



DEANS WORKING GROUP

We are forwarding the report from the Advisory Committee on the Future of the Historic Landscape at the University of Virginia. The report contains a series of broad principles for the University to consider in future decision-making, including:

1. Identifying what **additions** should be made to the historic landscape, particularly in order to acknowledge “change agents” who have altered and enriched the life of the University, for example “the four women (Virginia Anne Scott, Nancy Anderson, JoAnn Kirstein, and Nancy Jaffe) who applied in 1969 for undergraduate admission, filed suit to compel fair consideration of their credentials, and broke the barrier of entry into the formerly all-male University.”
2. Identifying what existing features of the landscape require further commentary, curation, or **contextualization**, for example the “unmarked, ‘unofficial’ spaces such as the ‘Black Bus Stop’ which served as an important gathering spot for African American students from the 1980s to the 2000s.”
3. Identifying what “existing symbols” of the landscape may be considered for **alteration or removal**. The committee suggests that any such recommendations be based on “accepted curatorial principles.” These include addressing the following questions: “[D]oes the symbol lack historical importance to the University? Does the symbol continue to have value as an object for teaching, study or research? Does the symbol currently reflect the values of the University?”

The report recommends that such decisions be made in a broadly open and consultative manner; that additions or changes to the historic landscape utilize forms of memorialization that take advantage of new media technologies; that the University consider supporting ongoing research, classes, programming, and orientation events aimed at increasing “students, faculty and staff, alumni, and the larger public’s engagement with the history and historic landscape of the university”; and that the University allocate adequate resources to pursue these goals.

A key underlying ethos of the report is that “Grounds are an environment for both learning and living.” We understand this as a dual reminder that the University is—and must remain—a place where, as we learn together, we will encounter ideas and histories which can be difficult or even offensive and that it is a place where we live together, and so must remain sensitive to one another and to the well-being of all those living here. A second ethos is that though “history has hard edges,” we need not always seek to smooth those edges, as history is also layered, and the University’s landscape can be similarly layered to acknowledge the ongoing processes and milestones of historical change.

Report of the Advisory Committee on the Future of the Historic Landscape at the University of Virginia

The Deans Working Group established the Advisory Committee on the Future of the Historic Landscape at the University of Virginia in October, 2017. The nine-member, advisory committee included John T. Casteen III, President Emeritus, Gary Gallagher, John L. Nau III Professor of History and Director of the John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History, Claudrena N. Harold, Professor of History and African American and African Studies, Attiya Latif, a fourth year Political and Social Thought major, Truman Scholar, and past chair of the Minority Rights Coalition, George Keith Martin (Col'75), former Rector of the Board of Visitors, Elizabeth Meyer, Merrill D. Peterson Professor of Landscape Architecture and former Dean of the School of Architecture, Brendan Nigro, a third-year history major and chair of the University Guides Service, Victoria Tucker (Nurs '12), a doctoral candidate in the School of Nursing, and Sheri Winston, Interim Rotunda Manager and former director of Strategic Communications in the University's Office of Development and Public Affairs. This report is the culmination of the Committee's work.

Committee's Charge

Our Committee's charge was to formulate principles and offer recommendations on the display of visible historic symbols on Grounds. We were asked to establish principles and recommendations that would provide "a pathway to remember and recognize the University's history, foster our contemporary values and future aspirations, and celebrate our highest ideals." As outlined in our charge, committee members reviewed the reports of similar committees at other colleges and universities, including but not limited to: Yale, the University of Mississippi, Brown, Clemson, the University of Texas, and the University of Michigan. Their reports on the renaming, contextualization, and removal of historical symbols gave us much to consider. At the same time, we remained mindful of our charge to be "cognizant of the particular history of this University, both its imperfections and achievements, and its contemporary commitments to both diversity and free expression."

The Historical Landscape at the University of Virginia

The University's landscape has developed as a space for both living and learning, consistent with the University's educational mission. In addition to these core uses, it has also become over time a destination for alumni and other visitors, often tourists, who come to see artifacts of the University's origins and history. Several elements (the Rotunda, arguably the Lawn, et al) are more or less on permanent exhibition and are in various way conserved or curated, and protected. Early curators worked within defined cultural contexts. They preserved and displayed artifacts, including buildings and organized landscapes, thought to embody, however imperfectly, Thomas Jefferson's designs, innovations, and educational philosophy, and they assimilated into these

artifacts of the University's origins their own designs and subsequent contributions. The designs of the Pavilion Gardens and the rows of trees planted on the Lawn, neither of Jefferson's doing, reflect one process of assimilation of the later into the earlier.

