

# SVHE New Name Announcement

## Rationale

The decision to change the name of the organization was not made lightly. Several factors suggested that such a change would be a positive one. Most notably, the term “values” has, in recent decades, been largely coopted by certain narrow political and ideological circles. This cooptation has made it increasingly difficult to differentiate SVHE from these other influences that stand in tension with the mission and identity of the organization.

The increasing challenge posed by the term “values” has meant that attracting potential new members to the organization has encountered the unnecessary barrier of requiring a more thorough explanation of the group’s identity and mission. These challenges were recognized by a Strategic Planning Committee that, in the fall of 2019, strongly urged that the organization change its name, in part, to allow for a more accurate picture of the Society to emerge. As the organization has noticed a steady decline in membership in recent years, the Strategic Planning Committee recognized a need to focus on the sustainability of the organization and the use of branding to aid in the recruitment and retention of members.

With many changes, there are both “pushing” and “pulling” factors. While the difficulties with the term “values” provided a push, the heart of the organization’s identity provided a pull. The organization is at the cusp of celebrating its centennial anniversary. For nearly a century, the organization has responded to the challenges of its times, and it has updated its name at key points throughout its history in response to these challenges. For example, when the organization changed from being the “Society for Religion in Higher Education” to the “Society for Values in Higher Education,” the change recognized that the historical concern to infuse non-sectarian religious studies in university curricula was no longer such a pressing concern with the rise of such programs in universities across the country. In the present time, higher education faces new challenges: challenges around the survival of institutions of higher education, challenges around the stagnation of institutions, and challenges around equitable access to the resources that colleges and universities can provide. Thus, even as the organization continues to maintain the traditions of its past, it looks ahead to the ways in which its identity can continue its reach into the future. Thus, the name “Society for the Future of Higher Education” offers a forward-looking perspective that creates space for interdisciplinary scholars, teachers, activists, and other educators to continue the mission of the Society well into the future.

## History & Process

The organization that is currently known as the Society for Values in Higher Education has maintained consistent and core values throughout its nearly century-long existence, but it has not been afraid to change its name with changing times. Founded as “The National Council of Schools of Religion” (1922-1924), the organization underwent its first name change just two years after its founding, switching over to “The National Council on Religion in Higher Education,” a title it held from 1924-1962. In 1962, the organization endured its third name change to the “Society for Religion in Higher Education.” Finally, in 1973 the organization went through yet another rebranding to take on the title “Society for Values in Higher Education,” a moniker that has stuck for several years since then. In short, the organization has not shied away from taking cues from the

signs of its times and changing its name accordingly. What has not changed is the organization's strong commitment to higher education without sectarian or ideological bias.

It's hard to say when discontent with the current name first began. Anecdotal accounts from Society members suggest that as early as the late 1990s, some members of the Society began advocating for a change. A few years later, similar conversations trickled up to the Society's Board of Directors. Minutes from a 2008 Town Hall meeting at the annual Fellows Meeting suggest that a recommendation was brought for a name change at that time.

For at least the past 5 years, the Board of Directors has been having serious conversations about the possibility of changing the organization's name. Finally, in 2019, the Board took action to begin pursuing the change that had been discussed for nearly two decades at that point. This process began with a series of several listening sessions that were held at the 2019 Fellows Meeting at Loyola University and a Town Hall meeting that allowed for full Society participation in the conversation. As then-President Allen Dunn noted in summarizing the results of those sessions, there was no great resistance to changing the Society's name. However, there was not yet strong enthusiasm for a particular alternative.

Finally, in the summer of 2020, the Board began to coalesce around the option of "Society for the Future of Higher Education." During the 2020 Virtual Fellows Meeting, this option was tested with the larger membership of the organization in the context of a Town Hall meeting. The conversation that emerged suggested that many members were amenable to this option and expressed a desire to do what it takes to ensure the future viability of the organization. Following that conversation, a poll was disseminated to the full membership to get a more quantitative measure of member reactions to the newly proposed name. The response rate to the poll suggested that its results were a reliable indicator of where much of the larger membership stood. The poll data suggested that only 10% of respondents would reject the newly proposed name. The other 90% of respondents indicated acceptance of the name, with nearly 55% choosing the option for "Fully, and enthusiastically support."

One of the comments that emerged from conversations with the full membership was that in updating the organization's name, it would also be helpful to revisit the organization's mission statement to match the proposed new name. Thus, given the strong support from the full membership, the Board of Directors began a process of crafting an updated mission statement that would capture the organization's identity and aspirations. This process lasted through the fall of 2020.

Finally, at the 2021 Winter Board meetings, that Board voted unanimously to change the name of the organization to the "Society for the Future of Higher Education." The Board also cast a unanimous vote to update the organization's mission statement to read, "The Society for the Future of Higher Education (SFHE) is an incubator and advocate for ideas, strategies, and pedagogies to lead higher education to a more inclusive, just, and equitable future."

### **Name/Mission Connection**

As the new name, "Society for the Future of Higher Education," was processed both within the Board as well as within the context of the larger organization's membership, one concern that emerged was with the name's descriptiveness. That is, some worried that "future" was too vague and failed to signal to its audiences precisely who the Society really is. For this reason, the Board decided that a strong, yet concise, mission statement should accompany the new name.

The newly crafted mission statement provides a clear direction for the organization as it looks ahead. This statement articulates the specific ways in which the Society intends to create space

for intentional work on inclusivity, justice, and equity in higher education. Thus, even as the new name itself remains flexible enough to withstand future changes in direction, the new mission offers an unapologetic statement about the Society's core identity. In this way, the new name and mission together hearken back to earlier goals of the Society while simultaneously looking ahead to the future.

### **Invitation**

As we enter into this new season of the life for this organization, there are many opportunities for all members to continue taking an active part in the life of the society. All members can be considering the question, "How will I implement this mission statement?" While there are several ways in which you could do this, here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Commit the new name and mission statement to memory so that you can share it widely with your networks
- Submit your work in response to our annual Call for Papers
- Share the Call for Papers with others
- Lead a new (or old!) Morning Group
- Invite your friends and colleagues to a Society event like the Fellows Meeting
- Lead a new project

In short, there are many ways in which you can continue to help the Society thrive and grow into its new name and mission statement! We look forward to partnering with you as we begin our future together!