

A Summary Report and Timeline of the Naming Task Force Mississippi University for Women

**Presented to President Nora Miller
February 6, 2024**

May 2022

On May 24, 2022 the academic deans of Mississippi University for Women wrote a letter to MUW President Nora Miller to recommend that the University take the actions necessary to identify a new name for the institution. The letter stated, in part, that MUW faces serious challenges in declining enrollment, a decreasing pool of traditional-age students from which to recruit, and especially, a significant decline in interest in women's colleges among all students. Although Mississippi University for Women has been coeducational for over 40 years, prospective students often dismiss the University as an option, because their perception of the name does not reflect the reality of the institution. The deans are finding it ever more challenging to recruit for their programs. <https://www.muw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Deans-Council-May-24-Letter.pdf>

August 2022

President Miller formed the Naming Task Force and appointed Dean Amanda Clay Powers as chair. The Task Force consists of 19 members, including representatives from the President's Cabinet, the Deans' Council, Faculty Senate, Student Government, Staff Council, Council of Chairs, the Alumni Association, and the Foundation Board. Ten members are MUW alumni, and one is a current student. Collectively, the Naming Task Force is made up of nearly 300 years of dedicated service to the university.

Amanda Clay Powers, Co-Chair, Dean, Fant Memorial Library
 Dr. Tom Richardson, Co-Chair, Former Provost and Dean; Professor; Eudora Welty Chair
 Dr. Scott Tollison, Provost / Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs
 Dr. Brian Anderson, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
 Dr. Marty Brock, Dean, College of Business & Professional Studies
 Dr. David Brooking, Executive Director, Enrollment Management
 Dr. Marty Hatton, Dean, School of Education
 Dr. Brandy Larmon, Dean, College of Nursing & Health Sciences
 Dr. Dee A. Larson, Chair, Department of Business; Coordinator, Graduate Studies in Business;
 & Professor of Marketing and Management
 Jenny Katool, Foundation President
 Dr. Holly Krogh, Faculty Senate President
 Tequila McCoy, Staff Council President (2023-2024)
 Samuel Garrie, Student Government Association President (2023-2024)
 Karen Clay, University General Counsel
 Anika Perkins, Executive Director of University Relations
 Andrea Stevens, Executive Director of Alumni & Development
 Heather Stone, Alumni Association President (2023-2024)
 Dr. Kim Whitehead, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs; Director, Ina E. Gordy
 Honors College; Director, Student Success Center
 Cathryn Vaughn Borer, Former Director of the Columbus Lowndes Chamber of Commerce

Additional Naming Task Force members included:

Rachel Damms, Staff Council President (2022-2023)

Mackenzie Pearce, Student Government Association President (2022-2023)

Symone Bounds, Alumni Association (2022-2023)

Jennifer Claybrook, Director of Athletics (2022-2023)

September 2022

President Nora Miller announced in a campus-wide email that the University had started formal preparations to determine if now is the time to change the name of the University. She stated: “The University values your input and appreciates the passion you have for The W,” and she invited people to offer their thoughts and suggestions by emailing to a dedicated email address: namechange@muw.edu. She noted that updates would be provided at www.muw.edu/name.

September 2022

The Mississippi University for Women Alumni Association (MUWAA) Board was notified of the name change process by President Miller on September 15, 2022.

September 2022 - early October 2022

The University engaged a consultant, Dr. Jordon Sharp, Vice President of Marketing at Utah Tech University, who led the name change and rebranding of Dixie State University to Utah Tech. Dr. Sharp met with the President’s Cabinet, University Relations staff, and the chair of the Naming Task Force via Zoom on September 26 to describe the naming process. He met on campus with the same group for 2 days in early October to go through the steps of a name change and rebrand, and to develop a timeline. Dr. Sharp asked about plans for school colors and the mascot, and President Miller confirmed that the colors and mascot would not change, nor would there be a change to the University’s [mission](#).

Mississippi University for Women’s Mission

Mississippi University for Women provides high quality undergraduate and graduate education for women and men in a variety of liberal arts and professional programs while maintaining its historic commitment to academic and leadership development for women. Emphasizing a personalized learning experience, the University engages in a variety of instructional methodologies to provide educational opportunities in a diverse and inclusive environment. The institution promotes research, scholarship, and creativity to enhance student development and achievement as a platform for lifelong education and growth.

The group adopted a 1-year proposed timeline that was preferred by IHL, and included work already completed. The timeline’s endpoint was the identification of a name to be presented to the legislature in January 2023 for their consideration.

Below was the original projected timeline, from May 2022 to May 2023.

- May 24: President receives letter from Dean’s Council in support of a name change process.
- August 10: President announces at convocation the need to remove known enrollment barriers.

