

Honoring Clarence H. Fielder:
A proposal for an honorary naming of History Department Area of
Breland Hall – The Clarence H. Fielder Wing

Rani T. Alexander,
Department Head, Anthropology

Beth O’Leary,
College Professor Emerita, Anthropology

Dwight Pitcaithley,
Adjunct Professor, History

Kimberly York
Black Programs

REVISED PROPOSAL
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this proposal is to present information and expressions of support to name New Mexico State University's History Department Area of Breland Hall as the Clarence H. Fielder Wing.

The re-naming is honorific and in accordance with established NMSU Policy and Procedures. <https://arp.nmsu.edu/18-10/>

We believe an honorific naming of the History Area of Breland Hall, including the Departmental Office, Faculty offices, and conference room as Clarence H. Fielder Wing best serves the interests of the institution at the present time.

Clarence Fielder made extraordinary contributions to NMSU and to the Las Cruces community in education, history, and military service. The honorific naming of the Fielder Wing will preserve his legacy within the building where he worked and taught.

This naming is aligned with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives underway within the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts and Sciences, and across New Mexico State University.

The honorific naming of a wing for Clarence Fielder is not associated with any gift, fundraising effort, or endowment at NMSU.

We present information about how and why the area which houses the Department of History should be named the Clarence H. Fielder Wing. The Fielder Wing is appropriate as a part of the architectural history of Breland Hall.

Many Academic Departments and Programs support the proposal to honor Clarence Fielder including the most recent letter of 3 March 2021 which unanimously supports the renaming of the History area of Breland Hall to honor Clarence H. Fielder. Letters of support are located in the appendix.

**Honoring Clarence Fielder:
A proposal for an honorary naming the History Department Area
the Clarence H. Fielder Wing of Breland Hall**

1.0.0 Purpose

The purpose of this proposal is to present information and expressions of support to name a part of Breland Hall as the Clarence Fielder Wing. The wing is the second floor of the west side of Breland Hall and occupied by the Department of History. Our proposal for an honorific naming is aligned with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives underway within the College of Arts and Sciences and across New Mexico State University.

The early twenty-first century is forever marked by national debate over historical representations of diversity and the inclusion of marginalized social groups. Monuments matter for members of social movements who seek to commemorate the experiences of those left out of the national narrative. Their efforts seek to redress the erasure of historical memory and acknowledge the legacies of racism and socioeconomic disparity within our communities.

At NMSU, a Hispanic- and Minority-serving institution, we can do more than just listen to the debate. We can react to the injustice of historical erasure, improve inclusivity, and also celebrate New Mexico's diverse alternatives to mainstream narratives right here on campus. Specifically naming the History Department area in honor of Mr. Clarence Fielder offers a way forward for the benefit all faculty, staff, students, and community members for years to come.

2.0.0 Why should NMSU name the History Department wing for Mr. Clarence Fielder?

Clarence H. Fielder was an African-American educator and icon both at NMSU and within the Las Cruces community. His personal story resonates with diverse constituents among our students, faculty, and staff and inspires the selfless commitment to doing what counts to foster equitable and inclusive communities. Mr. Fielder spent over 30 years teaching in the History Department at NMSU. He taught African American history and helped to create the Black Studies Program. Most of his career at NMSU was orchestrated from his office and in classrooms within Breland Hall. Clarence Fielder's life's work is immediately relevant to the changes of our time. He embodies the resilience, ability, knowledge, and skills that all members of the university seek to develop in our students and in our community.

2.1.0 NMSU Policy

We seek to designate the Clarence Fielder wing in accordance with established NMSU Policy and Procedures. <https://arp.nmsu.edu/18-10/>

Pursuant to NMSU ARP Policy 18.10 Namings, Part 3 Honorific Naming: "An Honorific naming may be bestowed to those (e.g. person(s), organization, group, etc.) who have made exemplary or meritorious contributions to the University or society. The recognition afforded the honoree may also include private financial contributions related to the naming

opportunity. Honorees shall not be currently employed within the NMSU System nor currently hold any appointed or elected office.”

We want to honor the contributions of Mr. Clarence Fielder to NMSU as part of the architectural history of Breland Hall, the building in which he taught and worked.

Pursuant to NMSU ARP Policy 18.10 Namings, Part 4 Permanence of a Name:

- A. **Permanence of a Naming:** The naming of Physical Entities is intended to be in place for the life of the specific physical entity. Should circumstances change so that the purpose for which the physical entity was established is significantly altered or if the physical entity is no longer needed or habitable, the Chancellor and, if appropriate, the Board of Regents, in consultation with appropriate academic and/or administrative leadership and the donor(s), if possible, will determine an appropriate way to recognize the donor’s naming gift in perpetuity. If the University and the donor(s) previously established a Gift Agreement or contract that provides a practicable course of action, then that action shall be followed.”

