

September 12, 1972

Dr. E. Bruce Heilman  
University of Richmond  
Virginia 23173

Dear Dr. Heilman,

After having been a student for two years in Richmond College I have decided to transfer to Duke University. Although many factors played a part in my decision, one overriding concern was my realization that Richmond was just not the "great University" that it professed to be. This is not to say however that my two years at Richmond were not well spent. I believe that many meaningful experiences which I received can be attributed directly to various assets of the university; however, I feel that I received an equal number of benefits in spite of the university and its policies.

There seems to be something in the air at Richmond that promotes a collective apathetic mood. This mood is almost universally felt within the university community. It is rare enough for a student to consider any course to be exciting or inspiring but it is unheard of for a student to seriously undertake any line of study which is not grade-oriented. In addition, options for extending academics beyond the traditional classroom setting are largely non-existent for most students. These and other factors are largely responsible for making talk of any generalized "academic zest" at Richmond sheer fantasy. While it would not be fair for administrators to assume full blame for the prevailing academic mood of the university, many people may wish to find fault with those who have not taken effective steps to help alleviate this problem.

At a time when the University of Richmond has achieved a super-normal degree of financial stability one would expect this university to seriously strive toward the greatness that we have all been hearing about. If the University of Richmond is to emerge as a great university it will be necessary to change its past philosophy of assuming "tradition" to be a viable cure-all. A great university must be creative and flex to the needs and ambitions of its student body. We have often been reminded of the university's obligations to its alumni, trustees, Baptists, public relations and football team as if these groups should receive equal consideration with students. In the past, we have witnessed at Richmond the administration's desire to project the University of Richmond as a "respectable" educational institution (thereby keeping money coming in) to the exclusion of (for instance) presenting

the divergent opinions of controversial figures to the university community (e.g. Rennie Davis last year). Any university that delegates less than enthusiastic support for the interchange and examination of any divergent opinions is in a very sad state. It should be quite evident that it is in the real interests of the university to function with as little outside interference as possible. We must be willing to differentiate between a "community of scholars" and a "community of politicians" in our efforts to make the University of Richmond a superior educational institution (which, I assume and hope, is our goal).

It has been suspected that the administrative offices of the university have been afraid to relegate too much liberty or power directly to the students. Consequently, the insistence of the "in loco parentis" philosophy on Richmond students has been a constant source of friction between students and administrators. I will admit that on many occasions, some students have presented some doubt as to the degree of maturity that should be expected of the 18-22 age group. I find it also true that the great majority of students, if invested with confidence and respect, can act sensibly and maturely in any given situation. It does not seem right to restrict the freedom and growth of the larger, more mature segment of the student population to protect an irresponsible minority from themselves.

Assuming that at least some of what I have said may seem unreasonably harsh to some people, I would like to say that my thoughts are well meaning and not intended to be bitter. I would hope that administrators and students could join together to seriously discuss the potentialities and intentions of the university. It may be useful to examine how some of the better universities are treating their students so as to determine what changes could best benefit Richmond students. The entire university community should constantly consider ways in which the university can be improved. Any university that exhibits any degree of mediocrity will have definite problems in attracting or retaining its more serious students. I do not wish to propose any specific changes but rather I suggest generally that students should be treated with greater respect and be given more diverse options concerning their academic and social interests and desires.

Administrators and students would both do well to become inspired by the thoughts of the great philosopher, A.N. Whitehead. In a lecture on "Universities and Their Function" he states that "the justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life. A fact is no longer a bare fact: it is invested with all its possibilities. It is no longer a burden on the memory: it is energising as the poet of our dreams, and as the architect of our purposes."

To many, Richmond has existed for too long in a pool of stagnant mediocrity. For Richmond to emerge as a great university it will have to become innovative and imaginative. Great universities do not become great by basking in the security of the status quo. A university should never be allowed to become too satisfied with itself. A commitment to flexibility should not be seen as a weakness but as an opportunity for a university to boast of its strength and self-confidence.

I hope that someday Richmond can be on the cutting edge of the movement towards institutional vitality in higher education. Admittedly this would be a tremendous task for the University of Richmond, but it is a task which should never be neglected nor overlooked. As the University of Richmond moves toward its own standards of greatness, I would like to suggest (in the spirit of Bob Dylan) as a constant reminder to the entire university community that any institution which is not busy being born is busy dying.

Best wishes,

*Craig A. Updegrave*

Craig A. Updegrave  
Class of 1974

cc

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E. Bruce Heilman  
President

September 13, 1972

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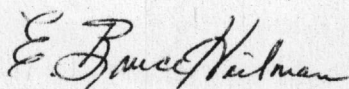
Dear Craig:

I very much appreciate your letter as I am sure that everyone did to whom it was addressed. Anytime anyone, who has had association with the University, expresses himself in the interest of helping the University, it is meaningful to those involved in the process of improvement.

Open-mindedness is the first step toward a posture of continuing improvement and I believe that it exists at the University of Richmond and will continue to exist in the years to come.

You have moved to a very fine school. I have had much association with Duke through the years as their neighbor and one who has participated in some of its programs, as well as one who has worked with many of its graduates. You will find strengths and weaknesses in persons and departments there, as is true at the University of Richmond, but a student who has ambitions for quality will emerge with a good education from whatever institution he attends. We are pleased to have had you and look forward to claiming a part of you in the years to come. Come back to see us often.

Cordially yours,



E. Bruce Heilman

EBH:mjp

cc: Dr. George M. Modlin  
Dr. Austin E. Grigg  
Dr. William H. Leftwich  
Dr. Kenneth Blick  
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