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SOCIAL CONCERNS AND EQUITY, ACCESS, AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEES STATEMENT ON BUILDING NAMES

Social Concerns and Equity, Access, and Diversity Committees Statement on Building Names

April 2, 2019

Statement on March 8, 2019 Board of Regents Discussion on Building Names

The University Senate’s Social Concerns Committee and Equity, Access, and Diversity Committee write this statement in response to the March 8, 2019 Board of Regents meeting, during which Professor Susanna Blumenthal and Dean John Coleman, co-chairs of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History, presented its findings. The committees believe the Board of Regents failed to address the findings of the report, choosing instead to challenge the soundness of its methodology and scholarship in a manner that does not uphold the guiding principles outlined in the Board of Regents Policy: *Mission Statement*. Furthermore, we believe that certain members of the Board allowed their concern for the reputations of the individuals in question to overshadow the harm done by their policies, as well as the values and wishes of the present-day University community.

Upholding our Guiding Principles

The University of Minnesota's three-part mission of teaching and learning, research and discovery, and outreach and public service is codified in the Board of Regents Policy: *Mission Statement*. That same policy includes a set of guiding principles that specify how the University community will create an environment that supports the execution of its mission:

Subd. 2. Guiding Principles. In all of its activities, the University strives to sustain an open exchange of ideas in an environment that:

- *embodies the values of academic freedom, responsibility, integrity, and cooperation;*
- *provides an atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance;*
- *assists individuals, institutions, and communities in responding to a continuously changing world;*
- *is conscious of and responsive to the needs of the many communities it is committed to serving;*
- *creates and supports partnerships within the University, with other educational systems and institutions, and with communities to achieve common goals; and*
- *inspires, sets high expectations for, and empowers the individuals within its community.*

The committees believe the discussion at the March 8, 2019 meeting of the Board of Regents failed to uphold the principles outlined in the Board of Regents policy. The suggestion by several Regents that the Task Force omitted key details and facts because of a predetermined agenda and/or an undisciplined approach to scholarship is contrary to those guiding principles.

We have serious concerns that the framing of the Task Force's efforts by several Regents will have a chilling effect on future dialogue that is necessary for a decision to be made on the recommendations. Rather than seeking to understand the complexity of the issues before them, some of the regents used their time to lecture Professor Blumenthal and Dean Coleman because the image they were expecting of racist and anti-semitic actors—that of, as one regent put it, “brown-shirted, white-hooded racists”—was absent from the report. The Task Force presented evidence of administrators making deliberate, institutionally-sanctioned choices that harmed University students and others. Focusing on the intent of the decision makers, rather than the impact on the affected populations, will allow discrimination and harassment to be protected in policies, quieter actions, and in countless decisions that are passively observed and never scrutinized, and is not conducive to creating an “atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance.”

Future discussions regarding the Task Force's work must be intentionally rooted in the principles outlined in the Board of Regents' policy that are most applicable to its work, and subsequent discourse must be held to their standard. We encourage the Regents to publicly acknowledge their responsibility to uphold these principles and state their commitment to carrying them out as they engage with members of the Task Force, the University community, and others on the recommendations.

We believe strongly in intense inquiry of scholarship and research; our ability to respectfully question one

another and our deeply held beliefs, and wrestle with these complicated issues is what allows the University of Minnesota to improve the human condition through the advancement of knowledge. The Board of Regents, like all members of the University, have a duty to inquire as they seek to understand the complexity of the recommendations before them, and to seek that understanding in a manner consistent with the guiding principles the Board itself has codified.

The Question Before Us

The question before the Board is whether the documented actions of four past University of Minnesota leaders to intentionally exclude, harass, and discriminate against University students is sufficient evidence to warrant the removal of their names from University buildings.

All leaders have the responsibility of being accountable for decisions that are the result of the actions of many people working under their direction. For example, a University president will get “credit” for a rise in graduation rates and carries the burden of increases in tuition that happened under their administration that can make at University education cost prohibitive; this tension is both the challenge and opportunity of leadership.

Individual names on key University assets carry the complexity of that legacy, and what we choose to call these assets is an intentional statement, not just about who we were and what we valued in the past, but who we are and what is important to us today. This fact is at the core of both the Task Force’s report and the Coleman Committee’s findings that laid the foundation for their work.

The task before the Board of Regents is rooted in this reality. The exhibit, report, and numerous statements by University governance groups and others affirm our belief that what we call things matters, because it sends a message about what is important to us as a community. Members of the Board did not engage this question in the March 8 discussion, but rather sought to challenge whether the decisions of the administrators in question were their own, or whether they were bound by unjust societal norms or the will of the Board of Regents at the time.

Members of the Board also implied that the standard of evidence in such an inquiry should be comparable to that of a court of law, and that it must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that these leaders were guilty of intentionally and maliciously harming University students, and that they did so independent of societal influence or pressure from their governing board. The Task Force was guided in its recommendation by the standard of evidence established by its predecessor, the Coleman Committee. To call for a different standard of evidence at this time ignores the work of that committee and is inappropriate to the task at hand: the charge of the task force was not to put the individuals on trial, but to “consider the ethical implications and aesthetic dimensions of contemplated uses of public spaces” and make recommendations regarding the four buildings in question based on this inquiry.

The committees urge the Board to re-focus their decision to the question before them. We expect them to wrestle with its implications and consequences, but they must not avoid it by questioning the motives, integrity, and intent of the Task Force, nor by seeking to change the standard of evidence under which it operated.

Approved:

Social Concerns Committee 4.1.2019

Equity, Access, and Diversity Committee 4.1.2019

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5

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