

July 16, 2021

To the Washington and Lee Board of Trustees,

After much thought and deliberation, I am writing to express a lack of confidence in President Dudley's ability to lead Washington and Lee University. Our community needs a strong leader who is willing to stand up for the ideals, history, and traditions of our institution even when that position is out of consensus with current national trends. Instead of demonstrating a willingness to lead by example and take a courageous national stand indicative of the consensus view of our community and our University's ideals, President Dudley has pandered to a small vocal population expressing out of consensus opinions.

To effectively lead our community toward healing and reconciliation, President Dudley should demonstrate the courage and willingness to vocalize and reflect the consensus view on the traditions, values, and history of Washington and Lee University. Pandering to the outvoted minority is not reflective of this leadership characteristic but instead represents an attempt to undermine and discredit the consensus and trust of the community.

President Dudley finds himself struggling to justify his actions to an informed and invested community interested in preserving the unique and important history of Washington and Lee. A strong and effective leader could have avoided this predicament and guided our University through the current social climate while adhering to the values and desires of the consensus.

When the demands to force unneeded change were first proposed, President Dudley could have acknowledged the request and educated the community on the financial, educational, and important contributions that General Washington and President Lee provided to the University, setting an example for the rest of the country. Instead, he allowed a fringe group to use incivility and threats of public shame to drag the University through a costly and unnecessary vote on the name of our institution.

Instead of promoting the rich and full history of the University, President Dudley supported the unsubstantiated claim of past racism committed by the

University community. He has failed to provide any instances or facts to support this claim.

Besides being unfounded, the implicit accusation is of a racist and insensitive community that previously failed to take proactive action to promote civility, inclusion, and discourse.

Instead of implementing a compromise that addresses the concerns of the minor faction and the desires of the consensus, President Dudley supported and even promoted the unnecessary changes to the University's diploma and the layout of Lee Chapel. Providing options for all students is a more inclusive and reasonable compromise reflective of the consensus community view.

If it has not already occurred, the out of consensus decisions of President Dudley will ultimately cause a reduction in financial giving. If the vocal minority in each new generation gets to determine the criteria upon which the previous generation is judged, how can any alumnus make a substantial and lasting gift to the University? He or she will have to weigh every decision made, word spoken, or action taken to determine if that one thing could lead to censure, reproach, and removal from his or her place of recognition.

These decisions are not reflective of a strong leader but of one who ignores the ideals of the majority to adhere to the out of consensus political trends of the day.

For these reasons and others, I want to express my lack of confidence in President Dudley. I urge the board to prayerfully consider the type of leader that Washington and Lee needs and to decide if President Dudley is that leader. Change is hard but can be necessary when needed.

I do not need to remind this group of the University's motto, Non Incautus Futuri. That future can be promising with the right leader or challenging without.

Respectfully,  
Gaius "Whit" Whitfield, VI, '04