



LONGWOOD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

An Overview Report by the Administration to the Board of Visitors

June 2021

Chapter 1

“2020” Begins

The first week of March 2020 was spring break at Longwood. But even with campus comparatively quiet, a steady and varied drumbeat of activity continued. The academic year was already a hectic one – under a tense national climate as a new decade began. More than 550 community members, students and visitors had just attended the annual Moton Museum Banquet, and nearly a hundred high school students and teachers were expected the following week for the Junior Science and Humanities Symposium. The men’s and women’s basketball teams were preparing for the post-season, and spring athletics were in full swing.

For several members of Longwood’s leadership, it had been an exceptionally busy stretch, filled with back-to-back conference calls with financial advisors, bankers and prospective investors. Within days, the University was scheduled to go to market with the most complex and arguably consequential financial transaction in its history. The planned \$134 million bond refinancing for the Longwood Real Estate Foundation would lock in historically low interest rates and – through the REF’s support agreements with the University – save millions of dollars over the coming years in interest expenses. For the University, it would ease budget pressure, reduce risk, and produce \$23 million in liquid cash reserves, strengthening the institution’s financial foundation for generations.

The Democratic presidential primaries led the news that week – former Vice President Joe Biden, seemingly far behind just days before, had suddenly surged into the delegate lead. But the story of the emerging Covid-19 coronavirus was attracting increased attention. The S&P 500 had fallen almost 9 percent in February on concerns about a global pandemic. But that Monday,

March 2, the index rose almost 4 percent on hope the worries might be overblown. No cases had yet been found in Virginia.

Against the backdrop of a nation politically on edge, early in a hugely divisive presidential election campaign year, Covid felt like part of an array of contingencies that warranted planning, not panic. And certainly not like a cataclysmic wave that would soon strike worldwide, with dire and destabilizing effects across America and every sector of national life, higher education especially.

Such contingency planning was the normal job of Tracie Giles, Emergency Management Coordinator, and Mike Lonon, Director of Environmental Health and Safety. They had been monitoring Covid daily since the return from the 2019 winter break, tracking a Johns Hopkins University epidemiological map as the virus began spreading from Asia to Europe, and the first cases appeared in North America. The news gave urgency to work already underway to begin updating the University's Infectious Disease Preparedness Plan. On Wednesday, March 4, they broadened the conversation to the University's Incident Command Team, a cross-campus group comprised of staff from the University Health Center, Campus Police, Communications and Student Affairs. Infectious diseases were common on any college campus, but the possibility of extensive quarantine was new.

The group hashed out some of the first hard details about how exactly Longwood would quarantine or isolate students if needed, and support them safely. They proposed using vacant apartments at the Longwood Village complex, where students would be off central campus but could be monitored and provided food and other essentials. VP for Student Affairs Tim Pierson asked Associate Dean of Wellness Matt McGregor, whose role included oversight of the Health Center as well as leadership in Student Affairs, to head the response team. They would meet regularly, often daily, for much of the next 15 months.

Also paying increased attention to developments was President Taylor Reveley, who in his previous career as an attorney had represented hospital systems and worked on pandemic preparedness during the SARS outbreak of the early 2000s. His academic and policy background in the U.S. Presidency and with senior U.S. officials also gave him ready focus on any number of troubling historical parallels and case studies. Reveley had communicated with the Board of Visitors in January about his concerns regarding the coronavirus, and was surprised how little attention the issue was getting in his regular calls and meetings with fellow Virginia public university presidents.

On Wednesday, March 5, VP and Chief of Staff Justin Pope, Assistant VP of Communications Matt McWilliams and others from Incident Command sat in on a planning call with the Virginia Department of Health. Longwood's cabinet was scheduled for its annual retreat the following day, in Lynchburg. Reveley changed the agenda: the VPs would devote half the meeting to discussing how Longwood would respond if cases appeared on campus. The next morning, in a basement meeting room at the Virginia Hotel, they laid out the possible impact on academics, residential life, university operations and finances.

Longwood's first communication with students about Covid had been sent on February 28, just as students were leaving for spring break. The email to campus noted the University was monitoring the situation, and shared information about travel advisories as well as symptoms to monitor. As the retreat meeting finished, several VPs stayed on to work with the President to compose and send via email and social media a second message. This message more directly asked students to contact the Health Center before returning to campus if they experienced symptoms.

The tone balanced caution with reassurance, noting healthy young people were not at high risk of severe complications. "While there have not yet been cases anywhere in Virginia, we are operating on the assumption they will appear," the message read. "If we do have cases at Longwood, we will respond in a careful way that shows responsibility for the common health of our community and compassion for anyone involved – in short we will act as the responsible citizens we are."

All-campus messages like this from leadership were fairly routine but not especially common – perhaps six or eight over the course of a semester was typical. These two communications would be the first of hundreds related to Covid1-9 sent via email, social media and Longwood's emergency alert system over the coming 15 months, as the University plunged into a challenge as complex and serious as any in its 181-year history.

The hours and days that immediately followed would be among the most strenuous and intense.

On Saturday, March 7, Gov. Northam announced the first confirmed Virginia case, at Fort Belvoir. Soon thereafter Longwood was informed of a student, still in Northern Virginia, who had been contact exposed to a positive case and required testing. Another student who had traveled to Italy was also being quarantined, but also still at home. The Longwood Communications team, including McWilliams, Pope, VP for Strategic Operations Victoria Kindon, and Assistant VP for Marketing and Communications Dave Hooper '00, worked through the weekend on a set of FAQs about Longwood's response. Those first FAQs, posted Sunday morning, would be supplemented constantly over the months that followed, eventually totaling well over 100 questions and running nearly 7,000 words of answers for students and staff on everything from health precautions to academic accommodations to leave policies and student refunds.

Late Monday, March 9, as classes resumed, came word another student, this one now on campus, had been potentially exposed by family in Northern Virginia. The student had been told to quarantine and was being tested. The Cabinet, meeting Tuesday morning the 10th, along with Longwood's communications team, were wary of sharing news about a possible, unconfirmed case. But they also knew that as the story unfolded maintaining trust with the campus and local community would be an essential tool. They decided to err on the side of communicating publicly – noting a student was in quarantine, awaiting test results, and promising to update.

That evening, the women's basketball team played a post-season game in Willett Hall. Over the course of the day several of the VPs moved forward with calls on the bond financing. The market was increasingly nervous, particularly about higher education-related financings, but the team wanted to be ready to go quickly if a window opened. The Council of Presidents, the body of Virginia's public college presidents, held an emergency conference call – the first of dozens of meetings on Covid over the months ahead. Most Virginia institutions were on spring break that week. The institutions' growing concern was whether to tell students to remain at home. But Longwood's students were already back.

By Wednesday, March 11, the Covid story nationally, and on college campuses, was shifting rapidly. The NBA suspended its season, and the Ivy League cancelled spring athletics. Several Virginia public universities, including VCU and James Madison, announced moves to virtual learning. President Reveley sent a new message to campus at 3:24 p.m. There was no change in plans for classes, but non-essential or potentially risky meetings should be postponed, and Longwood was preparing if courses did need to shift online. He wrote: "My assurance to you is the following: Our community's well-being will remain paramount in all our decisions. We will adjust if necessary as circumstances and professional recommendations change. And we will continue to be in regular communication with you."

By now, the pace of news nationally had made it clear cases at Longwood were inevitable – the question was no longer "if" but "when," and how to respond. Still, larger institutions, with more international student bodies and travel, seemed likely to see the first campus cases in Virginia. Flu symptoms are common at almost any college campus in the winter, so students experiencing them were no cause for panic. As Longwood's leadership awaited news of its student being tested – they were told the results could take as long as three days – there was anxiety, but continued work on other more usual fronts.

Then, just before 9 p.m. on Wednesday the 11th came word from the Virginia Department of Health to the Health Center and shortly thereafter the president's office: the test of the Longwood student on campus was a presumptive positive. Longwood had the first confirmed Covid-19 case at a Virginia university.

Reveley, the communications team, several VPs, McGregor and later Dr. Rob Wade from the Health Center quickly gathered in the president's office in Lancaster. They faced two urgent tasks. The first was arranging transport for the positive student to Longwood Village. Three local medical transport companies had all indicated they were not yet prepared and willing to transport Covid-positive patients. Finally, the Prince Edward Volunteer Rescue Squad agreed to handle the transport. Eventually, transporting students in isolation and quarantine was rationalized, but would nonetheless become a major element of the logistical operation, enlisting volunteers, Longwood police officers, and a dedicated van from the University fleet.

The second task was following through on the promised update to campus. That went out shortly after 10 p.m. – only about six hours following the president's previous communications. It conveyed two major developments. First was the positive result. Second was that classes would be cancelled until the following Wednesday. Faculty might continue coursework online,

as with a snow day, and in the meantime would use the days ahead to prepare for a longer-term shift online if needed. That communication was preceded by a flurry of hurried calls from Reveley to other key figures, who would be trusted partners and leaders throughout the crisis ahead, as in normal times: Rector Eric Hansen; Farmville Mayor David Whitus '83, and the President of Longwood's neighbor Hampden-Sydney College, Larry Stimpert.

Some institutions were now telling students not to return to campus from spring break. Others with students back were telling students to go home. Longwood's team was strongly opposed to making students depart, worrying about both the impact on students and on public health. They also held hope the disruption might prove temporary. "The University is not closing. Students may wish to return home during this period, but they do not have to," Reveley wrote. "We recognize many students may feel safer and more secure here at Longwood than in places to which they might return, and we will continue to accommodate you." New protocols were announced for the dining hall and library, but both would remain open.

There were six days before classes were set to resume online. Kay Stokes, Executive Assistant to the President, began the arduous work of putting the customary array of meetings and events onto hold for Reveley. For Longwood's hundreds of faculty and support staff, the moment marked a huge shift. Some courses had a meaningful online presence already to build on, but many did not. The Digital Education Collaborative (DEC), which generally provided routine guidance to faculty on learning technology, was suddenly thrust to the front lines. Early the next morning, the 12th, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies Jeannine Perry, who oversees the DEC, approached Provost and VP for Academic Affairs Larissa Smith to ask if she should buy Zoom software licenses for the entire university. "Yes," Smith said. "Buy them all." Longwood held 25 Zoom licenses at the time. By the spring of 2021, it held 621 for faculty and staff and 2,592 for students.

On Friday, March 13, under the guidance of director Julie Mersiowsky and Zoom guru Dean Boyle, the DEC offered the first of 23 group workshops over three days to help faculty transition to digital learning. Over the semester there would be 32 altogether. More than 160 faculty participated in individual or group classes and support sessions, and 55 took an 8-week course on instructional design in online learning. All took place with the DEC staff itself operating remotely. On top of all of the emergency course planning, it took a staff member just to handle the phone queries and another to answer the constant stream of emails.

The quick transition was easier for some faculty than others, depending on discipline and existing course structure. But it was easy on no one, especially amidst the generalized anxiety of the moment. Still, almost all stepped up. "The general zeitgeist was: 'this is an extraordinary amount of work but we need to do this,'" said Associate VP for Academic Affairs David Shoenthal. "Because we are doing it for the students. This is just who we are and what we do."

The next two weeks were a relentless cascade of news, almost all bad. Longwood could do little more than react, and focus on supporting its increasingly anxious students and staff.

On March 12, Broadway went dark. Gov. Northam declared a state of emergency in the Commonwealth. Longwood shared further details about campus operations. The General Assembly passed a budget, based on assumptions of continued strong funding from an economy now stalling rapidly, which included meaningful new funding for higher education. The spending plans felt like a happy postcard mailed just before an earthquake and now arriving in a changed world; the day of the vote saw the S&P 500 fall 2,300 points, or 9 percent – its worst day since Black Monday in 1987.

On March 13, the NCAA cancelled its men's and women's basketball tournaments – the source of 90 percent of the NCAA's revenue, including meaningful support payments to member institutions such as Longwood. In Farmville, the local VDH district released a community letter with details on the Longwood case, and two student contacts in quarantine, urging continued vigilance. "The self-reporting by the students and rapid response of the University leadership have done all appropriate measures to contain this situation and minimize contact and possible spread of this virus," Piedmont Health District Director Dr. Robert Nash wrote. "Their prompt and responsible actions have appropriately responded to safeguard the community." Longwood worked with VDH on arrangements for the positive student to be safely transported home.

Nash commended Longwood on the decision to keep students on campus, rather than dispersing to their potentially more vulnerable families. VDH and Longwood had of course interacted sporadically over the years. But in these early days strong lines of communications between Nash, the University and the University Health Center were established, which proved invaluable going forward. Over the months ahead, acrimony and mistrust characterized the relationships between many other Virginia colleges and universities and their local VDH counterparts. But not at Longwood.

Stock and bond markets gyrated on Wall Street, and the news was especially bad for the corner of the financial markets that mattered most to Longwood. The prospect of students nationwide heading home from campus, without knowing when they might return, was the worst possible development for a student housing-based transaction. Just hours from when Longwood had hoped to move forward and sell its bonds to investors, the bottom dropped out of that market. "It was the most volatile week I've ever experienced in 25 years in the municipal marketplace," said Greg Fawcett, the financial advisor to Longwood and the REF. "There were just no buyers in the market. Yields just skyrocketed overnight. We all agreed there was no chance of getting our deal sold. We had to pull it." Longwood's team could only hope to ride out the fluctuations, then be ready later when – if – the markets calmed.

Also on the 13th, Gov. Northam shut down K-12 schools for two weeks, compounding the challenges of working parents. Longwood – still reluctant to abandon in-person learning yet for the semester – extended online courses through March 27, and directed employees to work with their vice presidents on telework options. President Reveley reiterated to students they could stay on campus, while Smith followed up with faculty describing resources and support. Spring registration was pushed back.

On campus, the designated longwood.edu/covid19 website went live for the first time. So did the “questions@longwood.edu” email address, responding to its first query at 1:20. The first question asked about a rumor on campus concerning the positive student. Monitored by rotating staff but especially Senior University Writer Lauren Whittington, the account would receive and answer 3,338 queries through May 2021.

The news headlines on Saturday, March 14 revealed a dire national emergency. *The New York Times* reported experts projected 200,000 to 1.7 million Americans could die in the pandemic, with 2.4 million to 21 million hospitalized. The headline of another lead story read, “Panicked Shoppers Empty Store Shelves as Coronavirus Anxieties Deepen.”

Volunteers from Advancement, Communications and university leadership signed up for shifts monitoring the “questions@longwood” account over the weekend, and a parallel account for HR queries. Yet another message to campus, this one from Tim Pierson, informed the community that two additional students deemed contact exposed to the first positive case had been cleared as negative. Still, further transmission nationally and locally should be assumed. Over the weekend, cases began appearing at a broader range of Virginia campuses, and the Commonwealth announced further distancing and workplace restrictions.

