



May 19, 2021

President, University of Arkansas
University of Arkansas System
President's Office
2404 North University Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72207-3608

Dear President Bobbitt:

As you know, the university formed a committee to evaluate Senator J. William Fulbright's controversial and complex legacy on our campus. Its charge was to explore whether the statue of Fulbright should continue to occupy a place in the center of campus and whether the college that bears his name should continue to do so. The committee was also asked to consider the naming – and potential renaming – of Charles Hillman Brough Commons.

Last month this committee released its recommendations, which have been posted on a campus website:

1. Charles Brough's name should be removed from Brough Commons.
2. J. William Fulbright statue should be removed from its location outside Old Main.
3. Fulbright name should be removed from the College of Arts and Sciences.

Since the committee released its recommendations, I have received much additional feedback and have considered additional input and perspectives from a range of university stakeholders. I have heard from students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of the university, and have had lengthy discussions on this matter with every member of my executive committee, our academic deans and some other university administrators, you, and members of the Board of Trustees. I have taken this wide range of input very seriously. I would summarize the input as diverse and highly polarized, especially related to Fulbright. Opinions range from “don't change

anything” to “completely divest the university from all connections with Fulbright.” And as expected, many expressed a middle ground.

One thing is very clear—as public servants and educators, we have an obligation to reckon with our past and reconsider who we choose to honor and how we choose to do it. As a community of researchers and scholars, we should be in a perpetual process of discovery, updating and augmenting our knowledge and understanding of the world around us to account for fresh perspective and new evidence as well as recognize the importance of historical context, both now and in the past. This is how progress proceeds.

We strive for a society that is more inclusive, and thus as a campus we have increasingly embraced diversity and inclusion as a necessary institutional strength and sign of excellence. We strive to promote an inherent feeling of belonging for everyone who joins the University of Arkansas community. Given these goals, new and fresh viewpoints must be considered, especially when they tell us we are not living up to our own values as a university. Indeed, that is what it means to give people a seat at the table – the right to ask uncomfortable questions about who we valorize, as well as the right to expect an answer. And it’s clear that a portion of our campus feels that veneration of Brough and Fulbright is contradictory to the values we espouse as a university and undermines their sense of belonging.

Let’s start with the most straightforward decision first – removing Brough’s name from the Commons.

The desire to rename Brough stems primarily from his role in the aftermath of the 1919 Elaine Massacre. The event is a tragic chapter in Arkansas history and with stories passed down through generation upon generation, there are students on this campus who can trace ancestors who were murdered during this terrible massacre. Frankly, I had no idea who Brough was prior to this conversation and his associations to this campus are largely due to his appointment as a faculty member on this campus in the early 1900s. And, after further conversation with members of the U of A community, it is clear to me that Brough’s connection to the institution is not strong, if present at all. While it is true that under his gubernatorial leadership, Arkansas became the only Southern state to allow women’s suffrage prior to the Nineteenth Amendment – and he publicly supported anti-lynching laws, something rare in the day – his governorship was significantly marred by his actions that led to one of the deadliest racial conflicts in history.

Since 1958, students have dined in a hall with little awareness of its namesake, or the Brough ties to the Elaine massacre, or his general place in history. Given these facts and the Brough, tangential at best, connection to the university, at this time I am

requesting that the Board of Trustees allow the university to remove this name from the dining hall.

The case of Senator J. William Fulbright is more complicated. On the one hand, critics have focused on his civil rights record. Specific concerns center on his decision to sign the Southern Manifesto, unwillingness to challenge Orval Faubus during the Little Rock Central High School Crisis, opposition to the Civil Rights Bills of 1957 and 1964, and vote against the Voting Rights Bill of 1965.

On the other hand, we must also weigh his contributions as a president of the University and as a U.S. senator, including opposition to the Vietnam war and perhaps his greatest legacy, the Fulbright International Exchange Program, likely the most prestigious, far-reaching and important exchange program in the world.

It reflects his commitment to internationalism and world peace.

