

October 29, 2020

Dear Chancellor Haefner and Provost Clark,

I am writing as the Faculty Director of the Colorado Women's College Leadership Scholars Program to express my program's response to the decision regarding keeping the university's pioneer moniker. While the students in the program can and certainly are speaking for themselves on this matter, I felt it important to also add my voice to profess their and my concerns about the subject.

First off, I want to restate how much the CWC Leadership Scholars Program values the support and interaction of both of you as senior leaders of our institution. The students have directly expressed appreciation for the time you've both spent with them to understand their experiences at the institution as first generation students, women of color, and queer women. Chancellor Haefner, you've met with us twice and both meetings were experiences of co-learning and understanding across different roles and perspectives. Provost Clark, your visit to the first and second years was a highlight of the quarter and the women expressed deep thanks for the time you took hearing their stories. Leadership that hears the voices of the least represented is a powerful statement and your presence with these students made a strong impact.

With that relationship established, it is with great care and concern that I relay the dissent expressed by my students regarding the decision to accept and embrace the positive aspects of the pioneer moniker. In all of my classes this week, the scholars have shared that they feel highlighting the positive elements of the pioneer meaning does not wipe away the deeply trauma-filled elements of the word for Indigenous members of our community. We have very few Indigenous students on our campus and only two of our CWC Leadership Scholars directly identify as Indigenous. I offer you the words of one of these scholars – a first-year student – who stated through tears in class on Monday,

"I thought the university would be more supportive with Indigenous students... me being an Indigenous person, and I thought maybe he would consider changing pioneer and he didn't. So I'm kind of having a tough time with that, especially with being in the [Indigenous students]club. We all were actually crying about it that it's been a four-year fight and we're still fighting that right now because of his response."

I am certain you have heard many such responses – but I wanted to capture and share this one voice, who is a bright ball of energy and light in our program and at our institution. She and many of the other scholars face daily challenges of not feeling fully part of the University of Denver community. I wanted to share with you her words and that her reaction to this decision furthers her sense of disappointment in the institution and her sense of feeling unwelcome.

As an educator and advocate for the CWC Leadership Scholars program, I share this story to make you both aware of the direct needs of the students in this moment. As senior leaders

you've taken time out of your busy schedules to engage with these students. Now, hearing how this decision has negatively impacted their experience at DU, how will you support them moving forward?

I was heartened and excited to see the plans moving forward addressing many of the students' requests, including hiring more faculty of color and supporting the experience of black students on campus. As a former college administrator, I know it is difficult to find solutions that appease and please all constituents. I also believe this particular topic will not be resolved simply by decree. I am hopeful we can continue these difficult conversations with purpose, in community, and with a hopeful vision for the equitable future of the University of Denver.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Trisha Teig, PhD
Teaching Assistant Professor, Leadership Studies
Faculty Director, Colorado Women's College Leadership Scholars Program
trisha.teig@du.edu



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DENVER

PIONEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

In early June and over the summer, our faculty and staff discussed our thoughts and concerns about the name of PLP being connected to the pioneer moniker. We requested a process from the Chancellor and Provost to discuss and consider a name change away from the use of 'pioneer' and our reasoning included the following in our letter which we share with you here:

We are formally requesting an opportunity to explore changing the name of the Pioneer Leadership Program. Our intent in this request is twofold: 1) to open the conversation about the factors leading to this request and 2) to explore the process we would take to do this with the support DU leadership and various stakeholders important for success. The timing of this conversation is critical as we are in this historic moment nationally and locally to commit even more to anti-racist thinking, curriculum, and pedagogy. With over 300 students in PLP currently, our community seeks more congruency between what we teach and value with how we brand ourselves as a social change leadership model program. It is our intent to keep working on centering ourselves in inclusive pedagogy and anti-racist policies and structures.

