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The Making of the Campus Namescape: A Comparison of University Naming Policies in Canada and the United States

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The naming of places on university campuses plays an important role in shaping the cultural landscapes and geographies of higher education institutions. In recent years, there have been contentious debates over place renaming at colleges and universities in North America and around the world, which has drawn increasing attention to the politics of toponymic practices in higher education contexts. The decision-making process involved in place naming on a university's campus is generally informed by the institution's naming policy and implemented by a university naming committee, yet there is very little scholarship on university naming policy frameworks, procedures, and practices. In this article, we provide a systematic and comparative analysis of university naming policies in Canada and the United States. Drawing on data from more than 2,000 colleges and universities across North America, we assess the level of representation that faculty and students have on university naming committees, institutional commitments to public engagement in the naming process, the value of diversity, and restrictions on corporate naming rights agreements. We conclude that colleges and universities should develop more inclusive and equitable naming policy frameworks to ensure that campus namescapes live up to the ideals of higher education institutions in the twenty-first century. **Key Words:** commemorative landscape, critical toponymy, higher education, place naming, university naming policy.

On 26 April 2022, it was announced that Ryerson University would be renamed Toronto Metropolitan University after years of student activism calling for the name change (*CBC News* 2022). During the nineteenth century, Egerton Ryerson played a leading role in the establishment of Canada's residential school system, which forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families and placed them in boarding schools where they were subjected to assimilationist ideologies, physical and sexual abuse, and, in numerous cases, premature death. In response to activist efforts to rename the university and remove a statue of Ryerson from campus, university leaders added a historical plaque next to the statue in 2018 that acknowledged Ryerson's role in creating the residential school system as a form of cultural genocide (Alozzi 2018). Yet, following the discovery of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia in May 2021, and related efforts at former residential school sites across the country, calls to rename places and remove statues honoring the champions of settler colonialism in Canada acquired a growing sense of urgency. Within this context, the Ryerson statue on the university's campus was torn down by protesters in June 2021, and, over the course of the next year, a university task force developed a series of recommendations, the most significant of which was to


rename the university itself, which eventually occurred in 2022 (DiSaia, Ellis, and Dallaire 2023).

The renaming of places and the removal of statues and monuments have become major focal points of political action, controversy, and conflict over the past decade (Rose-Redwood et al. 2022; Carlson and Farrelly 2023; Gensburger and Wüstenberg 2023). Commemorative place names have long served to inscribe the ideology of those with social, political, and economic power into the cultural landscape, thereby entrenching a particular conception of historical memory in the spaces of everyday life. The act of place renaming is therefore a key strategy for reckoning with the historical legacies of racial, gender, and class inequalities as well as the genocidal policies of settler colonialism, all of which continue to shape contemporary life in the twenty-first century.

Over the past several decades, geographers and other scholars have made important contributions to the field of critical toponymies, or the critical study of place naming (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu 2010, 2018; Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch 2016, 2022; Bigon and Zuvalinyenga 2021; Rusu 2021; Gnatiuk and Basik 2023). Recent works have begun to consider how the *namescape* of the university campus has itself become an important arena of memory politics (Brophy 2010; Brasher, Alderman, and Inwood 2017; Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020; DiSaia, Ellis, and

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Dallaire 2023). When petitions to rename a campus building are proposed, they are typically considered by a university's naming committee and ultimately its board of governors. Higher education institutions often have naming policies that provide guidelines for the naming of buildings and other places on their campuses, yet few studies have investigated university naming policies and the crucial role that they play in the making of the campus namescape.

This study provides a systematic analysis of naming policies at colleges and universities in Canada and the United States with the aim of investigating the administrative logics, practices, and procedures encountered by those seeking to transform the campus namescape. Following an overview of scholarship on the politics of place naming with a specific focus on the higher education campus as a commemorative landscape, we then discuss the data and methods employed for this study and present the key findings of our comparative analysis to illustrate how university naming policies shape the decision-making process of campus place naming. We conclude by proposing recommendations for improving university naming policies to work toward creating more inclusive and equitable decision-making processes to reshape the campus namescape and thereby transform the geographies of higher education.

The Politics of Place Naming and the University Campus as a Commemorative Landscape

Traditionally, place name scholars spent a significant amount of time tracing the historical and linguistic origins and meanings of toponyms, treating them largely as specimens or artifacts (Wright 1929). This conventional approach to toponymy has a long history and played an important role within the context of European colonial expansion as anthropologists, geographers, and other scholars sought to document the knowledges of peoples and places to advance the project of European colonialism.¹

Recent critical retheorizations of the field have moved away from simply analyzing the names of places in and of themselves to examining the larger social, political, and economic contexts and consequences of place naming as well as more fully understanding the locational politics of how and where toponyms are emplaced and experienced within cultural landscapes (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu 2010; Mamvura 2020; Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch 2022). The power of place naming is evident in more than just producing an isolated memorial or linguistic symbol but in how toponymies work through social actors, contested histories, policies, and lived places to form the broader namescapes that structure people's sense of place and the past as well as their daily spatial

interactions (Alderman 2022). Thus, it is important to recognize that educational namescapes—like all place-naming practices—“are positioned within and emerge from immediate physical, symbolic, and social settings and situated within broader environments, patterns, movements, and inequalities” (Brasher and Alderman 2023, 313).

