I. Process:

Individual interviews, focus groups, and open meetings were held over the summer. These sessions began with a full-day Board of Trustees retreat and concluded with a focus group with the University of Richmond Alumni Association Board Executive Committee. In between, approximately 250 stakeholders have provided input in person over the course of nearly 50 hours. An additional 210 comments to date have been received via the designated web page.

While a number of questions were posed in the process, the two essential questions were:

1. What are your aspirations for the University of Richmond over the next five to seven years?
2. Given those aspirations, what experience, skills, and personal characteristics will the next President need?

The answers to these two questions are then used to inform the position description which, in turn, is used as the basis for interview questions and provides the criteria used in selecting the next President. The responses also help inform the search committee, the search consultants, and the search advisor as they actively recruit top candidates.

II. General Observations:

- The focus groups and open meetings were generally well attended, particularly when the high level of satisfaction with the current President and University’s trajectory are considered.
- Participants were generally candid and thoughtful about the University’s present standing and its future possibilities.
There was a generally high level of consistency in the themes that emerged from all the stakeholder groups. While there were variations in emphasis and perspectives, the essential elements were very similar in nature.

The pride in the University’s remarkable progress under President Ayers’s leadership was uncommonly palpable.

III.  Summary of the Aspirations:

**The Richmond Promise.**

The University’s strategic plan was referenced constantly within all stakeholder groups. It is clearly a living document that has captured the imagination of virtually everyone. Several senior leaders even indicated that it was the primary reason they chose to come to the University of Richmond. It is highly unusual that a strategic plan is so well known by all and so often cited with a high level of understanding and a deep sense of commitment.

Almost without exception, stakeholders wanted the values and the core elements of *The Richmond Promise* to be sustained. Indeed, most credited the plan as having a key role in UR’s “remarkable upward trajectory.” However, a number of respondents believed that there was work yet to be done under a new President, including:

- Assessing, as empirically as possible, the impact and return on investment of key initiatives in *The Richmond Promise*.
- Prioritizing the initiatives that are assessed as having the greatest positive impact. (“Prioritization at UR is always a challenge, because, unlike most institutions today, UR has a deep resource base.”)
- Eliminating the initiatives that are assessed as being not highly impactful. (“We have done a lot of everything; we can’t keep doing that forever.”)
- Institutionalizing the most important elements of the plan. For example, by incorporating those activities within the reward structure, including promotion and tenure criteria. (“Have we hard wired the changes emanating out of *The Richmond Promise*?”)
✓ Exploring new ideas that are consistent with *Richmond Promise* core values rather than just implementing only the existing ideas. (“We can’t stand still. Our rock under the water could be our complacency.”)

A number of people felt that the next strategic planning phase should be highly focused and tightly bound to strategic budget prioritization. At the same time, most people realized that there is much work left to be done to implement fully the existing plan. For example, the progress to date on diversifying the student body is indeed impressive. However, respondents pointed out that there is work to be done yet on diversifying the senior administration and on increasing the diversity of the faculty.

- **Academic Quality and Distinctiveness.**
  While there was almost universal praise for the long-standing commitment at UR to student-centered teaching and learning, quite a few people (and not just faculty) felt that there had been less transformation in the academic program than in other aspects of the University (such as facilities, community engagement, and shaping a class) during this particular planning phase (although some pointed out this was quite natural, as the previous plan had focused heavily on academics). Representative comments include: “we have unrealized academic potential” and “we need to lean-in more on curricular innovation.” There appears to be considerable anticipation that the new Provost will have an important and pivotal role in advancing the academic agenda in the next phase.

A new President, in partnership with the Provost, Deans, and faculty leadership, will likely need to lead a conversation on the philosophical debate about the balance between further integrating the schools and the building of individual school and even departmental strength. While virtually all students (more than 60 of them) at the open student meeting had taken a class outside of their own school or been taught by a faculty member from outside their school, integration is given an “incomplete” grade by most. As no other university has the same constellation of schools as UR does, it is an area of potential distinctiveness. At the same time, many universities have built their reputations
on the quality of particular schools or departments or even on a handful of “superstar faculty.” While this is not necessarily an either/or proposition, there appears to be a future need for clarity and purpose around the academic portfolio and the roles of curricular and pedagogical innovation. For those who believe that profound changes in higher education are not imminent, they see little need for innovation but prefer the emphasis to be on doing what UR has always done well, but to strive to do that even better. For those who believe those changes are upon us, there’s concern that “good has become the enemy of great” for the University of Richmond. So there are important questions to be discussed and answered. A new President will need to create the environment to make that possible and positive.

