

Message from the Department of Nutrition Leadership Regarding Silent Sam

All,

Last night, August 19th, at about 9:20 pm, Silent Sam was toppled by a group of 200-250 protesters. This was the culmination of about a year of various protests and discussions regarding this monument, following on the tragic events in Charlottesville VA. Silent Sam was erected in 1913 to honor UNC students who fought in the Civil War, initially dedicated by Julian Carr with a speech that has since been widely recognized as a highly racist. Initially there was a strong push for Chancellor Folt to remove the statute but North Carolina law precluded the University from simply taking this action. However, from a UNC law professor colleague on the Faculty Executive Committee, there is language in this law, Section 100-2.1b of the North Carolina statutes as follows:

“The circumstances under which an object of remembrance may be relocated are ... the following:

(1) When appropriate measures are required by the State or a political subdivision of the State to preserve the object.”

Despite a number of protests, the University response to protect the safety of students and the public around the monument, and many discussions at many levels with many opinions expressed, the monument remained in place until last night despite obvious threats to the preservation of the object. Many feel that the NC law was used more as an excuse for inaction rather than working within the law in a timely fashion to address concerns that the monument, in our time, represented bigotry on our campus. In our history, there have been times when the existing systems were insufficient to address serious concerns in a meaningful way. In such cases, peaceful civil disobedience has been a way forward. In the case of Silent Sam, it is unfortunate indeed that existing systems were insufficient to resolve the concerns. Personally, we are glad that Silent Sam no longer greets us as we enter UNC campus. And we agree with the Chancellor that it is certainly good that no injuries were sustained as Silent Sam was brought down. What is important now is that we take this opportunity to engage together in discussions and actions that focus on respect for each other, learning from each other, and appreciating the vast wisdom and talent that exists across all of us, working diligently toward a department, a university and a community in which all are truly engaged together toward the common good.

This statement is one from the Department of Nutrition leadership as Chair and Associate Chairs, and does not necessarily reflect the views of Gillings School or UNC as a whole.

Sincerely yours,

Beth Mayer-Davis, Chair of the Department of Nutrition

Melinda Beck, Associate Chair for Academics

Penny Gordon-Larsen, Associate Chair for Research