

## **WWU LEGACY REVIEW TASK FORCE AY 2020-21**

Western Washington University is committed to maintaining a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for all members of the Western community, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees. One important element of this commitment is the consideration of how the historical names of features of the University such as buildings, streets, monuments, or colleges may be inconsistent with the University's values and mission with respect to equity and inclusion. In the summer of 2020, Western Libraries Heritage Resources was asked to research the history and significance of building names on Western's Bellingham campus, so that a thorough evaluation of this kind might take place.

Renaming a feature of the institution is a consequential decision that requires careful consideration and should be undertaken only with a thorough consideration of all the circumstances and potential consequences. The institution's contemporary commitment to rectifying the injustices of the past must be balanced with an honest recognition and assessment of the complexities of human action and context which does not seek to erase or revise history. In a similar vein, acknowledging the complexity of the past should generate humility about how today's decisions to name or rename institutional features may appear to future generations. In considering whether to overturn the decisions of previous generations we should be cognizant of the limited scope of our present knowledge and the tendency to overestimate the permanence of current perspectives and expressions of value.

In deciding whether to recommend to the University to consider removing a building or a college name, the Legacy Review Task Force should be guided by at least the following factors:

### **1. The harm caused by retaining the name**

Does the behavior or legacy of the person for whom the feature is named compromise or conflict with the University's mission, including both its commitment to intellectual integrity and its commitment to diversity and inclusion of all members of the Western community? This is a complex question of fact and value whose answer should not be casually assumed. Among other things, it will depend on the nature of the conduct at issue, the prominence and role of the named feature in daily life at the University, and the degree to which retention of the name interferes with the ability of university community members to teach, learn, work, and live in the community.

### **2. The potential harms of renaming**

The Legacy Review Task Force must take care that renaming not establish a University orthodoxy with respect to particular opinions or otherwise inhibit free inquiry and expression. The names of certain University features may have a positive value for students, faculty, staff, or alumni, who may find renaming disrespectful of their views.

### **3. Considering and weighing relevant factors**

The Legacy Review Task Force must carefully consider and weigh relevant factors in its deliberations on whether a name should be retained or not. Such factors include: the relation of the honoree to the University's history, the behavior of the honoree in terms of creating a significant negative impact on the core mission of the University and its teaching and learning environment, broader community identification with the feature, and the strength and clarity of

historical evidence. In considering whether to retain or eliminate a name, the Task Force should take into account whether the harm can be mitigated, and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing the individual's wrongful behavior. Furthermore, the University's prior deliberation of a relevant naming issue needs to be given due consideration.

The Task Force may want to elaborate and add principles prior to commencing its work.

### **Legacy Review Task Force Charge**

For the 2020 – 2021 academic year the Legacy Review Task Force is charged with a two-fold task:

The first task is to review the report prepared by the Western Libraries Heritage Resources in summer 2020 on the history and significance of building names on Western's Bellingham campus, and to decide if names of particular buildings warrant consideration for removal of those names. For buildings so identified, the Task Force is asked to do (or commission, with the help of Heritage Resources) additional research to ensure a thorough investigation.

The second task is to review the name associated with named colleges. Specifically, the naming of the Huxley College of the Environment for T.H. Huxley has been a topic of discussion among several students and faculty. Research on the Huxley name was not part of the work undertaken by the Western Libraries Heritage Resources over the summer.

The Task Force is not charged with considering new names for buildings in question, or with considering new name for colleges if it ultimately advances a recommendation for renaming.

The Legacy Review Task Force should submit a written opinion to the President applying the review principles above (and any others it develops in the course of its work) to the facts of the case. Regardless of whether the Task Force makes a recommendation for renaming or maintaining the name(s), the advice should make a clear case for its conclusion by providing evidence, documenting the sources used, and explaining why those sources are reliable.

The final responsibility and authority on naming buildings and academic colleges at Western rests with the Board of Trustees.

The work of the Task Force will commence in December 2020 with the expectation that it will be completed by May 31, 2021.

The Task Force will have 9 members: two faculty members recommended by the Faculty Senate, two students recommended by the Associated Students, an alum recommended by the WWU Alumni Association, two appointees by the President, a representative from the Board of Trustees, and the Secretary to the Board. Additionally, the Assistant Attorney General will serve as an ex-officio member of the group.