March 7, 2013

Dear Campus Community,

I write the March President’s Pause as I return from Washington, DC, where university presidents gathered at the American Council on Education’s (ACE) Annual Meeting. Our main purpose was to share best practices with each other and to hear about current and potential future changes in federal policies that will affect higher education.

The tenor of the ACE meeting was relatively positive as I listened to Dr. Terry Hartle (ACE Senior Vice President, Division of Government and Public Affairs) address the fiscal cliff policies. “Forewarned is forearmed...” and I write this month’s Pause in that same spirit. Although we are currently experiencing growth and fiscal comfort, we should remain sensitive to challenges of other institutions around the nation and also anticipate what federal policies are most likely to affect our current and future student populations. The following are highlights from Dr. Hartle’s address. I have underlined below what I believe will directly affect our students and/or our institution.

I. Most Recent Higher Education Happenings in Congress

1. January 13 - The tax benefits for families and individuals to “save for college, pay for college and pay off student loans” all remained intact. All of these tax benefits were scheduled to disappear if the Bush era tax cuts were not renewed. This will be fortunate for La Verne future students as their families can put aside savings monthly, without being taxed, for the future education of their children. The American Opportunity Tax Credit – worth up to $10,000 per year – will continue to benefit current students and their families.

2. The Pell Grants (federal funds for students who qualify) will remain intact for the next two years. These grants are exempt from the sequester and – thanks to technical re-estimates by the Department of Education – should be fully funded for the next two years. This is helpful to the University of La Verne, as a significant portion of our traditional undergraduate students receive Pell funding.

3. The White House has created the “Higher Education Scorecard.” This “scores” an institution on factors such as percentage of undergraduate students who graduate within four years or six years, obtain employment within months following graduation, continue on to additional graduate education, graduate with debt upon graduation. Though this “scorecard” may not influence which school a student chooses to attend (because not many students will go to the White House website when picking a college), it is indicative of the widespread interest in providing the public with information and rankings about higher education institutions.
4. July 1 - Interest on federal student loans will increase from 3.4% to 6.8%. This will have a direct impact on La Verne students who have assumed federal student loans. The same increase was scheduled to occur last year, but it did not as neither party wanted to let interest rates increase in an election year. It is possible that this year’s increase will also be avoided, but we will not know for sure until closer to July. This change only effects student loans made after July 1, but the much higher rate will mean that students will be paying more.

II. Sequestrations (across the board reductions)

1. There will be a 5% reduction in the amount of federal monies available for Historically Black Colleges, TRIO, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Gear-Up, Work-Study and Supplemental Grants. The fee that students borrow to take out a federal student loan will increase slightly from 1.0 percent to 1.1 percent.

III. What is Coming Next

1. The Fiscal Year 2013 Federal budget has not yet been approved. The temporary spending bill that has been keeping the government operating expires on March 27. Congress must pass and the President must sign a budget by that date or the government will close. The Obama Administration Federal Budget needs to be passed by March 27.

2. The federal debt ceiling will be reached in the middle of May. When that occurs the government will be prohibited from borrowing further monies unless Congress extends the debt ceiling. Although there are many differing opinions, failure to pass an extension will likely have consequences that will affect all in some way.

3. One of the primary foci of the Legislature will be immigration reform. The three issues that will be most debated are “The Dream Act,” visa approval and acquisition for International Scientists and Scholars, and a pathway to citizenship for undocumented individuals currently in the country.

4. Fisher vs. Texas - This Affirmative Action case has been heard by the Supreme Court and a decision will be handed down sometime in May or June. This decision will affect the ability of colleges to consider race and ethnicity in college admissions.

5. Senator Rubio (R-FL) and Senator Wyden (D-OR), are co-sponsoring an initiative that tracks where a student went to college and their income shortly after graduation. They are anticipating a correlation between cost of higher education and income following graduation.

Based on these recent reports from Washington, DC and our efforts at the University of La Verne, it is important that we continue with the following items:

First, we must stay committed to educating students in the liberal arts and the professional programs, while paying attention to their student learning outcomes, their continuation on to graduate programs as appropriate, their graduation rates, and their ultimate employment and earnings. Second, it is important for us to ensure that attending the University of La Verne is affordable and that students graduate without insurmountable debt. Finally, we need to be as transparent as possible about The La Verne Experience, the intended outcomes and the unwavering connection to our La Verne values. This is what will reinforce public trust in higher education.
Even more importantly, we, at the University of La Verne, represent the best of higher education, graduating students who truly are lifelong learners, committed to inclusivity and diversity, skilled in ethical reasoning, and dedicated to community and civic engagement.

In light of where we are as a university, committed to our mission and vision, I am struck by a quote from Martin Luther King when he stated, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

During the spring term the Board will be reviewing the final drafts of our 2020 Strategic Vision – La Verne’s strategic plan for the next eight years. The 2020 Strategic Vision will underscore our mission, our commitment to student success, our quality education, and academic areas where we can be most distinctive, relevant and competitive. The La Verne Experience will complete its first year and begin its second as it is further embedded across our four colleges, 11 campuses, and all academic programs. Your voices and participation are encouraged and important as we move forward as one university with one mission and one vision.

There are many recent La Verne accomplishments of which we should be proud. Here are just a few highlights:

- **President’s Dinner Gala.** The last President’s Dinner Gala was held in 2009. I am delighted that the gala will be back in full force on March 16. I look forward to greeting the approximately 1,000 people in attendance and honoring David and Priscilla Lizárraga. Mr. and Mrs. Lizárraga, a remarkable couple, are known for their tremendous contributions, their commitment to community and economic development for Southern California and the nation, and their dedication to helping countless college students reach their academic dreams by providing scholarship opportunities.

- **Student Achievement.** La Verne will be hosting the National Debate Finals on April 12-13. There will be approximately 47 colleges and universities with more than 450 participants and 164 teams competing on our campus throughout those days. At the moment, we are ranked among the top five debate teams in the country. This is a proudfull moment for all of us. Join me in congratulating our student debaters and their coaches.

- **Athletic Achievement.** Congratulations to the University of La Verne women’s volleyball team for showing all indications of returning to national championship form with an impressive 21-5 mark during the 2012 season. The Leopards earned a spot in the NCAA Division III playoffs for the first time since 2009, when the Leopards were a perennial entrant to the NCAA playoffs.

- **Scholarly Achievement.** There is much excellent faculty scholarship to share. For example, Professor of English Jeffrey Kahan published, Shakespiritualism: Shakespeare and the Occult, 1850-1950, a thought-provoking study on spiritualists and debatable meanings in Shakespeare’s writings, which is now available at Barnes & Noble and on Amazon.

- **Grant Achievement.** Our Literacy Center recently received a $50,000 gift from The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, to extend tutoring services to Pre-K and adult learners. As many of you know, our Literacy Center was established in response to a community need identified through existing relationships with parents, teachers and administrators. Currently, more than 1,900 local at-risk children and their families are taking advantage of La Verne’s academic support at the Literacy Center.

Finally, enjoy the remainder of March, and especially the upcoming Spring Break. I look forward to seeing many of you at the President’s Dinner Gala.
Sincerely,

Devorah Lieberman, Ph.D.
President