

President's Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

September 21, 2021 3:30-5:00 pm

President's Advisory Council (PAC):

- Senate Executive Committee: JoEllen Pederson (Chair), Will Holliday (Vice-Chair), Dorothy Suskind, Meg Meng, Pamela McDermott
- Board of Visitors Representative: Lee Bidwell
- meeting with President Reveley

PAC meets one week prior to meetings to set the agenda, based on questions received from faculty. The agenda is sent to President Reveley, who comes to the meeting prepared to discuss questions on the agenda. Each item is brought forward, President Reveley offers his response, and members of PAC ask follow-up questions. We try to stay within an estimated time frame for each item, so that we get responses to all questions on the agenda.

The questions from the agenda are listed as Items; responses and discussion follow each item.

Item 1: Planning for the future.

Faculty remain concerned about Admissions strategies and leadership / staffing. We have heard and understand the broader issues around generational numbers and the impact COVID could have on the ability for families to afford college; we are glad that Longwood is using the Common App.

Specifically, we are interested to learn more about

- The changes in leadership in the Admissions Office: What strategic decisions / visioning came into play in making these decisions, and what are the anticipated outcomes from restructured leadership?
- Are we considering new ways to include faculty in admissions strategies in meaningful ways?
- What specific analysis has been done in Longwood Admissions to determine what internal processes are working and what needs to be improved? What new strategies are Admissions adopting to address the internal problems that have been identified?
- What new strategies is Longwood adopting to address initiatives in diversity in Higher Education?
- What specific numbers are being reported to SCHEV – how many students, how many new, first-time, full-time students?
- What is the anticipated shortage to our E&G income based on projected admissions figures and what are the plans for dealing with the long-term change in our E&G Budget?

JoEllen shared SCHEV data from the last 6 years, along with data Emily Heady shared with the Chairs Council. The data show we are down 23% in first time, full time freshmen between AY 2016-17 and this year and enrollment has declined 19% between 2012-2021; faculty see these numbers and want to know more about how we will move forward from here.

President Reveley shared his responses to this multi-point question as follows:

BUDGET

- The budget variance for this year – anticipated income vs. real income – is meaningfully less than 1%. This means we are not looking at a need for acute measures in March to account for a shortfall.
- While the in-person, residential experience is the “soul” of Longwood, the budget benefits from other revenue lines such as graduate and part-time tuition. Unlike other institutions, such as Christopher Newport, our budget is not based only on full-time residential students. This makes a real difference in how undergraduate admission impacts our budget in comparison with other institutions.
- While numbers were trending downward to some extent, the number of freshmen in Virginia institutions collapsed 7.4% from Fall '19 to Fall '20. This quantifies the lower demographics previously noted.
- Virginia Higher Ed has divided into different pods Some schools (UVA, W&M) don't want to get any bigger but are under political pressure to get bigger, and so they have increased class sizes. VT has been overenrolling; growing quite a bit. Others are down quite a bit, with varying hits on budgets. Longwood and VMI are kind of treading water. Everyone else is seeing downward trends in both enrollment and budget.
- Lee said that faculty understand the broader context of factors that have contributed to the decline in Longwood's enrollment but asked what the plan is moving forward to increase undergraduate enrollment, who is designing the plan, to what extent will faculty have input on the admissions plan. President Reveley said that he has confidence in Emily Heady's leadership.
- Total is relevant on the money side – decline in freshmen but increase in graduate enrollment is good for the money side at Longwood. On the soul side, it's been a game of brands and we have not been able to connect with students in the way we need to due to COVID. We cannot fix the brand quickly; growing our brand is a long-term plan. The Admissions building, right next to the refurbished Weyanoke, is a huge draw for new students. The Common App is a big plus. The COVID impact is felt more dramatically for us because our biggest draw is our campus – students who visit make a personal connection and decide to come to Longwood. We expect this factor to decrease in the next few years as in-person recruiting and on-campus visits return.
- President Reveley will continue to prioritize the “soul” – commitment to the full-time residential education – while continuing to work on solutions for the “budget” side. He prefers to focus on the mission of Longwood – to stay true to the residential undergraduate experience – while capitalizing on additional revenue streams and seeking other solutions to provide the funding needed to carry out our mission.

