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To: Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz
Submitted By: James J. DeCaro on behalf of the A.G. Bell Working Group
Date: 8 May 2008
Subject: Naming of Alexander Graham Bell Dorm

This document is the final report of the working group that you established to address issues being raised by members of the community regarding the appropriateness of having a dormitory named for Alexander Graham Bell. The working group convened and executed our charge in a cooperative and collaborative fashion. In the course of our discussions, we:

1. Commissioned and studied a review of the literature
2. Reviewed background facts as regards the naming of the dorm
3. Reviewed e-mail messages received by you as regards the naming of the dorm
4. Discussed what a building name should represent
5. Discussed the pros and cons of the life of A.G. Bell as regards his contributions

With shared governance in mind, you approved a three step process for the working group:

1. Decide if the Bell name is or is not appropriate in terms of NTID's mission, history, goals, objectives and educational philosophy. The focus should be on Bell as a person, his impact on deaf education, his perspectives on deaf people and the like. This assessment should occur within the context of questions and issues generated by the group.
2. If the group feels the Bell name is acceptable, focus upon the plaque wording in terms of how it reflects the history of NTID and our mission, philosophy and practices. If changes are deemed necessary, develop a rationale for any recommended modifications.

3. If the group feels the Bell name isn't appropriate, determine if the concerns about Bell merit a replacement name being recommended. If so, develop a series of potential alternatives.

As regards Charge #1:

When confronted with the question regarding whether the positions held by A.G. Bell warranted the removal of his name from the building, the group recognized the complexity of the issues and thoroughly discussed the alternatives, including dropping the name and replacing it with another name, or keeping the dormitory name. The group was conflicted. The range of perspectives within the working group was varied and divided...however **there was a majority in favor of removing the name (8 to 6)**. The group could not reach a consensus...a thoughtful, considerate and conscientious group of people found that they could not agree.

It must be pointed out that those who wished to see the name removed from the dormitory wanted to be clear that their position was not intended to indicate that they rejected the legitimacy of any approach to education, depending upon the needs of a person who is deaf, or that they rejected any deaf person because of the communication choices he/she makes. Rather, these members of the working group rejected A.G. Bell's philosophy that promoted the exclusion and banning of sign language in the education of people who are deaf. Further, these members of the working group found abhorrent his views on eugenics and the role of deaf people in determining their own destiny. There was a strong feeling among these members of the working group that A.G. Bell was not a person who should be honored by allowing his name to be maintained on a dormitory.

Those who wished to keep the name, generally speaking, found many aspects of A.G. Bell's philosophy to be highly unacceptable but felt his positions must be considered within the context of history. These individuals expressed concern that the removal of the name would be interpreted by some as meaning that certain individuals were not welcomed at NTID. Further, some of those wishing to keep the name felt that it would be good to make sure that the history represented by A.G. Bell not be erased but remain as a reminder of issues that continue to be controversial in the field of education of those who are deaf.

However, the working group came to **unanimous agreement that A.G. Bell held perspectives, goals, and promoted objectives that are different from and inconsistent with the perspectives, goals and philosophies of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology.**

As regards Charge #2:

Here too, the group was conflicted with **8 feeling it should be removed and 6 members feeling the name should remain**. That is, NTID professes and strives to accommodate the education, personal and social needs of students no matter what their approach to communication or their educational backgrounds. The NTID community has worked to accommodate all students and provide a welcome home for them...a place in which they can grow and develop irrespective of their communication approach or philosophy. The approach promoted by A.G. Bell was radically different from the NTID approach...for example he promoted the exclusion of sign language in the education of people who are deaf. Therefore, the plaque in the lobby of A.G. Bell Hall, which ends with the statement, "**Today, NTID emulates the ideals for which Alexander Graham Bell worked**", is inconsistent with the findings of this working group. The plaque is misleading and inaccurate as currently worded and

is not acceptable or appropriate from the perspective of the working group. The group is of one mind that, **minimally, the wording of the plaque must be changed.**

As regards Charge #3:

In an effort to reach consensus, prior to a final polling of the membership, the working group reviewed and discussed five different alternatives (realizing that there were other possibilities):

1. Change the wording on the plaque
2. Remove the plaque but leave it without a name
3. Rename the hall “NTID Alumni Hall”
4. Rename the hall “Weitbrecht-Bell Hall”
5. Remove the name from the hall and rename another location in honor of A.G. Bell

The discussion of these alternatives was very helpful in clarifying the various positions held by the membership but the discussions did not help in facilitating achievement of a consensus. The final polling resulted in **8 members wishing to remove the name and 6 wishing to keep the name.**

In an effort to offer the sense of the membership, a poll was taken at our last meeting regarding the two options that had been discussed most by the working group—alternative #3 and #4 above. The 13 members in attendance were surveyed with the following question: **“If a decision is made to change the name, which would you prefer: A. Weitbrecht-Bell Hall, or, B. NTID Alumni Hall?”**

The poll resulted in the following count: **8 selected NTID Alumni Hall; 4 selected Weitbrecht-Bell Hall; 1 abstained.** The group wishes to indicate that we did not discuss all possible options but are providing this poll to present a sense of the membership.