Late Sunday afternoon, March 15, a message from Chief Human Resources Officer Lisa Mooney to campus announced the creation of a new category of leave for those affected by Covid that would not count against regular sick leave, vacation or other excused absences. “While campus buildings and office spaces remain open, Longwood understands that all of our employees are dealing with unique personal situations, which may include possible concerns about their own health risk, that of relatives, and also childcare, with the closing of K-12 schools. During this upcoming period, any Longwood employee who cannot come to work for such reasons and needs to be absent will be able to do so, without having to utilize regular types of leave.” When Mooney arrived back at work Monday morning, she found a number of emails expressing thanks and gratitude.

Still, while faculty and many staff were working from home, the campus remained open and, and essential personnel needed to come in. Long prior to the pandemic, when prices were cheap, Mike Lonon had stocked up on a reserve of emergency supplies: N-95 respirators, surgical masks that were good for 50 years, jugs of hand sanitizer. “It just sat on the shelf for five years,” Lonon recalled. Those became the foundation of a massive supply effort to support staff who needed to be on campus.

In early March a new budget line was opened for emergency supplies to keep campus operational – the first item was 2,400 bottles of hand sanitizer, for \$5,433. A few weeks later, walking his dog past VP for Administration and Finance Louise Waller’s house, Lonon stopped to talk about how to scale up the effort and asked for authorization to spend \$100,000 on supplies. She said yes, and assigned him regular staff contacts in Material Management to keep track of orders, hoping for eventual reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Masks, thermometers, plexi-glass, ventilation improvements, IT for virtual learning, and

many other expenses would multiply. Over the course of the year the University's purchases and deployments would include 6,400 gallons of hand sanitizer, 384 spray bottles, 664 gallons of surface sanitizer, 36,500 disposable and 10,000 cloth masks, and 2,620 thermometers. By the spring of 2021, Longwood's Covid-related supplies and other expenses were estimated at about \$5 million, and still growing.

One topic attracting little attention in the national headlines was the well-being of students. President Reveley was especially concerned about the traumatic short-term effects of the interruption, and the potential longer-term ones, too. Other institutions were showing little inclination to let students stay on campus, and students' anxiety was evident. "I think there was a good majority of students who thought we were going to be away for a while and then come back," said Jen Fraley, a veteran of numerous roles in Student Affairs who would transition over the summer to become dean of students. When it became apparent the disruption might be greater, their worries about academics and their own families began to mount. "Suddenly their perspective on public health was different because they were having conversations with their parents and grandparents about the implications of potentially bringing home an infectious disease."

Late that Friday afternoon March 13, at the very end of a day and week of seemingly relentless bad news, Reveley sent a short message of encouragement to students: "Too few people in the swirl of this national emergency have paused to focus on the toll this takes on you – let alone the hardships of your generation from the very start," he wrote. "At this moment I don't know how the remainder of this semester will evolve, but I promise Longwood will be in close contact throughout these days, like we have been. I do know that the tested rhythms of our campus life, here since 1839 at this crossroads of history for America, will hit stride again someday soon enough."

For now, though, there was no let-up from the pace of events, changes and communications – conference calls with state and local officials, on-the-fly creation of the system to support more students at Longwood Village if needed, supervisors across the University working to keep essential services moving for students while helping employees arrange to telecommute if possible. Guided by Housing Director Jean Wilwohl, a more organized registration system snapped into shape for accommodating the students who were staying on campus.

Faculty continued preparing for the shift to online learning. "Our faculty were at very different places," Smith said. "We had some who in a matter of 48 hours or four days were ready to start the shift to online classes. We had others who really needed that week and longer to make the switch. We had some faculty who weren't even really using Canvas at all in their classes and had to make that switch. It was just a tremendous amount of work."

The situation was stable on campus but worsening statewide and nationally almost by the hour. On Tuesday, March 17 Farmville declared a State of Local Emergency, and nationally guidance began to emerge calling for strict limits on gatherings, to no more than 10 people. The Office of Institutional Advancement postponed indefinitely “Love Your Longwood Day,” a popular fundraising event that could have been expected to raise several hundred thousand dollars. Nationally, philanthropy for non-Covid-related causes had ground to a halt.

On Wednesday the 18th, Longwood’s bond refinancing was again postponed. The Big South cancelled all spring athletics competition. James Madison University announced it was moving all classes online for the rest of the semester. Longwood was now an outlier in holding out hope students could return for in-person classes. As the Cabinet met at midday on Thursday the 19th, the momentum felt increasingly inevitable, and providing clarity to students and faculty increasingly urgent. At 6:03 p.m. Reveley reluctantly sent news that classes would move fully online for the semester.

Students who could go home were asked to do so, but those who needed to remain could register to stay. One-hundred thirteen would register remain in campus housing for the coming weeks (and numerous others who lived off campus); later in the spring, Longwood again encouraged students to leave if they could, but continued accommodating emergency appeals. In his message, Reveley committed to honoring the Class of 2020 with commencement activities in-person – though he could not promise when or how they would experience a graduation ceremony. “This is heartbreaking news to send,” he closed. “To our seniors especially, you are losing a precious and irreplaceable time together here at this place we all love. The Alma Mater yearns to have you here, and in profound ways this will be home for you throughout life. I am incredibly sorry – and we all are incredibly eager to be together again.”

With plans now at least known, helping faculty and students for the remainder of the semester became an urgent priority. A conference room just off the Rotunda became the Academic Affairs command center. “I called in the deans and the assistant deans and we met every day,” Smith said – a core group still in person and others joining by Zoom. “It was checking on people and seeing how faculty were doing. They were the connective tissue through the department chairs.”

The associate deans worked the front lines in partnership with Student Affairs and Student Success. One quickly apparent problem was Internet access for students at home. The IT Help Desk and DEC set up a triage system, not unlike the system to help students in academic difficulty. “We asked faculty to refer students to their associate deans if they weren’t connecting or if they’d fallen off the radar so we could reach out to them and see if it was a technology problem,” Smith said. “We looked at getting hotspots for some students but they were in such short supply. We did mail web cams to some students. We just tried quickly to do the best we could to support students in this new learning environment.” Along with DEC for faculty, student-facing resources including the Library, Counseling and Psychological Services, the

Writing Center, Quantitative Reasoning Center and Office of Disability Resources also stood up virtual support operations.

Students were especially anxious about grades, and whether the challenges of online learning would unfairly impact their academic standing, Shoenthal said. “That turned out to be a very quick but important conversation.” Crucially, the Academic Affairs leadership was determined to work through the regular curriculum process with Faculty Senate, despite the quick timeline. “A lot of other institutions just issued these fiats,” Smith said. “We tried our best to use the mechanisms that we had, and we are small enough to be able to do that.” A modified Pass-Fail system – PV (C- or better), DV (D+, D, D-), FV (failing work) – was approved by Faculty Senate on March 25 and announced immediately to students.

Faculty Senate also acted quickly to extend tenure and promotion guidelines – to reassure faculty and help them focus their efforts on their teaching challenges. President Reveley wrote to the faculty late on the afternoon of Friday, March 20 – shortly after the Board of Visitors met remotely in emergency session: “I know this is one of the great pedagogical challenges of your careers, particularly on top of the personal and family challenges all of us face with this disruption. Your hard work matters so deeply for our students – keeping them on track academically, keeping their time structured, keeping them connected with one another and the wider world. This will be some of the most important teaching you ever do.”

“Early Missteps Set Italy’s Path to Catastrophe,” warned one headline in another Sunday *New York Times* front page full of fear and alarm that weekend. “A Race to Deliver Critical Supplies to Medical Teams,” read another. On Monday, March 23, Gov. Northam ordered Virginia K-12 schools closed for in-person learning through the spring.

The financial emergency was also compounding. A Covid relief/stimulus package was beginning to take shape in the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate, but far below the scale of what education groups said was needed. “In all honesty, we’ve heard from a bunch of schools ... who are looking at the numbers and thinking, ‘we may not be able to stay open,’” an American Council on Education official told Roll Call magazine that week. The Covid Relief bill that eventually passed on March 30 included \$14 billion for higher education; ACE said \$50 billion was needed. Longwood received about \$1.6 million, plus an equal amount it was charged with distributing directly to students in need. For both the university and students, this was a meaningful amount, but hardly sufficient for the challenges anticipated. Chip Bowman, Managing Director at Fahrenheit Advisors, had been working intensely with Longwood’s leadership since the fall of 2018, adding resiliency, foresight and agility to the University’s financial operations. This would be a stress test beyond imagination.

Earlier that week, Virginia Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne told the General Assembly the Commonwealth’s budget could face a hit of \$1 billion in each year of the upcoming biennial budget – potentially, he said, a low estimate. Emily O’Brion, Longwood’s Director of Government Relations, monitored this alarming situation, as the General Assembly contemplated emergency special sessions over the months ahead. Louise Waller, along with Pope, Kindon and President Reveley, continued briefing investors and ratings agencies.

Understandably, their questions increasingly focused on Longwood's plans for the fall. Higher education's prospects were deeply uncertain and the economy was in unprecedented freefall. The week of March 14 saw 281,000 Americans file for new unemployment benefits. Two weeks later the figure was an astounding 7 million. Hope for the refinancing slipped further and further away.

On Tuesday, March 24, McWilliams emailed campus that VDH had confirmed a second Longwood student positive – a student living off campus who had traveled out of state. The message reported that anyone who had been potentially exposed would have already been contacted by VDH. This was in fact the final on-campus positive case of the spring.

On March 25, the ratings agency S&P revised to negative its sector outlook for all higher education student housing bonds. The announcement wasn't particular to Longwood, but it was another blow to the transaction's prospects. On April 2, the Commonwealth directed all state agencies to freeze hiring, trim spending in the current year and prepare for cuts for the two years to come. On April 11, Northam proposed budget amendments that "unallotted" almost all new discretionary spending, freezing \$875 million in the current year fiscal budget and \$1.4 billion for the following year. Amendments reducing state spending by \$2 billion over two years passed 11 days later.

The financial impact of the shutdown was being felt on campus, too. A growing number of questions were coming in about housing and dining refunds. In a series of meetings, Longwood's leadership settled on a refund policy it knew would leave some students and families frustrated, but which it felt balanced fairness, obligation, and – crucially, relative simplicity and promptness of execution. Tim Pierson shared the decision with students on the 25th: all students with Longwood housing and dining plans would be refunded \$1,000 (\$300 for commuter students with dining plans). Also, Longwood announced student workers would continue to be paid through May 9, even if they were not able to work. Key members of Waller's team, including Accounts Payable manager Ellen Spencer, built the system that got students their checks.

The refunds cost Longwood \$2.6 million. The costs of operating housing and dining facilities were almost entirely "sunk" – there was no savings to the University if students didn't use them. But the investment was essential for maintaining good will with families. "We knew people were scared and stressed because of Covid," Waller said. "We wanted Longwood families to at least not have to worry about this small piece of their lives."

"Questions@longwood.edu" received more than 100 emails the next few days; many students had logistical questions about processing refunds. Some were unhappy with the amounts. The Comms team stepped up efforts to make sure requests for phone conversations were honored; University Counsel Cameron O'Brion was among those volunteering to connect with the most frustrated families. A number also asked about Aramark "bonus dollars" students had accrued during the semester, as well as parking refunds. On April 9, Longwood told students bonus dollars would be rolled over to the following academic year, and students with parking

passes would receive a credit or refund of \$50. Meanwhile, Longwood released all “holds” on student accounts through the summer to provide further emergency relief for students.

The unrelenting torrent of bad economic news for the nation and higher education prompted President Reveley to write to campus again on April 8, bracing the community for perhaps unprecedented challenges and the need for shared sacrifice.

The economic crisis, he told them, exceeded anything American higher education had witnessed in living memory, rivaling the Great Depression and World War II. “Longwood has age-old strengths that will serve us well through this time of crisis, but I want to be forthright with you that the challenge is severe,” he wrote. The heart of the matter was the impact of the crisis on students and families, who provide a large majority of Longwood’s revenue. State funding was also in grave doubt. In response, he said, Longwood would need to find ways to limit spending – while also continuing to support students and families with the financial aid they would need now more than ever.

“While we will hope and work tirelessly hard for the best, the crisis may deeply impact college enrollment nationally and in Virginia, and we may eventually have to contemplate measures such as furloughs or layoffs, as sadly other institutions are now,” he wrote. “It will be at least several weeks before we have more clarity. What I can tell you now is that I know how profoundly the soul of Longwood is rooted in our sense of camaraderie and in the mutual loyalty between Longwood and its people. I will do everything I possibly can to avoid having this crisis tear at the fabric of the University. In the most serious scenarios, I will wherever possible ask for broad-based but bearable sacrifices shared by our campus community that minimize consequences to the most vulnerable.”

It was, Reveley later recalled, among the darkest stretches of the entire ordeal – with cases soaring nationally, and his commitment to balance reassurance with realism for the Longwood community most sorely tested. Most alarming, however, was what potentially lay ahead – in the fall. Wealthy, highly selective institutions seemed already to be making noises about staying online through the coming year – something perhaps the most selective could survive, but which could be devastating to the great bulk of higher education and students. Other Virginia institutions seemed to be among those faltering in confidence they could re-open.

Longwood and its students could navigate a disrupted spring with difficulty – but it seemed impossible to imagine most students re-enrolling and paying tuition for another semester of online learning. In closing his email to faculty/staff, and in another message two days later to students, Reveley stated for the first time Longwood’s determination to return in-person. “We have every expectation of being back,” he wrote to students. “When we are, we’ll be all the more appreciative of what it means to be in this special place.” Meanwhile, he closed, “take care of yourselves, and of one another. Check in on friends and classmates. Keep the spirit of Longwood strong until we are back together -- and stay well.”

Those words opened the next critical phase for Longwood: persuading faculty, staff, and students – along with public health officials, elected officials and even fellow institutions – that

residential college campuses like Longwood could successfully return to residential, in-person learning.

The work of the summer was to convince the campus community, and beyond, that “we can come back, and we can do it safely,” Smith recalled. “And frankly, we have to. We can’t afford not to try.”

Chapter 2

The Long Summer

In early April, Longwood had little choice but to start thinking ahead, even as the urgent work of navigating the spring semester continued. Deposits for the incoming freshman class, which just a month earlier had appeared on track to be among Longwood's largest ever, had understandably slowed, as they had across higher education – though Longwood's were holding up better than feared. With campus visits, normally a powerful engine for yielding admitted students, cancelled, Kindon and the admissions office had launched a barrage of communications to stay in touch with the incoming class. It was working for the moment. But Longwood needed to send a strong signal to students it would indeed open in-person in the fall – and reassurance it would be prepared to do so safely.

On April 16, Longwood announced the campus leadership team that would coordinate planning for the fall. The announcement had two purposes – to make clear Longwood planned to open, and to provide structure for the planning effort. The group included Pope, McGregor, Shoenthal, McWilliams, incoming Police Chief Doug Mooney, along with Lori Blackwood (MBA '17) from Administration and Finance/Facilities, and Moton Museum Director Cameron Patterson '10. Faculty Senate Chair JoEllen Pederson would join over the summer, following a faculty request for an additional representative.

