January 24, 2013

From: Tom Faulders, Student Life Working Group
To: J. Milton Adams
Subj: Student Life Working Group Report

Milton, please find attached the “one-pagers” for our three prioritized strategic initiatives and a discussion of other initiatives that are being undertaken as part of the Working Groups efforts.

Attachments: The Student Residential Experience
Attributes of a Graduating U.Va. Student
Curriculum Improvement
Other Student Life Working Group Initiatives

Cc: Nancy Rivers
The Student Residential Experience

What is it?

The transformative impact of a residential college experience and what makes that at the University of Virginia truly unique.

Why Does It Matter?

Decades of research summarized by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) show that the residential college experience positively transforms moral development, values, attitudes, maturity, well-being, principled reasoning, self-confidence, leadership, autonomy, identity, critical thinking, cognitive complexity, and problem solving.

These changes take place because students engage with new ideas, peers, teachers, freedoms, opportunities, and academic and social demands during a critical period in brain development. During the adolescent and twenty something years, the brain experiences its last growth spurt as thousands of new connections sprout in the frontal lobe as the brain wires itself for adulthood. It is a “use-it-or-lose-it” time when the connections we use are strengthened and those we don’t use waste away. We become what we see and do and hear every day.

The amount of development is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of involvement with diverse peer and social groups, faculty, service experiences, extracurricular activities, internships, interdisciplinary studies, and learning in cooperative groups. These opportunities act as a mutually reinforcing network—a network that changes the networks in our brains and in our lives.

How May It Differentiate U.Va.?

U.Va. offers a web of connection and engagement that distinguishes the University and its residential experience. The Rotunda and the Grounds connect students to the core identity of the University. The first-year experience, in which all students live together on Grounds, without cars, connects students to one another and to a diverse first-year community; the 20:1 student-to-resident advisor ratio ensures that first-year students can connect with the guidance they need.

As evidence of this, our first-to-second-year retention rate is 97% and our graduation rate is 94%. Also from the first year, 90% of students become engaged in service or student-run activities, including the honor council and student self-governance, developing leadership and interpersonal skills that connect to what employers want after college; compare this number to 60% of students at peer institutions.

Programs such as COLA, the open door policy of faculty, and the fact that top researchers teach undergraduate courses allow U.Va. to function as a top research university with a small college feel; students connect with mentors and leaders in their fields. The residential colleges, such as Brown College, allow students to continue that on-Grounds small-college experience if they choose. The 30,000 U.Va. alumni in the UCAN database connect students to their broader U.Va. social, internship, and career networks.

Engagement is the critical determinant of the impact of college and the residential experience is what makes college more than the sum of its parts. For this reason, it is a strategic imperative that, even as U.Va. grows, we sustain—and always improve—the uniquely transformative aspects of the residential experience. Similarly, it is imperative that we use technological advances, such as online learning, to enhance connection (e.g., through the “flipped classroom”) rather than to replace connection. Students and parents who chose U.Va. deserve the very best of what U.Va. has to offer and the very best of what
U.Va. has to offer is the residential experience.
Attributes of a Graduating U.Va. Student

What is it?
How the University can better equip graduates for lives beyond the Grounds through better mentoring and advising.

Why Does it Matter?
In recent open forums, we heard from students who described the graduating U.Va. student as collaborative, responsible, self-educators, responsive, takes initiative to seek out resources and opportunities, leaders, and thought leaders. This is an impressive set of attributes, no doubt, but we also heard an overwhelming frustration on the lack of consistent and effective academic and non-academic advising, which would better prepare students for their life after their University days.

The University requires all First-Year students to live in dormitories on Grounds and provides each student a resident advisor. The resident advisor program has been in place for many years and has performed quite well within the limits of its scope. The First-Year student is also provided an academic advisor to assist in initial course selection and, as needed, academic advise during that year.