Closing

The working group applauds you for initiating a shared governance process to address this sensitive issue which carries with it great emotion. We would like to suggest that you distribute our report to the NTID community and provide opportunities for input as you determine your recommendation(s) to President Destler. Parenthetically, we recommend that you make special efforts to collect feedback from NTID staff members because the two staff appointees on the working group withdrew from service because of the press of personal and job responsibilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Bell', written in a cursive style.

Appendix

In an effort to provide you with an indication of the breadth and depth of our discussions and deliberations, we present here for your review a set of materials generated by the working group in the course of our work.

A. Questions Generated by the Committee in the very first few meetings that were discussed in the course of our deliberations:

1. Does the Bell name reflect the pluralism and eclecticism we need to demonstrate to our stakeholders?
2. What are the potential positive and negative political implications of our recommendations?
3. What are our perspectives on Bell's study of eugenics and marriage of Deaf people, irrespective of the social context at the time he was proposing them?
4. Will the keeping of the name have a negative impact upon the community who find A.G. Bell's philosophies objectionable or will a name change convey a negative connotation to the oral/auditory oriented community regarding NTID, its mission, and our commitment to diversity within our community?

In summary: We need to walk the line between tolerating diversity, while not bending to exclusivity.

B. Committee discussion regarding how Alexander Graham Bell's work and perspectives relate to, or represent, NTID's history, goals, mission, and philosophy:

- Any decisions about the dormitory name need to reflect NTID's philosophy of respecting *all* students and not exclude anyone.
- Throughout history NTID has attempted to be inclusive.
- While one approach to education can be beneficial to some people, NTID's philosophy does not include requiring one approach with any particular type of student. Bell had some good ideas for instructing some students. However, Bell appeared to have had no interest or desire to advocate for the needs of students who might benefit from the use of sign language, for example.
- The more general education process, not just communication philosophy, is critical to whatever recommendation we make to Dr. Hurwitz. We should make sure that any suggestions we submit are not detrimental to the education of all students.
- The issues associated with Bell's philosophy and approaches have been raised over the years by NTID students.
- NTID's philosophy emphasizes inclusion of all students.
- NTID, and this working group, has no bias against people who are oral/auditory or those who use ASL as their primary mode of communication

C. Discussion of what a building name should represent:

1. A belief in inclusion of all deaf persons in educational and communicative contexts
2. Involvement in the field of deafness
3. A positive impact on deaf education
4. Supportive of diversity
5. Have a direct connection to NTID
6. Represent innovation
7. Integrity (defined as whole, undivided, of strong moral character)
8. Fairness in including everyone
9. Advocate for better future opportunities
10. Respects all students as a “family or community of learners”
11. Humanitarian
12. Eclectic
13. Characteristics of Students/Alumni
14. Supports the Institute (money, political, etc.)
15. Involved with the development of technology that advances the circumstances of deaf or hard of hearing students
16. Creates a safe environment for all language preferences
17. Promotes progress in the Deaf community
18. Cultural and Language Rights

D. Committee discussion as regards the pros and cons associated with Bell as a person:

Pros:

- He knew deaf people were intelligent
- He was a brilliant inventor and scientist
- He held good ideas for teaching, such as those related to reading
- He supported early education
- He recognized deaf education issues as important
- He was a benefactor/philanthropist

Cons:

- His leadership in the Eugenics movement emphasized deaf people as “defectives” and his work influenced many others to follow
- He advocated strongly against the use of sign language in education
- He advocated strongly against the marriage of deaf individuals with each other
- As a result of his emphasis on teaching speech, the percentage of Deaf persons in teaching positions dropped from 40 percent to less than 10 percent in a period of several decades (NTID has a strong emphasis on preparing deaf teachers in its MSSE program)
- His approach emphasized speech/hearing/speechreading only
- As a result of his emphases, Deaf education became fragmented. Organizations broke apart; academic leaders fought with one another about philosophies, deaf and hearing

persons were divided by the perspectives; many children never acquired a good education because they became “oral failures” (unable to learn to speak or speechread)

- Bell and his associates did not allow deaf people to participate in decision making regarding their own educational destiny
- He did not show respect for the sign language community, which repeatedly invited him to discuss his views and work together toward a common goal

E. Active membership of the working group:

Of the original appointees to the working group, there were 14 active members who participated in the deliberations. The membership was as follows:

- Scot Atkins
- Scott Bailey
- Jim DeCaro
- Patti Durr
- Wyatt Hall
- Ruthie Jordan
- Regina Kiperman
- Joe Kolash
- Larry Quinsland
- Mark Rosica
- Carmen Sciandra
- David Spiecker
- Kurt Stoskopf
- Megan Wetzel

The group wishes to express special thanks to Dr. Harry Lang who served the group as a historical consultant in the course of our deliberations.