

Responses to the Virginia 2020 Commission Reports

(Section IV.b.)

The University has invited comment on the Virginia 2020 commission reports from a broad range of constituencies, including deans and other members of the academic leadership, as well as faculty, students, alumni, and the general public. What follows is a summary of the comments received thus far and a compilation of the issues and questions most frequently raised in response to the commissions' work.

General Views of Virginia 2020

Looking at the Virginia 2020 process generally, most respondents applauded the University's effort to think strategically about its future, and there was widespread agreement that the four focus areas – the fine and performing arts, science and technology, international activities, and public service and outreach -- were clearly in need of attention. A recurring criticism of the commissions is that all four reports give inadequate attention to the need to increase diversity in the student body and the faculty. From several quarters came the call to ensure that addressing the Virginia 2020 priorities will not come at the cost of sustaining other areas of the institution, especially its well-established centers of excellence. Department chairs and their faculty worry that resources will be diverted from existing programs to fund new initiatives.

Also apparent in the comments, especially from the faculty and the academic leadership, is the need for a broader and more fully integrated strategic plan that incorporates the University's traditional strengths and not just the four Virginia 2020 focus areas. In their view, the University must demonstrate that the commissions' recommendations will be the most fitting means of effecting renewal and improvement at the University. Evident in the critiques of the commissions' work is a strong desire for an overarching institutional vision. The framework for such a vision was suggested by one respondent, who saw in the four reports collectively a blueprint for extending the reach of the

University across sociological and geographic borders, and therefore reinventing the public role of the University.

The Fine and Performing Arts

Although many took issue with specific recommendations or called attention to perceived weaknesses in the Fine and Performing Arts Commission's report, the overall goal of strengthening the arts at the University met with little controversy. One area of concern among those responding to the report is that the commission's recommendations place too much emphasis on facilities and should give more weight to programmatic vision and investment in human capital, such as endowed scholarships, fellowships, and professorships.

The Proposed Arts Precinct. For the most part, the commission's recommendations for new and expanded facilities were greeted with affirmation and an acknowledgment that current conditions are woefully substandard and need to be improved. Details of the arts precinct plan also drew a number of objections. For example, it was noted that the proposed performing arts center, which would be placed just west of Alderman Library overlooking Nameless Field and Memorial Gymnasium, may be too small and would cause congestion at its suggested site. An alternative would be to construct a larger facility on the site of University Hall after it is replaced by a larger sports arena.

Although they see clear advantages to bringing arts programs into proximity with each other, some arts faculty are worried that the arts precinct might isolate the arts from other departments at the University. Some faculty and deans in other areas wonder if the high cost of improving the University's arts facilities is justified, and it was recommended that the University examine whether new spaces need to be created independently for each department or if facilities could be shared to promote efficiency. There is also concern that ambitious plans to raise funds for the arts precinct will compete with efforts to finance capital projects for other schools and programs.

It was observed that there is no significant space in the planned facilities for the digital arts, which hold the potential to catalyze new connections between disparate fields. Nor does the arts precinct master plan include performance or rehearsal space for extracurricular student groups, such as the a cappella ensembles and student theater companies.

Other responses to the report include the following:

- Make recruiting artistically talented students a high priority.
- Move quickly to create spaces and programs for the study and performance of dance.
- Set the University's arts programs apart from their peers by emphasizing the public role of the arts.
- Create a clearer link between the arts and public service, including programs for schoolchildren.
- Recognize that the arts affect the quality of life of the entire University and are a factor in the recruitment of students and faculty in all departments.
- As efforts are undertaken to improve the arts at U.Va., especially their interdisciplinary activities, build new and stronger connections between the arts and other schools and programs across the Grounds.
- Do not let interdisciplinary arts initiatives detract from efforts to strengthen the core arts programs.
- Integrate promotion of the arts into existing publications and Web sites, in addition to new communications vehicles proposed by the commission.

- Place greater emphasis on performance.
- Set priorities among the commission's recommendations.
- Create a clearer vision for integrating digital technology into the study and creation of the arts and use the digital arts as a means to promote collaboration between the arts and other fields.

Science and Technology

There is broad agreement in the University community that to be a great institution, U.Va. must have stronger programs in science and technology. Respondents, including deans and faculty, endorsed the effort to put science at the forefront of the University's agenda. Many questions were raised, however, about whether the recommendations presented by the Science and Technology Commission offer the best way to achieve the University's goals.

