Statement from the Provost

One important aspect of W&M as a leading liberal arts university in the 21st century is the role of the professional schools. Our strategic plan states as one of its goals “to embed the core values of the liberal arts education in all parts of the university—undergraduate, graduate and professional.” What does this mean in practice? How are and how can these values be reflected in the professional programs – undergraduate and graduate both? How, in turn, can the core W&M liberal arts disciplines be enhanced by the professional programs? Looking to the future, how do we take best advantage of W&M’s mix of liberal arts and professional programs? These are among the questions that will be addressed at this forum.

Statement from Assoc. Prof. Bill Geary of the Mason School of Business

We welcome the opportunity to join in the campus conversation: “Professional Programs in/and the Liberal Arts University.” The chief focus of this statement will be the questions related to embedded core values. The questions related to existing and potential collaboration across organizational boundaries are perhaps best answered in continuing dialog.

William and Mary is a Learning Community. Or more precisely, William and Mary is a university that encompasses many semi-autonomous Learning Communities including Schools and Institutes. Autonomy provides the organizational architecture needed to pursue excellence and be responsive to particular goals. As a university, we seek the synergy that makes William and Mary as a whole uniquely more than the sum of its parts.

The Learning Community in the Mason School of Business reflects a pattern similar to our university. Within the Mason School our Learning Community encompasses identifiable programs serving different constituencies, and each of these programs is associated with a learning community that encompasses students and faculty working together within that program to build and nurture that community. In the Mason School of Business we seek to create learning communities that foster active and experiential learning. This is central to our mission.

The ways we implement our commitment to active and experiential learning are responsive to our educational context. For example, in our Undergraduate Program we have designed a week-long multi-disciplinary simulation experience that is greatly enhanced by advances in software; in our residential MBA and our Masters’ of Accounting programs we have devised a method of delivering particular electives that involve our students in an extraordinarily stimulating learning environment that draws upon some or all of: team teaching, creative use of technology, expertise from outside the university, field experience, research and independent inquiry, and opportunities to develop communication and collaborations skills. These two illustrations are drawn from hundreds of initiatives both large and small that express our abiding commitment to creating and sustaining active and experiential learning communities.

The language we use to discuss shared core values can be as varied as the designs we use to implement these values. For example, we sometimes speak in terms of the three dimensions of
discovery, diversity, and depth when we seek to refine and assess our efforts. Discovery is an essential idea that encompasses both the creation and the dissemination of knowledge. We ask all of our undergraduate students to develop an Individual Program of Study (IPS) which encompasses curricular goals, personal goals, plans for study abroad, extracurricular involvement, and post-baccalaureate goals. When students respond to the challenge of personal discovery by taking full responsibility for their IPS, we know that we have helped them fully appreciate the extraordinary learning environment that is uniquely William and Mary. Diversity, while related to discovery, explicitly adds the commitment to create an educational environment and an educational experience that is diverse. In our curricular design we insist on diversity, and in building relationships within our learning communities we seek to create welcoming and diverse communities. Some might say that words such as “liberal” and “multidisciplinary” capture a similar spirit, perhaps it is more comfortable for us in the Business School to urge our students to “diversify their portfolios.” Adding depth as a third dimension introduces considerable tension. While discovery and diversity are crucial, students must also experience their capacity to acquire the intellectual habits that are associated with depth of learning. If there ever was a time when students attended a university to acquire an education that would be complete by graduation day, that time is certainly not now. Our students must learn how to learn and focused learning provides them with the opportunity to experience their capacity to develop depth.

Reflecting upon factors that differentiate the culture of professional schools one somewhat subtle difference may be worthy of note. Professional schools are likely to invest heavily in building bridges to alums and supporters. There are many ways that alums and supporters express their high regard for the values of the institution that go well beyond but do not exclude financial contributions. Professional schools typically endeavor to cultivate relationships with our graduates and supporters and we find that many seek ways to give back and be involved with the College that they esteem.

The theme of "giving back" is a fitting conclusion for these brief comments. There are many ways to express the realization that our society must constantly be renewed. A personal favorite of mine is the line from W. B. Yeats that Chinua Achebe chose for the title of his book: *Things Fall Apart*. The Schools at The College of William and Mary are joined together in creating and sustaining our learning communities and in so doing we are joined together by our commitment to return to the larger society well educated citizens who will engage in the work of renewing things that tend to fall apart so as to sustain a just and civilized world.