- August 18: President meets with IHL Board regarding a potential name change process.
- August 22: President meets with Student Government Association president regarding a potential name change process.
- August 24: President meets with the Faculty Senate president regarding potential name change process.
- August 30: President meets with Dean's Council regarding their letter.
- September 8: President meets with the chair of the Director's Council.
- September 13: President meets via Zoom with the Foundation Board to discuss potential name change process.
- September 14: President creates Naming Task Force, and the group meets to discuss name process.
- September 15: President meets with Alumni Board to discuss potential name change process.
- September 27: An email address (namechange@muw.edu) is created.
- September 28: President meets via Zoom with MUWAA past presidents regarding the name change process.
- October 5 – 13:
 - o Continue to collect initial email information
 - o Secure support votes from governing bodies for name change
 - o Listening tours begin
 - o Create name theme survey
 - o Begin designer search
 - o Begin speaking with historical namesake families
 - o Begin initial trademark search
 - o Begin to create report
 - o Begin branding cost list
 - o Hire market researcher for survey and focus groups
 - o Create name process landing page
 - o Purchase URLs:
 - Brainstorm and purchase various theme combinations before the survey goes out
- October 5 – 10: Listening tours – This is the perfect time to explain the process.
- October 6: Submit name process agenda item for IHL meeting
- October 14 - 23: Distribute name theme survey
- October 28: Committee receives survey results
- October 31: Committee meets to review results and choose themes for further study
- November 1 – 2: Create name theme focus group presentation
- November 3: – Nov. 11: Facilitate focus groups
 - o 2 alumni; 2 student; 2 prospective student; 1 faculty; 1 staff; 2 community; 2 extra.
- November 18: Task Force receives focus group report
- November 21: Task Force meets to review all data
- November 21 – Dec 14:
 - o Name Task Force reviews all data and various considerations of names
 - o Nov. 21 – 30: Test final options if necessary (5 – 10 focus groups)
 - o Name is chosen
- November 3: Send agenda items to IHL for special session
- December: Finalize report
 - o Survey data, reasoning, supporting votes, name recommendation, etc
- December 15: IHL special session for name process or new name
- January: Begin lobbying legislature; find legislator to run bill
- January 4: Legislative report due
- January 4 – April 5: Legislative session

- January 16: Bill is due
- January: New logo design process begins and potential logo contest
 - o Initial trademark and logo reviews
 - o Do initial sketches
 - o Perfect the top choices
 - o NDAs
- February – March: Logo committee begins
 - o Review all logos and narrow to 5 or so logos
 - o Create focus group presentation
 - o Facilitate focus groups
- April: Rebrand preparations (assuming we have a logo)
 - o Acquire .edu site
 - o Submit name for registered trademark
 - o Photoshop old photos
 - o Take pictures with blank photos
 - o Begin getting bids for facilities (marketing and facilities)
 - o Website preparation
 - Emails
 - Software
 - URLs
 - o Swag
 - o Bookstore:
 - Order everything new
- May 5: Commencement
- May 15: Reveal:
 - o Video/social media reveal in morning
 - o Media strategy to push out new logo
 - o Secure social media influencer campaign
 - Embargo assets
 - B-roll of new signage
 - Logos
 - o Employee Appreciation Day New Brand Party
 - Social media walls
 - Swag
 - Food
 - o Community projects
 - Banners downtown
 - Flags to businesses
 - Potential Owl art project
- May 15 – Aug. 9: Rebrand facilities
 - o Create form for rebranding needs
- August 14: Blues Week dedicated to new brand
 - o Possible new tradition
 - o More swag than ever before

September 2022

18,000+ emails went out to campus, students, and alumni regarding the potential of a name change process and soliciting feedback. 150+ responses come back with 78% in favor of a change. The emails were shared with the Naming Task Force, and email solicitation continued.

October 2022

President Miller scheduled listening sessions to discuss the need for a name change with groups around campus and with alums. They were scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 5 at 4pm in the GPG Multipurpose Room (Faculty and Staff); Thursday Oct. 6 at 3pm in the GPG Multipurpose Room (Students); Friday, Oct. 7 at 2 p.m. (Open Zoom), Sunday, Oct. 9 at 2 p.m. (Open Zoom) and Monday, Oct. 10 at 5: 30 p.m. (Alumni & Community) in the GPG Multipurpose Room at Fant Memorial Library.

October 2022

University Relations published the following press release.

“Naming Survey Opens to Campus and Community”

<https://www.muw.edu/news/naming-survey-opens-to-campus-and-community/>

October 2022

A notice about the name change was placed on the MUW website.