Three years ago, in the wake of the racial bias case with a DU Pioneer Leadership Program student, our program faculty, staff and students were thrust into deep and difficult dialogue about what it meant to be an inclusive leader, a concept we were teaching in our first-year sequence in particular. We had to ask ourselves in the midst of the hurtful turmoil from this bias case, whether PLP was doing its utmost to create a welcoming learning community and deliver a relevant inclusive leadership minor curriculum. It compelled our faculty to review and critically examine the curriculum and pedagogy to move it toward a more inclusive and non-dominant cultural view of leadership and leadership development. We revised all of our courses to amplify researchers and authors from diverse identities, and we opened space for divergent leadership thinking and skill building. We changed the program application questions to recruit students with demonstrated histories of openness to others and a desire to keep learning in this area. We intensified our commitment to develop students' understanding and our teaching around intersectionality. We focused a number of our special events and speakers toward a community conversation regarding challenges of inclusion and how to be a welcoming community. We revised our vision to: "Transforming students to inclusively lead and serve the world".

We are humbled by this work and know that we will always have more to do. It is in this spirit that we have listened to the ongoing call from our students and within our own consciences to consider the problematic word 'pioneer' and how it impacts the inclusionary work to which we are so committed in this leadership program. The current amplification of Black voices and recognition of marginalized lives threatened by violence in the US has energized us further and compel us to action.

In DU's John Evans Report Executive Summary of Findings the authors state:

When any people fail to grapple directly with the dark sides of its collective past it falls prey to mythology. In the United States, one persistent strain of historical mythology has been to shroud complex and sometimes troubling realities in the language of triumph, divinely ordained missions, and a progress that overrides the violence in its wake. It takes courage to face both the illuminated and the more shadowed aspects of history, but here we are invited to walk toward a fuller understanding, with humility.

This thoughtful summary calls us to grapple with and untangle the complexity that language creates in dually shadowing and romanticizing a term that for some in our community find deeply hurtful and exclusionary. The word 'pioneer' is unfortunately difficult to extract from its etymological versus other historical roots connected to our racist narrative and violent history as a developing nation. Try as we have to redefine it and explain it in more current and progressive forms, the historic symbolism and consequent meaning are still embedded and offensive to many. Its usage has the ability to invalidate the history, cultures, oppression, and deaths of indigenous peoples in our country. This creates a context for our program that is out of sync with honesty and inclusion. The word romanticizes White space and signals to those who find it offensive that we are maintaining that White space without care. It is seen by some as a symbol of White supremacy. In fact, every year for the last three years, our program has seen indigenous students withdraw from the program, and it is not lost on us that our name could be partly, or even mostly, to blame. Additionally, our students tell us that other native students refused to apply or be associated with the program because of our name. Allies to these students and to the notion of being truly inclusive continue to find it offensive. And so, we ask ourselves, is keeping this name supporting our values, culture, and goals of truly "Transforming students to inclusively lead and serve the world"? We believe not.

In PLP we teach that leadership is about innovation and change, transformative change. It is not about maintaining status quo and power for a few. Our eight program values include *Courage*, which we define as "standing up for self, others and ideas that matter". Courage in this context requires a willingness to set aside long held comfortable views of a term that does not prick the lived experience of the majority culture, yet pains others. Another value is *Inclusion*, defined as a commitment to the richness and value that individuals and communities with distinctiveness bring to all of our lives and communities. We include the values of *Openness* and *Civility*, defined as "inclusive instead of exclusive relationships marked by respect and genuine interest." The word 'pioneer' threatens these values and the welcoming of individuals and communities who find themselves at odds with the concept. Finally, we also value Integrity, which we define as "value-based actions, rooted in a personal code of ethics". Language matters, and our continued use of 'pioneer' threatens these values and runs counter to our call to value-based actions.

We understand that this may be a larger shift than it was for CLIE in shifting something like the Pioneer Awards to the Crimson and Gold Awards last year. PLP has a long and admired history with one of the most active alumni groups of the University. We know that some, maybe more, will be offended and will believe that this is nothing more than political correctness with a hyper-liberal agenda. We are willing to do the work with our alumni and constituents to dialogue, educate, and lead with them as we consider the change.

With the above statements, we asked that we be given an agreeable process to dialogue and explore a future name. With the Chancellors statement on October, that door has been closed for now. But we invite you into a conversation aboutBut we do ask for permission to initiate a process for name change consideration.

