

**Naming Principles Commission
Interim Report and Draft Recommendations
February 2022**

I. Introduction

Origins of the Naming Principles Commission

The [Naming Principles Commission](#), comprising faculty, staff, student, alumni, Trustee, and external expert representation, and advised by additional distinguished scholars and practitioners, was appointed by the University's Board of Trustees in summer 2021 and began work in August 2021. The Commission was established to develop and recommend principles to guide future decisions about namings and removal of/modification to names, across applications of names (e.g., buildings, professorships, programs, etc.).

The need for these principles arose as the University navigated challenges and controversies over the course of more than two years arising from two specific building names: Ryland Hall, named for the University's first President, Rev. Robert Ryland; and Freeman Hall, named for alumnus and long-time Rector Douglas Southall Freeman. Following resolutions by the Westhampton College and Richmond College student governments in April 2019, the University undertook extensive research into the lives and work of [Ryland](#) and [Freeman](#), with particular attention to Ryland's intersections with enslavement and Freeman's involvement in the promotion of segregation and other structures of racism. Upon the completion of the research, the University's President (then Dr. Ronald A. Crutcher) and Board of Trustees disseminated the findings of the research and [communicated](#) in February 2021 their decision to retain the Ryland and Freeman names, while a) ensuring that the University conveyed as honestly and fully as possible the story of Ryland and Freeman's involvement in enslavement and segregation, respectively; b) permanently recognizing in Ryland Hall the persons Ryland enslaved, including those who were forced to labor on Richmond College's downtown campus; c) naming the terrace of the new Humanities Commons for an enslaved person or persons whose name/s and stories were recovered through the Ryland research; and d) re-naming Freeman Hall as Mitchell-Freeman Hall, in recognition of John Mitchell, Jr., who was born enslaved and became the editor of the African American newspaper the *Richmond Planet*, using that platform to challenge racial oppression and segregation.

This decision deeply divided the University community. Among some, especially alumni, there was strong support for retaining historic names, particularly that of Robert Ryland, due to his unique and essential role in the founding of the institution and sustaining it during its arduous early decades. Among many faculty, staff, students, and other alumni, the decision generated disappointment, frustration, and anger, which led to organized protests and disaffiliation from University activities. Many expressed to the Commission concern that students of color feel uncomfortable in spaces named for enslavers or segregationists and that retention of the names conveyed disregard for African American students in particular and that the names were not consistent with the institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion. In [April 2021](#), President Crutcher and the Board of Trustees communicated that the February naming decisions would be suspended and that they would establish "a broader, more inclusive process to determine how decisions are made about questions of re-naming." Soon thereafter, President Crutcher and the Board [announced the intention](#) to form a Naming Principles Commission, followed by announcing the composition and charge of the Commission in [May 2021](#).

Commission Charge

The Commission's primary objective is to formulate and recommend principles and criteria to determine the appropriateness of namings for an individual or entity at the University. Specifically, the Commission has been asked to develop clear and rigorous principles to provide consistent guidance for decisions related to namings, including questions of de-naming and re-naming. The charge notes that the principles should apply not only to building names, but also to various applications of names (e.g., spaces, professorships, programs, etc.). The principles also should not be limited to specific cases or time periods

and must be sufficiently broad and enduring to serve as a guide to the University into the future. In addition, the Commission has been asked to consider recommendations that address issues including: a) in what circumstances it is appropriate to consider the removal of or modification to names; b) in what circumstances it is appropriate to consider contextualization either of an existing/retained name or following the removal of a name; and c) a process by which requests may be made for consideration of de-naming/re-naming and by which the principles would be applied to specific cases.

Work of the Commission

The Commission has sought to ensure a transparent and inclusive process, consulting extensively with members of the University community to gain an understanding of the range of perspectives to inform its recommendations. Accordingly:

- The University engaged the Gallup Organization to conduct the survey of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and parents in fall 2021. More than 7,200 respondents completed the survey between October 18 and November 21, 2021. The survey findings were provided to the University community on January 21 and are available [here](#).
- The Commission held 16 [listening sessions](#), with more than 300 students, faculty, staff, and alumni participating.
- The Commission invited written comments from members of the University community and received comments from approximately 100 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and others. A summary of the themes from the listening sessions and written comments can be found by faculty, staff, and students [here](#) and by alumni [here](#).

