

St. John's College Alumni Association

All-Alumni Meeting June 5th, 2016 – Annapolis, MD

Agenda

1. Election of Directors, Officers, and BVG representative
2. Summary of ALF and areas of focus for the SJCAA in FY 2017
3. Motion of thanks to Chris Nelson
4. Motion of support for the College
5. Discussion of College Re-organization
6. New Business

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 am.

A sign-in sheet was used to record attendance and confirm quorum.

Forty-one alumni and four non-alumni were present. Some alumni also attended via conference call.

Alumni Association Election

Alumni Association President, Adrian Trevisan, gave a brief overview of the nominations and election process. We need more volunteers!

The current approach of presenting a slate of candidates with a single nominee for each seat was discussed at the 2014 Annual Meeting. This is what alumni said they wanted at that time.

Outgoing directors were recognized and thanked for their service. Then current nominees were excused from the room. The slate of nominees was read aloud. Given that there are no contested seats, a suggestion was made to vote on the whole slate at once and to proceed by voice vote.

A motion was made to vote on the full slate by voice vote. Allan Hoffman motioned, seconded by Steven Shore. **The motion was approved.**

The following slate of candidates was approved:

Treasurer: Babak Zarin, A11

Secretary: Susann Bradford, SF89

At-Large Directors: Claiborne Booker, A84; Elihu Dietz, SF06; Briana Henderson Saussy, A03, EC05;
Mark Parenti, AGI92; Brenna Strauss, SF04; Upshaw, SF04

Representative to Board of Visitors and Governors: Linda Stabler-Talty, SFGI76

Summary of ALF and SJCAA focus for FY17

President Trevisan gave a brief summary of the workshops and events that took place during ALF weekend, highlighting current projects of the alumni association.

This was followed by general discussion and feedback, which included the following comments and suggestions:

- Simplify online presence; make this easier to navigate
- Good experience; build on this next year
- Draw clearer connections between individual projects and big picture
- Encourage year-round involvement; we need to stay active and connect
- Programming needs more balance between new volunteers and returning volunteers
- Provide opportunities for feedback on prior year activities; evaluate what worked, what didn't
- Set annual goals for adopt-a-high school program
- Consider developing central theme to focus and connect sessions or projects
- Make sure sessions have clear objectives

Motion of thanks to Chris Nelson

A draft statement to thank Chris Nelson for his many years of service as President of the Annapolis campus was presented for consideration and approval. After some discussion and minor edits, a motion was made to approve the following statement:

The Alumni Association of St. John's College extends its thanks and appreciation to Christopher Nelson (SF70) for his 26 years of service as President of the campus in Annapolis and for his service to the campus in Santa Fe. Throughout that time, he has displayed wisdom and flexibility in adapting the College to face changing environments. As a result he leaves a stronger College poised for further success.

The Motion was made by Claiborne Booker and seconded by Steven Shore. The motion was approved unanimously.

Motion of support for the College

A draft statement to express support for College administration, faculty, staff and students was presented for consideration and approval. This opened up a discussion of possible edits and revised language. Several people began suggesting grammatical corrections and alternative wording, including some suggestions that diverged considerably in message from the original. At this point, some alumni suggested that a broader discussion was needed to clarify the situation before we could agree on specific language.

A motion was made to postpone further discussion of a specific statement until after agenda item number five, which would allow more clarity about the current situation with respect to reorganization and the proposed polity amendment. The motion was made by Rob Crutchfield and seconded by Chelsea Adams. **This motion was approved.**

Discussion of College Re-organization

President Trevisan opened the topic with some background on what's happening in the Board of Visitors and Governors (BVG). Sharing information is complicated due to the confidentiality agreements of BVG members; information is confidential if it comes up in executive session, other information is not. It's hard to keep clear what is confidential and what is not. Allan Hoffman offered to help since he is an honorary member of the BVG and does not participate in the executive sessions, leaving him quite clear on what can be shared. Several alumni present who are also currently serving on the BVG helped give a brief summary.