The Three Focus Areas. Much discussion has been devoted to the commission's recommendation to emphasize three interdisciplinary areas – quantum and nano-scale science and engineering, biodifferentiation, and computation and information science and engineering – as targets for intensive investment and expansion. Some see the three areas as offering great potential for enhancing education and research in Arts & Sciences, engineering, and medicine. They argue that the recommendations may keep some departments from moving up in the decennial National Research Council rankings, but the long-term results will be a more general rise in stature of the University as a center of scientific and technological inquiry. While acknowledging that the three focus areas would build on existing University strengths and show promise of attracting significant research dollars, critics of this targeted approach are concerned that it will diminish support for other science and technology departments that are already under-funded and under-staffed. One objection labeled the three proposed focus areas as “risky speculation”

on where future federal research funds are likely to be directed and were not selected on the basis of their scientific merit.

A number of deans and faculty suggested placing greater priority on commission recommendations aimed at strengthening science and technology generally – especially the basic sciences and clinical research -- and putting them ahead of the three suggested targets for improvement. Enhancing the basic sciences, noted some respondents, should take precedence over establishing institutes for the three focus areas. One fear is that quality faculty outside of the three focus areas may feel their work is not a priority of the institution and will be tempted to go elsewhere. The commission's recommendation to create new institutes devoted to the three focus areas drew fire from some deans and faculty, who felt that this would also weaken schools and departments and actually impede collaboration across school boundaries. One respondent suggested repackaging the three focus areas to attract donor support. Even those who favor emphasizing the three focus areas expressed concern about the proposed administrative structure. It was recommended that the University establish a council of appropriate deans to ensure that planning, fund-raising, faculty recruitment, and other functions in the institutes be coordinated with the schools and departments. They should not become “de facto departments” reporting outside traditional lines, wrote one critic of the proposal.

Other responses to the report include the following:

- Put more emphasis on undergraduate education in the sciences and technology. Steps should be taken to ensure that research makes its way into the classroom.
- Give greater weight to science rather than technology.
- Devote more attention to clinical research in the University Health System.
- Rethink the goal of raising unrestricted endowments for research start-ups, faculty recruiting, and graduate fellowships, which may be unrealistic.

- Follow the commission's recommendation to use Patent Foundation revenues to fund cross-unit strategic initiatives.
- Do not further reduce the level of research overhead funds returned to the schools.
- Consider eliminating or scaling back some programs and allocating their resources to world-class ventures.
- Emphasize science and technology programs that benefit the state and the nation.
- Require the three focus areas to demonstrate their ability to attract outside research funding.
- Avoid increasing intra-University competition for donor support and funding from other sources.
- Provide better analysis of existing strengths.
- Expect to take five to ten years of sustained effort to build pre-eminence in science and technology.
- Address the impact of the recommendations on existing library and technology resources.
- Take advantage of the Architecture School's ability to help design information technology environments and virtual space.
- Use the Curry School faculty to aid in translating research findings into K-12 teaching materials.

- Make better use of technology to link the University's schools.
- Make a stronger case to lay audiences that the three recommended focus areas are the right ones for the University.
- Take into account disciplines outside of science and technology.
- Make the University's science and technology initiative a competitive process that awards funding to the best proposals.
- Develop a clearer strategy for fostering productive partnerships with industry to reach the commission's goals.
- Encourage the exploration of ethical issues in science and technology.
- Make the University more affordable for graduate students.
- Address the issue of intellectual property rights.
- Give further analysis to the proposed budgets for the science initiatives.

International Activities

Much support was voiced for the overall goal of adding a global perspective to academic and student life, of raising the University's profile worldwide, and of providing better coordination of international activities for students and faculty. Many affirmed the commission's recommendation to create a high-level position in the provost's office to oversee international programs. The recommendation that the University create an international program in American studies (or more accurately, United States studies, as several respondents noted) also won strong approval, as did the idea of an international

studies center to coordinate teaching and research in this area. Most criticisms of the report focused on specific details rather than larger objectives.

Study Abroad. The proposal to create a fifth-year study-abroad option for students won a largely positive response, but many view as unrealistic the commission's recommendation that 80 percent of undergraduates study abroad at some point during their time at the University. Some pointed out that even institutions with model international programs fail to achieve such a goal. Questions were also raised about how sending such a large proportion of students abroad would affect programs on-Grounds. For example, if 20 percent of undergraduates are abroad every year, would the University use this as an opportunity to admit more students, and if so, how would they be accommodated? It was also pointed out that strong study-abroad programs will require strong on-Grounds programs in foreign languages, world cultures, international history and politics, and similar fields.

Several respondents urged the University to go beyond traditional exchange programs and to establish its own presence in key cities around the world, and it was pointed out that international experiences can include internships and study trips and not just the traditional semester or year abroad. It was also suggested that students live with families while studying in foreign countries, which can be an enriching and broadening experience.

