

A rose by any other name?

*"What's in a name? that which we call a rose
..." Romeo and Juliet, II, II*

The name of the rose in question is Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. The name was called into question by virtue of Senate Bill 708, a measure introduced by Senator Donald DiFrancesco on February 24, 1994. Senator DiFrancesco, himself a Penn State graduate, believes that Rutgers should be renamed the University of New Jersey. According to the proposed law, the rationale for the change is an apparent desire to "enhance the pride and sense of identity of the people" of New Jersey. The bill seeks to submit a nonbinding advisory question to the voters next November.

While the motivation for the legislation may be admirable, the consequences of its passage are not. Rutgers is the eighth oldest institution of higher education in the United States. Chartered in 1766 as Queens College, it was renamed Rutgers in 1825 in honor of Col. Henry Rutgers, a benefactor and "a man highly esteemed." New Jersey was the only colony to establish two colleges before the American Revolution, and it has been observed by Rutgers' current president, Francis L. Lawrence, that "both Princeton and Rutgers are an important part of the state's history and tradition."

Rutgers is a name recognized around the world for its quality of students, faculty and research. That name recognition has been painstakingly developed over the past 170 years. The name is a real incentive for companies locating to New Jersey who know it as an outstanding state university.

Some estimate that printing costs for the next few years would exceed

three million dollars per year in the event the name is changed. In addition, there will be costs associated with changes to signage and building designations. More funds would have to be spent to market and advertise to the alumni, potential students, corporations and other institutions in order to give the appropriate recognition to the new name. The funds necessary to accomplish this task would be enormous.

Rutgers has more than 260,000 alumni who appear to be overwhelmingly against the name change. These alumni and other friends contribute approximately 30 million dollars each year for scholarship, books and special projects. The loyalty to the institution that is at least partially name-associated would have to be rebuilt.

All current Rutgers publications, correspondence and logos clearly delineate that it is the State University. Even the football helmets bear the initials "N.J." Polling of New Jersey citizens has consistently resulted in statistics demonstrating that better than 90% know that Rutgers is, in fact, the State University of New Jersey.

Moreover, New Jersey is not alone. Other states have also maintained the historical names of public institutions of excellence, e.g., William & Mary, Purdue, University of Pittsburgh, George Mason University and Temple. Some private institutions with "public" names like the University of Pennsylvania have chosen not to abandon their historical roots.

Taxes and budgetary issues have been the subject of considerable attention in New Jersey in recent years. No one can doubt that the costs to New Jersey's citizens for the name change would be very significant. At best, the benefits are amorphous. If Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, changes its name to the University of New Jersey, at least some of the bloom will be off the rose. 