

November 18, 2019

Dear Provost Polak, President Salovey, and Incoming Provost Strobel:

The Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York (ART), a diverse group of more than 400 archivists, librarians, records managers, and information professionals in the New York metropolitan area, respectfully submits the following written statement concerning Yale University’s recent decision to cease providing funding for the Native Northeast Research Collaborative.

We regret this decision on Yale’s part. The Native Northeast Research Collaborative has been a part of the Yale community since 2003, beginning as a scholarly editing project initiated by the chairs of the History Department and the American Studies Program. In its sixteen years of existence, it has achieved much, from making thousands of primary source documents available through its Portal, to its intensive work with the content management system Mukurtu, created by and with indigenous communities to manage their digital cultural heritage, to its creative and wide-ranging educational outreach initiatives and its Native Partners and Native Internship Programs. Perhaps most importantly of all, it has built up relationships of trust and cooperation with Native communities in the Northeast, among them the Eastern Pequot, the Nipmuc, the Shinnecock, the Wampanoag, and the Massachusett tribes. Yale’s decision undoes this work and proves to Native communities, once again, that elite majority-white institutions do not deserve their trust. A new generation of Native scholars is also watching, and they are understandably concerned about Yale’s precarious commitments to the study of Native history. As Gabriella Blatt wrote in the Yale Herald on April 19, 2019:

Yale has a rapidly growing Native student body, of which Yale isn’t shying away to advertise in diversity brochures. So why does Yale shy away from committing the space that Native Studies needs in this institution? If Yale truly had any interest in creating a robust Native Studies program its 29.4 billion dollar endowment would have done so already. Perhaps Yale forgets that this endowment began with resources stolen from Native people. Perhaps Yale forgets that its foundation lies on the stolen land of the Quinnipiac people.

We need more tenured and tenure-track Native professors. We need classes that aren’t going to be offered for one year and then disappear. Simply put, we need the foundation that was stolen from us to create this university. We need Yale to commit to this. (1)



The Native Northeast Research Collaborative’s financial burden does not rest entirely on Yale. Their work has been consistently supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Council on Library and Information Resources. It is reasonable to assume that these and other granting institutions will continue to recognize the worth of this organization. Yale’s refusal to make even bridge funding or matching support for grant applications suggests a troubling degree of disrespect not only for the work that the NNRC has done and the people who have made it possible, but also for the fundamental value of making documents that are crucial to understanding the history of the Atlantic World available to the widest possible audience. Yale has the opportunity to be a leader in this area, and it has the resources to support the project at whatever level it deems appropriate. That it chooses not to sends a very clear message to Native scholars, to Native communities, to historians worldwide, to digital humanists, and to librarians and archivists like our members: history that takes into consideration Native voices and Native perspectives will not be prioritized. This directly contradicts Yale’s stated commitment to “the free exchange of ideas in an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community of faculty, staff, students, and alumni.” (2) We urge you to reconsider this decision.

Sincerely,

Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York

Citations:

1. Blatt, Gabriella. “Why do none of my professors look like me?” *The Yale Herald*, <https://yaleherald.com/why-do-none-of-my-professors-look-like-me-4c0dab2fd849>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

2. Mission Statement. Yale University. <https://www.yale.edu/about-yale/mission-statement>. Accessed November 18, 2019