



The Student Assembly of William & Mary

February 22, 2021

Memorandum

To: The Members of the Board of Visitors

From: The Student Assembly of William & Mary

Subject: Statement of Grievances on BOV Action Regarding PNR

On behalf of the student body of William & Mary, the Student Assembly of William & Mary raises a formal statement of grievances to the Board of Visitors (BOV) on their actions regarding the naming and renaming process of campus spaces, buildings, and landmarks on the campus. After polling our constituency for their feedback on the naming and renaming process, and the Principles designed to that end, we find the progress made thus far and the Principles approved by the Board inadequate.

Since July, students have been incredibly vocal about the naming and renaming process. Through petitions and public discourse over social media, the student body expressed a strong desire to **swiftly and boldly** take action on names that have ties to the Confederacy, slavery, and white supremacy on campus. Evident through their calls for justice is a yearning for inclusivity and a balance between glorification and representation. The students, who walk and live on the campus grounds, want their university to demonstrate inclusivity through its landscape.

However, students feel that they have not been consulted enough in this process. The two Listening Sessions offered over the summer were not adequately publicized for students to offer feedback. Only one student, albeit the Student Assembly President, was part of the Principles of Naming & Renaming (PNR) Working Group. Furthermore, students feel that there was not sufficient consideration of the sentiments of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) that are students at William & Mary, as they are the people directly affected by the names of racist alumni and individuals.

Over the past several months, these concerns increased dramatically. Granted, students were elated to see the removal of Trinkle and Maury's names from campus spaces but were still considerably confused as to why prominent Confederates and other virulent racists were not removed. While students, and the William & Mary community as a whole, believe in the importance of process—especially ones that are designed to dismantle systemic racism within the institution—students believe that the Confederates are the low hanging fruit, as they regard their involvement in the Confederacy as a commonsense metric for immediate removal.

Responding to these concerns, on Wednesday, February 17th, 2021, the Student Assembly submitted a referendum to the student body concerning the naming and renaming process that lasted until Friday, February 19th. These questions were crafted with careful consideration and deliberation amongst the Senate of the Student Assembly, the legislative branch. The aim of the referendum was not to sow more divisions and discord in an already divisive time, but to fully encapsulate student opinion in this process. To be clear, this was not a matter of erasure, but to balance **glorification and representation**. The Student Assembly recognizes that William & Mary, for better and worse, has a unique and controversial history, as it is the Alma Mater of the Nation. For that reason, we want our campus to bear witness to that complexity, but also bear witness to the evolving standards of decency and inclusivity.

The results of the referendum, which are on our [website](#), indicate serious grievances with the current Principles of Naming & Renaming and their scope, as determined by the BOV. 2,584 students voted in the referendum, roughly a third of the student population, which surpasses the standard of statistical significance. Roughly 60% of respondents agree that William & Mary should institute a cap on the number of awards, campus spaces, and iconography that commemorates an individual, including the Founders. Furthermore, 60% of respondents agreed that the standard evaluation procedure for naming and renaming should include the Founders. These statistics are backed by the last two questions, with over 70% of respondents agreeing that Lyon Gardiner Tyler and the anonymous quote contribute to a hostile environment to BIPOC students on campus and that they should be taken down. The author of the anonymous quote was Thomas Jefferson. Though we hold respect for our Founders, the extremity of the quote highlights a clear disconnect between his glorification and his beliefs.

Based on the results of the referendum, the Student Assembly believes that these grievances most directly relate to the following core areas that are not covered by the current Principles of Naming & Renaming and its processes:

- 1. Lack of Specificity:**

The Principles of Naming & Renaming do not delineate any metrics that would automatically disqualify a candidate for naming or determine a candidate for renaming. This is derived from the 70% of respondents that agreed that Lyon Gardiner Tyler's name should be removed, and that Thomas Jefferson contributes to a hostile environment on campus. Since three-fourths of respondents agreed to this, the generality of the Principles, which may currently permit these alumni's names to remain on campus spaces and landmarks is a great issue. Standard operating procedures that permit alumni that contribute to a hostile environment to be honored by campus space are incredibly concerning and should be addressed.

2. **Lack of Limits:**

The Principles of Naming & Renaming do not have a limit to how many campus spaces—meaning buildings, landmarks, departments, and awards—can be named after an individual. 60% of respondents agreed that William & Mary should institute a cap on the number of campus spaces, awards, and landmarks that are dedicated to an individual.

