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## President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognition

October 30, 2017

Turnbull Conference Center, Room 103

11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

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### The meeting began at 11:00 a.m.

#### 1. Welcome

Renisha Gibbs, Associate Vice President for Human Resources, welcomed everyone and introduced herself as the Chair of the Panel.

Ms. Gibbs thanked the panel members for accepting the invitation to serve on the panel. She stated that the purpose of the panel was to examine and review current policies and procedures of the University on Namings and Recognition. She recognized the time commitment of panel members for the task of deliberation, discussion, attending meetings, and considering all information presented. She stated that in general panel members should speak openly and directly during discussions, while maintaining collegiality and respect.

#### 2. Panel Introductions

Renisha Gibbs- Chair of Panel

Rebecca Peterson- Support Staff

Miguel Hernandez- Staff member in Student Affairs

Lane Forsman- Student in the College of Social Work

Maxine Jones- Faculty member in History Department and Director of Women's Studies

Karen Bearor- Faculty member in Art History

Walter Moore- President of the Association of Retired faculty

Norman Anderson- Assistant Vice President for Research and Academic Affairs

Janet Stoner- Alumni of FSU

Maxine Montgomery- Professor and Associate Chair of English Department

Robyn Jackson- Associate General Counsel

Elizabeth Hirst- Support Staff

John Thrasher- President of Florida State University

[Via phone conference]

Kyle Doney- FSU alumni and member of the Seminole Tribe

Allisson Yu- FSU alumni

President Thrasher stated that he had been FSU's President for three years and felt it was the best job he has ever had and it will also be his last job. He stated that the University is doing amazing

and is now the 33<sup>rd</sup> University in the nation, with a great feeling of enthusiasm and support for FSU all over the country. He acknowledged his role on the panel would be to listen and learn from the panel rather than contribute to the discussions directly.

### 3. Panel Charge

President Thrasher thanked Panel Chair, Ms. Gibbs, noting she is the University's Chief Diversity Officer. He thanked the entire panel for accepting the significant responsibility of examining the history of Florida State University, including the people who helped shape the University's history. He stated the history can be seen in the names of FSU's buildings, in statues around campus, and in the art on walls. He stated that FSU's history is not without its flaws, nor are the people who helped shape history and contributed to growth over the past 166 years.

President Thrasher recognized that violent protests on other campuses surrounding similar diversity issues have caused him great concern and added that he did not condone the hateful acts that took place in Charlottesville. He stated that last year, FSU students proposed to remove the Eppes Statue and brought to light issues and concerns in FSU's history. He stated that the University prides itself on free speech, but would never condone any act that inhibited safety for the University community.

President Thrasher stated that FSU wants to be an inclusive campus for all and so the panel must think about how the University can recognize the past and work together to build for the future. Ms. Gibbs was officially termed with this charge, but President Thrasher recognized that the work is up to the panel members. He asked them to think about the issues, seek input from constituents, educate the University community, and make recommendations that they deem necessary and appropriate, particularly as it relates to the Namings and Recognitions policy of Florida State University.

President Thrasher confirmed he had no preconceived notions about what the outcome of the panel should be or will be as he trusts the panel members to do their work. He promised that he and the Board of Trustees would take the panel's recommendations seriously and be respectful of the time invested. He stated that he believed the work the panel is doing is extremely important.

Ms. Gibbs asked if there were any questions.

[No questions]

### 4. Public Comment

Ms. Gibbs opened the floor to public comment and asked that anyone speaking limit their comments to three minutes.

[Comment #1]

Cea Moline introduced himself as an undergraduate honor student in political science. He stated he believed that the policy on Namings and Recognitions should align with the University's mission statements and that the University should search for justice. He recognized that certain

statues on campus, such as the Eppes statue, violate the University's creed and mission statement. He stated that Francis Eppes owned 91 slaves; started a slave catching militia; engaged in abolitionist literature; was in general against education of people in Tallahassee; and was against diversity in Tallahassee. Mr. Moline stated that Mr. Eppes did not appreciate the lives of black people and he believed the statue should be removed from campus. He opined that the policy of FSU for Namings and Recognitions should honor all students and faculty. He stated that even though the student's petition failed in the last election, it did not really matter, because it is well known that the number of students that vote in elections is very low because the elections are not well publicized. He asked the panel to consider that the rights of minorities should not be withheld.

[Comment #2]

Maddie Hendrick introduced himself as a 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate majoring in Spanish. He stated that he had a couple of concerns. The first was that the panel was not very publically known and he had to search to find out information about it. He stated that if the panel was public, then there should be a University announcement about it so that the message gets to all students. That would provide for more participation. He also stated that he agreed with everything Cee said about the policy that gets made and the panel should consider whether people who are recognized on campus should hold up to a moral standard and should not be controversial.

Ms. Gibbs responded that the panel will have a website and the panel would make sure adequate input was received from campus and the community.

