

Board of Visitors Meeting
March 30-31, 2012
Report to Faculty

Two days of Haydn's "Surprise Symphony"—lots of *pro forma* lulls punctuated by moments of intensity. I have skipped over some sections I usually mention; the full minutes of the meeting should be available soon as a link [on this page](#). As in my previous reports, I sometimes use agentless prose, with a few key exceptions, in order to decrease verbiage. I have elected to use a bit more personal narrative in places this time—I hope it will be clear why this was necessary.

FRIDAY, MARCH 30 (beginning at 8:45 am)

I. AAUP Salary Study

Dr. Bob Webber presented the annual [AAUP Salary Study](#), much as he had done at the faculty meeting the day before. Upon learning that our salary levels have fallen to the very bottom of our peer institutions (fourth percentile), members of the board were evidently dismayed. In answer to a question about faculty perception of compensation, I responded that concern is ubiquitous—low pay is the “but” that almost inevitably works its way into any faculty conversation of our work environment. One member noted that if we “lose faculty enthusiasm, we lose Longwood,” while several others wondered if immediate steps could be taken in order to “take the sting” out of our current predicament—increasing money for sabbaticals, for instance, or decreasing work load. The rector noted that “we’re getting to an inflection point” on this issue and cautioned us to remain cognizant of the “many different elements” that will need to be considered in attempting to find solutions. “Let’s muse on this until tomorrow,” she concluded.

II. Rector’s Report

Noting that the Virginia General Assembly had yet to pass a budget, the rector expressed her hope that the board would nevertheless arrive at “almost cloture” on a plan to adjust tuition and fees for the coming year. She emphasized the nationwide trend of increasing student debt and urged us to remain committed to affordability as a key element of student success.

III. President’s Report

The president began by pointing to progress with NCATE and to relatively “good news” from the General Assembly with respect to funding for higher education. He then provided updates as follows:

- *Salary Study*: Noting that salary issues have been a concern since he arrived, the president explained that the salary study he commissioned last year has nearly completed “phase two” of its work (which includes both a market assessment and an internal equity review); these findings will be presented in April. The next phase will involve implementing recommendations such that over the “next three to five years” salary gaps can be closed.

- *Personnel Changes:* The president congratulated Ms. Sally McMullin (Dean of Admissions), Dr. Alix Fink (Dean of the Honors College), and Ms. Kathy Johnson Bowles (ACE Fellow) on their new roles.
- *ESL Institute:* Twelve students, so far.
- *Smoke from the new boiler:* There was general consensus that “we dropped the ball” in not communicating in a timely manner with Farmville residents after the recent (and unexpected) emissions of large clouds of smoke from the new wood-burning boiler.
- *Acceptance into the Big South Conference:* Smiles all around.
- *Spring monies:* Our current intake (\$13.3 million) is ahead of our intake at the same time last year (\$11.8 million). This information led to a question-and-answer session; members of the BOV wondered “what latitude” we have in moving money around in order to address our compensation problems. In response, the president noted that several Virginia institutions have created a discrete pool of money from which they draw for equity increases, merit bonuses, etc.; he has been talking with presidents from these institutions in order to learn more about how this process works. Questions were raised about the appropriateness of the makeup of our current SCHEV peer-group (which includes a disproportionate number of private institutions) and about the potential benefits that might accrue from sharing the findings of our salary study with the General Assembly (i.e., in order to demonstrate that Longwood is in a uniquely precarious position).

IV. Administration, Finance, Facilities, and Technology

1. *Tuition.* Ms. Kathy Worster, Vice President for Administration and Finance, outlined a proposed 4.6% increase in tuition and fees for 2012-2013, with permission to adjust this number as necessary once the General Assembly releases a state budget. She pointed to the precipitous drop (30%) in state appropriation per-student over the last five years; increases in tuition and fees have thus risen accordingly. In the extended discussion that followed, the following points/questions were made/raised:
 - The BOV requested more information on the distribution between E&G and Auxiliary funds at the next meeting.
 - The BOV requested more information about how the cost structure of our graduate programs compares to that of competing institutions. Dr. Jeannine Perry, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies, explained that many institutions offer “discounts” to graduate students and warned that we may be pricing ourselves out of the market in some programs.
 - The BOV requested a revised business model addressing the financial implications of Longwood’s move to D-1 athletics in general and to the Big South Conference in particular.
 - Upon learning that we have “about \$300,000” in discretionary funds left over this year, the BOV wondered about the relationship between enrollment and budgeting. In particular, the rector asked if some of our guiding assumptions are “too

- conservative”—at what point can we assume an increased enrollment so that we can build extra money into our budgeting process?
- This led to a discussion of the Auxiliary Reserve, which continues to hold roughly four times as much money as required. I asked about a potential relationship between this pot of money and the hypothetical faculty-bonus pot mentioned earlier in the day by the president, and in response was told that we would have a full discussion of Auxiliary Reserve funds at the end of the day.
2. *Alumni Center.* The BOV approved a request to shift the placement of the Longwood Alumni Center from the originally proposed site on High Street to what was once the Blackwell Dining Hall. Although this change to the University Master Plan is in part a cost saving measure, there was broad consensus that moving the center to campus has a variety of other merits. Mr. Steven Meyers, Alumni Association Representative to the BOV, explained that this change of venue has the full support of the Alumni Association.
- V. Hull Springs Farm Strategic Planning Task Force: Final Report and Recommendations
Mr. Otis Brown and Dr. Alix Fink presented a truly [comprehensive report](#) (over 80 pages!) underscoring the benefits to Longwood of committing to the development of Hull Springs (no longer “Farm,” as I understand it) as a signature resource. Of particular note—and interest to the BOV—is the proposed development of a Center for Excellence in Environmental Education—or “CE³.” Aside from being easily the coolest acronym coined at Longwood in years (where is *your* superscript number, *CAFE?*), CE³ garnered a number of positive comments from members of the board, who especially liked the way it plays to one of our natural strengths (teacher preparation) while also allowing us to branch out into a STEM niche. There were some misgivings about the financial implications of the plan—for instance, the Longwood Real Estate Foundation has agreed to continue to *loan* \$100,000 in assistance per year for four years, but only if certain milestones are met along the way, which means its support could disappear. Several members of the board also wondered if we were *sure* that all of the proper environmental approvals had been sought and granted—it is crucial to get this just right, given that the success of the plan requires effectively managing a Wetland Mitigation Bank. In the end, the BOV offered its “endorsement” of the plan, but not yet its “approval.”