In fact, the structure was envisioned – and would prove very effective – as a means to ensure information flow among the various arms of the University already at work on campus preparation. Reveley believed strongly in a lesson validated during preparations for the 2016 Vice Presidential Debate: Even for a brand new task, make use of existing bodies and structures. The common higher education habit of ad hoc “working groups” was becoming the de facto approach at many institutions for Covid. But Longwood was determined to deploy the structures and teams already in place. “From the beginning, the coordinating team was mostly about making sure all the different groups were talking to each other,” Pope recalled. “The actual work was being done through people and structures already in place. That meant the Cabinet for high-level policy. Communications for messaging. Incident Command and Student Affairs for managing health and safety on campus. And it was up to Academic Affairs – the structure of the colleges and the deans and Faculty Senate – in partnership with Facilities to get ready to teach on campus.”

The degree of confidence Longwood projected about the fall was unusual. Reveley was constantly concerned Virginia's presidents would be tempted to try some kind of extended “hibernation,” possibly for the full coming academic year, in a misguided belief such an

approach would be financially endurable. In fact, Reveley was certain, only a fraction of institutions nationally could even contemplate such a thing; in Virginia, it would mean irreversible damage to students and institutions, including likely tens of thousands of layoffs. Still, he worried momentum might pick up for such an approach, making it harder even for institutions like Longwood determined to try to operate.

What's more, Reveley believed, colleges *could* manage the challenge; in fact they were better positioned than they realized. On April 3, after deliberating with among others his father Taylor Reveley III, President Emeritus of William & Mary (the two had served on the Council of Presidents together for five years, prior to Reveley III's retirement in 2018), Reveley sent the Virginia public university presidents a long email outlining the gravity of the crisis but also detailing what was at stake if institutions failed to rise to the challenge of re-opening. Critically, he said, the group needed to commit now to doing so. "I would recommend that we set as the clear expectation that our campuses will reopen for in-person activity this coming fall semester," he said. "The lives of students and families are in upheaval, and a measure of certainty in this storm will be dearly meaningful."

Reveley laid out the severity of the challenge, and admitted no end to the Covid pandemic was in sight. However, that was precisely the reason society would have to figure out ways to begin to reopen; it could not lock down indefinitely. Higher education, particularly the residential variety, had the ability – indeed responsibility – to lead the way in showing how. While it wouldn't be easy, campuses were self-regulating communities with in loco parentis traditions. They had historical muscle memory that could help them take the needed steps.

Regardless, they had to try.

"The long-term consequences to both our institutions and students would be devastating, and the overall net public health benefits increasingly doubtful, if our campuses remained functionally closed," he wrote. "Part of an institution's duty in collegiate life, especially at such a juncture, is also to structure and reinforce good decision-making by our students (something over which we have far more sway than, for instance, an employer with an employee or a business with a customer). I believe we also have an obligation to be mindful of the unpredictable generational effects on today's students of being kept from the ordinary progression of education."

A few weeks later, on April 27, Reveley continued the theme in a joint *Richmond Times-Dispatch* op-ed with Hampden-Sydney College President Larry Stimpert titled "Why Our Colleges Must Re-Open." "Colleges, particularly residential ones like Longwood and Hampden-Sydney, have the useful tools of traditions, habits and practices that guide student life," they wrote. "We can work with our students to limit the size and frequency of social gatherings, report off-campus travel and register guests. We suspect parents and our students, recognizing that changes are necessary for a return to a routine, would willingly accept these precautions."

It would prove the critical, counterintuitive theme of the months ahead. The assumption nationally was that the relevant traits of college campuses when it came to Covid-19 were young, social people, and crowded living and learning quarters – making them especially vulnerable

places for disease transmission. In fact, the defining traits of campuses like Longwood are community, tradition, and mutual responsibility.

Longwood wouldn't re-open successfully *despite* being a tightly-knit residential college campus. It would re-open successfully *because* it was a tightly knit residential college campus. The task now was the hard work of figuring out exactly how to make it happen.

Almost all of Virginia's private institutions seemed to grasp fully how urgent it was to move forward with an in-person fall, but the publics were not yet on board. In a stream of seemingly endless Zoom calls amongst themselves and with officials from K-12 and the Virginia Department of Health, the presidents wrestled with a problem rooted in Virginia's decentralized higher education structure. All the institutions craved some kind of guidance that would serve as both a green light and a road map for operating. But they were very different – from giant research universities with health centers to densely packed urban institutions to places like Longwood – mid-sized, in a small college town, and residentially focused.

One topic of discussion was a highly regimented set of restrictions the Connecticut higher education system had handed down for state institutions. But Connecticut's public institutions were quite similar to one another and more centrally run. It was clear such an approach would be almost impossible in Virginia – especially once the private institutions were factored in, too.

Reveley was in the center of the key discussions, as one of the several presidents appointed to serve on the Commonwealth's Covid-19 Education Response and Recovery Work Group, along with former Longwood Rector Marianne Radcliff – on top of an almost daily round of calls in his capacity as president of the Big South and a member of the NCAA Division I Board of Directors – both of which were navigating their own, comparably monumental questions about moving forward; Reveley and Big South Commissioner Kyle Kallander would swap insights, hunches, and strategy throughout the hard months ahead.

Radcliff and Reveley both spoke with Gov. Northam about the pressing riddle for higher education. The challenge for the Commonwealth was to find a mechanism of guidance that would in fact help campuses operate safely, and signal to students and families that it could be done – but avoid one-size-fits-all practices and requirements that would be unworkable or unreasonable at many campuses. In the end, it was a Longwood proposal that broke the logjam: Each institution, public and private, would provide to SCHEV, the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, details of its planning for a range of considerations rooted in CDC guidance – everything from moving students in, to dining and classroom arrangements, to managing cases, protecting vulnerable community members and communicating.

SCHEV and the Virginia Department of Health would review each plan. The substance of institutions' plans in each area could vary based on circumstances and resources. But SCHEV and VDH would certify that each had a plan. And each institution would share its plans prominently online, so students and families could make informed decisions before committing to the school year.

Reveley collaborated closely with his longtime colleagues Fran Bradford, Virginia's Deputy Secretary of Education, and SCHEV Director Peter Blake in the drafting process for the proposal and its requirements, along with VDH officials, and the Commonwealth finalized the guidance in late May and early June, promulgating it to institutions June 11. Each Virginia college and university had about three weeks to prepare and submit details for how the school would work in the fall – with their ability to open at all to in-person learning riding on this process.

In parallel, the pace of other challenges competing for time and attention only accelerated. On May 25, a viral video captured the hideous scene of a white Minneapolis police officer choking to death George Floyd over nine agonizing minutes. Protests erupted nationwide. Already in a state of highly anxious national politics, America was soon consumed with a national reckoning over police brutality and systemic racism. On May 29, hundreds of protesters marched through Richmond, some vandalizing local businesses. Richmond declared a curfew two days later. The coming weeks would see largely peaceful protests, but also vandalism and sometimes violent encounters with police in Richmond and across the country.

The nation felt profoundly on edge, and frustration on social media intensified. President Reveley emailed students on May 31 to acknowledge the pain, particularly of minority students, and express support. He issued a public statement from the University on June 4. “Today I recommit myself and all of us here to the hard work of listening, learning, striving to do better, and reckoning honestly with our past and present,” he wrote. Nationally, a wave of such statements emerged – but most of them sharing platitudes, not concrete plans. President Reveley felt Longwood had worked in recent years to warrant a reputation for honest reckoning with its own complex and painful civil rights history, including the 2014 apology for past actions, the partnership with the Moton Museum, and the launch of the Bicentennial Initiative in February, 2019. He was determined again to back words with action.

After a quick but broad range of conversations with campus leaders, he settled on a series of specific steps, which he announced publicly on June 17. They included the creation of an Equity Action Task Force, a new Title VI office to respond to issues of racial discrimination or harassment, a commitment to engage every graduating student with Prince Edward's civil rights history, and a series of forums and dialogues when students returned to campus in the fall. “With growing diversity comes welcome and appropriate energy pushing all of us to live up to Longwood's ideals,” he wrote. “Hard work remains. Still, I believe despite our diversity of backgrounds and ideas, our students, faculty and staff share common values: true collegiality, mutual respect and a desire to be active citizens making our community, and our country, better. These shared values equip us to navigate difficult challenges and conversations regarding our differences.”

Late the next evening, June 18, Reveley wrote again to campus to share more stunning news: Farmville's Town Council had voted unanimously to remove the Confederate statue,

which had stood on town property directly across High Street for 120 years. Within minutes, as bystanders gathered, but without incident, a town crew took it down.

As these events played out, Longwood continued taking steps to prepare itself financially for the coming year. On April 22, the General Assembly approved a budget that reduced state spending by more than \$2 billion in FY 2021 and 2022. Stories from *Inside Higher Ed* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* began noting furlough announcements at other institutions.

Altogether, more than 33 million Americans had lost their jobs. With the bond refinancing and the security it could provide still in jeopardy, Longwood needed to prepare for the year to come. Furloughs might still prove necessary, but the president had committed to shared sacrifice and was determined to start there.

“In this time of such disruption, the Board of Visitors and I are confident about the far future for Longwood. But we all should be clear-eyed about the challenges ahead,” Reveley wrote to campus on May 12. “We need to take hard measures now to prepare for next year. As this crisis has unfolded, I’ve committed to you to do all I can to avoid tearing at the fabric of the University community – our great source of strength. In practice, that means doing everything possible to keep our people employed – and, especially during this anxious time, tied to the Commonwealth’s strong health insurance and other benefits.”

The simplest approach was an across-the-board salary cut for the coming year, but the Cabinet felt that would hit the most vulnerable employees hardest. They worked through a complex spreadsheet trying out more progressive options. The final version, announced in the May 12 email, imposed a series of sliding-scale reductions across A/P and classified staff as well as faculty. Classified staff would see a 5.7 percent cut until Christmas, with a corresponding reduction in hours worked – an important consideration for families struggling with childcare and other challenges. For A/P employees reductions would range from 7 to 12 percent, rising through the salary band, and each would receive 30 additional days of leave. Faculty salary cuts would range from 4 to 8 percent. The University vice presidents would all take a 20 percent salary reduction, and President Reveley 25 percent. The progressive scale meant that more than half the total reductions would come from the top 20 percent of earners.

The savings would total \$3 million over the coming year, a meaningful contribution to fortifying Longwood for the challenge ahead -- but perhaps more importantly demonstrating the University was all in this together. Rector Eric Hansen had been especially encouraging of the approach; a similar step he had encouraged for his own company as CEO during a period of acute challenge had, in the long-run, strongly bonded employees together.

Another source of help came in the form of the \$1.6 million for the University from the federal CARES Act, signed into law in late March. The other \$1.6 million had come to Longwood as a pass-through, to be distributed directly to students in need. That required fast decision-making for how most fairly to do so, and to build a system to get the money out the door per the law’s requirements – very quickly, as Washington was insisting.

A working group from Administration and Finance, Student Success and Communications developed and quickly implemented a plan that gave \$618 to each of the 2,602 undergraduates who had filed a FAFSA form indicating financial need, with Cat Mobley and Jennifer Wilkerson from Waller's team playing a key role in building a payment system that met U.S. Department of Education guidelines. Separately, \$50,000 was made available to graduate and professional students. (The follow-up CRRSA Act, passed in late December, would also provide money for Longwood to distribute directly to students; Longwood is currently distributing grants of \$1,729 to each of 902 low-income students eligible for Pell Grants). At the same time, Sheri McGuire and her staff at the Small Business Development Center became the region's key hub for guiding area businesses through the federal relief funds application process, supporting \$10.5 million in local investments including Covid relief dollars, helping retain 730 jobs and create 94 new ones.

Then, in late spring of 2020, there were at last signs of a pulse on Longwood's bond refinancing. The REF team had remained vigilant throughout, as the REF Board itself proceeded with a long-planned transition in leadership in May, with real estate law titan Board President Bill Walsh handing off to another titan, John Daniel, former BOV member and former Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources. In a typical week on Wall Street, a dozen or more bond issues like Longwood's would come to market. Since February, not a single one had moved forward. But "sometime in June, for some reason, the market and the overall economy started feeling a little better," Fawcett said. "There was a downward tick in Covid cases. A small window just opened up and we thought we might be able to slip in there. We just stuck with it."

The Raymond James investment bankers were working the phones, and began lining up a new round of investor calls for Waller, Kindon, Pope and Reveley in early June. Longwood's April 16 announcement of its reopening team, and the early plans shared on the website, had provided some confidence the University was serious about having students back. Waller and Pope had helped write reams of new disclosure documents detailing the University's response to the pandemic. But the institutional investors who are the bond market's customers still wanted to hear directly from University leaders. Instead of questions about income streams and debt ratios, now they wanted to hear about plans for quarantine, testing and refunds. They were increasingly insistent that they hear from the top – clearly kicking the tires of the leadership to see if they were capable and serious. It was a game of cat-and-mouse. It was urgent for Longwood that the deal get completed. But if it moved forward and failed because there weren't enough buyers, it could be sufficiently tarnished to be stuck for months or years.

The stream of challenges came together in the final week of June – a stretch of hours and days that would be remembered by those involved as the most intense of the entire year. Pope was assembling the plan for SCHEV, which was now nearing 160 pages. Longwood was determined to submit before the end of the month, ahead of the deadline, hoping to be at the front of the line to receive word of approval. On June 24, Raymond James felt it was now or never for the bond closing. A series of final calls, closing memos and pricing decisions circulated. That same day saw the release of a new campus workplace policy, the product of a long series of discussions involving the VPs, university counsel Cameron O'Brion, and Lisa Mooney. They

wanted the policy, which set plans for teaching accommodations in the fall, to go out before the new fiscal year on July 1.

On the 26th, a final obstacle nearly derailed the bond transaction in its final hours; the S&P ratings agency suddenly announced it needed to review the rating that underpinned the transaction, given the pace of developments since it was first issued in February. But the analyst couldn't be reached. As late as noon chances of moving forward seemed 50-50 at best. A series of frantic calls ensued. Finally, just after lunchtime, word came: S&P had reaffirmed its rating for the transaction.

Typically, new bonds come to market first thing in the morning so the sale can proceed over the course of a full day. But Raymond James – wary of any more obstacles cropping up – went forward right away that afternoon. On a split screen amidst a range of other tasks, Longwood officials – and other curious onlookers around Wall Street and beyond – watched a video-game like app called IPREO Game Day that would show in real-time if orders for the first student housing issuance anywhere in the world since February were coming in – or if nobody was buying, and the sale would fail.

A team of more than a dozen stretching from Farmville to Memphis to Atlanta held their collective breath. Then, suddenly, the screen started popping with orders -- and then picking up speed. The response exceeded all expectations. The bond issue was oversubscribed by a factor of six, meaning orders for six times as many of the bonds had been requested by investors as were being offered. For a \$134 million offering, investors placed \$550 million in orders, leaving it to Raymond James to divide up the allotments to buyers who had hoped for more. At one point, Pope distractedly texted Waller expressing surprise that he'd seen a large, well-known investment bank – whom Longwood hadn't even been aware was interested – order \$120,000 in bonds. Waller texted back he was reading it wrong: they wanted \$120 million.

