



January 31, 2014

An Open Letter to the University of Illinois Community

Dear Colleagues,

Last weekend Chancellor Phyllis Wise of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) announced that her campus would continue to hold classes during a period of extremely cold weather. What was normally a banal administrative decision – if an unpopular one among some students – soon turned “viral” with numerous stereotype-filled expressions of hate posted on Twitter followed by significant news coverage.

Race and gender-based stereotypes directed at Asian American women in leadership positions occur within a specific and deeply evocative history in our country. Our social fabric is such that “Asian Americans have been particularly vulnerable to stereotyping and exclusion.” *Chin v. Runnels*, 343 F. Supp. 2d 891, 907 (N.D. Cal. 2004). Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE), Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP), the National Asian Pacific Islander Council (NAPIC) and the NASPA Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community (APIKC) denounce the hateful stereotyping that recently occurred at UIUC. It is extremely disappointing, and it is antithetical to the values of respect and civil discourse that are of utmost importance on college campuses.

Incidents like the one that occurred at UIUC also represent opportunities for a “teachable moment” with students both within and beyond the UIUC community – indeed this is part of the distinctive value of the college and university environment. As campus faculty, administrators, staff and community leaders we seek to help our students develop independence of mind and maturity as democratic citizens. We therefore encourage continued and respectful dialogue, in both public settings and in quite one-on-one conversations, about Asian Americans’ and Pacific Islanders’ rich and varied contributions. Additionally, we urge college and university officials to take proactive steps to address the harmful (whether intended or not) impact of negative stereotyping in our communities. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education

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