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New Men on Campus - Three local institutions of higher education have new leaders. Today the presidents present their visions and missions to the community. - Edward L. Ayers - University of Richmond

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There is no such thing as a perfect university. Despite the rankings and institutional bragging, there is no place that combines everything into a perfect package. Every institution is a work in progress.

The University of Richmond is no exception. Like every institution, it inherits both strengths and weaknesses.

The strong points are strong indeed. The University of Richmond is, first of all, in the capital city of the 12th largest state in the nation. This city and its surrounding area are diverse, lively, and growing, with major corporations, government agencies, and cultural institutions. For more than 175 years, the university has served the city, and today more than 12,000 UR alumni - many of whom came from places far away and who fell in love with this place - live in and around Richmond.

Part of UR's strength comes from the generosity of its alumni and friends. Few institutions of its size can claim benefactors such as the Robins, Weinstein, and Jepson families. Most of the university's endowment has come from local donors who appreciate what UR has done for them, their families, and their community.

The talented people on the staff at the University of Richmond maintain the beautiful campus, run a complex organization with a budget of nearly \$170 million a year, and organize numerous public events featuring world-class speakers, artists, and performers.

The nearly 400 faculty, the heart of any institution of higher learning, include national and international leaders in their fields of teaching and research. They also are famously dedicated to their students.

About 3,400 students from virtually every state and 70 nations enrich the university. Thanks to our outstanding academic reputation and our generous financial aid, these students come from a wide array of backgrounds: from first-generation college students to fourth-generation UR families, from modest means to wealth.

These young people could go many places for an education, but they specifically choose to come here and they are accomplishing remarkable things. Last year, for example, UR students won three Goldwater Scholarships, the most prestigious award science students can receive. And our student athletes, the Spiders, rank fourth in the nation in graduation rate while also consistently winning the overall championship of the Atlantic-10 conference, a remarkable accomplishment for one of the smallest schools in the NCAA's Division I.

The University of Richmond boasts one of the best international studies programs in the country. Around the world, people know of the city of Richmond because of its university.

So, with all those strengths, what could I hope to accomplish while president of the University of Richmond? I plan to take advantage of those strengths.

I intend, first of all, to make it clear how tightly bound together are the University of Richmond and the city of Richmond. Already, the university is one of the top 25 employers in the area, contributing \$450 million a year to the local economy. Already, our students, staff, and faculty give 100,000 hours a year to community service. Already, 6,000 of our neighbors take classes in our School of Continuing Studies every year. Already, our law school helps citizens who have nowhere else to turn in our legal system.

I want to see all those efforts sustained and grown, focused on the things that the people of the city tell us they want and need. I want us to help our local schools, our local charities, and our local people in distress. I want us to work in partnership with our fellow colleges and universities. I want the university to be the best citizen of Richmond we possibly can.

The University of Richmond is an institution with a substantial endowment. I want to use a portion of that wealth to make it possible for a broad array of students to get a Richmond education, regardless of their family's income. I want us to be more representative of the diverse population of our city, state, and nation. I want us to be a bridge of opportunity for students who could not otherwise afford to go to any college, much less a place that offers the personal attention and abundant resources of UR.

All of these things are possible, but they will not be easy. There is no such thing as a perfect institution, and the University of Richmond will not be perfect, either. But that should not stop from trying to get as close as we can.

Edward Ayers is the president of the University of Richmond. He begins his term today.