

February 25, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Educational Policy Committee:

Glynn D. Key, Chair	Mark J. Kington
Stewart H. Ackerly	Randal J. Kirk
Helen E. Dragas	Austin Ligon
Marvin W. Gilliam Jr.	John O. Wynne, Ex Officio
Sheila C. Johnson	Ann B. Hamric, Consulting Member

and

The Student Affairs and Athletics Committee:

Robert D. Hardie, Chair	Marvin W. Gilliam Jr.
Stewart H. Ackerly	Glynn D. Key
A. Macdonald Caputo	Mark J. Kington
Susan Y. Dorsey	Austin Ligon
W. Heywood Fralin	John O. Wynne, Ex Officio

and

The Remaining Members of the Board:

Hunter E. Craig	Vincent J. Mastracco Jr.
The Hon. Alan A. Diamonstein	The Hon. Lewis F. Payne

FROM: Susan G. Harris

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Educational Policy Committee and the Student Affairs and Athletics Committee on February 25, 2011

The Educational Policy Committee and the Student Affairs and Athletics Committee of the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia met, in a joint panel presentation, at 3:45 p.m., on Friday, February 25, 2011, in the Dome Room of the Rotunda; Robert D. Hardie and Glynn D. Key, Chairs presided. Stewart H. Ackerly, Student member of the Board, moderated.

A. Macdonald Caputo, Ms. Susan Y. Dorsey, Ms. Helen E. Dragas, W. Heywood Fralin, Austin Ligon, and John O. Wynne were present.

Also present were Hunter E. Craig, The Honorable Alan A. Diamonstein, and Vincent J. Mastracco Jr.

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Present as well were Ms. Teresa A. Sullivan, Leonard W. Sandridge, Ms. Susan G. Harris, Arthur Garson Jr., M.D., Ms. Susan A. Carkeek, Ms. Patricia M. Lampkin, Marcus L. Martin, M.D., Ms. Yoke San L. Reynolds, Thomas C. Skalak, and Ms. Jeanne Flippo Bailes.

Jonathan B. Overdevest, the student member-elect of the Board of Visitors, was present as well.

The panelists for the forum were Timothy Ingrassia, Ms. Cheryl Mills, Alexander Park, Larry Sabato, and Ms. Meghan Sullivan.

The following summary of the meeting is an edited version of a summary written by Julie Caruccio in the Vice President for Student Affairs office.

Mr. Hardie and Ms. Key explained that the panel discussion was intended to provide an understanding of those aspects of the University student experience that have had a lasting impact on University alumni. The objective was to learn from alumni about the structures, opportunities, and expectations that have shaped the student experience. This information will be used to provide helpful context as the Board prepares to make critical decisions affecting student life at the University. The panelists hailed from across four decades and represented different academic and extracurricular areas of involvement while undergraduates.

The moderator, Stewart Ackerly, introduced the panel before he began his questions.

Mr. Ingrassia graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1986, where he earned an interdisciplinary bachelor's degree as part of the Echols Scholar program. While a student, Mr. Ingrassia was selected as the first undergraduate student member of the Board of Visitors. He is currently Head of North American Mergers and Acquisitions for Goldman Sachs, and he lives in New York City.

Ms. Mills graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1987, where she earned bachelor's degrees in philosophy, religion, and economics. While a student, Ms. Mills was selected to serve as a Co-Chair of the Resident Staff Program. She is currently the Counselor and Chief of Staff, Department of State, and resides in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Park graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1999, where he earned bachelor's degrees in government and sociology. While a student, Mr. Park was elected president of the Inter-Fraternity Council. He is currently the Director of CapTech Consulting and lives in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Sabato graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1974, where he earned his bachelor's degree in the honors program in government and foreign affairs. While a student, Mr. Sabato was elected president of Student Council. He currently serves as University Professor and Robert Kent Gooch Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia and lives in Charlottesville.

