

Relationships avoided UVA mess

W&M's Reveley faced similar issues

By Susan Robertson
srobertson@vazagazette.com

WILLIAMSBURG — How academic and budgetary challenges are handled plays a huge role in whether or not a university thrives. And when there's a failure to thrive there must be someone to blame.

The recent ousting, followed by Tuesday's unanimous reinstatement of UVA President Teresa Sullivan is the

most recent example. Criticized for failing to make deep cuts in the face of decreasing state funding, a diminishing student experience, the need for a rigorous evaluation of curriculum, and her lack of a long-term plan, Sullivan was voted out by the Board of Visitors.

William & Mary has spent the last several years tackling many of the same issues, and the same complaints made at UVA could feasibly be made

here. They haven't been, nor is President Taylor Reveley worried they'll come up.

"The sorts of challenges on which UVA's board has focused are certainly not news to anyone familiar with higher education these days," he said Tuesday.

Relationships are what he says has kept William & Mary out of a situation similar to the one UVA has been struggling with. "I have an excellent

relationship with our Board, rooted in mutual trust and effective communication."

William & Mary watchdog Karla Bruno feels the same, to an extent.

"The problems at UVA are essentially a clash of world views and methodologies," she said in an interview Monday. "At W&M, Reveley works very closely with the



Reveley

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The Virginia Gazette

June 27, 2012

W&M financially at risk?

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Board, but the faculty has all the power with regard to academics and curriculum review."

For several years Reveley has pushed the notion that the college needs to create a sustainable financial foundation, and he feels the need has been understood and accepted by the campus community and alumni. Bruno thinks it's a step in the right direction.

"The college has to build itself a new financial foundation, because the old one was rooted in a level of state support that is not available now and almost certainly is not going to exist again given other demands on limited state resources," he said. "Already, the university relies on a public-private partnership to pay its bills, with the private side of the equation pulling an ever larger oar."

Despite making millions in cuts to cope with a shrinking state contribution, which drops to roughly 13% next year, Bruno feels William & Mary is more financially at risk than UVA. The assertion has to do with the college's endowment, not annual

budgets.

William & Mary had a \$624 million endowment as of 2011. UVA sits on more than \$5 billion.

On the academic side, curriculum review currently under way at the college has been criticized as watered-down and offering a diminished student experience. While it hasn't gained favor with everyone, the college has taken a long, hard look at its curriculum.

"The suggestion that William and Mary plans to dumb down its curriculum boggles my mind!" Reveley said. "What conceivable point would there be to our doing that? Our faculty wouldn't stand for it, and neither would I, the Provost, or the Board."

The proposed curriculum, yet to be approved by the faculty, would trade 10-12 general requirements for seven courses over four years.

Reveley said it builds on "traditional liberal arts excellence and seeks to create a uniquely William and Mary undergraduate experience." He's confident it will ensure academic rigor.

Bruno disagrees. "The new curriculum as it appears now is not academically rigorous and is a

step back in terms of quality."

Her biggest gripe with the college is not related to how the college's leadership is handling a specific issue. It's leadership itself.

She said UVA Rector Helen Dragas has shown "remarkable leadership in the face of financial pressure and a changing world." She called Reveley's leadership "tepid."

"That said, the William and Mary Board of Visitors and Reveley are not strong leaders," she said. "They do not in any way challenge the faculty, and thus abdicate the tremendous power of their positions to a group of people with personal agendas that may or may not be fiscally realistic or in the best academic interest of the students."

She cited the recent public intoxication conviction of Board of Visitors member Laura Flippin as "further proof of their lack of leadership," alluding to Flippin, who is appealing the verdict, not being removed from the board.

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