FAS Process for Considering Requests for Denaming

Introduction

In December 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.” In the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, those cases will be considered using the following denaming process, which designates eligibility to submit a request, what requests must include, and how requests will be evaluated.

N.B. This process governs the consideration of requests for removing a name from a space, program, or other entity. It does not apply to FAS- or University-initiated decisions to name or re-name 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.

Guiding Principles

The FAS denaming process follows these guiding principles:

- As an academic institution dedicated to research and teaching, all efforts should be grounded in historical inquiry and in careful deliberation and investigation.
- The decision to remove a name should be the end product of deep examination and learning, one that reflects reason, persuasion, and discussion.
- Judgment about whether to undertake a review should rest primarily on the completeness of the submitted request rather than the number of identified proponents.
- 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.
- The process should approach our history with humility and through the lens of reckoning and not forgetting.
- Action on a request does not depend on achieving community consensus, but there is an expectation that any request that moves forward to review will be subject to an inclusive process, broadly soliciting views from our community.

Eligibility to Submit a Request

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

Preparing a Request

A denaming request must address all of the following points, as outlined in the report of the Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming:

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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.

Submitting a Request

The deadlines for denaming requests during the 2023–2024 academic year will be October 2, 2023, and March 4, 2024. Requests should be submitted to the Secretary of the Faculty at seclas@fas.harvard.edu.
The Secretary will convey these submitted requests to the elected members of the Docket Committee of the FAS Faculty Council for an initial administrative review 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. If the Docket Committee recommends to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences that the request should move forward for further review and if the Dean, in consultation with the President, determines that the review should proceed within the FAS (as opposed to in collaboration with the University), the Dean will appoint a review committee. The timetable for these reviews will be flexible. At the end of the review process, the review committee will make a recommendation to the Dean. A denaming request will not be reconsidered for a period of five years from the issuance of the recommendation of the review committee, except in extraordinary circumstances when significant and consequential new information comes to light.

Further information is available in the full version of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Process for Considering Requests for Denaming.