More recent place-naming studies also take a decidedly more processual approach (Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch 2016), moving toward an analysis of the naming process and how certain place names come into being, who is in control (or not) of naming practices, whose lived experiences are written into (and out of) the naming process, and the always emergent discursive and material work that naming performs (Wideman and Masuda 2018). Although the control of language and place identity, especially in highly visible settings, is central to political authority, the naming process is also open to subaltern efforts to claim long-denied rights to public spaces and self-determination. Yet the process of naming places cannot be easily reduced to this elite-marginalized binary. Rather, a wide range of tensions, needs, and intersectional identities can converge and conflict in the naming process (Rose-Redwood 2008). As Brasher (2023) observed of many higher education toponymic debates, elite and marginalized groups on campuses are anything but monolithic. He added that the symbolic capital accrued through the (re)naming of university places can often be coopted and reappropriated to serve different interests—such as when university officials remove controversial place names to placate without really meeting the demands of those oppressed by the landscape symbol.

Scholars have thus increasingly theorized place naming as a technology of power—that is, a means of ordering, controlling, and resisting the identities of both places and people as shaped by broader distributions of power, access, and rights within society (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu 2018). Place naming participates in the social construction of identity across a broad range of geographical scales and political settings—from serving as a tool of nationalism, regime change, and geopolitics (Hui 2019; Azaryahu 2020; Gnatiuk and Basik 2023; Sysö, Ülker, and Tokgöz 2023) to being deployed in the service of the marketing and commodification of place (Madden 2018; Rose-Redwood et al. 2019). Important to our purposes here, the naming of places is heavily involved in the politics of public commemoration and therefore calls on us to consider the power of toponymies to selectively remember (or forget) historical narratives and identities in ways that can work to reinforce sociospatial exclusion or to articulate more inclusive connections between people, places, and the past (Alderman and Inwood 2013).

Building on the work of Alderman (2002), critical toponymic scholarship increasingly recognizes the strong memorialization dynamics at play through

educational namescapes, not just at universities but also at primary and secondary schools. Indeed, K–12 public schools in Canada and the United States have seen numerous highly charged calls to remove the names of racist and colonial historical figures, with even young students pushing to have a voice in the naming and commemorating process (Mitchell 2020; Hernandez 2021). Both within and beyond North America, educational institutions are deeply involved in crafting and debating memory and identity at national and local community levels. They have used school names and naming policies to enact (or silence) certain pantheons of heroes and, in doing so, aim to regulate the social values and ideas internalized by students (Rusu 2019; da Costa 2022). Thus, the educational namescape itself functions as a “hidden curriculum” instructing campus communities in whose lives, historical experiences, and struggles matter (or not) within the public symbols of education and the wider social world (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020).

Commemoratively named places not only engage in a direct narration of memory but also create what Sumartojo (2016) called “commemorative atmospheres,” which work with sensory and social experiences, individual memory, and the built environment to affect people’s connections with the past and broader feelings of belonging or alienation. As Ferguson (2019) argued, the names attached to educational institutions—especially those that reference racist historical figures—have the capacity to perpetuate environmental microaggressions, communicating daily place-based indignities toward teachers and students of color, and thus reinforce institutional discrimination. The affective atmosphere of place naming is especially evident in higher education institutions, where some minoritized communities of color see a direct tie between the hostile atmosphere created by campus namescapes that valorize white supremacist male figures and the fact that most universities have failed to come to terms with their historical and ongoing complicity in perpetuating racism, colonization, and patriarchy (Wilder 2013). Drawing on Till’s (2012) influential scholarship, scholars have conceptualized universities as “wounded places” and interpreted campus place name reform as part of the “memory-work” of not only removing offensive names from the landscape but also creating new geographies of naming and memory-making that advance the politics of recognizing previously erased Indigenous ties to land and the neglected struggles of people of color, women, and queer communities (Brasher, Alderman, and Inwood 2017). This memory-work, as Sheehan (2019) argued, is crucial to achieving “regenerative memorialization,” which stresses the healing possibilities and sociospatial justice capacities of university campus landscapes and ensures that these landscapes are responsive and evolving

sociocultural systems. In the U.S. context, such practices of regenerative memorialization are part of a broader reparations movement as colleges and universities reckon with their historical ties to slavery (Moscufo 2022; see also Garibay, Mathis, and West 2022).