“Follow Naming Process Website for Regular Updates”

<https://www.muw.edu/uncategorized/follow-naming-process-website-for-regular-updates/>

October 2022

Mississippi University for Women President Nora Miller spoke to a group of alumni and community members about the school possibly changing its name.

October 2022

The MUWAA Board invited President Miller to provide an update on the name change on October 29, 2022.

October 2022

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Staff Council was updated on the name change and informed that Staff Council does have a representative on the Naming Task Force. They also discussed what they were hearing about the name change around campus.

October 2022

Dr. Jordon Sharp, the naming consultant, recommended that the University engage Utah-based Love Communications to field a survey, as they were involved with Dixie State’s name change to Utah Tech. Love Communication Group was hired and tasked with helping MUW better understand the sentiment, knowledge, and general awareness of a potential name change for MUW among alumni, current and future students, faculty, staff, and the community at large.

Love Communications proposed a two-tiered market research study that blends quantitative and qualitative methodologies to procure the most valid and generalizable data possible. This would entail an online-distributed statewide survey that would be crafted and analyzed by Love Communications but distributed through a trusted industry partner in Qualtrics. Additionally, focus groups would be conducted alongside these efforts by Love Communications.

October 2022

Between October 25th and 31st, Love Communications conducted MUW Name Exploration research. The first step was a quantitative research study using an online-distributed survey. The objective of this research was to unearth primary naming themes for the University that would serve as core discussion points in the upcoming focus groups amongst key stakeholders.

A press release was launched by University Relations asking all stakeholders to participate in the study. <https://www.muw.edu/news/naming-survey-opens-to-campus-and-community/> The link to the survey was provided on The W website as well. Participants were asked to rank the importance of various factors and themes and to suggest possible names. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in upcoming focus group sessions.

It was announced at that time the report would be made available on the University's naming process [website](http://www.muw.edu/name). www.muw.edu/name

November 2022

In November, Love Communication conducted the second stage of the MUW Name Exploration research in the form of qualitative research using focus groups comprised of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members. The goal was to gather additional in-depth information on perceptions, insights, attitudes, and experiences and to further the research naming options and trends.

November 2022

- Administrative Council received updates on the name change process.

December 2022

In December of 2022, the Naming Task Force concluded that it was not feasible to complete the necessary work to submit a name to the legislature for the 2023 legislative session. The Naming Task Force did not want to rush the process, particularly the historical and archival research, so the decision was made to extend the process through 2023 with a new goal of submission to the legislature in January 2024.

At that point, President Miller appointed Dr. Thomas Richardson as the co-chair of the Naming Task Force.

January 2023

- The MUWAA Board invited President Miller to provide an update on the name change on January 21, 2023.

January 2023

The Naming Task Force met to review the MUW Name Exploration Survey and Focus Group research reports provided by Love Communications.

MUW Name Exploration Survey

Over 4300 people completed the survey. The survey results linked here are divided into five segments: Alumni, MUW Faculty & Staff, MUW Students, Prospective Students, and Community. (Respondents could choose more than one option.)

- Alumni - 2525 responses
- Faculty & Staff – 319 responses
- Current Students – 508 responses
- Prospective Students – 81 responses
- Community – 1877 responses

MUW Name Exploration Survey Results:

- The results for all constituents combined indicated that the most important reported factors for the future success of the University was, by far, academic reputation and affordability. Additionally, they felt that a name for the University must support the institution's [mission](#) and be unique above all else.
- Selecting a name that provided historical context to the University was rated as more important than a geographical identifier, and this was true across all audience segments.
- Students were more amenable to a geographical name, but ultimately did still prefer a historical name. Similarly, alumni and donors expressed less support for a geographical name relative to the full sample.
- For geographical names, the most preferred was University of Northern Mississippi (UNM), with no other names being close.
- For historical names, Callaway State University (CMU) was a clear first, followed by Weathersby State University (WSU).
- Other names that individuals felt should be considered included smaller geographical identifiers related to the area and Eudora Welty. This was the most popular open-answer response (30% of answers included some version of her name in it).

The survey also provided an opportunity for participation in focus groups, for eliciting suggestions for possible names from those who participated, and for gathering information about some characteristics people value when selecting a name.

MUW Name Exploration Focus Group Study:

- Current students (4 focus groups)
- Faculty and Staff (3 focus groups)
- Alumni (4 focus groups)
 - 94 total participants across all groups

Each focus group was informed they would be discussing name “themes” separately, exploring the pros and cons around each name. It was also explained that the names were not finalist names and that other names could be suggested for discussion and consideration. The goal of the study was to examine opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward Historic/Honorific and Location-based names.

The firm introduced the two themes — Location-based and Historic/Honorific — and provided the following example names: University of Northern Mississippi, University of Eastern Mississippi, Weathersby State University, and Callaway State University.

