

President's Advisory Council Meeting

February 8, 2022 at 3:30 pm

Location: Stallard Ballroom

1. **Planning for the future** (~20 minutes)

- Several recent executive orders and directives have implications for higher education. Can you speak to how Longwood University is planning to address these changes?
Specifically:
 - Executive order #1 – divisive concepts in public education.
 - Proposed legislation and partnership agreement about expanding lab schools.
 - Can you talk a little about how Longwood will respond to changes (or possible changes) at the state level to COVID 19 protocols?
- Previously, the state had been discussing an early retirement option for Faculty. Is this still happening?
- Are there any indications from the state as to how proposed tax cuts will affect the higher education budget?

Discussion:

Concepts in Public Education:

We go through these cycles of change every four years in Virginia, as a state with a one-term limit for Governor. COVID and the heightened divisive spirit make this transition more complex. (The “divisive spirit” is less jarring for students than for faculty/staff, since students generally don’t remember a time of unity.) We have divided government in Virginia; therefore, all views get attention.

Lab Schools:

The focus on education thus far is more toward K12 than towards higher education. When the General Assembly uses the term “public education” they are primarily talking about K12. The Lab School concept is still being discussed ... it’s a different concept than charter schools; still being defined. There are fewer entrenched views / feelings about lab schools than charter schools. Whether this will result in a new initiative remains to be seen. Should it turn into something, then the Andy Taylor Center would be a natural way for Longwood to participate. Still much too early to know what might come.

Lee asked if the Lab School was seen as a “back door” to charter schools? President Reveley believes it is not quite seen that way ... the proposal has been getting plenty of push-back from more conservative Republicans and from strong proponents of education who are concerned about money being diverted from public schools. There are some people who think of it this way, but a surprising number who view it as a different endeavor – it has a track record; numerous colleges / universities in Virginia have had lab schools.

Lee followed up, “What is his agenda? If it’s not linked to charter schools then why spend money on it?” Education is always on the public policy agenda. There’s a yearning in some quarters for change and a yearning in other quarters for new investment in existing systems. The Governor hasn’t talked with higher education much about this idea yet.

COVID Protocols:

The Youngkin administration listened to higher education about what has worked well on campuses; they have been deliberate about timing of how they roll things out to be least disruptive to college campuses.

There is plenty of complexity around the vaccine issue, which will not have a huge practical bearing on this semester; it remains an open question for the future. Nationally the Biden administration has been actively looking to enter the next phase / chapter of the response to COVID; that has bearings on the way different states have been playing things. At times Longwood has been at the forefront, like getting access to vaccines; and other times we have been trying to see what the mood among lawmakers might be. The hope is to get through this semester doing things largely as we have, then take stock over the summer to see what will happen going forward.

JoEllen said we don’t require vaccines but we suggest strongly that students have other vaccines, and asked “how does COVID play into that?” President Reveley explained that there are legal technicalities – other requirements are part of Virginia law, whereas the COVID vaccine is not codified in the same way.

Early/Phased Retirement

President Reveley hasn’t heard this administration talk about that yet. It is a part of state law, has been on the books for some time; Northam administration highlighted it to make sure people knew it was an option. It’s an existing option, whether it’s getting state-wide emphasis is another thing.

Tax Cuts

The General Assembly is in session these 2-3 months at the start of the year; that concentrated session means there is a flurry of activity in the first months of the year. It’s too soon to say how legislative proposals will play out. Virginia did make it through COVID in a financially strong posture; there are differing opinions on how we should use that strength – tax relief vs. investment. He doesn’t envision major setbacks to higher education this session; more a question of how artfully things are going to be handled.

Salary increases are vitally important; they become difficult when the state demands increases but only provides a portion of the funding necessary to pay for demanded increases. Higher education people are lobbying for more state money to effect increases demanded by the state.

