

Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

Dear Mr. Perry:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my pleasure in the working relationship that has developed between our offices during the past year in particular. The Virginia Indian tribes have often wished for a more nuanced presence and level of involvement at the University of Virginia and throughout the Commonwealth. Over the course of several years, we have developed excellent collaborations between the tribes and the University, largely through the offices of the Provost and the Dean of Students.

This past year, we were able to bring many more speakers and host more American Indian events on grounds than had ever occurred before, through the combined sponsorship of the Dean of Students Office, the Native American Student Union, and the Virginia Indian Heritage Program. Additionally, we were able to exhibit a remarkable collection of historic photographs, an exhibit entitled "Family Portraits: Virginian Indians at the Turn of the 20th Century," at the Kaleidoscope Center in Newcomb Hall, for a four-month period, exposing numerous students and activity groups to the history of the Virginia tribes, some for the first time.

Your participation as liaison and advisor to the Native American Student Union has been critical in the planning and production of all of these activities. Your ability to guide students while allowing them to define their own agenda is praiseworthy, and your fortitude in shuffling through the bureaucratic steps required to mount an exhibition while juggling conflicting schedules and demands from multiple constituencies is remarkable.

I am perhaps most encouraged by an idea that you suggested during the recent Virginia Indian Nations Summit on Higher Education, which we held this year through yet another partnership with Virginia Tech. Your idea, to convene a student leadership conference for American Indian students, one that references American Indian values, would be a precedent-setting event that would surely benefit everyone who attends. If this event could be combined with our mentoring efforts for Indian students in grades 8-12 as well as in higher education, we could reach most of an entire generation of future Virginia Indian leaders.

I look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts and to seeing what new projects might develop as we take our work further. Next year the University will host our VINSHE Summit, and we will produce additional programs for students and the public at large. Thank you so much for your supportive presence and your passion for engaging American Indian students, tribal leaders, and elders in the process of developing young leaders within the university community.