

Presentation to the Board
12/08/12
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If I were to ask each of you “what was the best part of yesterday’s meeting,” my suspicion is that most, if not all, of you would provide the same answer: the students.

Of the many reasons I have the greatest job in the world, this is reason number one: I get to interact with students like the ones you met yesterday on a *daily basis*.

It is easy to understand why we as faculty at Longwood prioritize our students. That we do so, however, isn’t just because we like them so much (*we do*), nor is it because we’re decent, well meaning people (though *we are*). Prioritizing our students is, quite literally, a job requirement.

Now, those of you who were on the board two Septembers ago may dimly recall that I distributed, as a handout, an update on the ASP that had NOT gone through the proper channels. As it turns out, that sort of thing is very much frowned upon. . . .

I refuse to tempt fate by providing a copy of Appendix F of the FPPM (Faculty Policies and Procedures Manual). But I *can* describe it to you: this document stipulates how faculty performance is evaluated on a yearly basis at Longwood, according to three categories: Teaching, Scholarship, and Service. What is *noteworthy* is that, while faculty may choose to redistribute percentages *to a point*, they must do so in such a way that teaching is necessarily prioritized as no less than “half” the job. In other words, I might choose 50 25 25 or 70 20 10--but the first number, the *teaching* number, is always *at least* 50.

There is nothing obvious about evaluating faculty performance in this manner. I have a very close colleague at another institution--a research 1 institution--who explained to me with no little consternation that his two-course teaching schedule had against his wishes been changed, after many years, from Tuesday / Thursday to MWF, thereby disrupting his research schedule. And I’m not blaming this colleague--he is at an institution where the priorities are . . . different.

Now, let me be clear: faculty at Longwood conduct meaningful, important, significant research--as I tried to make clear in my June report to the board. But research is a priority for faculty, not *the* priority.

I have attempted for the past two board meetings to introduce you to the embodiment of my point--both times, he was already spoken for, once to give a presentation, this time because he is accompanying students on a study-abroad program. That person is Dr. James Jordan--for whom the new Archaeology Field School was named at the previous board meeting.

I need to back up for just a moment--and by “moment” I mean 24 years. When I was a freshman in college, I thought, briefly, that I was a pretty good hurdler. Every day, I lined up at practice against Steve Brown--who had, the year before, placed third in the nation in high

hurdles. I would like to say that I ran “with” Steve Brown--but that would be an insult to the word “with”--the same goes for “alongside.” I *did* run in the lane adjacent to his.

I’m mentioning my experience with Steve Brown because it’s the closest I can come to describing what it’s been like to work with Jim Jordan over the years. Within my first year at Longwood, I became accustomed to the experience of having a student who was currently taking my class offer the unsolicited pronouncement that “Dr. Jordan is *the best* professor at Longwood.” At which point, audience awareness would kick in, and the student would try to somehow walk it back--some version of “you’re . . . good!”

I actually love that experience now--I’m imagining it must have been something like this to have been on a basketball team with Michael Jordan. For all of Jim’s significant accomplishments as a researcher and a scholar (he’s done archaeological digs in countries I didn’t know existed), first and foremost Jim Jordan has taught like his hair was on fire for over three decades--he helped me crunch the numbers, and that comes to something like 10,000 students--many, many of them--probably MOST of them--*non-majors* who, because they were at Longwood, had the opportunity to take a general education course with the person named “Virginia Professor of the Year” by the Carnegie Foundation in 1995.

The implications of this type of professor-student interaction in introductory courses is, I would argue, profound. When I first met our Alumni representative, Mrs. Colleen Margiloff, I asked her if she recalled any of her professors from her time at Longwood. She responded by telling me a truly wonderful story about. . . [Jim Jordan].

We are in the business of educating students--of helping them to become “citizen leaders.” And we are good at what we do precisely because we are not stingy with our Jim Jordans--or, at least with Jim Jordan wanna-bes like me. It’s what we do that so many other institutions *don’t*, and it is a story worth telling to the widest possible audience.

Let me conclude by recounting a discussion I had yesterday with Dr. Paul Barrett, Dean of the Business and Economics School. I asked Paul about the several new hires in his college, and he enthusiastically responded: “They’re great. Excellent researchers--and *terrific* in the classroom.”

I would submit to you that quite possibly *the* defining trait of Longwood is the fact that a Dean would think the second point was worth not only mentioning, but worth *stressing*.

