

November Meeting

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While there are public concerns, caustic politics, administrative meltdowns, rogue professors, and snow-flake students, that is NOT our story. I would like to highlight two narratives today. First, we have a story of responsible faculty and administrators who accepted the charge of updating the faculty handbook then used the existing approval system but accelerated the normal process. Second, we have a story of highly intelligent, principled students who also take their responsibilities seriously and help create a campus environment that is one of the best in the world...and a top reason why faculty stay at W&M.

Story One: Successful completion of the Faculty Handbook revision was accomplished through President Rowe's suggestion of an advisory group to offer changes to the approving bodies: PPC and Faculty Assembly (FA). She suggested a trustworthy group headed by Adam Gershowitz (a brilliant choice). FA requested 1) that the group include Alan Meese (a law professor with unparalleled experience and organizational memory of the process along with being past president of FA) and 2) that the approval voting process would not change to guard against undercutting our influence. But, FA offered a concomitant assurance to facilitating approval through the summer. Speed is possible but careful analysis and consideration of broad effects are a feature of functional faculty.

This narrative highlights the roles that BOV, administration, and faculty play. The BOV plays a critical role as an outside perspective highlighting changes that need to take place. 3-5% of the population are innovators and everyone else is generally resistant to innovation. Unfortunately, eventually, everything fails and so change is essential...someone must initiate innovation. Administration sets the structure, resource allocation, and leadership. Faculty have the longest organizational memory. We set the educational content. We are frontline for the life of our students. We offer new knowledge with our research and perform invaluable service. This is the partnership and it is critical for us to work together - with respect - for our unique roles.

Story Two: Our students are fantastic. One of the important reasons many of our faculty were attracted and continue to stay at W&M is the privilege of teaching our excellent students. While we can highlight some individual problems, it is clear - especially over the last four years - that we are thankful to have the people that are attracted to W&M. They are brilliant, hard-working, and responsible with a heart for helping others. When I interact with our students, I am heartened about our future. Our graduates go on to competently lead lives of influence and high ideals.

As a faculty member, how do high quality students make working at W&M better? I have never seen other schools reach the level of undergraduates involvement in research as at W&M. To have these valued partners who love learning is a huge benefit. To see their accomplishments as they arrive and know that almost none desire to graduate early...they want this experience. They inspire which drives us to prepare well for our classes and to live up to their expectations and abilities. I spent last week in class with 85 graduate students - Monday through Friday...9-5:00 with readings and evening homework. They started with almost no knowledge of the subject and ended Friday with them exhausted...presenting at a high level...with excitement...laughing...and thanking me. They even took it upon themselves to write "thank you" notes to all the guest speakers. That experience, those moments, are what all faculty love about our job.

Few other places have enjoyed such an environment in the last year. We would expect them to be concerned about all the innocents around the world and concerned with the wars, the environment, the state of the union. Their overarching answer to these concerns is to focus, learn, and prepare for their time of leadership. These strong minds and good hearts help keep faculty here.