Any number of theoretical approaches can be applied to studying the cultural politics of naming places on university campuses, but a particularly relevant one in the case of this study is viewing naming as a cultural “arena” (Alderman and Inwood 2013; Basik 2022). The arena metaphor directs attention to the power-laden and often uneven debates and negotiations that surround naming. Examining the place-naming process as an arena of memory politics recognizes the often contentious nature of these debates as social actors and groups with varying subjectivities and histories seek to influence collective decisions, justify their naming claims, and entice others to participate in the debate. Conceiving of the university campus as an arena of cultural politics brings a heightened interest in understanding how the inscription of geographical spaces is invariably shaped by administrative policies and procedures (Azaryahu 1997), which determine how naming decisions are made, who holds the right to make those decisions, whose voices are included and excluded from the process, and how open naming politics is to public oversight and participation. These are centrally important ideas driving this study’s investigation.

The arena of place (re)naming debates at universities is often kept decidedly narrow and, in many cases, hidden. The confidential nature of such deliberations is, of course, not unique to university naming procedures alone but rather extends to a wide range of different governance arenas both within higher education and beyond as part of what Mulgan (2014) referred to as “the private space of internal decision-making, where views are exchanged in confidence within a trusted inner circle of advisers” (84–85). In the case of campus place (re)naming, decisions are often tightly controlled by university officials and trustees, heavily influenced by donors (Krucoff 2021), and particularly opaque with regard to public participation—despite most institutions’ stated commitment to shared governance. Our interest in researching university naming policies is driven in part by a recognition of the procedural injustices that characterize and affect the place-naming process. Procedural justice, which has received limited attention in the field of critical toponymies (but see Alderman and Inwood 2013), recognizes that inclusivity in place naming is not just marked by who or what is remembered through a named place, but also whether the right to participate in decision-making processes and procedures has been realized—especially for those social groups that have been historically disenfranchised from the

production of space. It is hoped that this study's analysis can be an important first step to understanding the procedural and participatory justice obstacles shaping university place (re) naming.

Although commemoratively named campus buildings, streets, and other public spaces sit right outside many of our office doors and windows, scholars have until recently largely neglected the study of university naming practices. As of late, however, university faculty and students have played active roles in not just studying oppressive educational namespaces but also pushing for their replacement, and some geographers have taken visible stands against long-standing, racist campus monikers such as those at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill (Menefee 2018), Middle Tennessee State University (Allen and Brasher 2019), and the University of Victoria (Rose-Redwood 2016). Alderman and Rose-Redwood (2020) sought to use these calls for name reform on university campuses as an educational moment for students to develop a keener understanding of the material, affective, and even violent capacities of place naming as well as to critically examine naming policies at their universities in terms of inclusiveness, level of public participation, and efficacy in reforming unjust commemoration. In the absence of procedural frameworks aligned with a commitment to sociospatial justice, they suggested that students might be taken through the scenario of writing their own place-naming policy for their school or university. Ensuring a robust level of publicness and responsiveness in the university naming process—especially with regard to listening to and working with the groups most oppressed by offensive names—is a key part of place renaming to serve reparative ends.

Data and Methods

This study employs both content analysis and an interpretive approach to examine the policies of place naming on university campuses. The research team collected data on university naming policies by compiling a list of liberal arts colleges and universities in Canada and the United States in 2015 based on various sources and then proceeded to conduct keyword searches online to access naming policy documents and related information for each institution, updating the list of university naming policies through to 2020.² For the sake of convenience, we use the phrase “university naming policies” to refer to naming policies at both liberal arts colleges and universities.

In cases where we could not access a naming policy online, a member of the research team contacted university staff to request a copy of their naming policy if such a policy existed. In total, data were collected for 106 higher education institutions in

Canada and 2,158 colleges and universities in the United States, or a combined total of 2,264 schools. For each college or university, the first question we considered was whether the institution had a publicly accessible naming policy. In cases where a naming policy could be identified, the research team analyzed each policy document with respect to (1) faculty and student representation in decision-making, (2) the role of public consultation in the naming process, (3) a recognition of the value of diversity in campus place naming, and (4) any restrictions on corporate sponsorship of naming rights. In addition to the analysis of naming policy documents, the research team also examined the number of Canadian and U.S. colleges and universities that had experienced at least one naming controversy.

