

January 6, 2017

To: President Mark Schlissel

From: Terrence J. McDonald, 

Chair, President's Advisory Committee on University History

Re: Committee Views on Possible Review of University Space Names

You have asked your Advisory Committee on University History to review the criteria upon which and the process by which questions raised about historical names on and in buildings might be considered. We are grateful for this opportunity and think it especially appropriate as we approach our Bicentennial Year. Our committee charge calls for us to “advise the President of the University on matters relating to the history and traditions of the University that require historical interpretation, sensitivity, and expertise.” Our agenda “will be determined by the Office of the President as issues come to it requiring advice of this nature,” and our task, when called upon, is to “provide to the President a report that discusses the historical dimensions of the issue in question, the impact of various approaches to the issue on the University’s appreciation and maintenance of its history and traditions, and recommendations of actions for consideration.”

Working in this advisory spirit we begin by stating our unanimous opinion that the University should welcome inquiries from members of the University community who propose thoughtful review of names given to buildings and spaces within buildings.

We believe that such inquiries should be submitted to the President’s Office and, if and when they do arrive, we are willing to play a role that is consistent with our charge as recommended in this document, recognizing again that we operate in an advisory capacity and at the President’s discretion.

We are also very aware of the many ways that buildings and spaces are named. For example, some names are proposed by University administrators, some are the result of legal agreements with donors; some have been submitted and approved by the Regents, some have not. We understand that we serve at your pleasure and act within the framework of University authority, previous legal agreements, and current policies and procedures, including, importantly, the “Policy and Guidelines for Naming of Facilities, Spaces and Streets,” approved by the Regents May 15, 2008 (the 2008 Policy).

In everything we do we hope to rely upon and exemplify the knowledge, wisdom, and values of this University now and in the past.

Background:

Although the names of buildings and spaces within them today seem freighted with history in fact the practice of naming such spaces is a relatively recent development in the University's history. As late as 1914, the Regents rejected the whole idea of naming buildings after persons, insisting, instead that buildings be known by their functions: "the policy of the University had been against the naming of strictly academic buildings for individuals, as illustrated in the case of the new Chemical Laboratory and the new Engineering Building where strong arguments had been advanced for the naming of these buildings after former members of the Faculty." Under this rule, for example, the building we now know as "Angell" Hall began its life as the "Literary Building." Although Tappan Hall received its name in 1893 (after Tappan himself was dead) those buildings known today by the names of Presidents Little, Ruthven, and Hatcher were all named by the Regents at one time in 1968. As far as we can tell, the first dormitory "house names" – Allen-Rumsey, Wenley, Lloyd, Winchell, Adams, Chicago, Williams -- were approved by the Regents only in 1939 upon the recommendation of the then Deans of Men, Women, and the Director of Residence Halls. From time to time dormitory "house names" have been transferred from building to building, in at least one case this was done to permit the addition of a new name – Frost House.

When the Regents approved the new set of policies and procedures on naming in 2008 it appears to have been one of several attempts to rationalize these policies since 1965. And throughout those years the practice was not consistent. At one point central campus buildings were supposedly reserved for presidents and some but not all space namings were directed to the Regents. But today there are central campus buildings named after department chairs (Dennison), and deans (Kraus), and foundations (Dow). It was in those years after 1965, too, that the initiation of major fundraising campaigns raised the issue of buildings named after generous individuals and defined by binding legal agreements.

Over these years two things have been consistent. First, the source of ultimate authority over all building names has rested with the Regents, but, second, the names proposed have emerged from a wide variety of places in the University: faculty petitions, donors, University planners, external constituencies, etc. Some internal space names have been approved by the Regents and others have not. While there is now a robust statement of policy and guidelines the relative lack of a statement of principles guiding the naming policy complicates the issue of reviewing the names selected in the past.

Proposed Relevant Principles:

We do not believe that historical questions about the names of buildings or spaces can be answered by means of a checklist. Indeed, given the nature of our institution and its history such questions bring into play principles that already exist – sometimes in tension – within the University. We believe that in any such discussion a consideration of principles such as the following could be helpful:

First, **The Principle of Pedagogy:** As an institution of learning our naming process and outcome should always be an opportunity for learning, about our past, about path breaking contributions by our faculty, the distinguished lives of alumni, extraordinary acts of generosity, or important contributions to administrative leadership.

Second, **The Principle of Interpretation:** When a name is selected for a building or portion of a building the obligation to explain and interpret that name does not end at the end of the naming ceremony. Indeed, it is not only good stewardship on behalf of those after whom spaces are named, but also an affirmative obligation of our Pedagogical Principle to continuously interpret – and if necessary reinterpret – the names

and the stories behind the names of our facilities. When questions are raised about the name of a space the issue may actually be about the interpretive information provided about the name. In some cases changing a name may be less important than providing adequate interpretation of it.

