William & Mary announces Katherine Rowe as 28th President

Liberal arts innovator to lead Alma Mater of the Nation

William & Mary’s Board of Visitors today unanimously elected Katherine A. Rowe, currently provost of Smith College and a leader in digital innovation of the liberal arts, as the 28th president of the university. She will begin on July 1.

Rowe will succeed W. Taylor Reveley III, who is retiring June 30 after two decades with William & Mary, including 10 years as president. Rowe will be the first woman in William & Mary’s 325-year history to hold the presidency.

“The Board is thrilled to make this announcement and welcome Katherine Rowe to the William & Mary family,” said Rector Todd A. Stottlemyer ’85.

“Katherine is a widely respected and recognized leader, teacher, researcher, scholar, innovator and entrepreneur, and she is a passionate and articulate advocate for the importance of the liberal arts and their critical intersections with technology and research.”

He added, “We had a difficult mission: to find a leader to whom Taylor Reveley could pass the reins. In Katherine Rowe, we have found the ideal person to lead William & Mary at this point in the university’s history.”
Since 2014, Rowe has served as provost and dean of the faculty at Smith College in Massachusetts. Her areas of research and scholarship include Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Medieval and Renaissance drama and media history. She is deeply interested in design thinking, entrepreneurship and the digital humanities.

“It is an honor to be called to serve as the 28th president at William & Mary,” Rowe said. "Under President Taylor Reveley’s outstanding leadership over the past decade, William & Mary has become a model of intentional, mission-driven innovation in higher education. The vision of William & Mary conveyed to me over the past months, by everyone I met in this community, is so compelling: a deep appreciation of history and tradition; a commitment to fostering inclusive communities of teaching, learning and research; and an understanding of the value of change and innovation to advance a liberal arts mission. These commitments are essential to a university’s continued excellence in the 21st century. I am resolved to further that vision as we work together in the coming months and years.”

She added, “I am so excited to lead an institution that has – in addition to a premier academic program for undergraduates – distinguished graduate and professionals schools, championship athletic teams and a strong alumni culture of engagement and philanthropy. As someone who has spent 20 years at institutions with a deep commitment to educational access for students from all incomes and backgrounds, I am particularly drawn to William & Mary’s abiding commitment to serving the public interest. I look forward to working with – and learning from – the dedicated faculty and staff, talented students and William & Mary’s passionate alumni, parents and friends.”

A proven leader

At Smith College, Rowe leads academic strategy and planning, including overseeing all academic operations. She leads a nine-person senior team administering more than 600 faculty members and staff in almost 200 units, partnering with faculty leaders to empower shared governance.
As provost, Rowe works closely with the president, cabinet and trustees on a wide array of strategic priorities. During her tenure, Smith has transformed its liberal arts curriculum, greatly increased diversity in faculty hiring, launched one of the first statistical and data sciences majors at a liberal arts college and broke national fundraising records for women’s colleges. She has also served as Smith’s interim vice president for inclusion, diversity and equity.

“I look forward to Katherine Rowe’s presidency with great enthusiasm and confidence,” said President Reveley. “A proven leader, Dr. Rowe understands American higher education and appreciates the vital role played by historic universities rooted in the liberal arts. She knows as well that we must be intensely entrepreneurial these days, open to new possibilities and willing to change. She has a keen appreciation for the part that alumni, in league with the campus community, play in William & Mary’s progress.

“Along with the Tribe writ large, Helen and I warmly welcome Katherine and her husband Bruce to William & Mary,” he added. “The President’s House, with its three resident ghosts, awaits their arrival.”

Rowe is co-founder and CEO of Luminary Digital Media, which has reimagined books with interactive reading apps that transform and enhance student engagement and learning of classic Shakespearean texts. She was also guest-editor for what is believed to be the first issue of a major humanities journal to experiment with open peer review when the *Shakespeare Quarterly* crowd-sourced its reviews in 2010.

This work has led to national recognition for Smith College and Rowe, who has been featured by the *New York Times* as well as the *Atlantic’s* special project, “Startup Nation: Ideas and Entrepreneurs on the Leading Edge.” She also represented liberal arts opportunities in teaching and learning data science at “Crunching the Numbers: An Atlantic Forum on Data Analytics and Tomorrow’s Workforce” in 2017.

“Dr. Rowe is a wonderful choice to lead William & Mary,” said Chancellor Robert Gates ’65, former U.S. Defense Secretary. “Taylor leaves a strong foundation
upon which to build, and I look forward to supporting and working with Katherine as she moves the university forward.”

**The process and the match**

After nearly a decade as the 27th president of William & Mary, Reveley announced plans in April to retire effective June 30, 2018. Stottlemyer appointed a 19-person presidential search committee to lead the national search for Reveley’s successor. The committee, chaired by Vice Rector H. Thomas Watkins III ’74, was made up of representatives from across the university community. It included Board members that have held many leadership positions across campus as well as faculty and staff members, a recent graduate and a current student leader.

