Good morning. I’ll be talking about Stanford’s recent, yet lengthy process for renaming campus elements honoring Junipero Serra.

Background
In early 2016 a bill was submitted to Stanford’s Undergraduate Senate to rename Stanford property currently named after Junipero Serra out of respect to the Indigenous and Native American community. In 2018, Stanford announced it would rename a street and two buildings. Only recently did the process conclude as Stanford announced that two buildings would be renamed for Sally Ride and Carolyn Lewis Attneave.

Why did it take so long? Why was it so complicated? Most importantly at least for us, what role do or should archives and archivists play in such deliberations? What role, if any, do we have in interpreting history, context, and guiding ethics? These are some of the questions I will explore in examining Stanford’s renaming process and how it did and didn’t work, and offer lessons learned for other institutions who may be undertaking their own renaming process.

Stanford & Serra
Before that though, let’s explore how we got here. Father Junipero Serra was a Roman Catholic missionary who lived in the 18th century and established the first several missions in the California mission system. Rather than get into the weeds about his life, suffice it to say that he is a complex yet highly problematic historical figure. While Serra played a critical role in the development of modern California, his name is also associated with violence against Native Americans, including forced labor, forced living arrangements and corporal punishment.

In 1889, Jane Stanford commissioned a granite monument to Serra which was erected in Monterey in 1891--the same year Stanford opened. Prior to that, the Stanfords, while guests at Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, had observed ruins of Mission Carmel, and the accomplishments of the early missionaries were brought to their attention. The Stanfords were not Catholics, but they were interested in California history, and they felt that Serra’s role as senior priest of California missions warranted acknowledgement. In fact, their interest helped renew interest in Serra and initiated a conservation movement. Western artists, historians, authors, benefactors, and church hierarchy began to demonstrate awareness of the vanishing evidences of Spanish California history. Restoring missions became the first preservation movement in the state of California. Stanford’s very campus, its signature quad, reflects that influence in its elements of Spanish mission architecture.

David Starr Jordan, Stanford’s first president named early streets on campus for missionaries, including Serra, Salvatierra and Lasuen. Serra House, formerly on Serra Street and constructed
in 1923, was the former home of Jordan. It is now occupied by the Clayman Institute for Gender Research.

**Serra**, in Stern Hall, was named by students in the 1950s.

In sum, multiple Serra edifices across campus, including along the Quad, the heart of campus.

Fast forward to 2016. **Leo John Bird**, ’17, a Native American student who had recently taken a class on missions and was moved to act and introduced a senate resolution, requesting renaming of Serra’s campus namesakes, writing, “The prominence of Serra’s name on campus perpetuates the history of abuse.” “If we name buildings after people who directly contributed to genocide, that perpetuates the historical trauma, [and] it does harm to my wellness, and Stanford has the obligation to care for its students.”

**Timeline**

In early 2016, Stanford’s Undergraduate Senate passed said resolution.

The Graduate Student Association endorsed the resolution.

Faculty Senate passed its own resolution resolution.

In March 2016, under then University President John Hennessy, a renaming committee was created. Momentum built up quickly. It would not last.

In 2017, after expressed criticism of lack of progress and with a new university president in place, the process was revamped based on input from committee members. First, the mission was changed--it was now tasked with formulating general principles to guide any future renaming deliberations. A new committee on Renaming Principles was established to do that. A separate committee would then be charged with deliberations and recommendations.

In March of 2018, the **Principles** were released. I won’t go over them in detail because they really are a presentation topic in and of themselves but they are available online and I would recommend you explore them if interested. I will say that they marked a turning point in the process and I’ll explain why later.

In September 2018, Stanford announced it would rename Serra Dorm, Serra House and Serra Mall. Serra Street would retain its name. Serra Mall would become Jane Stanford Way. In February 2019, Serra dorm and Serra House were renamed.
Analysis
On the face of it--yes, it was a lengthy process, but the desired result was had. Positive change came to the University through official deliberations. Behind the scenes, however, it was messy. In fact, the original committee failed spectacularly. Mind you those are the words of committee members, not mine. Why?

First, they tried to do too much without having a clear direction. They settled on the need for consensus but failed to achieve it. This was largely due to the difficulty on the one hand of developing abstract renaming principles while on the other hand delving deeply into the historical context of Serra. In the end, it was hard to disentangle these two things and unfortunately led to incompatibility of committee members, infighting, and emotional entrenchment on both sides. Sadly, these tensions could not be resolved by a professional facilitator.

Further complicating things was the conservative nature of certain committee members. Although somewhat surprising, Stanford has long been a conservative institution, especially certain departments, influenced of course by the Hoover institution, but other factors as well. In short, some did not want to engage in the renaming process and were not open to appeals of social justice.

For context, let’s all remember that Stanford had an Indian as a mascot from 1930-1971. For the time, Stanford was progressive in removing the Indian in 1972 following a similar petition from native students. Dick Lyman, then president, took a lot of heat for the decision, but knew it was the right thing to do. Many donors said they would not donate again. We have many angry letters to the effect. Sadly, the decision is still controversial. Each year during reunion weekend we encounter alums who are still mad at the decision, who still wear “always an Indian” buttons, and who still want to donate Indian ephemera. They don’t get it, despite having had fellow students participate in the civil rights movement, in anti war protests, and protests by minority students for greater representation, minority academic programs, and for cultural centers. They just don’t get it. We do however. That’s why we stopped accepting those materials and explain our rationale in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, as this case illustrates, issues of race persist at Stanford and amongst its alumni. What our minority students have to deal with is far worse, which makes it all the more remarkable that Stanford actually took the step to rename Serra monuments. Insiders on the committee who were sympathetic to the cause were even surprised.

