

To: University Faculty Council

From: Tim O'Donnell

Re: November Report

Date: November 11, 2025

I encourage you to read the many different reports from Academic Affairs prepared for the November Board of Visitors meeting which is soon to post to **BoardDocs**. There is a lot that is happening across the division.

Perhaps the most significant news is that we were the first public institution to successfully bring a proposal through SCHEV's new program approval process. We received unanimous support from the Council for our Master of Science in Nursing program. It is now off to SACSCOC for their review and work has already begun to stand up this program at the earliest possible date. Many contributed to this effort and our region will benefit from their efforts.

As the semester draws to a close, it is worth returning to key topics raised in August. We continue to strive to put in place support for **digital accessibility** including procuring useful tools to assist with ensuring that digital materials used in the classroom are compliant. It will be important this spring to put in our individual and collective best efforts as we approach summer courses and next fall. I expect that we will soon be sharing more about the tools and support that will be available. We have also made some strides with our **Life After Mary Washington** initiative, which is so important to making the case for what we have to offer. Consider this, we have more than 30 credit-bearing courses that count for the After Mary Washington requirement. Finally, the emerging **Center for AI and the Liberal Arts** has offered a number of events and workshops and is planning even more for the spring. I especially recommend the talk on AI pluralism by Dr. Alan Coverstone.

I have had the good fortune to listen to and join in several different conversations with colleagues across camps in recent weeks. To my delight, I have learn that so many members of our community are wrestling with, in positive ways, the same question – **what does the future for higher education look like and how might we adapt to meet the emerging opportunities and challenges**. Some of it has been spurred on by AI. Some of it comes from public skepticism about the virtues of higher education. Some of it results from significant changes at the federal level. All of it can be unsettling and worrisome. However, what have taken from listening to our colleagues is that many are thinking about how to navigate these uncertain times in ways that affirm what we do, while acknowledging that things are changing and the pace of change is quickening. I encourage each of us to engage when the opportunities present, including during the months of December and January as we enter phase two of the strategic planning process.

On a different topic, I've been asked to remind all of us that while efforts to foster student engagement, energize school spirit, and bring identity to our programs and departments through swag and spirit wear are welcome, it is important to consult early with procurement (Melva Kishpaugh) and University Communications (Amy Jesse). They can assist in aligning your efforts with relevant **procurement and licensing** policies and practices.

Finally, an update on **sabbaticals and fellowships**. Of the 18 sabbatical proposals received, 8 (two more than last year) were advanced to the Board of Visitors for consideration at the November meeting. The University Sabbatical, Fellowships and Faculty Awards Committee (SFFA) recommended awarding order aligns with what was forwarded to the Board. As in the past, there were more quality proposals than could be funded. Addressing this gap is an important fundraising goal and I have followed up with Advancement to reiterate the imperative to secure additional resources to provide more faculty with this opportunity. The one Jepson Fellowship application that was received and reviewed was also recommended. My hope is that we'll have more Jepson applications next year and I encourage those who are eligible to prepare a proposal. Finally, you've received the call for **Waple Fellowships which are due on December 8th** to your respective dean. I am grateful to the Committee for its tireless efforts and look forward to debriefing with them in January to hear more about how we might refine our processes and enhance the information available to the committee.