



To: University of Oregon Board of Trustees
From: Michael H. Schill, President
Re: The Denaming of Deady Hall
Date: June 10, 2020

I look forward to the Board of Trustees holding a meeting before the end of June to take up the recommendation that we rename Deady Hall. I offer these thoughts for your consideration and am happy to discuss the matter further with any of you as that meeting approaches.

The recent, tragic death of George Floyd at the hands of white policemen, coming soon after a spate of other senseless murders of black men and women, has refocused our attention on the racism that affects our black community. Racial disparities affect virtually all aspects of American life, from infant mortality rates, access to healthcare, residential and educational opportunities, incarceration rates, employment, and life expectancy. The recent COVID-19 pandemic makes clear to all of us once again the disproportionate burden facing our communities of color as reflected in rates of illness and death. The protests in cities throughout the nation, including in Eugene, show the pain many are feeling and the desire for us to be a nation that must do more, that must do better and that must adopt new approaches to equity.

Almost five years ago, following the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the Black Student Task Force presented a series of 13 demands to me, which included the denaming of Deady and Dunn Halls. Following the preparation and dissemination of a detailed report by three eminent historians on Matthew Deady and Frederick Dunn and a remarkable period of consultation with the entire community that elicited over 1,000 written comments, I recommended to the Board of Trustees that it take the name off Dunn Hall. I did not recommend denaming Deady Hall. Subsequently, the board voted unanimously to dename Dunn Hall and later, after a consultative process, to rename the building in honor of DeNorval Unthank, Jr., a distinguished black alumnus and prominent architect.

Three and one-half years later, the board will now revisit the question of the naming of Deady Hall. For the reasons set forth in this memorandum, I recommend that the name be removed.

The Principles of Denaming

In a communication to the community dated September 1, 2016 with respect to Dunn and Deady Halls, I stated a set of principles that would guide my decision about whether to recommend to the Board of Trustees that a building be denamed. Those principles were as follows:

- Bigotry and racism have no place in our society or our university. Each of us must value each other based on individual merit and not the color of our skin, the social status of our parents, our gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or physical or mental ability.



- It is vital that all students at the University of Oregon feel valued and included as part of this institution. This is true for every member of our community, but particular attention needs to be paid to members of groups who often feel isolated and alienated as a result of their chronic underrepresentation on campus and the legacy of racism in this state and nation.
- We must be careful not to obscure our history regardless of whether we like what we find when we study it. The only way we can understand our present and prevent injustice from repeating itself is to study our history and learn from our past.
- The process of naming or denaming a building has symbolic value. But symbols are less important than actions that affect the material circumstances of members of our community.
- Naming a building and denaming a building are not identical actions and should be governed by separate decision-making processes and considerations.
- Naming a building honors an individual either for exceptional contributions to the university and our society or for exceptional generosity. While extremely meaningful, naming a building occurs regularly and is usually done contemporaneously with, or shortly after, the life of the person for whom a building is named. The very purpose of naming is to establish a durable honor that stands the test of time.
- Denaming a building, on the other hand, is an extraordinary event and should only occur in very limited circumstances. Many decades may have passed since the person whose name is on a building was alive, and information will typically be less complete than in a naming decision. Contemporary decision-makers will often be limited in their ability to evaluate the behavior of people who lived in circumstances and with cultural mores very different from our own. Denaming is also an act associated with ignominy and the destruction of reputation. We should normally be careful when we do this, particularly because the person involved will seldom be available to defend himself or herself.
- Finally, denaming threatens to obscure history and hide the ugliness of our past, which is contrary to our institution's values of promoting lifelong learning and sharing knowledge. Therefore, the presumption should be against denaming a building except in extraordinarily egregious circumstances.

In my January 25, 2017 decision not to recommend the denaming of Deady Hall I reasoned that, although Deady “held racist views which I find abhorrent and contrary to the principles of our university,” historians found he had undergone a “metamorphosis” as evidenced by his support of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth



Amendments after the Civil War and acts to protect the rights of Chinese immigrants. Ultimately, I determined that heinous nature of Deady's views on race, his other "positive acts" and his noteworthy historical importance to the nation, state, and university were of such distinction that it did not merit overturning the presumption against taking his name off the building. You can read my [entire recommendation on here](#).

What has changed since then to cause me to reverse my original decision? Everything and unfortunately very little. The repeated and senseless murders George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Laquan McDonald – just to name a few – have pushed us over a tipping point. In addition, the accelerating level of racial inequality in our society and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, met with indifference by some of our nation's leaders, have all raised the cost of silence. As our own Trustee Andrew Colas so eloquently stated, if Deady were alive today, then he would surely understand "the need to step aside and let somebody else's name be on that building for the sake of our university."

In my 2016 statement of principles I wrote, "[i]t is vital that all students at the University of Oregon feel valued and included as part of this institution. This is true for every member of our community, but particular attention needs to be paid to members of groups who often feel isolated and alienated as a result of their chronic underrepresentation on campus and the legacy of racism in this state and nation." It is now apparent to me that, as long as Matthew Deady's name remains in a place of honor on our campus, our students of color will feel that they are not valued; that this institution is not *their* institution.

Trustee action to remove Matthew Deady's name from our oldest and arguably most prominent building will send a clear message to our black students as well as our entire community that racism has no place in our academic community and that their welfare, inclusion and success is central to our mission.

I am mindful of another principle that could be weakened by a vote of the board to remove Deady's name from Deady Hall—that we should learn from history and not cover it up. We all need to be reminded that racism is insidious because it is embedded not just within the villains of history but in many of us, even those of us who go on to do great things like found a university or become federal court judges. We need to make sure that future generations know who Matthew Deady was—a man who did great good for our state and our university, but a man who also supported causes and ideologies that were abhorrent. To achieve that goal, I will work with our faculty to create an appropriate learning experience on campus to describe Judge Deady and his legacy.

I am under no illusions that my decision to recommend denaming Deady Hall will be greeted with unanimous acclaim. People of good will may weigh the criteria differently from me and/or feel that my recommendation shows insufficient regard for the preservation of history as a vehicle for future generations to avoid the mistakes of the past. In my view, we should respect those views even if we disagree with them.

The denaming of Deady Hall is, I believe, necessary, but not sufficient. Our community needs to redouble our efforts to combat racism and promote equity. As an educational institution we must work hard to



understand the root causes of racism and lead in identifying solutions. But we must not forget that we have not accomplished all that we said we would do in response to the demands of the Black Student Task Force. We have opened a wonderful building to serve as our Black Cultural Center and hired its first director. But we must make sure our black students benefit from this investment. We began a black studies program, but that program continues to require further nurturing. We have hired new faculty of color but our retention efforts have been spotty. We have increased our enrollment of black students, but the numbers are still too low. Transformation sometimes takes years to successfully accomplish. But we will not be deterred; the time is ripe for change.