
President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions Town Hall

March 1, 2018

Black Student Union House, Multipurpose Room, 921 West Jefferson Street
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Panel Attendees:

Members

Renisha Gibbs- Chair
Maxine Jones
Miguel Hernandez
Robyn Jackson
Maxine Montgomery
Walter Moore
Lane Forsman
Chris Pinango

Support Staff

Elizabeth Hirst
Danni Staats

The meeting began at 3:15 p.m.

- Welcome

Renisha Gibbs welcomed the audience to the third of five town hall meetings being hosted by the President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions, and thanked everyone for coming out. She introduced herself as the Associate Vice President for Human Resources at Florida State University [FSU] and explained that her role was to serve as Chair of the panel, which was made up of a diverse group of students, staff, faculty and alumni. Ms. Gibbs then proceeded to make the additional statements as follows:

The charge before the panel is to listen, learn and, finally, make recommendations on policies concerning campus names, including buildings and statues. In order to get there, we are conscientiously and continually gathering facts and opinions to help us shape thoughtful ideas on how to best memorialize the university's historical and cultural past in a way that reflects our core values today.

Since the panel's first meeting in October, we've been educated on how other campuses are dealing with this same challenge. We've heard from archivists and legal experts to become better informed about relevant historical and legal facts. In addition, we've listened to passionate students and alumni who have shared their own research and sentiments about specific campus recognitions. As a result of the public input we've received so far, President Thrasher has asked us to initially focus on B.K. Roberts Hall, Francis Eppes Hall, and the Eppes statue.

The panel has been immersed in learning the details about these specific landmarks, and as such, we urge speakers today to help us broaden the conversation. More specifically, we'd like to hear your perspective in three significant areas:

- What impact have these landmarks had on you and/or others? What message do you and/or others think these landmarks are communicating?
- What role should university history play in our current day campus environment?
- What do you think should be done and why (i.e., suggestions for solutions)? Are there additional options besides removing and/or renaming?

In the interest of time, each speaker is typically limited to 5 minutes, however, considering time, we will let speakers go over if needed. If you don't have the opportunity to speak today we encourage you to provide your input online. You can find a link to the President's Advisory Panel website on FSU's homepage, where you can offer feedback and review other information. We are committed to ensuring the work we do is transparent, inclusive and respectful. We ask that all views expressed today be respected, consistent with our values as a university. Behavior contrary to those values will not be tolerated and we will not allow these proceedings today to be disrupted.

Ms. Gibbs concluded by thanking the attendees for being there and welcoming the first speaker to come forward.

- Public Comments

[Comment #1]

Name: Deanna Hughes

Affiliation: Staff

Statement: Up until what happened in Charlottesville, the names on campus were out of sight and out of mind. When you see names on a building and/or a statue on campus, you assume they are being recognized for something good about them, but when events like that happen, you realize the pain is real. We should consider that we are Seminoles, because the tribe allows us to appreciate their culture. Carla Gopher was the first female tribe member to graduate from FSU in 1996. There are different tribe member names inside of halls and recognition of originators like Miccosukee, but not much on her. I suggest adding something as a solution in value and progression. I don't think [Eppes's] name should be removed, tends to be removed from people's minds. The past can be painful and makes people uncomfortable, but being able to see where we come from is important. I think it would be a good idea to create something around the Eppes statue to see where we have progressed. I suggest looking into Eppes's lineage to see if you could find someone that contributed positively who might not be in our history books.

[Comment #2]

Name: Danni Vogt

Affiliation: Alumni

Statement: Realized being on committee is a lot of work, and a thankless task. Wanted to say thank you as an alumni, tax payer, and citizen of Florida. I recognize that you are trying to get all

of the information and not make a knee jerk reaction. Appreciate willingness to listen and get input, as I believe it's the way to arrive at a sound decision.

Ms. Gibbs indicated that she wouldn't speak for the rest of the panel, but agreed that they had put a lot of time into their work, and that she felt it was more than worthwhile. She stated that she was looking forward to gathering more information to ensure the panel could make the best recommendation to the President as possible.

Ms. Gibbs noted that she hadn't received any other comment cards from audience members requesting to speak, and opened the floor for any additional comments.

[No additional comments]

Ms. Gibbs commented that there was so much going on in society today and referencing some major events that had happened recently, opined that people's focus may have shifted to gun control, potentially affecting attendance at the meeting.

Mr. Vogt stated that he thought these buildings and the statue were a "niche" issue and not widely publicized. He added that despite his and the committee's effort to get people engaged, this issue was not as important for people.

Ms. Gibbs asserted that the panel had given the public a lot of different options to provide feedback, and shared that there had been a lot of comments at the other meetings thus far, in addition to feedback submitted on the panel's website.

Miguel Hernandez indicated that he had heard from students who were getting ready for midterms and working on assignments and suggested that attendance could also be affected based on the time of day, since classes get out at 3:15 on Thursdays. He added that he had spoken to a variety of student groups over the last few weeks, who are interested and engaged in the issue, but they have a lot on their plate. Mr. Hernandez commented, that for this reason, he was happy the panel was providing a lot of different options.

Ms. Hughes stated that she worked in Housing and that there had been a lot of dialog on the shooting, as a lot of students had been affected. She also mentioned that counseling services were available if needed.

Sandra Varry shared that as a University Archivist, she had conversations with her colleagues about these issues all the time and also with those in the heritage community, confirming that there was awareness.

Mr. Vogt stated that he was encouraged by Ms. Varry's comments.

Ms. Hughes asked if there are any classes students can take at FSU to learn about the negative parts of history, specifically in regards to the individuals represented on campus.

Ms. Gibbs responded that she wasn't aware of such a class, but that it was a good thought.

Mr. Hernandez added that the idea was something to share with the Undergraduate Studies Department, and that it might be something the panel could recommend.

Ms. Varry stated that there are a lot of Universities that teach 1 or 2 credit courses on campus history and that the University Archivists have discussed possibly offering this type of course.

Maxine Montgomery shared that Princeton University was engaging in these types of conversations and that they had constructed a website around that dialogue, so that people could come away with a better understanding of the history behind the university.

Ms. Gibbs noted that the University was working on new diversity website that will have a piece on university history, and specifically on the Seminole Tribe.

Ms. Varry suggested that this part of history might be something to integrate into legacy walk, and commented that doing so should be relatively easy, since the walk was already developed and could just be added to.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed that there were no additional comments, and stated that the panel would continue to wait for a little bit longer. She also noted that there was another session scheduled for Monday at the Student Life Center and on Tuesday at the Turnbull Conference Center.

[No additional comments submitted]

- Adjourn

Ms. Gibbs moved to adjourn the meeting and stated that the panel would be sending a reminder out to the campus tomorrow about the remaining two town hall meetings schedule for the following week. She also confirmed that the next Advisory Panel meeting would take place on Monday, March 19th and that she would be inviting special guests to present. Ms. Gibbs concluded by thanking everyone for their time.

The meeting ended at 4:00 p.m.