Ms. Sullivan graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 2005, where she earned bachelor's degrees in philosophy and government and foreign affairs. While a student, Ms. Sullivan was elected chair of the Honor Committee. She is currently a doctoral candidate in philosophy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and lives in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Mr. Ackerly began with five planned questions and informed the Board members and others in attendance that after about 45 minutes of discussion on these questions, the floor would open to discussion from Board members. The planned questions for the panel included:

1. How would you describe the U.Va. student experience when you were a student?
2. Do you think the U.Va. experience is unique and if so, drawing from your time as a student, in what specific ways do you feel this is true?
3. We heard from the student focus groups about the importance of the first-year experience. We also heard that faculty-student interaction was important. Does anyone on the panel have a similar experience that they want to share?
4. Thinking back on your undergraduate years, what were the most critical resources supporting your student experience? By resources here I mean people, funding, administrative or academic structures, etc.
5. Most of you have been responsible for hiring decisions for your organization. Are there qualities you see in U.Va. grads that set them apart from other candidates you review? If so, what are they?

Some Board members also posed questions to the panel. These questions included:

1. We've captured 80% of the student experience with many of you representing the college. Would the experience be different if you were in a different school?
2. What are the one or two things that you would like to add into the UVa culture as an improvement or addition?
3. How do we keep people like you connected to the university—your involvement and your resources—as we get bigger? I worry that as things get more complex and it gets harder to do: What can we do to create better engagement and understanding among alumni?

4. Is it worth developing a niche in expanding intellectual engagement for a lifetime for alumni?
5. As we grow, what are the things that we need to ensure live on? What's in the secret sauce?

Overall, there was consensus among the five panel participants that the University of Virginia student experience is unique. There were several reasons for why panelists articulated this belief - the numerous ways to get involved in the life of the Grounds, the common first-year residential experience, the importance of the Honor System, and the shared value of student self-governance. These four reasons or themes were not just found in the answers to the question referencing the uniqueness of the U.Va. student experience, but they were also woven throughout the entire dialogue.

Another theme emerged throughout the dialogue on the value of peer mentorship, especially structured interactions between underclassmen and upperclassmen. This theme was most emphasized throughout the first-year experience of living in residence halls with upper-class Resident Advisors. One panelist noted the value of having to "band together and...figure out how to get things done."

In addition to peer support, the alumni continually emphasized the critical resources - people - that supported the unique student experience. The relationships these alumni built with administrators and faculty shaped their undergraduate experiences.

Once the moderator opened up the session to questions from the Board, several additional themes emerged. There was agreement among two out of the five alumni that more international and out-of-state students would enhance the undergraduate student experience. Additionally, two out of the five alumni emphasized the importance of preserving the good traditions of the University. Finally, the alumni expressed the value of utilizing social networking tools to keep more graduates of the University engaged and involved.

The alumni on the panel spoke to the great value in the number of opportunities the University provides for students to get involved in the life of the institution. One of the panelists described these plentiful opportunities as an "all-you-can-eat buffet." These opportunities are at once overwhelming and exciting for students when they first arrive at the University. A couple of alumni spoke to the learning experience of deciding how to navigate the abundant choices. One panelist stated, "you need to make something of yourself at this place, and originally, [as] a first-year, you're kind of star struck and you're not sleeping and you're trying to do everything, but that turned out to be a really good experience." Another panelist encouraged the university to continue to invest resources in this area, as limited resources at other schools have made students at

those institutions "struggle to find expression and communities and leadership and other opportunities."

The alumni identified a clear sense of obligation that accompanied this involvement. They noted that as students they thought, "now you need to make something of yourself in this community." Another panelist spoke of "a sense of mentorship and stewardship of giving back and being part of something bigger and larger than you which is inculcated in your first year." This powerful motivation was identified as both intrinsic and environmental - students who came to the University wanted to make an impact, but the culture also dictated that this was an expectation.

The panelists, all student leaders while at the University, repeatedly noted the value of being trusted with "enormous responsibilities" through their student leader positions by faculty and administrators; one described this as "both wonderful and hard and both things made it a very unique combination." Sometimes the responsibilities that fell to them felt "out of their league," but the panelists acknowledged the invaluable skills they learned in having to rise to the occasion.

Connected to this authority was the value of risking failure. Having the opportunity to fail, to be held accountable for that failure, and to grow from the experience made students into effective decision-makers. One alum noted that the University provided a "unique opportunity to be accountable for your failures and your successes and people give you enormous responsibilities...I'm willing to make a decision and be held accountable for [it] and that's something I learned to do here." The benefits of this level of accountability "made you a stronger individual, a more effective individual, and a more compelling partner, friend, business person, leader." Other alumni described this as the way the University intentionally creates "accountable adults," noting that the students who are attracted to the University want this and work hard to achieve it.

The panelists also spoke to the well-rounded nature of students. Two panelists stated that students whom they have hired tend to be more well-rounded as compared to other new hires. A couple of the panelists spoke to a side-effect of these rich academic and extracurricular activities: some University of Virginia students come across as over-confident in job interview situations or in teams within a work setting. One participant stated "the feedback I have gotten sometimes in a supervisory role is that their peers from . . . other schools find some of the [University of Virginia] grads to be a little bit over-confident and perhaps always thinking that they need to be [the] leader".

The importance of the first-year experience was emphasized by the alumni panelists. One of the panelists described the first-year experience of living in the residence halls as "grounding the experience" of being a student at the University. One reason for the importance of the residential experience is the commitment to living with and among other students who are very different from one another. The alumni also commented that beyond the first year, interacting with others who are different from oneself is something that one would have to seek out on their own. This opportunity to get to know a wide range of people was transformational for the alumni, and they identified it as a critical component of the student experience that shaped who they are now.

Another reason that the first-year experience was so important was the access this residential experience provided to upperclassmen through Resident Advisors (RA's) or Senior Residents (SR's). One panelist expressed that "RA's were not only friends but . . . mentors, peers, . . . disciplinarians, who [were] helping to shape and guide your experience."

The Honor System was also a theme that emerged in the focus groups. Several panelists commented that the system, despite its challenges, was and continues to be a shared system across the student body. The perception of the panelists was that the Honor System was stronger as compared to other schools that might have a similar system. One panelist described the system as "training young people ethically." Tradition also emerged as an important element of the student experience. One panelist stated that the Honor System is one of these important traditions that "transcends decades."

All of the alumni panelists commented on the importance of the critical resources—or individual faculty and administrators—that helped to shape their time at the University. One panelist described the role of the administrators as "guiding gently with a light touch" and "encouraging students to push their limits without directing them [and] without dictating to them." Another panelist spoke more broadly about how both faculty and administrators are "committed to the community" and intentional about their choice to be at this institution. Several of the panelists reinforced this point when they acknowledged that many of the administrators and faculty have stayed for long periods of time through many generations of students. They noted "a willingness to spend time with students and to individually mentor students"; that these faculty and staff "treat[ed] you as an individual rather than just part of a group"; that they did their work in a way that communicated they "had a responsibility to be involved in not just the easy things but the hard things in your life." These contributions were seen as valuable and distinctive to the University.

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A critical element of the student experience for one alumnus was the shared experience of legendary teachers. With regard to access to classes, one alumnus remembered that "everybody was always frustrated they couldn't get into the classes they wanted to get into and that was one of the few sources of anxiety that I remember when I was at school was the semi-annual panic associated with I need to take X and I didn't get in."

One alumnus noted that the overall feel of the student experience could be characterized as "excellence and achievement and ... a lot of competitiveness."

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On motion, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

SGH:lah

These minutes have been posted to the University of Virginia's Board of Visitors website.

<http://www.virginia.edu/bov/educationalminutes.html> and

<http://www.virginia.edu/bov/studentminutes.html>