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# THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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WASHINGTON, DC

## NAMING TASK FORCE RENAMING FRAMEWORK

### Guiding Principles

These Guiding Principles will inform the university's philosophical approach and the application of the considerations prescribed by the Board of Trustees when considering the renaming of buildings, memorials, and the like.

- In applying the Renaming Framework, those charged with the responsibility for overseeing/executing the process **shall**:
  - 1) Embrace the role of the university as a training ground for citizens and future leaders and be true to the university mission: In summary, to educate, conduct scholarly research, and publish.
  - 2) Approach each petition for renaming with the understanding that the interested constituency is the entire GW community, inclusive of those with whom many, or some, may sharply disagree.
  - 3) Establish credibility through meaningful outreach to, and engagement with, the GW community.
  - 4) Model the behaviors of listening and compromise, which are essential to a vibrant campus community and healthy democracy.
  - 5) Handle each individual petition with intellectual rigor and compassion for the individuals who will be impacted – on either side of the matter – by the university's decisions on renaming requests.
  - 6) View history in context and with a longitudinal, future-oriented perspective that will serve the community beyond the particular moment.

### Procedures

The Board of Trustees, based on the work of the university's [Task Force on Naming](#), adopted the procedures below as part of the Renaming Framework to guide the prospective renaming of buildings, memorials, and the like at GW. Should any member of the GW community have questions regarding these procedures, or wish to submit a request for a naming reconsideration, please contact the Office of the President via email at [president@gwu.edu](mailto:president@gwu.edu).

## Review of Name Change Requests

It is the sense of the Board of Trustees that reconsideration of the name of a building or memorial of any sort should be a rare undertaking, pursued only in extraordinary circumstances. When such circumstances do arise, requests for reconsideration should be directed to the Office of the President. Each request will be reviewed on an individual basis. However, duplicative requests may be joined and reviewed together. While the Guiding Principles will apply to all requests for reconsideration, the unique circumstances of each case will inform the timing and, ultimately, the decision that is rendered. The Board of Trustees retains the final authority over all matters related to naming, whether arising under the Renaming Framework or the Gift Naming Policy.

## Required Steps

1. GW students, faculty, staff, and alumni may submit a request for reconsideration of the naming of any campus building or memorial.
2. Such requests are to be submitted to the Office of the President ([president@gwu.edu](mailto:president@gwu.edu)), and include:
  - a. the specific building or memorial in question;
  - b. the general basis for the request for reconsideration;
  - c. a statement, including relevant background information and application of the guiding principles to the specific details of the case for the requested change; and
  - d. a supporting petition duly signed by no fewer than 500 students, faculty, staff, and/or alumni, which may be waived at the President's discretion.
3. Upon receipt of a complete request, the President will:
  - a. formally acknowledge the request;
  - b. add the request to a registry that is available online to GW students, faculty, staff, and alumni;
  - c. review the request for factual sufficiency and application of the guiding principles; and
  - d. request additional information, where necessary.
4. If the request is found to be reasonably compelling when the guiding principles are applied to the particular facts, the President will:
  - a. consult with the appropriate constituencies, such as the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, leadership of the Student Association, and the Executive Committee of the GW Alumni Association, on the merits of the request for reconsideration;
  - b. appoint a special committee to research and evaluate the merits of the request for reconsideration; and

- c. where such special committee finds that there is a compelling case for renaming, consult with the Chair of the Board of Trustees, in whose discretion it shall be whether and when to submit the request for decision by the Board of Trustees.
5. If the case for renaming is brought forward by the President, the process of consultation, research, and evaluation remains the same.
6. The Board of Trustees may then accept, deny, or modify the recommendation as part of the final action of the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees retains the discretion to decide what level of consideration is required prior to a renaming decision.

### **Renaming Considerations**

*Assess the strengths and weaknesses of each case based on the following considerations.*

#### **Consideration #1: The prevalence and persistence of the namesake's repugnant behavior.**

**Guidance:** The case for renaming is most compelling when the behaviors in question were exhibited on a sustained basis as part of the namesake's public life. The case for renaming is less compelling where the behavior in question is known but amounts to an isolated incident, or does not represent a core element of the individual's public profile. The case is likewise weaker if deep and consistent contrition was expressed by the namesake and accepted by the affected parties, there were sincere attempts to rectify the prior behavior, or if the historical record establishes that the behavior was considered consistent with the conventions of the time. The case for renaming may also be weakened where, despite the behavior in question, other aspects of the namesake's life and work are especially laudable.

#### **Consideration #2: The harm caused by the namesake's behavior.**

**Guidance:** The case for renaming is most compelling when the behavior in question is directly contrary to the mission and values of the university and the overarching role of higher education institutions to promote knowledge and education among the citizenry. As such, the case for renaming is further strengthened where a name undermines the ability of a significant number of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin or other characteristic protected by federal law or university policy, to engage in, or feel a sense of belonging to, the university community.