Operating funding is another revenue stream; he is also working hard on the Wygal Replacement building to try to get it through the process of adjudication in this cycle. There are several steps in a project of this scale:

- You first get into the master plan
- Then get it into the state’s capital outlay queue
- Then get the planning funding
- Then do the planning work (done over 2019-20)
- Then get it into the funding queue (last year)
- Finally get the project actually funded

It is a process that takes several years, and each step requires much work by President Reveley, Louise Waller, and others. It is rare that something gets this far and never happens, but it takes a great deal of effort to get it over the goal line in a specific cycle; projects can be stalled or be pushed back to another budget cycle.

We have to let the funding process unfold over the next few months and we will not know anything definitive until April. The timeline is:

- General Assembly will pass their budget, after reconciling budgets from both chambers
- Legislation and budget go to the Governor, who then has the chance to utilize various powers, like the line-item veto, to contour the budget and send it back to the General Assembly.
- General Assembly gets it back in early April; once it gets through that then we’ll know whether it is in the budget for this year or not.

2. **Student Retention** (~20 minutes)

- As we enter year three of the COVID pandemic, [research](#) continues to show that individual students need more personalized support (academic, psychosocial, financial). How are we planning to address this need?

JoEllen opened this question by asking, “How does K12 ‘stuff’ trickle up to us? What happens when we get students who have been protected by their parents for so long?”

This will be one of the big things America will be thinking about in the years ahead. At the National level, this conversation is complicated by the lack of civil discourse.

Anyone who has given any attention to Civitae is very impressed with that program; that is what we need. The rising generation needs plenty of help in all sorts of ways, but one way they are different is that they are a lot less riven on these types of issues – they have a broader sense of accord and common purpose.

On the student front, we hear that everybody in the business of helping people learn are going to be grappling with the effects of COVID for a long, long time in all sorts of different ways.

The country is losing sight of the way COVID has taken a million lives, and the primary impact that has on families. We need to make sure CAPS is strong; part of it is making sure that Accessibility Resources office is strong; part of it is some innovative things we are doing from a CAFÉ standpoint – being thoughtful and intentional in that regard. We need to develop a better-honed sense of the role of the professor in the face of mental health challenges. That instinct to go the extra mile can wear you down very quickly and can lead to a set of expectations that are complicated; the nature of our campus community will be a strength for us as we work through this. We have scale and intimacy – we know each other whereas at a bigger school there is more of a sense of distance; programs can be developed and implemented more quickly here.

It's going to be hard; the thing that weighs on us is that we've all been so used to higher education getting stronger and being beloved, and we are less beloved than we used to be and we are less strong than we used to be. That is going to make the next generation feel different than we did when we came of age. Despite that, he is still optimistic about the students themselves; makes him feel good about the present and about what things are going to be like in the future.

There is an understanding on the part of policymakers that they need to be attentive to higher education and to help. When some of the trends started to move against us 4-5 years ago, policymakers still reflectively thought "you all have been fine, we don't need to help"; that has changed – they now recognize the issues facing higher education. Federal stimulus related to COVID that was focused on higher education is one example of a shift in perspective.

Lee pointed out that Academic Success is essentially a one-person shop, and is another area that needs more support. Will agreed that referrals have definitely increased over the years. The administration's emphasis on Longwood as an in-person undergraduate institution has helped us work out some issues with students, like expectations about in-person vs. online attendance.

Dorothy mentioned that students seem to be more lonely; they are more reluctant to speak up, to reach out to professors, and connect with others. They are struggling to make connections in class and are not sure how to join clubs and other activities outside of the classroom to facilitate those connections. Some students have also lost their home support systems, as their parents navigate job loss, caring for family members, and other difficulties.

Meg also observed that students are not reaching out to others; they work by themselves at their own desk; they don't know anyone in their class 4 weeks in. After the past two years, they don't know how to make conversation. Will noted that even in terms of gym attendance they're not going to group fitness the way they used to; the ones who are there are headphoned up and are not socializing.

JoEllen said that Learning Communities are good; students know each other better and are actually talking to each other when she walks into class. They keep each other updated as to their personal lives. It will take thoughtful new strategies to find ways to help students get back on a stronger footing.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam McDermott