

**President's Advisory Council Meeting**  
March 31, 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. The Future of Admissions**

*With the departure of our former Dean of Admissions, it seems that Longwood has the opportunity to re-evaluate our approach to recruiting students and perhaps strategically rebuild our admissions program.*

- *What strategies are being used to recruit students throughout the pandemic?*
- *What recruiting strategies adopted during the pandemic are likely to be retained in the future?*
- *What are other state schools doing to recruit during the pandemic and to compete for the declining number of students applying to go to college?*

**President's Response:**

- President Reveley said the admissions strategies can be divided into two categories: Covid-specific/pandemic specific strategies and long-term strategies.
- **Pandemic specific:** We have been lucky, thanks to our hard work, that we are one of campuses in VA where students and families have been able to come for in-person tours, which hopefully will be an advantage when students are making decisions this spring.
- Virtual events have been useful in recruiting during the pandemic as well, and may be good to continue long-term. We can connect with families and students from across the state. Last week he did a Zoom call with close to 140 people on a weekday evening. It would have been hard for these people to assemble in Farmville, but they were given a chance to ask questions and get to know the campus through the virtual event.
- The Common App has been helpful in bringing students' attention to Longwood. In years when students haven't been able to interact with high school counselors as much, the Common App has been a way to get students' attention to the university.
- Admissions has made a stronger recruiting "push" into NOVA recently. In the past we recruited most heavily from the Richmond and Hampton Roads areas, but we are now also strongly recruiting in NOVA. This push has continued into the pandemic.
- **Long term:** Longer run strategies that "hopefully will bear fruit:" 1. We have a state-of-the-art admissions building with a hotel within walking distance to campus. We haven't had a full year when Admissions building and Weyanoke were both operating fully, but long-term this convenience will benefit recruiting. 2. Looking out much more broadly, demographers have been surprised with in the past 5-7 years that birthrates didn't

rebound after the recession. With COVID-19, against expectations, the birthrate is at lowest rate demographers have seen. Is this part of an aberration or is this a permanent shift in birthrates? We won't see the effects of the recession baby bust for several years. What this foretells is that higher education growth will be more static in the future, as opposed to continued growth as has been in the past. The silver lining is that the predictions of hundreds of colleges would fail in the pandemic has not come to fruition. We can't keep planning on growth though.

- Faculty are more involved in admissions, which helps recruit students.
- Vibrancy of Farmville has grown and helps recruit and retain students.

*What conversations are being held at the state level about how colleges and universities can adapt to meet the learning gaps of students due to the pandemic?*

*What processes are available to maintain standards of undergraduate and graduate programs while simultaneously offering students the skills they need to be successful in our majors?*

### **President's Response:**

- This is a difficult problem. In-coming students will have more appreciation of what they didn't have in high school.
- Pam asked whether we can develop a process to have students have probationary status so they can rise to our standards. Is there a way that 4-year schools can help students adapt and meet standards of programs without us lowering our standards to where the students are?
- The President said the state is grappling with how much we are dealing with a one-time situation versus a situation that will last for years. He does not see a solution at the state level.
- Lee pointed out that from a faculty perspective we seem to have a very high acceptance rate and many students are less prepared academically. She asked how we can maintain academic integrity and still continue to recruit a class size that helps us meet our budget. He said that equity issues are important to consider in admissions, as we know from national conversations and that "based on test scores, our incoming classes show growth in preparedness." Bennie followed-up asking "What are faculty supposed to do? Do we hold rigor and fail them? Junior faculty worry that if they hold standards and fail students they will be evaluated negatively. President's reply: "We always have to strike a balance between rigor and nurturing. Everyone is struggling with this statewide. Even the UVAs and Princetons of the world are grappling with the issue." He understands that it has been a particular challenge with the pandemic.
- Ian added that when we see students who are not demonstrating competencies up to par, we try to intervene early in the assignment rather than just point the problems at the final

grading, but it is labor intensive. We also work with students out of class to help them. He pointed to the CLASP program that mentors first generation college students as an example of interventions faculty do outside of class. However, providing this is time-intensive and strains our capacity. Bill asked if there has been any change in the General Assembly's rule that 4-year schools cannot offer remedial classes. Pam suggested that perhaps LU students could be connected with community college resources for remediation while they are enrolled here.

