

UNIVERSITY STAFF ADVISORY COUNCIL

February 2017 Web Submissions

1. **Date Submitted:** January 18, 2017

Web Sub: *Thank you USAC for providing the monthly web submissions. I noticed there was some confusion around what is and what is not a Christian symbol. Christmas tress, wreaths, etc.. are actually pagan symbols. While some people may attach some religious meaning to it, they are not directly linked to the Christian faith/ religion. I personally was sad to see that beautiful tree in the library was taken down. I am hopeful that next year you can work on adding more winter themed symbols. Please note this message is intended strictly for clarification.*

Response: We are hearing a lot of messages regarding holiday decorations and they all point in different directions. As a University we are dedicated to inclusion. We have started a conversation with University administration about this topic and there is a shared commitment to creating and sustaining a welcoming community for all.

2. **Date Submitted:** January 19, 2017

Web Sub: *I was disappointed to learn that the youth Spring Break camp previously offered to UR staff through SPCS, has now been discontinued. Many of us with school-aged children relied on this much-appreciated benefit, and planned our schedules accordingly. It leaves me concerned for the summer SPCS youth camps that I know many of us also rely on (even more so), and whether or not they will also disappear from the schedule with no notice. I am interested in the decisions that lead to not offering a spring camp and even more concerned about the state of summer camps, as this would greatly impact many of us across campus. Any insight would be appreciated, because many parents with school-aged children are preparing NOW for their summer plans, and this could have a huge impact on us, especially considering we are a community that prides ourselves in supporting our employees and their families.*

Response: Thank you for your question concerning Spring Break youth classes offered through SPCS. While we have on occasion offered youth courses over Spring Break, we are consistently challenged to find suitable, open space on campus during that time of the year. Unfortunately, we have found that we are not able to make spring break courses work logistically.

We offer educational youth programs through SPCS for the greater Richmond and University of Richmond communities and advertise those as soon as we can. Our timeline for advertising summer courses hinges on finalizing logistics on campus. (JW)

3. **Date Submitted:** January 20, 2017

Web Sub: *I am extremely disappointed to once again read the opposition to a Christmas tree in Boatwright and the wreaths that have adorned the Boatwright Towers for years. I may not celebrate the symbols representing other faiths or beliefs; but I appreciate what they stand for and what they mean to those who embrace them. This is a Christian country, founded on Christian principles. If one does not embrace them, that is your right; however, it is also my RIGHT to enjoy and display the symbols of the season.*

Response: Please refer to #1.

4. **Date Submitted:** January 23, 2017

Web Sub: *During the summer, a lot of staff members have their children at the Summer Camps on campus which are 9:00-4:00pm as it is a benefit offered. Is there any way to implement an extended day program for the children attending the camps? Extended care from 8:00-9:00am and 4:00-5:00pm would help significantly in not altering the staff member's schedule too drastically or missing work to accommodate dropping off and picking up their child(ren) in order to use this valuable benefit. It could potentially be a part-time summer position for students.*

Response: While extended hours may be desirable for those who register their children for summer courses, this is not a request that SPCS is able to accommodate. Our current program structure (times, locations) maximizes the facilities designated for our use while allowing other departments across campus to adequately prepare for the return of our undergraduate students each fall. (JW)

5. **Date Submitted:** January 26, 2017

Web Sub: *This is in response to a couple of web submissions posted in the January USAC minutes, one about the Christmas tree and the other regarding the wreaths that are placed in the tower of Boatwright Library during the holiday season. Obviously submitted by the same person, they state that as a university one of our goals is to be more inclusive and that includes the wide variety of religions represented among our students, faculty, and staff. Displaying just one of these symbols doesn't seem like the right way to be welcoming to all people. In the other post, they write that it seems inappropriate to have such a symbol displayed in such a public and prominent space on campus? Where to even begin?? Let's start with the removal of the Christmas tree. I am SO insulted and offended that the tree was removed without consideration of how this would make people feel. This person wants to be more inclusive, yet the removal of the tree excluded those of us who do love the symbol of a Christmas tree. To many, the Christmas tree is more than a symbol of Christianity and to remove it just flat out insulted them. I'm not sure I understand the inappropriateness of having a tree up during the holiday season. As a parent who will soon be looking at colleges for my son, I will be looking to see how welcoming a school is to its students and their families and something like this would definitely put up red flags for me. It was my belief that USAC represented ALL of us and not just 1 person. While USAC obviously represents all staff on campus (and I'm not sure who made this final determination), it sounds like the opinion of 1 person swayed the decision makers. In regards to the wreaths, how about they are just beautiful?? They don't have to represent anything. My mom worked for UR for 3 decades, I am alum of UR and I have been working here for almost 17 years. While I don't know the exact year the University started hanging them, I cannot remember a time in my life at UR that those wreaths were not hanging from the bell tower. They are more than a religious symbol? As always, it is the complaint of 1 person that ruins it for everyone else. Since when did the minority rule? That person does NOT speak for me or (I'm guessing) many, MANY others on campus. If the idea of NOT having a Christmas tree is more welcoming than having one, then I am truly afraid of where this University is headed. I hope we don't start going down the rabbit hole of so many other institutions in this country where ?inclusive? actually means ?exclusive? and ?diversity? actually means ?only to certain people?? Instead of taking down the tree, maybe there should be other representation of other religions, such as a menorah or kinara. Truly BE inclusive and not exclusive? I know that USAC is not obligated to publish all submissions but if it's not posted, I will take it to mean that my opinion was not valued but you may be surprised it actually is the opinion of more people than you think, but are worried about speaking out?*

Response: Thank you for your submission; your opinion is valued. When a “web sub” is received, USAC representatives (typically the Vice Chair) reach out to the best source to collect responses. USAC does not encourage an outcome or provide a solution. These responses are then shared during the monthly USAC meeting and included in the meeting minutes.

We encourage you to share your opinion openly and often. We encourage you to reach out to your USAC representative to discuss this matter and others pertinent to the university.