

## **An Open Letter from the Deans of the Five Schools**

One of the foundational values identified in the University of Richmond's strategic plan is inclusivity and equity. A critical component of implementing this value is creating a sense of "belonging" among all students. As the 2019 university report, *Making Excellence Inclusive*, explained, belonging entails "[c]ultivating inclusive living, learning, and work environments in which all can fully participate in the life of the institution and experience a sense of belonging." As deans of the five schools at the University, each of us is committed to making our schools places that are truly welcoming to all students, faculty and staff, and each of us has worked hard to make that aspiration a reality.

Against this backdrop, we are extremely concerned for our community. The decision regarding the naming of Ryland and Freeman Halls, questions about the procedures and reasons supporting that decision, and the subsequent events surrounding that decision have left many of our students, faculty and staff angry and deeply dismayed at what they perceived to be a turn away from our shared values of inclusivity and equity. The harm that has occurred is extremely serious and is getting worse. The Faculty Senate and some of our Schools and departments have asserted strong positions regarding recent events, and others are planning such statements. It would be a deep misreading of the situation to assume, for example, that all of this will blow over once students leave for the summer. On the contrary, we believe that without a significant change in course, we are on track to suffer deep injury as a community – injury from which it could take us years to recover. We offer these observations in the spirit of service. We are on the ground meeting with our students, faculty and staff, and are reporting the situation as we see it.

With this in mind, we respectfully offer the following suggestions, and we recognize that others are making recommendations as well:

- Establish an advisory committee to undertake a transparent and inclusive process to develop a set of policies and procedures regarding naming.
- Expand and amplify our initiatives to better understand our history and to present that history in a format that is visible, honest and compelling.
- Within the Board of Trustees, establish a formal structure such as a standing committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion to assure that issues of diversity and inclusion are consistently at the forefront of Board decision making.

We do not mean this to be an exhaustive list and would observe that there may be lessons we can take from the many other colleges and universities have addressed issues of naming and institutional history.

Finally, we observe that what our community is experiencing goes beyond the issue of the naming of these two buildings. A deep distrust is settling into the community, along with a growing skepticism about whether our long-stated goals of diversity and inclusion are fully embraced by University leadership. This causes us great pain, as it does no doubt for everyone who cares deeply about this University. We affirm our willingness to work with the Board of

Trustees and everyone within the University to do the hard and continuing work of assuring that the University of Richmond lives up to its values.

Respectfully,

Sandra Peart, Jepson School of Leadership Studies

Wendy Perdue, Richmond School of Law

Mickey Quinones, Robins School of Business

Patrice Rankine, School of Arts & Sciences

Jamelle Wilson, School of Professional and Continuing Studies