

Statement on Recent Meeting with Board of Trustees

On March 26, 2021, seven representatives of the University Faculty Senate as well as three representatives of the University Staff Advisory Council met with Rector Paul Queally, President Crutcher, Provost Legro, and three other members of the Board of Trustees, for about 75 minutes beginning at 3:15 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to engage in dialogue around recent campus events related to the Board's decision to retain the names of Ryland and Freeman on university buildings.

This brief statement represents some of the shared observations of the seven Senators who attended the meeting. We have collectively elected to issue this statement in order to keep focus on the serious issues ahead of us as a community while also fulfilling our obligation to inform the community of the basic substance of Friday's meeting.

We are deeply troubled by the tone, tenor, and substance of this meeting, which in our judgment involved the Board utterly failing to model reasoned dialogue and respect for all participants regardless of status. The meeting also included numerous statements from the Board that we regard as offensive.

Specifically, after opening statements by the Senate President and USAC Chair (both white men) and a follow-up comment by another white male faculty member went uninterrupted, the Rector interrupted a Black woman staff member in the middle of her initial comments and noted that she sounded angry. He then proceeded to direct a series of comments and questions at this staff member over much of the remaining hour in a largely adversarial manner. At one point, he challenged her credibility by stating that because the staff member has only been at the university a few years, she does not appreciate the progress that has been made. At another point, the Rector said to the staff member she should not talk to him like that when she challenged him by asking what he meant by the term "the real world." We are immensely proud of our colleague for continuing to engage with the Rector and respond to many of his statements, but are also deeply angered that an untenured staff member who is Black would be treated this way--the only colleague so treated--in a conversation about race and racism on campus.

The Rector also stated clearly that he considers the issue of building names on campus to be a closed matter but was interested in discussing what other steps could be taken to help Black students; at one point, he stated he wanted to help Black, Brown and "regular students." He further opined that he regarded the demand for changing the names to be part of "cancel culture," and that the university would be failing in its duty to prepare students for the "real world" if it removed the names.

Both faculty and staff stated clearly that the Board must reconsider the building names policy if it wants to be a welcoming environment for Black students, that the university would pay a heavy cost for continuing its current stance, and that faculty are willing to work with the Board to find an appropriate way to acknowledge our institutional history without retaining Ryland and Freeman on university buildings.

We are extremely disappointed in this meeting and specifically the conduct of the Rector. We are also disappointed that the Board did not take advantage of the opportunity to listen to the urgent message we wished to convey: that the entire campus community is united in our demand for change and that the university as a whole will pay an enormous price for continuing with its present policy position.

As members of the University Faculty Senate, we remain committed to helping build the University of Richmond that all of our students, faculty, and staff deserve. We hope in the near future there will be additional opportunities for dialogue with members of the Board of Trustees, and we encourage any Trustee to reach out to members of the Senate publicly or privately to have a more productive dialogue. The painful, embarrassing, and disrespectful meeting of March 26 shows just how much work we have yet to do.

Signed,

Karen Kochel
Stephen Long
Cassandra Marshall
Noah Sachs
Andrew Schoeneman
Peter Smallwood
Thad Williamson

March 30, 2021