

May 8, 2015

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’s 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.

Updated Goals - Historically, this committee also had the charge of providing a Faculty Colloquium in the Fall and Spring of each year. Due to the advent of the recent Blackwell Talk Series, submissions and participation in this Faculty Colloquium had diminished. To that end, it was difficult for the committee to justify the expenses spent on that endeavor and, with the approval of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, monies allotted for those two colloquia talked were merged with the Simkins Lecture monies and the Faculty Colloquium would no longer take place. This would allow Longwood’s oldest and most prestigious speaker’s series to acquire even more renowned speakers to come to campus. This series has always been well attended by students, faculty, and the Farmville community.

The recent addition of the RAFT debate still allows the Lecture Committee to provide an outlet for interested Longwood faculty to participate in a series offered by the Lecture Committee, where speakers have been known to add some of their own research findings within their debate strategies.

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 two student representatives add critical insight into the selection of the speakers and largely help with advertising the events in various social media outlets. Student Representatives were not present on the committee this year, but I hope in the future students will again be part of this committee. The members this year included:

Peggy Agee, Department of Social Work and Communication Sciences and Disorders
Ayse Balas, College of Business and Economics
Robert Marmorstein, Department of Math and Computer Science
John Miller (co-chair), Department of English and Modern Languages
JoEllen Pederson, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice Studies
Andrew Yeagley, Department of Chemistry and Physics
Wade Znosko (co-chair), Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences

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 five (“very satisfied”), and the most frequent score was five, with four coming a distant second. 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 public speaking skills) recommending adjusting the scheduling of the events in the evening or during the semester and the length of the RAFT Debate.

In fact, we were pleased to note some progress on several fronts. As mentioned above, we redesigned the special events this year to eliminate the two faculty colloquia and in tern increase the monies set aside for the Simkins Lecture. This helped the committee tremendously, and I feel was the impetus behind, securing such a high level speaker as Bill James, the famous baseball statistician who was the focus in the book and subsequent movie, "Moneyball". His talk resulted in a standing-room only attendance. When scanning the audience, there was a large contingent of Longwood faculty and students from all departments, in addition to community members, and many students and faculty from Hampden-Sydney College. I'd be willing to say that this was the most diverse audience we have had in a Simkins Lecture in quite some time. Mr. James also stayed on campus for two days, speaking to many different groups of students during his stay. The overall experience was quite positive. I really do not feel this would have been possible without the reallocation of funds. One problem in previous years of low attendance at the Simkins Lecture was held at bay this year, which I feel was primarily due to the popularity of the speaker and the amount of different types of individuals who would find this speaker entertaining. Maintaining the higher honorarium for this series can ensure amazing speakers in the future that will also draw larger crowds. The committee was also pleased at the growing popularity of the Raft Debate. We again had standing room only in Wygal Hall Auditorium. This was the largest audience thus far for the Raft Debate. 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, I do believe attendance, even though outstanding this year, will always be something we are struggling with, based on previous years. In addition, even with the increase of the Simkins honorarium, we received few nominations (only 5 this year).

Over the past couple years, 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 the Provost's office 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

Co-Chairman, University Lectures Committee

Assistant Professor, Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences