

Cormier Retirement Forum
March 5, 2009
Comments BoV Rector Marge Connelly

It is truly an honor and a privilege to work with Dr. Cormier. Since joining the Board of Visitors in 2004 and being named Rector in 2007, I have observed, in both challenging and joyous times, her dedication and commitment to this University. From the halls of the General Assembly to boardrooms and classrooms, she is not only a tireless leader; she is also Longwood's number one cheerleader. Thirteen years ago, she set out a plan to advance Longwood among its peer institutions and the result has been truly transformational. That plan continues to be executed even as we speak and Longwood continues to become stronger, more vibrant, and continues to build its well-deserved reputation for preparing citizen leaders to make a difference in our world. And that, in my opinion, is what makes a truly great leader – someone who not only gets big things done, but does it in a way that continues even after they individually have moved on.

Under Dr. Cormier's leadership, Longwood College became Longwood University in 2001; the university concluded its first comprehensive campaign one year ahead of schedule and goal with more than \$33 million in contributions; athletics moved from Division II to Division I; and enrollment grew from 3,325 students in 1996 to more than 4,700 students this year. New degree programs -- including an M.B.A. program -- have been introduced; an internship or some form of experiential learning is now required of all students to ensure a "real world" experience before graduation; and -- for the eleventh straight year -- Longwood has ranked among the best in the U.S. News and World Report "America's Best Colleges" issue. The establishment of the Cormier Honors College for Citizen Scholars, with more than 200 students currently enrolled, will allow Longwood to continue to attract outstanding students who seek opportunities for advanced research, international study, and extensive faculty-student interaction. The Cormier Honors College will also serve as a permanent reminder of the many contributions of Dr. Cormier as well as Dr. Raymond Cormier who has served the University as First Gent and visiting professor of French. Raymond, we appreciate your many contributions to the life the University and the way in which you have executed the duties of First Gent. We hope you never part with those First Gent license plates!

In challenging times, Dr. Cormier has led the university with courage and vision. Following the Great Fire of 2001, Dr. Cormier promised, “The Ruffners are going to be rebuilt and they will be rebuilt in the way in which they were designed.” And they were – only better. Ruffner and Grainger Halls were not only rebuilt to their original designs but with greatly expanded amenities and high-tech infrastructure. Today, in spite of that fire, Ruffner remains the signature building of Longwood University.

But it didn’t stop with Ruffner and Grainger. During the past thirteen years virtually this entire campus has been transformed. The opening of Brock Commons in 2004 united the campus and created an inviting space where students, faculty, and staff mingle; children – and students -- play in the fountains; and the campus community gathers for formal and informal outdoor ceremonies. It is almost impossible to imagine the campus before Brock Commons.

The opening of the Health and Fitness Center in 2007 is another addition that has had an enormous impact on the campus. Each day hundreds of students use the center to improve their overall health and fitness. It almost makes one wonder: What were all these students doing before the place opened?

Another addition to the campus, that Dr. Cormier mentioned in her remarks, is the new Communication Studies and Theatre Building that will be dedicated later this year. As home to the communication studies program, one of the university’s fastest growing majors, this building is a very important addition to our campus.

I believe that Longwood is poised to move confidently into the future. As Dr. Cormier said, the comprehensive campaign “Change Lives—Transform Communities” is well under way and will raise \$65 million. In addition, the approval of a campus master plan ensures that the university’s physical development through 2020 will proceed according to a plan that best meets the academic, residential, and social needs of the campus community.

So, having reflected on these and so many more accomplishments, I think you will agree that we have some big shoes to fill.

On behalf of the Board of Visitors, I offer sincere appreciation to Dr. Cormier for her vision, leadership, and persistent drive for excellence. The Cormier Legacy will take Longwood far into the future as we work with a new president to build on the achievements of the past thirteen years.

Therefore, it is important that we select a president who shares the values, mission, and vision of Longwood University. Someone who appreciates our heritage while envisioning a new era for Longwood that will enable us to implement our long-range strategic Master Plan. Someone who can help us meet the goals of our \$65 million dollar comprehensive campaign. Someone who wants to help educate the next generation of citizen leaders. Someone who can continue the legacy of leadership established by Dr. Cormier.

The presidential transition process is already under way and our goal is to have a new president selected by the spring semester of 2010. At our board meeting later this month, we shall announce the members of the Presidential Search and Screening Advisory Committee, which will be composed of Board of Visitors members and representatives from the faculty, staff, students, alumni and Foundation Board. A national search will be conducted and a search firm will be hired to assist in the process. Input will be solicited from the campus community as well as the community at large on the desired attributes of the next president. I shall keep you informed as the process continues.

While the Presidential Search and Screening Advisory Committee will be working diligently to find the best person possible to be the next president of Longwood University – someone to fill those really big shoes I mentioned earlier – you need to know that Dr. Cormier will not miss a beat -- she will continue her outstanding leadership of this University just as she has for the past thirteen years. And even after her official retirement in June 2010, Dr. Cormier has agreed

to continue working with University Advancement to reach the goals of the comprehensive campaign. It is true – her blood runs Longwood Blue!

Thank you for being with us this afternoon. Please join us for refreshments.