“It wasn't just luck,” Fawcett said. “We were the first credit to get into the market after Covid. It was a good team sticking together.” In a world often assumed to be dominated by numbers and charts, the human element had mattered; the conversations with investors over the months before paid off. “It was the messaging to the institutional buyers. I really believe that,” Fawcett said. “They weren't going to buy bonds in some place unless they had real confidence in their ability to bring students back to campus.”

“The Longwood deal” got widespread attention across Wall Street – and helped other institutions too by at last un gumming the market. “I will never forget it,” Waller said. “The student housing bond market was frozen – most investors were petrified to take on risk in this sector because of Covid. Hundreds of millions of dollars were leaving the market every week and for three months it looked like we would never be able to get this deal done.” But through persistence, “we were able to convince investors Longwood is a good investment.” She continued: “I can't overstate what this meant for Longwood and other universities around the country. Not only did it provide \$23 million in liquidity and peace of mind to focus on Covid, but we became a benchmark for other bond transactions to start moving again.”

There was, however, little time to celebrate. Finalizing the SCHEV submission took the entire following weekend. On Monday, June 29, Pope submitted Longwood's plan and posted it on the University home page. Meanwhile, throughout all these developments, the national racial reckoning story had continued to boil. On Tuesday, June 30, President Reveley emailed campus to announce three substantial changes to the names of campus buildings. The newly rebuilt residence halls, formerly named Curry and Frazer, would be renamed in honor of civil rights hero Barbara Johns and former professor and dean Gordon Moss. Ruffner Hall would again be known as the Rotunda. And the new academic building would be renamed in honor of Edna Allen, Longwood's first Black tenured professor and a beloved retired faculty member.

The next day, in extraordinary coincidence, Allen died unexpectedly, having been in long declining health.

Assembling the SCHEV Plan did not itself comprise the preparatory work, but it proved a useful organizing and forcing mechanism – a series of boxes to be checked, and a way of flushing out which questions were not yet answered. It stated what steps Longwood would take to prepare for students to return – but they still had to be executed. The blocking and tackling of getting ready began in earnest in June – for classroom learning on the academic side, and for residential life in a pandemic for Student Affairs and Incident Command.

In Academic Affairs, leadership of the task fell to David Shoenthal, Smith's top deputy and a soft-spoken mathematician whose normal bailiwick of accreditation and compliance rarely brought to his attention issues of class schedules, assignments and classrooms. The summer of 2020 would be utterly different. Shoenthal and Smith managed a complex operation evaluating requests from faculty with health or family situations for teaching accommodations – which included teaching online or hybrid courses, as well as particular scheduling and classroom requests. They were determined to honor valid requests but also maintain in-person learning as the core academic experience for most students for the coming year.

Shoenthal and Russ Carmichael, a director of planning in Facilities, along with Facilities colleagues Tracey Neihouse and Tammy Benhoff and help from University Events and Ceremonies, formed an operation that set about redesigning every classroom space on campus to implement distancing requirements between desks. They catalogued 284 spaces for possible use on campus, including 50 non-classrooms that were repurposed – among them Blackwell, the LCVA basement and a space at Longwood Landings that had been a fitness facility and was transformed for music performance. "It was a huge Easter egg hunt," Carmichael recalled.

Their tools ran the gamut from high-tech to low-tech: a jerry-rigged software program developed by a mathematician at Virginia Tech that analyzed room dimensions and space requirements and generated designs to maximize capacity; miles and miles of masking tape for floors; and an 8-foot-dowel laid endlessly down on floors to ensure seat spacing. "Tammy had this big stick that she just kept with her to make sure we were keeping things as far apart as possible," Shoenthal said. "We re-measured, taped and catalogued the seating capacity for every possible classroom space," he said. Moving furniture comprised his summer exercise. Shoenthal

kept a series of post-it notes on the inside of his door to post on the outside whenever he was away from his office. The most well-worn read “I’m on a classroom constitutional.”

The challenges went beyond just maximizing space – Shoenthal had to help 17 different departments adjust for their own teaching and learning needs the coming semester, details he worked out in a seemingly constant stream of conversations and meetings with department chairs. That meant preparing for courses that would have to be split into sections to accommodate students and some students might join online – and also whatever accommodations faculty had decided to offer students who needed to isolate or quarantine.

Longwood had decided to commit to students that there would be a way in every class they could keep up with work if they had to miss class due to quarantine or isolation – an essential policy to encourage students to be honest about possible Covid symptoms and staying in quarantine. But it would be up to faculty how. Some would record lectures for later review, while others were committed to incorporating students in real-time – “synchronously” in the suddenly ubiquitous terminology -- from afar over platforms like Zoom. Academic Affairs was determined that every classroom space would have the technology in place for so-called synchronous learning if faculty needed it. That meant cameras, microphones, and wireless capacity. Also on their to-do list: finalizing plans for upgraded classroom cleaning, and a redesign of the traffic flow in and around buildings between classes to ensure spacing, a task that would require hundreds of new directional signs.

Through trial, error, and countless hours, the plan eventually came together over the course of the summer. Longwood did have meaningful advantages over many institutions. As the SCHEV plan noted, only about 15 of Longwood’s 1,000 officially listed courses typically had more than 40 students. The opening of the new, 42,000-square foot Allen Hall created new classroom spaces. By decamping to the repurposed space in Longwood Landings, the Music Department usefully freed up Wygal Hall for other classes. The new capacities were greatly reduced but large enough to accommodate most Longwood courses: Jarman Hall went from more than 1,000 seats to 135; Wygal from 210 to 24, Jeffers Auditorium 238 to 34, Hull Auditorium 150 to 23.

The SCHEV plan noted a wide range of activity preparing for other aspects of campus life. Stockpiles of masks and cleaning supplies continued pouring in, with Michael Lonon coordinating distribution across campus. Aramark detailed a series of new requirements for food service workers – training, temperature checks, handwashing, and PPE. The Dorrill Dining Hall set-up would be shifted to “buffet style” to avoid contact, and many menu items would become “grab and go.” Capacity was shifted to 50 percent per Commonwealth Phase II guidelines, and several nearby spaces like the Grand Dining Room and Nance/Lewis were commandeered as spillover to increase capacity. Waller worked to negotiate additional hygiene steps into Longwood’s contract with Budd Group for the coming year – heightened cleaning frequency, stronger disinfectants, and plans for “remediation cleaning” for spaces potentially impacted by positive cases.

The revamped cleaning plans were a topic of greater attention on campus, but on their regular calls, Pope, Blackwood and other members of the umbrella planning team were increasingly focused on ventilation as a potentially more consequential area in terms of limiting the spread of Covid-19 (and other illnesses) on campus. Longwood was being bombarded with solicitations from companies touting expensive ventilation upgrades. Here, being part of the Commonwealth proved immensely helpful; state officials provided detailed advice to state agencies on what steps would help and which were a waste.

Over the summer, Longwood undertook a substantial inspection and upgrade regimen. Every HVAC unit was checked, coils and fans cleaned, parts upgraded. More than 3000 filters were installed with the highest MERV rating for their unit – essentially the strongest filtering available. A new contractor was brought in for further upgrades.

Across campus, settings were adjusted to maximize fresh air intake, and run continuously 24-7, rather than just during hours of use. These were not the normal settings because they were not the most energy efficient. But they would maximize air flow and filtration across campus. On the residential side, it was immensely helpful that every on-campus residence hall had been built or remodeled within the last 15 years. That meant ventilation systems were up to date, including in the two newly rebuilt and renamed giant residence halls on campus, Moss and Johns, where each suite now had its own direct air intake and outflow.

For Waller's facilities team, there was an extraordinary amount of work, little of which could be done remotely. John Ellison installed sneeze guards throughout campus. Vince Nichols, TJ Ferguson, and Tommy Witt managed the HVAC maintenance and upgrades, with project support from Jennifer Sheelor. Greg Stapleton improved lighting to encourage outdoor activities. Barbara Soldivieri assisted Lonon throughout, and Barry Gentry oversaw vehicle fleet planning.

Lastly, the SCHEV Plan detailed a broad range of plans for “de-densifying” campus life. Longwood decided to offer heavily discounted single rooms to any student – freshman, transfer, or continuing– living in an on-campus residence hall. The idea was to facilitate further spreading out in accommodations, and also reassure concerned families and roommates. Single rooms were offered at a discounted premium of just \$200 more than the double-room rate per semester. Nearly 300 students took advantage of this – again, all managed by Jean Wilwohl, in partnership with the Communications team.

The SCHEV Plan catalogued a range of additional steps around campus residential life: required masks in public spaces, signage requiring daily symptom checks, and dozens of additional sanitizer stations. Housing and Student Affairs collaborated on a detailed, staggered move-in plan, as well as training for Residence Life staff, plans for supporting international students, as well as protecting vulnerable faculty and staff, and for campus life.

A great deal of work remained over the course of the summer to bring these plans to life. But the physical aspects of campus, as laid out in the SCHEV Plan, were snapping more fully into shape for the coming year.

Longwood began preparing to manage the inevitable positive cases the fall would bring among students and staff. The University's decision in 2015 to hire Potomac Healthcare Solutions to run the University Health Center could not have anticipated the pandemic, but would prove essential to navigating the year – a resource many comparably sized institutions lacked. Over the summer, Potomac's site in Longwood Landings geared up. Longwood built a negative pressure suite for examining possible Covid patients. Further protocols took up 10 pages of the SCHEV Plan: spacing in waiting rooms, stocks of equipment and testing supplies, staff training, processes for reporting and communicating with VDH, and detailed, step-by-step protocols for handling potentially Covid-positive patients in the facility.

Student Affairs and Incident Command moved forward to set up a quarantine and isolation management system. One piece of luck was that Arc Hall was already scheduled to be offline for the year for maintenance. It was a natural, far more central and convenient place to use for isolation and quarantine housing, with Longwood Village available as backup.

Nationally, campuses faced doubts they could pull off such a system – but that ignored any college campus had experience almost every year with managing communicable diseases. To be sure, quarantine was less common. But Fraley was confident Longwood could figure it out. “We had services in place. We knew we could deliver food,” she said. “And we knew that people would pitch in and volunteer. We didn't think we had a problem providing these things to people as long as we had enough manpower.”

With encouragement from the local VDH office despite mixed guidance nationally, Longwood charted a somewhat different course from many peer institutions on several issues. The first was the question of mass testing of students. At the time, CDC guidance characterized mass re-entry and regular surveillance testing of college students as options institutions may want to consider. But there was also a longstanding school of thought in public health that mass surveillance testing of asymptomatic individuals was a waste of resources – and in fact, potentially counterproductive. By giving those who “passed” surveillance testing a false sense of security, it could diminish appreciation of the need for other mitigations.

Several members of Longwood's team were concerned this would be particularly true for Covid-19 in a college setting. The argument for surveillance testing was rooted in the fact that Covid could be transmitted by asymptomatic individuals. But the argument cut both ways – it seemed actively useful for everyone in the campus community, rather than being regularly reassured they were negative, to behave like they could potentially transmit the virus.

In the meantime, the considerable resources, including staff time, which some institutions were planning to invest in regular testing of asymptomatic students could be more effectively deployed in aggressive contact tracing and quarantine support. It was also relevant that college-age students were unlikely to become seriously ill from Covid – but others in the community might. That underscored the argument for an approach that encouraged everyone to behave cautiously, not one that tried to identify every possible asymptomatic case.

Finally, there was also the issue that test results took days to come in, and were of course only “valid” for the moment of the test. Even then, they were imperfect; false positive or

negative rates of even a couple percentage points would inevitably manifest themselves widely on a campus amidst thousands of tests and have real consequences.

In July, Potomac, Longwood and VDH met for a table-top planning exercise for the semester ahead. Dr. Nash, the local health district director, expressed his deep skepticism mass testing would help – and his view it could actually be harmful. “Testing was a big part of the questions as we were putting the plan together” that day, McGregor recalled. “We verified it over and over, and Nash’s opinion was that it does as much harm as good, with the delay, the false sense of security that you are clean, and just that it didn’t help with community spread.”

Another topic of extended discussion was the emerging trend of “dashboards” for colleges and universities to keep their communities informed about spread on campus. This was a new phenomenon for higher education and at Longwood, and every institution was charting its own course. Some planned detailed reporting on test positivity and many other metrics. Some institutions planned weekly updates, others daily. Some planned to report only on-campus cases. There was a steady stream of questions at Longwood about what exactly the University would share.

Longwood’s dashboard ideas were the subject of intensive discussions over the summer, with IT Specialist Kevin Bryant expertly translating ideas into proposed designs and eventually finalizing the website. It was a quiet, behind-the-scenes roll he would play for the Communications group throughout – taking the communications goals of the group and coding them into existence. He worked so hard Victoria Kindon purposefully refrained from providing feedback on projects on Fridays, knowing otherwise he would work through the weekend despite needing a break.

The group was determined that “because everyone else is doing it this way” would not be a guiding principle. The focus of the final dashboard design was to be frequent, simple and clear – providing a regular daily update of case numbers, including both Health Center positives and self-reports, and also to report separately student and staff cases. Positivity numbers, they felt, would be too confusing and potentially misleading. Real-time data on case data, however, made daily updates seem meaningfully more useful than weekly – and including self-reports and even cases totally off-campus (even far from Farmville) would give a comprehensive picture.

Speaking by Zoom to the Faculty Senate on August 10, McGregor and Pope gave detailed presentations on Longwood’s Covid-management plan, and the communications plan, including the dashboard and the reasons behind the approach. Nationally, a growing chorus of faculty were criticizing the idea of students returning to campuses at all. Pope noted that at Longwood and elsewhere, students who live off-campus were planning to return to their college towns regardless of the status of their universities. “They are tired of living at home,” he said. “It’s better to maintain as best we can and as responsibly as we can the structure of in-person learning.”

The final issue that attracted particular attention was masking – what policy would Longwood implement, and how would the University enforce the rules if students didn't comply? The guidelines on campus had gone through several iterations as the Temporary Workplace Policy was updated over the summer, and eventually landed on a requirement that masks be used in all public indoor spaces, except in certain settings like the dining hall or in music classes where other precautions were clear and in place.

As for compliance, the plan would be built into Longwood's employee policy and the Student Handbook. But fundamentally it would only work if rooted in something deeper – community ties and traditions, and in particular Longwood's Honor Code. The motivation, after all, was similar. The choices of each individual community member to act honorably and responsibly were what would allow trust and reassurance among the community as a whole.

Fraley oversaw a new electronic reporting system where campus or community members could file reports about possible offenses to be addressed by Student Conduct and Integrity. But more visibly, the expectations were set forth in a "Shared Commitment." Developed, notably, in conjunction with students themselves through the SGA, the document was released to students on July 14. It required daily symptom checks, and adherence to masking and social distancing policies, and specifically invoked the Honor Code in asking community members to look out for one another.

