

# **Renaming Buildings, Space and Structure Committee: Process and Principles for Renaming Features at Stony Brook University**

## **Introduction**

Stony Brook University is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and academic freedom, and providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for our campus community — students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners. This commitment is integral to Stony Brook’s mission. Naming campus spaces for an individual or an organization is a high honor that forges a special link between the namesake and the University. That special link must be consistent with the University’s mission.

Stony Brook recognizes that the name of certain features<sup>1</sup> of the University may be challenged as inconsistent with its mission. Under such circumstances, a review will proceed under an established process to determine whether a renaming should be recommended. A renaming will be an exceptional event and can only occur following a thorough and transparent examination that considers many criteria and demonstrates a compelling need for the change.

## **Recommendation Process**

### **Request to Review a University Feature**

Any individual or group from the Stony Brook University community (e.g., students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners) may submit a request to the President to have a University feature reviewed to determine if it should be renamed.

Upon receipt of such a request, the President will convene a Committee for the purpose of reviewing the request.<sup>2</sup> The procedures and principles set out in this document are intended to provide guidance to those making requests for renaming and to the President and Committee when considering renaming.

Renaming requests should describe:

- the specific behavior(s) or course(s) of conduct by the person after whom a feature is named that violate the University’s mission and core principles;
- the sources and strength of the evidence of that behavior;
- the nature, depth, and extent of the harm that the continued use of the name may inflict on the University’s integrity, mission, and communities; and
- how renaming comports with the principles described in this document.

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<sup>1</sup> The term features include but is not limited to: buildings, spaces, structures, benches, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The membership of the Committee will consist of voting members and additional non-voting members who may be appointed as necessary to provide the expertise needed by the Committee to carry out its charge. Such membership should include representation by staff, faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students. All members of the committee serve at the pleasure of the President and will be convened on an as needed basis.

## Committee Review

Upon receipt of the request, the Committee shall begin the process of considering whether there is strong evidence that retaining the name is inconsistent with the University's mission, including its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

The Committee may seek to engage community members about the context of the namesake's legacy/life (or lives if named for a group) to generate discussion, and collect constructive input. This input should be incorporated into the Committee's evaluation. Practically, this community engagement could take the form of a forum, town hall, round table, teach-in, panel presentation, exhibit, or other format conducive to critical engagement.

The request will be considered using the following factors:

1. *The centrality of the person's offensive behavior to his or her life as a whole.* The case for renaming is strongest where the honoree's offensive behavior is inextricably connected with his/her public persona. The case for renaming is weaker where the honoree's offensive behavior, though publicly known, is not a central or inextricable part of his/her public persona—especially when the honoree's behavior was conventional at the time of the behavior or the naming, and when, despite the objectionable behavior, other aspects of the person's life and work are especially praiseworthy.
2. *Relation to the University history.* The case for renaming is weaker when the honoree has had an important role in the University's history, and stronger when the honoree is a person without a significant connection to the university. The concern about "erasing" the university's history—or any history, for that matter—is diminished to the extent that the relationship between Stony Brook history and the honoree is incidental to begin with.
3. *Harmful impact of the honoree's behavior.* The case for renaming is strongest when the morally repugnant behavior of an honoree for whom a feature is named has a significant negative effect on the core University missions of pursuing knowledge and receiving an education. Thus, the case for renaming is strong to the extent that retaining a name creates an environment that impairs the ability of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, or other characteristic protected by federal law or University policy, to participate fully and effectively in the missions of the University. The case is also strong to the extent that the morally repugnant behavior is connected to academic fraud or misconduct. In assessing the negative effects, the salience of the named feature for members of the Stony Brook community should be considered: The case for renaming is stronger where the name is prominent and encountered in a personal or intimate setting (e.g., a student residence) and generally is weaker where the feature is a relatively impersonal public place. As a result, when several features are named after the same individual, the impact may be more harmful for some features than for others.
4. *Community identification with the feature.* The case for renaming is weaker where the feature is part of a valuable positive tradition or identification shared by a substantial number of Stony Brook community members, including alumni.
5. *Strength and clarity of the historical evidence.* The case for renaming is strongest when evidence of the honoree's wrongful behavior is clear and unambiguous, and is weakest when the evidence is scant or ambiguous.
6. *The University's prior consideration of the issues.* The case for renaming is stronger when the honoree's offensive conduct came to light after the naming, or where the

issue was not the subject of prior deliberation. The case for renaming is weaker when the University addressed the behavior at the time of the naming and nonetheless decided to honor the person, or when the University has already considered and rejected a prior request for renaming. (The original decision deserves some degree of respect if the decision makers considered the competing interests, but not if they made the decision in ignorance of relevant facts, or if they did not address the honoree's questionable behavior at the time of the naming.)

7. *Possibilities for mitigation.* In reviewing whether to retain or eliminate a name, the University should consider whether the harm can be mitigated and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing the individual's wrongful behavior. When a feature is renamed or when the name is retained but the committee considers it a close question, the University should consider describing the history in a prominent way—at the feature, where practicable, or in some other suitable location.

### **Recommendation to the President**

After due consideration as described above, the Committee shall submit a written recommendation to the President applying these principles to the facts of the case. The President will determine whether to move the request to change the name of the subject feature through the established Stony Brook Council and SUNY processes.

### **Related Policies:**

- Education Law Section 356
- SUNY Policy on Naming Opportunities on State Operated Campuses #9251