

**UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
BOARD OF VISITORS**

**Meeting of the
Buildings and Grounds
Committee**

April 13, 2021

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

4:25 - 4:50 p.m.

Electronic Meeting

Committee Members:

Robert D. Hardie, Chair

Whittington W. Clement, Vice Chair

Robert M. Blue

Mark T. Bowles

Elizabeth M. Cranwell

Thomas A. DePasquale

Barbara J. Fried

Louis S. Haddad

C. Evans Poston Jr.

James V. Reyes

James B. Murray Jr., Ex-officio

Mazzen S. Shalaby, Student Member

AGENDA

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- I. ACTION ITEM (Mr. Hardie and Mr. Ryan)**
- Contextualization of University Statues and Memorials
- II. APPENDIX**
- Naming and Memorials Committee Recommendation on Contextualization of UVA Statues and Memorials

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**UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
BOARD OF VISITORS AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

BOARD MEETING: April 13, 2021

COMMITTEE: Buildings and Grounds

AGENDA ITEM: I. Contextualization of University Statues and Memorials

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION: The University’s Naming and Memorials Committee was charged, in part, with studying the question of contextualizing statues on Grounds. The Naming and Memorials Committee convened this winter to discuss the charge and subsequently issued a report to President Ryan that contains recommendations on contextualization. President Ryan requested that the Board of Visitors formally indicate its support for the recommendations in the report.

ACTION REQUIRED: Approval by the Buildings and Grounds Committee and by the Board of Visitors

**SUPPORT FOR NAMING AND MEMORIALS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION ON
CONTEXTUALIZATION OF UNIVERSITY STATUES AND MEMORIALS**

WHEREAS, President Ryan’s charge to the Naming and Memorials Committee included, in part, studying the question of contextualizing the statues on Grounds; and

WHEREAS, in its report to President Ryan (the Committee Report), the Naming and Memorials Committee concluded that digital contextualization of the University’s statues and memorials will “help visitors and residents alike [to] make new connections and perceive the history of UVA, and of the U.S., with greater capaciousness, nuance, and complexity;” and

WHEREAS, the Committee Report recognizes that the “plan and pattern” of Thomas Jefferson’s Academical Village was intended “to be eloquent of the historical ideas and the civic values he sought to champion in the new university” and so we should continue to find ways to use the built environment “to challenge us to think and learn;” and

WHEREAS, the Committee Report recommends creating a digital historical stratigraphy that does not support a particular perspective but “afford[s] a balanced and fulsome experience, enabling all who visit our Grounds to develop their own informed perspective;” and

WHEREAS, the Committee Report recommends that the President commission a working group to convene professional historians, students, local residents, and alumni with relevant expertise, to work collaboratively to design and produce “a dynamic and evolving history of the Grounds open to new historiographical trends and the insights of new archival research” with full recognition that this method of delivering content can and will change and evolve with advances in research and scholarship; and

WHEREAS, President Ryan has asked the Board of Visitors for its support of the recommendations of the Naming and Memorials Committee;

RESOLVED, the Board of Visitors supports the Naming and Memorials Committee recommendation to commission a working group to engage individuals with relevant expertise to create a digitally- enabled narrative, beginning with the statues on Grounds, that presents a balanced and fulsome history of the subject of each statue, as well as the sculptor, and the historical context around its commission and placement on the University's Grounds.; and

RESOLVED FURTHER, any digital narrative contextualizing statues or memorials on Grounds shall be provided to the Rector at least 30 days in advance of publication.

Naming and Memorials Committee Recommendation on Contextualization of UVA Statues & Memorials

The charge of the Naming and Memorials Committee, delivered by UVA president James Edward Ryan on 21 January 2021, instructs the Committee, in part, to study the question of contextualizing the statues on Grounds. Having duly undertaken this task, the Committee respectfully offers the following recommendations to the President for his consideration.

Our University, as a center of teaching and scholarship in service of the Commonwealth – and indeed the commonweal – should strive to tell the stories of the past in ways that are at once accessible, rigorous, and fostering of self-reflection. Accordingly, this Committee recommends digital contextualization of the University’s statues and memorials using QR codes, or some like expedient, to promote deeper engagement with our Grounds and the multi-layered stories of our past. It is our hope that digital contextualization will help visitors and residents alike make new connections and perceive the history of UVA, and of the U.S., with greater capaciousness, nuance, and complexity.

We recall that Jefferson himself, in designing the Academical Village and in commissioning the execution of that design, took great pains to ensure that the very plan and pattern of his architectural scheme would be eloquent of the historical ideas and the civic values he sought to champion in the new university.¹ Recognizing that this impetus underscores the importance of our ongoing search for ways that the built environment around us might most powerfully continue to challenge us to think and learn, it is our hope that, by digitally contextualizing statues and memorials, the University will accord them new expressive power and pedagogical purpose.

We also hope that by digitally contextualizing the University’s monuments and, then, other aspects of the built environment (i.e., commemorative plaques and sites of particular historical importance), the University will thereby expand its mission of public education. Helping to cultivate a deeper sense of the past will, we hope, inspire both residents and visitors not only to greater empathy, but also to considered thought about their own role in making history in the years to come.

Believing that it is salutary to foster both historical memory and critical thinking, the Naming and Memorials Committee seeks to promote the integration of memory and thought on Grounds through the increased historical nuance and complexity that the digital environment makes possible. This digital contextualization should, first and foremost, be concerned with truth-telling about history and enlivening visitors and residents to the past. Toward this end, three chief virtues of enlisting the digital domain are: 1) the generous canvas afforded by a phone, tablet, or laptop permits the telling of a multi-layered story with accompanying detail that would not be possible if contextualization were attempted by traditional (static) means;² 2) accessibility features and a thoughtful user interface can help the University welcome everyone who comes to Grounds; and 3) the digital medium makes it easy to update information provided

¹ Jefferson voiced the aspiration, for example, that the new “academical village” would provide the opportunity to exhibit “models in Architecture of the purest forms of antiquity, furnishing to the Student examples of the precepts he will be taught in that art” (Jefferson to Virginia Governor Wilson C, Nicholas, April 2, 1816).