Inevitably, this work embodied originally and still preserves, contributions made by persons, enslaved and free, who have been generally ignored in the University's story of itself. These persons, particularly enslaved persons, are equally a part of the University's history –they own what one might call cultural shares in the University itself, shares that deserve to be displayed in any comprehensive, honest presentation of the University's origins and history.

Living and learning in spaces intended to memorialize these many persons' distinctive contributions and subcultures or visiting these places may prove to be more difficult for some than for others. This is to say that part of the challenge for the University's leaders is to understand that because we live with evidence of the life and work in Jefferson's time, we learn from these evidences, which implies living with a Jefferson whose demonstrable, documented experiences, concepts, and actions differ in significant ways from what we have all been taught. And that this complex history requires that we accept that history, which like life, sometimes has hard edges.

A Philosophy for Commemoration around Grounds

The environment itself ought to advance students' safety, power, and happiness. When considering the University primarily as a space for learning, the landscape ought to be curated in accord with the best known, established curatorial principles, by which the University's presentation of its physical identity ought to be fully informed, honest, and reasonably candid.

We recommend that the University manage and interpret all of the landscape as space for both living and learning, simultaneously and consciously. This approach will require especially active curation of spaces with rich histories, including the historic central Grounds. Supplying context informed by the best documented and current historical research and understanding may well be simpler now than a decade or two ago owing to recent technologies for virtual and enhanced experience. We recommend deploying these technologies and keeping them up to date and functional.

History is ongoing. Certain spaces have many, evolving layers of use and occupation. Acknowledging this perspective suggests to us the additional recognition that the practice of commemorating history is itself pedagogy. To teach in classrooms and also in technological systems intended for visitors is to explore contexts, to contextualize. Contexts can be challenging. Gary Gallagher says of his teaching in and around the University that he “set[s] up the tension between what happened and how it is remembered,” a purpose that we take to be fundamental to interpreting the Grounds. Similarly, students studying demonstrations that occurred here in the 1960s find themselves addressing the critical issues that confronted the University generally, the surrounding city and county, the nation, and ultimately the world at that

time. Gestures that might disguise or remove our factually documented history handicap faculty members who refer to the landscape itself in their research and teaching.

A New Tradition: Commemorating Change Agents

Certain varieties of recognition are oddly absent from the landscape as it now exists. Change and its agents, persons who have caused or led the University to reinvent itself, ought to be appropriately celebrated. By any reasonable assessment, desegregation and the admission of women into the undergraduate schools mark the demarcation line between the University's prior history, successes and failures, and the contemporary era. To be sure, a few members of the "trailblazer generation" of African American students have gained some recognition. On November 10, 2017, the School of Nursing unveiled a portrait of Mavis Claytor, the first African-American student (and eventual graduate) of the School of Nursing. The Law School has recently hung a portrait of Gregory Swanson, an African-American lawyer whose application and successful lawsuit in 1950 forced desegregation of the Law School, and effectively provoked the admission of African-American students into the University generally. So far as we know, this portrait is the first public acknowledgement that this individual broke through a barrier embedded in Virginia law and in University policies, and that the university itself changed in consequence. Similarly, we know of no public memorialization of the names of the four women (Virginia Anne Scott, Nancy Anderson, JoAnn Kirstein, and Nancy Jaffe) who applied in 1969 for undergraduate admission, filed suit to compel fair consideration of their credentials, and broke the barrier of entry into the formerly all-male University. Yet they changed the University as profoundly as Mr. Swanson (and Dr. Walter Ridley, the first African American graduate of the University) did. We believe that it is noteworthy, and will be so to future students and to visitors and others, that known persons whose names we can know if they are memorialized on placards or disclosed in some other powerful way, provoked changes that have come to be fundamental to what the University is in our time and what it aspires to be in the future.

An attendee at our open session described a "need to put people back into the historical landscape." That notion is compelling. Somehow, the University needs to tell who have been its great makers, its faculty members and staffers whose work has distinguished them, its students whose contributions have mattered in the larger world where they have worked and produced. That our landscape is relatively quiet about human excellence strikes us as an odd thing. It also opens up the prospect of new kinds of memory. Most of us are shaped in part by the models or role models we know. Ought not the place tell their stories and thus enrich its students and others?