Other responses to the report include the following:

- The commission's proposed funding for international activities is too modest. More resources will be necessary to develop first-rate international programs. Especially needed will be seed money for expanding language courses to accommodate students and faculty going abroad and to provide seed money to internationalize courses. It was also pointed out that the success of the University's international activities is integral to the success of the other Virginia 2020 initiatives, and therefore deserves aggressive funding.

- Take measures to ensure that programs abroad meet the University's academic standards.
- Appoint a person in each school to serve as a champion of international programs. Each of these school representatives would serve on an international advisory board for the University
- Centralize international services to promote efficiency and to avoid duplication of functions.
- Give greater attention to the potential of technology – the Web, distance learning, video conferences -- for expanding the University's international relationships.
- As we bring more international students and scholars to the Grounds, help U.S.-born students and faculty to overcome cultural biases and create an atmosphere of diverse cultural acceptance.
- Provide more financial support for international students.
- Ensure that increased international enrollment does not affect the University's quota of out-of-state U.S. students, who are typically our best students.
- Set a realistic entrance standard for English fluency and create a summer English-as-a-second-language program to help attract and retain international students.
- Provide free bus service to the Washington, D.C., area to tap its international resources.
- Place more emphasis on the role of the sciences in raising the University's international profile.

- Promote collaboration between the Darden School and the McIntire School of Commerce to create an international business center.
- Foster business partnerships abroad as well as academic relationships.
- Place more emphasis on opportunities for graduate students to study and conduct research abroad.
- Do not expect schools outside of the College to teach foreign languages.
- To prepare students for study abroad, ensure that every language department has an instructor who specializes in language pedagogy.
- Find ways to evaluate the impact of international study experiences.
- Strengthen ties with alumni working abroad and encourage them to establish internships for University students.

Public Service and Outreach

While acknowledging the University's obligation to serve the public good, especially in the Commonwealth of Virginia, responses to the Public Service and Outreach report reflect concerns about how public service is rewarded. Several responses suggest public service should be a natural outgrowth of teaching and research and should not be treated as an end in itself. The commission was given credit for attempting to show the impressive breadth and depth of the University's current public service activities, but a number of deans, faculty, and staff felt that important public service activities in their areas had been overlooked. Some also asserted that the commission should have provided clearer guidance on what constitutes public service and how it should be evaluated.

K-12 Education. The recommendation to provide better coordination and greater exposure for University programs that aid K-12 education was often cited as one of the strengths of the report. Indeed, some regard it as the central recommendation of the commission. It was noted that initiatives aimed at helping K-12 education can be found in many schools and programs at the University, and work in this area is an attractive candidate for support from private foundations. It was suggested that the University launch a focused, University-wide effort to enhance K-12 education.

Rewarding Faculty and Students. The recommendation to consider public service a major criterion in the evaluation and promotion of faculty drew considerable criticism. One dean called it “profoundly misguided.” The proposal of a dual career ladder that gives public service equal weight with teaching and research prompted strong objections from faculty and deans, who fear it will harm the University’s academic standing. Criticism also was leveled at a proposal that students be given academic credit for public service work connected with a class. It was often noted that public service should be pursued out of a sense of altruism and not as a means of raising a grade or earning a promotion.

Other responses to the report include the following:

- Place more emphasis on the University’s role in economic and business development and call attention to programs in the McIntire School and the Darden School already working in this area.
- Rather than commit resources to a new service-learning initiative, build on existing programs in Madison House. This would avoid competition with well-established student service activities that are regarded as some of the best in the nation.
- Strengthen the School of Continuing and Professional Studies’ the ability to assess market need and costs in order to meet revenue and expenditure targets.

- Give distance learning a more prominent place in the report.
- Make public service one of the University's core values and promote it as part of the University's "brand."
- Create an information center at the University that serves the public.
- Market the University's public service activities more consistently and more aggressively.
- Determine what the public needs and fashion public service programs accordingly.
- Address the University's image as being aloof from the public in the community and the Commonwealth.
- Increase parking to make the University more accessible.

Opportunities for Comment

Responses to the Virginia 2020 commission were gathered in a variety of ways during the fall of 2000. Deans, vice presidents, and other administrators were asked to read the reports and give their comments. The reports were the main topic of a two-day meeting of the Virginia 2020 young alumni group on November 4 and of the All-University retreat on November 17. Later in the fall, the Faculty Senate hosted public forums on each report, and the Science and Technology Commission held discussions on each of its three focus initiatives. Students were briefed on the reports and asked for their views at a forum on December 7. More than 200 comments were submitted online via the Web.