[Comment #3]

Roderick Pearson stated he wanted to ask a question to the panel. He asked if anyone was a History expert. [No answer from panel]. He stated that in history there is a term called collective memory which is how we as society interpret the past or the history of a place. He explained that an important part of this concept is creating monuments to memorialize the past. As an example, he cited a confederate monument in North Carolina that states that the war was fought for the rights of the states. He opined that this statement is a lie because the war was fought over slavery and the right of the southern states to have slaves and condone the business of slavery. He asked the panel what they see when they look at the statue on FSU campus of Francis Eppes. He stated that we see a man looking out over the Westcott building and over a city that he used to govern. We don't see his dark past and the truth because the statue has poisoned the collective memory about him. He stated that collective memory is a false memory and not who he really was and the University must throw that memory away.

[Comment #4]

Zachary Shultz introduced himself as an undergraduate student in Sociology. He stated he was glad to see the panel was convened. Students have been concerned over the statue of Francis Eppes and the building that is named after him. He said he never thought he would see the administration of FSU create this panel and really consider the naming of monuments on the FSU campus. He stated he believed this panel was important, because as the policy is developed it should not allow figures or persons that have committed atrocities by engaging in human oppression and violating human rights be honored. He opined that the universal philosophy should be that any figure or memorial in modern society should not be of someone who favored bigotry and violated human rights. He expressed that he believed Eppes was a supporter of the confederacy and he should not

be honored. He cited the BK Roberts building as an example of a figure that violated human rights that is being honored on our campus. He stated that he hoped the panel would take time to look into the real history of FSU and use the great resources available to them. He stated that there are many unknown truths about the historical oppression of black people in Tallahassee. He also stated he wanted the panel to look at how other Universities are handling their naming policies and considering true history. As an example, he stated Harvard Law School recently removed their fundamental symbol because it represented a slave owner. He said that the panel can do this review and choose a better image for our campus.

Ms. Gibbs replied that she anticipated having town halls and giving every opportunity to the community to give their input. She said that future meetings would have opportunities for public comments, but it may not be at every meeting.

[Two more panel members introduced because of late arrival]

Kyle Hill- student and Student Body President  
Chris Panango- student

#### 5. Open Meeting/Public Record Guidelines

Ms. Gibbs introduced Robyn Jackson as the Associate General Counsel that will be doing a short presentation on public meetings and public record guidelines.

Ms. Jackson stated she was pleased to be a part of the panel and present on public meeting and public record obligations. The Florida laws that speak to public meetings and public government are about a commitment to transparency, which is something FSU believes is important. She cited that the right to having an open and transparent government is specified in the Florida Constitution, and the Florida Statutes, Chapter 119 and Chapter 286.

Ms. Jackson presented on record keeping issues and stated that the work that the panel is doing is considered official business of the university so the meetings are public record under Chapter 119. She stated that this means the panel and the University have an obligation to retain those records and keep them safe. This includes all records including electronic documents, emails, text messages, etc. She suggested the best practice for electronic records is to keep a folder in our emails for the work and communications related to this committee. This would make it simple and easy to comply with a Public Records Request, and keeps general counsel from having to search through a panel member's entire email inbox. She also stated that if a panel member receives a Public Records Request for information associated with work as a panel member that they should let either her or one of the support staff know so the University can ensure that it gets handled properly. She reminded the panel that there are civil and sometimes criminal penalties if there is a violation of a Public Records law. She stated it is important that everyone is in compliance with the law, and if this was anyone's first time on a panel like this, that it's important to know about Florida's Sunshine Laws. One of the reasons it's important is so the President, the government, and the public knows exactly what the panel is doing. She explained that all of the meetings are noticed including dates, times, and locations, and that the meetings are open to the public. The University welcomes people to attend. The meetings are also memorialized by taking minutes of

the meeting so that if someone makes a motion or a second motion, there is a record of that. The minutes of the meeting are also open to the public as they are part of the public record.

Ms. Jackson then explained that one of the tougher parts of keeping in compliance with the Sunshine Laws is remembering that panel members cannot have discussions with each other outside of the meeting. This includes discussions over the phone, via text message, via email or any other means of communications. She asked that if a member has something to share that cannot wait until the next meeting, to please engage the support staff, and the panel chair will determine if the information should be shared via email to other panel members. The general counsel's office generally would ensure that there is a disclaimer on these emails that would ask that no reply be made to the email and that the content is for informational purposes only.

Ms. Jackson then told an anecdotal story about a public meeting that once had all male panel members. One of the panel members saw an attractive woman walk into the meeting to observe and he wrote a comment on a sticky note and handed it to another panel member. Someone in the audience noticed and asked to see what was written on the sticky note. Knowing the comment was not related to the meeting and would be taken the wrong way, the Chair of the panel grabbed the sticky note, crumbled it up, and ate it. [Laughter]. She concluded that the point of the story was that panel members should not put themselves in a situation like that and should not attempt to have secret communications even if it has nothing to do with the meeting itself.

Mr. Walter Moore asked if panel members were permitted to have conversations about the topics of the panel with people that are not serving on the panel.

Ms. Jackson answered that panel members are permitted to discuss issues with other parties that are not on the panel.