Proposed Principles

1. *Acknowledge that the Grounds are an environment for both learning and living, and accept continuing obligations to teach in many ways for many audiences.* This implies the need for ongoing assessments of what we recognize, and how. Decisions such as whether or not to add or remove memorials of whatever kind or to provide newly framed contextual statements merit various kinds of public disclosure, and may often provoke debate. The forum may vary from one change to another, and locations for display may change as, for example, the University develops its proposed new Visitors' Center and Museum, but disclosure and discussion need to occur.
2. *Acknowledge change agents and broader cultural trends.* Celebrate the contributions of persons who define excellence in the modern University. Acknowledge context, and study contextualization constantly. Perhaps few persons know or understand how racial segregation, eugenics, massive resistance, and the exclusion of women largely shaped higher education and our University during the past half century or so. Events, changes, and people here have played roles, often significant roles, in bringing or compelling changes that made major differences. One way to ensure our acknowledgement of change agents captures individuals within the context of larger movements is to have historical markers or plaques that commemorate certain events that signal a change in the University's culture. For example, on February 17, 1969, hundreds of students at the University participated in a march on the Lawn in which they called for more African American students and faculty, demanded the implementation of a Black Studies program, expressed concerns about the wages and conditions of University employees, and asked administrators to waive application fees for low income students. A plaque commemorating this event would honor not one individual but a coalition of students who worked to transform the University. Similarly, acknowledge faculty accomplishments, in part for what they are or have been, and in part for their impact on students and on the world generally.

Acknowledgement is not enough; there should also be a commitment to providing the resources to conduct and sustain this important work. First, the University ought to commit itself financially to support research and classes aimed at increasing the students, faculty and staff, alumni, and the larger public's engagement with the history and historical landscape of the University. Secondly, the University ought to perform due diligence in the exposure of such agents of change to all of its students through classwork, programming, or orientation events. Finally, the University must commit itself to introducing these agents of change in the built landscape through means of additions of visible historic symbols.

3. *Recognize that memory is embedded in existing spaces and places on Grounds.* Members of the UVA community associate these places with on-going everyday routines as well as special events. Support a discovery and research process, perhaps part of the new President's Commission on UVA in the Age of Segregation but expanded to include other communities including (but not exclusively) women, LBGTQ and staff, that identifies these spaces on Grounds and opportunities to interpret them as spatial sequences and networks as well as individual sites.

As the landscape and its uses evolve, certain historic buildings carry deep meaning and significance to different groups for different reasons. Cabell Hall, for example, serves as a central classroom, but it also has been the site of student protests and demonstrations around important political issues. And then there are unmarked, "unofficial" spaces such as the "Black Bus Stop" which served as an important gathering spot for African American students from the 1980s to the 2000s. As evident during Black Alumni Weekend gatherings, this space holds great meaning and significance for many within our community and demonstrates the ways people turn ordinary spaces into sacred ground. One of the advantages of technology is that it provides us with the opportunity to acknowledge these "hidden, cherished spaces" and disseminate that history to a larger public.

Because of this "embedded memory," the removal or alteration of existing symbols should be based on accepted curatorial principles. For example, does the symbol lack historical importance to the University? Does the symbol continue to have value as an object for teaching, study or research? Does the symbol currently reflect the values of the University? If the symbol does not fulfill one of these purposes, then alteration should be considered.

4. *Use physical, virtual, multi-layered representations, and spaces beyond the central Grounds to teach students and visitors.* Keep these teaching systems current as to content and up-to-date as to technology. Refuse to present the University as a static space with a frozen history. Much has changed at the University in the past fifty years, and the interpretive landscape should reflect that. Celebrate challenge, human work, accomplishment, and learning rather than privilege, past or present, and the merely good old days. Claim the demonstrable truth, and tell it well. One potential means of telling the demonstrable truth is through virtual and interactive experiences of the University's historic landscape made available to students with flashpoints at spaces of particular significance. Additionally, we recommend a commitment towards an evolving interpretation of the University's history. The Rotunda's Lower East Oval exhibit room is insufficient for the broad scope and resonance of the University's history. It is incumbent upon the University to make such historical narrative and content more readily available through online archives and potentially through a University museum.
5. Develop collaborative processes to be pursued as representations of history here evolve. Perhaps uniquely here, American higher education can declare where and how it originated, what is distinctive about its obligations to the public interest, what its contributions have been. For its architecture, engagements with its alumni and the general public, uses of its landscape generally, and provisions for residential life, the

University has reputations and constituencies. Students and visitors should encounter evidences of what we value, and perhaps also of what we aspire to do. This requires active and sustained public input. We recommend that the University appoint a permanent committee on the future of the historical landscape that meets biannually to discuss unresolved and new issues. We also believe that it is incumbent upon the curators of the historic landscape to consistently engage with the University students, faculty, and staff who inhabit it through means of public forums. Opportunities for discussion ought not to occur exclusively in times of crisis but on an annual (or semiannual) basis. To acknowledge the necessity of consistent public forums is to recognize the ever-evolving experience of the community that lives and learns within our Grounds. Additionally, there ought to be an established expectation that alterations to the historic landscape be communicated clearly and promptly.