STAFFING

- Emily Heady has the President's full confidence as head of Admissions. She is the right person for the job at this moment – she brings a variety of skills and tools to the job.
 - Emily feels good about the suite of people around her.
 - Emily piloted the Faculty/Staff Ambassador program last year, promoting 1-on-1 interactions between prospective students and faculty/staff identified as ambassadors for this pilot year. The yield from that program was 69% (69% of students who connected through this program decided to come to Longwood). Contact Emily if you are interested in being involved.
 - President Reveley also noted that additional measures (as yet unspecified) to improve admissions yield, beyond the new admissions building, Faculty/Staff Ambassador program, and Common App will be required.

- Members of PAC expressed concern that Emily is being spread thin, and that there is perceived chaos, inconsistent messaging to prospective students, and poor communication between Admissions and Faculty. Faculty are interested in engaging with Admissions but have had limited success feeling heard after numerous visits.
 - It seems the onus is on the faculty to reach out to Admissions, we would like to see a more proactive approach from Admissions. Will suggested that Admissions make visits to faculty during office hours, to learn specifics about programs and hear about innovative work being done through Longwood’s classrooms.
 - Lee mentioned specific innovative programs that are not being shared with prospective students.
 - Pam suggested that Admissions talk with faculty about articulating academic opportunities that are unique to Longwood. Beyond faculty-student ratio and the status of the teacher in the room, Longwood offers creativity, collaboration, and innovation among faculty and between faculty and students. Civitae is a unique core curriculum, but there are also unique features to major programs we could market.
 - We are interested in helping to communicate what makes Longwood special academically.

STATUS OF EACH PART OF THE ADMISSIONS CYCLE

There are three major phases in the admissions cycle: Prospecting (catching the attention of sophomores and juniors), Application (with a distinction between opening an application and completing an application), and Yield (students deciding to enroll).

- Prospecting Phase – this phase has been upended for everyone; we expect the COVID implications to resolve but other changes are also in play.
 - College Fairs are a big part of the teenager’s experience with making decisions about college and opening up to schools with which they are unfamiliar. This is the main arena for college “shopping”, and they have been suspended due to COVID.
 - The SAT/PSAT system was also disrupted. In addition to providing students and parents with an indication of achievement, this system also provided a databank of information about students who were college-bound. This has made it much harder to connect with sophomores and juniors. No one is clear about how “prospecting” is going to work moving forward; everyone in the Admissions arena is figuring it out. Applications are up; we believe we are doing some things right but will continue to adapt and try new strategies.
- Application Phase – this phase is working quite well. Last year we had the second highest ever number of completed applications.
 - PAC members expressed concern about our 9% rejection rate (2019-20 first-year applicants). President Reveley highlighted Longwood’s focus on the transformation of students, and our mission to help students hit their stride while they are with us.
 - President Reveley also highlighted growth in the diversity of our student population.
 - While the number of black students has remained steady across the state over the last decade, Longwood’s black student population has doubled. This is a success in both the application and yield phases.
 - In normal times 25% of our students are Pell eligible. Longwood, VCU, and GMU are the only colleges in Virginia with a 25% Pell eligible rate and a 6-year graduation rate above 60%

- It was also noted that we currently only have one tenured black faculty member.
- Yield Phase – The president noted that this is an area where we have had issues. Visiting our campus has always been a key component of this phase. If a student visits once, the yield rate jumps from 20% to 53%; if they visit twice that rises to 75%.
 - We are already beginning to see a turn: Summer '19, 485 prospective students visited; Summer '20, 277 prospective students visited; Summer '21, 712 prospective students visited campus.
 - Faculty/Staff Ambassador program is effective and helpful in this phase, but due to potential self-selection bias (potential students who contacted faculty/staff ambassadors may already have a strong interest in Longwood), more creative activities that help improve yield rate are encouraged.