Following the data collection process, the research team tabulated and mapped the results and compared the findings for Canada and the United States, which are presented in the next section. Several Canadian provinces and territories (Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nunavut, and the Yukon) and one U.S. state (Wyoming) had insufficient data for the purposes of calculating province- or state-wide percentages (e.g., calculating a percentage with either no data or only one data point), so we have listed these with the label of “insufficient data” when mapping the research findings (Figures 1–4). We also developed a Web map using ESRI's ArcGIS Online software, which is publicly accessible as an online resource for university administrators, faculty, staff, students, and researchers (Hackett and Rose-Redwood 2020).

A Comparative Analysis of University Naming Policies in Canada and the United States

Naming policies provide an institutional framework to guide decision-making related to the naming of new buildings and other places, as well as the renaming of existing places, on university campuses. Of the 2,264 higher education institutions in Canada and the United States considered in this study, 620 schools (27.4 percent) had a publicly accessible naming policy (see Figure 1; Table 1). This figure was significantly higher in Canada (58.5 percent), however, compared to the United States (25.9 percent).

One indicator of the inclusivity of a university's naming policy is whether faculty and students have formal representation to serve on naming committees and thus have a seat at the table when campus naming decisions are made. In this respect, our research findings indicate that Canadian universities with naming policies were more inclusive of both faculty and student representation compared to their

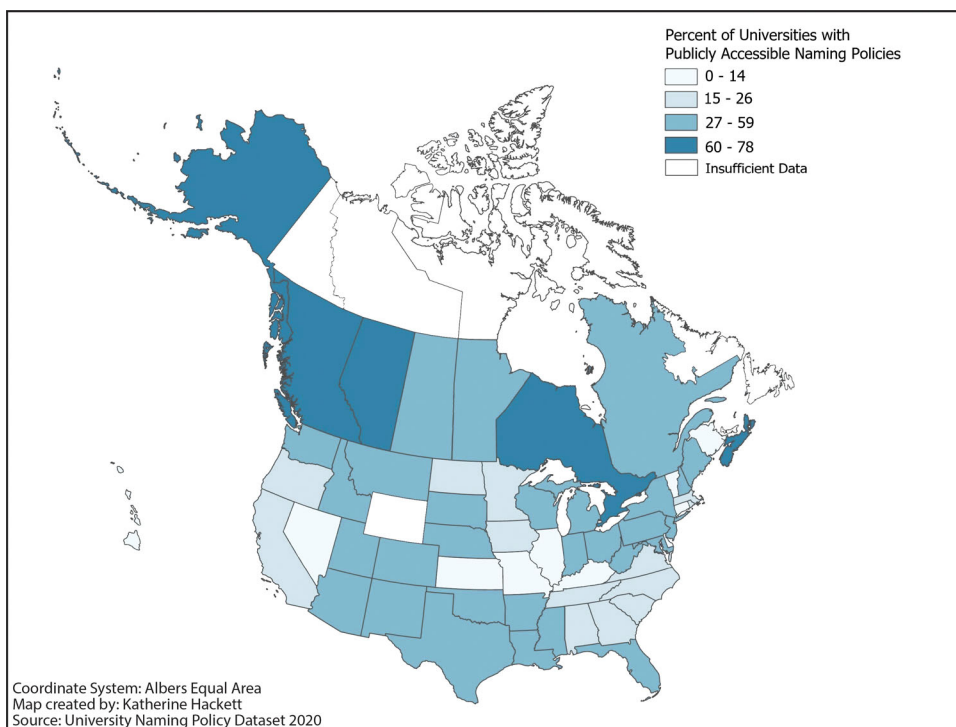


Figure 1 Universities with publicly accessible naming policies in Canada and the United States.

Table 1 Summary assessment of university naming policies in Canada and the United States, c. 2020

	Canada	United States	Combined
No. of universities	106	2158	2264
No. of universities with publicly accessible naming policies	62 (58.5%)	558 (25.9%)	620 (27.4%)
No. of university naming policies with faculty representation	31 (50.0%)	88 (15.8%)	119 (19.2%)
No. of university naming policies with student representation	13 (21.0%)	55 (9.9%)	68 (11.0%)
No. of university naming policies that mention public consultation	11 (17.7%)	22 (3.9%)	33 (5.3%)
No. of university naming policies that mention diversity	2 (3.2%)	10 (1.8%)	12 (1.9%)
No. of university naming policies that mention restrictions on corporate sponsorship of naming rights	35 (56.5%)	143 (25.6%)	178 (28.7%)
No. of universities that have experienced a naming controversy	16 (15.1%)	149 (6.9%)	165 (7.3%)

U.S. counterparts. More specifically, half of all Canadian universities with naming policies included faculty representation on naming committees, whereas only 15.8 percent of U.S. university naming policies had a similar requirement (Figure 2). The data are less encouraging when it comes to student representation, with 21.0 percent of Canadian university naming policies including a student representative on naming committees and only 9.9 percent of naming policies in the United States requiring student representation (Figure 3). When considering Canada and the United States together, a total of 19.2 percent of university naming policies provided faculty representation and 11.0 percent included student representation. Faculty and students are key constituencies within the university community, and making space for their inclusion in the decision-making process for campus place naming signals that their voices are valued as active participants in the making of the

campus environment. In contrast, excluding faculty and students from university naming committees sends a message to the university community that campus place naming is strictly the purview of university administrators and appointed officials as part of a top-down decision-making process.