After each theme and name introduction, the focus group participants were encouraged to share their opinions of each theme and name. Participants were also asked to share any additional name ideas that fit within the themes of “Location-based” and “Historic/Honorific.”

MUW Name Exploration Focus Group Results:

- Location-based names do not support the school’s unique history, culture or mission.
- Alumni support could be severely compromised if a location-based name is adopted.
- Strong support for an honorific name IF an appropriate woman could be identified and thoroughly vetted to avoid any potential issues in the future.
- Strong opinions were shared by women and men that if an honorific name is chosen it MUST honor a woman.
- If the term “State” must be included, a thorough explanation of why will be required for many to accept it.

Naming Task Force’s Evaluation of Study

After Love Communications presented the results of the MUW Name Exploration Survey, it was noted by the Naming Task Force that the research did not generate the distribution of participants the committee hoped for. While Alumni and MUW employees were adequately represented in the study, it was lacking in representation from prospective students, although the survey went out via the Slate tool to more than 20,000 potential students. The sample size of students currently enrolled at MUW was also disappointing.

Whereas the Naming Task Force did believe there was value in the data, it was decided that additional research would need to be conducted. Since it was crucial that the University name be inclusive and resonate with today’s college students, the Naming Task Force felt that the limited representation of prospective students in the survey was problematic. The Naming Task Force reaffirmed their commitment to continuing research to get a more balanced view of all the constituencies.

January 2023

The “Naming Process” page of the MUW website was updated.

January 2023

The Task Force began compiling a list of names obtained from the following sources:

- University and Alumni listening sessions.
- The MUW Name Exploration survey.
- The MUW Name Exploration focus group sessions.
- Names submitted to the “Name Change” email address (namechange@muw.edu).

The list included more than 350 suggestions for names.

January 2023

The Naming Task Force met to further discuss location-based, historic, and mission-based themes for names. Directional names received negative feedback, especially from alumni, in our Fall 2022 survey, focus groups, and listening sessions. The pervasive sentiment was that we would be losing our tradition-rich history by choosing a directional name, and we could potentially sound like a community college. The other two types of University names that were options for us were historic and mission-based names. The Naming Task Force determined that it would be difficult to consolidate our mission into a three, or even four-word, name for the University, so the task force continued to pursue a pathway of using a historical or honorific name.

The list of possible names included several notable alumni. The Naming Task Force enlisted individuals to conduct extensive background investigations on each person via archival and historical research in both the University Archives, as well as nation-wide archives as appropriate for some suggestions.

January 2023

On January 31st, the Naming Task Force met to hear a presentation by Stephanie Salvaterra, Archivist and Special Collections Librarian. She presented archival and historical research on several notable alumni under consideration.

February 2023

As part of the next steps of its naming process, Mississippi University for Women shared findings based on data gathered in the open community survey.

University Relations published the following press release.

“The W shares results of naming process survey”

<https://www.muw.edu/news/the-w-shares-results-of-naming-process-survey/>

February 2023

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Administrative Council received updates on the name change process.
- Staff Council received updates on the name change process and were also updated on the status of data collection.

February 2023

Since the research conducted by Love Communications was lacking in adequate representation from prospective students, the Naming Task Force met several times to discuss the path forward. The decision was made to partner with a new firm. The goal was to find a firm that could help with more focused research and provide branding assistance that would take the process forward. The Naming Task Force formulated a document that provided a description of the work that needed to be done by a market research/branding firm to complete a naming project.

March 2023

MUW prepared a Request for Proposals and invited market research/branding companies interested in working on this project to submit Scope of Work (SOW) plans for consideration by the University. Proposal submissions were due by March 31st.

March 2023

Archival research into possible historical names continued for several months using both MUW and external researchers. Numerous letters, manuscripts, census records, and other historical documents were evaluated. It was slowly becoming evident that there may be no clear path to using a historical name while also keeping the forward-looking mission of the University. Additionally, there is a dearth of scholarship on the remarkable women under consideration. The social and cultural norms of Mississippi in the 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries were not appropriate for a 21st century University with a national and international reach. It was becoming increasingly apparent that it was perilous to base an entire University's identity on any person from that period. Although, archival research on historical names continued into the summer of 2023.

March 2023

The MUWAA Board invited President Miller to provide an update on the name change on March 30, 2023. She also provided an update at the MUWAA Annual Meeting on March 31, 2023

March 2023

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.

April 2023

A subset of the Naming Task Force, along with additional individuals from the Alumni Association, interviewed the marketing firms that submitted SOW proposals. The team chose to partner with Chernoff Newman, a fully integrated communications agency with an extensive background in higher education. Their relevant experience in this particular space includes research, branding, messaging, and public affairs. Additionally, David Campbell, COO and Vice-Chairman of Chernoff Newman, is originally from Columbus, MS, and had connections to campus, including seven close relatives that were graduates of The W.

