

President's Advisory Council Meeting
February 24, 2021 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. *Planning for a New Normal.*

How are we going to gather information to review COVID practices and to make recommendations for transitioning to a new normal? How will faculty, staff, and students be involved in that process?

For example, having Zoom capacity has helped us with more than just COVID-19 protocol. A holistic approach to this assessment could help us understand how these changes have benefited faculty, staff, and students.

President's Response:

- President Reveley said he is incredibly thankful for the nursing faculty and the guidance of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). He said we are fortunate that we are in Virginia right now because, compared to other states, the Commonwealth has done well handling the virus and the economy is relatively strong. Furthermore, Virginia Higher Education is faring well. He pointed to a report from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that estimated 651,000 jobs have been lost and there has been a 183 billion dollar loss in American higher education due to the pandemic.
- It is uncertain when the pandemic will subside to the point we can return to a new normal. Apart from commencement, the rest of this academic year will proceed as it has thus far in 2020-2021. Spring weekend has been canceled. Perhaps as the weather improves some "time honored traditions" at Longwood, such as the Chi Burning, will be able to be held with COVID-19 safe protocol. No decision has been made about commencement. President Reveley said it is important to do something to mark this milestone, but it will not be the traditional ceremony. He wants to get input from students on how to handle commencement, but he suggested that perhaps there would be separate ceremonies for each college.
- He anticipates that for the fall face masks and social distancing protocol probably still will be in place. He noted that in the fall of 2021, the only students on campus who will know what Longwood is like "normally" will be the seniors. We will have to think about how to preserve and resurrect the activities that give Longwood University its special character.

- One potential long-term outcome of the pandemic is that the Gen Z students who are coming into the university system might have a greater desire for in-person contact, as opposed to interaction through technology.
- Pam asked how we can develop a process to engage all constituents on campus to discuss what has worked well during the pandemic so that we can be proactive and capitalize on those ideas and practices.
- President Reveley suggested that perhaps surveys could be used to get input across campus. Ian suggested that often forums can be more productive than surveys. Lee said she was planning to solicit input from faculty about lessons learned from the pandemic to present to the Board of Visitors in her March report.
- Lee asked whether the leadership team has discussed a structure to plan for the future. The President replied “yes and no.” He said that any plans depend on what the state orders permit and that the leadership team is thinking in terms of timelines rather than structure. He said if the virus subsides, we can “return to business as usual.”
- Lee responded that PAC was asking how to be proactive so that we don’t just “return to business as usual,” but instead use the lessons learned from the pandemic to better position the institution and deliver education. President Reveley said, “The time is nigh to start thinking about that.”

2. ***Changes in Important Positions.***

Recently the Dean of Admissions and the Director of Financial Aid have left Longwood. At Senate, Provost Smith stated that these positions are being redistributed to current staff members. Will these positions be replaced or are we permanently re-assigning these duties? If we do re-hire these positions, will faculty be included on the hiring committees? Is there a conversation happening about any other administrative restructuring as we look to post-pandemic normal?

President’s Response:

- President Reveley said no significant restructuring of units is being planned. He said that any decisions regarding organization and personnel in admissions will be informed by input from Jennifer Green and Emily Heady. He can envision a scenario in which job tasks are permanently reassigned to existing positions, as well as a scenario in which searches are conducted for positions. If we conduct job searches for the vacated positions, faculty will be involved.

3. ***Partners for College Affordability and Public Trust [Report](#) and [HB 2120](#).***

What is your perspective on what this means for Longwood? How are institutions of higher education in the state responding to this report? How can we be better informed about stories like this in the future?

- The President said we are in a “populist moment” at this time with groups on the far left and the far right setting their sights on criticizing and disrupting higher education. The Partners group, who authored the report referenced above, aspires to be a nationally recognized and influential group but currently is focused in Virginia. The organization used to be a “creature of the hard right” but has “changed their tone to be a creature of the hard left.” It is not a “perennial group dominating the conversation in the legislature right now, and it is not a friend of university professors.” While the group’s stated goal is ensuring college affordability, the legislation they endorse “isn’t consequential for us.”
- President Reveley explained that the above legislative proposal in part grew out of frustration among constituents (faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members) regarding JMU’s handling of the pandemic in the fall. There was much public comment and concern not communicated to the University’s BOV, which sparked the most recent concern of the Partners group.
- He suggested that if faculty have questions about issues such as these that we contact Emily O’Brion or Matt McWilliams.
- Ian asked if there is a way the university can get out in front of a negative story, suggesting that perhaps Matt McWilliams can give advance notice or context when negative press is coming or occurs so that faculty and staff know how to respond when others ask them about it. Pam noted that the handling of the message regarding vaccinations at Longwood is another example where we should have framed the message more clearly to note the service that was being provided, rather than allowing the message to be framed negatively that “Longwood was cutting the line for vaccines.”
- President Reveley said these issues are deeply on his mind. He suggested that responding to organizations like the Partners group can validate them and allow them to think they have “gotten under your skin.” He likened it to professors choosing whether to address poor student behavior in a class or ignore it.
- Pam said the problem of not responding at all is that the only message people hear is the harsh message of critics. Lee said that most prospective students and their parents do not understand the underlying political currents and that it is important to address negative headlines or that is all people remember about Longwood.
- President Reveley said the questions raised by PAC have him thinking about the issues.

President’s Response

4. *Other Questions.*

Has any decision been made about faculty salaries for next year? If not, when do you expect those decisions to happen?

President’s Response:

- On this front, he said he had “good news, although it is not carved into stone yet.” Staff salaries have been restored. Given what he is seeing in the legislature he is optimistic faculty and A/P salaries will be restored in the summer, and “may be a little higher.”

What percent of faculty and staff received vaccinations?

President's Response:

- While he did not have specific figures, President Reveley said that “overwhelming supermajority of faculty” received the vaccine. The majority of staff also took the vaccine, but not to the degree that faculty did.