[ADDENDUM](#): The PAC members also forwarded this question to Emily Heady and Pam Tracy. Their responses are found as an addendum at the bottom of these minutes.

Item 2: The President's Welcome

Traditionally, we have all gathered to listen to you, and previous presidents, set the tone for the upcoming school year. This is an important time for faculty and staff because it is the only meeting where we are all invited, together. The new approach to this welcome does not create an opportunity for us to build community or set goals for the new school year in an inclusive setting.

- Why has the President's Welcome format changed? Will you restore the traditional gathering next year—even if it has to be on Zoom?

President Reveley's discussion touched on the following points:

- A number of constituencies watch to see how Longwood will handle business during COVID. As the year was getting underway there were numerous people who were adamant that an in-person welcome would be dangerous due to COVID.
- In addition to his "Campus Tour" model, he also visited different areas of the university sequentially, and stayed to answer questions at each meeting.
- He mentioned other points in the year when we gather as community.

Members of PAC highlighted the unique nature of the Welcome as a kind of "state of the union", where faculty and staff together hear the latest vision and current issues in higher education and at Longwood. Unlike other informal gatherings, the Welcome is received with more seriousness.

President Reveley recognizes the value of the opening meeting.

Item #3: Announcements about Meetings

The Board of Visitors meetings are public meetings, yet no e-mail is sent to the campus in a timely manner to announce when and where these meetings are occurring. The University Planning Committee is also not announced to the University community in a timely manner.

- How can we ensure that faculty are informed about public meetings in a timely manner?

President Reveley acknowledged that there needs to be a better approach for UPC meetings and will make sure the word gets out.

BOV meetings are different. They are open (although COVID has had an impact on those meetings as well), and they are posted on the website.

Item #4: Foundation Questions

Faculty would like more information about what led to the rewrite of the Foundation MOU (see http://www.longwood.edu/media/presidents-office/public-site/board-of-visitors/PRES_BOV_2021_Sept-optimized.pdf starting on p. 16). Faculty are concerned that these changes, along with the creation of the Trust several years ago (using the Trust to deal with faculty contributions), imply a rift between the Foundation and the Administration.

For example, it seems the Real Estate Foundation loaned the Trust part of a person to process faculty donations to Longwood; it is unclear to faculty why this wasn't accomplished in a similar manner with the Foundation.

- Would you explain the factors involved in making these decisions and the anticipated gain from these changes?

President Reveley's response:

- Growth in the endowment changed the scale of management required. That resulted in significant staff turnover at the Foundation over time. Therefore, the Board focused on specialization – allowing Real Estate to focus solely on that aspect, including Hull Springs Farm, while the Longwood Foundation focused on growing the endowment and making sure scholarships are well utilized.
- The Trust is functioning as a vehicle between the two, assisting daily transactions. The Trust centralizes management of gifts, like a receiving arm to direct donations to Foundation or Real Estate.
- State dollars come with restrictions in a way that is different from private money. This structure allows donors to give money in a more streamlined way.

Items 5: Other Questions

- If there is a change in the mask mandate at the state level, how will Longwood respond?

President Reveley's response included these points:

- The Governor and House are elected on the same cycle. The Senate will stay Democratic; the Governorship and/or House could change.
- Because of Redistricting, it is conceivable that there will be races sooner than normal to get new representatives on the correct cycle. There will be "a lot of politics" in the coming years.
- President Reveley noted that Longwood was the first to be vaccinated. He is not averse to putting us in political headlights to do what is right.

