



Friday, February 4, 2022

Re: Residence Life's Chinese New Year Hell Bank Note

Dear Professor Sandy Welsh,

It has come to our attention that Residence Life sent out Hell Bank notes in their Lunar New Year red envelopes. Though it is encouraged and a custom to give family, friends, and loved ones red envelopes to celebrate the new year, a Hell Bank note on the other hand is offensive and hurtful. A Hell Bank note implies that you are cursing a family's loved one who has passed away or wishing death on the recipient, which is cultural misappropriation.

Many students in residence were surprised to receive this note during an important time of the year. The Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) is the most solemn traditional festival in China. Influenced by the Chinese calendar and culture, nearly 20 countries and regions in the world also celebrate the New Year as a legal holiday.

It is the university's role to create equitable spaces on campus, including on residence, where many students' home and student life intersect. For many students living in residence, they are celebrating the Lunar New Year away from family and during an incredibly lonely and difficult time in the pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated Anti-Asian racism, harmful stereotypes, and beliefs about the Asian community. Though we believe that this action was unintentional, it does highlight a greater issue around cultural sensitivity. Oftentimes, it is not the intent behind an action that matters, but the impact it has on those who have been harmed. Asian students at the University of Toronto need a campus that will take thoughtful consideration of their cultural practices and ensure that they are supported in their community.

On behalf of students impacted by this action, the UTMSU calls on Residence Life and any other responsible parties to:

1. Provide a formal apology and explanation for this inappropriate gesture.
2. Provide culturally appropriate, anti-oppressive supports in residence and/or on-campus for students who have been negatively impacted by this action.
3. Ensure that all Residence Life and administration staff attend anti-oppression training and trainings to ensure cultural sensitivity.
4. Make public the steps you plan to take to ensure similar issues never happen again.
5. Implement any other steps you see fit to address this problem and better support students of the East Asian diaspora.

We look forward to hearing your response and the ways you plan to address this problem.

In Student Solidarity,

The UTM Students' Union