A third element that played a role here is the role of religion, specifically Catholicism. In short, Stanford was seeking to undermine a saint—one respected and memorialized by no less than Jane Stanford--our own patron saint of sorts. Not an easy task by any means, especially with a
monumental church in the center of campus standing as a testimony to Jane Stanford’s belief in the fundamental importance of religion to the lives of students. As a result, some Catholics within the Stanford community took it as an affront on numerous levels.

To his credit, Mark Tessier-Lavigne, Sanford’s current president intervened when necessary, listened to the committee members, split up responsibilities, and assigned a highly capable individual in Paul Brest, former dean of the law school and co-director of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, to chair the principles committee and get the process back on track. It worked. Brest offered a different, effective decision making process informed by straightforward principles and careful weighing of the evidence. He created buy-in and provided a framework for the third committee to finally make renaming recommendations.

In the end, I think what separates Stanford from other institutions is that Stanford’s administration is working closely with activists. At other institutions, especially the Ivies, it’s been a fight. Stanford learned from what others had done and tried something different.

**Lessons Learned**

Let’s now examine some of the lessons learned from the process. I give credit here to committee members who shared their thoughts with me.

1. First and foremost, know if **consensus** is required going in. This will guide and structure the process from the get go. The first committee came to this decision far too long into the process and never figured out how to do it.

2. **Authorship**
   
   Determine how the report will be produced and who will do it. Stanford’s first committee succumbed to dissent, infighting and emotional investment in authorship. Individuals took charge and exerted top down authority, minimizing buy in and left little room for collaboration.

3. Separate **principles** from deliberations. Stanford’s initial committee tried to both and failed. Separate the two. Make sure the committee composition is accordingly different as well. In terms of composition...

4. **Lawyer up**
   
   Say what you will about lawyers, but they are experienced in dispassionate, principled analysis. As part of the second committee tasked with developing principles for considering the renaming of campus features generally, they provided a framework for fair consideration of evidence. It worked well and turned things around.
5. When it comes to deliberations, avoid stacking the deck with too many historians. The first committee bogged down in trying to understand context and debates about colonialism and historical relativism—often losing sight of the forest from the trees. Also, and perhaps given their generational difference, they were less open to contemporary notions of social justice and personal impact, unable to understand how current students are affected by these named entities. Historians are our friends and collaborators, but choose them wisely when trying to build consensus.

6. **Trustees**
   Have at least one trustee on the committee to represent higher authority and people on their best behavior. That presence of authority was surprisingly effective. Psychology 101.

7. **Students**
   Students are key. Committee members state that what really turned the corner in the process was meetings with Native and Latinx students. They provided the best evidence. They were smart, eloquent, calm, inspiring, and aspirational. They expressed their desire to live and study in places that represent their values. Although Leo, the student who submitted the initial resolution graduated two months later, he was supported and succeed by a coalition of students. It was their passion, their commitment to each other and to their cause that won out. For them, they were negotiating from a position of strength.

   A second important point here is to be open to this generation of students and how they are affected; accept that they are affected if they say that they are. It’s especially hard for whites to understand what this means to students of color. Students want and deserve a sense of belonging and safety. We all, faculty and administrators especially, need to understand that this is an important issue.

8. **Patience**
   Understand that the wheels of the gears of bureaucracy grind slowly. Progress takes time and patience. There will be missteps and mistakes but keep your eye on the prize.

9. **Allies**
   Finally, what makes patience possible is to have someone who is part of multiple communities on the inside. In Stanford’s case that was Laura Jones, University Archaeologist, president of Stanford Historical Society, supporter and collaborator with the Archives, and leader of repatriation efforts with Ohlone community. Without her, none of this would have been possible. She was the glue that kept it together having
served on all three committees. Everyone respected her. She reassured everyone involved and gave them hope that the process would be fair and just. The Native students especially gave the process time knowing she was involved.

Role of Archives
So what about archives? In this particular case, given that debate centered on Serra, which we have little if anything in our collections beyond biographies, our formal role was one of providing context and resources for the decisions behind Stanford’s honoring Serra. Informally, we had a much bigger role. We have formed close working relationships with faculty, staff, and students, especially activists, on those committees. They respect our collections, our work, and our commitment to documenting activism and social justice. They, like we, know that Archives are not neutral. They know that for generations they were not part of Archives. That they are now has made a world of difference. They, like us, are often not involved in writing history but we both play a role in shaping the history written. Just as students of today are aspirational in their choices, so too are we as archivists in what we collect, what we process and digitize, and what projects we engage with.

In that vein, our real role is what happens next, working with the university on the education campaign. It’s simply not enough to erase a name and call it quits as not PC, we need to do the hard work of interpreting context, acknowledging it and educating the community. The test of all renaming processes is one of programming, be it exhibits, signage, classes, symposia, etc. Our real challenge is how can we better educate the community about history and incorporate a critical understanding of the past in the future. We need to teach classes on California history, eugenics, racism, sexism, lgbt rights, and on and on. That ultimately depends on faculty but we too can clearly play a role. And we should play that role. We do play that role.

Next
What’s next at Stanford? We have worked closely with committee members and their research staff to identify materials beyond the initial scope of the inquiry--Serra--for potential other renaming requests. We don’t expect Serra to be the first and last case. In addition to other missionaries like Lasuen, there are buildings named after faculty who espoused eugenics and racism. For these individuals we have much more material. Let’s see who’s next.

Thanks.