

## President's Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

November 10, 2020 3:30pm, via Zoom

Present: JoEllen Pederson, Pam McDermott, Bennie Waller, Bill Burger, Ian Danielson, Lee Bidwell (recording secretary), President Reveley

(The agenda items presented to the President are in italics, followed by his response.)

### 1. *Budget concerns.*

*How will state cuts be absorbed by the university?*

*What are the options or scenarios for dealing with this shortfall?*

*How will future shortfalls be dealt with?*

#### **President's Response:**

- JoEllen noted that some of the questions on the agenda were addressed at the Budget Forum on Nov. 5. She asked if there were any updates since then on the budget.
- President Reveley said that little has changed. The 4 big variables that will affect Longwood's budget that remain unknown are: (1) whether additional CARES Act funding will be approved by Congress and whether it will be "truly helpful" to higher education, unlike the first round of funding last spring; (2) what the state budget will look like, which is also tied to federal funding decisions; (3) the trajectory of the pandemic in the spring and beyond; and (4) how the economy recovers.
- The one variable that we do know right now is enrollment, and we have held enrollment steady unlike many other colleges and universities.

### 2. *Disappearing positions.*

*How and when will decisions about lecturers and adjuncts be made? Will departments be part of this decision? Planning for our programs' future is dependent on knowing how we will staff classes.*

*Two AV services positions have been eliminated without input from faculty who use these services the most. This change seems to put more of a financial burden on department budgets and faculty load. Have these types of decisions been discussed with deans or department chairs?*

*What other staff positions will be/have been eliminated? What is the process for these decisions?*

#### **President's Response:**

- The President segued into a discussion of the elimination of the AV services positions from his discussion of the budget. He said the decision to eliminate those positions is "an example of reality bending differently than in the past." He said that AV services are most needed for large outside events and since the pandemic we have not had those types

of activities. Academic programs, such as music, are working with the dean and provost to decide how to best meet their needs currently.

- Lee asked what the long-term plan is for providing AV services on campus post-pandemic. President Reveley said that is “TBD.”
- Pam commented that equipment management and maintenance is at least as important, if not more so, than simply running microphones. Cables, lights, and other equipment in Jarman must be maintained; someone must know where equipment is and when it was last used. Outside vendors cannot do that. She said that many performers who have used Jarman facilities over the years have had such a good impression of Longwood because the equipment works well and someone knows how to use it and a house manager is essential.
- The President said that it will be Fall of 2021 or later before we have any events on campus in the way we “were accustomed to” that will require AV services.
- Lee asked if that means that the decision has been made to cancel Spring 21 commencement. The President said that we have been using an outside vendor to facilitate commencement for several years and if “circumstances allow” a commencement ceremony in the spring, we will continue to use the outside vendor.
- Pam said that Jarman Hall and AV services are needed in the spring for musical performances to allow faculty to meet the academic objectives of courses in music. This semester students were not asked to perform concerts because of COVID-19, but now that it has been established that they can safely perform with social distancing, Jarman and the necessary technical support will be needed to allow for live-streaming of performances.
- Lee asked the President to explain what he meant when he said the long-term plan for AV services is “TBD” and whether meant that the positions were eliminated without any forethought as to what would happen post-pandemic. She said although 2 AV positions are a small part of the university structure, the elimination of the positions without any transparent communication about the process or even the decision makes faculty and staff feel vulnerable and relates to the question above about what other positions will be eliminated and the process that will be used to make those decisions.
- The President replied: “America is in a vulnerable spot. Higher education is in a vulnerable spot.” He said that he is not worried about LU in from a “generational or century time frame,” but the management of the budget in the next few months and years is important. He said “I cannot make a firm declaration that things will go ‘just fine;’ I’d like to, but I can’t.”
- Joellen asked if we will be able to revisit lost positions in the future. The President replied that in the last 6 to 8 months “hundreds of thousands of jobs in higher education have been lost” and pointed to a Pew report that said 14% of the employment base in higher education has been lost since the pandemic. He said it is possible that in the future

we would hire back positions lost during this time, but he would be “surprised” if we were able to do so.

- Bennie said that it is premature to be talking about bringing back positions given that an announcement about a vaccine was made only yesterday afternoon. He said that higher education has “gotten fat” during good times and needs to trim back spending and that he appreciates that President Reveley has said academic essentials will be protected.

### 3. *COVID-19 Update.*

*Will there be any changes in protocol for the spring semester?*

*How are you considering winter break and the return from winter break in spring plans?*

*Are there any updates from the state level?*

*Is there anyone at the state level tracking difference in cases based on protocol at different universities?*

*Is there any plan to re-open the Willett pool?*

### **President’s Response:**

- Regarding protocol in spring semester, President Reveley said “in broad stroke, the model we used for the fall semester has worked well” thanks to the work of the faculty and will be largely the same in the spring semester, with about the same mix of online, hybrid, and in-person classes.
- The two big variables shaping spring semester are the progression of COVID-19, particularly if there is a large spike in cases, and whether a vaccine is both approved and made widely available.
- The President said we all should be proud of what we have accomplished this semester.
- In response to Pam’s question about the plan for athletics in the spring semester, President Reveley said the NCAA is planning to let fall sports have truncated seasons in the spring, likely without spectators, and that plans for testing athletes who are competing are still being made at the NCAA and Big South level.
- Regarding the question as to whether data are being tracked at the state level to determine what practices at colleges and universities are working best, the President said that conversations across universities seem to suggest that the quarantining process is the most important in controlling spread and student compliance with COVID-19 testing. He said that if students feel as if their academic, dining, and residential experience will be good when quarantined or isolated, they are more likely to engage in the testing process. He believes Longwood has done well with the quarantine experience for students.
- Pam asked if there is a process to systematically examine whether mass testing of students on entry, random testing, or only testing those symptomatic or exposed works best to control spread. The President said he believes VDH is looking at that data.
- Ian pointed out that we had a spike in cases around Oktoberfest and we flattened the curve after that. He noted that we should pay attention to ritual milestones in the spring

semester to avoid similar spikes in cases. The President agreed, saying events such as Spring Weekend could pose a risk for increases in cases. He said that he was pleased that there was no spike after Halloween, which fell in a Saturday with excellent weather and a full moon.

- The President said there is no plan to reopen Willet pool at this time. The pool closure was not related to the pandemic. The pool use “wasn’t vast,” there were operational cost savings by closing the pool, and the pool isn’t NCAA length. He said, “In the deep fullness of time, if we could do renovation on the pool to make it NCAA regulation length” there is the possibility of reopening the pool but it will not happen any time soon.

4. *Spring Break Update.*

*Senate is gathering information from departments.*

*Could we end the semester a week early? This was not on the table, but we’ve had several comments that show this may be a popular option.*

*Will staff receive the usual amount of time off?*

**President’s Response:**

- JoEllen said that Senate Executive committee has been in conversation with the Provost about the parameters of the Spring Break options and she thanked the President for including the faculty in the conversation about how to best handle spring break days. She said she has received many responses from faculty that are innovative and thoughtful, which will be discussed at Senate next week. She also thanked the President for responding to other PAC requests, such as having Matt McWilliams send an e-mail with more information regarding COVID-19 after our last meeting and providing the free coffee at Starbucks to boost morale.
- She asked if staff will still get the usual amount of time off for Spring Break and the President said they would.
- In response to whether the President had any questions for us, he asked what our perception of students’ responses to the election have been. A short conversation about students’ civil, restrained response to the election ensued.