"Professional Programs in/and the Liberal Arts University"
January 25, 2010

**Moderator:**
Michael R. Halleran, Provost

**Panel:**
Pamela Eddy, Associate Professor of Education
Bill Geary, Associate Professor of Business and Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Business Programs
Alan Meese, Ball Professor of Law

**Opening Remarks**

Dr. Halleran opened the conversation by welcoming the audience, which included nearly 100 people. The third in a series of public conversations throughout the year, this session focused on the topic, “Professional Programs in/and the Liberal Arts University.” The ongoing series of events arises directly from the strategic plan, which states, “Promote a campus-wide conversation about the future of liberal arts education and the role of graduate and professional programs in a liberal arts university” (Challenge 1, Goal 1, Objective 1).

Dr. Halleran briefly reviewed the first two events; the first on the meaning of the term “liberal arts university,” the second on the role of research in a liberal arts university. Introducing the current topic, he stated professional programs are critical to our identity as a “liberal arts university.” Dr. Halleran noted, “To the extent we can take our attributes and turn them to our advantage, we are considerably better off.” The discussion then moved to the panelists’ remarks on the role of professional programs in the overall environment of William and Mary.

**Remarks from the Panelists**

Prof. Meese began by distinguishing between a liberal education, a liberal arts university, and the values present in a liberal arts university. Meese noted that no individual program provides a liberal education, which requires the combination of multiple disciplines. To him, the graduate professional programs, including law, business, and education, fit comfortably into a liberal arts university. These programs enhance the education of students already grounded in the liberal arts. Using the law school as an example, that educational experience can deepen and/or broaden a liberal arts education, such as an economics major now focusing on the economics of law or a philosophy major now learning about Constitutional law. Meese noted the professional programs provide research contributions to the College. Collaboration between undergraduate and graduate programs enrich the undergraduate educational experience (law events, co-taught courses, etc.). He suggested that as a part of a liberal arts university, professional programs should also strive to graduate good citizens.

Prof. Meese felt unsure how well the current metrics measure strengths of the various units. He emphasized the importance of hiring faculty embracing interdisciplinary perspectives. Within that mentality, a willingness to co-teach, ideally in synergistic relationship with a colleague, should be encouraged by the institution. Meese then directly
addressed Prof. Eddy’s comments in her written statement on “liberal arts university” as an exclusive term. While he does not personally find the term exclusive, he submitted that the articulation of the overall mission of William and Mary does not always resonate with the professional programs. Meese provided the example of “research-based teaching,” which he finds to be targeted to the undergraduate faculty. He concluded by stating care should be given developing terms that apply to all programs and levels of study.

Prof. Geary expressed an appreciation of the atmosphere of learning more about each other in the ongoing conversations. His remarks then focused on questions related to embedded core values of the College as a whole. Geary started from the question, “What is our relationship to each other?” William and Mary described itself previously as a “learning community,” which Geary developed through the metaphor of an umbrella corporation or holding company to allow for the idea of semi-independent units, or learning communities, within William and Mary as a university. He continued that the challenge is to create the synergy among these learning communities that make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Geary described the Mason School of Business itself as “a collection of learning communities.” Geary then posed the question, “What do we share in common?” His answer, developed from the Mason model, is active and experiential learning. At both the undergraduate and master’s level, the Mason School seeks to model this style of learning in sincere communities. Geary believes this value to be at the core of William and Mary. