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A new university for all: Nevada State proposes renaming



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Opinion

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Students walk on the Nevada State College campus in Henderson on Friday, Sept. 24, 2021. (Daniel Clark/The Nevada Independent)

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Ensclosed in stone at the edge of the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., is a cautionary reminder: Our “institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.” Thomas Jefferson, Founding Father and principal author of the Declaration of Independence, knew then what we know now. Our laws and institutions must continue to evolve as “new discoveries are made, new truths discovered, and manners and opinions change.” Circumstances and opinions have changed in Nevada, and it’s high time the state’s newest institution of higher learning changes along with it.

In its first 20 years, Nevada State College built a reputation as an institution committed to great teaching and transformative student experiences. It has since empowered its employees and created strategic alliances that have made Nevada State an important element in the intellectual, economic, and civic wellbeing of our region and our state.

We believe renaming the institution better reflects our mission of “A University for All” as we continue to grow and develop our exciting potential during the next two decades — and the many decades to follow. The Board of Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education next month will consider renaming our institution “Nevada State University.” Nevada State strongly endorses this proposal, and we seek the continued support of students, alumni, and members of the community in the days before the Sept. 9 vote on the renaming.

Nevada State’s enrollment increasingly reflects the remarkable diversity of Nevada. About 77 percent of our 7,200 students are non-white. Hispanic enrollment surged to 47.4 percent in 2021 — a higher figure than the approximately 40 percent of Nevada’s residents who identify as Hispanic. Nevada State opens the doors of opportunity to what we call the New Majority — first-generation students, adult learners, students of color, Dreamers and immigrants — and anyone who is looking to find their way into the middle class.

Renaming the institution will strengthen our mission. In every way except its name, Nevada State has been a “university” for years. Students are more likely to actually enroll in an institution that has the word “university” in its name, according to research published in Economics of Education Review. Institutions that are renamed with the word “university” from “college” typically experience a 5.2 percent increase in enrollment of first-time students within five years and a 7.2 percent increase within six years. That means more teachers and more nurses – something Nevada is also in desperate need of.

It's particularly important in Nevada, which ranks 46th in the nation in college-going rates. Less than a quarter of Nevada’s adults hold a college degree, and the state’s levels of educational attainment are a barrier to its economic competitiveness in attracting new business investment. As a state, we must open the doors of higher education to all Nevadans and provide them with educational experiences that can transform their futures.

Already, our regional peers — institutions in other states — have recognized the importance of the university designation. Only one institution similar to Nevada State in the western United States still has “college” in its name. Nationally, 95 percent of our peers use “university.” This reflects the reality that “college” is a name more commonly associated today with small liberal arts schools or two-year institutions. It is critically important that the name of Nevada State provides a clear definition of its mission and its position as one of the fastest-growing four-institutions in the nation.

The renaming proposal already has strong support among students and alumni. Among other factors, they recognize the annual pay of graduates typically is \$1,500 higher when they’ve earned a degree from an institution that’s a university rather than a college. Students and their families have been assured that Nevada State remains committed to its role as an affordable and accessible option and doesn’t plan to increase tuition or fees associated with the renaming. (And our t-shirts already have said simply “Nevada State” for a while now.)

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Equally strong support comes from Nevada's higher education institutions. The leaders of University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), College of Southern Nevada (CSN), and Desert Research Institute (DRI) all support this proposal. They recognize the vital mission of Nevada State as an institution committed to excellence in teaching and educational experiences. They understand that Nevada State has no aspirations to become a research institution or to gain designation as a State Land Grant Institution. Their collective support demonstrates that this proposal is one that will help to advance all higher education in this state.

Nevada State boldly defines and reaffirms its mission. Since its earliest days 20 years ago, the institution has delivered quality university teaching that provides an opportunity for all to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. We have expanded the participation of Nevada's new majority in higher education. We have increased income mobility and creation of wealth for our students and their families for years to come. We are committed to acting with intention to design, redesign and invent our campus and its programs, to break down the historic barriers that prevent learning.

Nevada State University will appeal to a larger audience of students as higher-education enrollment becomes increasingly diverse and competitive. Our continued enrollment growth, in turn, will strengthen students, families and communities. Nevada State University truly will be "A University for All," and all of Nevada will continue to benefit from this vibrant institution.

Jefferson knew "laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind." The rest of the country already has acknowledged and affirmed their "state universities." It's time for Nevada to do the same. If we don't, Jefferson warns, we might as well continue to be governed by our "barbarous ancestors."

If you agree, please let the Board of Regents know you support this renaming proposal. Go to **theuniversityforall.com** to learn how you can help.

Dr. DeRionne Pollard is the current president of Nevada State College (NSC) and first Black female president of any NSHE institution. She held previous roles at the College of Lake County and served as president of both Montgomery College and Las Positas College. She holds a bachelor's and a Master of

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