The proposed polity amendment for a college-wide president is a somewhat separate from the proposed reorganization of the College. The proposed alumni statement of support was written before the proposed polity amendment was announced, so the draft language wasn't really addressing this. The proposed polity amendment to create a college-wide president appears to be much more controversial than reorganization in general. Most people agree that streamlining college-wide operations to eliminate unnecessary duplication is a good idea if done properly. In contrast, the idea to make one president the chief executive that the other campus president will report to has met with considerable criticism. Statements by faculty and students in Annapolis have been critical of the polity proposal. Other information is not public yet, leading to a wide variety of claims and conjectures, at least some of which has seemed more emotional than rational. It's important to hear these concerns and answer them as well as possible.

Some people commented that the polity amendment seems rushed. Shouldn't such a big decision be weighed carefully, over a longer period of time? Objections by faculty are cause for concern. The fact that this is moving forward at a time when the undergraduate program is not in session also led some to believe this is an effort to circumvent proper feedback. Some people are afraid that Annapolis will become a second tier campus if the college wide president is in Santa Fe. It's also unclear how this proposal might affect cost-cutting; two presidents will still be very expensive. Others pointed out that the retirement of Chris Nelson influenced the timing. The fact that this came up during reorganization makes it important to clarify the job description. The job search will take a full year. The new fiscal year begins July 1st, so they need a clear budget by then. College-wide offices need to know who they will report to. Students and younger alumni may not be aware that the question of whether the College should have one or two presidents has been revisited and debated many times over the years since Santa Fe campus was founded.

Allan Hoffman offered some history of the College concerning the one-president and two-president models that have been tried over the years. The decision to have a campus in Santa Fe raised the question how to effectively govern one college on two campuses that are so far apart. For over two decades we had a one-president model. Travelling back and forth was a hardship and there were other issues with this model. Now we've tried having two-presidents for many years, which solved some problems but raised others. This issue comes up every time a new president needs to be hired. This isn't a brand new idea; there has been a great deal of analysis of alternatives. Any particular configuration will probably need further refinement in the future. The current proposal reflects a continued evolution; if it doesn't work we can change it. It seems clear that we have to do something to address functionality; another small college (Dowling) closed its doors this week – we are not at that stage but the boat is leaking. This is also the first time we have a college president with prior experience; Mr. Roosevelt is bright, experienced, and can be held accountable. There are also governance issues on the faculty side and many details still being worked out. Faculties on both campuses agreed with college-wide president model, but disagree on details of how to structure this.

Discussion continued, revisiting and clarifying many of the concerns that have been raised. Joe McFarland, who is an alumnus and the incoming Dean in Annapolis, also spoke to clarify that the faculty objections were aimed at revising the proposal, not rejecting it completely. Process involved identifying all the functions of the presidents and trying to envision how a single person could do this. Having someone who will be present on campus, who is part of the heartbeat and engaged in the community, is very important. The amendment can be revised without another 30 day period as long as the revisions reflect the issue vetted for feedback. Much of the current confusion stems from the lack of clear information and the fact that many details are still being worked out. History shows this is not the first time the governance structure has been changed; we have to trust that the current proposals reflect goodwill for College. The polity does not require they take comments from alumni, but this was a big enough issue to merit reaching out to us.

After a lengthy discussion and many comments, focus shifted back to whether or not to approve a statement of support for the reorganization effort. Some questioned the wisdom of making a statement of support with so many details still unknown. Some said we should support the faculty, rather than the administration or BVG, while others counselled against picking sides. The proposed statement is not about the governance issue.

Motion of support for the College (resumed)

Discussion then refocused on the specifics of a proposed statement. Many people raised their hands to propose edits and revisions. After some initial comments suggesting edits, the following statement was offered for consideration:

The Alumni Association of St. John's College wishes to extend our thanks to the BVG, faculty, staff and students for their work during this challenging time. We share their commitment to the well-being and integrity of our alma mater and offer our continuing support for their efforts.

A motion to approve this was made by Babak Zarin and seconded by Paul Martin. Discussion ensued briefly. Some people expressed that they liked this simple statement of support. Others began to offer alternative statements of their own.

A motion to call the question was made by Paul Martin and seconded by Steven Shore. There was some confusion on how to proceed. **Then the motion to call the question was approved.** This ended discussion.

The vote was then taken on the language shown above. Voice vote was too close to call so a show of hands vote was taken and **the motion carried.**

There was no new business.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:00 am.