The challenge to current students is two-fold. First, the academic advising is very uneven. There are advisors who are excellent, makes themselves available and work to get to know each of their advisees. They are well versed in the myriad of academic opportunities and make it a priority to keep up with changes in academic programs as they occur. At the other end of the spectrum are faculty advisors who view this assignment as an extreme chore. They are not up-to-date with the latest information, they process their advisees as if they were on a production line and they have little, if any, time for any advising past the first encounter. And, of course, there are academic advisors who define all of the points between these two end points of the spectrum. The effect is that students receive uneven, at best, and inaccurate, at worst, during their critical early years at the University. This results in students missing academic opportunities that could very well make a huge difference in their academic careers.

The second challenge is one that can be defined as falling between residential and academic advising and is an area that has never been formally addressed by the University. This can be defined as the extraordinarily rich co-curricular and extracurricular activities provided by the University and the student community. Currently, students find out about everything from available research grants to leadership opportunities to the 600 plus student organizations in a seemingly random walk manner. There are activity fairs and bulletin boards, but most students seem to fins out by word of mouth from older students, and sometimes far too late to be able to participate.

How May It Differentiate U.Va.?
The enhancement of advising capabilities such as exists with COLA programs, as well as student peer advising programs such as provided by the Office of African-American Affairs, will better equip the U.Va. student with the knowledge to take advantage of all that the University and the broader University community has to offer. With the proper residential, academic, co-curricular and extracurricular advice, the student at the University will be able to mature into the type of individual that graduate schools and employers will clamor to accept.
Curriculum at the University of Virginia

What is it?
The University needs to eliminate curricula barriers and provide both more research-oriented and life skill courses.

Why Does It Matter?
The students who attend the University today bring with them unprecedented intellect and college level course experience. They come to the University to academically explore all that it has to offer. Unless they are part of an elite program, such as Echols or Rodman, they find that they do not have the ability to take a wide range of courses outside their major or school. Additionally, today’s student wants the be able to conduct research in the same manner as graduate students, as well as have access to a Masters degree in their major either within their four year program or with an added fifth year. Finally, today’s student looks to the University to provide them practical knowledge that will assist them when they leave the Grounds.

At the recent Student Life forum, participants noted that the goal of interdisciplinary studies is running headlong into the difficulty of non-majors enrolling in advanced courses in many fields and the difficulty students experience getting into courses in other schools. Addressing this seems fundamental if there is to be interdisciplinary work. Additionally, students emphasized the importance of student research and the student presentation of their results to fellow students as well as the larger community. They emphasized the need for greater communication about research opportunities and funding starting in the first year, suggesting a “Research Fair” for first years, along the lines of the “Activities Fair” for extra-curricular organizations. They pointed out that the Center for Undergraduate Excellence should be much more prominent in student life. And some at this forum proposed the development of 4+1 and 3+1 M.A. and M.Sc. programs that will coordinate course work and research opportunities for students across departments and schools to provide greater flexibility for faculty and students to engage first-hand in research and in the presentation of their research to the university community and to the wider public.

Why will this initiative matter? 1) It will bridge departments and schools and bring faculty and students together (counteracting the silo effect). 2) It will serve as a catalyst for new interdisciplinary efforts and new collaborations across traditional boundaries 3) It will be a means of attracting and recruiting the best students. 4) It will prepare students better for the job market and for entry into more advanced programs. 5) It will expose more students to research and the research method. 6) A thesis and public presentation requirement will give students needed writing skills and experience in the communication of their results to a wider public. 7) These kinds of programs will promote creativity, teamwork, and highlight the importance of collaboration.

How May It Differentiate U.Va.?
How it may differentiate UVA? Fostering distinctive and flexible programs that promote student creativity and enhance employment prospects will give us higher visibility in the outside world, will attract incoming students, and will also attract innovative faculty.
Other Student Life Working Group Initiatives

There are additional topics and items that have been discussed as part of the above prioritized strategic initiatives.

- **The Student Residential Experience**
  - How does the UVa student experience compare with other peer institutions?
  - How can the UVa student experience be improved?
  - How does the UVa graduate student experience differ from that of an undergraduate and how can this be improved?