Although the internal deliberations of university naming committees are generally confidential, some university naming policies allow for different forms of public consultation to inform the committee’s work. In Canada, 17.7 percent of universities with naming policies provided an opportunity for public consultation related to at least some aspect of campus name changes, and the figure was even lower among higher education institutions in the United States (3.9 percent). The lack of public consultation over campus naming is a missed opportunity to build a shared sense of community through the making of the campus as a commemorative landscape.

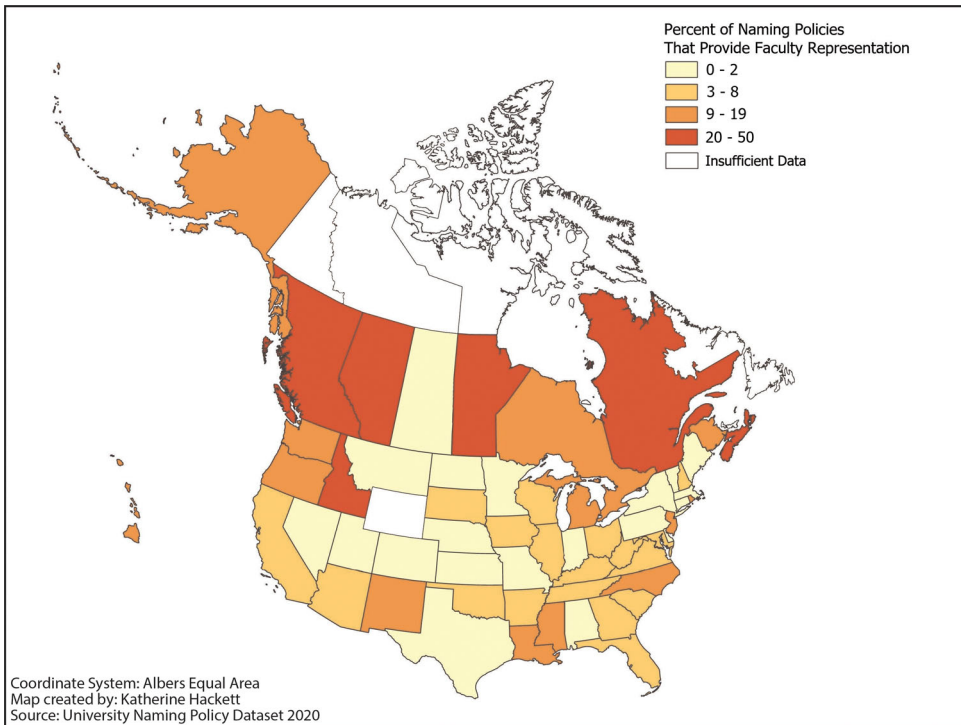


Figure 2 Universities that provide faculty representation in naming decisions in Canada and the United States.