We are grateful to all who took the time in recent months to participate in a listening session, share your perspectives in written comments, or participate in the Gallup survey. We also wish to thank President *Emeritus* Edward L. Ayers and Visiting Lecturer Laurant Lee, who served as facilitators for the majority of the listening sessions.

In preparing these draft recommendations, the Commission also studied and benefitted from other institutions' naming principles and procedures.¹ The proposed principles draw on that work in the ways that seem most appropriate to the University of Richmond. The Commission also: co-sponsored a [virtual panel](#)² discussion for the University community with colleagues from other institutions to discuss the aims of, approaches to, and lessons drawn from memorialization and institutional history work at their institutions; and consulted with expert advisors from the fields of philanthropy and architectural history.

Key Considerations

The Commission considered carefully all views expressed by the University community on naming issues. Not surprisingly, the Gallup survey affirmed that many in the community feel strongly about the importance of the University's naming, de-naming, and re-naming decisions. Several considerations consistently emerged in our conversations with the community and in our own deliberations and influenced our draft recommendations. Those are the following:

¹ The Commission reviewed documents from more than 25 other U.S. institutions, including [Duke University](#), [Emory University](#), [The Johns Hopkins University](#), [Princeton University](#), [Stanford University](#), [Yale University](#), the [University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill](#), the [University of Virginia](#), [Wake Forest University](#), and the [College of William & Mary](#). We are indebted to colleagues at these institutions for the opportunity to benefit from their experience. There is significant consistency (including similarity of language) among principles and procedures across institutions, and we have, where appropriate, proposed principles and procedures similar to those of other institutions, while tailoring our recommendations to the specific situation of our institution.

² The panel comprised colleagues from Furman University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Humanities, and the College of William & Mary.

- There should be a clear, consistent, and transparent process for decisions about naming and removal of names.
- The University's [mission and values](#) must be at the heart of and the guiding force in all that we do, including any naming principles and resulting decisions about names.
- The University community views visible namings as an honor—in fact, one of the highest honors the University can bestow. Accordingly, the standard for namings should be high, and it is imperative that those for whom something is named at the University should exhibit exemplary character and integrity.
- The University should augment existing names—particularly visible building names—in ways that recognize a) additional individuals of diverse backgrounds who have made important contributions to the University (not only philanthropic contributions), and/or b) meaningful milestones in our institutional progress.
- While the Commission's charge does not include making a recommendation about specific names, views about the Ryland and Freeman names dominated discussion with and input from the University community in the first phase of our work. More broadly, the questions that animated this discussion included: What particular response to issues of enslavement and segregation is required by the University's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and belonging? Is the University's responsibility to confront these issues heightened by the ways in which the history of slavery and segregation pervades the history of the city of Richmond and the state of Virginia? When considering serious wrongdoing by a namesake, is it appropriate (as some other institutions' principles recommend) to undertake a holistic assessment in which the wrongdoing is evaluated in the context of one's overall life and legacy (including especially significant service to the institution)? Or are there certain limited categories of harm or wrongdoing that should simply disqualify one from having something named in one's honor at the University of Richmond? Is it valid to judge historical figures by contemporary norms, or should they be judged by the standards and prevailing moral norms of their day? What is the role of namings in preserving institutional history? Must names be considered permanent or might they evolve with time and circumstances, as the name of the institution itself has?

The preliminary recommendation of the Commission to issues outlined in the final bullet above is represented in Principle 6 below. Ultimately, the majority of Commission members felt that direct involvement in enslavement and the promotion of segregation should disqualify one from being honored with a naming at the University. With respect to other forms of serious wrongdoing that might merit consideration of removal of a name, Principle 7 allows for a broader evaluation that considers the wrongdoing in relation to a person's overall life, work, and legacy. The primary reason many Commission members feel such a holistic evaluation is not applicable in the case of enslavement in particular, is that there is no way of assessing the totality of the harm to those enslaved, and thus that harm cannot be accurately weighed today. In addition, historic norms that allowed slavery to persist were not universally supported at the time. As members of the University community observed, there were always individuals who understood that enslavement and racial oppression were wrong and who worked toward abolition and equality.

