

Report from Board of Visitors Meeting, December 6-7, 2013

Audrey Church

First, sincere thanks to Derek Taylor for “substituting” for me at the September Board meeting. I had committed to speak at the Kentucky Association of School Librarians’ conference on September 13-14 long before the August faculty meeting at which you elected me to serve as Faculty Representative to the Board of Visitors. So, thanks to Derek for coming in from sabbatical, attending that meeting, and reporting to you.

Next, I thank you for the privilege of representing you to the Board of Visitors. I am honored and humbled and will do my best to represent you to them and them to you. What follows is my report from this weekend’s Board meeting, held Friday in the Lancaster Stallard Board Room and Saturday on third floor Ruffner.

The agenda for the meeting can be found at http://www.longwood.edu/assets/president/Agenda_BOV_December2013.pdf and the full meeting materials at http://www.longwood.edu/assets/president/Board_of_Visitors_December_2013.pdf.

Discussion:

Friday Morning—

- President Reveley opened the meeting with general comments, some of the same information that he shared with Faculty Senate on December 5: applications are up 25% from this time last year; philanthropic funds are up \$1.1 million; we received a good bill of health from SACS just before Thanksgiving and an A1 bond rating from Moody’s.
- Moody’s bond rating (See letter, Tab 5 in Board materials): consensus was that this would serve us well, particularly with SACSCOC, the General Assembly, and corporate donors.
- Revenue potential of retention (See Tab 2 in Board materials, bottom of page, for explanation.)
- Philanthropy: we are at around \$3.3 million annually now but this needs to increase; \$10 million suggested as first target; Longwood has 32,000 alumni with 12% currently donating. Alumni donations need to increase.
- Compensation: still an issue of concern for the Board; the goal is to have a pool of funds in place in the annual budget for performance-based/merit raises.
- Fees: concern expressed that fees are high. If we can raise retention and increase philanthropic funds, fees could be lessened, actual tuition increased, but total cost to students remaining, in essence, the same.
- Tuition structure: changed about ten years ago to charge by credit hour. Has this structure increased the five/six year graduation rate? Decreased the number of double majors? Contributed to an expectation among students that less than 15 credit hours per semester is the normal load? (Longwood students take an average of 12 credits per semester.) The question was raised, “If we were to make an adjustment in the tuition structure, how long would implementation take?” It was suggested that this would be a multi-year process.

Friday Afternoon—

- “What Will Advance the University?” Tab 3, Board Materials outlines Dedication to Key Principles, Focus on What Most Needs to Be Done, and Perspective on What We Can Become. Board members supported these as key areas of value and of need, asking that our residential focus and faculty/staff/alumni connections to students also be emphasized.
- New Strategic Plan for University: will be developed through groups already in place on campus (for example, Faculty Senate, SGA, etc.) rather than setting up new committees, task forces, etc. Board members expressed that a strategic plan should be relevant and useful and that, in strategic planning, “less is often more.” The goal is to develop the strategic plan this year.
- New Campus Master Plan: beginning work being done on this; it will follow Strategic Plan.
- Housing and Dining Fees for 2014-2015: approved by the Board so that students will have this information prior to making housing commitments for next year. (See Tab 5, Board Materials)
- Sophomore Dorm will be built sooner, rather than later. The Board seems to support students living on campus freshman and sophomore years to allow for a full residential experience.
- See Tab 13, Board materials, for “Retention at Longwood: An Overview.” There was considerable discussion on Friday afternoon regarding retention. David Lehr presented and explained preliminary results from the application of statistical learning techniques on multiple student cohorts (See Tab 14, Board materials). Using this statistical model, we can begin to predict which students will be retained and which ones will not. Those who are likely not to be retained fall into two groups, high-performing students who transfer to another institution and low-performing students who drop out.
 - The model will be refined as additional cohorts of students come in and as variables are added.
 - One outcome of this work is an attempt to standardize collection and coding of data across campus to allow for efficient access to and use of data.
 - Beyond the predictive model, which Board members were very pleased with, is the challenge of how the data will inform policy and impact instruction...but the good news is that we have data on which to base policy.

Saturday Morning—

- Wade Edwards led a rich discussion on “Liberal Arts and Higher Education Today.” (See Tab 15, Board materials, for his article from the Fall 2013, *Longwood Magazine*.)
 - Wade distributed copies of “What is Liberal Education? The LEAP Vision” from AAC&U and asked and presented possible answers to the question, “Are liberal arts worth the trouble?”
 - Numerous Board members expressed full support for liberal arts education. Discussion included
 - the connotation of the word “liberal” in today’s environment which leads to misunderstanding of the term “liberal arts”

- false separation of science and math from the humanities (The STEM movement has contributed to this misunderstanding; hence we now see STEAM, STEM-X, STEM-H, etc.)
- One Board member asked specifically, “How does this threat to liberal arts education manifest itself?”
 - Funding: Legislators are hesitant to fund liberal arts in public institutions. The current emphasis is on STEM, technical careers, preparation for the workforce, etc.
 - Mindset of parents and students: what is the outcome of education? A job/career or a well-rounded graduate who can think critically, read, write, communicate, etc.?
- Potential actions suggested included
 - Emphasizing the importance of liberal arts courses (general education) in orientation and in New Lancer Days
 - Advisers working with students to encourage them to pursue what they are really interested in (Preceding discussion centered around students following their interests and passion, increasing the likelihood that they will do well in college, thus increasing the likelihood that they will find employment.)
 - Strengthening Longwood’s connections to graduate schools
 - Gathering data on graduates five/ten years out—Salaries alone are not indicative of “success,” and one-year out salaries do not tell the full story.
 - Marketing efforts which focus on humanities graduates who are very successful

Looking Ahead:

Since this was my first Board meeting, I took the opportunity to introduce myself to Board members and shared a bit of information about what I know best at Longwood—graduate programs and curriculum revisions underway at the graduate level. I assured the Board, however, that I was there to represent all faculty and asked what they would like to hear from me at future meetings, what they would like to know about or from faculty. Their responses:

- Student research
- Faculty research
- Faculty members’ top three likes about Longwood
- Faculty members’ top three dislikes about Longwood
- Happenings at Faculty Senate
- Issues considered significant by faculty
- New degree programs

Therefore, you will be hearing from me with “requests for information” prior to the March Board of Visitors meeting. Again, thank you for the opportunity to represent you.

Please let me know if you have questions or need further information or clarification from this report (churchap@longwood.edu)