

From: President Joanne Berger-Sweeney President@trincoll.edu 
Subject: Naming Buildings at Trinity
Date: March 31, 2021 at 12:01 PM
To: President Joanne Berger-Sweeney President@trincoll.edu

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Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

March 31, 2021

Dear Trinity College Community Members,

Names matter.

The year 2023 will mark Trinity's bicentennial. As we prepare to celebrate such a historic milestone, this is an appropriate moment to consider how our campus reflects both our history and our values. An important part of this reflection is a consideration of place names. The names on our buildings and spaces reflect who we were, who we are, and who we wish to be. This issue has come under greater scrutiny in recent years across our nation as institutions have taken up the work of examining their histories and aspiring to tell fuller, more accurate narratives of their pasts.

This issue came to the fore here on Trinity's campus last year. In July 2020, I shared with our community our intention to rename two Trinity buildings: Wheaton and Seabury Halls. That decision was based, in part, upon research indicating that Bishop Samuel Seabury, after whom one of these buildings was named, had authored a treatise espousing racist views, views that any member of our community today would reject. Further research on the matter made it clear that a citation was incorrect: a treatise and sermons were misattributed. I regret this error and have apologized to members of his family, some of whom are still members of our community.

That experience has made it clear that we must have a thorough and deliberate process for the naming (or renaming) of spaces on our campus that articulates clear and specific objectives and criteria. To that end, I am reactivating the Committee on Named Facilities and Commemoratives, which was established by the Board of Trustees in 2013.

The committee will relaunch in July 2021 with a slightly altered membership than originally established. In consideration of the important concerns articulated by the Task Force on the Status of Women in 2019 and the students of the Umoja Coalition in 2020, we are adding specific community members to this committee. In addition, the director of donor relations is no longer included in the committee membership, as the focus on naming, renaming, or commemoration at Trinity should be based on our values and shared history, not solely on the size of a donation. The committee will consist of the following individuals (or their designees):

- Dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs, chair
- Vice president for advancement
- Vice president for communications and marketing
- Vice president of finance and chief financial officer
- Assistant vice president for construction, facilities, and operations
- Two members of the faculty (one recommended by the [Task Force on the Status of Women](#) and one recommended by [The Primus Project](#), exploring Trinity's past and forging a more just and inclusive present)
- Two designees from the Trinity College Alumni Association (TCAA)
- Two student members, as designated by the Student Government Association (SGA)

The college archivist shall serve as an adviser to the committee, as will other college staff or external entities as determined by the committee. The committee shall report its judgment on the suitability of opportunities and requests to the president and to the Board of Trustees, as appropriate.

I will ask the committee to begin its work by examining the histories of the more than 30 buildings on our campus that are named for individuals and considering whether any changes are warranted. I also will ask that the committee develop a process for the naming of buildings and spaces in the future. My request to the committee is that this work be completed before the beginning of our bicentennial year in 2023. My goal is to ensure that our named spaces honor our full history and represent the inclusive community that we are and continually strive to be. This is an important step to reaffirm our values as Trinity moves into its third century.

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney
President and Trinity College Professor of Neuroscience