We have taken especially seriously our charge to consider the conditions under which the University might decide to remove an existing name. The threshold for a decision to remove a name must be extremely high and the circumstances rare. We have undertaken our work with humility; a profound sense

of gratitude for those whose work and support made possible the University we know today; empathy for both those who are pained by the University's honoring of individuals who sought to uphold enslavement or to promote racial oppression and those who feel that the exceptional contributions of some of these individuals to the University's history warrant ongoing recognition; and an awareness that all who feel passionately about these issues—no matter their view—are motivated by a deep love for the University and all it has meant in their lives.

As indicated above, we encountered ongoing discord in the University community related to the names of Ryland Hall and Mitchell-Freeman Hall, as well as concern that the Commission was created as a stalling tactic to delay action on those names. Accordingly, we urge the Board of Trustees to act as swiftly as possible to resolve the question of the Ryland and Freeman names, ideally making a final decision on those names in April, when it considers the final principles the Commission recommends.

Commission members brought varying backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to our work. We did not always agree. We did, however, seek in our work to act with respect for one another, respect for all members of the University community and their views, appreciation for the University's past and hope for its future accomplishments, and with the best interests of the institution and its students always in mind. We also recognize that what we have proposed will be strengthened by discussion and deliberation with the University community. It is our hope that we can ultimately arrive together at principles that all can accept as thoughtful, rigorous, befitting an academic community, and in the best interest of the University and its students, even if the principles may sometimes yield results with which we disagree or that we find personally disappointing.

Finally, we have sought to develop principles that will serve the University well both in addressing current challenges and into the future. At the same time, we also recognize that no matter how apt these principles are for our time and place, our successors in the University community will and should revisit and revise these principles to suit the needs of their times.

Draft Recommendations

Based on the information gathered through the processes outlined above, and consistent with the Commission's commitment to ensuring a transparent and inclusive process, the Commission has developed two sets of draft recommendations for discussion with the University community:

1. [Proposed principles](#) to provide consistent guidance for future decisions related to namings and removal of/modification to names, across applications of names (e.g., buildings, professorships, programs, etc.);
2. A [proposed process](#) by which requests may be made for consideration of removal of names ("de-naming") and by which the principles would be applied to specific cases.

We look forward to the community's feedback in the coming weeks. We invite input via the [Contact the Commission](#) portal. As we have indicated, if particular groups would be interested in meeting with members of the Commission to provide feedback, we will ensure opportunities. It is also important to note that as part of its consultative process during the comment period, the Commission will confer with the University's administration to ensure that the final principles and procedures reflect appropriate consideration of any legal or other institutional obligations that may affect decisions about namings.

The comment period will continue through March 21. The Commission will then take time to consider the input received, make any necessary adjustments to the recommendations, and submit its final recommendations to President Hallock and the Board by mid-April in order to allow the Board sufficient time to consider and act on the recommendations before the end of the academic year.

II. Draft Principles

1. Naming a building, professorship, program, or other entity is one of the highest and most visible honors the University can bestow. Those honored with a naming should uphold and advance the University's [mission](#), values, and aspirations. The University should undertake appropriate due diligence about a potential namesake prior to conferring the honor of naming to ensure that the namesake represents the University's values and a commitment to its educational mission.
2. The array of namings at the University should represent and reflect the diversity of the institution's full history and the community we are today.
3. The University, through its Board of Trustees, also reserves the right to remove names, subject to existing legal obligations associated with the name.
4. The University must have a clear and transparent process for its naming decisions and for consideration and resolution of questions relating to the removal of names ("de-naming"). The same principles/criteria should apply to all decisions relating to naming, de-naming, and re-naming, whether the object named is a building, space, professorship, scholarship fund, or other entity.
5. Reasons for which the University might confer a naming in honor of an individual or entity include the following:
 - a. To express the values of the institution;
 - b. To recognize especially meaningful contributions to the life of the University, including through teaching, research, and scholarship;
 - c. To recognize major milestones in the University's development and progress;
 - d. To recognize significant philanthropic support of an institutional priority to advance the University's excellence;
 - e. To recognize excellence in a particular field especially germane to the University and the entity named.