Sincerely,



Linda G. Olson, PhD
Teaching Professor/Director

On behalf of:

Paul Kosempel, PhD	Teaching Professor/Assoc. Director
Effley Brooks, MBA	Asst. Teaching Professor
Trisha Teig, PhD	Asst. Teaching Professor
Erica Wright	PLP Community Relations Program Coordinator
Nicole Cozzi, MA	PLP Program Coordinator

Cc: Jennifer Karas, Tom Romero



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PIONEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

September 25, 2020

Dear Chancellor Haefner and Provost Clark,

This letter is a formal request to explore changing the name of the Pioneer Leadership Program. Our intent in this request is twofold: 1) to open the conversation about the factors leading to this request and 2) to explore the process we would take to do this with the support of your leadership and other stakeholders you believe important for success. As you might surmise, the timing of this conversation is critical as we are in this historic moment nationally and locally to commit even more to anti-racist thinking, curriculum, and pedagogy. With over 300 students in PLP currently, our community seeks more congruency between what we teach and value with how we brand ourselves as a social change leadership model program. It is our intent to keep working on centering ourselves in inclusive pedagogy and anti-racist policies and structures.

Three years ago, in the wake of the racial bias case with a DU Pioneer Leadership Program student, our program faculty, staff and students were thrust into deep and difficult dialogue about what it meant to be an inclusive leader, a concept we were teaching in our first-year sequence in particular. We had to ask ourselves in the midst of the hurtful turmoil from this bias case, whether PLP was doing its utmost to create a welcoming learning community and deliver a relevant inclusive leadership minor curriculum. It compelled our faculty to review and critically examine the curriculum and pedagogy to move it toward a more inclusive and non-dominant cultural view of leadership and leadership development. We revised all of our courses to amplify researchers and authors from diverse identities, and we opened space for divergent leadership thinking and skill building. We changed the program application questions to recruit students with demonstrated histories of openness to others and a desire to keep learning in this area. We intensified our commitment to develop students' understanding and our teaching around intersectionality. We focused a number of our special events and speakers toward a community conversation regarding challenges of inclusion and how to be a welcoming community. We revised our vision to: "Transforming students to inclusively lead and serve the world".

We are humbled by this work and know that we will always have more to do. It is in this spirit that we have listened to the ongoing call from our students and within our own consciences to consider the problematic word 'pioneer' and how it impacts the inclusionary work to which we are so committed in this leadership program. The current amplification of Black voices and recognition of marginalized lives threatened by violence in the US has energized us further and compels us to action.

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This thoughtful summary calls us to grapple with and untangle the complexity that language creates in dually shadowing and romanticizing a term that for some in our community find deeply hurtful and exclusionary. The word 'pioneer' is unfortunately difficult to extract from its etymological versus other historical roots connected to our racist narrative and violent history as a developing nation. Try as we have to redefine it and explain it in more current and progressive forms (see attached email to concerned parent), the historic symbolism and consequent meaning are still embedded and offensive to many. Its usage has the ability to invalidate the history, cultures, oppression, and deaths of indigenous peoples in our country. This creates a context for our program that is out of sync with honesty and inclusion. The word romanticizes White space and signals to those who find it offensive that we are maintaining that White space without care. It is seen by some as a symbol of White supremacy. In fact, every year for the last three years, our program has seen indigenous students withdraw from the program, and it is not lost on us that our name could be partly, or even mostly, to blame. Additionally, our students tell us that other native students refused to apply or be associated with the program because of our name. Allies to these students and to the notion of being truly inclusive continue to find it offensive. And so, we ask ourselves, is keeping this name supporting our values, culture, and goals of truly "Transforming students to inclusively lead and serve the world"? We believe not.

