To the UNCP Faculty & Other Stakeholders,

NASO writes to offer their full support of the Indigenous Cultures and Communities (ICC) Proposal. Below are NASO’s thoughts on the need for a graduation requirement centered on Indigenous history and culture:

1. UNCP was founded by Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous Peoples, we all know this; it is evidenced by the very names of the buildings we walk into every day. As UNCP evolved from an Indian Normal School to an UNC-System University the number of students representing different ethnicities and backgrounds have increased. This diversity has been welcomed, but the Indigenous history of the university and the culture of the Indigenous community in which it is located continue to inform the identity of the institution. NASO, other student organizations, and staff members in offices across campus contribute to this continuation by organizing and supporting various programming throughout the year (ex. Spring Powwow, M.M.A.I.W. walk, #RepYourNation Tribal Showcase, etc.). Although these efforts are wonderful and we believe that they have educated many students about Indigenous history and culture, we do not think they are enough. Plenty of students graduate UNCP without really knowing what it means to be Indigenous. Sure, they know a little about the history of UNCP, but they have no idea about the struggles Indigenous Peoples are facing today. Many students do not even realize the existence of the Indigenous community on campus; this is partially due to the societal belief that Indigenous Peoples are a thing of the past, that we were mere characters in a story that was told to us around Thanksgiving in Kindergarten. If it is not our duty as an institution to correct that falsity, whose is it?
2. It is our understanding that University faculty have raised concerns that students do not want such a requirement. Our question to faculty is this: do students really want any requirements? Are students thrilled about having two P.E. requirements? Do we want to take two writing enriched classes and a writing in the discipline to graduate? No. Surely there has been protest over any new developments in the graduation requirements. The difference is that the University has deemed those requirements necessary and some seem to suggest that this one is unnecessary. This brings us to our third point,
3. We are not the first institution in the country to impose a cultural requirement to graduate, we are not even the first institution in the state to do so. North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University has a graduation requirement that necessitates students take a minimum of three general education credit hours from courses in African-American Studies. The ICC, therefore, is not a new idea, and it should not be a controversial one. Other schools have already implemented the institutional ideals they value in their curriculum, why not UNCP?
4. Finally, we want to point out that there are multiple ways for students to satisfy the ICC Graduation Requirement. You can take two classes, you can swipe into events, you can even do a service-learning project or an internship. You can also do a combination of all of these things. Not only does this make the requirement accessible, it turns it into an opportunity to build student’s resumes. Students are provided with an opportunity to learn about the community that they are in and the people who fought tirelessly for the school they attend, students also get an opportunity to learn about the diversity of Indigenous cultures, what it means to be Indigenous in the 21st century, and they get to use this knowledge to further their academic career and broaden their academic interests.

A graduation requirement centered on Indigenous history and culture, like the ICC, should have been implemented long ago; let us not impede progress. Let us remember where we are and honor those who paved the way for UNCP to be a safe-haven for students who value diversity and inclusion. UNCP’s motto is, “You can get there from here.” Let us remember and appreciate exactly where here is.