

## GSC BoD Letter of Support for Sarah Sam, BSEC, and all anti-racist activism on campus

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on behalf of  
Katherine Rinaldi <kat@caltech.edu>

Thu 10/8/2020 10:49 AM

To: gradstudents@caltech.edu <gradstudents@caltech.edu>

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**tl;dr** The GSC Board of Directors (BoD) stands with and supports Sarah Sam, BSEC, and all anti-racist activism on campus. Based on the disturbing reports in Sarah's resignation statement, we believe that the Naming and Recognition Task Force (NTF), in its current form, is incapable of fulfilling its duties and should be dissolved. Graduate students should not be asked to fill the vacancy on the committee until major improvements are made, and **the BoD strongly encourages all graduate students to decline if asked to join the current committee**. The following letter was sent to President Rosenbaum and Dr. Jergovic with the request that it be forwarded to the entire NTF.

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Dear President Rosenbaum and Dr. Jergovic,

On behalf of the Graduate Student Council Board of Directors, we are writing to express our disappointment and disapproval with the proceedings of the Naming and Recognition Task Force (NTF) and their recent responses. In particular, the resignation statement of Sarah Sam leads us to believe that the NTF does not have the legitimacy or knowledge to deal with Caltech's legacy of racism. Sarah's experience on the committee left her exhausted and unable to make progress on her scientific research. As a result, we now believe that the committee, in its current form, is not a productive or safe place for graduate students to participate unless major improvements are made.

We unequivocally support the Black Scientists and Engineers at Caltech (BSEC) in their call to rename the buildings that currently honor racist eugenicists like Millikan, Chandler, Ruddock, Robinson, and Watson. BSEC's calls alone should warrant action, but they are also backed by more than 1,000 Caltech community members across two separate petitions that explicitly call for the renaming of these buildings. The GPS division is already working to remove Robinson's name from its building. Clearly, there is widespread community support on this issue.

Furthermore, we are dismayed that your Sept. 29th, Oct. 1st, and Oct. 6th community emails dismissed the serious concerns that Sarah Sam raised in her resignation letter. We share Sarah's concerns and those of Black community members, not out of "impatience" or "facile interpretations." Rather, we share these concerns because many NTF members and Caltech leadership have repeatedly demonstrated that they are unwilling to grapple honestly with racism at Caltech. Racism and eugenics are difficult subjects to discuss, but it is facile to treat them as abstract concepts. They continue to have concrete consequences on people today.

The NTF should not have been debating whether the HBF's propaganda in favor of forced sterilization was racist or ableist (it was), or the extent to which individual HBF members were complicit in the tens of thousands of nonconsensual sterilizations documented in California (they became culpable when they chose to lend their name and prestige to a eugenics propaganda organization, regardless of their day-to-day involvement). In order to reckon honestly with racism at Caltech presently and historically, the NTF should have consisted of members who had already obtained rigorous education in race and oppression. Their lack of training, regardless of expertise in other fields, was made clear in Sarah Sam's resignation letter, evidenced by the denial of racial inequity affecting the issue of building renaming and the dismissal of Millikan's racist "private views." Caltech's own Center for Inclusion and Diversity could have helped educate NTF members about the issues at hand, yet the NTF excluded CCID staff from serving on the committee, a serious oversight. We conclude that the NTF, in its current form, is incapable of fulfilling its duties honestly and responsibly and should be dissolved.

We call on Caltech to convene a new committee, one that consists of people with legitimate expertise in the history of eugenics and racism, who better represent the actual makeup of the Caltech community, unlike the current NTF where trustees are heavily overrepresented and students are heavily underrepresented. The new committee should start from the premise that buildings should be renamed. Then, the committee can begin to select new names, recognize and apologize for Caltech's history of exclusion, eugenics, and racism, and discuss ways Caltech can acknowledge this history without celebrating it.

Millikan, Chandler, Ruddock, Robinson, Watson, and others are a part of Caltech's history, but placing their names on prominent buildings on campus does not contextualize this history. It memorializes them. It honors them. We cannot disentangle these individuals from our history, but we can stop honoring them as men who pushed racist agendas and willingly supported eugenics.

Please share this email with the rest of the Naming and Recognition Task Force.

We urge you to do right by our community.

Sincerely,  
Katherine Rinaldi  
on behalf of The Graduate Student Council's Board of Directors