Final Comments:

- While President Reveley has found much in the last few years to make him more pessimistic about the world, he remains optimistic about Longwood. The storm is real, but he believes we are positioned to weather it in good standing.
- Pam said that last year there was much communication between administration and faculty and staff regarding COVID-19 protocol and plans, and suggested that the discussion about enrollment and admissions potentially could parallel that process in which there are regular updates and opportunities for input from the broader campus.
- Lee said that faculty would not be asking difficult questions about enrollment and the budget if they were not so invested in the well-being of the institution. President Reveley acknowledged that he understands and appreciates the faculty's concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
Pam McDermott

ADDENDUM

Item 1:

Because of COVID-19, students are not coming to Longwood prepared for the challenges of college. Are we planning for changes in student success, faculty development, academic requirements or academic protocols to address these changing needs?

From Emily Heady, Assistant Vice President of Admissions & Retention:

Students not seeming prepared for college is not a novel problem that arose with COVID. But there are some new or increased readiness gaps that we're finding (and the research is just starting to document), especially among students that were marginalized in one way or another to begin with—economically disadvantaged, a member of an ethnic/racial minority, first-gen, etc. Some of that (unfortunately) meant that a fairly significant number of students who fit those criteria simply didn't come to college when in a non-plague year they might have.

Here's what we're doing on the student success side.

1. Current systems are built scalably, and they work, provided people make appropriate referrals. The Center for Academic Success will work with students on all aspects of the learning process, including skills like time management and test readiness. There is the usual tutoring available, and the Writing Center has expanded the types of tutoring it supports to include oral communication, brainstorming, etc. Programs like CLASP provide excellent wrap-around support to students who fit in one or more of the categories I mentioned above. First-year coaches are engaged with their groups as a whole, and they're also offering individualized support to an average of 7 students per day at this point. Some days are higher (like yesterday, which had 22 outreaches), and some are lower. This is much higher than last year, most likely because people are now out of their rooms some—so we have a better sense of what's happening. I'm glad to see it, as we can nip most problems in the bud if we only know about them early. And once students do end up in trouble, we're assigning academic coaches to students who end up on probation or SAP appeal status. And there's Care Team.

2. New this year: Orientation was set up very differently with the goal of delivering the information in smaller chunks over a longer period of time (and it was repeatable for those students who really wanted to, say, watch the housing video three times). While most of the content focused on campus life, we did add a session (peer-led) about how to succeed at Longwood—good advice about things like time management, reading a syllabus, how not to get too involved, etc.
3. Also new: An online course called 5 Things Every Lancer Needs to Know. We worked with Roger Byrne and Wade Edwards, plus a variety of offices across campus, to help students get off to a good start. This course deployed via Canvas in the summer, and we had quite a few completers—66% of our incomers, actually. The goal was not to give students all that they need to succeed over four years, but simply to help them (1) have some healthy messages to get them through the first few weeks of self-doubt, (2) learn about some resources that are available to them, and (3) help them set good habits in the first few weeks. We thought that if we could get them calmly and competently through the first few weeks, we'd be ahead of where we might have been otherwise. Response to the class was really good—lots of students were asking for referrals to specific resources, telling us they felt much better about the transition, etc. We'll see how those completers did academically once the term is over, of course, but all signs are good for now.

From Pam Tracy, Director of the Center for Faculty Enrichment:

I agree that faculty have always seemed to be concerned about student preparedness and that faculty are experiencing some atypical student learning behaviors and/or encountering more students who are less prepared.

Based on discussions during our CAFE Advisory meeting and our CAFE Staff meeting this morning, we are planning a **Faculty Development session** focusing on how best to meet students where they are while simultaneously nudging them forward. The tentative title is *Were they ready to be back?: Pedagogical strategies for overcoming COVID learning funk*. We wanted to plan a session that wasn't just focused on new students because our returning students are also experiencing difficulties. We will have two sessions dates/times for faculty to choose from—**September 30th from 8-9:30 and October 1st from 9:00-10:30**. **We will record these sessions**; both will be via Zoom. On the event registration form, faculty will be asked to note what atypical or different student learning experiences they are encountering this fall. This data will help us plan the session. The first hour of the session will be strategies and the last 20-30 minutes will be small group discussions of how best to put the strategies into motion. We will send the announcement out.