

Christopher Bradley

From: President William C. Dudley <presidentdudley@wlu.edu>
Sent: Sunday, March 15, 2020 4:20 PM
To: Christopher M. Bradley
Subject: A Personal Message from President Dudley

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

Dear W&L Community,

On Friday evening, I wrote to students, faculty, and staff with the difficult news that we have [suspended on-campus classes](#) and will take a two-week recess before shifting to virtual instruction for the remainder of the year.

Today I want to share with you what I have observed in the course of this extraordinary week, and what it has revealed about the Washington and Lee community.

It is difficult to fathom how much has changed in a few short days. On Sunday, I watched the women's lacrosse team rise to #4 in the country with a victory over national powerhouse Gettysburg. We had no idea it would be their final contest of the year. On Monday, the university faculty conducted ordinary business at its monthly meeting and considered the possibility that some Spring Term Abroad courses might need to be canceled. Because there are no known cases of COVID-19 at W&L or in the surrounding area, and February break was behind us, we had every hope of completing the school year on campus. The weather was deceptively beautiful, drawing flocks of students to bask together on the front lawn outside my window in Washington Hall.

But at the same time, each day brought news of additional disruptions to the normal lives of people across the country and the globe. On Wednesday, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic and exhorted individuals and institutions to take measures to slow its spread. On Thursday, the President of the

United States announced a ban on flights from Europe. On Friday, the Governor of Virginia ordered K-12 schools closed across the commonwealth. The NCAA and professional sports leagues suspended competition. Public health authorities warned with increasing urgency against non-essential travel and gathering in large numbers.

Here at W&L, we were not exempt from grappling with this unprecedented situation. I met daily with our leadership in academic affairs, student affairs, health and counseling, business operations, and communications. Together, we assessed and reassessed the latest information and guidance, which changed as rapidly as decisions could be made. Everyone at Washington and Lee did their utmost to act in the best interest of our campus and extended community, for which I am very grateful.

I also heard from many of you. You wrote to share your thoughts, hopes, and fears. This crisis is not abstract. It is personal for all of us. I have two children in college. My parents live in a retirement community in Virginia that has had to prohibit visitors to protect vulnerable residents. Nothing is more important than our safety and that of our loved ones. Some of you were pleased that W&L made every effort to continue holding classes on campus, so long as that remained compatible with the guidance from public health authorities. Some of you urged us to send students home.

Your views were varied, but almost without exception your messages were thoughtful and constructive. You wanted me to know how you felt, and your feelings were strong, but you were sincere, respectful, and understanding. Many of you, in writing and in person, expressed your support and appreciation. I was struck, again and again, by your empathy, kindness, and generosity. Thank you.

The Washington and Lee community has shown me this week a pervasive, persistent, and even cheerful resolve. Everyone understands that we are navigating a fluid situation, the contours of which are shifting and unpredictable. And everyone is willing to adapt, however we must, to reduce the threats to communal health while educating our students the best we can. Students, faculty, and staff have demonstrated great flexibility, creativity, and determination. All across campus, people have taken initiative, learned to do things in new ways, worked longer hours,

remained focused on what is most important, and done it all without complaint.
Thank you.

Universities have rhythms that are centuries old. They are deep in our bones, and their disruption is shocking and painful. Every morning I watch students and faculty stream across the Colonnade to class as I walk to work. Afternoons and evenings, I see our teams and ensembles play and perform, and attend academic events hosted by our faculty. Springtime, in particular, is rich with annual traditions that are dear to everyone at W&L. It is also a time when accepted students visit campus and alumni return for reunions. It is clear now that none of these events will take place as planned. We still hope to conduct the scheduled Commencement ceremonies for both undergraduate and law students, but we must be prepared for the possibility that these plans may need to be changed.

It is hard to overstate our collective disappointment about all that we have lost. But we know that these losses pale in comparison to the potential consequences of the global health crisis, and our community has handled its disappointments with dignity and grace.

My heart aches for every one of our students, and most especially for our graduating seniors, whose time together has been cut short, and whose events, performances, competitions, and trips have been canceled. I know how much these mean to you and I know that they can never be replaced. I will miss them dearly myself. Seeing the joy you take in each other's company, and watching you all shine in so many ways, is the best part of my job.

In June, a campus without students is peaceful. In March, it is eerie and sad. Work here will continue, although much of it will be transformed by the need to reduce human interaction. Professors are learning new technologies and reinventing their courses. Instructional technology staff are providing tools, training, and support. Admissions is preparing to host virtual visits for admitted students and will enroll a great Class of 2024. Facilities is keeping the Duchossois Athletic Center construction project on schedule to open this fall. Everyone at W&L will be busy and productive in the coming months, but nothing will be the same.

The greatest lesson that has been reinforced for me this week is how fortunate we are for all that we have at Washington and Lee. The richness of our lives together on this campus is precious and never to be taken for granted. I will miss it terribly, as will each of you. Our community has made me proud this week. I will be so eager to welcome our students back, when circumstances permit, to resume normal life at W&L.

Until then, I wish the best of health and safety to all.

Will Dudley

Washington and Lee University
204 W. Washington St.
Lexington, Virginia 24450
540-458-8400

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