

Mr. Allen R. Gillespie, '95: June 28, 2020 response to President Dudley's letter of June 23, 2020.

Mr. Gillespie commends the University's Strategic Plan and Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, but finds three underlying issues needing explanation, focus, and change. His penetrating questions force the reader to more carefully scrutinize President Dudley and Ms. Locy's arguments for removing President Lee's name from that of the University.

"Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this [school] and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation." – Abraham Lincoln

Dear President Dudley:

You recently wrote that you and the board are "eager to hear your perspectives on the university, recent national events, and issues of race and their implications for W&L." I trust that is true, but I fear that it is not. However, I will take you at your word and share my perspectives. In general, I find the various initiatives, plans, and next steps laid out in the Strategic Plan and in the Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are well considered and appropriate. I specifically applaud the focus on "need-blind admissions," "the full W&L experience" and "Institutional History." There are, however, three underlying issues which I would like to address: our name, our curriculum, and our costs.

Our Name

Abraham Lincoln rightfully noted, we cannot escape history.

Our institution pre-dates the formation of the United States of America. As a result, our institutional history highly intertwines with our nation's history, which includes fierce battles over the issue of race and slavery. Today's focus on racial issues has again brought attention to our University's name.

Our University changed its name due to the generosity of the nation's first president. Our name changed again to honor a university president that led the school's recovery following the devastation of the American Civil War. In both cases, their service to the University was after their military service. Without the

efforts of our namesakes, as judged by the school's contemporaneous boards, none of us now living, in this country or this University community, would be having this conversation. We cannot forget, nor should we attempt to erase, these very basic facts, despite what flaws our namesakes possessed.

In each of the naming situations, our University faced the real, practical possibility of financial ruin. Today's concerns regarding Lee's name, as expressed in Toni Locy's article, which appeared on *thenation.com*, and in your letter to the community, seem to rest on the presumption that "we are missing out on talent" and that it will "get increasingly hard to persuade high school students who care about diversity to attend a university named after a Confederate general."

Independent and critical thinking are key parts of a liberal arts education. Other key aspects include asking the right questions and challenging assumptions. Therefore, I ask the following:

- 1) Does your statement that we are "missing out on talent" contain an implicit value judgement regarding the relative merits between groups of "talent?"
- 2) Does your statement that we are "missing out on talent" really hold in a world where there are 5.12 million private college students? Or, will we always be missing out on some talent while attracting other talent?
- 3) Is the success of higher education best measured by the initial talent level or the learning distance traveled by a student?
- 4) Are we in the business, as Ms. Locy suggests, of "persuading high school students" or "educating" students?
- 5) How is diversity defined? In short, is it "increasingly hard" or has it always been difficult to recruit students interested in "diversity" to a small, rural school?
- 6) What is the diversity of thought make-up of the faculty?
- 7) Finally, her comment that our university "bears responsibility for the mis-education of thousands of students," despite her attempt to later soften the slight, is a complete slander on the alumni of our University. I think it is more reflective of her skills as a professor. Furthermore, her description of the student body as "white and loaded" is reflective of an animus toward current students, as she is judging them ironically on the basis of factors outside of their control. I trust that you and the board will address this, but personally I would not tolerate

or employ someone who slanders my clients and my investors in a national publication.

Our Curriculum

I think it is in the curriculum and ideas that W&L should lead our nation in race relations. One of the things that attracted me to W&L was the history department, though I was not a history major. Given that African American history, like our school, pre-dates the nation, I think if we made it a goal to be THE recognized leader in African American History, we would be able to attract the desired diverse talent in a way consistent with our history and culture.

Equally, important, for those not blindly interested in cancelling Robert E. Lee's legacy, an important curriculum change implemented during his tenure was the introduction of foreign languages beyond Greek and Latin. In a world of Google Translate, advanced AI, natural language processing, and other forms of machine learning, adding classes in machine language would be the modern equivalent of adding French, German, or Chinese. Thus, I would encourage you and the board to go further in incorporating computer languages into our foreign language requirements.

Finally, Ethics & Logic – I know you teach a course in ethics, but I am not aware as to whether this is a required class or an elective. Given the general decline in journalistic standards, and our society's confusion between biblical/legal truth established on the basis of multiple, non-false witnesses, scientific truth established through hypothesis testing, and now the narrative truth standards of the internet, I think it is time Ethics becomes a mandatory class requirement.

Our Costs

The demographer, Neil Howe, recently wrote that “partisanship has become much more strongly intertwined with education, income, and race, with more affluent, educated, and nonwhite voters voting Democrat and working-class whites voting Republican.” As you and the board consider what that means for Washington & Lee University, I also ask that you and the board also consider the following: 25 years ago, when I graduated, the cost of one year of tuition was roughly equal to the average annual wage, even in my relatively poor home state of South Carolina. Today, the only places where that would be true would be major metropolitan cities. Therefore, I would strongly suggest that if the student body is not to be “white and loaded” as Ms. Locy so derogatorily states, then you and the board should focus on controlling costs.

W&L used to take pride in its affordability, but it seems W&L like most of higher education has lost its way since the expansion of federal loan programs. In addition to the tuition cost increases, I am concerned by what I have read in the news concerning what appears to be the University's lack of due process, and losses associated with a recent lawsuit settlement. In trying to find the settlement amount, I then happened to notice the University is again in a Title IX associated lawsuit. Where are these liabilities disclosed to donors?

I have never been the biggest donor, but my wife and I had given consistently since our graduations until this past year. We decided not to give this year, as we have grown increasingly concerned about W&L's fiscal stewardship and direction. In short, for the first time, when we asked ourselves whether we would want our teenage boys going to W&L, or if we would be willing to make the financial sacrifices necessary for them to go, we answered – we are not sure.

Sincerely,

Allen R. Gillespie, '95