On July 15, Longwood shared via social media a message to campus from Fraley under the headline "Responsibility Belongs to All of Us." Fraley also introduced herself in her new role as dean of students. She wrote: "When we each take it upon ourselves to behave honorably, trust and community follow, making Longwood more special. In the same way, if we all do our part and behave honorably in response to this pandemic, we will be able to experience what matters most about Longwood this year."

Still, some sharp questions about what would happen if students didn't follow the rules came up at the Faculty Senate meeting on August 10, and again two nights later, when Pope briefed the Farmville Town Council about re-opening plans.

Longwood's leadership continued to believe the spirit and traditions of the University community would lead students to follow the guidelines – as would their obvious wish to be back on campus and not see the school year jeopardized.

But until they returned, there was no way to know for sure.

Chapter 3

The Alma Mater Onward

On July 24, SCHEV approved Longwood's re-opening plan. On August 6, Nash and his deputy David Martin from the Piedmont District VDH took a tour of Longwood's classrooms, dining facilities and residence halls, laying eyes on the work of the past six weeks -- the hundreds of signs, sanitizing stations and seating adjustments. Afterward, Nash said he couldn't imagine any institution could have prepared more thoroughly. But whether it would be enough, he couldn't say.

Contrary to dire fears from the spring, enrollment was holding up. The freshman class was smaller than hoped but bigger than feared, at just under 900. But a bump in graduate programs and the MBA meant overall enrollment was trending up slightly. Students were coming. Only time would tell for how long.

No one was busier around this time than Associate VP for Enrollment Management Jennifer Green, who was shepherding students through the complex array of in-person, hybrid, blended (in-person but with some virtual elements) and fully online offerings that had emerged. Once faculty and space-necessitated accommodations were set, Longwood ran 1,124 classes in the fall semester. Eight-three percent were in-person (including hybrid and blended) and just over half were fully in-person. The proportions at Christopher Newport, Radford, and VMI would be roughly comparable, but the other Virginia public universities all had a dramatically higher percentage of their courses online.

Some students were writing to "questions@longwood" with frustrations over online courses they'd been assigned when they preferred to be in-person. Conversely, 184 wanted to be fully or mostly online. Which courses were online was determined by which faculty needed accommodations, so it wasn't always possible to shape each student's path precisely as they wanted. Still, Green and assistant Nikki Bryant, with help from Larry Robertson and Josh Blakeley, worked with the colleges constantly, often late into the night, trying to usher students to courses that met their needs and wishes but also kept them moving toward degree completion.

"My goal was to accommodate everyone so we could save enrollment," Green said. Losing, say, 100 students who couldn't be accommodated would not just knock students off track but potentially cost Longwood six figures in revenue. "I worry a little bit with our efforts we may have unintentionally created a 'we'll do whatever you need' mentality," she said. "But it was either that or not have the enrollment, and that was a better risk to take." By the time fall class schedules settled in, 3 percent of Longwood full-time undergraduates had four or more

online courses. By contrast, 39 percent had zero online courses, 30 percent had one, and 19 percent had two.

In late July, Smith shared eight pages of guidance for faculty on how the coming year would work academically – accommodations, how student scheduling requests were being addressed, what to do when students needed to miss class, and masking. At the August 10 special Faculty Senate meeting, the second in two weeks and just a week before the arrival of most students on campus, Pope, McGregor and Smith fielded a series of follow-up questions on those and other topics. Smith, a former Faculty Senate chair herself, implored her colleagues to step up at this important moment, when their impact on students could be truly life-changing.

“I need you—your students want you—to do what you do so well: To teach them, to educate them as citizen leaders, to help them grow as people,” she said. “We can provide them these bright prospects in unclear times. And we must model the resilience, resourcefulness, and conviction that can make opportunities a reality. They look to us, they listen to us. The passion for the subjects that you share has not diminished, and our students are here to learn about topics you love. In this moment, we can give them an even broader appreciation for why those topics still matter.

“I have faith in you. I have faith that we can do this together,” she continued. “This work is going to be hard and challenging. It’s going to stretch us in ways we can’t anticipate. It’s going to test our ability to be flexible and roll with the punches. Inspire them with your teaching; reassure them in Longwood’s ability to nurture their growth. They need it now, more than ever.”

Nine days later, following staggered schedules and a series of welcome events revamped for careful spacing, New Lancer Days arrived. Outside her office in the Rotunda, Smith encountered a student for the first time in five months. He needed directions to Blackwell and she walked him and his family to the door. “It was this amazing moment where I thought, ‘this is why we are here. This is why we are doing this. This is why we are taking this risk,’” she said. “His parents were so grateful he was coming to college to have this in-person experience.”

Across campus, first-years arrived and began unloading belongings outside the Johns and Moss towers. The mechanics were carefully calibrated. Families were assigned times over two days to help spread them out. Elevators were prioritized for families moving to higher floors. Families were limited to three helpers, and student volunteers focused on advice and guidance but didn’t enter buildings.

“Seeing you all begin to arrive these last few days, and our beautiful campus return to life, has brought great joy,” Reveley wrote to students on August 20. “You are the reason Longwood exists, and you are the reason we have worked so hard this summer to prepare.” He acknowledged the continued anxiety in the country, and that the coming year would be unique – “a true lesson in citizen leadership for all of us – a reminder we are all connected and must be accountable to one another.”

Among those moving into Longwood was Micah King '24, later elected freshman class president, who arrived with a sense of relief the college he had chosen would give him an in-person experience. Many of his high school friends, he knew, were getting something less. “Stepping out and just seeing new people with the same goals as you, that was really monumental,” he said.

Monumental, but precarious. As Longwood began its on-campus experiment, news headlines from other campuses were less than encouraging. On August 17, two days before Longwood’s New Lancer Days, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill had already reported 177 positive cases after one week of classes, and announced it would shut down in-person learning for the semester. Notre Dame announced 147 positives in just two weeks and said it would move online temporarily. Closer to home, Radford, where students had returned before Longwood, had 293 cases by Sept. 1. That was the day James Madison announced it was moving classes online for at least a month, following a week in which the campus averaged almost 100 new cases *per day*.

It was no surprise that Longwood’s system for managing cases and quarantines was quickly tested. A handful of students got word after arriving they’d been potentially exposed back home and went almost immediately into Arc Hall. PCR testing results remained slow, and it wasn’t until the second semester that the widespread availability of quick-response antigen tests, and more flexible CDC guidelines, allowed many students who had been contact exposed to avoid quarantine. By September 1 there were four positive student cases, all isolating off campus, but 40 in quarantine.

The figures were tiny compared to what Radford, JMU, Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia were seeing. But the ratio was a quick lesson in how quickly quarantine numbers could multiply through contact exposure – even with relatively few positive cases. Much going forward would depend on how effectively the rules in place were limiting the number of contact exposures per positive case. With classes and campus life underway, those plans would now be fully tested. Would the rules and preparations keep cases manageable? And would they allow the in-person aspects of Longwood life – inside the classroom and beyond – to actually work?

For Longwood faculty, there were as many ways of trying to navigate the semester as courses to teach; no two had the same challenges. For some lectures, it meant splitting classes into sections. For seminars, the challenge was often continuing to nourish class discussions in rooms where students were physically spaced and wearing masks. With face coverings, “you lose your non-verbal tools that you have for classroom management and making sure students understand what you’re doing,” Smith said. “You can’t see the quizzical expression and know to ask, ‘Do you have a question?’”

A challenge for virtually every course would be incorporating students who needed to be absent – either catching them up asynchronously, or joining them synchronously via Zoom or another platform into the class itself. “That was just a huge amount of effort – for faculty who may not have been scheduled to teach blended (in-person and remote, at the same time) classes

but had to always be ready to switch on a dime,” Shoenthal said. Nobody, he said, seemed to find an easy way to teach blended courses.

While some faculty questioned Longwood’s decision to move forward with in-person, most “were practical enough to understand that it was mission-based, that that’s who we are, and also the financial practicalities,” Shoenthal said. “You have to follow through on what you say your mission is.” Faculty who stood in the practical camp “just wanted to make sure as many practical safety precautions were in place as possible.”

What emerged was a surge of creativity from across the faculty over how to make in-person learning work. In biology, Prof. Leslie Striker and colleagues focused their efforts on preserving laboratory assignments, which were hard to move online, as much as possible. In the College of Education and Human Services, Prof. Karen Feathers couldn’t fit into one classroom all the students in her Survey of Exceptional Children and Introduction to Assessment courses. But rather than blending in some online, she filled three neighboring classes in person, connecting them all by Zoom, but shuttling back and forth among them herself to teach while mixing in group assignments.

A public school teacher for 34 years before coming to Longwood, Feathers had plenty of experience improvising, making do. For her, keeping her students in the same seat and checking in with them in person was the priority. “If you told me I had to teach in a hallway,” she told her dean, “I would pull in whiteboards and stuff and I would figure it out and make it work.” Her priority was to maintain the human connection. “If I have a sense of who they are, I have a sense of how to teach them.”

Longwood installed more than 100 Adirondack chairs around campus to encourage outdoor gatherings, as well as fire pits. Some faculty made use of the chairs to teach outside. No department faced greater challenges than music – and none displayed greater ingenuity in preserving students’ in-person learning experiences over the course of the semester. Working with Shoenthal and Carmichael over the summer, the department had converted the former location of the Barnes and Noble bookstore at Longwood Landings into a classroom space, where it was able to teach in person during the fall and spring. Longwood’s choral and percussion ensembles, wind symphony and jazz band were able to have classes and practice there, spaced 10 feet apart and wearing special masks.

“I remember telling the students at the beginning of the year, ‘it’s going to be different and we’re going to learn a lot but you are going to learn some different skills,’” said Lisa Kinzer, department chair. “‘You are going to learn flexibility and perseverance.’ They were grateful that we were working face-to-face.” One student who was in multiple music classes and ensembles contracted Covid-19 early in the fall semester, but no one else tested positive and it didn’t spread. Continuing the full program of courses and practice through the fall set the stage for a spring semester with departmental recitals and a livestreamed concert performance via the department’s YouTube channel. Students got dressed up and performed live from the stage in Jarman, even though the auditorium was mostly empty. “I was really glad that we got to have those moments,” Kinzer said.

With similar challenges, students and staff also did their best to maintain versions of student traditions, keeping the flame alive to ensure they would be passed down. Longwood's numerous student organizations and extra-curricular groups navigated a tight set of meeting rules, each figuring out ways to maintain social bonds and activities.

Dean of Student Engagement Cheryl Steele and University Center and Student Activities Director Susan Sullivan took the lead in helping student leaders keep organizational life as vibrant as possible. Some, like the Outdoor Club, took advantage of new opportunities and attention – adding weekly activities like bike rides and slack-lining. There was organized stargazing, movie nights, and at least a partial version of Oktoberfest. Remarkably, students started eight new official organizations during the fall semester, among them the Six String Society (guitar), Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Greeks for Change and First Lancers Connect (a first-generation students group). Others adjusted; when they couldn't sing in the normal fashion, an a cappella group, Pitch Perfect, held virtual auditions and added four new members, and continued meeting for team-building activities and games. "We just needed to be together, even if we couldn't be signing," said director Molly Mancini '21.

"We tried to encourage the clubs and orgs that could to be active and to keep things as normal as possible. Students had to get used to doing things on a smaller scale," Steele said. "The Rec Center and the Outdoor Club really did stellar work to keep students active and connected. We were all trying to get students out of their rooms." She added: "We've all learned how to make better use of this beautiful campus we have."

Greek organizations were a focus of criticism nationally as stories of transmission at off-campus parties seemed to dominate news coverage of the return of college life. At Longwood, there would be several instances of transmission chains within Greek organizations, and four groups faced disciplinary probation regarding off-campus events. In the fall, members of Greek organizations accounted for about twice the proportion of students in the quarantine/isolation protocol (28 percent) as their proportion of undergraduates altogether (14 percent). In the spring, the gap was narrower (25 percent of those in quarantine or isolation, 18 percent of students overall).

To be sure, Greek life was a focus of concern and attention. Still, Student Affairs leaders also noted that was understandable; like all campus organizations, members were eager to continue with their purpose – and their purpose was essentially to be present together. In general, the leadership of Greek organizations "bent over backwards to try to get their membership to follow the rules," Fraley said. "They did great things trying to educate their members. It was pockets within those groups."

Longwood's famously vibrant SGA persevered – initially meeting in-person for the executive committee and via Zoom for the full body. They also helped facilitate outdoor activities, buying a portable movie screen for outside use and funding lights for the beach volleyball pit. "I know it made students feel good to see that our secret societies are still active and to see the traditions we were able to maintain," SGA President Brandon Bowen '21 said later

in the semester. “We were still able to have Late Night Breakfast, even if it didn’t look the same. Students were really excited to see the tree all lit up in the Rotunda. Longwood is pushing to find a way to still have those traditions, and students love it. The Longwood spirit is to be resilient and find a silver lining in everything.”

President Reveley, meanwhile, was determined to keep his postponed promise to the Class of 2020 for the most important tradition of all: some kind of in-person graduation experience – and if at all possible by the fall, before plans might begin to impinge on those for the class of 2021.

The challenge was that 50-person gathering limits remained in place. So after a lengthy explorations of options with Brenda Meredith, Ashley Long, Kay Stokes, and many others, Reveley invited the Class of 2020 to come to Longwood House for small ceremonies throughout the day on Saturday, October 9th. Each slot accommodated about 15 graduates and two family members, keeping the numbers under 50. Rector Eric Hansen himself was isolating in preparation for seeing his parents for the first time since the onset of the pandemic and could not risk any possible exposure, but the president and Vice-Rector Pia Trigiani ran the ceremonies – complete with regalia, processions, remarks, and the reading aloud of every graduate’s name. They performed the ceremony 17 times, from early morning until sunset.

As the Fall of 2020 moved forward, arguably no aspect of the university had been knocked more thoroughly sideways by the pandemic – not just at Longwood but nationally – than athletics. The program’s immediate focus in the spring had been supporting students. But Athletics Director Michelle Meadows’ attention quickly shifted to the complexities of building a structure that could safely support student-athletes to begin practicing again – and hopefully competing – whenever circumstances allowed. The nature of athletics made the actual public health challenges of spacing and testing even harder than elsewhere at the University.

But failing to try was not an option – for student-athletes, who without structure in place would likely struggle and might transfer – or the program itself, which would be hard to stand up strongly again if it somehow shut down. Leadership of the task fell to Senior Associate Athletic Director Rick Canter, whose team developed a plan on par with the campus-wide plan the University had submitted to SCHEV. Somehow, it reconciled the complex and often contradictory guidance from the NCAA, Big South, Commonwealth and others. The program would require detailed practice and testing guidelines to have any chance of moving forward. There was complex scenario planning for what to do, and how to communicate, when cases emerged within teams. Every aspect of the department, from academic support to bus travel to sports medicine to event management, was impacted, and it was all hands on deck.