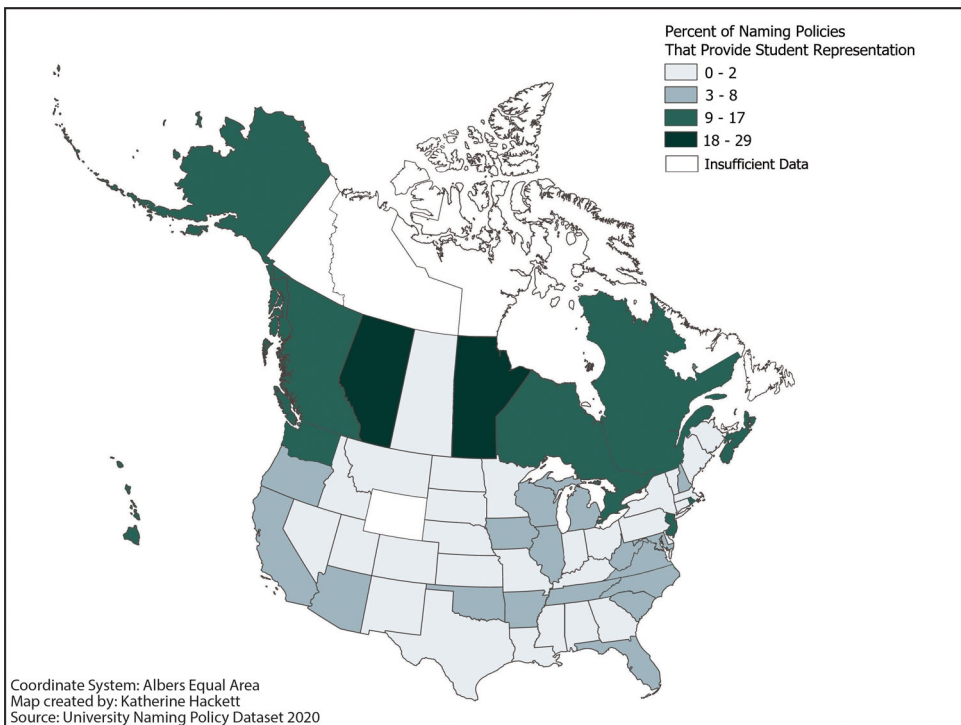


Figure 3 Universities that provide student representation in naming decisions in Canada and the United States.

Examples of policy language related to public consultation that could serve as models for other university naming policies can be found in both Canada and

the United States. For instance, the naming policy at Carleton University in Ottawa states that “[c]oncerns from any member of the Carleton community

regarding a philanthropic naming opportunity may be submitted” (Carleton University 2021). Similarly, California State University at Los Angeles has a policy statement noting that “[a]rguments in support of or opposition to the proposal may be submitted by individuals, organizational units, and any interested person(s)” (California State University–Los Angeles 2007). This implies, however, that the university community is aware of a naming proposal, yet many proposals are submitted to naming committees confidentially without the knowledge of the university community as a whole. Although many naming proposals remain confidential until they are approved, there are some cases in which members of the university community petition the administration to rename a building that has a controversial name. In such cases, a naming proposal might become an issue of public debate on campus. Whether a naming proposal is confidential or public knowledge, outlining a process for seeking input from relevant stakeholders in university naming policies is an important way for universities to demonstrate their commitment to engaging in meaningful consultation with the university community on matters of public concern.

The inclusion of more diverse voices in the discussion over campus place naming could lead to a greater recognition of the need to diversify the campus namescape itself. As of 2020, however, only 3.2 percent of Canadian and 1.8 percent of U.S. universities with naming policies included any mention of the importance of “diversity” in their naming policy. Most university naming policies view each naming opportunity in isolation rather than considering how they relate to the broader toponymic pattern of the campus namescape. Exceptions include schools such as Humboldt State University and California State University at East Bay. Both cases acknowledge the importance of social and cultural diversity more generally, noting that campus naming should involve:

recognizing cultural, ethnic, national, and gender diversity with fairness, dignity, compassion, and procedural consistency. (Humboldt State University 2005)

[s]pecial attention ... to the desirability of achieving over the long run a pattern of names that will reflect the ethnic and gender diversity of the California society CSUEB serves. (California State University–East Bay 2009)

This emphasis on the “pattern of names” is particularly significant because the vast majority of university naming policies generally treat campus place names as individual cases rather than taking a more systemic approach to redressing sociocultural imbalances in the campus commemorative landscape. The lack of a more relational view of the campus namescape can be attributed, in many

cases, to the use of campus place names as individualized fundraising “assets” to lure large donations or as political capital through the recognition of outgoing university presidents as well as other institutional and political leaders. These institutional priorities have left little room for considering the missed opportunities associated with the deprioritization of diversity in university naming policies—and thus the de facto devaluing of diverse campus namescapes—despite the declarations that many universities make to support the value of equity, diversity, and inclusion in their strategic plans.

Many building names on university campuses are named in honor of wealthy donors and increasingly corporate sponsors as well. A number of higher education institutions, however, have restrictions on the corporate sponsorship of naming rights. By our estimate, 56.5 percent of Canadian universities and 25.6 percent of U.S. universities with naming policies have some form of restrictions on corporate naming. For instance, Indiana University at Bloomington has a firm policy against naming academic buildings and entities after corporate sponsors, with its naming policy stating that “[m]ajor academic facilities and major academic organizations should be permanently named for individuals and not for corporate entities” (Indiana University–Bloomington 2021). The naming policy of McGill University in Montreal similarly requires that “[b]uildings and academic units and programs shall be named only after individuals” (McGill University 2019), and, thus, not after corporate sponsors.

