles for a Safe Way Forward: An Open Letter to
BOT and Chancellor Folt on Silent Sam*

October 2, 2018

We, the undersigned UNC faculty, write in regard to the statue known as “Silent Sam.” We recognize that an equitable campus requires that we offer a realistic, safe way forward for all vested stakeholders before November 15th; otherwise, we run the risk of getting stuck with less desirable outcomes imposed from above.

Everyone should be able to agree that ensuring the safety of our entire campus community and our neighbors is absolutely paramount. No one wants to see any member of our campus community injured or harmed as a result of the confrontations that continue to take place at the remaining pedestal of Silent Sam. At this critical moment in which we find ourselves, what is the safest way forward?

As the campus finds its way to a proposal, we advance the following principles in the interest of establishing safe ground:

1. Under no circumstances should the statue be returned to its former location on McCorkle Place. Returning the statue there would recklessly endanger the lives of our campus community. For the same reason, the pedestal on which it rested must also be removed;
2. White supremacist extremists have already issued credible threats against the lives of students on our campus and may continue to do so, regardless of any outcome. We believe that the University has a primary responsibility to protect its students, not the statue that has brought danger to our campus;
3. Wherever the statue is eventually placed, its history must be clearly and unequivocally contextualized, situating and curating Silent Sam and its history as part of early twentieth-century efforts on the part of white supremacists to co-opt the broader memorialization of Civil War dead;

4. Should the statue remain on this campus, the Board of Governors must guarantee an adequate and continuous source of funding to ensure that any future space for it is retrofitted appropriately, staffed, and maintained in order to promote public safety to the fullest extent possible;

5. Moreover, if any university unit(s) should end up receiving the statue, we support the close consultation of the administration with any students, staff, and faculty who must work and learn there, out of respect for their safety and well-being.

Reasoned, contextualized, evidence-based evaluations of the past have a crucial role to play in today's society. Let our deep intellectual and moral engagement with this artifact of hatred transform its ugly origins into something more productive: an opportunity to name and know the past in all of its complex, polyvocal richness. When we place this inanimate object within its broader historical context, whether on or off-campus, Silent Sam can become an object of critical historical analysis through productive, creative, reasoned intellectual inquiry.

We believe that a plan that promotes the safest way forward must uphold these five principles.

[Signed by 140 UNC-CH faculty members as of October 9, 2018.]