



**RESOLUTION NO. 2021-08**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF  
WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**

**MAINTAINING THE NAME OF MATHES HALL**

**WHEREAS**, Western Washington University is committed to providing access to transformational higher education for the people of the State of Washington, pursuing justice and equity in its policies and practices, and supporting an inclusive and welcoming campus environment that celebrates the dignity and value of all students, faculty, and staff; and

**WHEREAS**, at the start of in the Winter Quarter of 2021, President Sabah Randhawa charged a Legacy Review Task Force composed of faculty, staff, students, and alumni to review the history and significance of building and college names at Western Washington University, and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees as to whether any names warrant consideration for removal; and

**WHEREAS**, the Legacy Review Task Force submitted its report and recommendations in June of 2021, and has the gratitude and appreciation of the Board of Trustees for its efforts on behalf of the institution; and

**WHEREAS**, Edward Tilden Mathes (1866-1937) served as the first principal of the New Whatcom State Normal School, the forerunner of Western Washington University, from its opening in 1899 until 1914; and

**WHEREAS**, the New Whatcom Normal School was chartered by the State Legislature in 1893, but did not open until 1899 due to lack of funds; and

**WHEREAS**, Mathes was instrumental in persuading the Legislature to allocate funding for the construction and serial expansion of Old Main and its annexes, a dormitory, an auditorium, and other facilities; and

**WHEREAS**, during Mathes' 15-year tenure there was a fourfold increase in faculty and a threefold increase in students, partially due to his personal recruitment efforts, as well as the creation of the Campus School, a beacon of progressive education designed to give future teachers hands-on classroom experience; and

**WHEREAS**, Mathes established the Normal School's Extension Department in 1910 to help educate students' parents and other adults in the community, many of whom had only an elementary education; and

**WHEREAS**, Mathes helped organize the Bellingham Bay Lecture Course, bringing a notable array of national speakers to a community which had little access at the time, including Progressive Party leader Robert LaFollette, photographer and social reformer Jacob Riis, and more controversial speakers such as South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman, among others; and

**WHEREAS**, in support of Western’s first Black student, Alma Clark, and in the face of considerable anti-Black sentiment in the Bellingham community, Mathes and the Board of Trustees passed a resolution supporting her right to receive an education at the Normal School, earning Mathes and the Board commendation from the *Seattle Republican*, Seattle’s first successful Black-owned newspaper; and

**WHEREAS**, the Mathes Hall dormitory was named in his honor in 1966; and

**WHEREAS**, the Legacy Review Task Force report expressed concerns about newspaper summaries of two among the hundreds of public talks that Mathes gave throughout his life, as they appear to advance a hierarchical conception of human races and cultures, and a view that white people are obliged to educate and “civilize” non-whites; and

**WHEREAS**, there are no transcripts of Mathes’ lectures to determine his specific comments or any record that his views were considered controversial at the time, nor is there any other evidence that Mathes generally held discriminatory views about people of color, or used his office and authority to enact such views; and

**WHEREAS**, the Legacy Review Task Force report expressed concerns that there is a lack of evidence Mathes made public comments denouncing the violent expulsion of South Asian immigrant laborers from Bellingham in 1907; and

**WHEREAS**, during Mathes’ administration two students from India studied at the Normal School, including one, Nahbi Ram Joshi, who lived in the Mathes family home and enthusiastically supported the naming of a campus building for Mathes; and

**WHEREAS**, Mathes’ support of educational access for Indian students was sufficiently well known that the Vancouver, Canada newspaper *Free Hindustan* called Mathes “a good friend of India”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Trustees recognizes the complexities of evaluating an individual’s legacy, and that there are a great many contextualizing factors and nuances involved in the interpretation and assessment of an individual’s statements and behavior in their time and place; and

**WHEREAS**, Edward Tilden Mathes, in addition to making significant contributions to the mission and development of Western as its first administrative leader, personally and publicly supported Western’s few students of color during a time when racism was generally condoned in Bellingham; and

**WHEREAS**, these contributions and personal commitments outweigh his possible engagement in racist actions or statements which may be considered insensitive in light of today’s values and social norms; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Trustees recognizes that while the names of campus features have powerful symbolic value, these considerations are separate from the need for continued, mission-critical focus on advancing concrete, measurable efforts to increase inclusive success for underrepresented students, faculty, and staff;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of Trustees of Western Washington University, that Mathes Hall shall continue to be named for Edward Tilden Mathes.

**PASSED AND APPROVED** by the Board of Trustees of Western Washington University at its meeting on December 9, 2021.

ATTEST:



John M. Meyer, Chair



D. Chase Franklin, Vice Chair