- **Change.**
  Presidencies today, more so than just seven years ago, are more akin to whitewater rafting than ever before. There are rapid streams of external forces that have to be, at a minimum, navigated. Respondents cited such issues as affordability; student indebtedness; federal compliance; public trust; employability of graduates; the relevance of the liberal arts; the relevance of even college itself; the amenities arms race; intercollegiate athletics; disruptive technologies; the process and structures for assessing learning and awarding degrees; the changing philosophical basis for foundation, corporate, and individual philanthropy; the rapid shifts in academic program demand (most strikingly in recent times is the decrease in demand for legal education); and the nature and needs of millennial students. As the oldest person interviewed tellingly prophesied: “We won’t recognize what we now call higher education seven years from now.”

Respondents cited the need for a President who not only could navigate the endless challenges and the increasing number of crises, but could also anticipate and even influence those issues that have national standing. (“A national thought leader, earned through substance.”) As the students themselves noted: “The times call for an epic leader!”
• **Fundraising.**

This topic was greeted with divergent perspectives. At the extremes, a few people suggested this was a President’s primary role, while others questioned the purpose of additional fundraising. Between the extremes, however, most agreed this would be an important priority for the next President.

There were also a wide range of views on what was realistic to expect. A number of people questioned whether the recent campaign of $150 million was bold enough, citing other similar institutions with larger targets. Others thought that the pipeline of major donors needed to be significantly expanded and that UR might be approaching that “sweet spot of opportunity” during the next Presidency as the changing nature of the institution over time yields results. (“We are a younger institution than our age.”)

It was also pointed out that UR’s apparent relative wealth, with over a $2 billion endowment, led some potential donors to conclude that the institution did not need their dollars. Other indicated that it was easier to raise money for buildings than programs or initiatives, pointing out that even one of the most praised elements of *The Richmond Promise* (student summer fellowships) had yet to be fully funded and that restricted endowed scholarships were still a relatively small proportion of scholarships awarded.

Someone suggested that President Ayers has superbly reconnected a significant number of alumni who had become disaffected for a variety of reasons and that the next President would be a beneficiary as engagement could lead to greater financial support for the institution. The changing nature of philanthropy also led some to conclude that both the structure and infrastructure of fundraising might need to be revisited by the next President.
- **Communication/Consultation/Conversations.**

On every university and college campus in the country, communication is cited as a challenge. Ironically, the ease of technological communication has only seemed to acerbate the challenge as information overload (a.k.a., “unread emails”) rules the day. So it is not surprising that this topic was discussed. However, all groups (Board, faculty, staff, and students) had members who expressed the desire for some perhaps new structures and protocols related especially to consultation.

Consultation is a complex topic in higher education, as it is one of the bedrocks of academic culture and, done well, leads to wide and deep ownership of decisions. On the other hand, the pace of change currently, and into the future, makes nimble decision-making an increasing imperative. There seems considerable ambiguity at UR about who needs to be consulted on what and when. A number of examples were cited where some felt there was inadequate prior consultation on certain decisions. None of these were necessarily earthshaking decisions and some respondents were quick to point out that someone else might have been consulted or that there might have even been an email inviting views. However, the consistency of the concern across groups suggests that in the future there will need to be greater clarity and definition of roles and responsibilities. The recent discussions about the need for a faculty senate seems to validate this need. ("Communication and consultation are definitely works in progress.")

In addition, it seems that suitable forums for important conversations need to be identified. Full faculty meetings are poorly attended. Some suggest that is because the institution has become too large for a faculty assembly to be practical. Others suggested it was because those meetings seem to have lost their relevance. Whatever the reason, this lost venue and the absence of other structures lead to a vacuum for university-wide conversations. For example, the role of on-line education and the implications for UR have largely been conversations held, or not held, in the individual schools.

This is all likely a sign of the natural evolution of UR into a larger, more complex, and busier university. Some of these issues are likely (and should be) addressed before the
arrival of a new President. However, it is inevitable that the overall tenor of communication and consultation will depend on Presidential leadership.

- **Reputation.**

  With the deep and genuine excitement about UR’s transformation (while retaining the best of its history and traditions) and trajectory comes a desire for its reputation to catch up with its reality. It is truism in higher education that reputation lags reality, both on the way up and on the way down. President Ayers’s visibility as a world-class historian and humanities teacher/scholar has helped advance UR’s reputation and his presence will continue to do so. UR’s remarkable climb in the rankings has also been helpful in building reputation. And the city of Richmond’s increased popularity has been an asset for the University, especially given its name identification.