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We understand that this is a larger shift than it was for CLIE in shifting something like the Pioneer Awards to the Crimson and Gold Awards. PLP has a long and admired history with one of the most active alumni groups of the University. We know that some, maybe many, will be offended and will believe that this is nothing more than political correctness with a hyper-liberal agenda. We are willing to do the work with our alumni and constituents to dialogue, educate, and lead with them as we consider the change. We also realize that this may stir up unwanted discussion and unrest with others around the University regarding 'pioneer'. We are glad to help and support through any disruptions with this and would support any further institutional discussions. But we do ask for permission to initiate a process for name change consideration. While we have worked with Advancement to situate PLP for a naming donor which could simplify this process, that has not come to fruition at this point in time. It is still our aspiration and could make the process easier. Regardless, we seek your advisement on this and would like to engage in a productive dialogue and process.

Additional attachments include several letters from students we received a few weeks ago, urging us toward this change. Students were fearful of having their names on these as they do not feel safe, which pains us as well.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration and direction. This is a very challenging time to be leading the University and we want to support you and DU's reputation and mission in every way possible.

Sincerely,



Linda G. Olson, PhD
Teaching Professor/Director

On behalf of:

Paul Kosempel, PhD	Teaching Professor/Assoc. Director
Effley Brooks, MBA	Asst. Teaching Professor
Trisha Teig, PhD	Asst. Teaching Professor
Erica Wright	PLP Community Relations Program Coordinator
Nicole Cozzi, MA	PLP Program Coordinator

Cc: Jennifer Karas, Tom Romero

- *We as Students of The Pioneer Leadership Program* -

We as Students of the Pioneer Leadership Program, stand unafraid and determined in the declaration of our beliefs. As students we chose deliberately and proudly to attend the University of Denver in the pursuit of education, inspiration and truth. We as students searched from a catalog of possibility and plethora of opportunity in search of a home and place of transformative learning and chose the Pioneer Leadership Program. We are the students that chose these journeys and found ourselves a family to call our own that gifted upon us the values that we now hold in highest regard.

These values consist of empathy with the downtrodden, advocacy for our own struggle and solidarity with those who fight in ways different from our own. These lessons of the University of Denver and most prominently of the Pioneer Leadership Program, have inspired us to become students prepared and motivated to stand at the brink of what is to come with moral hearts and just action.

We have been taught since our first lesson as PLP students that we have the capacity and most importantly, the responsibility to stand for not only our beliefs but our integrity as human beings. This has bestowed upon us the responsibility to uphold the values of our university and our PLP Family to protect the dream of “A Great Private University Dedicated to The Public Good” and being “Participants and active leaders in the DU, the greater Denver community and the globe”.

To us as students, this dream is not a marketing slogan nor a ploy to recruit passive participants in the existing state of our world. We see this to be a rallying cry to improve this place for which we hold so much reverence.

We now call for change. We seek not to abide by stagnant tradition nor to follow blindly the current trends of public opinion. We, as simply as can be articulated, want to fight for our place in this that we call our home and our future.

As students of the Pioneer Leadership Program, we are told we will commit “5,000 hours every year to community-based organizations both here in Denver and abroad”. This kind of commitment has given us as PLP students and civic leaders the distinction and respect, hard earned, to demand the following:

1. For our students and faculty to collaborate and choose a new name for our program that properly respects and represents all of our members and values.
2. The beginning of an open and active conversation within our program to improve ourselves and better meet the goals and promise of our program and university
3. For students to be included in conversations on ways we can address injustices and change within the program

In Summary, we as students, ask to change our name from the “Pioneer Leadership Program” to a name of our choosing: one agreed upon by our students and faculty to properly represent ourselves and our promise. We came to The University of Denver and this program understanding our value as students, and this value is not lost upon us now. We ask not to become adversaries of this proud and respected University. We seek not to be troublemakers or provocateurs. We ask only for collaboration and conversation.

***We as Students stand together atop the work of those who came before us
and reaching for a future brighter to be stood upon by those who come after us.***

As a Student in The Pioneer Leadership Program...

