MEMORANDUM

To: Graduate & Professional Student Senate
From: Diversity & Inclusion Committee
Re: GPSCY Renaming Recommendation
Date: January 24, 2019

I. Introduction

In the spring of 2017, Senate’s Diversity & Inclusion Committee (“Committee”) met with members of the graduate and professional student community who expressed concern about the pronunciation of the Graduate and Professional Student Center at Yale (“GPSCY”) and its similarity to the slur used to describe the Romani ethnic group. Based on these discussions, the Committee undertook the task of researching the issue and preparing a renaming recommendation to be presented to the full Senate by the end of the 2017-18 academic year. In the 2018 report, the Committee recommended the building not be renamed at the time, but requested additional research and analysis of the issue be undertaken during the 2018-19 academic year.

Committee members discussed this topic in a series of meetings, engaged in extensive archival research to determine the origins of GPSCY’s name, and met with key stakeholders in the community. The Committee also examined the Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming (“CEPR Report”) and used the framework it articulates to inform the GPSCY renaming recommendation.

Based on the Committee’s findings, analysis of the renaming principles in the CEPR Report, and the Senate Bylaws, the Committee recommends that the building be renamed to “The Gryphon.” According to Article II (4) of the Bylaws, Senate is “to oversee the management and maintenance GPSCY and Gryphon’s Pub.” As the stewards of the building, Senate is given authority to rename GPSCY. The Committee concludes that renaming is a necessary step in ensuring that the building is a safe and inclusive space for all graduate and professional students at Yale.

II. Findings

a. Impact on Students

The Committee recognizes that graduate and professional students have expressed discomfort with the pronunciation of GPSCY. As the name indicates, the building is a hub of G&P student life at Yale, and its status as a popular campus location means that its name is frequently spoken aloud. Given that its pronunciation is identical to that of an ethnic slur, such common usage may immunize students from associating the word with a racial insult. In Senate’s 2017 survey of G&P students, 7.5% of respondents (130 out of 1725) said they were personally offended by the...
pronunciation, and 56% (957 out of 1712) said they would support a rebranding campaign if their peers were offended. Although the Committee is unaware of how many students identify as Roma, students have expressed sufficient concern to justify scrutiny of the issue.

b. Archival Research

The Committee also undertook extensive archival research to learn about the building’s history. It was built in 1923 to house the Yale chapter of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. In 1969, Senate requested a physical location. The fraternity had vacated 204 York in 1968, so Yale repurposed it and Senate moved in around 1971. The building was intended to house three spaces: the Senate chambers, the student center, and the pub. It was originally named the “Graduate-Professional Student Center,” but added “Yale” to the name (and “Y” to the acronym) in 1975. There are several references to the ethnic slur from this period. A flyer from October 1, 1975 refers to the “Gypsy Bar” and “Gypsy Lounge & Enormous Room”. It was also used colloquially among student groups in the 1970s according to references in the Yale Daily News.

c. Stakeholder Views

Finally, in addition to the 2017 annual survey, the Committee spoke with other key stakeholders. For example, committee members raised the issue with Dean Cooley (GSAS), who said that she would support Senate if it advocates renaming and that her office could help with administrative issues and formal institutional channels. Dean Cooley emphasized Senate’s ability to positively influence naming spaces and shaping campus culture.

In spring of 2018, the Committee also met with Laura Smith, the director of GPSCY. Director Smith expressed caution against Senate taking unilateral action on the renaming issue. She advised Senate to seek support from the pub staff and the administration in addition to G&P students, and that the rebranding would likely be a costly and complicated process. Also, the “Gryphon’s Pub” branding was relatively new, and past pub managers Director Smith contacted were opposed to renaming the building and undergoing another round of rebranding. She suggested that the Committee remain in close contact with Deputy Provost Lloyd Suttle of the GPSCY Supervisory Council. Senate has maintained a close working relationship with Director Smith and Gryphon’s Pub management over the course of the 2018-19 academic year. In subsequent meetings, Director Smith has continuously supported Senate’s efforts in the renaming process.

The GPSCY Supervisory Council met with Deputy Provost Lloyd Suttle in spring of 2019 to discuss the building renaming process. Deputy Provost Suttle advised against a new name that referred to the building as a bar or pub, as 204 York also houses Senate chambers and spaces beyond the pub.

III. Renaming Principles

a. CEPR Report
The Committee used the renaming principles in the CEPR Report as a reference point for its analysis of the GPSCY renaming issue. The CEPR renaming principles are as follows:

- Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event.
  - There is a strong presumption against renaming a building on the basis of the values associated with its namesake. Such a renaming should be considered only in exceptional circumstances.
  - The presumption against renaming is at its strongest when a building has been named for someone who made major contributions to the University.
- Sometimes renaming on the basis of values is warranted. Factors to consider:
  - Whether the principal legacy of the namesake is fundamentally at odds with the mission of the university.
  - Whether the legacy of the namesake was contested in the time and place where the namesake lived.
  - Whether the University, at the time of a naming, honored a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University.
  - Whether the building with a namesake at odds with the University’s mission plays a substantial role in forming community at the University.
- Renaming decisions require non-erasure, contextualization, and process.
  - When a name is altered, there are obligations on the University to ensure that the removal does not have the effect of erasing history.
  - When a name is retained, there may be obligations on the University to ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history.
  - The University ought to adopt a formal process for considering whether to alter a building name on account of the values associated with its namesake; such a process should incorporate community input and scholarly expertise.

b. Analysis

The renaming principles articulated in the CEPR Report are largely inapplicable to the GPSCY renaming issue because they envision a dispute over a building’s namesake, not its acronym. Yet the Committee takes seriously the Report’s position that renaming buildings ought to be a rare and carefully considered decision. The renaming principles state a presumption against changing building names because of the values associated with namesakes. Applied to acronyms, this line of thinking would conclude that a building should not be renamed unless the acronym is fundamentally at odds with the University’s mission. While GPSCY is pronounced the same way as the ethnic slur, it is spelled differently and the Gryphon’s Pub website expressly says that “GPSCY is in no way a reference to the Roma people. It is merely a coincidence that the acronym rolls of[f] our tongues as such.” Beyond this, a name change would have to be significant, given that removing the “Y” would likely not lead to a different pronunciation. Again, however, the Committee is cognizant that GPSCY plays a substantial role in forming community among graduate and professional students, and that its negative effect may be enhanced as a result. Specifically, the Committee finds that the pronunciation of GPSCY promotes the usage of an ethnic slur, which would not be spoken so frequently if not for the name of the building.
IV. Recommendation

a. Renaming

Having considered the renaming principles in the CEPR Report and the administrative complications involved in renaming, the Committee concludes that GPSCY be renamed to “The Gryphon” in accordance with Senate’s mission to ensure the building is accessible to all graduate and professional students and fosters a safe and inclusive environment.