

To: Faculty Senate

From: Wade Znosko, Chair, University Lectures Committee

Cc: Lisa Edward-Burrs, Alex Hosterman, Robert Marmorstein, Vicki Palmer, JoEllen Pederson, Nancy Riddell, Steven Samaras, Mike Dinh (student rep), Jie He (student rep)

Subject: Annual report of the Committee

Date: April 17, 2017

Dear Faculty Senate Executive Committee,

Purpose – The purpose of this committee is to organize and promote an excellent lecture program, consisting of soliciting nominations, selecting, advertising, and planning the visit of the recipient of the Francis B. Simkins Lecture Series, the oldest and most prestigious speaker series at Longwood. This lecture would typically run each Fall with its counterpart, the RAFT Debate, being held in the Spring. The newly introduced RAFT debate includes a Longwood-centric panel representing multiple disciplines in a debate-style format. Faculty present arguments based on evidence from scientific literature, pop culture, and their own research.

Members - Due to the nature of these talks spanning disciplines, the diversity of faculty having a seat on this committee is critical. Having 8 members to assist in scheduling, transportation, advertising, and logistics of each of these events is necessary to have a successful experience. Each of the student representatives add critical insight into the selection of the speakers and largely help with advertising the events in various social media outlets.

Evaluation – Each of the special events were very well received. We included a scale on our audience survey form asking attendees to rate their experience from one (“not satisfied”) to ten (“very satisfied”). The average score for the Simkins Lecture was an ‘9’, as well as being the average score for the RAFT Debate. People enjoyed the breadth of topics and ideas presented, with the only suggestions for improvement (aside from only a very few criticisms respecting the presenters’ ideas or the general topic covered) being adjusting the location of the RAFT Debate. The RAFT Debate, held in Hiner Auditorium this year, was standing room only.

We are pleased to note progress on several fronts. For the Simkins Lecture, the Committee was diligent in making the speaker’s visit extremely inclusive to all parts of the University and the community. David LaMotte’s visit not only included his evening lecture, but he was also a guest speaker to four different classes, spoke with numerous faculty in several academic disciplines, and spent a good deal of time at the Moton Museum. All these activities took place over the course of two days and I believe is one of the most inclusive visits we had for a Simkins Lecture. The evening seminar was fairly well attended with both members of Longwood and the community. We estimate that there were about 150 people in attendance in Wygal Auditorium.

The committee was also pleased at the growing popularity of the RAFT Debate. This was the second year we had an online student nomination/voting system for participation in the RAFT Debate, allowing students to have more ownership of this event. It worked well and we look forward to continuing this process for the next RAFT Debate. We had a great crowd in Hiner Auditorium, with standing room only, consisting mostly of students, who were extremely engaged in the program. The feedback highlighted not only the humor of the event, but also the provocativeness of the participants' arguments.

Improvements - In spite of our success this year, we are still striving to increase participation in these events. In addition, even with the recent increase of the Simkins honorarium, we still received few nominations (only 5 this year). A few ideas have been generated by the committee to address this. First, in terms of acquiring nominations for the Simkins, it should be pointed out that that nominator is also responsible for guiding the planning of the event. To this end, many faculty may not be willing to nominate since time may not be available for them to put forth in the planning of the even. It may be possible to set aside some funds from the committee to also have a smaller honorarium for the nominator whose speaker has been chosen and who helps the committee in preparing for the event. In terms of attendance at the RAFT Debate and the Simkins Lecture, it has always been an idea to partner with existing event series to pool resources and ideas rather than instituting series that compete with the former. Perhaps more effective, though, would be contacting the coordinators of major academic events and series before the start of the semester to establish a schedule that accommodates every one, and then decline adding new events on days surrounding those legacy events.

Sincerely,

Wade Znosko

Chairman, University Lectures Committee

Assistant Professor, Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences