

January 3, 2019

To: The Board of Advisors to the Williams School of Commerce, Economics and Politics
Cc: President William Dudley, Dean Robert Straughan, Beau Dudley

Friends and colleagues, it is with a heavy heart that I submit my resignation from the Williams School Board of Advisors. Washington and Lee University's efforts to change the student body and remold itself under unrelenting pressure has seemingly led it to abandon core principles it should hold dear among all others: excellence, commitment and loyalty.

A titan in my life – my grandfather, John (Jack) Ecker (W&L '28) – introduced me to W&L and that is where I was fortunate to spend the most treasured days of my life. It is where the values that guide my life were solidified, the critical thinking that created my career honed, the friendships of a lifetime initiated, and the love of my life discovered. No institution or experience has had a greater impact.

I have tried to repay that debt through support and active involvement with the University, hosting numerous paid interns first at the U.S. House Ways & Means Committee and then for the past 15 years at my own firm, The McManus Group, LLC. I run a very active boutique health care consulting and lobbying firm where the interns are given substantial responsibility. We spend a great deal of time training them to write concisely and analytically, research emerging trends for our clients and network with others in the political and business sphere. I've had more interns than I can remember, often for both spring and summer sessions, since the existence of my firm. We typically choose W&L interns over other applicants and receive 20-30 applications per spot. In addition, it's been my pleasure to help mentor and place scores of young Alumni in both business and government jobs– often meeting with two to three W&L grads per month, and hired several myself as full-time employees. And, of course it has been a great honor to serve with you on the Board of Advisors. Many of you have done more, so much more than me.

To my delight, my oldest son, Jack Ecker McManus decided to apply for early decision to W&L. This choice was his own, after visiting many universities, large and small, in numerous different states. His recent visit to the campus where (with Dean Straughan's assistance) he was able to sit in on several classes, participate in the entrepreneurship summit and get to know some of the outgoing students encouraged him to select W&L as his first choice. I think that he also knew that he was carrying on a noble family tradition and wanted to carry the banner.

Jack is graduating from McLean High School with a 3.94 GPA, where he excelled in numerous Advanced Placement courses, scored 1320 on his SATs, and named National AP Scholar and scholar athlete every year. He is a leader on campus: Captain of the McLean High School swim team and President of the Young Conservative Club. Jack is compassionate -- teaching disabled kids to swim, mentoring freshman at his high school, and personally intervening when kids were in crisis. He is a loving brother and role model to his sister and brother.

On its face, this is a record of accomplishment that should earn him careful consideration for a spot at W&L regardless of his family background. While I am certainly not arguing that he would be at the very top of the pool of applicants, I can state unequivocally based on my own substantial empirical experience working with scores of W&L students who intern for my firm, that Jack would have performed as well as the vast majority of W&L students and offered much to the W&L community, as well. The same is true of other superbly qualified children of active alumni who I also hear were rejected this year. I mention Jack only as a case study of a problem that I fear may be more endemic.

Let's be honest -- many of us on the Board support W&L with our time and the fruits of our labor, in part, because we hope one of our kids may one day be able to enjoy that same W&L experience, which has blessed our lives. We want what is best for our kids and the University. Certainly, I would never suggest the university should admit an underqualified student with middling academic and extracurricular records simply because of his legacy. That would be a recipe for disaster both for the student and the University as the rigorous academic requirements could not be met.

But when a double legacy student, with an outstanding academic and extracurricular record, is denied entry, we must ask what criteria is W&L using to select its new students? Is it succumbing to other prestigious universities' fixation on promoting society's evolving, and sometimes transient, social mores (e.g. Duke University explicitly asks applicants to describe their "sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression") and other fabricated notions of diversity over more traditional values of excellence, leadership, integrity, commitment and loyalty? Or worse, are liberal admissions officers (with left-leaning social media profiles) attempting to remake the student body to reflect academia's predominant progressive perspective¹² that exalts lockstep fealty to politically correct positions over true philosophical diversity? Unfortunately, it is a zero-sum game. With a discrete number of slots available, emphasis on more fashionable criteria appear to be outweighing the values that built the University and forged its time-honored bonds with its alumni.

Many loyal alumni think of the University almost as part of their "family", particularly when they are actively involved for many decades. One wonders what the true nature of that bond is when well-qualified double legacy applicants can be so summarily spurned. When I inquired with the Admissions office about the number of students admitted with SATs below certain thresholds, I was told "we do not have the number of students admitted above or below particular scores." I understand the University's desire for opacity, but to be flatly told data that is readily accessible in every college admissions offices' spreadsheets is unavailable, is simply unconscionable. In several conversations and email exchanges with W&L's Admission Office, I

¹ https://www.nas.org/articles/homogenous_political_affiliations_of_elite_liberal

² <https://econjwatch.org/articles/faculty-voter-registration-in-economics-history-journalism-communications-law-and-psychology>

was told “we approach every applicant holistically”. Never once was the applicant’s family ties or commitment to the university mentioned as having ANY weight whatsoever. Rather, I was dismissively admonished to work with my son as he “moves forward with the next phase of his college search process.”

On December 13th, I was left a voicemail from the University informing me of Jack’s rejection and with tears in my eyes, I heard the pain in my son’s voice when I called him with the bad news. When I got home that evening, I found a letter from President William Dudley to the “President’s Society,” which stated, “A top priority is to attract the most talented students from all communities and backgrounds to W&L.” I hope, in the future, one community would be its very own alumni family who spend countless hours dedicating themselves to assisting the University in many different ways. Sadly, my family’s almost century of involvement and dedication to the University comes to a close.

Sincerely,

John Ecker McManus ‘91