Being a student in the pioneer leadership program, I think it is really important that we address the injustice in the name of the “Pioneer Leadership Program”. This name has represented one of the most respected programs at the University of Denver, and still never really represented the students that make up its heart and soul. PLP students come from all over the world and from all kinds of backgrounds but are expected to use an image and idea of colonization to be their identity. The same students who have to say they are students of the Pioneer Leadership Program also come from cultures that were harmed, hurt and sometimes destroyed by Pioneers. Those students carry the weight of this conflict into classrooms that teach about communal leadership and empathy. Classrooms that do not show that same empathy towards their students from different places and cultures. I believe that if we want to be a program that really practices what we preach then we shouldn’t have a name that represents the colonization and oppression of the identities of our students. I understand that “Pioneer” can mean other things but when there are literally thousands of names that can be the name of this program, why would we keep the one hurts its students? If we are really a program that believes what it says, then it’s our job do make this a program with a name that students are proud of, not one that hurts them.

As a Student in The Pioneer Leadership Program...

As an Indigenous student, I am proud of my program that we are taking active steps towards making this program that which was promised to its students; those students whom to this program they have given so much. I am proud to say I belong to this program that carries such renowned across this campus and community. I am proud to belong here, and I am grateful for the lessons this program has given me. That being said, if I was taught anything in my time in this program, it is that the true measure of a human being lies within the effort they are willing to put forward to do the right thing.

We as people often struggle with this notion of “the right thing”. We as people struggle to see if our actions or inaction have adverse or worsening reactions. This struggle should not stop us as leaders from putting in the effort to taking action and finding the right thing. I understand that the conversation around the name Pioneer is long and problematic. I understand what it represents to some people, but I want to express what it means to me. I understand that the Pioneer was never meant to signify oppression and colonization. I understand that it is not the intent of those who champion the name to harm others. I understand. Now I ask you to understand it for me. As an Indigenous student the Pioneer name has not only represented the greater concepts of colonization and genocide but has very literally alienated me from my Indigenous community. The name has hurt me personally, as I have to carry upon my shoulders a title that was used to champion the men who drove my people from existence. Those people who so long ago destroyed the identity of thousands of generations, both past and present, were forever engrained into history not as villains, but as “Pioneers”. I can see how this is hard for people who are not Indigenous to understand, but my

hope is that if we are taught empathy towards others, then we as a program can exercise it between ourselves.

As an Indigenous student I have seen fellow students of color abandon the Pioneer Leadership Program because it was not the program that it said it was. I have watched good friends, good people, leave behind this amazing opportunity because it was not a place for them. I do not believe that this has to be the case. I believe that we are strong. I believe that we are brave. Let us not be silenced in the conversation of how we can improve. Is that not the true quality of a leader? To be able to see their faults and work to make them right. We are some of the greatest students to cross the University of Denver. We have some of the greatest educators giving us the knowledge and inspiration to leave this world better than we found it. This program stands for something, and if that is true then we need now to stand with our students. We need to make this program one that respects all students and one of the greatest first steps possible towards this is to change our name.

I am not asking for us to change the name at a university level. Please read that last sentence an additional time. I am asking that within this PLP community we choose to change the name of our program because it is the right thing to do. We need to do this because we cannot tell the world that we are inclusive and diverse leaders when we call ourselves by a name that is neither. We cannot carry this contradiction of leadership and oppression into communities that we aim to help. We have the responsibility as a program and a people to live up to the ideas that we champion. We have an opportunity now to hear the voices of the students we have lost and to hear the voices of the students who will one day be a part of this program. As an Indigenous student I am asking for my voice to be heard. Hear the hope that this program can be one where an Indigenous student can call home without having to experience what I and many others have. I am asking for us as a program to stand united and do this together. We are a family, and we can do the right thing.

As a Student in The Pioneer Leadership Program...

Our nation is facing some of the most challenging times it has seen in decades as we battle two different pandemics- COVID-19 and humanity. Pioneer Leadership Program has always put at the forefront of their students minds to challenge the process even if that process is fighting against the mainstream for what we believe in. As students in an everchanging world, we need a program that is willing to hear the needs that we are presenting.

For years, the term “Pioneer” was deemed as a great way to pay tribute to those individuals who settled the land and made pathways for others to follow, but as years have passed, a new definition has immerged of a pioneer. The native peoples of the area were the Pioneers of the area and were unjustly forced away from their homes, land, families, and rightful area. As a community, we must recognize what has been done and allow ourselves our own process of healing and recognition.