  Every stakeholder group would like UR to have the reputation it deserves. Most recognize that it is a mistake to have a focus on branding and marketing before having “a product.” However, many believe that *The Richmond Promise* and the attendant results are that product and that time has now come for a collective and intentional approach to reputation building. There is also some sense that that intentionality might include such strategies as grooming students for prestigious awards (Rhodes, Truman scholarships, etc.) and attracting a small cohort of faculty with very significant academic reputations. (“We are so ripe to be mentioned in the same breath as the most prestigious universities.”) Whatever the means, the next President has an opportunity to increase the reputation of the University not only nationally and internationally, but also in the crowded higher education space of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

IV. **Summary of Desired Background/Characteristics.**

  There was considerable consistency across groups, with two exceptions. Many wanted someone who was a distinguished teacher/scholar. Others desired someone with strong managerial experience, perhaps, but not necessarily, acquired from outside the academy.
Yet others wondered if there was a hybrid, someone who had both set of experiences (for example, someone who had been an academic but who had “stepped out” for a while, such as for government service or foundation work or for a business experience). There was universal agreement that the next President, whatever her or his background, should be a person who could provide intellectual leadership as the University is, at its core, an intellectual enterprise. The other exception was level of experience. Some felt that the challenges ahead required someone with considerable executive experience. Others argued that the changes that are coming will be so profoundly different that adaptability was more important than experience. The good news is that virtually everyone agreed that the search should cast a wide net initially and that the search process would likely resolve these two issues, especially as there was widespread agreement on the other elements of background and characteristics. Most also realized that it’s unlikely that any candidate will “check all the boxes” (although President Ayers came very close to the list developed in the last search).

A. Desired Background

- A combination of academic credentials and/or intellectual abilities sufficient to command the respect of the faculty and successful executive/managerial experience sufficient to lead a complex institution. Demonstrated leadership qualities, ability, and achievement.
- A knowledge of, and appreciation for, teaching and learning; research, scholarship, and creative works; and student life and success. A deep respect for and understanding of the academic enterprise and a commitment to maintaining and building on academic excellence.
- A strategic visionary, with a proven record of synchronizing vision, capability, capacity, and resources.
- A demonstrated commitment and achievement in advancing diversity in its many forms.
- A passion for higher education and a rich appreciation for the synergistic relationship between the liberal arts and the university’s professional schools and distinctive leadership school.
• A proven record of risk assessment, change management, and crisis control.
• Experience and success with fundraising and with adapting to changes in the philanthropic landscape.
• A commitment to the educational value of local community engagement and meaningful global/international participation.
• An inspirational communicator to multiple audiences, with the ability to listen and to lead genuine conversations. The ability to be a vigorous and effective spokesperson and advocate for the institution and its students externally and potential to be a national thought leader and institutional reputation builder.
• Genuinely welcoming of different viewpoints and comfortable with consultation, yet with the ability to make data-informed decisions.
• A commitment to consensus-building and meaningful shared governance, including experience with a governing board.
• A deep understanding of the higher education landscape and the challenges nationally and globally.
• Experience with and commitment to intercollegiate athletics.
• Ability to engage and inspire alumni to be active participants in the life of the university.
• A demonstrated track-record of assessing, retaining, attracting, and developing superior talent in the leadership team and of being comfortable delegating distributed leadership.

B. Desired Characteristics
• Strong core values, including impeccable integrity, wise judgment, and appropriate levels of transparency.
• A secure sense of self, comfortable with being the face of the University and with giving credit to others. Confident, charismatic, collaborative. Accessible and visible to, and comfortable with, all audiences.
• An inquiring and analytical mind, initially with more questions than answers.
• An adaptable spirit, comfortable leading change.
• A quick and deep study.
▪ A willingness to appreciate and embrace the best of the University’s history and traditions.
▪ A source of good ideas; recognizer of others’ good ideas; and the ability to build support for, and ownership of, good ideas.
▪ Comfortable with complexity, ambiguity, and criticism.
▪ A seriousness of purpose but not of self; a sense of humor a plus.
▪ Endless stamina; contagious enthusiasm; an unwavering commitment to mission, vision, and values.

V. Conclusion

As the detailed profile demonstrates this can be the dream Presidency for the candidate with the appropriate background and characteristics to lead this university at an important moment in its history. With its unique profile, its location in a southern capital city, and its boundless momentum, the University of Richmond will undoubtedly attract a superior pool of candidates. However, most participants expressed the desire for “a destination President”; that is a candidate who does not just want to be a President, but who wants specifically to be the next President of the University of Richmond.

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