3. **Lack of Metrics:**

The metrics of evaluation for renaming a building space seem to be an unnecessarily high bar. This grievance leans on the statistics aforementioned in grievance 1 (above). 70% of respondents agreed that Lyon Gardiner Tyler's name should be removed from campus. Lyon Gardiner Tyler wrote a book called the *Confederate Catechism*, which calls Abraham Lincoln a traitor to his country and is widely used amongst white supremacists today. Lyon Gardiner Tyler's father, John Tyler, swore allegiance to the Confederacy and served in its Congress till his death in 1862. Therefore, white supremacists seem to be an incredibly low bar for removal and renaming. Any metrics of evaluation in place that permit white supremacists to be honored by naming campus spaces after them are of great concern and should be addressed.

4. **Improper Exceptions:**

The newly designed standard evaluation process, guided by the Principles of Naming & Renaming, is not applicable to the Founders, as determined by the Board of Visitors in a statement made addressing the Founders at the August Board meeting. The anonymous quote was from Thomas Jefferson. The fact that 70% of respondents agreed that he contributes to a hostile environment on campus demonstrates how the lack of inclusion of the Founders in the standard evaluation for renaming is problematic.

One thing important to note is that, even at a Predominantly White Institution—especially with a history like ours—70% of respondents agreed that the actions and words of some of our alumni contribute to a hostile environment for BIPOC students. At the core of the questions presented is the sentiment that students have issues with campus spaces, buildings, and landmarks being named in honor of racists. Historically at William & Mary and throughout the nation, BIPOC voices and concerns have been unheard and diminished. The fact that 2,584 students voted and the majority of them voted in the same manner demonstrates immense allyship, something that William & Mary as a whole has promoted significantly this year.

Furthermore, it is even more important to note the skepticism that many BIPOC students possess regarding the Principles of Naming & Renaming and its process, as American history demonstrates that processes have seldom worked in favor of people of color in this country. The Thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery except as a punishment for a crime, leading to the great dilemma of mass incarceration and the criminalization of “Blackness.” Poll taxes and literacy tests were processes to disenfranchise African Americans. And, even after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, redlining and gerrymandering tactics were enhanced to limit the political power of people of color. **In short, BIPOC students have great reason to be skeptical of the Principles and its processes, and they yearn to see tangible change that demonstrates a commitment to addressing historical wrongs by putting their perspectives first.**

Due to these results, which deliver a clear consensus from our constituency, we, the Student Assembly of William & Mary, by virtue of our authority as the **duly elected** representatives of the

student body, formally petition the Board of Visitors and the William & Mary administration to consider these adjustments to the Principles of Naming & Renaming:

1. When considering naming and renaming campus spaces and/or landmarks, William & Mary should contextualize as a standard operating procedure;
2. When considering naming and renaming campus spaces and/or landmarks, William & Mary should not permit more than one space/landmark dedicated to an individual;
 - a. While a campus space and/or landmark may be named for a Founder, it should not be the top prize or an award that is given to the William & Mary community and distinguished guests.
3. When considering naming and renaming campus spaces and/or landmarks, William & Mary should include the Founders in the standard evaluation process, as outlined by the Design and Review Board;
4. When considering candidates for naming and renaming campus spaces and/or landmarks, the Design and Review Board should consult diverse student perspectives from relevant cultural and identity affinity organizations that could help advise whether the actions of a candidate for naming or renaming contribute to a hostile environment for its members;
5. When considering naming and renaming campus spaces and landmarks, the Design and Review Board, during their process of reviewing candidates, should write a report regarding the individual for public purposes;
 - a. The Design and Review Board should give this report to the Student Assembly representative on the Board Committee on Administration, Buildings, and Grounds;
 - b. The report, once the process is completed, should be made available to the William & Mary community for public consumption.
6. Individuals that perpetuated slavery, the Confederacy, Jim Crow, and/or white supremacy should not have their name on any aspect of the William & Mary campus space, building, and/or department name;
7. Individuals that perpetuated slavery, the Confederacy, Jim Crow, and/or white supremacy should not have an award named in their honor that is given to the William & Mary community.

This statement of grievances is not to be misconstrued as an expression of disapproval towards the Principles of Naming & Renaming Working Group, but as an expression of disapproval towards the parameters of their mission and the boundaries installed by the BOV prior to the release of their principles and full report. All grievances should be tended to by the Board of Visitors, as they are the only body on campus with the ultimate authority to name and rename campus spaces, buildings, and landmarks or approve parameters to that end.

Students acknowledge that these matters may be in the way of important antiracist institutional work that William & Mary is considering, and it is for exactly that reason why they are adamant on these issues. **Words, names, and symbols matter.** The symbolic actions that we take signal to our alumni, those across the Commonwealth, and the nation that the times are changing, and we must change with them. As the future alumni of the university, we hope that future students will not have to adjust to campus landscaping that may be offensive to them.

For too long, BIPOC students have had to adjust to manage the landscape around them, and we feel that William & Mary should deal with these matters swiftly for their sake.