² The contextualization of the Jefferson statue, for example, might usefully include information on: a) the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom that it commemorates; b) the sculptor Moses Ezekiel and how the statue came to be at the University; and c) the events of 11 August 2017 – all of which would be too much for a single plaque or marker. A digital ‘site’ cued to the statue might also reasonably make use of newsworthy scholarship on the biography of Jefferson, including his relationship with Sally Hemings and the operation of his plantation at Monticello. We recall Jefferson’s observation to English historian William Roscoe, “here [at the University] we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead” (Dec. 27, 1820).

and to refine narratives based on evolving scholarship. The overriding purpose of contextualization should be to provide an ever-contemporary and robust context to our environment, not to suggest a particular perspective, but to afford a balanced and fulsome experience, enabling all who visit our Grounds to develop their own informed perspective. The proposed digital domain best enables the University to achieve that purpose.

It is our hope that such a digitally-enabled historical stratigraphy might help the built environment – beginning with the statues on Grounds – play a more dynamic role in the cultivation of critical intelligence among those who are privileged to have meaningful encounters here. This Committee therefore recommends that such digital contextualizations should not merely relate the triumphs of the University, but should aspire to advance a balanced, critical, and reflective view in their telling of the University’s history and its role in the nation’s past. Accordingly, we encourage the President to commission a working group that would recruit and convene an admixture of professional historians, students, local residents, and alumni with relevant expertise who would together undertake the project of digital contextualization as a collaborative enterprise. Thus, it is our hope that the University would gather members of the whole community to produce a dynamic and evolving history of the Grounds open to new historiographical trends and the insights of new archival research. We urge those who would be so commissioned to create a thoughtful user-experience design to establish a maximally accessible and effective environment for learning and thinking.

In addition, we are especially sanguine about three aspects of this project. First, that it can be undertaken by diverse groups as a model of collaborative engagement. Second, that its content can change with advances in research and scholarship. And third, that the plasticity of this medium for storytelling will naturally invite new generations of students and scholars, ancestors and alumni, to contribute to the dynamic history of the University and its evolving roles in working to advance the common good.

Mindful of the architectural value and beauty of our University Grounds, we believe that physical markers should be added with discretion. We applaud the planned addition of select commemorative markers – for the Black Bus Stop, the Ginger Scott Case, and the Coat and Tie Rebellion – and we encourage the judicious addition of further markers with similar design features in the future. We believe, however, that both the number of statues and memorials on grounds and their physical situation does not make widespread contextualization via such markers a practicable option for this particular task.

We further recommend that the new visitors’ center prominently feature the digital contextualization of statues (and, we hope, other features of the built environment) on Grounds, so that visitors and their hosts might benefit from this work to deepen and enrich historical understandings for all. We salute the groups that have created digital applications for tours that highlight important aspects of the University’s history, and we recommend that these apps also be an integral part of the educational program at the new visitors’ center.³ (At present, these applications are difficult to find [e.g., in app. stores] and there is, to our knowledge, no physical signage on Grounds pointing to them. In addition, after review, we believe that their user interfaces should be updated in accordance with evolving technologies.) We further recommend that any newly constituted working group charged with digital contextualization include the creators of digital applications, whose experience will surely prove of considerable value. In the interest of providing a welcoming experience to all who come to Grounds, we recommend that new digital contextualization include audio features, as well as appropriate visual/audio enhancements for increased accessibility.

³ See, for example, <https://news.virginia.edu/content/new-app-offers-virtual-tour-enslaved-african-american-history-uva> for a description.

Understanding that in many cases memorials reveal as much about the memorializers' needs as the memorialized's merits, we also recommend that any contextualization of a statue or memorial include a reasonably thoroughgoing delineation of the human agencies that played significant roles in that object's creation and presence on Grounds. These may include, but are not limited to: a) a history of the decision to commission, fund, and introduce the statue into the built environment of the UVA community, whenever such documentation is available (Who made that choice? and, if known, How was it made?); and b) an informed treatment of the artist who created that statue. In addition, we recommend that any such contextualization also include a discussion of the object itself: its design, manufacture, provenance, and artistic value. As university community, we honor the value of scholarship by marshaling information and insights from multiple academic fields.

We believe that, through digital contextualization, the University can best encourage both residents and visitors to think more deeply, not only about particular memorials, but also about the cultures that created them and about the changing nature of public memory and commemoration across decades and generations. In doing so we hope to occasion in those who walk these Grounds a greater sense of the past and why it matters today.

Recognizing the power of memory to help promote healing among individuals and communities who discover that their past is not lost to oblivion, we warmly recommend that the histories rendered in these contextualizations strive to be capacious and inclusive, mindful of the stories that have not, as yet, been adequately related. A true history that is true to the complexities of the past will not shrink from raising contentious issues and prompting difficult questions. In this regard, we believe that the ethical potential of a contextualization project as here conceived should not be overlooked, for it accords our University the opportunity actively to affirm the value that we as a community of higher learning place on the need continually to strive for greater authenticity, objectivity, and truth, as we seek to build community through a shared sense of the past.

Ultimately, it is our hope that digital contextualization will help enhance everyone's experience of Grounds as a place of education and reflection, of healing and repair.

Respectfully submitted,

The Naming and Memorials Committee

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Michael Suarez, Chair