

RESOLUTION 16–13

“Live Captive Mascots and LSU: A Hiatus by Way of a Dialogue”

Sponsored by Suresh Rai

Whereas the mission of a great university includes the advancement of knowledge, the education of citizens, and the betterment of society;

Whereas the achievement of this composite and diverse mission requires the study, analysis, and presentation of creatures, phenomena, and experience in a respectful, enriching, and ennobling fashion;

Whereas expertise in the full range of knowledge acquisition and dissemination—from the direct study of the world and its wonders to the representation of discoveries through writing, performing, and exhibiting—abides in the faculty, staff, and students of great comprehensive universities;

Whereas members of all of these constituencies have expressed grave reservations about the keeping of captive display animals on higher education campuses—campuses that, as the phrase “liberal arts” suggests, promote freedom of inquiry, freedom from oppression, and, in general, freedom;

Whereas an officer of the LSU central administration, when quizzed by a newspaper reporter about possible obstacles and adverse reactions to the acquisition of another live tiger for display purposes, vaguely asserted that some way will be found—a comment that suggests less than ardent commitment to proper procedures;

Whereas the use of animals as totemic objects of veneration or as isolated specimen displays may not prove congruent with modern zoological practices;

Whereas our sister institution, Southern University, long ago halted the practice of

keeping live mascots on public display, and that with no apparent negative impact on donations to the athletic foundation;

Whereas the LSU central administration has not a convincing argument as to how the maintaining of display animals in environments stressing the LSU “brand” serves educational or scientific purposes:

Whereas such purposes could equally well be served by establishing or participating in legitimate animal conservation and shelter programs;

Whereas the LSU central administration has demonstrated good will by opening a discussion about the creation of a high quality tiger care facility that will serve not only local tigers, but tigers from around the nation;

Whereas LSU, a major research university with an international audience and clientele, has not yet conducted the research required to determine whether the use of captive animals for the entertainment of sports “fans” improves or damages the reputation of the university;¹

Whereas the brilliantly illuminated, noisy, and heavily trafficked environment of the tiger mascot enclosure may not adequately resemble a natural habitat;

Whereas the long history of the display of animal mascots prior to the present tiger (“Mike VI”) includes such spectacles as the parading of tigers through the stadium, where they faced loud crowds and are drawn in vehicles surmounted by chanting cheerleaders;

Therefore be it resolved that efforts to obtain a replacement for its tiger mascot be halted until such a time as a full, careful, multidisciplinary, and extended dialogue involving the full range of stakeholders, constituencies, and learned professionals belonging to the LSU flagship university and to expert communities has been conducted on the LSU campus and until such a time, if the keeping of a captive tiger is found to be appropriate for a great university, as competent professionals may assess the tiger enclosure and not before recommended repairs and improvements are completed.

1. Substantial criticism of the keeping of live mascots at LSU has already begun. An article in the Baton Rouge Advocate (June 19, 2016; http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_ab67628c-8b08-11e6-98ec-a3ee6df3eb13.html) cites vigorous criticism of LSU's live mascot tradition by Debra Leahy of the Humane Society of the United States and by Kellie Heckman of the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries. The report also notes that the current ailing tiger, "Mike VI," was obtained from a sanctuary which has now been shut down by the USDA, and that the preceding tiger, "Mike V," also came from a facility repeatedly cited by federal officials. Meanwhile, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has launched a nationwide petition drive calling for the ending of the keeping of live mascots at LSU [<https://secure.peta.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=6541>]. Editorials opposing LSU's keeping of live mascots have also appeared in sports journalism outlets such as *The Comeback* [<http://thecomeback.com/ncaa/lsu-replacing-mike-the-tiger.html>].