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To: The York University Community
From: Centre for Human Rights
Re: Inclusive Halloween Costumes

As Halloween approaches, there are often questions and concerns about Halloween costumes.

There are several examples of members of university communities choosing to wear costumes that are offensive and could even be perceived as harassing or discriminatory in nature. Concerns arise when people consider taking markers, stereotypes and stigmas of a culture - clothing, accessories, skin color, and/or religion - and replicate them into a costume; 'Blackface' and 'Pocahontas' are two examples of this type of costuming.

As you may know, the Centre for Human Rights continually advocates for Respect, Equity, appreciation of Diversity and Inclusion of all. In this spirit, we would like to offer some tips in the form of questions to the York community when choosing a costume. Ask yourself:

1. Is my costume depicting and perpetuating a stereotype or stigma associated with a particular race, culture or religion?
2. Does my costume include a replication of a garment that is a significant component of a particular religion or culture of which I do not identify with?
3. Is my costume depicting a historical time-period where that look/costume is now considered offensive and discriminatory?
4. Does my costume represent elements of a culture or cultural practice that is being commoditized for consumption?
5. Can I look in the mirror and confidently say that my costume choice would not be considered offensive to a particular race, ethnic origin, gender or religion?

If you answered yes to any of the questions 1 - 4, it is likely that your costume has the potential to cause harm to the members of the cultural, racial and religious groups of which your costume is depicting. Protecting and upholding the human rights and dignities of all individuals is a shared responsibility and choosing a costume that is offensive, hurtful or potentially harassing and/or discriminatory in nature goes against York's values of inclusion.

This Halloween, we urge you to be REDI and plan to wear a costume that is fun, inclusive of your fellow community members and leaves you with lasting good memories.

For articles and resources on cultural appropriation and stereotypes go to:

Majoring in Minstrelsy: White Students, Blackface and the Failure of Mainstream Multiculturalism (<http://www.timwise.org/2007/06/majoring-in-minstrelsy-white-students-blackface-and-the-failure-of-mainstream-multiculturalism/>)

Cultural Appropriation as a Process of Displacing Peoples and History (<http://www3.brandonu.ca/library/CJNS/10.2/lutz.pdf>)

Day of the Dead, Sugar Skulls, and the Question of Cultural Appropriation (<http://blog.redbubble.com/2014/10/day-of-the-dead-sugar-skull-art/>)

For more information please contact the Centre for Human Rights at rights@yorku.ca

Have a safe Halloween!