

## Talking Points:

It is an honor to speak to the Faculty Senate. I have been a senator twice, but I have never before been in the role I have now.

As most of you know, I was asked by Dr. Cormier to help in Longwood's effort to hold on to more of our students.

My job mostly rests on the work of several teams of people from across all the vice presidential areas (I call them our volunteer fire departments).

One of these teams has been very instrumental in development of the proposal you have. I will spare you a recitation of the names of people, some of whom are here now. The point of mentioning the teams is to emphasize that the proposal is essentially a "bottom up" approach. Dr. McWee and Dr. Pierson have had input. The proposal is not Dr. Cormier's idea (not that it would be bad if it were) but she is very interested in it for obvious reasons.

The proposal began to take shape at the end of last semester and into this one.

The heart of the idea is to strengthen our advising of undeclared students and to strengthen our academic intervention and support program. We already have some academic intervention and support in the form of the Learning Center. But we do not have any formal emphasis on undeclared students. They get advised by whoever will volunteer to advise them. *[Rebecca Sturgill pointed out to me subsequent to the meeting that the advising is not as haphazard as I made it sound. Rebecca has cultivated a small number of Longwood staff from various areas to do the bulk of undeclared advising.]* And the number of these students was a surprise to us—20 percent of the entering class (200) and this number is very likely to grow. Undeclared students are one of the most likely groups to have high attrition. The faster we can firmly integrate them into Longwood the less attractive the road to JMU.

As we visited other institutions we found that many had some form of organizational structure that served undeclared students and more resources devoted to academic support. Some of the institutions had areas called "Student Success" areas that provided not just advising and support functions, but other functions that involved freshmen orientation programs, first year experience programs, as well. And, in the case of more than a few of these areas, academic advising and career planning were integrated. This seemed to make sense to us.

So, I would like to highlight the main points of the proposal for you and end with some questions that we have asked ourselves about our idea. Before I do this, I would like to say two things: First, we know that faculty retention is not insignificant. We understand that this problem is a student retention issue too. We just can't address it. Our focus was on students. And second, speaking for the people who worked on this proposal, I will say with great emphasis that we need the support of the Longwood faculty for this proposal to work—for it to have the right foundation. We know that faculty have a vital interest in student issues from admission to enrollment to graduation—and advising and support and transition programs really are aimed at serving the academic enterprise.