

Alumni lose autonomy

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ARLINGTON

The College of William and Mary recently announced a shift in staffing and a merger with the William and Mary Alumni Association (WMAA).

ESSAY No more W&M Office of Development (fundraising). No more WMAA staff (fundraisers and alumni event planners). Instead, one new W&M department combines them into the Office of University Advancement (fundraising and alumni events that are fundraising opportunities).

In layman's terms, it means that all fundraising and alumni relation efforts will be under one umbrella, paid for and staffed by the college.

Combining all fundraising efforts and donor information is a brilliant move, guaranteed to improve fundraising for the college. But at what cost to alumni?

In the early 1970s, the WMAA ceded its independence to the college by taking funding from the Board of Visitors. Since then, the WMAA has become more and more dependent upon the college for funding. In 2013, the college gave \$1.784 million to the WMAA.

The college will be giving almost \$2 million toward the WMAA's mission of engaging alumni in 2014-15. It will not be a donation to a foundation, however. It will be in the form of paychecks and operational support to the Commonwealth of Virginia employees.

The college will also pay \$186,000 toward the mailing costs for the Alumni Magazine.

The effect of this merger is to render the WMAA a nonprofit foundation with public employees doing the actual work. It gives almost all power to the college.

Yes, the WMAA Board of Directors is still autonomous and has authority over the budget that remains. But they are all volunteers with lives in other parts of the country. The grunt work will continue to be done by the office staffers, once nonprofit workers, now paid public employees.

What is the ethic behind reforming a foundation with all staff beholden to a public entity?

Why do we need to put 25 more people on the public payroll and retirement plans?

Why usher all alumni into the fundrais-

ing tent, as if we were ATMs waiting to be touched?

Even worse, though, is the claim by the college that the WMAA will still be independent. The WMAA may be a lot of things – "huge" and "happy" come to mind – but "independent" it is not and hasn't been for 40 years. This merger cements the dependence of the largest alumni association the college knows.

With dependence comes compliance and a fear of speaking out lest retaliation or rebuke or, worse, unemployment comes your way. An independent alumni association wields power to persuade and influence. An independent alumni association is both a cheerleader and an honest voice of concern when needed.

In giving the college control of the WMAA, the WMAA has now ceded all independence of voice. No one will dare express disagreement or concern for fear of losing funding and destroying the organization.

The WMAA is not the sole college alumni group, of course. The Society for the College is the only truly independent alumni group in existence. You can and should visit www.societyforthecollege.org for their opinion on the merger.

The society is the only alumni group to actively engage the entire college community in debate over the curriculum redesign, one of the most important college decisions in 20 years, a decision that will determine the college's impact for the next generation.

The WMAA did not address the curriculum issue at all. It did nothing to inform alumni about Gene Nichol and the train wreck he and the Board of Visitors perpetrated on the college, including but not limited to the removal of the Wren Cross from the chapel; the approbation of the Sex Workers Art Show; and the mishandling of alumni donations and interests.

Now, with complete dependence overwhelming the organization, there is no chance the WMAA will ever do what an alumni association should be doing – supporting the good, questioning the bad, maintaining civil discourse, and keeping alumni informed on all topics of importance.

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