Third, **The Principle of Due Diligence:** In approaching a naming decision the University owes it to itself and to succeeding generations to do substantial research into the name. We believe that this research should be focused on the public record.

Fourth, **The Principle of Commitment:** In general the University community makes a significant commitment to an individual or a family when it names a space after a person. This applies both to spaces named for donors and for others. In some cases involving donors this naming is regulated by a binding legal agreement. Those who wish to change the formally designated names of spaces or buildings carry a heavy burden of argument to justify it. And in all instances, any such discussions must take account of appropriate legal analysis from the Office of the Vice President and General Counsel and the 2008 Policy and Guidelines for Naming of Facilities, Spaces and Streets.

Fifth, **The Principle of Revision:** The exciting and important thing about the study of history is that both the materials for and the understanding of the past are constantly changing. At a research university historical scholars must lead the way in producing these new historical discoveries and interpretations. If these new understandings, from time to time, produce controversy over space names, that is not an unnatural thing, far from it. Indeed, the historical foundations of a naming decision by one generation may appropriately be questioned by the new historical understandings of another.

Sixth: **The Principle of Historical and Institutional Context:** It is easy to blame those in the past for lacking the knowledge, wisdom and values that we seem to possess. Keeping in mind that we will likely suffer the same fate at the hands of those who come after us, it behooves us to understand that it is impossible to hold someone accountable for failing to share our contemporary ideas and values. Instead, the question must be what ideas, values, and actions were possible in a particular historical context. Moreover an institution of knowledge must leave room for an essential truth: the search for new knowledge through research is messy and today's shared values or reigning frameworks may be overturned through the give and take of scholarship in the long run.

Seventh, **The Principle of Consistency:** There have been more than 16,000 faculty members in the history of the University; many more staff members, fourteen presidents, etc. Why some are honored with space names and others are not is a major question about our past. To take just one example that raises this question, there currently is no dormitory hall named after one of our most famous faculty members, John Dewey, although he was on the faculty at the same time as Alexander Winchell, Henry Carter Adams, and Alfred Henry Lloyd. If all space names recommended to the Regents by administrators are fixed forever, then the idea of using named spaces to honor faculty members, for example, is almost at an end. Because they were selected in the past some space names also tend to reflect the early composition of the University: an all-male student body until 1870 and an overwhelmingly male faculty for much of the twentieth century.

Eighth, **The Principle of Contemporary Effect:** Honorifics given at one time can have significantly different effects on community members at another and these too are worthy of consideration.

This list is certainly not exhaustive; other principles may be proposed or discovered in the future.

Proposed Process:

We believe that any member of the University community -- student, faculty, staff, alumni/ae or University organization -- should be able to submit a proposal for review of the current name of an officially named University space to the office of the President. Because the naming of a space is an honor conferred by the University community only members of that community may make such requests. Anonymous proposals should not be considered. It is not enough however, merely to request the review of a name. Proposals must thoughtfully engage with the principles enunciated in this document and make a case on that basis for any proposed name change. Any such proposals may become public documents.

Such a proposal may be submitted to the office of the University President who may, in his or her discretion, refer a proposal to the President's Advisory Committee on University History for an initial review. The Committee will determine whether such a proposal is within its purview, seek additional information if necessary, and then offer a recommendation on whether such a review should proceed. The results of this initial Committee review will be shared with the President along with, when appropriate, a proposed process for further review. The President, at his or her discretion, shall determine whether such a further review will be conducted and whether by the Committee itself or by a subcommittee of and by the Committee appointed for the purpose. The Committee may add other experts from within or outside the University, including archival staff members of the Bentley Historical Library. And the Committee may as appropriate solicit the views of relevant University officers. Where relevant and after appropriate consultation with the President, a broader, community outreach may be invited. The Committee will work in as timely a manner as possible at each stage.

The results of this further review, including, where relevant, a recommendation for action, will be submitted to the President, who will have the authority to accept, reject, or modify any Committee recommendation for action. Any proposed name changes are subject to the ultimate authority of the Regents, as explicated in the Policy for Naming Facilities, Spaces and Streets adopted by the Regents in May 2008.

The 2008 Policy is designed to provide consistency to the naming process by, among other things, establishing a committee of certain executive officers to oversee the naming process (the "Naming Steering Committee"), clarifying the responsibilities, eligibility and the process to be used for honorary and donor naming recommendations and confirming the University's commitment to approved names.

The purpose of the process proposed in this memorandum is not necessarily to interfere with future namings subject to the process documented in the 2008 policy, but to provide the University community with a resource that can provide a thoughtful, educated and historically accurate review of the decisions behind the existing names on or in University buildings.