The current proposal (March 2021) was discussed with Enrico Pontelli, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and is a revision of a previous proposal reviewed by Dean Pontelli, Henrietta Pichon, Dean of the College of Education, the Provost’s Council for African American Affairs, and Patrick Knapp and Derek Dictson from NMSU Advancement.

Procedures and steps for honorific naming are (ARP 18.10 Namings, Part 5 Naming Procedures):

1. Submit the Fielder Naming and Recognition proposal and Naming Opportunity Routing Form to the University Naming Committee.
2. Present the proposal to the Naming Committee and obtain the Naming Committee recommendations.
3. Present the proposal to the University Administrative Council (UAC) and obtain UAC recommendations.
4. Obtain NMSU Chancellor’s recommendation
5. Obtain NMSU Regents’ approval

2.2.0 Diversity and Inclusion Report

We believe an honorific naming of the Clarence Fielder Wing in Breland Hall for Clarence Fielder best serves the interests of the institution at the present time.

The NMSU External Review Report for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lists several recommendations for creating a more inclusive community, including the names of buildings, under Recommendation #12.¹

12. The University’s designation as an HSI and MSI institution represents the diversity among students at NMSU but is not a proxy for being an inclusive community. Campus climate and

¹ Ervin, A., P. Granberry Russell, and J. DeLeon 2020. New Mexico State University External Review Report, Diversity Equity and Inclusion Organizational Structure and Strategy. Report submitted to the NMSU President and Executive Vice President and Provost, Spring 2020, p. 4.

culture is influenced by whether NMSU is viewed as welcoming and inclusive for ALL. The University is urged to examine how the campus communicates its messaging on DEI and how the campus “looks” to different groups (e.g., pictures in central support buildings, names of buildings, and public art) – how inclusive are representations of campus life, pictorial history of campus and who is represented and who is not, etc.

By naming a significant place in the building as the Fielder Wing, the university communicates the commitment to honoring a member of their own community who has excelled in the field of education and history. Mr. Fielder served and can continue to serve as a role model for student success. He was born into a segregated school system but persevered, rising to the height of a professor. By having a Fielder Hall on campus and promoting the biography of the man it is named for, it makes students aware of a local leader who grew up where they grew up. Clarence Fielder was also a decorated Korean War veteran and honoring him resonates the breadth of the military constituencies at NMSU and DACC.

A Fielder Wing becomes a reminder of the man who made extraordinary contributions to NMSU and whose legacy will continue to be visible. The NMSU External Review Report for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion stresses the need to address how the campus “looks” to different groups and commitment to diversity and inclusion is urgent.

3.0.0 Biography of Clarence Fielder, accomplishments and service to NMSU and the Las Cruces Community

The legacy of extraordinary individuals can be preserved by naming an important place after them. Clarence H. Fielder was an African American historian and teacher who dedicated his entire life to teaching in Las Cruces. He said, “The student always comes first. Children deserve to be educated in pleasant and safe surroundings. It is important for people to know their heritage. It’s important for people to remember from whence they came.”

Clarence H. Fielder was born in Las Cruces in 1928, a grandchild of early Black pioneers who founded Phillips Chapel, which also served as the first segregated school. Fielder began his education at the segregated Booker T. Washington School when it was little more than two tar paper shacks. Later he graduated from the newly constructed (1934) Booker T. Washington School where all Black children in Las Cruces attended grades 1 to 12. He received a B.A. in Business Administration from New Mexico A&M College (now NMSU).

A first lieutenant in the US Army, he fought in Korea and was awarded the Purple Heart and Silver Star after refusing to leave his fellow soldiers, despite receiving serious wounds. After his tour of duty, he returned to Las Cruces to teach. He taught many decades at Booker T. Washington, Court Junior High, and Alameda Elementary and Junior High Schools. Mr. Fielder earned his M.A. in Education (NMSU). He was instrumental in creating the curriculum for the Black History Program at NMSU where he taught from 1970 until he retired in 2005.

Numerous Anthropology and History faculty and graduate and undergraduate student alumni worked with Dr. O’Leary and Dr. Fielder on the documentation and restoration of the Phillips

Chapel. The Department of Anthropology remains deeply committed to preservation and recognition of cultural heritage in the borderlands.

Some of his positions and awards include: Las Cruces Public Schools Board of Education; Board of Directors, Las Cruces Public Schools Foundation; President of the Doña Ana County Historical Society; State Teacher of the Year Award; Outstanding Educational Services Award; and the “Griot Award” from the African American Museum and Cultural Center in Albuquerque. Mr. Fielder served on the Governor appointed Cultural Properties Review Committee for the State of New Mexico. He was recognized twice by the New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs for outstanding individual accomplishment in preserving the history of African Americans, and the Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award.

When Mr. Fielder passed away in 2015, Las Cruces Mayor, Ken Miyagishima said, “Clarence Fielder was an icon of our community. Las Cruces has lost a kind and gentle man, a great educator and a great mentor.” When a community chooses to honor those who have made an extraordinary impact, they should first look for heroes close to home. It is time for NMSU to honor Mr. Fielder by naming the second floor wing in Breland Hall for him, where he taught in the History Department for so many years.