The University may choose to employ descriptive, conceptual, geographic, or otherwise generic names rather than names of an individual person.

6. No building, program, professorship, or other entity at the University should be named for a person who directly engaged in the trafficking and/or enslavement of others or openly advocated for the enslavement of people. Documented evidence of the promotion of segregation; promotion of eugenics; oppression on the basis of race; or other forms of racial discrimination shall also disqualify a person or entity from being honored with a naming at the University.
7. In considering questions of de-naming in relation to other serious wrongdoing (for example, other forms of oppression and discrimination, such as discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or ability), the following should be considered:
 - a. The specific evidence for and the nature, scope, and effects of the wrongdoing;
 - b. The overall life, contributions, and legacy of the namesake. The presumption against re-naming is weaker when an individual's repugnant or offensive behavior is a central part of his or her legacy;

University of Richmond Values

Student Growth

*Pursuit of
Knowledge*

*Inclusivity and
Equity*

*Diversity and
Educational
Opportunity*

*Ethical
Engagement*

*Responsible
Stewardship*

- c. Whether the namesake expressed regret and made restitution for the wrongdoing;
 - d. The social and political context in which the wrongdoing occurred, though that context alone does not necessarily justify an ongoing commitment by the University to retain a name;
 - e. The context in which the original naming occurred, the University's rationale for conferring the honor, and the degree to which the wrongdoing was known and considered at that time.
8. If the primary use of a named facility changes, or the facility undergoes renovation so extensive that it constitutes reconstruction, the University may rename the facility or space. If a named facility is demolished, the University is not obligated to transfer the name to another facility or entity.
9. The University's educational mission requires specific action to preserve the historical record when the institution engages the question of potential removal of a name (particularly in relation to Principles 6, 7, and 8 above):
- a. In instances in which a decision is made to remove a name for any reason, an explanation of the original name and the reasons for its removal should be preserved and accessible;
 - b. In instances in which a decision is made to retain a name, an account of the (reasonable) concerns that arose with respect to the name, the information considered, and the rationale for the decision to retain the name should be preserved and accessible.
10. The University's Board of Trustees retains ultimate authority for decisions about namings, de-namings, and re-namings at the University, guided by these principles and informed by appropriate due diligence (including, where applicable rigorous historical research) and the recommendations of the Name Review Advisory Committee.³

III. Draft Procedures for the Application of the Principles to Questions of Possible Name Removal

The Commission recommends that a standing institutional advisory committee be established to consider questions of name removal and to make a recommendation to the University's President and Board of Trustees, which has final authority for all decisions about removal of names.

Additional specific recommendations pertaining to the committee and procedures for considering removal of a name follow.

Name, Composition, and Charge of Committee

The committee should be given a name that appropriately reflects its work, such as the Name Review Advisory Committee. The committee should include representation from the University's students, faculty, staff, senior administration, alumni, and Trustees, who should bring to the committee's work a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. The composition of the committee should be appropriately balanced, so that no constituent group holds disproportionate representation. Either through appointed members, *ex officio* members, or advisors, the committee should also include essential administrative and scholarly expertise. Committee members will be appointed by the University President for specific terms. The President will also appoint the Committee's Chair and establish the Chair's term. A formal charter and procedures for the committee should be developed by the President and Board of Trustees and shared with the University community.

³ This committee is described more fully in the Draft Recommendations for the Application of the Principles to Questions of Possible Name Removal below.

Procedure to Request Consideration of Name Removal

Any member of the University community (student, faculty, staff, alum) may make a formal request to the committee for consideration of removal of a name for reasons consistent with the established principles. The request should be submitted to the Secretary to the Board of Trustees and should include the name and affiliation of the person or group making the request; the naming that is the focus of the request; sufficient specific explanation of the nature of the concern; reference to sources from which the information about/evidence for the concern is drawn; and the applicability of the principles to the specific case.