Nearly 400,000 scholars across the world have participated in this program and had the opportunity to study in another country – including hundreds who have taught, studied and learned on this very campus – going all the way back to 1957. I have heard from students, faculty and researchers who shared stories about how their experience as Fulbright Fellows literally changed the trajectory of their academic careers and perspectives on the world. I've heard from many of our own international students, both current and former, who revere Fulbright with the full understanding that their ability to learn at a U.S. institution is due in tremendous part by the commitment to global understanding. Needless to say, he has many passionate supporters, including many who worked for and with him when he was in the senate.

How do you weigh his shortcomings against his virtues? There is no simple math to provide an answer.

While Senator Fulbright fell short on integration and civil rights, scholars, biographers and former staffers have largely tied his shortcomings to the demands of political expediency of the times. For them, his votes did not reflect a hardened personal racism toward African Americans. Instead, they were more a reflection of his need to appease a voting constituency that was not ready for social change.

Nevertheless, the record exists and we cannot ignore the impact this had on the lives of people struggling for basic civil rights – nor ignore how demoralizing it must have been to see one of the Senate's most progressive leaders yield to racist policies. I believe it is appropriate that we temper our praise while also remembering that hundreds of thousands of lives were impacted for the better through the Fulbright Program.

This very discussion and conversation has created the opportunity for many to seek information and learn about this pivotal point in American history – something that may not have happened but for existence of this issue. For these reasons, I think it is appropriate that the **Fulbright name remain on the college**. The name is not only associated with a person: It is also associated with a renowned program that has promoted international understanding through education while also impacting thousands of lives. I believe it is in the best interest of the university to retain this connection. We cannot and should not erase this history and connection to our campus, primarily for the educational value his presence brings to the campus.

The Fulbright statue presence outside of Old Main is another point of contention. Some would prefer that the university completely remove the statue in an attempt to further distance the campus from Senator Fulbright. Others suggest that we move the statue from its current location in order to reduce the discomfort that some students feel from having to pass by it when entering and exiting Old Main. Although I am very sympathetic to the latter view because it challenges the university's efforts to expand a sense of belonging, my desire for moving the statue stems also from the educational benefits that could be derived from moving the statue to a location more conducive to learning and instruction.

Dr. Bobbitt, **I am making a formal request to move the statue to another appropriate campus location**, in conjunction with the statutory requirements of ACT 1003 of the 93rd General Assembly and ask for time to develop a process to determine how we decide the future location. More specifically, it is our desire to place the statue in a location where we can provide an accurate context for the life of Fulbright; that is, the great accomplishments as well as his failures related to civil rights. A place where our campus community and visitors can go to see and hear the entire story of Fulbright. I believe this will provide us an opportunity to honestly confront our history as a university and a state rather than simply hide from it by totally removing the Fulbright legacy from the campus. American history is fundamentally complex, and an important tool to our betterment because we may learn from it. Only owning our past will help us move forward.

These decisions do not come easily and I fully recognize that people will feel a range of emotions from elation to disappointment. Ultimately, the goal and desire is to create a healthy dialogue, to minimize hurt feelings, and challenge false dichotomies – that you are either against Fulbright and Brough or else you are a racist. It is just more complicated than that.

Perhaps a better way to signal our true and abiding commitment to creating an environment where all members of our community feel a sense of belonging and an

ability to contribute in meaningful ways, is to invest in programs and activities that advance our diversity, equity, inclusion and sense of belonging. To this end, I take this opportunity to introduce to you and the public some new initiatives (in addition to the many important things we are already doing), organized under four pillars, that will make us a better campus.

I. Pillar One: Climate

- a. Implement a New Paradigm Centered Around Belonging – Establish a clear vision of how all students can and should experience a sense of belonging on our campus. This effort is dedicated to helping students find community in measurable ways and feel like they matter. The framework will serve as a guide in our programming, services and communications, and will be embedded throughout campus.