3.1.0 Relationships to Clara Belle Williams

Williams Hall is currently the only building on the NMSU campus to be named for an African American. Ms Williams was the first Black graduate with a degree in English at New Mexico A & M (now NMSU) in 1937. During the time Ms. Williams was at NMSU the university did not allow her inside the lecture rooms and she took notes from the hallway, she did not participate in the graduation ceremony as the university continued to practice segregation and discrimination.

Clara Belle Williams was first hired in 1925 to "fill the position as negro teacher" for the Las Cruces public schools when the School Board voted to segregate. She taught at Phillips Chapel CME church which served as the first school for Black students after segregation. It should be noted that later Clarence Fielder and his siblings went to Booker T. Washington school where Ms. Williams was their teacher. She taught in the racially segregated Las Cruces school system for 27 years. In 1961, NMSU recognized the injustice to Ms. Williams and named her and her children, outstanding alumnae of the year. She received many other honors, including an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree. In 2005, 11 years after Ms Williams died and 68 years after she graduated with her B.A., the English building was renamed to celebrate Ms. Williams as a “pioneer in education.”

Although noteworthy it is tragic that it took so many years to recognize a prominent African American. Mr. Fielder is remembered by several generations of students at NMSU, his impact is more current and vital with his passing just over five years ago.

4.0.0. Architectural Planning for Breland Hall and proposed Fielder Wing

University Architect Heather Watenpaugh states:

There are no major upcoming renovations beyond maintenance projects planned for Breland Hall. Breland Hall is listed on the considered for demolition list in the current campus master plan document; however, there are no immediate plans or funding to remove this building from the campus inventory. A campus-wide space utilization study is currently being planned, which will help inform decisions such as demolition and major renovations for capital planning purposes. Here is the link to current master plan, <https://architect.nmsu.edu/masterplan/>.

If the Department of History were to move to new premises at any point in the future, the honorific Fielder name would move with them.

4.1.0. Efforts to honor the Fielder legacy at NMSU

We propose that a plaque to Clarence H. Fielder should be added to the Wing. The History Department will include information about Fielder in front of the department office as well as on its departmental website, Facebook page, and other social media as is specified in the History Department's letter of 3 March 2021.

An effort is currently being made by NMSU's Anthropology Department to create a prize named for Mr. Clarence Fielder for an outstanding M.A. thesis in the area of historic preservation in the same manner as the Bradley Blake Prize. Mr. Fielder's outstanding work on the restoration of Phillips Chapel, the oldest extant African American church in New Mexico, was completed with student collaboration by NMSU, DACC and volunteers from Las Cruces. It is on both the State Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places (2003). The years he served as an Historian on New Mexico's Cultural Properties Review Committee also makes the Clarence Fielder Prize an appropriate way to recognize graduate student achievements.

5.0.0 Letters of Support

History

Anthropology

Black Programs

Geography

Government

Interdisciplinary Studies/Gender and Sexuality Studies

Languages and Linguistics

Philosophy

6.0.0 Appendix – NMSU News Stories about Clarence Fielder, Clara Belle Williams

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/11051/nmsu-history-professor-leaves-mark-as-educator-preserving-african-american-heritage>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/11137/late-nmsu-history-professor-honored-with-lifetime-achievement-award>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/13847/late-nmsu-historian-s-archive-donated-to-museum>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/articles/view/7820>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/9070/nmsu-gospel-choir-rock-phillips-chapel-holiday-cheer>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/articles/view/9024/nmsu-gospel-choir-hold-christmas-concert-100-year-old-phillips-chapel>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/11992/historic-las-cruces-chapel-restoration-complete-volunteers-host-public-ceremony>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/1072>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/1394>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/articles/view/4988>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/9453/nmsu-professors-students-volunteers-receive-historic-preservation-award>

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/5190>

National Register of Historic Places Nomination of Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church by Terry A. Moody and Clarence H. Fielder 2003

https://www.lccommunityradio.org/lcstories_clarence_fielder.html

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/stories/view/502/nmsu-s-breland-hall-evolves-over-more-than-60-years>

Clarence H. Fielder Memorial Scholarship/ Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico.
<https://www.lcsun-news.com/story/news/local/community/2020/11/07/equity-inclusion-scholarship-renamed-honor-clarence-h-fielder/6206426002/>

KTAL community radio during Black History Month (2021) provided a profile of Mr. Clarence Fielder and his life in the Las Cruces Stories series
https://www.lccommunityradio.org/lcstories_clarence_fielder.html.

Clara Belle Williams

<https://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Stories/view/517/nmsu-s-english-building-honors-university-s-first-black-graduate#:~:text=The%20English%20Building%20may%20only,name%20was%20Clara%20Belle%20Williams>