VI. Academic & Student Affairs

At this point, we went off script a bit and covered a number of items out of order, including:

- An update on SACS by Dr. Virginia Kinman
- An update on QEP by Dr. Mc Amoss
- An update on Student Housing by Dr. Tim Pierson (we are currently at 94% occupancy, our highest number ever at this time of year).

VII. Discussion of Auxiliary Reserve

As noted above, this discussion had been mentioned earlier (see above, the fourth bullet under “IV. 1. *Tuition*”). The president gave a presentation outlining plans for a new University Center. He stressed the importance of having an “anchor” for the campus—a gathering and dining place not only for residential students but for commuter students and for prospective students (and their families). Competing universities have all

invested in this area, as evidenced by the photographs the president shared with us—Christopher Newport appears to have reconstructed the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Unfortunately, fundraising for this project has not met our goals—which is where auxiliary money comes into play. Essentially, the president proposed using \$5,000,000 from reserves in order to make up some of the shortfall, thus allowing construction to begin sooner rather than later. The BOV was very excited about this plan and urged us not to penny-pinch on something so institutionally vital.

It was at this point that, much to my surprise and embarrassment, I sort-of lost my composure. I was in the midst of explaining that I was thinking of *another* “vital” part of the institution that was “crucial to student success” and that was in far worse shape than Lankford—and then sort of petered out into whatever it is that happens when one’s throat will no longer permit words to be formed. I did regain my footing enough to explain how increasingly difficult it was becoming for me to make clear to those I represent why it is we can move around millions of dollars for one thing and not for another. The basic response, as best I can remember it, was something along the lines of “rules are rules”—the money is on the wrong side of the budget. The meeting adjourned at about 5:00 pm.

SATURDAY, MARCH 31 (beginning at 9:00 am)

I. Parent’s Council Report

Representatives from the Parent’s Council explained the genesis of the group, its makeup and mission, and its work on behalf of Longwood. Thus far, the group has awarded \$27,000 over the last three years in support of innovative projects dedicated to academics, student engagement, and citizen leadership. Dr. Heather Lettner-Rust and two of her students from ENGL 400 offered a demonstration of the fruits of such support by providing a synopsis of a project they developed and implemented: “Dinner with [Farmville’s] Town Council.” The BOV was clearly thrilled, and wondered if SACS was aware of such wonderful examples of civic engagement.

II. Faculty Report

I offered the BOV my sincere thanks for their sensitivity to faculty concerns. I then provided them a “facts-on-the-ground” picture of the consequences of our current salary scale. The report I wrote is [here](#), but I should note that I didn’t really look at the script this time—this one has been rattling in my head for weeks now. I do think the written report is pretty close to what I said, so please take a look if you are interested.

The result was a truly surprising, engaging, and *thorough* dialogue, the gist of which is as follows: the BOV agreed that it was time to commit to doing something tangible about what the rector described as “the worst threat facing Longwood.” Dr. Ken Perkins, Dr. Chuck Ross, Dr. Paul Barrett, and Dr. Larissa Ferguson each stressed the urgency of the problem, underscored the importance of communicating clearly with faculty and staff, and offered suggestions for how best to move forward. Various members of the BOV discussed what a meaningful resolution might look like—i.e., one that outlines a careful,

thoughtful, but decisive action plan instead of an empty statement of solidarity. As one member of the board put it, “it’s time for us to stick our necks out.” The result was a unanimously passed resolution (composed during break by a gathering of board members and administrators) that reads as follows:

“Whereas the Longwood University Board of Visitors recognizes that the lack of competitiveness of faculty and staff compensation constitutes the greatest threat to the future success of the University, be it resolved that the Board will convene a Compensation Task Force comprising Board members, faculty and staff to create an action plan to make Longwood more competitive in hiring and retaining outstanding faculty and staff. The plan will explore short-term and long-term solutions to address compensation issues. The members of the task force will be named and begin their work immediately and will present the action plan to the full Board of Visitors no later than the end of the fall semester.”

III. Academic Strategic Plan

After an introduction by President Finnegan, Drs. Ken Perkins, Charles White, and Larissa Ferguson explained clearly and (if I may editorialize a bit) brilliantly the how, who, when, and what of the ASP. Members of the board commended everyone involved for devising a plan that “plays to our strengths”—and I should note that many members seemed to have read the document *carefully*. Comments that followed included “I like the balance” and “I really like your attention to general education” and “This warrants celebration.” After expressing keen interest in seeing the first steps toward implementation, members of the board concluded discussion with a round of applause.

IV. Legislative Update

Ms. Brenda Atkins explained the various ways the General Assembly may or may not assist higher education in general and Longwood in particular. So much depends on how the competing budgets are reconciled.

Respectfully submitted,

E. Derek Taylor