On August 12, the Big South postponed fall sports competition until the spring. But operations were already in motion. The first students back on campus had been basketball players in early July. When one of those players showed up as an asymptomatic positive – caught by a Longwood test upon arrival – it provided an early trial run for those protocols, including the University’s isolation housing. But overall, things went smoothly.

“The basketball teams’ return was a pretty big confidence-booster for us,” Canter said. “At that time, everything was still hands off, socially distant and masked up. To at least have athletes come back in a controlled environment, be able to train successfully, and have as ‘normal’ a summer training session as possible gave us at least a strong starting point after facing so much uncertainty.”

There was an important public health dimension to running the isolation and quarantine experience smoothly. If students were unwilling to submit to quarantine, they might not come forward if they had symptoms or report their own contact exposures. Social media on other campuses was exploding with horror stories about bad food and prison-like accommodations; it was no wonder they were struggling with compliance.

Longwood knew from the beginning its plan would need adjusting with experience. In September, it became increasingly clear the logistical tasks of supporting students were too great to rely on volunteers. Potomac hired two Certified Nurse Assistants (CAN) to provide professionalize health monitoring for students in Arc Hall. Trash, food delivery and laundry services all required scaling up and reorganizing; in late October, with quarantine numbers near their peak, the team shifted to a system using student workers to deliver food rather than volunteers.

Still, as Fraley recalled, the task never felt beyond the capacity of the group to work through; it had been assumed all along the battle plan would need to evolve. “A lot of the people involved in planning and executing on the Incident Command team had also been involved in the Vice-Presidential Debate,” she said. “There was this deep well of trust and knowledge that we relied on. Once you do something hard together, you can do other hard things. There’s a ‘we’ll figure this out,’ attitude.”

As director of university events and ceremonies, Judith Campbell’s role was Longwood’s chief hospitality officer. But with outside events all cancelled, she and her staff turned their attention to helping Incident Command manage the isolation and quarantine operation. “We wanted Arc to be comfortable, so we brought in good sheets and extra towels and mattress toppers and good blankets – items that made you feel like you were in staying in a B&B,” she said. Campbell’s team pivoted when students made requests, buying 50 microwaves and mini-fridges. In addition to receiving regular check-ins, all students in isolation or quarantine, and their families, were given an on-call cell number that was manned 24-7, a week at a time, by Campbell, Fraley, Tracie Giles or Matt McGregor.

Nobody enjoyed isolation or quarantine – though for many the monotony was the worst part. It didn’t help that the vast majority of people in the system felt healthy (they included contact exposures who were negative, or were asymptomatic positives, or potentially had been symptomatic but were fully recovered well before their 14 days were up). In October, the CDC relaxed some of its strictest quarantine guidelines. Longwood immediately implemented a plan allowing quarantined students to get fresh air and walk outside safely. A relative handful broke rules and snuck out – including one who was symptomatic -- the only student all year who faced

disciplinary action rising to the level of suspension for a Covid-related offense. But unlike at many institutions, complaints about accommodations, services and resources were few and far between.

In hindsight, McGregor and others said, one of the most consequential adjustments as the fall had approached was bringing Jennifer Green directly into the Covid-19 response structure – not just for helping organize course schedules, but managing students academically through quarantine over the course of the semester. It became a more-than full-time job that would have overwhelmed the other team members. With her familiarity with Longwood’s academic side and network of working relationships with faculty, her team proved an essential addition.

The key was plugging the academic side directly into the line of communications that ran from the Health Center to the contact tracers to the quarantine support personnel. There were also privacy challenges to navigate. When a student had to quarantine, faculty got a carefully worded email notification so they wouldn’t be considered absent, and again when they were cleared. Faculty, she said, were “grateful to have a single point person.” Every few days each student in quarantine or isolation got an academic check-in from Green’s office by email. Some needed nothing, others needed extensive help. Early in the semester, Green drove to a Wawa convenience store near her house to drop off books for a student quarantining at home. “Everyone was pitching in to get students the course materials they needed,” she said. Heavier than books were electronic keyboards and other equipment for music students. “You wouldn’t believe the number of keyboards we carried over to ARC.”

Longwood’s case and quarantine numbers never approached those at institutions like Radford, JMU, or U.Va. – in total or proportionally. But the most challenging stretch of the year came in mid-October. After following guidelines well the first few weeks, student case numbers confirmed at the Health Center rose in early October. The contact tracing revealed a clearly visible pathway from off-campus events the previous weekend. While one or two positives per day had been fairly normal in September, there were a combined 11 Wednesday, October 7 through Friday the 9th. Quarantines were piling up too.

Over the summer, VDH had indicated it would likely handle contact tracing itself. But as McGregor and the UHC had anticipated, that was not the case, and they had taken on the work directly, realizing Longwood insiders could act far more quickly and effectively. So far that had worked well. Through September it had been encouraging to see that the relatively small number of positives were coming mostly from known chains of transmission, often among students who had already been identified as contact exposed and quarantined, limiting further spread. But in mid-October the work was expanding. On October 14, Longwood hit 97 students in quarantine and 39 active cases in isolation. Not all were staying on campus, but Arc was approaching capacity, and there was the prospect Longwood Village would need to be activated.

That Friday afternoon, Matt McWilliams sent the latest of his now weekly campus Covid updates, noting the uptick and urging the community to be especially careful. Pope and McGregor spoke at length about possible next steps if trends continued over the weekend. They contemplated further restrictions on dining and other activities – but there was no evidence of spread in those settings. They also discussed a period of online classes, following what other campuses had done when numbers got high – but again, there was no evidence of any spread in classrooms. Both felt strongly such a move would send a confusing signal about how to actually mitigate spread.

They agreed a productive step would be to reinforce the contact tracing team, as that work seemed to be a genuinely useful tool – especially if it could be done promptly. Larry Robertson, Jen Cox, and Josh Blakely were assigned to help McGregor. Each now worked in other corners of the University, but all were veteran Longwood hands with experience in Student Affairs. They were well-positioned to quickly navigate the academic and extra-curricular landscapes whenever there was a positive case, to identify others who might need testing or quarantine.

The culminating weeks of the historically vitriolic presidential campaign around the same time, and approach of Election Day on November 3, contributed to the general sense of stress. But fortunately, the tone of the weekend that followed was far quieter. The daily updates of the dashboard seemed to prove its worth; the numbers got students' attention. "When the numbers on campus started to rise, you could see students start to hold each other responsible even more," said Micah Clark, the freshman. The uptick peaked. By the end of the month the number of active student positives (essentially, positive cases within the past 14 days that required students to isolate) was down to zero. It stayed in single digits the rest of the semester.

Prompt and thorough contact tracing, which snuffed out lines of transmission before they could spread, was clearly a factor. "Ron Goforth (at Potomac) and I had daily contact, multiple times a day," McGregor said. "Communication was the key. He was literally sending me the positives as the doctor was still in the room telling the student they were a positive case. That's how quickly we could get those things turned around and get their contacts out of the general population."

It was a concrete example of how residential colleges, despite their density and sometimes risky populations, also had real strengths to deploy when it came to curtailing the epidemic – their dense network of relationships, resources and traditions allowed for contact tracing to work better than in almost any other setting. A dense community had its epidemiological downsides – but community could also be a powerful and perhaps countervailing resource.

The total dashboard tally for the fall semester was 119 student positive cases, and 11 among faculty and staff. A major reason for the relative success of the semester was students themselves. Contrary to the fears expressed in August, they had mostly embraced the face covering mandate. Complaints did come in through the Maxient system to Student Conduct and Integrity, on average about two per day over the full course of the year. But only about half were

considered actionable, and the vast majority were resolved with an admonition warning or, in some cases, social probation. “When behavioral issues came to light, most of our conversations were one and done,” Fraley said. “There was no need to have a repeat conversation, and most people took the requirements to heart.”

Surprisingly few of the complaints came from the off-campus community, which had been anxious. “I honestly felt we were going to get more concerns from the community than we did,” Fraley said. To the contrary, the sight of Longwood students almost universally masking as they walked through campus and town seemed to motivate community members.

“The College Students Showed Us the Way,” read the headline of a Nov. 25 *Farmville Herald* editorial looking back on the fall semester. Students had mostly headed home following the end of in-person classes before Thanksgiving, and the start of the mostly virtual exam period. It was no secret, the *Herald* wrote, that the Town Council’s emergency ordinance passed in August limiting gatherings to 50 people had been aimed squarely at students, and that the community had been wary. Early in the fall, “other colleges around the state and nation struggled, with many returning to the safe haven of remote learning and clearing residence halls shortly after students arrived. The odds appeared long for any institution of higher learning looking for a return of normalcy.”

“But as it turned out, we could learn a few things from the students,” the newspaper continued. “While they regularly followed the rules and wore masks even while walking around the streets of Farmville, many of the townspeople could be found shopping area stores and in other areas without masks. Health officials made it clear throughout the fall that the college students were not the cause of community spread in Prince Edward. The rise in cases was from simple community spread caused by gatherings.”

Neither Longwood nor Hampden-Sydney had been perfect, and each produced “moments of trepidation” for those following their dashboards. “But they hung in there, quarantined people who may have been contact exposed, and moved on.”

“May we learn from their diligence and commit to keeping ourselves healthy this holiday season and be a safer community for them when the students return in 2021.”

The November 3 election, with President Trump refusing to concede, had not brought the quick resolution of political anxiety many had hoped, and national anxiety about a possible spike in cases contributed to a sense of gloom amidst the shortest days of the year in mid-December.

Still, on December 16 came some happy news from Richmond: The General Assembly had chosen Barbara Johns to join George Washington as one of two Virginians to be honored with a statue in the U.S. Capitol. That day, Reveley sent a holiday message to students acknowledging it had been a “harsh and historic year” and “our achievements of 2020 weren’t the usual ones. Simply being together for in-person learning tapped our deepest reserves of creativity, flexibility and perseverance. We had to dig further still to maintain the human connections that are Longwood’s heart and soul.” These efforts had been tiring but successful.

“Our mission of preparing citizen leaders has never mattered more, and we should be proud to have succeeded, in such full measure.”

Longwood’s Board of Visitors, which had conducted virtually its two fall semester meetings, in addition to the emergency virtual meetings of the summer and prior spring, took out a full-page ad in the *Herald* on December 18 to express thanks for a successful semester. The Board thanked the Town of Farmville and local community, Hampden-Sydney, the Commonwealth and the University’s leadership – but above all, students, faculty and staff: “Our Lancers have been true citizen-leaders.”

A strength for Longwood throughout the crisis was the inherent trust between the Board and administration. The longest serving members, Rector Eric Hansen and prior Rector Colleen Margiloff, had both been closely involved in the hiring of President Reveley almost eight years before. All had helped navigate Longwood through moments of triumph and hazard alike in years prior. But this was a test unlike any in generations.

Chapter 4

Spring

Undergraduate classes resumed January 13. It was the very peak of the epidemic nationally. That week, more than 43,000 Virginians tested positive for Covid-19. Nationally, more than 1 million Americans were testing positive every four days. The country was on edge, following the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, and the heightened security around the inauguration scheduled for January 20. A number of young Longwood alumni were among the National Guard troops deployed to Washington.

Campuses across the Commonwealth saw high case numbers as students returned. By far the two highest-reporting days of the entire year at Longwood were January 21 and 22: a combined 28 students either tested positive at the Health Center or self-reported those days, plus two staff.

Yet while the Response Team was busy, the anxieties of the spring semester always felt more contained. One reason was simply that the experience of the fall had tested the system and proved it could hold up; with more personnel in place now the chances of being overwhelmed seemed lower. Potomac added a third CNA. Meanwhile, the chain of communications from the Health Center to Student Affairs and Jennifer Green had achieved a workable rhythm, with software support keeping close track of every student in the system – testing, contact tracing, and academics.

Another major help was the now-widespread availability of rapid antigen testing, and new CDC guidance, which combined to provide substantial relief in terms of the number of contact exposed students who needed to quarantine. The Commonwealth provided thousands of free antigen tests. “In the beginning, we were doing so many more PCR tests than Antigen tests, and we were sending students to Arc for a few days who ended up being negative,” McGregor said. By the spring, depending on timing of the exposure, students deemed contact exposed could usually get quick negative results and avoid quarantine.

During the fall, the team had needed to operate Arc almost like a hotel, with rapid turnover, and many students coming and going as PCR test results came back. Altogether, Longwood had 214 positive student reports in the spring semester, up from the 119 during the fall. But only half as many students had to be accommodated in Arc during the second semester as the first.

The final reason anxiety fell over the spring was vaccinations. Before the holidays, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration had approved the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, and

distribution slowly began. Initially, Longwood had hoped it might be able to offer vaccinations to faculty and staff sometime in the spring semester – and students perhaps before the fall of 2021. In fact, thanks to the fast-moving efforts of a range of people across the University and the strong partnership with the local VDH office, Longwood faculty and staff would have the opportunity to get first-dose vaccinations in mid-January – long before any other Virginia college or university.

In early December, Longwood lent Centra Southside Hospital a special, minus-80 degree freezer, one of two owned by the Biology Department, so that Centra could use it to store Pfizer vaccine for the community. As soon as the first vaccines gained approval, Longwood had reached out to Piedmont District VDH to offer nursing faculty and students to help vaccinate the local community. “I can say the answer is yes, we would love the opportunity to take part in this,” nursing department chair Kim Little had replied when first asked by the president’s office if they could help. For the moment, it was a question of lining up an MOU and planning ahead; there was not yet any supply of vaccines, or clear process in place in the district to begin storing, scheduling and administering doses.

On January 5, Pope emailed Nash reminding him student nurses would soon be back on campus and were eager to help with whatever plans the District was developing. Late on Friday afternoon, January 8, to McGregor’s surprise, VDH staffer Cindy Debusk brought up the possibility of eventually vaccinating students. That seemed premature given the pace of vaccinations so far. But cases statewide were at an all-time high, and it was clear despite the success of the fall, VDH still viewed college campuses as potential kindling for outbreaks.

On Monday morning, January 11, with pressure mounting from the Governor’s office in Richmond to get more doses into arms, Debusk told Pope the district had a supply of Moderna doses, but little yet in the way of a system in place to organize, schedule and administer them, including the challenging cold storage requirements for both Moderna and Pfizer. Pope asked how Longwood could help –communicating, setting up a scheduling system, administering doses?

Debusk asked how quickly Longwood might begin vaccinating its own employees. Pope said standing up a version of its employee flu clinic could probably happen within days. He assumed she meant on a small scale, starting with older employees. Instead she asked how many employees Longwood had altogether. “About 800,” Pope replied. She asked how many of them Longwood could administer shots to. “If you have doses for us, we’ll administer as many as you tell us to,” he said.

“I was surprised,” Pope said. “But it was clear their priority was to get shots into the arms of community members, and start building a wall of protection. I knew right away some people in the community would be frustrated. But I had a pretty clear view by now of how hard it was logistically to start this process, and it was clear to me there wasn’t anybody else out there who would administer those doses anytime soon if we didn’t. In the moment, I felt we had two choices. We could say no, we weren’t going to help. Or we could accept the request, use it to

work out kinks in the system, and then hopefully use it as a proof of concept to start getting others vaccinated.”

