

Report to Board of Visitors

12-3-11

E. Derek Taylor (Faculty representative to the BOV)

In just a few minutes, I will have to sneak out of this meeting in order to join a colleague in hosting an all-day conference at which graduating English majors will be presenting professional papers on a variety of topics. In attendance will be other students, a few parents, and LOTS of faculty members, many of whom will stay the entire day in order to interact with, to question, and to celebrate these students and their accomplishments. You'll see in a moment why this event has everything to do with the following report.

In my previous report, you may recall, I provided a synopsis of the Academic Strategic Plan, as it then stood. Later this morning, you will receive an update--so, rather than stealing thunder, I thought I'd preemptively, and I promise briefly, prepare you for what I take to be one of the more important themes emerging from this process, something sure to come up, if not today, then at a later meeting.

As perhaps you are aware, faculty and staff at Longwood are woefully underpaid; and, in a related story, dog bites mailman. I do NOT want to talk about money today--though, if you peeked at the salary-study yesterday afternoon, you know what a grim subject this will be when we take it up in March.

Instead, I want to talk about what one of my colleagues recently described as "the most precious commodity for faculty at Longwood." I want to talk about time.

Members of the ASP task force have already begun to develop several *very* provisional strategies for addressing faculty work-load issues--for addressing, in other words, how we spend our "time." What I want to stress to the Board today is that faculty at Longwood are not trying to find ways to do *less work*. Rather, we are interested in finding ways to prioritize the work that *most matters*.

And the work that *most matters* is our direct interaction with students. There has been a great deal of discussion in recent days among members of the ASP task force, and perhaps the most important point to emerge is a consensus that the core "brand" of the institution is, and should remain, "close faculty-student interaction" (I'm quoting from a colleague's email). As it now stands, however, there is concern that our "brand" is beginning to outpace our reality.

In a scientific poll I conducted yesterday--by which I mean I emailed all of the faculty on my floor of Grainger--I learned that the seven of us together have conducted somewhere around 130 *individual meetings* with our students just this week. To my mind, this type of one-on-one interaction represents everything "right" about our institution, everything that makes us unique and valuable to students and their parents. And, frankly, it's the best part of a job that has lots of good parts. But I must tell you that, as someone who accounted for a non-trivial portion of those 130 meetings, maintaining

this level of accessibility to my students has become increasingly difficult as I, as all of us, continue to stretch in order to accomplish all that needs doing at Longwood.

I hit upon an analogy for the current state of the faculty the other day while jogging--something called V02 max. When we exercise, our bodies, of course, find ways of increasing the supply of oxygen--faster pulse, quicker breathing. Essentially, V02 max is the point at which an increase in effort no longer increases oxygen intake--it's the point of maximum efficiency, but also the point just before a collapse into diminishing returns. My sense is that the faculty at Longwood *have not* reached V02 max. But we're probably pretty darn close.

Let me leave you with a reminder that may prove unwarranted--but just in case. I come from a long line of engineers and general contractors--which is why my father frequently wonders aloud, "where did you come from?" I have in recent years had to remind him and other members of my family that while, during economic downturns, construction companies and many other industries have *less work to do*--fewer buildings to build--the opposite holds for higher education. As everyone here well knows, we have more students than ever, and fewer resources.

Our students *deserve* what I'll call "the Longwood experience"--a place where students really can have "close interaction" with faculty members who have the *time* to treat them as their first professional priority. As a faculty, we are committed to doing what we can to be sure students get what they deserve (I know that sounds a bit menacing--it is exam week, after all).