April 2023

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Staff Council received updates on the name change and were encouraged to attend Chernoff Newman's brand audit focus group sessions in May.

May 2023

Chernoff Newman representatives met with the Naming Task Force to explain their suggested process. Their goal was to first conduct a Brand Audit, so they could identify where our brand is today and where we would like it to be in the future. Chernoff Newman's goal after completion of the brand audit was to provide a Brand Map and Brand Matrix and conduct primary sentiment research on prospective students. With research complete and a Brand Map and Messaging Matrix in place, they would then work on our new name and visual identity.

May 2023

Chernoff Newman began the Brand Audit process with Brand Discovery sessions. Chernoff Newman's branding strategy team met with the Naming Task Force and other key MUW employees and alumni to lead them through a two-part Brand Discovery session.

The first half of the session focused on:

- Reviewing the existing strategic plan and visioning documents
- Identifying core audience segmentation
- Discussing marketing communications
- Examining the category profile
- Reviewing the competitive landscape
- Identifying the brand mission or brand intent
- Assessing the current brand
- Identifying key attributes
- Examining opportunities

The second half of the process focused on working with the groups to build out the Brand Platform as the basis for the brand strategy. Specifically, they identified:

- Objectives of the initiative (why are we here?)
- Brand architecture/nomenclature across all identified audiences
- Brand benefit(s), representing emotional need to core audiences
- Brand value, or the rational need to core audiences

Upon completion of the process above, Chernoff Newman provided a Brand Map and a Messaging Matrix that would ensure alignment of our messaging with our brand.

May 2023

The next step of the process was a Brand Audit. The brand audit was a critical step in the naming process, and input from the various constituent groups was important in defining the future of the University. Chernoff Newman met with various University constituents to hear what people felt and thought about the value and purpose of the University. Chernoff Newman met with eight groups, including Cabinet, the Naming Task Force, Deans, Department Chairs, Staff, Faculty, Students, and Alumni.

Discussions revolved around the following questions:

- What are the most important opportunities facing The W during the next 12-24 months?
- What are the most important challenges facing The W during the next 12-24 months?
- Who are the most important audience members who need to understand who we are?
- What position do we occupy in the mind of these audiences?
- How do we describe ourselves as a university?
- What is our brand promise and how do we describe the promise?
- How do we describe our brand? What do we do? Why do we matter? What do we believe in (brand perspective)?

- Who do we “compete” with for mindshare regarding our brand?
- How do we describe our brand position in the marketplace?
- What makes our brand claims and promises credible and trustworthy?
- Why should our audiences believe what we say about ourselves?
- What words describe how the brand is expressed? Ex — tone of voice, sentiment, feelings, etc.
- What words, phrases or feelings would you use to describe the University?

May 2023

University Relations published the following press release.

“University partners with Chernoff Newman, enters next phase of rebrand”

<https://www.muw.edu/news/university-partners-with-chernoff-newman-enters-next-phase-of-rebrand/>

June 2023

University Relations published the articles below in *Visions*, a magazine for Alumni and Friends of The W, explaining the name change process and the need for a name change.

Visions (Spring 2023 Edition)

“Q + A with President Nora Miller”

<https://www.muw.edu/visions/features/q-a-with-president-nora-miller/>

Visions (Spring 2023 Edition)

“Past & Future”

<https://www.muw.edu/visions/features/past-future/>

July 2023

- The MUWAA Board invited President Miller to provide an update on the name change on July 15, 2023.

August 2023

Chernoff Newman conducted two studies on prospective students. The first consisted of 4 focus group sessions with a total of 26 prospective students, and one-on-one interviews with 13 parents of prospective students. Chernoff Newman also conducted an additional online survey of prospective students that resulted in 139 responses.

Prospective Student Focus Groups and One-on-One Interviews

The first part of The “W” name and image research effort conducted by Chernoff Newman involved interviews and discussions with 13 Mississippi parents and 26 prospective students. The parent effort was a value-added task used to check the validity of the student responses. Seventeen and 18-year-olds do not necessarily have the experience to formulate detailed answers about the importance of money, access, etc. that fold into making a college selection. Also, we know that parents can be an important part of the college selection process. Consequently, having a parallel set of answers between a control group of parents and students helped ensure that the questions produced valid answers.

The student insights were derived from online focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and online student surveys. All discussion guides and survey questions, including the parent online survey, followed the same format. Parents and students were asked about their impressions of the college application process, priorities, and their awareness and impressions of the “W.” Also, 11 students were administered a name choice sentiment test, which is detailed in this “findings” note.