Nash confirmed his personal approval of the plan on Thursday the 14th. “I am happy to authorize the vaccination of all Longwood Staff beginning next week, on or about Jan. 18 or 19. Advancing them into category 1B,” he wrote. The approval came in a narrow window. A week later, on the final day of Longwood’s clinic, the Commonwealth reasserted more centralized control over the prioritization process, which had previously been left more directly in the hands of district directors to make on-the-ground decisions based on needs and resources.

The days that followed were a whirlwind preparation from a cross-campus team. Kindon, Hooper and the Communications group quickly team built a Longwood-specific online scheduling system and notification system to ensure an ambitious but manageable patient flow. Russ Carmichael, Potomac’s Ron Goforth and Police Chief Doug Mooney took charge of receiving and safely storing the doses in carefully monitored refrigerators on campus. Little’s department organized faculty and student shifts, and worked with Potomac’s Dr. Wade and the Prince Edward Volunteer Rescue Squad to line up emergency supplies in case any recipients had an allergic reaction. Human Resources prepared to staff the registration line and completed online training so they could record doses in the Commonwealth’s VIIS system, saving time for the overworked local VDH staff back at their office.

At 8 a.m. Tuesday morning, January 18, less than eight days after the plan was first floated, faculty and staff began lining up in the first-floor hallway of Stevens to receive their first doses. Over four days shots were administered to 634 individuals, roughly doubling the number of people who had been vaccinated in Prince Edward County. With VDH’s blessing, Longwood had added Aramark and Budd Group frontline workers to the eligibility list, and worked with both companies to schedule as many workers as wanted to get shots. Each afternoon there was a busy – and ultimately successful – rush to ensure no doses from opened vials went unused at the end of each day. Some employees scheduled for later in the week had already been contacted and asked to stand by for potential earlier doses if needed. Some shots were also administered to student nurses (who fell in the 1A group), and on one occasion, an elderly couple who lived across Griffin Boulevard.

On the first afternoon, Pope emailed Nash to report the clinic was moving along, but already looking ahead. “We’re busy with this current group right now, but with the vaccine management and patient flow system I think established, eager to start planning whatever we can do next for the community,” Pope wrote. “Please let us know what you think the best next use of Longwood is, in the context of your overall plan.” He suggested sending First Responders, or possibly area teachers. “If you let us know who needs covering, we can take it from there, and organize and staff.”

On January 26, Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors member Jim Wilck penned an angry letter to the *Farmville Herald*, stating the University had used “their political pull” and “feels like they are better than others and should be able to break in line.” But the newspaper itself, in a long editorial running alongside the letter, strongly defended the effort. “(T)he key is to get shots in arms as quickly as possible... We need everyone working together to solve this

problem,” the newspaper wrote. The editorial said Longwood’s effort would be a model for future clinics, and that Longwood’s vaccination pace of more than 150 people per day vastly exceeded what the local health department and Centra were managing. “It’s clear Longwood has the people and process to speed Prince Edward’s vaccination process along,” the *Herald* wrote. “This is a resource not commonly seen in a county of 23,000 people... Longwood can be our secret weapon to get us out of this pandemic mode quickly.”

Two days later, Nash himself wrote in the newspaper to explain the decision was his, and that Longwood had been eager to help. “Because of licensing and logistical issues, the most efficient and feasible immediate group was their ... employees,” he wrote. “Every dose we get quickly off the shelf plays a role in helping stop the spread of the disease. So I authorized and requested them to vaccinate as many of their employees as possible, and incredibly they administered almost 650 doses over four days. Now they’re helping with essential workers we’ve assigned them. Gov. Northam has encouraged taking advantage of such opportunities, and last week commended our partnership and efforts with Longwood.”

Indeed, two weeks later, the same teams reassembled in Stevens for another round of clinics – this time administering doses to 191 Prince Edward County Public Schools teachers and staff, and then 147 from Buckingham. Director of Local and Community Relations Jen Cox took the organizational lead, managing a shuttle bus system from the schools to campus. Through February and into early March, four weeks after the respective first clinics, the teams reran the clinics almost identically for second doses – all on top of their normal teaching and staff work.

Since the beginning of the year, Longwood’s primary health concern had been the vulnerability of faculty and staff, given the strong correlation between age and risk of serious complications from Covid. Now that most were vaccinated, that anxiety diminished considerably – including for the students. The announcement faculty and staff would be vaccinated “was a big sign of light,” SGA President Brandon Bowen ’21 would later recall. “To me that was the moment that there was all this promising light at the end of the tunnel.”

Vaccines for students also came sooner than first expected – though not without their own last-minute logistical challenges. In early April, VDH officials told the weekly Zoom call of public university Covid managers the agency was eager to push student vaccination clinics on campus ahead of graduation and the dispersal of students back home. There was a rush on many campuses to move forward with first-dose clinics so students would still be on campus in time to receive second shots.

Longwood, whose academic year ran later than some, had offered to wait longer, until late April or early May, if it could be assured supplies of one-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccines. But on Tuesday morning, April 13 came the totally unexpected word that U.S. regulators were pausing the J&J vaccine over possible blood clotting concerns.

By midday, Longwood’s impromptu vaccination team was once more rushing into action, this time to assemble a Pfizer vaccination clinic for students on an even faster timeline than in

February. They had expected to have three weeks to prepare for a one-dose clinic; now they had two days to prepare for the first of a two-dose one. They aimed for the following Friday and Monday, because with the change to Pfizer they would need to rerun the clinic again before the end of the semester. The Comms team reassembled the scheduling software, and this time the clinic set up in Willett Hall, with many of the same staffers taking the lead. Lisa Mooney, Jeanne Hayden, Shannon Christian, Reggie Marsh, Heather Staylor, Kim Witcher and Donna Morris from HR manned the line and entered data. Jen Cox, Josh Blakely, Matt McWilliams and Matt McGregor monitored students and worked with them to confirm plans for second doses. Nursing faculty, staff and students along with Potomac personnel administered doses. Events and Ceremonies, Information Technology and LUPD also contributed.

By now, many students were reporting they'd already gotten vaccinated elsewhere in the community. But the two-day clinic administered shots to 529 people, the vast majority students but also some community walk-ins, who were invited over social media. "Universities are not famous for swinging quickly into action, but this week was proof again that when you have the right Longwood people gathered, anything is possible," Pope wrote to the group. Despite the J&J curveball, "Without any particular drama, each of you worked together, and we figured it out." The team came together once last time in early May for second doses. The final dose of the year went to a construction worker who was doing initial site work for the new Joan Perry Brock Center just outside Willett, a key project embodying Longwood's dreams for the future. As the nurses began working to break down the clinic and put away their equipment, he was flagged down, offered a shot that would otherwise have gone unused, and gratefully accepted.

Altogether, Longwood and UHC nurses, including students, administered more than 3,000 doses, vaccinating 1,564 individuals. Nursing faculty and students also vaccinated hundreds more area residents while doing clinical hours staffing the vaccination clinic at Southside Community Hospital. In the early part of 2021, a solid majority of those who received the vaccine in Prince Edward County got their dose from someone with a Longwood connection.

For student nurses, the experience was invaluable educationally and personally moving. "It's definitely been my number one experience as a Longwood nursing student," said Grace Puleo '23, who worked eight clinics over the semester. "I feel lucky to have participated in giving out so many vaccines." At the nursing department's annual retreat in early May at the Hotel Weyanoke, President Reveley presented the faculty a copy of the resolution of appreciation passed by the Board of Visitors.

The spring semester did not bring full normalcy, but adaptation and accommodation to make due until a full return was possible.

Longwood athletics pulled off what the previous summer might have seemed an insurmountable task, administering (some in partnership with the UHC) 4,426 surveillance tests and working with coaches on guidelines to allow practices and games to move forward. The surveillance testing resulted in 11 positive cases, a positivity rate of 0.2 percent. But in all student-athlete cases, any transmission traced came via housemates and sources other than

official team activity; there were no known or suspected instances of transmission in a practice, game or other team setting.

Over the winter, the men's and women's basketball teams played more than 90 percent of their scheduled games, more than any other institution in the Big South. The Lancer men played a league-leading 28 games and had just three canceled – all due to Covid issues outside of the Longwood program. The women played 25 times for the second most among Big South women's teams. Together, the Lancers' 53 basketball games, under head coaches Griff Aldrich and Rebecca Tillett, were the 33rd most games played among the NCAA's 347 Division I institutions. Both programs hit records for conference wins and earned post-season bids.

In the spring, Longwood Athletics undertook the unprecedented challenge of simultaneously running not just its spring sports, but the delayed fall ones, too. The effort, especially with the Covid-19 protocols in place, was immense – taxing staffing for event management, communications, and most especially athletic training staff, under the leadership of Carly Fullerton '07. But the structure and opportunity they provided Longwood's 250 student-athletes were hugely meaningful – and results on and off the field were exceptional.

Five Longwood teams finished in the top four of their respective conference standings. Three Lancers received major conference awards, including Big South Scholar-Athlete of the Year, Carrie Reaver '21 from women's soccer, who was also valedictorian. Reaver's teammate and classmate Madison Hommey '21 won another of the University's highest awards at Commencement: the Dan Daniel Senior Award for Scholarship and Citizenship.

“It would have been easy to just cancel all competition, cancel all training, but we're also talking about ingrained identities for our student-athletes that they have solidified over the course of their lives,” Canter said. “It behooved us to do the best for our athletes to preserve some of that identity throughout the year and continue to provide them those irreplaceable flash points for personal growth that are inherent in sports.”

“You don't realize how important the group dynamic is with a team until it's taken away,” said women's soccer head coach Todd Dyer '92. “Last March, when we went home, there was such a void in terms of that in-person contact, that togetherness.” As his team took the field for its first game against USC-Upstate, he realized it was the first time he had seen all his players' faces in a year. “It hit me. It was hard to understand how much that means in terms of that personal connection.”

Academically, Longwood's 200-plus student-athletes ended the 2020-21 season with a record spring GPA of 3.26, the department's highest-ever. Longwood's athletic training staff of Fullerton, Lindsay Bentley, Yu-Jin Shim, Jessica Siler, Sam Wanger, Rachel Stapleford and Sean Berberich was awarded, along with its Big South counterparts, the conference's annual leadership award.

In February, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported 650,000 jobs had been lost since the start of the pandemic across American higher education. Financially, Longwood's budget

situation remained challenging but under the stewardship of Waller and Chip Bowman achieved stability, thanks to a range of factors: the cushion of the shared salary reductions; the bond refinancing, reduced spending in areas like travel, stable enrollment, federal stimulus dollars that reimbursed some Covid-related expenses, and an eventually finalized state budget that was far better than feared.

The Admissions Office developed and executed plans to safely continue campus tours for prospective students – a relative rarity among colleges in the Commonwealth. Philanthropy began returning to its normal rhythms. VP for Advancement Courtney Hodges and her staff, while also pinch-hitting in various needed roles on campus and advising on communications, had spent much of the year maintaining relationships with donors. After missing 2020, on March 25, 2021 Love Your Longwood Day returned, raising a record of nearly \$390,000 from more than 1,800 donors. The success “was a celebration of all that Longwood accomplished despite the pandemic, as well as a reminder of the community of support we have for the work we still have to do,” she said.

As promised, classified staff salaries were fully restored by Christmas, and A/P staff by June 1, with faculty soon to follow. Medium- and long-term financial challenges related to the pandemic – including its impact on family finances and potential impacts on enrollment and retention going forward – remain real and meaningful. Nationally, college enrollment was 6 percent lower in the spring of 2021 than it had been a year ago.

But the prospect faced at Longwood in March 2020 of genuine financial crisis, and large numbers of layoffs, was avoided.

The cold days of February were rough on the campus psyche. But things improved as the weather warmed, some classes moved outdoors, and case numbers fell. On March 14, Reveley sent a mid-term message to students, noting continued large outbreaks at other college campuses and the need for continued vigilance. “But with the first feel of spring in the air, I am more hopeful than I have been for some time.” The spring, he predicted, would see more and more aspects of life returning to normal. “As for next fall, I believe we really can look forward to a far more normal campus experience, closely resembling the deeply connected Longwood we know and love.”

Smith worked to keep burning the flame of academic life and community. In May, a new institute to help prepare faculty to teach Civitae courses incorporating Prince Edward’s Civil Rights history, funded by a \$100,000 grant from the Teagle Foundation awarded just before the pandemic, went forward in partnership with Moton, to great success and acclaim. Under the leadership of Cam Patterson, Moton had also navigated the year successfully, developing and sharpening a host of online resources that found their moment as schools scrambled to find quality online resources to continue teaching history during virtual learning. Patterson also served valuably in the University cabinet, and as a key leader in the community effort with Prince Edward County and others to encourage vaccinations.

As the end of the year approached, Smith challenged academic departments to plan careful in-person events for the end of semester, so students who had seen far less than usual of their professors and fellow students could do so before graduation. Late April saw a string of such gatherings – part re-union, part ceremony, all carefully planned – at the Alumni House and other locations.

Such end-of-year moments carried special weight. Malik Thornton, a freshman music education major who'd been delivered his musical instruments so he could practice while quarantining in Johns Hall, recognized if Longwood had not persevered in-person his musical education would have ground functionally to a halt. "If I were at home," he said, "I don't know what I would have done." The triumphant moment of his year was April 18 with the Longwood Wind Symphony concert in Jarman – no public audience, but playing together. The program included John Whitewell's *American Elegy*, a favorite piece that he said "resonates with my soul."

"I can't put into words what it was like to sit on that stage with the entire ensemble and contribute to some of my favorite music," Thornton said. "I had been looking forward to that moment since I graduated high school."

The biggest tradition of all was the one that, almost until the end of the academic year, seemed most unlikely to pull off. "When we returned in the fall, I honestly didn't think Commencement was possible," said Ashley Webb '21. "We had spent all these years here and made all these memories and I thought we wouldn't be able to celebrate." With strict Virginia guidance in place through the winter and fall, it seemed like some kind of repeat of the sequence of small ceremonies in October was a best-case scenario.

Still, the Class of 2021 signaled how important it would be for them to graduate together as a class, and Reveley continued to hold out even as other institutions began finalizing plans for virtual or greatly reduced celebrations. On March 2, Longwood told seniors it hoped to have an in-person ceremony on the scheduled date, May 15. On March 17, Gov. Northam released four pages of precise, strict requirements for commencement ceremonies – tight capacity limits and entrance controls, 10 feet of distance between individuals, no shaking of hands or handing out of diplomas, and relentless sanitizing.

