Onomastics Online
15 February 2022, 3:00 PM (UTC)

Professor Derek H. Alderman (University of Tennessee)
Race, Memory, and Campus Place Name Reform: Strategies for Transforming the Classroom into a Toponymic Workspace

Abstract: School and university campus landscapes—specifically their array of place names—have emerged as flashpoints in ongoing global struggles to acknowledge, debate and come to terms with legacies of racism, settler colonialism and patriarchy. Yet, we lack sufficient pedagogical tools for investigating the power-laden politics of place (re)naming, especially in the face of growing debates over removing the names of racist historical figures from USA public schools and university campus landscapes. Dr. Alderman argues for transforming the classroom into a "toponymic workspace" and offers strategies to help students and instructors critique and possibly reform the oppressive "namescapes" and "toponymic ecologies" within their own educational institutions. He offers three avenues for developing a reparative pedagogy of campus commemorative place naming. The first is to involve students in tracing and mapping the historical-ideological genealogies of "landscape backstories" related to naming practices and named spaces. The second is to use the classroom to document and empathize with the "affective entanglements" between educational toponyms and the well-being and wishes of historically marginalized groups. The third is to interrogate questions of "procedural justice" within university place naming decisions and encourage students to think of themselves as the architects of more inclusionary place naming policy and toponymic formations on their campuses. Importantly, place name reform should not be an administrator-directed public relations performance but part of the wider memory-work of (ad)dressing the wounds of historical and contemporary racial inequality.

Link to the Zoom Meeting:
https://tuni.zoom.us/j/67133440690?pwd=K3hUejB6bE1tRDNVOXpzZnhxMGRtZz09
Meeting ID: 671 3344 0690
Passcode: 000557