At the end of the focus group session, prospective students were shown The W website. When questioned about what they thought about the university, the students indicated that they liked the programs, majors, tuition rates, etc. But further investigation revealed that if not pushed to evaluate the entire website, the name directed their attention away from investigating those opportunities. Chernoff Newman concluded that addressing this problem may be the most important reason for rethinking the name. In its present form, the name does not invite “search” or communicate a value that easily connects with what today’s students want from their college. It is important to note that among the 26 Mississippi students involved in this research, not one had applied to the “W”.

According to Chernoff Newman, “As is clearly demonstrated throughout this research, parents and students have a rather fixed ‘hierarchy of needs’ when looking at colleges. These needs can really be reduced to just two categories. The most important is “value,” which has two components. College costs money. But “value” also is measured in terms of finding/having a major that will produce a career. The next priority is “fit.” Fit is a concept that is a little more subjective than tuition and major or value, but during the focus groups, we heard about diversity, sports, social opportunities, student life, and the big one — the school’s proximity to home. Added all together these things measure the “fit” of the school. But as we learned in these discussions — value trumps fit in most calculations. If you cannot pay for it and expect to graduate with a major/skill/degree that will point toward success, then why apply?”

“Simply put the concepts — value and fit — drive the search process. And if you want to stand out as a potential college choice, speaking the language of value is critical. The “W” seems to do a great job of that on its website. Both parents and students uniformly had good comments about the website’s structure and information. But getting students to look at the “W”’s value offering is clearly being short-circuited by the confusion over and lack of awareness of the existing name.”

A great deal of emphasis was placed on trying to draw out what students would expect a school to be like based only on its name. To test this, Chernoff Newman created a university with a name containing a clear geographical identifier and one with a name more akin to a person’s last name. Then a question was devised asking students to determine which university name most likely reflected different characteristics. The universities named in the exercise were East Mississippi State University and Whitford University — both fictitious institutions. Students were asked to choose which of these two schools were most likely to have:

- The best tuition

- Offer the most majors
- Have the best sports programs
- Best faculty
- Hardest to get into
- Strong sense of community
- Best graduation rate
- Best student life
- Diverse student body

The school characteristics were presented in random order. Overall student answers were illustrative of a number of dynamics about how the structure of institutional names communicate or are seen as describing the nature of (in this case) a type of school. East Mississippi is generally seen as having better tuition, sports programs, and diversity. Whitford is seen as harder to get into, offers more majors, and graduates a higher percentage of students. The group almost divides on which school has the best faculty and a strong sense of community. Many of these trends follow the big vs small school assumption made by the students.

Prospective Student Naming Convention Online Survey

The second part of The W name and image research conducted by Chernoff Newman involved a Naming Convention Research Study of prospective students via online methodology between August 24 and September 6, 2023. The sample for this study was drawn from prospective students aged 17-24 years-old in Mississippi (n = 74) and Alabama (n = 65). The study tested sentiment around fictitious University names used as placeholders in the study to not bias the results. Though conducted online, the study was designed and conducted to serve as a directional indicator for preferences on geographical vs honorific naming conventions among prospective students.

Key Findings

Name Preference

Overall, prospective students in Mississippi prefer the name East Mississippi University, while prospective students in Alabama prefer the name Whitford University.

Attributes

Study participants were presented with 13 attributes and asked, based on the name only, with which University they most closely associate the attribute.

In Mississippi:

Prospective students were most likely to associate the name University of East Mississippi with:

- Being more affordable
- Offering more scholarships and financial aid
- Having a more diverse student body
- Having a better campus life and extracurricular activities and

- Being the best fit for them

Prospective students were most likely to associate the name Whitford University with:

- Having a better academic reputation
- Having a more prestigious degree
- Having better facilities and resources
- Having a stronger alumni network (when ranking Whitford University's attributes, this attribute ranks fourth but prospective students were more likely to associate this attribute with East Mississippi University)

In Alabama:

Prospective students were most likely to associate the name University of East Alabama with:

- Being more affordable
- Having a more diverse student body
- Offering more scholarships and financial aid
- Having a better campus life and extracurricular activities*
- Being the best fit for them

Prospective students were most likely to associate the name Whitford University with:

- Having a better academic reputation
- Having a more prestigious degree
- Providing more personal attention from faculty and advisement
- Having better facilities and resources
- Having a stronger alumni network
- Being more likely to provide you with the education you need to get a job right out of school
- When ranking East Alabama University's attributes, this attribute ranks fourth, but prospective students were more likely to associate this attribute with Whitford University.

Implications and Considerations

- In this and previous research conducted — both quantitative and qualitative — the data did not strongly support one naming convention over another. Some people preferred a name, while others preferred a geographic identifier.
- These findings suggest an opportunity for MUW to “thread the needle” by using a name that also included a geographic identifier. While it is unlikely that any new name will be universally embraced, a hybrid naming approach might be the best solution.