II. Pillar Two: Students

- a. Student Scholarship Program – We are making a pilot investment in improving access for underrepresented Arkansas undergraduate students, to international experiences and domestic experiential learning, the focus will be on students from the Arkansas Delta as well as south Arkansas who have Fulbright College majors. We hope to launch the program this coming academic year.
- b. Open the Student Success Center – With December 2021 completed construction of the Student Success Center, we anticipate our pre-matriculation programs will even better serve first generation and other populations in need of services and support. I've said before and will say again, every student we admit to the University of Arkansas has the capacity to flourish and succeed, and it's our duty to provide the tools and support necessary. Programs such as Accelerated Student Achievement Program, Engineering Career Awareness Program, the Academic Enrichment Program, and other academic opportunities provide meaningful and measurable support to students and may be scaled where appropriate.

III. Pillar Three: Faculty and Staff

- a. Launch the Gordon Morgan Visiting Faculty Program – Named after the university's first African American faculty member, a professor in Fulbright College, we will seek board approval to name a signature faculty fellowship program designed to serve as a pipeline for the recruitment of minority and underrepresented faculty. This does two major things: rolls out the welcome mat to prospective faculty and creates pathways toward academic careers on our campus for additional underrepresented faculty. It's an essential part of a student's sense of

- belonging and growth to engage diverse faculty who add to the intellectual and social richness of the campus community.
- b. **Develop Recruitment Plan for Diversifying Faculty and Staff** – in addition to the above mentioned pipeline program, we will develop a specific and comprehensive plan for the recruitment of underrepresented faculty and staff, with a special focus on mid-career professionals.
 - c. **Deploy Retention Program** – Recruiting underrepresented employees is only the first step. Ensuring they feel welcomed and supported is the next step to retaining talented faculty and staff. Through the development of retention programs – from mentoring and coaching, access to conferences, and enhanced employee resource groups – we will set the benchmark of being among the most desirable employers in the state.

Pillar Four: Outreach & Engagement

- a. **Center for Greek Chapter Support** – We will dedicate an entire building as a welcoming space for student groups and alumni who are members of smaller, traditionally unhoused Greek chapters whose membership is primarily minority-based, including some of our NPHC organizations. This will be a place where these groups can gather, convene, hold meetings and events and have a place of fellowship and community dedicated to their co-curricular activities. We will designate University House, located at the prominent and highly visible Maple Street location to serve this purpose and to fulfill a longstanding need articulated by these Greek organizations. We will begin programming this space this summer with an anticipated opening in the fall.
- b. **Expansion of the Multicultural Center** – Physical space in the Arkansas Union and enhanced programming will be developed and deployed so students may more deeply explore cultural identities and advance intercultural understanding. A coordinator will be designated and the programming will launch immediately. The space designation will be phased in over the next two years.
- c. **Completion of the NPHC Gardens** – Following a groundbreaking this month, a monument commemorating the “Divine Nine” and the role of the campus’ National Pan-Hellenic Council fraternities and sororities will be completed so that current and future students will have a visible and physical place of reverence to be aware of the contributions these organizations have on our campus. We will dedicate this monument this fall.

This pillared approach will guide and organize our planning in this regard and serve as touchstones for ensuring the work continues. These are by no means the extent of our programming, policy and participation as an inclusive campus, but form some significant new initiatives timely to share here.

Moving forward, our campus and our society will continue focusing on history with an eye on our future as we celebrate our Sesquicentennial year and embrace a healthy conversation about who we were in the past, who we are now, and who we will strive to be in the future. An important part of that conversation will be listening and dialoguing with members of our campus about ways in which we can enhance the campus climate and sense of belonging.

We can't change the past, but we can adjust our relationship to it as necessary. And we can ensure that those who enter the university can do so with a greater sense of welcome, belonging and inclusivity. This is our basic responsibility to our campus community, and I look forward to implementing these and other ideas in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "J" and a trailing flourish.

Joseph E. Steinmetz, PhD
Chancellor