Pioneer Leadership Program are the leaders of the DU community, and we call upon ourselves to find a name that suits our community as a whole. If that means that the term Pioneer stay, it will be because we as students, faculty, and staff choose for it to be and create our own definition of a pioneer. One that recognizes the suffering, but also gives light to a new era that we are entering into We must create our own pathway rather than holding onto a tradition that has put down so many individuals, especially when so many individuals currently in our program have been affected in one way or another by that oppression.

As a Student in The Pioneer Leadership Program...

As a student of the pioneer leadership program I ask myself what my role as a white student in a conversation about diversity and inclusion is. This summer I have seen the very real consequences of white privilege that I before only knew in a classroom setting. I have seen the divides of our society tear apart compassion and understanding, leaving a lingering wound on our communities. As a student of this program I think that this is one of the most important times for PLP to exist. With everything happening across this country, and across the world, we need to teach students to be leaders with the compassion and understanding that we have lost. This program has the chance to help communities during this time of uncertainty with things from COVID-19 to racial injustice. We have the students willing and resources necessary to be more impactful than any other time in history. There is only one thing that would get in the way of that impact. Ourselves. We as a program need to work together to make this program something that can realize the potential of its students in a way that doesn't exploit them. Our name "The Pioneer Leadership Program" does not properly represent our students and the impact that we want to have on people in this country and across the globe. We are supposed to be leaders, so now we need to lead and show our program, our school and people across the world that a real leader never stops making themselves better. My white privilege is not an excuse to be compliant in our name hurting my friends and peers and I will stand with them to make this program one that we can all be proud of and one that shows the world who we really are.

As a Student in The Pioneer Leadership Program...

I am a person of color in the Pioneer Leadership Program. As a rising senior, I have seen how the Pioneer Leadership Program has treated its students of color and dealt with diversity on campus. I am not impressed. As I enrolled into DU and decided to make this leadership program my priority, I was told how diverse and welcoming this school was for people of color. I was confident that this would be my chance to embrace my background and find other students that I could grow with. I quickly realized that this is not exactly what I was promised. I saw very surface-level attempts to deal with on-campus racism, segregation through Greek organizations, and faculty within DU. "Pioneer" is not what I want to represent the hard work, effort, and time that I contribute to this program. It represents a history of racism, prejudice, and abuse of people of color. In a time with high civil rights tensions and thriving movements for change, why would PLP stay silent? We are leaders, peers, and friends of all, and should be promoting ourselves as an organization of innovation. We have the power to be better and show our community that we are taking part in the movement for equality and justice of minorities in America. There is always room for improvement in any organization, and there are various approaches that PLP can take, but changing our name and removing "Pioneer" is a monumental start. If we are trying to be the best leadership program that we can be and embrace diversity on campus, why would we not take action? I am doing my part in holding PLP accountable for its actions and today, lack of action. PLP should be holding themselves accountable as much as they hold its students accountable for becoming great leaders. You may not hear from many students of color, but please listen to me. I can confidently speak for many others in this program and throughout campus, so I am asking for a step in the right direction.

As a Student in The Pioneer Leadership Program...

When I think of the Pioneer Leadership Program, I think about all the work that we did and that students still do in their communities. I think of all the time I spent learning about how to be the most effective and most responsible leader that I could be, and I think of the amazing community that we got to be a part of. I love the PLP community so much because of the diversity and kindness that every student brings with them whenever we come together as a program. I think that it is that same diversity and kindness that makes PLP one of the best programs at the University of Denver. I am proud to be a part of this great community, but I still think that we as a program need to talk about how we can be better. This program has a lot it can do to be better, and that conversation needs to happen with students and teachers together. A good first step in this conversation should be changing the name from the Pioneer Leadership Program to a name that we as a diverse and kind community all agree on. I think that this change will show students and teachers and even alumni, that they have a say in this community and that all of us are working together to be the program we want to be. During my time in PLP, I have seen my peers do amazing work in their fields and communities while representing the program, I think it is only fair that the PLP community puts the same amount of work into making the changes that its students need to feel represented and heard. This work needs to start with changing our name from the Pioneer Leadership Program.