September 2023

- Administrative Council received updates on the name change process.
- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Council of Chairs received updates on the name change process.
- Staff Council received updates on the name change process.

September 2023

Chernoff Newman representatives met with the President’s Cabinet, the Naming Task Force, and the University Relations staff. Chernoff Newman proposed seven creative, mission- and brand-based names that did not start with a W, explaining that, in their opinion, The W would always stand for Women. The Naming Task Force chose three names and provided feedback for each name to President Miller for consideration. The Naming Task Force was disbanded at that time.

Based on the feedback from the Naming Task Force, the name that was chosen of the three was Mississippi Brightwell University.

October 2023

- The MUWAA Board invited President Miller to provide a university update on the name change on October 21, 2023.

October 2023

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Administrative Council received updates on the name change process.
- Council of Chairs received updates on the name change process.

November 2023

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Council of Chairs received updates on the name change process.

January 2024

- The MUWAA Board invited President Miller to provide an update on the name change on January 3, 2024.

January 2024

On January 8, President Miller announced the name of Mississippi Brightwell University at Spring Convocation. The new name was inspired by the MUW motto, “We study for light to bless with light,” as well as the University’s academic and personal emphasis on health and wellness. As President Miller said, “Our distinguished faculty — beacons of enlightenment and a wellspring of knowledge — collaborate with each of our students one-on-one. They inspire, cultivate and guide them towards monumental achievements, fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and leadership.”

January 2024

University Relations published the following press release.

“Miller announces proposed renaming of MUW to Mississippi Brightwell University”

<https://owlsathletics.com/news/2024/1/8/general-miller-announces-proposed-renaming-of-muw-to-mississippi-brightwell-university.aspx>

January 2024

After Mississippi Brightwell University was announced on January 8, it quickly became clear that it was a misstep to depart from The W identity. It also became clear that for 42 years, “The W” has referred to every member of the Long Blue Line; all our graduates are W graduates. Students, faculty, and staff were more accepting of the Brightwell, many even

embracing it, and there were some positive responses from the community and alumni, but overall, the feedback from our alumni stakeholders was negative, including from those who supported a name change.

January 2024

- Heather Stone, Alumni Association President, updated the Alumni Association on the name change on January 3, 2024.
- President Nora Miller provides an additional update on the university's proposed name via a video statement on January 10, 2024. <https://fb.watch/q3Ntg0eTQc/>

January 2024

The Naming Task Force was reconvened, as it became clear a new name must be a “W” name so that we could retain the trademarked brand logo of “The W.” The name should embrace a new meaning to The W — one that could represent our alumni while also embracing our current and prospective students. It was decided that while the “W” pays homage to the past, it can be dynamically redefined to position the University with a modern and inclusive educational approach.

Returning to Chernoff Newman, they were asked to suggest “W” names for the Naming Task Force to review. Chernoff Newman met with the Naming Task Force on January 24th for presentation of 18 potential names that would allow us to keep using “The W” trademarked logo.

January 2024

- Heather Stone, Alumni Association President, updated the Alumni Association on the name change January 20, 2024.
- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process in their regular meeting on January 12, 2024.

January 2024

On January 19th, Holly Krogh, Faculty Senate President, sent an email request to the Senators asking for suggestions for any novel names not yet mentioned. She explained the important factors to consider in a new name and asked them to report back on their own, and their department's, thoughts. She received feedback from several senators, and also from individual faculty and presented these to the Naming Task Force.

January 2024

The Naming Task Force approved a new timeline for its new process, and the new information was posted on the website. <https://www.muw.edu/proposed-w-names/>
The new timeline maintained a commitment to have a new name acted on by the legislature in the 2024 session.

The following tentative timeline going forward was posted on Naming Process webpage.

1/24/24 –Faculty, Staff, Alumni, and Community feedback due to the Naming Task Force Co-Chair, Dean Amanda Clay Powers (acpowers@muw.edu).

1/25/24 – Task Force members gather feedback from their respective areas.

1/26/24 – New Survey released to students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

1/29/24 – Survey ends.

1/30/24 – Task Force meets to begin analysis of survey data.

2/1/24 – 2/8/24 – Task Force reviews survey data and prepares analysis.

2/9/24 – Task Force provides analysis to President.

2/9/24 – 2/13/24 – Task Force makes recommendation to the President and President announces name.

January 2024

The new timeline allowed the University to respond to the negative responses to the originally proposed name of Mississippi Brightwell University. Dean Powers opened her email to receive feedback and additional name suggestions at this point.

