

19 June 2020

Dear President Alger and Provost Coltman,

As deans at James Madison University, we believe that nurturing and celebrating the diversity of our community is fundamental to our academic enterprise. Providing a community where students, staff, and faculty are valued and included is paramount to our collective future. As deans at an historically white institution, we acknowledge that we have a long way to go to create a learning environment that all our students deserve and a campus environment where all faculty and staff can feel a strong sense of belonging. We write today to advocate for the swift removal of the names of buildings on JMU's campus that commemorate Confederate icons.

The time to dismantle oppressive structures and practices on our campus is now. Any delay reinforces the impression that we are unwilling to redress the long-standing concerns voiced by the Black members of our community. Ongoing reminders of our nation's legacy of slavery, such as the names of Maury, Jackson and Ashby Halls, place an unfair burden on our Black colleagues and students. These names are not benign details etched in building façades, but visible symbols that we have not yet reckoned with our past. They do not represent the JMU to which we aspire: a place where "Being the Change" is not just a slogan, but a lived reality.

For many years the voices of our faculty and staff colleagues of color who experience those building names as an affront have been loud and clear. Our JMU faculty colleagues have carefully analyzed the context in which those buildings were named and have presented cogent arguments for changing those names. Our students of color have told us how they perceive our inaction as an endorsement of exclusion. Our constituents and our community want us to act. They expect us, now that we "know better," in the words of Maya Angelou, to "do better." We must remove the names.

This has been an extraordinary year for JMU and for institutions of higher education around the country, with the stress of responding to the COVID

pandemic compounded by the eruption of national protest over pervasive police brutality and anti-Black racism. As academic leaders, we are concerned about the health and well-being of our students and colleagues. We do not want them to return to campus in August to find that no action has been taken on this significant issue. Instead, let us prepare the ground for their return and ready our campus to engage in a forward-looking conversation that imagines what the names of those buildings ought to be today.

Respectfully,

Robert D. Aguirre, PhD

Dean, College of Arts and Letters

Cynthia Bauerle, PhD

Dean, College of Science and
Mathematics

John Burgess, MFA

Interim Dean, The Graduate School

Michael E. Busing, PhD

Dean, College of Business

Rubén Graciani, MFA

Acting Dean, College of Visual and
Performing Arts

Bob Kolvoord, PhD

Dean, College of Integrated Science
and Engineering

Mark L'Esperance, PhD

Dean, College of Education

Sharon E. Lovell, PhD

Dean, College of Health and
Behavioral Studies

Melissa Lubin, PhD

Dean, Professional & Continuing
Education

Bradley R. Newcomer, PhD, MBA

Dean, The Honors College

Bethany Nowviskie, PhD

Dean, JMU Libraries

This statement is endorsed by the individuals who have signed it, not by any academic unit, office, center, or other entity affiliated with James Madison University.