Faculty of Arts and Sciences Process for Considering Requests for Denaming

May 2022

On December 9, 2021, President Bacow shared the final report of the Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming with the Harvard community. The report sets out principles and a framework for considering cases in which Harvard might contemplate removing an individual’s name from a space, program, or other entity “based on the perception that a namesake’s actions or beliefs were ‘abhorrent’ in the context of current values.” The full report is available online.

President Bacow acknowledged that consideration of the removal of a name ("denaming requests") will involve a balance of local and central University responsibility and asked Schools to develop processes to consider such requests. The following describes the process for considering these requests in the FAS. It will undergo review at the end of three years, in Spring 2025.

This process governs denaming requests initiated by eligible community members. It does not apply to FAS or University-initiated decisions to name or rename spaces or programs in the ordinary course of managing the institution. Similarly, this process does not pertain to the naming of buildings, programs, or other entities; suggestions for new names will not be reviewed under this process.

A. Guiding Principles

The FAS process follows these guiding principles:

1) As 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 be the end product of deep examination and learning, one that reflects reason, persuasion, and discussion.
3) Judgment about whether to undertake a review should rest primarily on the completeness of the submission rather than the number of identified proponents.
4) The process should encourage generous listening and substantive discussion, motivated by care 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 and through the lens of reckoning and not forgetting.
6) Action on a request does not depend on achieving community consensus, but there is an expectation that any request that moves forward to further review will be subject to an inclusive process, broadly soliciting views from our community.
B. The Request

Eligibility to submit a request

Anyone who is a current FAS affiliate (faculty, student, staff, or researcher) at the time the request is submitted, inclusive of SEAS, with a direct connection to the entity that is subject to the denaming request is eligible to submit a denaming request to the FAS. Former FAS affiliates, including emeriti faculty, are not eligible. While in certain circumstances FAS may solicit input from alumni, alumni cannot initiate a denaming request in the FAS.

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 building or other 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.

Denaming requests are submitted to the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty.

C. The Initial Administrative and Legal Review

Submissions of denaming requests will be accepted once per term, in October and March. The Office of the Secretary will publish the submission deadlines annually, and information about how to submit a request will be available on the website of the Office of the Secretary.

The Secretary will convey any submission to the Docket Committee of the FAS Faculty Council for an initial administrative review, to be conducted by the elected members of such
committee, and to the Office of the General Counsel for advice about whether there are legal constraints that may inform the range of actions that are possible.

The initial administrative review will address the following:

1) whether the request comes from an individual with standing (current FAS affiliate with connection to entity); and
2) whether the request is complete (i.e. that it addresses all six required questions outlined above and demonstrates substantial research and analysis); and
3) whether the request pertains to a name that has not been considered through this process in the last 5 years. A denaming request will not be reconsidered for a period of 5 years from the issuance of the recommendation of the review committee, except in extraordinary circumstances when significant and consequential new information comes to light.

There are two possible outcomes of the initial administrative review:

1) The request is moved forward to further review, as described below; or
2) The request does not move forward to further review because the requestor is ineligible, the request is not complete, and/or the request pertains to a name that has been considered within the past 5 years.

The administrative review does not consider the merits of the request.

D. The Process for Further Review

After the Docket Committee completes the initial administrative review of the request, they will submit a recommendation to the FAS Dean to either (1) move the request forward to further review or (2) not move the request forward.

For requests recommended for further review, the FAS Dean will consult with the President’s Office to determine whether the review will be undertaken in collaboration with the University or will proceed within FAS.

The Secretary notifies petitioners of the status of their request; in cases when requests do not move forward to further review, the petitioner will receive an explanation for this decision from the Docket Committee. If the request did not succeed for reasons of completeness, the petitioner may revise and resubmit the request for consideration at the next opportunity for submission of requests.

The decision to proceed to further review does not bind FAS or 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 FAS Dean’s flexibility to undertake reviews in the order that makes sense and as resources allow.
Further review within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences will be conducted by a review committee that may include members from Harvard Library, the FAS Office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging, FAS Faculty Council, the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty, and current faculty, staff, and students, as the FAS Dean deems appropriate to the particular request. (The review committee will be provided legal advice and counsel by a member of the Office of General Counsel and will receive support from other offices as needed.)

The review committee will conduct inclusive outreach regarding the request as part of the review. This outreach should include a public comment period for the Harvard community and engagement of a broad range of campus stakeholders. If the review committee decides to seek alumni views, that outreach will be facilitated by the Harvard Office of Alumni Affairs. The review committee should consider whether to hold “live” events (either on Zoom or in person) and/or solicit written submissions.

The charge of the review committee is to evaluate the merits of the requests along the six areas of consideration required in the request submission. To fully consider the issues, the review committee may need to gather additional information.

At the end of the review process, the review committee will make a recommendation to the FAS Dean to (1) take no action, (2) dename, or (3) keep the name but contextualize it. (It should be noted that a denaming recommendation may also include a recommendation for contextualizing efforts.) The review committee’s report to the FAS Dean should include their recommended action, their reasoning, and a description of the outreach and consultation they conducted.

As stated above, any consideration of a new name is undertaken in a separate process and at the discretion of the FAS Dean.

E. Records of the Process

Records related to denaming requests and decisions will be maintained in perpetuity. The records will be maintained by the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty until such time when the Secretary deposits them with the University Archives.