The Secretary will forward all completed formal requests for consideration of removal of a name to the President and the Board of Trustees for information, and to the committee for consideration. The committee, in consultation with the President, will determine within 30 days if a request warrants action (i.e., study of the name and circumstances and a recommendation to the Board about whether the name should be removed). If needed, the committee may request additional information from the individual or group that submitted the request (“Requestor”) prior to making a determination about whether the request merits action. If multiple requests pertaining to the same name(s) are received, the committee may consolidate those requests.

The committee’s determination about whether the request will be accepted for action, and the rationale for that determination, will be communicated to the President; the Board of Trustees; the Requestor; the namesake or his or her heir (if identifiable); any affected University administrative unit or academic department and Dean. To facilitate transparency, appropriate information about requests to the committee will be made available to the University community (see “Records” below).

Committee Procedures for Evaluating and Making a Recommendation with Respect to Potential Removal of Names

The committee’s work will be guided by the principles established to inform decisions about naming, removal of names, and re-naming.

The committee will work as expeditiously as possible and should normally be expected to forward its recommendations to the President and Board within one calendar year of a request being made. If multiple matters are before the committee in any given year, the committee will determine and communicate to the University community the sequence and timeframe in which the matters will be addressed.

In deliberating and formulating a recommendation about whether a name should be removed, the committee should initiate and consider appropriate research, as well as the expert opinions of relevant scholars in the University community or others with important relevant knowledge in the matter, including knowledge of the namesake’s actions or the original circumstances of the naming. The namesake or his or her heir will also be given the opportunity to provide information for the committee’s consideration.

The committee will receive necessary staff support and research support in its work. The committee will also seek from the relevant University offices an opinion about any legal or contractual obligations or considerations relevant to the potential removal of a specific name. The committee may also solicit additional information from the Requestor or any University office. As the committee formulates its recommendation, it should also consider the relevant precedents of its previous decisions.

The committee should provide periodic public updates on its progress and invite the perspectives of members of the University community as part of its deliberations.

The committee will prepare and forward to the Board a full report, including its recommendation, rationale (with explicit reference to the application of the relevant principles and the strength of the evidence), and summary of information considered, including a summary of comments received from members of the University community and any opinion provided by the University's administration about any legal or contractual obligations or considerations relevant to the potential removal of the specific name. The committee may elect to recommend removal of a name, retention of a name, or some other remedy. A two-thirds affirmative vote of the committee should be required for the committee to advance a recommendation of name removal to the Board of Trustees. If the committee's recommendation is not supported by a unanimous vote of the committee, the report should include reasons for the minority view. The report and recommendations will be made available to the University community.

Procedures for Board Consideration of Committee Recommendations

Upon receiving a recommendation from the committee, the Board will consider and act on that recommendation as expeditiously as possible. The Board will ordinarily consider the recommendation at its next regular meeting, provided that the report and recommendation are received at least 30 days prior to that meeting. The Board may, in its discretion, request additional information from the committee prior to making a decision. The Board may accept, reject, or modify the committee's recommendation. The Board's decision in all cases is final, absent the discovery of significant additional information or changes in circumstances that could alter the committee's original recommendation or the Board's decision.

The Board will communicate its decision on the committee's recommendation within one week of the meeting at which the matter is considered. The decision will be communicated to: the committee, the namesake or heir, the affected department/programs, and the University community.

The President or his/her designee will be responsible for carrying out the decision, including the removal of the name; assignment of a temporary name and/or initiation of the process to select a new name; and, in the case of buildings, creation of permanent educational information (e.g., plaque, webpage) about the building's previous namesake and the decision to remove the name. In cases in which a name is retained, the creation of such permanent educational information may also be appropriate.

Records

The Secretary's Office should maintain a website making available the policies and procedures for consideration of name removal and the committee's charge and membership. The website should also record requests for consideration of removing names that have been brought to the committee and their status; the committee's reports and recommendations to the Board; and a record of the Board's final decisions, the rationale for those decisions, and related communications to the University community. The original documentation of the committee's work will be maintained by the Secretary, who may deposit the records in the University archives.