The distinction between the corporate naming of academic and nonacademic buildings is made particularly clear in the University of Texas System’s policy, which notes that “[c]orporate namings for academic and health buildings, colleges and schools, and academic departments shall not occur, with the exception of rare and special circumstances,” while allowing for the corporate naming of “athletics facilities, arts facilities, and museums, conference centers, and non-academic and non-health facilities” (University of Texas System 2021). By contrast, other higher education institutions do not permit corporate naming for any university buildings. As the naming policy for Fairmont State University in West Virginia makes clear, “Corporate names are not considered to be appropriate for the external identification of campus buildings” (Fairmont State University 2008). Some higher education institutions that do allow for the corporate naming of campus buildings place restrictions on the type of corporate sponsorships that are permitted. For example, Nicholls State University in Louisiana requires that the “university will not consider the names of companies associated with the production or sale of tobacco products, arms producers, or alcoholic

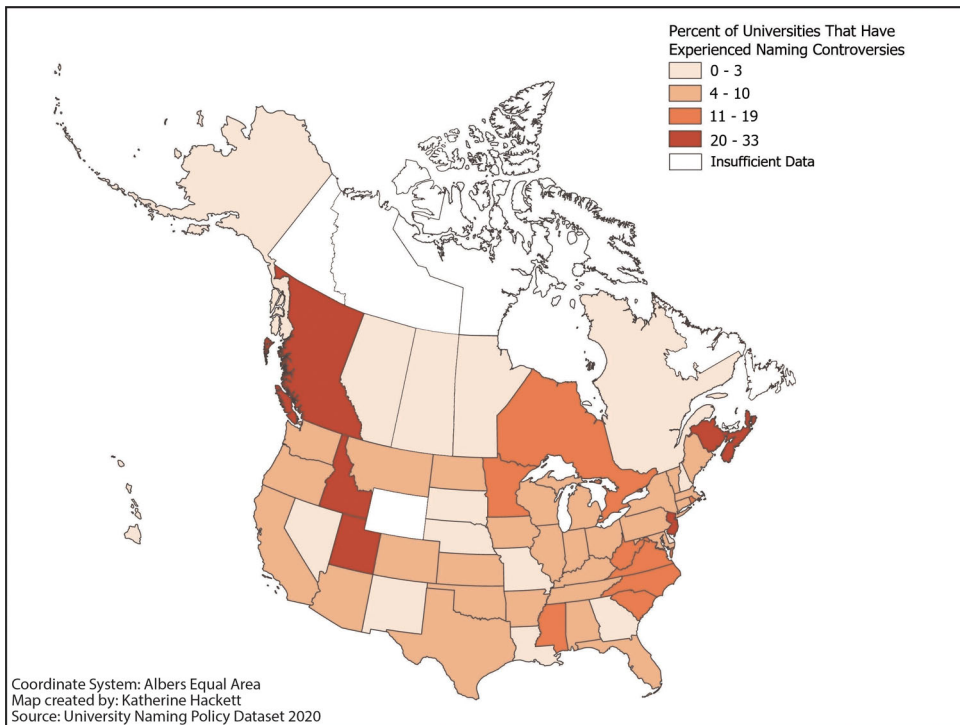


Figure 4 Universities that have experienced at least one naming controversy in Canada and the United States.

beverages” (Nicholls State University *n.d.*). Other universities place restrictions on the use of corporate logos in campus signage (e.g., University of California System 2002). The selling of naming rights for campus buildings to corporate sponsors is part of a broader trend toward the corporatization of public namespapes globally (Light and Young 2015; Rose-Redwood et al. 2019), which comes with the opportunity costs of privileging the interests of those with economic capital over efforts to produce a more equitable commemorative landscape that recognizes members of the university community irrespective of their wealth and power.

In addition to the analysis of university naming policies, the research team also documented naming controversies at higher education institutions. Based on our findings, as of 2020, approximately 15.1 percent of universities in Canada had experienced at least one naming controversy and 6.9 percent of higher education institutions in the United States had become embroiled in a debate over campus place naming (Figure 4). In total, around 7.3 percent of universities in Canada and the United States combined had experienced such a toponymic debate over a renaming on campus. In Canada, the greatest total number of universities that had experienced a naming controversy were located in Ontario (six), followed by British Columbia (three), Nova Scotia (three), New Brunswick (two), and Newfoundland

and Labrador (one). Among U.S. universities, campus naming controversies were most evident in Pennsylvania (fourteen) and California (ten), followed by New Jersey (eight), Texas (eight), Minnesota (seven), North Carolina (seven), Virginia (seven), and various other states. Such naming controversies have generally involved calls to rename a building that honors a historical figure with ties to white supremacy, slavery, settler colonialism, or a controversial corporate sponsor. Student activism has often played an important role in campus renaming efforts, and, as the demand for social justice grows, the number of naming controversies on university campuses will likely continue to increase in the future.

