

October 23, 2015

Dear Trustee Colleagues,

I write today to share with you my recommendation regarding our nickname and mascot. Let me begin by thanking you for the charge to engage the Susquehanna community in discussion of this topic. We were able to engage more than 1,300 people either in person or electronically through this process. Our discussions have been wide-ranging, and those in which I have been involved have been thoughtful, constructive, insightful and respectful.

It became clear to me early on in the process that it is unreasonable and untenable to continue to be ambivalent about being the Crusaders. We either need to embrace Crusaders or move to change; and there are reasonable arguments that can be made for either direction. Your charge for me was to engage a process and to render a recommendation. Please know that as I have sought discernment on this matter, I have given it my full attention, thinking always about what will serve Susquehanna's interests best in the years ahead.

I am recommending that the best path forward is for Susquehanna to seek a new nickname and corresponding mascot that can be developed over time as assets. Following are reasons why I have come to this conclusion:

1. Symbols are important and powerful. An institution's mascot and nickname should be beloved and unifying symbols. Susquehanna is a community where history and tradition are deeply appreciated. It was therefore surprising that only slightly more than half of those we heard from expressed support for retaining the "Crusader" nickname. Put another way, can you imagine nearly half of the alumni of institutions like Penn State, Notre Dame, or Michigan favoring moving away from their iconography?
2. For more than 50 years, Susquehanna has sought to be a more diverse and inclusive community. Susquehanna needs an unambiguous symbol that can help build spirit and pride; not one that offends or raises questions about this extraordinary institution.
3. While the term "Crusaders" has been associated with the University for 90 years, its usage, meaning and relevance has varied significantly across time. Its moment of greatest prominence and popularity was when it was coupled with the iconography of the medieval "crusaders" during roughly a 25-year time span beginning in the early 1960s and ending in the late 1980s. Given the power of matching name and symbol, it is understandable that many alumni of this era most identify as Crusaders. The university, however, recognized the incongruence between these symbols from the Middle Ages and the original association of "Little Crusaders" with those dedicated to fair play. Since 1990,

we have struggled and failed to find an alternative embodiment that captures the original spirit and intended meaning of the Susquehanna Crusaders.

4. Our ambivalence and discomfort with the “Crusader” nickname has contributed to its decline. We have not been able to attach our identity to our own definition of “Crusader” (engaged, sustained effort to advance a worthy cause). To re-brand “Crusader” now, while highly laudable would be extremely challenging, especially at a time when the term is being daily re-associated with religious violence.
5. We have no idea how many people have been turned off or turned away from the University because of our nickname. During this review, some members of our community described the use of the term “Crusader” as problematic. Various, I heard alumni, students, faculty and parents say that the nickname gave them pause and made them unsure about whether Susquehanna would be a welcoming and comfortable community. Others expressed concerns about the problematic nature of Crusader references on apparel, resumes, news reports, etc. as they live, work and travel around the globe where nuanced explanations aren’t always possible.
6. While for many the discussion of this subject smacks of “political correctness,” our willingness to engage the discussion is the antidote to such criticism. Political correctness very often prevents such discourse, so appropriate in higher education. If the Board supports my recommendation, it will not be an act of caving to political correctness but an act of conscience as we seek to live out a commitment to being an inclusive and diverse community of learners and scholars and to developing symbols that unify, strengthen, and bring pride to our community.

Some will be pleased and some disappointed with my recommendation. While I am suggesting a course of action that will move us away from the Crusader nickname, an important goal is to continue to be respectful of those who disagree and to work collaboratively towards identifying a nickname and mascot that can be a source of inspiration and pride as our institution continues to grow and change. That said, we are likely to lose the support of some in our community. While that saddens me, I respect their opinions and fervently hope that, in time, their commitment and loyalty to the orange and maroon will prevail.

If you accept my recommendation, I ask you to authorize me to proceed with engaging University stakeholders in generating ideas for a new nickname and mascot. I hope that this work results in a recommendation for the trustees to consider at your February 2016 board meeting, with the implementation of changes commencing in the 2016-17 academic year.

Sincerely,



L. Jay Lemons  
President