



HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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.”

The following is the process the University will follow when it considers such a request. This includes an initial, centrally coordinated review that will identify any legal obligations and designate the appropriate level to conduct full review of the submission, if appropriate. It is expected that, in the majority of cases involving naming of units within a School, the School rather than the University will be designated as the appropriate level to conduct substantive denaming review.

This process does not apply to School or University-initiated decisions to rename entities in the ordinary course of managing the institution. 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 and respectful.
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.

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. Former affiliates, including emeriti, 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 Review

Submissions of denaming requests should be submitted to [president@harvard.edu]. The Office of the President and Provost (OPP) will coordinate an initial review with participation from other University offices.

The initial 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 pertains to a name that already has been considered through this process. A denaming request ordinarily will not be reconsidered except in extraordinary circumstances when significant and consequential new information comes to light;

4. Whether the request sets forth a substantial and reasonably persuasive case for denaming;
and
5. Whether there is a gift or other legal agreement that bears upon the ability to dename.

Possible outcomes of the initial review:

1. The submission does not move forward for full review because it does not meet the eligibility criteria, is incomplete, is viewed to be without merit, is contrary to legal obligations, or because an alternative resolution of the matters addressed in the submission is identified.
2. Substantive denaming review is determined to be appropriate. Generally, full review would be conducted by the applicable School under its procedures, but in some circumstances the University may handle the full review under the procedures described below, with School participation as appropriate.

In cases where requests do not move forward to full review, the OPP 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.

D. The Full Review

The decision to proceed to full 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.

In instances when a full review of a request is coordinated by the University, rather than a School, it will be conducted by a committee to provide advice to the President about the request. The Committee's members will be selected by the OPP, and may include individuals from among Harvard faculty, administrative staff and students. It shall not include anyone who authored or signed the request.

In cases where a School should participate in such a review, as determined at the discretion of the OPP, 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 OPP.

The OPP 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.

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. (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 OPP 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 full 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 and updated on August 27, 2025. It may be amended from time to time at their discretion.