



RESOLUTION NO. 2021-06

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

**REMOVING THE THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY NAME FROM THE COLLEGE OF
THE ENVIRONMENT**

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 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, Western's 2018 – 2025 Strategic Plan acknowledges Western has failed to meet the needs of people of many races, ethnicities, creeds, socioeconomic classes, gender identities, sexual orientations, and disability statuses, and states Western will contribute to redressing these inequities by transforming policies, structures, and practices to ensure meaningful inclusion; and

WHEREAS, a letter submitted by the leaders of Black student organizations in June 2020 expressed an urgent desire to see Western consider how the names of its buildings fail to support the experiences of Black and other students of diverse identities; and

WHEREAS, the Huxley College of the Environment was founded in 1969 as one of the first environmental colleges in the country, earning international renown for continued leadership in environmental education, applied research and outreach, and contributing to the excellence and reputation of the University as a whole; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 – 1895) was an accomplished anatomical biologist, prolific author, and public speaker, known most widely for his outspoken defense of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, and was an abolitionist and a champion of progressive education reform, campaigning for universal education and the introduction of science into curricula; and

WHEREAS, Huxley expressed views about Black people in works such as "Emancipation Black and White" that are offensive, hurtful, and out of step with the institution's mission and values; and

WHEREAS, Huxley’s application of the theory of evolution to humans in his work, “Man’s Place in Nature” may be understood as implying or providing support for racial hierarchy and scientific racism; and

WHEREAS, some students of color at Western have stated that they consider the naming of the College after Huxley as an instance of callous indifference to their experience as traditionally underserved students, and in contradiction to the institution’s claims to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment; and

WHEREAS, the College of the Environment came to be named after Huxley through an informal process by which several faculty and administrators began applying the name to the college for several years while it was still under development, creating a common usage and a presumption that it would be named Huxley College by the time it came to the Board of Trustees for approval; and

WHEREAS, the excellence of the College of the Environment has not been due to the Huxley name, but rather to generations of passionate and committed faculty, students, and alumni, united around a vision of addressing urgent environmental issues, developing practical, collaborative approaches to solving environmental problems, and supporting movements for environmental social justice; and

WHEREAS, neither Thomas Henry Huxley nor his descendants have any relationship to the development or mission of the College of the Environment or Western Washington University, having made no financial, service, scholarly, or other contributions to the College or the University; and

WHEREAS, the Huxley name was therefore chosen to represent the College of the Environment largely on the basis of an assessment of Huxley’s character and a set of values he represented relevant to the academic enterprise at Western Washington University in 1969; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees recognizes the complexities of evaluating Huxley’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, the complexities of the situation present a choice between defending the honor of an individual who has made no contribution to the institution by contextualizing the racism in his statements, or acknowledging that, despite Huxley’s other qualities, he is not the person to represent the institution’s present day values; and

WHEREAS, the Huxley name no longer serves to advance the goals of the University, or to make it a more welcoming and inclusive place for the increasingly diverse students and faculty the College and the University as a whole strive to attract and serve; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees recognizes that while removing a name has powerful symbolic value, it is critically important to follow such statements with 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 the name of Thomas Henry Huxley be removed from the College of the Environment at Western Washington University.

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