Ms. Gibbs stated that it is fine to receive information from other parties if they approach you as a panel member. She explained that the biggest concern is having conversations via emails with other panel members and she asked the members to be very cautious about what they say in email communications because the University does not want to do anything that can be considered a violation.

## 6. General Comments

Ms. Gibbs stated that she wanted to underscore the need to be open and honest throughout this process. She explained that the spirit of the panel was focused on this concept of open and honest communications. She explained that the President wanted to ensure that the panel hears all different perspective from all constituents, the public, and anyone else that has an interest in the policy.

## 7. Logistics

Ms. Gibbs explained that for the logistics, she thought it would be helpful to plan out a number of future meetings in advance so that Panel Members can make travel plans and other plans accordingly. She suggested that the panel meet every three weeks and at least two more times

before the end of the Fall semester. She also suggested that meetings be scheduled even beyond the end of this calendar year. She stated that the support staff would be in touch to schedule future meetings and asked that members be as responsive as possible. She added that there will be a website and meetings will be posted with locations and other information that's appropriate for the larger public.

Ms. Gibbs mentioned that she expected media inquiry about the work of the panel. She stated that members are under no obligation to speak to the media and that University communication staff were available for assistance. She asked that the members confirmed that they thought three weeks for meetings was appropriate. [Panel Members Confirmed].

#### 8. Comments from Committee Members

Ms. Gibbs asked if there were any comments or questions from Panel Members.

Ms. Montgomery asked if they should assume the University's constituents would know about the panel and contact us, or if Panel Members should reach out to constituents.

Ms. Gibbs indicated that it was a good question and responded that it was appropriate to reach out to constituents. She also inquired about whether the panel wanted an overview of FSU's history and asked how everyone wanted to start talking about the issues.

Ms. Montgomery asked if the University had a master list of constituents and if we planned to communicate with specific ones such as the Alumni Association.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed that constituents would be included, but wasn't aware of a master list. She stated that she thought the panel would want to review other Universities practices and what they have done with similar policies. She stated that she wanted to help educate Panel Members as much as possible. She thought an overview of FSU building names might be helpful and that we could also arrange a historian or FSU history expert to present the panel with facts. The panel should also review the policy that is already in place. She stated that those were her suggested items to go on the next agenda. [Panel members agreed].

Ms. Montgomery stated she would like to review something on lesser known controversies on names of buildings or memorials on campus. She asserted that everyone already knows about the BK Roberts building and the Eppes statue and building but wondered if there were more that should be reviewed.

Ms. Gibbs asked if the committee wanted information on other state governments and public policies on these types of issues. [Panel Members agreed].

Mr. Anderson asked if we had any information on other institutions that have dealt with these issues anywhere in the US.

Ms. Gibbs summarized the proposal for future agendas, which were to develop a list of other institutions to be reviewed, look at different groups and see how they should be involved in this

process, do research on lesser known controversies and any other issues that exist, do a review of current policies in place, and a general overview of FSU history and historical namings. [Panel Members agreed].

Mr. Hernandez commented that it may be helpful to have an understanding of how our relationship with these issues as a public institution may differ from non-public organizations.

Ms. Gibbs responded that she agreed, as being a public institution governs every action that takes place on campus. She stated that she would work on developing the next agenda and would try to secure the same location for those meetings.

Ms. Bearor stated that she was aware of a number of articles from artists about the history of art on campus that may be helpful to the committee.

Mr. Hernandez stated that his focus has been around diversity and inclusion and he has done work in this area. He wanted to look around at what we have on the campus, including the building and statues to give the panel a full concept of FSU's history, including looking at female contributors and items on the campus that represent diversity in meaningful ways.

Ms. Gibbs stated that she hoped the panel could get that information as they reviewed the overview of the history of FSU. She clarified that the charge of the panel was twofold: the first charge is to determine a recommendation on how the University handles these policies for future namings and recognitions, but also to make recommendations on how to handle current buildings and namings. These should be our two focuses as we consider developing the policy.

Mr. Anderson asked if there would be more opportunity for public comments in future meetings.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed that there will be more opportunities as appropriate and she envisioned at least one future meeting would be dedicated to public comments before the committee was completed. She wanted to ensure that there was adequate input from faculty, students, staff, and the community.

Mr. Anderson suggested that the panel may want some expertise in a particular area from someone on campus or resources on campus that are readily available to the committee.

Ms. Gibbs stated that the next few meetings would focus on the items mentioned previously, but that those resources could be used in future meetings, as she planned to include anything the members thought would help them form a recommendation.

Mr. Forsman stated he expected there to be a formal resolution on the issue from the council of graduate students, as they would be a constituent group the panel should expect to hear from regularly.

Ms. Gibbs stated she would suggest if they had a strong interest, they should attend the meetings.

Ms. Montgomery stated she thought there was a possibility of some level of resistance against changing names or recognitions already in place from the descendants of those that have been memorialized on campus.

Ms. Gibbs stated she expected to hear all different perspectives and she thought the panel should listen and take everything into consideration. At the end, she was confident the panel would recommend what is in the best interest of the University.

**Meeting Ended at 11:55 a.m.**