- **Attributes of a Graduating U.Va. Student**
  - What do graduate schools and employers look for in a graduating student? How do University students meet these needs and where are there gaps?
  - Should an Undergraduate Advising Course be created to better train faculty?
  - Should the University change the academic advising program from using faculty for this task to creating a professional advising office?
  - Can a student advising/mentoring program be set up to include upperclassmen and graduate students?
  - Can the University provide a capability for each student to build a personal portfolio which enables he/she to include all curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular activities in one place in such as way as to more fully explain to prospective employers the value of each in terms that are easily understood.

- **Curriculum at the University of Virginia**
  - Can the bureaucratic barriers to the development of new Masters programs be eliminated or at least mitigated (note SCHEV has a 17 page form, excluding appendices, to complete)?
  - Which Masters 3+1 and 4+1 programs should be created?
  - What improvements can be made to the current Ph.D. programs?

In addition, the Student Life Working Group has two other major initiatives in process. The first looks at access to and affordability of the University. This effort is led by Dean of Admission Greg Roberts and will be readily informed by the soon to be released report on AccessUVa from the consulting firm Art & Science. This report is expected to be released late in January. Once released and digested, the Working Group will formulate strategic imperatives in this area.

The second area of focus is the provision of career services to students. This subgroup has fashioned a charge and is just getting underway. The results of this subgroup’s efforts will be integrated into the above strategic initiatives as the output becomes available. The approved charge is:
The integration of students’ academic pursuits with career exploration and post-graduation decisions is essential to the student experience. The institution’s approach to providing career services that help students connect the knowledge and skills gained through an array of experiences to job opportunities or additional educational pursuits varies by student level (undergraduate, graduate, professional) and readiness. Ultimately, the provision of these services - centrally or at the school level - should be consonant with the goals of meeting student needs and responding to external forces, while further differentiating the quality of the UVA student experience.

For this initial phase of work, the purpose of the career services work group is to affirm the essential extra-curricular knowledge, skills and experiences undergraduate students should obtain to optimize their opportunities upon graduation - whether related to employment or graduate or professional studies - as well as when it is most beneficial for students to obtain these skills (i.e., first, second, third or fourth year). The work group should then identify major institutional career services provided to undergraduates and target select services in order to understand:

- the purpose of the service
- the demand for the service
- where the service is being delivered
- how the service is being delivered
- the resources required to deliver the service; and
- the effectiveness of the service

With this context in place, and informed by external requirements (e.g., employer trends), best practices research and a review of other relevant materials, the work group will make recommendations on key strategies that best meet undergraduate student needs, support the University’s career services objectives and respond to external realities in ways that:

- are clearly understood
- organized and coordinated effectively
- resourced properly
- promote efficiencies when appropriate (economies of scale); and
- consider the University’s overall best interests

In making its recommendations, the work group will specify expected outcomes and articulate key assessment data to gauge the effectiveness of a strategy.

For web:

The integration of students’ academic pursuits with career exploration and post-graduation decisions is essential to the student experience. The institution’s approach to providing career services that help

---

1 Graduate student career services are also an important topic. The initial focus on undergraduate students is designed to manage scope and ensure progress in a timely manner. The work group will take advantage of opportunities to collect data on graduate services, but the level of analysis required for a review of graduate career student services and involvement of key stakeholders in that process will be a managed separately.
students connect the knowledge and skills gained through an array of experiences to job opportunities or additional educational pursuits varies by student level (undergraduate, graduate, professional) and readiness. Ultimately, the provision of these services - centrally or at the school level - should be consonant with the goals of meeting student needs and responding to external forces, while further differentiating the quality of the UVa student experience.

For this initial phase of work, the purpose of the career services work group will be to assess core career development strategies provided to undergraduate students across the University and make recommendations on key strategies that best meet undergraduate student needs, support the University's career services objectives and respond to external realities in ways that:

• are clearly understood
• organized and coordinated effectively;
• resourced properly
• promote efficiencies when appropriate (economies of scale); and
• consider the University's overall best interests

In making its recommendations, the work group will specify expected outcomes and articulate key assessment data to gauge the effectiveness of a strategy.