Conclusion

College and university campuses are key spaces in which higher education institutions express their values in both material and symbolic terms. The naming of campus buildings and other places is an important arena through which such values are articulated, publicly recognized, and institutionally maintained. As such, the campus namescape is an integral part of the “hidden curriculum” of higher education. It therefore deserves greater attention from the academic community (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020). In this article, we have highlighted

the role that university naming policies play in shaping the institutional frameworks that inform the campus naming process with respect to decision-making, stakeholder representation, public consultation, the value of diversity, and corporate influence over the naming process, as well as documenting the geographies of place naming controversies on university campuses in Canada and the United States. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that systematically examines university naming policies as technologies of institutional power.³ The results of this study point toward a number of policy recommendations that we believe will make university naming policies more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the university community, which we outline next.

Recommendation 1: Ensure That Key Stakeholders Such as Faculty and Students Have Representation on University Naming Committees

Given the importance of the campus namescape to the university community as a whole, it is critical that diverse stakeholders are included in the decision-making process related to campus naming practices. In addition to university administrators, donor relations, facilities management, and so on, other stakeholders such as faculty and students should also be included as official members of a university's naming committee. Faculty and students are the largest constituents on a university campus and are the primary users of campus place names for wayfinding purposes as they navigate throughout the campus landscape on an everyday basis. They are also generally attentive to how existing campus place names are perceived by the university community and what type of reception a proposed place name would likely receive if adopted. Moreover, students have often played a leading role in calling attention to inequities in the campus namescape. If higher education institutions are truly committed to creating a sense of belonging within the university community, the inclusion of faculty and students on naming committees can contribute to identifying gaps and areas of improvement to foster a more inclusive campus environment.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate Meaningful Opportunities for Public Consultation as Part of the Standard Procedures of Campus Place Naming

Campus place-naming decisions are generally made by university naming committees through a confidential process and, thus, the university community often only learns of a new name once the decision has already been made. In many cases, there are good reasons to maintain confidentiality in the naming process, particularly when it involves negotiations with potential donors. A lack of transparency in the decision-making process, however, can result

in a loss of trust and a feeling of disempowerment within the university community. We therefore recommend that university naming policies incorporate different forms of public consultation as part of the campus naming process. In cases where confidentiality must be maintained, a university naming committee should develop a process for engaging key stakeholder groups through private discussions that are held in confidence by all parties. For naming proposals that involve a matter of significant public concern, however, such as a petition to rename a building that honors a historical figure with a highly questionable legacy, university naming policies should clearly outline a process of public consultation with the university community, which could include a public forum or other opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to share their views of the proposed name change.

Recommendation 3: Conduct a Campus Place Name Audit and Develop a Systemic Approach to Reviewing How Individual Naming Proposals Relate to the Campus Namescape as a Whole

The vast majority of campus naming decisions are made without due consideration for how an individual naming proposal relates to the broader pattern of names that forms the campus namescape as a whole. The first step in addressing this issue is to conduct a campus place name audit, which consists of compiling a list of all place names on campus (building names, street names, etc.) and evaluating gaps, imbalances, and inequities in the university's toponymic landscape (for a critical discussion of heritage landscape audits, see D'Ignazio, So, and Ntim-Addae 2022). Once this baseline assessment has been conducted, the university naming committee should engage with the university community to develop a strategic action plan for how to create a more inclusive and equitable campus namescape that aligns with the mission and values of the university.

The critical reevaluation of the campus namescape and naming process is a concrete step that higher education institutions can take to enhance the campus environment and foster a greater sense of belonging within the university community. Creating a more inclusive and equitable university naming policy framework demands bold and courageous leadership and a willingness to rethink longstanding institutional norms that have upheld social hierarchies and legacies of historical injustice. When leaders of Ryerson University announced that the university would be renamed Toronto Metropolitan University in 2022, such a move only occurred after years of student activism in the face of institutional inertia and half-measures that had largely reinforced the status quo. As Ryerson's leaders learned the hard way, the naming of places on university campuses—and the naming of universities themselves—matters

and can have consequential effects for the very identity of a higher education institution and the members of its community. Developing a university naming policy that represents the voices of key stakeholders, provides opportunities for meaningful public consultation, and adopts a systemic approach to campus place naming can lay the groundwork for creating a campus environment that lives up to the ideals of higher education institutions in the twenty-first century. ■

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Notes

¹ Despite the colonial erasure of Indigenous place names from maps during the colonization process, Indigenous scholars and communities have themselves engaged in efforts to document and reclaim Indigenous toponymies (e.g., Gray and Rück 2019).

² A team of research assistants was given a common set of instructions for data collection. In some cases, though, there were minor inconsistencies in the way that each research assistant coded the naming policy data that they entered into the database. To address this issue, when new research assistants were brought onto the project, they were instructed to update the data input during previous years and correct any errors or misinterpretations. It is possible, however, that human error could have resulted in missing information or

misinterpretations of policy content for some higher education institutions included in the data set.

³ Keyword searches for university naming policies yielded no results in Web of Science or Google Scholar for academic works with an analysis of university naming policies as a primary focus.

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