As part of the process, committee members hosted more than 150 listening sessions throughout the country, involving nearly 1,600 people. Hundreds of emails and submissions were also received via the presidential search website. All of that feedback, Watkins said, was critical in helping the committee to narrow the candidates down to finalists to recommend to the Board.

“At every turn, the committee found that Katherine’s experience and expertise complemented William & Mary’s strengths and the direction we heard from the community that the university needs to head in the future,” Watkins said. “We truly believe she will be a transformational leader for this university.”

In a short period, he added, Rowe has made an indelible impact as provost of Smith. During her time at the college, Smith revitalized its curriculum which, like William & Mary’s COLL Curriculum, emphasizes interdisciplinary teaching and learning, real-world problems and positioning students for futures characterized by rapid technological, social and cultural change.

“Katherine recognizes what William & Mary’s COLL Curriculum affirms: that the liberal arts with its key questions, critical thinking and ability to communicate across disciplines puts students at an advantage, whatever fields they enter after graduation,” said Suzanne Raitt, chair of the English department and faculty
representative on the Presidential Search Committee. “I look forward to working with her.”

Rowe was also the academic lead at Smith College for the $100 million signature capital project redesigning the main library. She successfully partnered with outside organizations and philanthropic donors to fund initiatives in statistical and data sciences and design thinking.

“When you think ‘data science,’ you probably don’t think ‘Shakespearean scholar,’” said Sue Hanna Gerdelman ’76, secretary of the Board of Visitors and chair of the For the Bold fundraising campaign. “But that’s what is so exciting about Dr. Rowe and developments in the digital humanities, which is already a point of pride at William & Mary. Katherine is comfortable in a world of possibilities, where barriers between science and the humanities have fallen away.”

Rowe has a commitment to making large, complex organizations into welcoming places to learn and work so that community members from all backgrounds can thrive. In addition to serving as interim vice president for inclusion, diversity and equity at Smith College, she chaired the college’s search committee for a permanent vice president. Rowe has also been responsible for navigating a period of rapid retirement and hiring of faculty at Smith College, crafting a strategic plan to reshape the faculty along with the curriculum. The result was almost 30 academic new hires at Smith, roughly 45 percent of them scholars of color, representing the largest cohort of underrepresented faculty hired in the college’s history. She has also been recognized for her commitment to under-represented students.

“Katherine is a change leader with endless energy,” said Smith College President Kathleen McCartney. “Her legacy at Smith will be felt for years to come — new majors, new processes and new programs. William & Mary will be in great hands under her leadership.”

**Innovative teacher and scholar**

Rowe earned a bachelor’s degree in English and American literature from Carleton College and a master’s and a Ph.D. in English and American literature from
Harvard. She has also completed graduate work in Cinema and Media Studies at New
York University’s Tisch School of the Arts.

Prior to her time at Smith, Rowe spent 16 years at Bryn Mawr College as an
English professor, department chair and director of the Katharine Houghton Hepburn
Center for leadership and public engagement. There she was awarded the Rosalyn R.
Schwartz Teaching Prize for Excellence and Innovation, in 2011.

Rowe also directed two collaborative programs with Haverford and
Swarthmore, Tri-Co Digital Humanities and the Mellon Tri-College Faculty Forum.
Before that, she was assistant professor of English at Yale.

“This is exciting news for William & Mary and its students,” said Laini Boyd ’18,
senior class president and student representative on the search committee. “Dr. Rowe’s
commitment to student achievement and her enthusiasm for the liberal arts are evident.
I was impressed with the quality of her ideas and her dedication to promoting and
sustaining the inclusive environment that our campus needs. I am optimistic that she
will continue to build on the success of our university and carry us forward.”

Rowe has published three books: *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen* with Thomas
Cartelli (Polity Press, 2007), *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural
History of Emotion* as co-editor (Penn Press, 2004) and *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency,
Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford, 2000). She also has editing credits in the *Cambridge
Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare* and introduced G.B. Evans’ *The Tragedy of Macbeth.*

*The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*, with more than 350 scholarly
contributors from five continents, was honored in 2016 by the American Association of
Publishers with two PROSE awards, considered the most prestigious in the publishing
industry, for excellence in reference works and multi-volume reference in the
humanities and social sciences.

Rowe also serves on Harvard’s Board of Overseers’ Visiting Committee of the
Library and the Executive Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies. She
has served as a trustee for the Shakespeare Association of America and has held

Rowe has spent more than a decade coaching Ultimate Frisbee and has led multiple teams to state championships in Pennsylvania. She was a World Ultimate Club Finalist and a Women’s Nationals Finalist. She also co-founded the nonprofit Boston Ultimate Disc Alliance and the Carleton College women’s Ultimate team.

Rowe shares her love of Ultimate with her spouse, Bruce Jacobson. They have two adult children, Daniel and Beah.

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