

On Naming and Renaming Buildings at the University of St. Thomas

The University has a [policy](#) for naming its “assets” (buildings, programs, spaces, etc.). A primary criterion is that the “Naming...is consistent with the mission, convictions and vision of St. Thomas.” Assets are named:

1. To honor a person/persons/organization for their “extraordinary contributions or service to St. Thomas” or their “meritorious qualities” consistent with our mission,
2. To recognize a person/persons/organization for their philanthropic generosity to the University.

The policy recognizes that the University can remove or change the name of an asset when it “becomes aware of past conduct by the donor or honoree, that reflects unfavorably upon the good name, goodwill, reputation or image of St. Thomas.”

Over the past several years many Catholic universities, and other universities, have gone through the painful process of renaming assets as they became aware of past conduct by a donor or honoree. In Catholic institutions the issues have been the owning and selling slaves, racist statements, sexual abuse, and the mishandling of sexual abuse cases. Most of these institutions did not have a policy to address the process of reconsidering, reviewing, and the possible renaming of assets when the challenges arose. President Julie Sullivan created the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming to consider amending the current University policy on naming to create a coherent set of principles in case the need arises.

The charge of the Committee is as follows:

To articulate a set of principles that can guide the University of St. Thomas in decisions about whether to remove a historical name from a building or other prominent structure or space on campus and/or take other related actions to address the naming.

In light of that charge and compelled by the [University’s mission and convictions](#), the Committee is organizing a series of listening sessions to seek input from a broad range of stakeholders and community members. Renaming is a complex and significant process that requires careful consideration of the range of available information. The University begins with a presumption of retaining an existing name and recognizes that only under extraordinary circumstances will renaming be undertaken. While each case will be different, the University believes it is critical to develop a set of principles to guide each fact-specific inquiry.

The purpose of the listening sessions is to learn from the experiences and research of others, gain additional perspectives and insights, and surface issues and concerns related to renaming assets. Ultimately, the Committee will utilize the information it learns during the listening sessions to inform the process of generating a list of principles that can serve as a workable framework for future renaming decisions. Note that the work of this Committee is drafting over-arching principles to guide the renaming process, not to address any specific cases.

As such, the Committee encourages listening session participants to think broadly, guided in part by the following questions:

- What kinds of issues should cause the University to **consider** renaming an asset?
- What specific factors should be examined when determining whether to rename or pursue an alternate option? How should those factors be weighted or considered relative to one another?
- What actions, in addition to or separate from renaming, should be considered on a sustained/systemic level to address the concern or issue (e.g. reparations, reconciliatory acts)?
- What should the University's process for considering renaming entail?
- How does/should this process reflect the University's mission and convictions?

St. Thomas community members and other stakeholders should know that any views expressed by individuals within listening sessions will not affect their relationship with the institution or its leadership. The committee welcomes open and honest responses to the questions above.

For these listening sessions, the committee's purpose will truly be to listen rather than to comment or answer questions for which we do not yet have answers. We have made no recommendations and are holding these listening sessions at an early stage in our process. We will try to ensure that at least one of the co-chairs and a critical mass of the committee members are present. We are also creating a space for written submissions, which will not be made public but will be distributed to all members of the committee.