



Senate of College Councils

November 15th, 2019

S.R. 1904

A Resolution in Support of the People for PMA Movement and PMA-Related Inclusion Initiatives

Summary:

Over the past few years, students have repeatedly expressed their discomfort with studying and working in a space named in honor of Robert Lee Moore, a professor in PMA who has a well-documented history of engaging in racist and discriminatory practices. While we recognize that there have been attempts made in the past by UT Legislative Student Organizations to rename Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM), we believe it is still important to show continued support for this cause, and to also draw attention to the grassroots efforts led by students in Physics, Math, and Astronomy to make their departments more inclusive. First, this legislation calls for all students, faculty, and staff to refer to the building as the Physics, Math, and Astronomy Building (PMA) on all official documents. Secondly, this resolution calls for the university to add undergraduate student representatives to the Campus Contextualization Committee, and to convene the committee to discuss the contextualization of future physical landmarks and buildings on campus. Finally, this resolution calls for the continued support of the renaming of RLM as well as diversity and inclusion initiatives in Physics, Math, and Astronomy.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Q: Who was Robert Lee Moore?

A: Robert Lee Moore was a faculty member in the University of Texas at Austin Department of Mathematics for thirty-nine years. Dr. Moore has been repeatedly honored for his teaching methods and work in general topology. However, he was also an outspoken segregationist who refused to allow black students into his classes even after the formal desegregation of UT in 1956, and declined to acknowledge his black academic successors, for reasons explicitly due to race.

2. Q: How do we know that Robert Lee Moore expressed racist sentiments that impacted students' academic progress?

A: First-hand accounts from the UT Austin Dolph Briscoe Center for American History archives detail correspondence between Moore's students regarding his racist behavior. Walker Hunt, one of the early African-American Mathematics Ph.D. students at UT Austin, stated that he "wanted to take Robert Lee Moore's famous Foundations of Point Set Topology. However, that was not to be. The reason: I was black! His words were, 'you are welcome to take my course but you can start with a C and can only go down from there.'" Several other personal accounts of Robert Lee Moore's racist behaviors have also been documented, including altering classroom policies to avoid calling a black student by the title "Mr.," refusing to acknowledge two of his black mathematical "grandsons" (individuals whose doctoral mentors were students of Robert Lee Moore) and denying access to a course to, among many others, Vivienne M. Mayes, the first female African-American student to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics at UT Austin.

3. Q: Have previous attempts been made by students to rename RLM Hall?

A: Calls to change the name of RLM Hall occurred in 2015 and every year since, with no results. In Fall 2017, students from the Physics, Math, and Astronomy departments at UT began organizing to have the name changed immediately, resulting in the organization of the People for PMA student organization. Alongside the passage of JR 1710 and JR 18(S)3 in support of the renaming, a petition was created which garnered 520+ signatures from undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members, and staff.



4. Q: How are students impacted by honoring a man who held beliefs in direct opposition to the University's values of Diversity and Inclusion?

A: By refusing to acknowledge and act on Robert Lee Moore's beliefs regarding race, university administration continues to send a message of exclusion that is antithetical to the values of diversity and inclusion that they publicly claim to espouse.¹ Continuing to memorialize a man whose values are inconsistent with the university's current goals advances the systemic biases and inequalities that exist within our society. As a result, the structural inequalities that permeate university culture persist, most visibly in the Physics, Math, and Astronomy departments. These inequalities send a continued message to students of diverse backgrounds that they are less capable of achievement than their peers and that "money is more important than the ways universities treat its marginalized students."² This message continues to harm both the health and academic success of diverse student populations. For instance, the dropout rate for women in physics is twice that of men and the four-year graduation rate for underrepresented minorities in physics is half that of non-underrepresented minorities.³ These statistics are further proof that the departments of PMA, specifically physics, are currently not fostering an inclusive environment for historically underrepresented groups in these fields. The name of Robert Lee Moore Hall perpetuates these inequalities.

5. Q: What are the direct goals of this piece of legislation?

A: First, this legislation calls for all students, faculty, and staff to refer to RLM as the Physics, Math, and Astronomy building (PMA) and for this name change to occur on all official university documents. Secondly, this resolution calls for the addition of undergraduate representatives on the Campus Contextualization Committee and for this committee to convene to discuss contextualization of all future namings of physical landmarks and buildings on campus. Lastly, this resolution solidifies the continued commitment of both the Senate of College Councils and Natural Sciences Council for the official renaming of the building and to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout campus.

¹ <https://diversity.utexas.edu/actionplan/>

² <https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2019/10/07/ut-must-rename-rlm-to-physics-math-and-astronomy>

³ iq-analytics.austin.utexas.edu/#/site/Campus/views/CNSStudentDataVisualizationDraft2/MajorSankey?iid=1