An email was sent to students, employees, and alumni, saying, “The Naming Task Force has been working hand-in-hand with our communications agency Chernoff Newman to find a name that will allow us to continue to use trademarked “The W” branding logo. In keeping with our desire to hear from many constituencies, we are asking for feedback and suggestions from alumni, faculty, staff, and students.”

Over the next few days Dean Powers responded personally to over 1000 emails, and she took the feedback she received to the Naming Task Force as they reconvened to consider the best way to move forward.

January 2024

By January 24th The Naming Task Force had received 333 unique naming suggestions, including 237 from alumni and 18 from Chernoff Newman. All naming suggestions were compiled in a spreadsheet (<http://tinyurl.com/thewname>) according to categories of the recommending constituencies and posted on the MUW Naming Process website. <https://www.muw.edu/name/>

January 2024

FAQ information on the name page of the MUW website was updated.

January 2024

The Naming Task Force was asked by a group of alums to allow them to attend the meeting on January 22 to pitch a name option. They made a presentation for the name “The W: A Mississippi University.” Chernoff Newman also presented their names in this meeting.

The Naming Taskforce met again on January 24th, after the deadline for submission of new names and feedback from alumni, faculty, staff, and students. This fresh look at names was built on 18 months of work with constituents and consulting groups that included surveys, listening sessions, focus groups, and a brand audit.

The discussion of names included a review of constituency feedback, including emails and feedback received by all Naming Task Force members. All names were considered, weighing the merits of each name in terms of our desired branding strategy:

1. The name must make the University more appealing to prospective students.

2. It must be meaningful, generate curiosity, and attract students who may not have previously considered the institution.
3. It should also help the University project a modern and forward-thinking image, appealing to the younger generation.

The Naming Task Force narrowed the extensive list to three names from alumni, employees, and current students: Wynbridge, Wynbright, and Welbright. The final name would also include some arrangement of “Mississippi” and “University” as part of the name.

January 2024

Between January 26 and January 29, the three names, Wynbridge, Wynbright, and Welbright were tested via Brand Name Testing, or sentiment analysis. A quantitative online survey was sent to alumni, University employees, and current students to test the names against elements of the University’s desired branding strategy.

The following statement about the brand appeared at the head of the survey, and a brief statement of how each name related to the brand appeared for each name. The statement and name explanations appear below:

Brand Statement

Mississippi University for Women is known for its rich history of empowering women, and its commitment to providing a high-quality education to all. Its faculty, staff, students, and alumni create a vibrant and forward-thinking University built on a tradition of academic excellence, personal growth and leadership, and strong community.

Wynbridge

The first part of Wynbridge comes from the Old English word for the letter W. Borrowing on this history, we pair it with bridge. A bridge connects the past to the future, our alums to our students, and our campus to our community. When the W was founded, it built a bridge from exclusion to empowerment for women. With this name, past, present, and future alumni will all be W grads, creating a continuous connection for our tradition-rich school, while maintaining its forward-looking spirit.

Welbright

The first part of Welbright comes from the idea of wellness, which represents our supportive environment that promotes the well-roundedness of our students. Traditionally each graduation ceremony begins with a reminder of the historic purpose of the University, to “study for light to bless with light.” This idea lives and breathes at the University, embodying a supportive, inclusive, and empowering community. This is a name that reflects our founders’ vision of excellence, positive transformation, and brighter futures.

Wynbright

The first part of Wynbright comes from the Old English word for the letter W. Borrowing on this history, we pair it with bright. Traditionally each graduation ceremony begins with a reminder of the historic purpose of the University, to “study

for light to bless with light.” This idea lives and breathes at the University, embodying a supportive, inclusive, and empowering community. This is a name that reflects our founders’ vision of excellence, positive transformation, and brighter futures.

January 2024

The contract with Chernoff Newman was concluded on January 30, 2024.

February 2024

On February 8, 2024, The W announced a partnership with alumna Laura Prestwich, Class of 2008, as it enters its next phase of the renaming process that began 18 months ago. Prestwich brings more than a decade of experience in brand development and naming strategy development. Prior to her role as a consultant, she served as the chief operating officer and account manager for Fuze Branding, a Charlotte, North Carolina-based, full-service creative agency with clients among the top creative influencers and to globally distributed brands.

“Alumna Prestwich Selected to Partner with The W”

<https://www.muw.edu/news/alumna-prestwich-selected-to-partner-with-the-w/>

February 2024

The raw data for the Brand Name Testing survey results were analyzed by the Naming Task Force. A subset of the group was charged with creating a results document that would help with the interpretation of the data and that could be shared on the website.

February 2024

- Faculty Senate received updates on the name change process.
- Council of Chairs received updates on the name change process.
- Staff Council received updates on the name change process.