

## Harvard University Process for Considering Requests for Denaming

On December 9, 2021, President Lawrence S. Bacow shared the [final report](#) of the Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming. The report sets out principles and a framework for considering cases in which Harvard might contemplate removing an individual's name from a building, space, program, professorship or other entity (collectively, entity or entities) "based on the perception that a namesake's actions or beliefs are 'abhorrent' in the context of current values."

President Bacow acknowledged that consideration of a request to remove a name (a "denaming request") may be decided by a University process or may involve a combination of local and central responsibility. Depending on which part of Harvard has historic ties to or manages particular named entities, or whether a naming occurred as a result of a gift agreement or other contractual commitment, a request may be considered by the University, a School, or jointly by the University and a School. The question of responsibility seeks to balance local discretion and University-wide interests.

The following is the process the University will follow when it considers such a request. When a request is considered jointly, this process also shall be followed, rather than a School's process. This process does not apply to School or University-initiated decisions to rename entities in the ordinary course of managing the institution.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, this process does not pertain to the original naming of entities. Suggestions for new names will not be reviewed under this process.

### A. Guiding Principles

The process follows these guiding principles:

- 1) Because this is an academic institution dedicated to research and teaching, all efforts should be grounded in historical inquiry and in careful deliberation and investigation.
- 2) The decision to remove a name should not be undertaken lightly. It should be informed by deep examination and learning, and the process leading to the decision should be characterized by reason, persuasion, and discussion that is robust, respectful and generous.
- 3) The judgment about whether to initiate a review should rest primarily on the completeness of the submission, not the number of identified proponents or the strength of their convictions.
- 4) The process should reflect compassion for the members of our community and a commitment to their full participation in our mission.
- 5) The process should approach our history with humility, in recognition of the imperative to remember but with the courage to reckon with past actions or beliefs that were flawed.
- 6) Community consensus is not a prerequisite to acting on a request, but there is an expectation that any request that moves forward to review will allow for the solicitation of views from stakeholders.

---

<sup>1</sup> The President, Provost, and Deans have inherent authority to propose changing the names of entities under their authority, after consideration of contractual commitments, if any, and appropriate consultation with University leadership. Other eligible Harvard affiliates, as defined by this Policy, must use a request process to initiate a denaming process, either under this Policy or under a School policy.

## **B. The Request**

### **Eligibility to submit a request**

Any current faculty or staff member, or enrolled student at Harvard, with a direct connection to the entity that is subject to the denaming request, is eligible to submit a denaming request to the Office of the President. Former affiliates, including *emeriti* faculty, other retirees or graduates, are not eligible.

### **Preparing a complete request**

A denaming request must address all of the following points, as outlined in the report of the Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming:

- 1) Whether, in what ways, and to what extent “the name creates a harmful environment that undermines the ability of current students, faculty, or staff to participate fully in the work of the University;”
- 2) Whether the historical evidence advanced to supporting a denaming request is marked by “strength and clarity,” and what is understood about “why our forebears originally selected the name;”
- 3) Whether, in what ways, and to what extent “the behaviors now seen as morally repugnant are a significant component of that individual’s legacy when viewed in the full context of the namesake’s life;”
- 4) Whether, in what ways, and to what extent “the namesake’s actions or beliefs we now regard as abhorrent would have been regarded as objectionable in the namesake’s own time;”
- 5) Whether, in what ways, and to what extent the named entity “is central to University life and community and to the identity and experience of students, staff, or faculty;”
- 6) Whether, in what ways, and to what extent the University might consider alternatives to denaming in order to contextualize the name and namesake by means that allow us to reckon with our history.

## **C. The Initial Administrative Review**

Submissions of denaming requests will be accepted once per term, in October and March. A submission may be made to [president@harvard.edu](mailto:president@harvard.edu) and must be submitted no later than the last day of the month of October or March.

The Office of the President will conduct an initial administrative review.

The initial administrative review will address the following:

- 1) Whether the request is complete (i.e that it addresses all six required questions outlined above and demonstrates substantial research and analysis);
- 2) Whether the request comes from an individual with standing;

- 3) Whether the request should be referred to another Harvard School or unit, or should be handled under the University's process, alone or with participation from one or more other School or unit;
- 4) Whether the request concerns a name applied to an entity as a result of a commitment Harvard made through a gift agreement or other legal contract; and
- 5) Whether the request pertains to a name that has not been considered through this process in the last 5 years. (Ordinarily, a denaming request will not be reconsidered for a period of 5 years from the issuance of the recommendation of the review committee.)

There are three possible outcomes of the administrative review:

- 1) The request advances to a substantive review under these procedures, as described below;
- 2) The request does not qualify for a substantive review because it is not complete, the requestor is ineligible, and/or the request pertains to a name that has been considered within the past 5 years; or
- 3) The request is referred to another School or unit for that School or unit to consider the request under its procedures.

The administrative review does not consider the merits of the request.

In cases where requests do not move forward to a substantive review, the Office of the President will provide an explanation to the party or parties making the request. If the request failed to proceed because it was incomplete, the party or parties making the request may revise and resubmit the request for consideration at the next opportunity for submission of requests.

#### **D. The Substantive Review**

For requests recommended for substantive review, the Office of the President will first determine whether any other School or unit of Harvard should be asked to undertake the review in collaboration with the University. The Office of the President also shall consult with the Office of the Vice President for Alumni Affairs and Development and the Office of the General Counsel to confirm whether the request concerns a name applied to an entity as a result of a gift agreement or other legal contract and to assure all pertinent legal instruments are identified. Any request, even if submitted originally through a School-based denaming process, that involves a gift agreement or other legal contract shall be reviewed at the University level.

The decision to proceed to further review does not bind the University to any particular timetable; as noted in the report, these considerations are likely to be complex and the process puts a premium on retaining the flexibility to undertake reviews in the order that makes sense and as resources allow.

The substantive review of a request will be conducted by a committee to provide advice to the President about the request. Its members will be selected by the Office of the President.

The Committee shall not include anyone who authored or signed the request, but may include individuals from among Harvard faculty, administrative staff and students. In cases where

another School should participate in such a review, as determined in the discretion of the Office of the President, the School will be invited to nominate one or more individuals from the Harvard community to join the Committee. The ultimate selection from among the nominees remains with the Office of the President

The Office of the President shall formally charge the Committee, appoint its Chair, provide staff to manage administrative matters, and provide other guidance for the Committee to facilitate its work.

The Committee may seek additional advice, expertise or community input about the request to the extent and by whatever means it thinks appropriate. If applicable, the committee also will take into account advice from the Office of the General Counsel about any legal constraints flowing from a relevant gift agreement or other legal contract that may bear on the ultimate recommendation.

At the end of the review process, the Chair of the Committee will make a recommendation to the President to (1) take no action, (2) dename, or (3) keep the name but contextualize it. (It should be noted that a denaming recommendation may also include a recommendation for contextualizing efforts.) The recommendation may be accompanied by a report.

The President will confer with the Harvard Corporation about the recommendation and then issue a decision, which will be conveyed to the party or parties who initiated the request and other parties that the Office of the President determines.

As stated above, any consideration of a new name will be undertaken in a separate process.

#### **E. Records of the Process**

Records related to requests that proceed to substantive review will be maintained in perpetuity. The records will be maintained by the Secretary to the Corporation until such time when the Secretary deposits them with the University Archives.

#### **F. Approval of Policy and Amendments**

This process was approved and adopted by the President and Provost on April 14, 2023. It may be amended from time to time at their discretion.