

## **Committee to Establish Principles on Naming**

### **Background**

In this moment of national reckoning with racism and inequity, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and Johns Hopkins Medicine (JHM) are undertaking a number of initiatives intended to deepen our commitment to building a diverse, equitable and inclusive community. Among these are a review and assessment of the JHU Roadmap on Diversity and Inclusion; a multi-year, faculty-led project to deeply explore and reflect upon our institutional history; and the establishment of this committee to address important questions regarding the legacy of individuals whose names or iconography adorn our buildings and programs.

The Committee to Establish Principles on Naming is a joint effort of JHU and JHM to lay essential groundwork for the deliberative consideration of requests to change or remove the name of an existing building or program. The role of the Committee, as conveyed in a message from the President and Provost on July 8, 2020, is to develop institutional-level principles and procedures for evaluating renaming requests, which can then be applied with rigor to specific cases.

The naming of a Johns Hopkins building, room, professorship, fellowship, scholarship or other program typically marks the legacy of an individual or individuals who contributed substantially to our institution through their professional or academic achievements, societal impact, or philanthropic generosity. The university's decision to name is made in a distinct moment framed by then existing social, cultural and institutional norms and, in some historical instances, a less than complete understanding of the individual being recognized. With time, such norms and/or perspectives about the actions of the individual may shift, insofar as their relationship with Johns Hopkins is concerned or in society more generally. In addition, salient facts about the individual's life may come to light that weren't known at the time of naming and may change our understanding of the individual. These changes in norms or known facts may, in some cases, create intense concern and discomfort with the individuals' for whom we name facilities, professorships, and programs, and give rise to calls for de- or re-naming.

We know and recognize that few of us lead lives that are without moments of fault, and that, for the most part, we leave legacies that are complex and contradictory, composed of moments of achievement and contribution and also failure and mistake. We also know that it is important that we learn and benefit from our history, so that we can make better decisions today in the lives we lead at Johns Hopkins and beyond. Confronting our past can enable us to secure a better future, and keep us from valorizing individuals whose legacies are repugnant to the values and aspirations of the institution. Nevertheless, we also know that certain actions/decisions taken by individuals for whom facilities, professorships, scholarships, fellowships, and programs are named may be such a defining and repugnant part of their legacy so as to require the revocation of their name.

The challenge therefore in addressing the question of re-naming is one of thresholds, namely, when do we re- or de-name, when do we contextualize and "footnote" individuals for whom facilities, professorships and programs are named? It is also one of process: How do we make

these decisions in a manner that is deliberative, rigorous and thoughtful? These questions stand at the core of this Committee's mandate.

## **Mandate**

The Committee's charge is three-fold:

- First, to develop a set of substantive criteria upon which the university ought to decide whether or not to de- or re-name a facility, professorship, fellowship, scholarship or other program. These substantive criteria are closely tied to the questions of how frequently de- or re-naming should occur and, more generally, what a name means for the university – do we see naming as simple acknowledgement of an individual's discrete and separable contribution to the university, should it be construed as a more general valorization of the individual in question?
- Second, once the substantive criteria are identified, to recommend the process that should be utilized to determine to remove or change a name. What kind of factual or other types of information should be assembled in order to support a rigorous evaluation of the individual in question? Where in the university should these decisions be made in specific cases – at the school or university level, or some combination thereof – and by whom? How do those vested with evaluating the legacy of a contested individual solicit university opinion and/or outside expertise that might illuminate the analysis and information needed to make these decisions?
- Third, to suggest, apart from the options to de- or re-name a facility, professorship or program, other options for grappling with the complex legacies of named individuals. Removing a name is not a decision to be taken lightly. When a name is kept, how do we ensure that a decision not to remove a name is not construed as an affirmation of every aspect of that person's life, and ensure that we have the opportunity to understand and contextualize their legacy? Is there a distinct and enhanced role for the university's museums and libraries in this enterprise?

Note that the Committee is not charged with taking up specific renaming requests. That task will be remitted to the entity (or entities) charged with discharging this role following receipt and consideration of the Committee's report. However, if in the course of its work, the Committee is presented with specific naming or renaming requests or suggestions, it should keep track of these requests, and convey them to us at the conclusion of its deliberations. Further, although the Committee is not charged with developing criteria or guidance for the adoption of future names, as that responsibility is subject to a review process that has been in place for decades and is regularly updated by the Office of Development and Alumni Relations and is the prerogative of the trustees and/or the deans, we will ask the university's Board of Trustees to review this process and consider appropriate modifications in light of the Committee's final report.

Professional staff within the Office of Development and Alumni Relations and the Office of General Counsel, who are responsible for current naming protocols and familiar with the legal constraints and implications of naming agreements, will be available to support the work of the Committee.

The Committee is expected to consult with students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and to complete a draft of its recommended principles and procedures for input from the Johns Hopkins community during the 2020-21 academic year, and a final report with recommendations to the President, Provost, and Boards of Trustees of JHU and JHM by the end of the academic year.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the Committee, please email them to [namingcommittee@jhu.edu](mailto:namingcommittee@jhu.edu).