**Consideration #3: Strength and clarity of the historical evidence.**

**Guidance:** The case for renaming is most compelling where the historical record of the subject's questioned behavior is substantial and unambiguous; and is least compelling where the record is limited or debatable. Any decision should be based on research that uses all publicly-available sources to ascertain the historical context and naming decision holistically.

**Consideration #4: The namesake's relationship to the university.\***

**Guidance:** The case for renaming is subject to greater scrutiny when the namesake has had an objectively significant and noteworthy role in the history of the university. It follows, then, that the argument for a name change becomes especially compelling when the namesake does not have a significant connection to the university. In addition, consideration should be given to legal or other commitments the university has made to any donors (and their heirs) in connection with the name in question and the legal and financial implications thereof.

\* When considering the namesake's relationship to the university, any members of the special committee or Board of Trustees with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves from deliberations.

**Consideration #5: The university's earlier consideration of the appropriateness of the name.**

**Guidance:** The case for renaming is considerably more compelling where the conduct in question became widely known after the initial naming decision, or where the university has not previously examined the issue with reasonable rigor, as determined by members of the special committee. The case for renaming is less compelling, and names more appropriately left to stand, where the university was aware of the namesake's behavior and, based on reasonable diligence and research, nonetheless decided to confer the honor; or where the university has previously examined and rejected another request to change the name. While decisions following previous reconsideration of a name should be shown some deference, such decisions should receive less deferential treatment where decision-makers ignored, or were not aware of, history of the behavior in question.

**Consideration #6: Opportunity for education.**

**Guidance:** In considering a name change, appropriate weight should be given to the potential educational value to the GW community of contextualizing and confronting the namesake's legacy. Where there are strong arguments for and against a name change, the university will be best served by exploring appropriate opportunities to address the history in a deliberate and visible manner, it being all the more important to do so where a name change is made.

## Appendix

Throughout the Naming Task Force's research, community engagement, and deliberations, the GW "Colonials" moniker stood apart as an issue of great concern. However, it became apparent that a framework intended to address namesakes for buildings, memorials, and such is not appropriately applied to an examination of the moniker. It is the task force's sense that renaming should be rare, and, while in no way sacrosanct, moniker reconsideration, given that there is only one moniker at any given time, should arguably be even rarer – potentially a matter of one-time concern. Accordingly, the Naming Task Force includes as an appendix the procedures and considerations below, to guide the university in taking up the matter, posthaste.

### Procedure

In response to the Student Association resolution (Resolution) and views expressed by other members of the GW community, the President will:

- formally acknowledge the 2018 GW Voice Petition, 2019 Student Referendum, Student Association Resolution SR-19-11 "The Colonials Referendum Act" and Student Association Bill SB-F19-08 "Colonial Moniker Task Force Executive Order Codification Act";
- request additional information, as appropriate;
- take immediate steps to appoint a special committee, made up of a *diverse* and *representative* cross-section of the GW community (i.e., students, faculty, alumni, and staff) to research and evaluate the merits of the request based on the considerations adopted by the Board of Trustees for this specific purpose; and
- where such special committee establishes that there is a compelling case for changing the moniker and recommends such action, notify and consult with the Board of Trustees, which will accept, deny, or modify the recommendation as part of the final action of the Board of Trustees

### Considerations

*Assess the strengths and weaknesses based on the following considerations.*

**Consideration #1: The use of the term "Colonials" in historical context.**

**Consideration #2: The history and process behind the initial selection of the moniker.**

**Consideration #3: The connection of the moniker to the university and/or its namesake.**

**Consideration #4: The depth and breadth of offense or harm caused by use of the moniker.**

**Consideration #5: The affinity for and prominence of the moniker as found on or associated with structures, events, athletic uniforms, traditions and the like.**

**Consideration #6: The legal and financial implications of changing the moniker.**

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## **Task Force on Naming Membership List**

### **Trustees:**

1. Gabbi Baker, BBA '13, Trustee
2. Mark Chichester, BBA '90, JD '93 Trustee, Task Force Chair
3. Todd Klein, Trustee
4. Allan From, BBA '72, Emeritus Trustee (member of the Athletics Advisory Council)
5. Chair Grace Speights, JD '82 (ex officio)
6. President Thomas LeBlanc (ex officio)

### **Students:**

1. Undergraduate: André Gonzales, BA '20
2. Undergraduate: Owen Manning, BA '21
3. Graduate: Camila Tapias, BA '18, MPA, '20

### **Faculty:**

1. Elizabeth Tuckwiller, Associate Professor, Special Education and Disability Studies Department
2. Denver Brunsman, Associate Professor, Department of History
3. Robert J. Cottrol, Harold Paul Green Research Professor of Law

### **Alumni:**

1. Vincent Gray, BS '64, DC Council Member
2. Michelle Rubin, BA '91

### **Administration/Staff:**

1. Patricia Carocci, Associate Vice President for Alumni Relations
2. Caroline Laguerre-Brown, Vice Provost for Diversity and Community Engagement
3. Lorraine Voles, Vice President for External Relations
4. Brigitte Kamsler, University Archivist (Advisor)