

(November 2022)

Proposed Process for Considering Petitions to Change Names or Commemoratives on Trinity College's Campus

Preface

Placing the name on a campus building or facility, indoor or outdoor space, a professorship, or other activity or program or commemorative objects on campus is a proper and natural prerogative of the Board of Trustees. Changing names and/or commemoratives also is the prerogative of the board.

Naming decisions by the Board of Trustees are among its fiduciary responsibilities focused on the long-term interests, prosperity, and success of the college and must be understood in that context. In many cases, a naming decision is properly and naturally concerned with attracting, maintaining, recognizing, and expressing appreciation for philanthropy that supports Trinity. Names also are sometimes selected to recognize service or intangible contributions to the college by faculty, staff, alumni, students, or others. Therefore, the Board of Trustees can initiate this process or provide names at its discretion, with notification to the Trinity community.

Naming decisions are made primarily with reference to Trinity and its community. Persons not widely known or accepted broadly in our city, state, or nation or known but not considered important or significant may nonetheless merit distinction among us, in our long history.

A proposal to remove a name or change a commemorative, the efforts to develop support for or to oppose such a proposal, and all aspects of official consideration of and deciding upon such a proposal should be viewed as learning opportunities and opportunities to bridge our past, present, and future. As such, a proposal should be conducted in a scholarly manner and should promote knowledge and understanding about the people, times, or other factors involved. It is both practical and consistent with the liberal arts education mission for the Board of Trustees to establish a formal process for accepting a petition for consideration.

If the Board of Trustees accepts a petition to consider a change in name or commemoration, it is recommended that a primary consideration in this decision be whether the name is a source of material harm to Trinity and its mission, vision, and values in the present day. This approach is healthy and more easily managed than attempting to stand in the shoes of a long-ago board evaluating the totality of the life of someone not present and not able to speak for themselves.

Finally, the names by which buildings and other entities are known are both part of Trinity's history and an important component of the legacy shared by many generations of students, faculty, alumni, staff, and friends of the college. Educating the Trinity community about our names, our history, and how we commemorate the present and past is a meaningful exercise.

Introduction

A member of the Trinity College community believing that the Board of Trustees should change a name for a campus building or facility, indoor or outdoor space, a professorship, or other activity or program or a commemorative should be permitted to submit a formal petition demonstrating a sound case and shared concern and support from a cross section of the college community. The Board of Trustees designates the Committee on Named Facilities and Commemoratives, led by the dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs, as the group to receive, consider, and vet proposals. The committee will seek input from the community and determine whether to ask the president to submit the qualifying petition to the board.

Petitions should be conceived and presented in a manner rooted in the traditions and values of liberal arts education and further free expression. Petitions should constructively further a deeper and broader understanding of Trinity and its history and the person, family, or entity whose name is proposed to be removed.

Petitions and the processes by which they arise can be a form of co-curricular activity and should be conducted in a way that complements Trinity's higher education mission. Petitions should clearly, thoroughly, honestly, and accurately state the case. A qualifying petition should consider the matter and act upon it in a manner that is punctilious, well-researched, and transparent.

Procedures for considering and acting upon a qualifying petition should be designed to maximize opportunities for informed participation by students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others as appropriate.

The Petition Process

The following persons are eligible to initiate and/or sign a formal petition asking the Board of Trustees to remove a name: current undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

To qualify for consideration, a petition should be complete and thorough; that is, the text of the petition itself or supporting material should be made available to all signers, in advance, and must include some research and advocacy.

A petition must explain in thorough and accurate detail the rationale for the petition, along with all documentation reasonably available to the petitioner(s), as appropriate, that supports the case made.

A petition and its accompanying documentation should solicit, and, as appropriate, incorporate the views of the person at issue, if living. If that person is deceased, the views of the closest surviving family members of the person at issue should be sought and incorporated. Documentation included with a petition should summarize efforts to locate and seek input from the person at issue or family members, as relevant.

Member(s) of the Trinity community sponsoring and submitting to the Committee on Named Facilities and Commemoratives a petition bear responsibility for the accuracy, thoroughness, and academic integrity of the petition and supporting documentation. The college's academic ethics standards for student work should apply to a petition (or faculty standards if a professor[s] sponsors and submits a petition.)

To qualify for consideration, a petition should be supported by a cross-section of the Trinity community. Qualifying petitions should indicate the affiliation of any supporters and bear the signatures, printed names, campus addresses in the cases of students and faculty, and email addresses or cell phone numbers of all signers. Undergraduates and graduate student signers also must indicate expected year of graduation. Alumni signers must indicate the year they graduated.

To qualify for consideration, a petition must be signed by at least 25 members of the Trinity College community from at least two, but preferably three, different constituent groups: current undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, or alumni.

Petition Review Process

A qualifying petition should be submitted in writing to the dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs and be received on a day that classes are in session. The petitioner can check with that office to request the status of the petition.

The first step would be to submit the petition to the Committee on Named Facilities and Commemoratives, chaired by the dean of the faculty. The committee, with the support of the college archivist and other campus resources deemed necessary, should determine within 60 days of receipt whether the petition, on its face, is complete as described in this policy, including that it states a case clearly and completely.

If the committee determines a petition is complete as described by the policy, the committee can request that the president engage two or three independent scholars with expertise in the pertinent persons, era, or general topics to prepare an analysis of allegations, concerns, or questions raised by the petition and supporting material and any other sources deemed relevant and worthy by the independent scholars.

If the committee determines a petition is not complete as described by the policy, it is recommended that petition sponsors be informed of the deficiencies of the petition and allowed sufficient time to cure such deficiencies and one opportunity to resubmit a qualifying petition.

Independent scholars appointed by the president should not be graduates of Trinity or have ever been employed by Trinity or served on its Board of Trustees. They should not have material conflicts of interest regarding a Trinity trustee or employee or the subject matter. If deemed constructive to the process, the president may keep confidential the names of the independent historians though not their final written work product.

The independent scholars should be requested to complete their work within six months of being engaged.

No longer than 60 days after receiving final reports from the independent scholars, the committee should submit to the Trinity community, by means of a dedicated website and other means it might select, a request for input from the Trinity community on the case made by the petition, the work of the independent scholars, and any other relevant material. Tools such as GroupMind software can facilitate online input from our community. The time period for Trinity community input should be at least 60 days but should not begin or conclude while classes are not in session.

The committee can then request that the president submit the petition and accompanying materials to the Board of Trustees.

Board of Trustees Decision Process

The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees should determine which subcommittee of the board should review and assess the merits of the petition before bringing the petition to the full board. Within no more than 60 days after the close of the community input phase, the designated subcommittee of the Board of Trustees should begin its review and decision process, which should conclude within three months, although it may be extended at the discretion of the chair. Any decision should be issued when classes are in session.

The Board of Trustees should announce any decision to not remove a name, to remove a name, or to take some other action concerning the name of a campus building or facility, indoor or outdoor space, a professorship, or other activity or program or commemorative to the Trinity community and should provide transparency into the process and reasoning behind the decision.

Consistent with our view that a discussion about removing a name should be conducted in a manner that complements the liberal arts education mission of Trinity, we further suggest that the board's decision-making process aim to embody key values of a Trinity liberal arts education, including:

- Rigorous and thorough academic inquiry;
- Support of the current mission, vision, and values of the college;
- Fair and civil discourse, which is respectful of dissenting viewpoints and others outside the mainstream.

Finally, the Board of Trustees retains the prerogative to name, rename, or commemorate entities on campus in a fashion that it deems fair, appropriate, and in the best interest of the college.