The next day, Brenda Ferguson Meredith, the veteran Commencement director in the president's office, confirmed to seniors there would be a ceremony on Wheeler Mall, with a limit of two guests. "Honestly, I was speechless, because I didn't think it was going to happen," Webb said. "I thought we might have something together with just the class and no guests or some small ceremonies like other schools." Anne Patterson '22, the incoming SGA president, said the announcement gave a needed boost of energy. "Having that news made people really push through the rest of the semester," she said. "There was a period that was tough on students around mid-terms. Once we got through that period and into the spring people started to feel a lot more positive."

The announcement, however, was frankly an act of faith; Meredith and colleagues in Facilities and University Events and Ceremonies had as yet no idea yet how exactly the ceremony would work, and how the whole class and guests could fit onto Wheeler while meeting the strict guidelines. Over the days ahead, they would pour over 27 diagrams, marking up arrangements to maximize the number of “pods” of students and guests in place, with required distancing, to accommodate the class. The other priorities were allowing students to make a traditional processional in as a group, and every graduate hearing his or her name called, ideally while crossing the stage. As for how to do those things, all the normal methods from past ceremonies were off the table, and any conceivable solution was on it.

Most Virginia public universities stuck with plans for conducting smaller, sequential ceremonies. But Meredith and her team persisted. A geometrical seating arrangement was identified that hit the capacity marks. A breakthrough on the challenge of lining up the students properly and sequencing the announcements of their names as they arrived on stage came with an idea borrowed from the Southwest Airlines boarding process – giving students numbers and having them line up beside numbered signs in groups to move forward.

On Friday, May 14, just hours before the weekend’s planned activities got underway, Gov. Northam announced the end of masking requirements for vaccinated individuals, following a change in CDC guidance the day before.

That evening on Stubbs Mall, former Virginia Secretary of Education Anne Holton provided the final Longwood lesson with her remarks to 254 graduate students before their degrees were conferred. Graduates were hooded in their seats by family members rather than faculty, in an innovative approach to observing the public health protocols.

The following morning, with some traditional elements adjusted but the essentials in place, the undergraduate Class of 2021 marched into place under cool sunshine and onto Wheeler Mall – newly resplendent with a plush green lawn following the long-delayed completion of the steam tunnel reconstruction project that had left it torn all year. Campus itself was especially beautiful, under the stewardship of Dave Love, Director of Landscape and Grounds. A silver lining of the shutdown in the spring of 2020 was it had given the grass across central campus a season off from the wear-and-tear of foot traffic; as a result, Longwood’s lawns were fortified and shone bright, untrammelled green.

To preserve the required pod spacing, graduates sat with their two guests. Nine-hundred thirty seven degrees were conferred. Following the Southwest Airlines system, the class lined up and crossed the stage, passing the beloved Joan of Arc statue, which had been moved from Rotunda to the graduation stage to confer the spirit of the Alma Mater, with traditional handshakes outside the bounds of the public health protocols. Per tradition, Prof. Chris Swanson sonorously read each name aloud.

The Board of Visitors observed the strict limits on attendance, with the Executive Committee serving as representatives for the whole: Eric Hansen, Pia Trigiani, Mike Evans, and Eileen Anderson, with Rector Hansen giving powerful remarks. Acclaimed broadcast journalist Ray Suarez gave a rousing keynote address, noting the unusual challenges not just for the year

but for an entire generation. “You don’t get to pick the times that you grow up in. You don’t get to pick the times that you become an adult in. They pick you, and you’ve got to make the best of it” Suarez told graduates. Having come through the events of the past year, he said, “There’s a rudder on your boat. You’ve been given the tools to be head up, eyes forward, wide awake in an unpredictable and challenging time. But it doesn’t have to sound so ponderous. Light up every room you’re in. Don’t be bored, and don’t be boring. Be salt. Be bread. Be light. Be a gift to everyone you meet.”

Longwood, VMI, Virginia State and Norfolk State were the only Virginia public universities where the full class graduated together. That Commencement coincided with both the re-opening of Wheeler Mall and the lifting of the mask mandates, as vaccines had become widely available, heightened the sense of spring renewal, rebirth and awakening. For the students and their families, it was a profoundly meaningful send-off following a hard year, navigated with resilience and ultimately success. “It was really special to have a ceremony that was as normal as possible,” said Webb, whose boyfriend and mom attended with her. “I’m honestly proud to be part of a school that worked so hard to make that possible.”

Reveley in his own remarks that day told Longwood’s graduates, “At its finest, a college campus is a temporary paradise, one that fires your ambition and your pride. The Alma Mater also becomes a shelter in the storm, a home forever through the seasons of life. We are so proud of you, all you have become, all you set out to do.”

Conclusion

The course of the 2020-21 academic year and the spring prior was far from perfect. With hindsight, variations on the path would have been taken, or discovered earlier: more emphasis on air circulation and less on classroom hygiene, a quicker recognition of some of the logistical challenges of quarantine. In early summer, Longwood had decided to make only small adjustments to its academic calendar, while other institutions more dramatically moved up or back their semester starting dates. This seemed like guesswork. In the fall some places that moved starting dates either forward or back regretted the decision; for Longwood the guess turned out on target in terms of health and welfare, even though in the spring, Longwood's mid-January return turned out to be near the absolute national peak of the pandemic.

For all of the preparation, effort, and technology, there was persistent difficulty in engaging students who needed remote access synchronously into an otherwise in-person class.

Overall, Longwood's students showed exceptional commitment to public health guidelines – but inevitably over the long haul there were let downs, most commonly off-campus and while visiting other campuses. While the sense of community obligation proved a valuable tool, there were complaints that the system of filing complaints over masking was sometimes abused for personal or group grudges.

Still, that problem stemmed from the students' sometimes zealous commitment to enforcing the safety rules they had agreed to – rules they saw as the ticket to allowing the semester to continue. Before the year began the concern had been the opposite – not that students would be overzealous, but rather that they wouldn't try at all.

Longwood's goals for the year were 1) to continue in-person learning, uninterrupted, while mitigating – not eliminating -- the spread of Covid-19, and 2) to protect the potentially most vulnerable members of the community. In this it succeeded.

Over the course of the year, there were 333 Longwood student positive case reports, on-campus and off, or about 6.8 percent of students. There were 33 reported faculty/staff positives.

McGregor estimated that roughly two dozen student cases could be characterized as having moderate or severe symptoms; the rest were mild or asymptomatic (largely the result of tests tied to contact tracing or athletic surveillance). There were no hospitalizations or fatalities. A small handful of students who had previous medical issues and also got Covid either withdrew from a course or took an incomplete, or in one case a temporary medical leave.

Despite concerns about the density of congregate settings, there were substantially more cases among students living off-campus than in on-campus residence halls. The most common lines of identifiable transmission were from family members while visiting home, roommates and housemates, boyfriends and girlfriends, and social settings.

There were no known or suspected cases of transmission in any classroom or academic space, in any campus dining setting, or in any Longwood office or workplace setting.

The University Health Center conducted 3,008 tests – 1,868 PCR and 1,140 rapid antigen. A total of 250 students were accommodated at some point in Arc during the year. The highest number in the quarantine and isolation system was 201 on January 27. Altogether, either on-campus or off, 1,251 students spent at least some time in quarantine or isolation (though in many instances briefly while awaiting results).

A full picture of the impact of the year on students – academically (retention, degree completion, etc), developmentally, and in terms of their physical and mental health – will take years to study and emerge, and may never be fully revealed. It is impossible to compare the Longwood students who went through the year with an imaginary cohort of themselves who would have stayed home if Longwood had not re-opened to in-person learning.

Academically, the analysis is in its early stages. Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement from the fall of 2020 showed Longwood freshmen scored significantly higher than peer Southeastern public universities in areas that might have been worrisome with the restrictions: collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and quality of interaction. A different barometer is that survey results from Longwood's partner Aramark indicate students' overall satisfaction with campus dining services during the year was 91 percent, the highest in the entire east region nationally for Aramark, a testament too to the efforts of Director of Operations Joy Presley and General Manager Mitch Rodhe.

Overall student GPAs were comparable to prior years. Quarantine, it turns out, was on average good for grades; students who spent time in quarantine saw higher GPAs both fall and spring semester -- about a third of a letter grade, or the difference between a B and a B+. As Assistant VP for Student Success and Retention Emily Heady noted, it turns out when students have to spend an extended period of time with few distractions available, they study. Notably, there was a bigger impact for students who both spent time in quarantine and also had other factors of concern such as poor attendance, mental health or other issues that had brought them to the attention of the Care Team (the several-times-daily check-ins that were part of the quarantine experience likely helped in a range of ways).

On the other hand, it is clear some students struggled over the course of the semester with online learning, personal, family and mental health issues, diminished structure and other worries. The experiences of first-year students were, predictably, of special concern. About 15 percent of the cohort entering in the fall of 2020 was placed on academic probation, comparable to past years. But the number on academic suspension was considerably higher: 13 percent, compared to 7 percent and 8 percent, respectively, for the prior two cohorts.

At the end of the fall, the percentage of freshmen in good academic standing was 72 percent – six percentage points lower than the year before. At the end of the full year, the percentage of freshmen in good standing stood at 81 percent, compared to 89 percent and 90 percent the two previous years. For other students, the figure was 98 percent, compared to 99 percent the prior year. “This was a hard year for our freshmen, but we’re working through it,” Heady said. “Otherwise, we did well.”

Beyond grades, it was abundantly clear that it mattered viscerally for students that they were able to be together.

“It was a big relief to have some kind of normalcy,” said Taylor Jennings ’21. “Coming back made a lot of us feel like Longwood really cared about us. We needed that safe space to have something of a normal routine, and a place of support for those of us who were struggling mentally. A lot of us were thankful Longwood prioritized students being here.”

“As human beings community is vitally important. When we start disconnecting with each other, that’s when things really unravel,” said Chris Kukk, whose first year as dean of the Honors College coincided with the pandemic. “Longwood has been kind of that oasis in this desert of lack of connections. We were able to keep those connections alive.”

What made the year successful?

One key reason was the partnership with Potomac Healthcare, which has operated the University Health Center now for five years. A successful year would have been almost unimaginable without Potomac, and many institutions of Longwood’s size struggled mightily – totally dependent on community providers. Longwood’s staff worked seamlessly with Potomac on patient management, contact tracing, and eventually vaccinations.

The two lead medical providers, Dr. Robert Wade and N.P. Harriet Vincent, both had long experience and deep relationships in the community that proved invaluable. More importantly, they were steady, competent, and firm but reassuring voices of comfort and care for hundreds of students who did – or feared they might – have Covid. The University certainly fielded some gripes over the course of the year from families and students who didn’t think they needed to quarantine, and occasionally (though comparatively rarely) about student support and accommodations. But there were few if any complaints about medical care. On the contrary, most seemed to realize that their access to high-quality providers with the time and ability to provide detailed attention and care was a great and rare luxury, particularly at the height of the pandemic.

The strong partnership with VDH locally also was key – in a variety of ways, some unexpected. Several Virginia colleges and their local VDH offices were at constant loggerheads. After Longwood launched its vaccine clinics, by contrast, Nash, the Piedmont District director, wrote to express thanks and called the University “better than the best partners I could have created in my wildest dreams.” The table-top planning exercise in July had envisioned VDH would handle contact tracing, but Longwood officials correctly suspected that would prove

impractical, and put staff through contact-tracing training just in case. Sure enough, the work would fall almost entirely on Longwood staff – but they were able to execute it quickly and effectively. “That along with the vaccines were the areas where we didn’t wait for them to come to us, we went out and said we are going to be ready to do this, and so I think that was the big step for our fall, really,” McGregor said. “We were getting people out of the general population when they were contact exposed and minimizing the amount of damage they were doing.”

Similarly on testing, Nash’s views that surveillance testing would not be helpful – and could potentially do harm – gave Longwood the confidence to try a different route than other institutions. While further research may at least partly parse the national trends, it seems unlikely that the data will show any obvious superiority to the approach of institutions like U.Va., JMU and many others nationally that used mass reentry and surveillance testing -- but still had thousands of cases. Longwood, by contrast, focused efforts and benefitted from student vigilance that came from community members understanding they could be a carrier.

“We did 3,000 or so tests at the Health Center, and that’s not going to be a high number compared with most of the schools in the Commonwealth, but we were testing the right people,” McGregor said. “Our positivity rates are probably higher than those other places, but we were testing those who were sick and exposed, and then right away we were doing aggressive contact tracing. That’s one of the things as we’ve gotten through this is we did it a little different than most places especially in the spring, but there’s nothing about that I would change. That was one of the best decisions we made.”

There was flexibility to recognize what wasn’t working and adjust – like food delivery and trash pickup for students in isolation, or the need to professionalize the medical checks with CNAs. The regular involvement of the SGA gave students a continuous voice – but sometimes the best step was sticking to plans. Throughout the semester some students were vocal in advocating a change to the policy limiting visitors from other parts of campus (and outside) in residence halls. But the student leadership was wary of any changes that might jeopardize the semester, and the Student Affairs staff felt the practice made a real difference in limiting spread. “One of the things that saved us all year was our residence hall visitor policy,” Fraley said.

Communication was imperfect – but thorough, constant, and generally balanced between reassurance and realism. Campus community members saw hundreds of emails and social media posts, and had access to a growing library of FAQs along with the dashboard. After a few complaints from faculty during mid-summer about the pace of details about emerging plans, Matt McWilliams started a regular campus email update.

Altogether, McWilliams sent 57 all-campus emails between March 5, 2020 and April 29, 2021. President Reveley sent 21 messages to students, including three in late June, normally the quietest stretch of the year, and roughly the same number to faculty and staff. Dozens more came from Lisa Mooney, Justin Pope, Louise Waller, Larissa Smith and McGregor. It helped that Longwood, wherever possible, tried to develop and communicate policy through regular channels – the Cabinet, the Faculty Senate for Academic Affairs, the Human Resources Office, and the University Planning Council.

The final, ingredient, of course was the hard work of people – too numerous to list fully – across the University.

That included staff – from Student Affairs guiding students at all hours, to Facilities personnel and food and cleaning contractors who worked under additional burdens and risk, to contributors from virtually every other department who at various times and out of the public eye helped students, helped staff vaccination clinics, or just picked up the slack from other employees who had new responsibilities.

It meant faculty -- who had to quickly assemble entirely new approaches to teaching, while also being called more than ever to serve as mentors, helping countless students through the travails of the year.

Last but not least it meant students, who despite anxieties, challenges and inevitable imperfections, shamed skeptics who had placed little faith in them as the year began, profoundly underestimating their commitment to one another and to being together.

In their April 2020 *Richmond Times-Dispatch* op-ed outlining why Longwood and Hampden-Sydney were determined to re-open, Reveley and Stimpert had laid out the counterintuitive gamble they wanted higher education to make: to act on faith that the residential nature and traditions of liberal arts colleges were not weaknesses, but rather the essential strength that would carry them through.

“The country will face difficult challenges in reopening, but our institutions believe colleges can and should help lead the way,” they wrote.

Fifteen months later, not every institution in society, and not every institution of higher education, could claim to have succeeded. But Longwood had been resolute in the storm – for its staff and faculty, for Farmville, and for the Commonwealth and beyond. And most of all, for its students.