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- WHEREAS, Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM) is named in honor of the mathematician Robert Lee Moore for his time as a faculty member in the University of Texas at Austin Department of Mathematics; and,
- WHEREAS, Robert Lee Moore has a well documented history of racism towards Black students, and discriminatory views towards Jewish people and women; and,
- WHEREAS, The name of Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM) is not representative of the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion and the continued inaction on renaming the building opposes the development of a culture of inclusivity within the Physics, Math, and Astronomy Departments; and,
- WHEREAS, As seen in JR 1710 and JR 18(S)3, there is continued and widespread student support for the promotion of a culture of inclusivity on campus and the renaming of Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM)⁴⁵; and,
- WHEREAS, CNS department leadership has emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion in campus and college culture⁶; and,
- WHEREAS, The CNS Dean's Office already refers to Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM) as the Physics, Math, and Astronomy Building (PMA) on official CNS Communications and many professors currently refer to the building as PMA on their course syllabi; and,
- WHEREAS, CNS Administration has indicated that the renaming of RLM would pose no significant financial barrier and the building was not originally named for any financial donation; and,
- WHEREAS, Comparable universities, both private and public, have previously renamed buildings on campus due to the racial beliefs held by the original buildings' namesakes⁷⁸⁹¹⁰; and,

⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ENVxnsVZYmH-RJRTWje0A4x7w-3SjrkB/view>

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/13dPbWP4Qe-cU8MIbR2MC37BB-s_bSvQ9/view

⁶ <https://cns.utexas.edu/diversity>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/11/us/yale-protests-john-calhoun-grace-murray-hopper.html>

⁸ www.dukechronicle.com/article/2018/12/duke-university-renames-carr-building-julian-carr-white-supremacist

⁹ <https://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2014/06/aycock-renamed-following-student-leaders-call-action>



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- WHEREAS, Oregon State University, a public university, created an Architectural Naming Committee to contextualize and alter the names of campus buildings. This committee also established standards for evaluating whether the “context of an individual's life and legacy” is consistent with current university values in order to determine if buildings should be renamed¹¹ ; and,
- WHEREAS, The power to change the names of buildings on campus lies with the Texas Board of Regents, who voted unanimously to change “Simkins Hall,” named in the 1950s, to “Creekside Residence Hall” in 2010, because the Professor of Law for whom it was originally named had strong ties to the Ku Klux Klan; and,
- WHEREAS, At that time, the University President of Diversity and Community Engagement stated that “naming a building after a self-proclaimed racist compromised the University’s image,” and that “We’re certainly not erasing Professor Simkins from the annals of UT history...All we are saying is that honorific is a very special designation and it should not harm the university’s reputation.”; and,
- WHEREAS, Diverse student organizations, including but not limited to the black Health Professions Organization (BHPO), regularly meet in the PMA(RLM) Building; and,
- WHEREAS, The drop-out rate for women within the Physics major is twice that of men even though women outperform men in their coursework, implying that this is a result of the climate within the major¹²; and,
- WHEREAS, The climate within the Physics major has also led to the four-year graduation rate of underrepresented minorities in the major being half that of non-underrepresented minorities in the major¹³; and,

¹⁰ <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-state-university-building-names/>

¹¹ <https://leadership.oregonstate.edu/building-and-place-names/evaluation-process/renaming-criteria>

¹² iq-analytics.austin.utexas.edu/#/site/Campus/views/CNSStudentDataVisualizationDraft2/MajorSankey?iid=1

¹³ iq-analytics.austin.utexas.edu/#/site/Campus/views/CNSStudentDataVisualizationDraft2/MajorSankey?iid=1



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- WHEREAS, Changing the name of RLM is integral to changing the atmosphere in these departments; and, therefore, be it
- RESOLVED The Senate of College Councils encourages undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty members, and staff to refer to Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM) as the Physics, Math, and Astronomy building (PMA); therefore, be it
- RESOLVED, All faculty and staff members refer to RLM as PMA on all official documents, including syllabi; therefore, be it
- RESOLVED Pursuant to other public institutions¹⁴, the Senate of College Councils calls for the reinstatement of the Campus Contextualization Committee with the addition of undergraduate student representatives; therefore, be it further
- RESOLVED The Senate of College Councils continues to support a culture of inclusivity on campus alongside the official renaming of Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM); therefore, be it further
- RESOLVED Natural Sciences Council will continue to work with the CNS Council for Diversity Engagement, the CNS Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the CNS Dean's Office, and the Senate of College Councils to further promote inclusivity on campus; therefore, be it
- RESOLVED That this resolution of the Senate of College Councils be sent to Mr. Kevin P. Eltife, *Chairman of the University of Texas System Board of Regents*, Dr. Gregory L. Fennes, *President of the University of Texas at Austin*, Mr. Carlos Martinez, *Chief of Staff to the President*, Dr. Leonard N. Moore, *Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement*, Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, *Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students*, Provost Maurie McInnis, *Executive Vice President and Provost at The University of Texas at Austin*, Dr. Jack L. Ritchie, *Chair of the Physics Department within the College of Natural Sciences*, Dr. Thomas Chen, *Chair of the Mathematics Department within the College of Natural Sciences*, Dr. Volker

¹⁴ <https://leadership.oregonstate.edu/building-and-place-names/about>



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APPENDIX

Timeline of events regarding the renaming of Robert Lee Moore Hall (RLM)

October 2017

- Meeting with the Chief of Staff of the President's Office
 - indicated disinterest in renaming

January 2018

- Unofficial renaming launched
- People for PMA Rally

March 2018

- J.R. 1710 passed through Student Government Assembly
- J.R. 18(S)3 passed through Graduate Student Assembly
- Campus Contextualization Committee convened

September 2019

- People for PMA Town Hall