Finding A Westhampton Dean

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Finding a Westhampton Dean

STORY BY MIA HAGERTY

In 1914, Westhampton College was one of the first institutions committed to educating women and fostering leadership. Just over a hundred years later, Westhampton College is beginning the search for the next Westhampton College Dean and dual appointment as Associate Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences (WC dean). This WC dean directly influences around 1,300 undergraduate students and also interacts with student leadership organizations, faculty, administration, and alumni. “I have never had someone leave a position and have so much interest from so many constituencies,” said Dr. Steve Bisese, Vice President for Student Development. “There has been interest from alumni young and old, recent grads, and faculty and staff because this position means so much.”

In August, Juliette Landphair resigned as the Dean of Westhampton College in order to take the position of Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Mary Washington. The search committee has just been assembled, and they aim to appoint the WC dean this summer.

In Search of a Multi-Faceted Dean

Many students might find themselves wondering what exactly the dean of a college does, and that question is made even more complicated because of the university’s coordinate college system. In fact, the WC dean will have to possess a wide range of administrative, interpersonal, and mentorship skills. “This [position] is a very unique job,” Bisese said. “It means being an administrator and one that has very strong ties to the faculty and alumni, which is not typical.”

Each year during the Dean’s Welcome, first-years are encouraged to come to the Westhampton Deanery with any problem, from feeling like they don’t fit in to mental health issues to reporting sexual misconduct. “I don’t think people realize that the dean interacts so much with the police, registrar, and the general counsel,” Bisese said. “A lot of what the dean does is crisis management.”

Cindy McGuire has worked as the Administrative Specialist in the Dean’s Office for 23 years, and has found that empathy and mutual respect are keys to the position’s success. Bisese does not feel that finding a caring candidate should be a problem for this position. “The people who really want these kinds of jobs have it in their DNA to care and be empathetic,” he said. “Those kinds of people will be in the pool and the process will find those people.”

The Dean’s Impact on Westhampton College Students

While the search committee will consist of around fifteen members, there will be three student members, each representing WCGA, residence life, or WILL*. “Dean Landphair always reminded us about the meaning of cultivating leadership within a group of women and always worked to promote confidence and encouragement amongst us,” senior Lauren Pepe said, “Above all, we want someone who is dedicated to serving students and is super accessible, someone who wants to get to know as many students as possible and always has the door open to talk.”

Elena Brooks-Perkins, Area Coordinator for Westhampton College, also reflected on Dean Landphair’s active role with the residence life team. “The RAs enjoy having a close relationship with the dean and all of the Westhampton College staff and I would like to see that continue for many years to come.”

The WC dean also plays a large role in maintaining the spirit of a woman’s college within the university. “My involvement in WILL* and the then Women’s Studies minor were some of the most meaningful experiences of my college career,” said Kim Dean (WC’97), Richmond Families Initiative and UR Downtown Program Director at the CCE. “Now, as our ideas about gender development and gendered education evolve, I look forward to a new dean doing what we know can be done—honor the history of Westhampton College while providing opportunities that meet the needs and expectations of current students.”

The Search Process

When a university hires someone for such an important position, the process can take up the whole academic year and then some. The search firm, Witt-Kiefer, will be actively recruiting exemplary professionals currently employed at other universities, which is why the search process is designed to be confidential and anonymous until the finalist stage. In the coming months, Witt-Kiefer will survey faculty and students alike to inform the job description for the position.

While Dean Landphair left a tremendous blueprint for the qualities and goals the new dean should have, it’s important for the future dean to be capable of leaving her unique imprint on Westhampton College. “We want a WC dean who embraces the coordinate system, but also is progressive and able to see how our unique model can fit the social dynamics of today’s student body,” Pepe said.

Ultimately the mark of a truly successful dean of Westhampton College is someone that will play a transforming role in the lives of students. “Dean Landphair reminded me that Westhampton is about more than what side of the lake you live on but about the relationships and accessible leadership opportunities in this unique coordinate college experience,” Dean said. We will look forward to continuing the 100-year Westhampton College with the welcoming of the new dean next July.

Search Timeline

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<th>Winter:</th>
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<th>July 1, 2016:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dean search committee assembled</td>
<td>Airport interviews with semifinalists</td>
<td>Campus visits with 3 to 5 final candidates</td>
<td>Expected date of Dean appointment</td>
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