

Stanford University

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<https://campusnames.stanford.edu/renaming-principles/>

The relevant factors and how they should be weighed

1. *The centrality of the person's offensive behavior to his or her life as a whole.* The case for renaming is strongest where the honoree's offensive behavior is inextricably connected with his/her public persona.^[2] The case for renaming is weaker where the honoree's offensive behavior, though publicly known, is not a central or inextricable part of his/her public persona^[3]—especially when the honoree's behavior was conventional at the time of the behavior or the naming, and when, despite the objectionable behavior, other aspects of the person's life and work are especially praiseworthy.
2. *Relation to the University history.* The case for renaming is weaker when the honoree has had an important role in the University's history, and stronger when the honoree is a person without a significant connection to the university. (The concern about "erasing" the university's history—or any history, for that matter—is diminished to the extent that the relationship between Stanford's history and the honoree is incidental to begin with.)
3. *Harmful impact of the honoree's behavior.* The case for renaming is strongest when the morally repugnant behavior of an honoree for whom a feature is named has a significant negative effect on the core University missions of pursuing knowledge and receiving an education. Thus, the case for renaming is strong to the extent that retaining a name creates an environment that impairs the ability of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, or other characteristic protected by federal law or University policy, to participate fully and effectively in the missions of the University. The case is also strong to the extent that the morally repugnant behavior is connected to academic fraud or misconduct. In assessing the negative effects, the salience of the named feature for members of the Stanford community should be considered: The case for renaming is stronger where the name is prominent and encountered in a personal or intimate setting (e.g., a student residence) and generally is weaker where the feature is a relatively impersonal public place. As a result, when several features are named after the same

individual, the impact may be more harmful for some features than for others.

4. *Community identification with the feature.* The case for renaming is weaker where the feature is part of a valuable positive tradition or identification shared by a substantial number of Stanford community members, including alumni.
5. *Strength and clarity of the historical evidence.* The case for renaming is strongest when evidence of the honoree's wrongful behavior is clear and unambiguous, and is weakest when the evidence is scant or ambiguous.
6. *The University's prior consideration of the issues.* The case for renaming is stronger when the honoree's offensive conduct came to light after the naming, or where the issue was not the subject of prior deliberation. The case for renaming is weaker when the University addressed the behavior at the time of the naming and nonetheless decided to honor the person, or when the University has already considered and rejected a prior request for renaming. (The original decision deserves some degree of respect if the decision makers considered the competing interests, but not if they made the decision in ignorance of relevant facts,[\[4\]](#) or if they did not address the honoree's questionable behavior at the time of the naming.)
7. *Possibilities for mitigation.* In considering whether to retain or eliminate a name, the University should take into account whether the harm can be mitigated and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing the individual's wrongful behavior. When a feature is renamed or when the name is retained but the committee considers it a close question, the University should consider describing the history in a prominent way—at the feature, where practicable, or in some other suitable location.

Application of the Principles to Particular Cases

A committee considering a particular renaming case should submit a written opinion to the President applying these principles to the facts of the case. It is inevitable that the principles will be elaborated or even modified in the course of their application over time. The President may, at any time, reconvene a committee to reconsider the principles.