- Bennie said that he believes the University leadership should have a vision for the directions that Longwood will take. President Reveley said there are 2 paths in higher education. One path is building university prestige by becoming more selective; the other path is allowing greater access to higher education for more by admitting many students in and then allowing natural consequences winnow out the class. Longwood is on a path in between those two routes. We will not become more" ruthlessly more selective on the front end. Instead we accept those who might not demonstrate highest abilities in the beginning and then help them succeed."
- Ian asked if the capacity of the Office of Student Success needs to be expanded. The President said that support services are important, but he is "wary of thinking that expanding staff is the solution." He said, "If we crack the code on this problem, we will be famous."
- Pam asked if the change in Admissions is likely to be restructured long-term. The President said this is a moment to think long-term about the balance of employees in Admissions.

## **2. Financial Health**

- *A letter was sent to you by several faculty members about the financial health of the University. Can you speak to the questions asked in the letter sent?*

### **President's response:**

- The budget forum in a few weeks is an important place to address these issues. It's important for senior faculty to keep in mind that it's tempting to drift into a "doom-scrolling frame of mind" when we read articles about higher education. It's commendable to be concerned about the financial health of Longwood and higher education, but it's also important to recognize the strengths of our institution. Relative to other institutions in VA and across the country, we are stable and we are not grappling with many of the problems that other institutions in other states or small private schools are experiencing. The support we get from the state equates to stability. We have to acclimate to the fact that there won't be dramatic growth in the near future, but we are in a stable position.

- *How is the budgetary decision-making process communicated across campus? Can we incorporate more intentional communication about process alongside budget decisions to increase transparency?*

**President's Response:**

- He said he the answer is two-fold. 1. Within academic affairs budgeting was not historically transparent. That has changed and has improved. We now have a variety of pretty good mechanisms to foster more involvement and engagement, for example, UPC, Senate Budget and Finance Committee, UAC. COVID-19 in some ways interfered with plans to weave all of these things together. 2. The web site makes the financial health of the institution transparent. "We should not lose sleep over the financial health of the institution, but there are many things we should be mindful of."
- *The Virginia legislature included a 5% salary increase for faculty and staff in the proposed budget sent to the Governor. How will Longwood pay their share of the salary increases?*

**President's Response:**

- Politicians like to talk about salary increases. However, they don't always provide the resources. There is a balance between tuition and salary increases. We've made strides on compensation while holding tuition costs low.
- Lee said that the question is will we be able to get salary increases on top of restoring the temporary cuts. If yes, how will it be paid for? He said yes salary increases will be able to be implemented. Federal and state funds will pay for that. Restoring salaries is facilitated by not having same COVID-19 related expenses next year.

**3. COVID-19 Update**

- *When will we know more about plans for Commencement? What can you tell us so far?*
- *How is planning for the fall being discussed in light of vaccination rates? How is VDH approaching these issues? How can faculty be involved in this planning?*

**President's Response:**

- Regarding vaccines, there is hope that they will be available to a meaningful number of students before the end of the school year. They have not revealed plans, but he is hopeful that we will hear some concrete plans within the next days.
- Commencement: "is hideously complicated but also very important." He prefers to do it as a collective activity rather than broken up into separate events. It most certainly will

be restricted tightly in attendance. They are still planning for May 15. A graduate ceremony also will be held.

- Vaccines in the fall: He will be surprised if in VA individual institutions are allowed to have vaccination requirements. Part of that is technical because COVID-19 vaccines are under “emergency” protocol, so we cannot require them. However, the supply of vaccines should be widely available so prudent students and family members will be able have them. The fall will likely be easier than this year, but masking requirements are likely to be in place. Other protocols may be removed.

#### **4. Board of Visitors Reports**

*We understand the Board is meeting on Zoom, that time is valuable, and that written reports from Vice-Presidents and other Board Representatives were eliminated due to pandemic workload issues. However, written reports are publicly available and are important historical documents, perhaps especially in times like these. We understand there is a plan to return to written reports next year.*

- *Is there a plan for trying to document / capture some of the work done this year that is missing from the public record?*
- *We understand that some of the efficiencies gained may be worth keeping. Is the Board considering changes to the balance between written and spoken reporting in future meetings?*

#### **President’s response:**

- Yes, we plan to capture well what has been done this year. The COVID-19 plan was lengthy and detailed and we should capture what we have done in detail as well.
- Yes, Board meetings are likely to return a more normal format. The materials do inform their decisions. Lee iterated the importance of having complete, written reports from Vice-Presidents for the Board in the future, but to limit the verbal reports. In-person meetings can be more efficient and we can learn from how meetings have been constructed this year. However, it is essential to have full written reports to the Board that are publicly available for transparency and documentation.