

Houston, Texas
May 31, 2018

President William C. Dudley
Washington & Lee University
Lexington, Virginia

Dear Will:

Thank you for your kind note of May 22 concerning the President's Society and Ogilvie Scholarship. Reading the letter reminded me that I have not expressed opinions on our current issues since writing the Commission at the beginning of its work. I am going to do so in this letter. I do not want to address the expedient matter prior to considering the larger, encompassing considerations that frame the issue de jure. The larger consideration can, for our community, be summarized by the question "Why do we do what we do?"

Our School's mission is not self-preservation, it is not pleasing outside reviewers (although neither of the preceding is undesirable as a by-product of accomplishing our actual goal). The primary mission is simply the production of confident, contributing, competent citizens. We expect the occasional extraordinary leader to come from among our graduates, but, even more, must consistently produce young adults who can have solid career accomplishments in government, the professions, business, journalism, and the arts. So, what is competent citizenship? Here are nine characteristics of competent citizens that make my sine qua non list:

- (1) Awareness of, and commitment to, honorable comporment.
- (2) Developed critical thinking including the ability to understand other perspectives.
- (3) Ability to organize and explain.
- (4) Capability in persuasion, both by writing and by speaking.
- (5) Sufficient self-awareness and knowledge of human nature to be able to identify and create parallel incentives.
- (6) Focus and balance in the midst of complexity.
- (7) Sufficient maturity to grasp subtleties and accept imperfections in others - both contemporaries and historical figures.
- (8) Foundational knowledge of the workings of our governmental and economic system.
- (9) Awareness that any system or philosophy requires societal support to endure and that moral relativism (that is, an unwillingness to choose which system or philosophy to embrace) is a guarantor of decline and an invitation to the imposition of a powerful zealot's rule.

I have great confidence that Washington & Lee graduates so prepared can carry forward the torch of liberty.

There are 3 points I would make about developing this set of characteristics in our students:

- except for the rare matriculating student, the development of the full set of these characteristics is a difficult task and is why we have a 4-year program.
- students are present to learn, only rarely to teach. Their developing awareness and wisdom do not qualify them to be equal partners in determining curricular content, student admissions strategies, or modification of the School's value system.
- although there are many curricular paths to the development of these characteristics, intentional direction toward their achievement takes the commitment of faculty and administration.

If one accepts the desirability of the nine characteristics we seek to develop, and one accepts the requirement of leadership of the learning process by adults who are committed to helping students develop the traits, then there are 3 inescapably logical conclusions:

- (1) Acceding to the demands of students (current or prospective) to direct the curriculum in ways deleterious to the intended development of desired characteristics, is dereliction of Administration and faculty leadership duty.
- (2) Faculty need to agree to their role in developing the characteristics the School deems necessary for competent citizenship.
- (3) Achievement of the desired competencies should be measured, reported, and celebrated. There should be no ambiguity about the School's intentions.

On the other hand, if one who is in either Board or administrative leadership does NOT accept the desirability of the nine characteristics as the School's guiding purpose, he or she should make that position clear to financial supporters of the School. Supporters can then evaluate their attitude toward the School's commitments.

With this perspective postulated, I now address the University's current conversation and offer four thoughts:

- (1) Hiding our genealogy to avoid upsetting the tremulously immature or to avoid antagonizing the angry voice of discontent operates against our desired characteristics. Our students will be prone to failure in life (and we to failure as an institution) unless they have the ability to recognize and celebrate what was worthwhile in the past even as they strive to shape and be part of a necessarily more diverse and inclusive future. By all means, increase the notice given the lives of other formative contributors to the University and the broader society. But do not be ashamed of the accomplishments of Generals Washington and Lee in times decidedly more challenging than any of us living today have or will ever face.

- (2) Push our students beyond victimhood. Being a victim has become a profitable undertaking in our time but it is an unsustainable shuffling of assets. It is better by far to increase society's production and have contributors to the economy feel the emotional reward of concentrated effort and success rather than the momentary, but typically embittering, palliative of economic transfers. Similarly building courses that encourage separateness and disaffection has no encouragement component. Let's strive for inclusivity in a sophisticated globalized future rather than attempt score settling for a less inclusive past. Demanding less of our students diminishes their capabilities.
- (3) It is the faculty's job to challenge student thinking. Being provocative is appropriate for shaping our young students' minds and skills. Being lamely predictable for the latest progressive (or were circumstances reversed, reactionary) sloganeering is too easy and misses our citizenship challenge. If the best a faculty member can muster is popularity-seeking with peers and students, or deconstruction of worthy values he or she did not create, then he or she lacks the ability to engender the characteristics our graduates need.
- (4) Our Nation is filled with underperforming universities (sadly including many of the most laureled) apparently intent on weakening our confidence, our ability to distinguish virtue from vice, our social fabric, and our national resiliency. In a globally competitive world (that should generate a golden age of insight and productivity), American higher education seems intent on forfeiting America's role as world leader. Washington & Lee is better positioned now to differentiate itself and to produce capable leaders and citizens than ever before. If instead we follow fads and let student attitudes crowd out mature adult judgement, if we run from rather than embrace our legacy of high accomplishment and honor, posterity will hold all of us who were in a position of influence accountable, but mostly the Board and professional administrators who are entrusted with the ongoing attainment of the School's mission.

I realize that what began as a letter has concluded as an essay, and I thank you for taking the time to read and think about it. I will finish with an exhortation to all of us here in 2018: George Washington and Robert E Lee, as heroic leaders of their time, set lofty standards for those who follow at their university. Let us be the bold and principled legatees who, in our forming of competent citizens, deserve their gifts to us.

Sincerely,
Staman Ogilvie