

The name: a question of identity

When Dean of Admissions Dave Wottle, winner of an Olympic Gold Medal for running, was asked to appear on NBC's nationally-televised "Real People," he saw it as an opportunity to spread the word about Southwestern At Memphis. The interview went well in every respect save one: Wottle was identified as the dean of admissions at Southwestern University.

At a meeting some time later, the president of Southwestern University — which happens to be in Georgetown, Tex. — thanked Southwestern At Memphis President James Daughdrill for the free publicity.

Even the College Board, which administers the SAT exam, is confused by Southwestern's name. It recently sent a dozen freshman applicant test scores intended for the Memphis Southwestern to the institution in Georgetown.

Over the past months there has been a growing discussion of what many see as the Southwestern name handicap and possible remedies. In addition to comments on campus, President Daughdrill has received letters on the subject from alumni, faculty and friends close to the college. The following are extracts from some of those letters.

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" . . . My experience has shown that Southwestern may not have widespread name recognition partly because of the difficulty of the name. I think the following problems exist:

- The name is confused with other colleges. (For example, Georgia Southwestern, Northwestern, Southwestern Bible Institute, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Southwestern University, Memphis State, etc.). Some of these schools do not have Southwestern's high academic standards, and a person who confuses Southwestern with one of these schools may have an immediate negative association.

- The name is a mouthful and is not 'catchy.' People may remember 'Southwestern' or 'Memphis' but may have trouble remembering the whole name and thus confuse the school with other colleges.

- The name lacks 'university' or 'college.' Because 'Southwestern' is usually an adjective, it is unsettling to some people that 'university' or 'college' is missing. So creative liberties are taken to 'amend' Southwestern's name, which only serve to multiply the confusion.

- The college sounds like a regional school. Both the name 'Southwestern' and 'Memphis' leave the impression that the school serves a limited area.

- The college sounds like a state school since it has a regional name and many state schools have regional names . . ."

Carol Ellis Morgan '76
Corporate Attorney,
National Linen Service
Decatur, Georgia

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" . . . I am convinced that we need a new name for our College. In my opinion, we not only need one, we must have one, and soon . . . we have a geographical name—Southwestern At Memphis. Actually, we are calling ourselves after a region of the country which we are not even in. We get lost among what seems to be a hundred other 'Southwesterns' and 'Southwest So and So' colleges and universities. Those who know Southwestern are aware that it is a prestigious college, academically superb. Unfortunately we lose all the good points we have by not being better known. The time has come when Southwestern must achieve national scope and have a name that projects what we really are. . ."

Goodbar Morgan '31
Director of Alumni Affairs
Emeritus

" . . . The college is on the brink of marshalling its forces to gain broader recognition, the Board appears to be of one mind in lifting the institution to new heights, there is a new wave of excitement and enthusiasm about the strong future of the college. I can't think of a better climate in which to introduce a new name that bespeaks all that the college represents and all it can become, a name exclusively ours unencumbered by mis-identification or confusion. . ."

Mel Grinspan
Distinguished Service Professor
of Business Administration
Director, Seidman Lecture Series
and Seidman Award

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"I am convinced that we have a serious problem. . . Southwestern seriously lacks name recognition. It has achieved academic excellence but this excellence is not being recognized. This is a real problem that those of us in the trenches, interfacing with students and counselors, have to deal with constantly. It is a handicap that we can not overcome without a name change.

The name Southwestern At Memphis is very hard for counselors I work with. They frequently get it confused with other colleges and universities that have the word southwestern in their names. The 'At Memphis' really causes trouble; at College Night this year, one counselor asked me where the main campus is. The most frequent problem I have is convincing someone that it is not a state school; right behind that is explaining that it is not in the southwest . . . Having graduated from Southwestern and having been so involved with it, the thought of a name change does not come easily to me. I am certain it would be difficult for many alums. But I feel strongly that there is no alternative. We need a name that is unique, that suggests academic excellence and that is easily remembered. . ."

Mrs. Sue Caldwell Pond '61
Alumni Admissions Representative
Mobile, Ala.

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" . . . More than a year ago I had an article accepted in the magazine 'Scientific American.' A staffer assigned to write a short bio on the authors called me. The conversation went something like this . . .

'Where did you receive your undergraduate degree?'

'Southwestern At Memphis.'

'OK, that's where it is, but what's the name again?'

'That is the name—Southwestern At Memphis.'

'Oh.'

I realize the name is a holdover and may have been appropriate in 1925 but not now. Not for a school with national aspirations. The most obvious problems are:

- Our region is really south-central, not southwest. Southwest works only if you're talking just about Tennessee.

- There are probably a dozen other schools around (most of them not very good) with southwest or southwestern in their name.

- The name is very awkward.

- Why be named for a location? . . ."

Dr. Arch Currie Johnston '67
Associate Professor,
Memphis State University
Director, Tennessee
Earthquake Information Center

" . . . Once again, rumors are plentiful that a name change is being considered for Southwestern. I hope them to be merely rumors. Changing the name of the college would serve only to negate the progress that has already been made toward national recognition and the accomplishments of all those who have worked so hard to make Southwestern the fine institution it is today. If sacrificing the college's name is necessary to gain national recognition, then such recognition cannot be worth having. . ."

A. Trice Gibbons, III '83
Research Assistant,
Veterans Administration Hospital
Memphis, Tennessee

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" . . . as a member of the faculty and particularly as Dean of British Studies At Oxford, I have confronted the same problem again and again both in this country and abroad. Southwestern What? Southwestern Why? Southwestern Where? (In the sense of a Southwestern somewhere else.) I cannot say how many times I have told the little history of Clarksville's being in the Old Southwest and our removal to Memphis. . .

I keep returning to the conclusion that minimal recognition of the college, much less national recognition, will have its beginning in our adopting a more distinctive and memorable name. . ."

Yerger H. Clifton
Dean of British Studies at Oxford
Professor of English

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"Southwestern at Memphis. Can you say that three times real fast? More importantly, can your grandmother remember that it is the name of your college? (Mine persists in telling people that I go to Memphis State.) And for those of you who watch Giants' games, have you ever once seen the announcer get Tom Mul-lady's alma mater right? . . .

In an offprint from a College Profiles Catalogue I counted 76 colleges that could easily be confused with SAM. They ranged from Southwestern Adventist College to Southwestern Junior College of the Assemblies of God to Southwestern Oregon Community College.

Let's face it. Southwestern at Memphis is an ambiguous name. . ."

Lisa McGee '85
Student from Dechard, Tenn.
Writing for "The Sou'wester"

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"The names of the 71 Presbyterian-related colleges are interesting, both for what they say and for what is not included. Five call themselves 'Universities.' One is a 'School,' one is a plurality ('Colleges'), and one isn't anything—it's just 'At Memphis!'"

Dr. Merrimon Cuninggim,
Former President, Danforth Foundation
in address to Inaugural Meeting
(in Memphis) of the Association of
Presbyterian Colleges and Universities

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Since it was founded in 1848 in Clarksville, Tenn., the college has actually had six different names: Masonic University of Tennessee (so dubbed in 1848), Montgomery Masonic College (1851), Stewart College (1855), Southwestern Presbyterian University (1879), Southwestern — also called Southwestern, College of the Mississippi Valley — (1925), and Southwestern At Memphis (1946).

Is it time for a new name? Address your comments to:

Executive Committee
Board of Trustees
Southwestern At Memphis
2000 North Parkway
Memphis, TN 38112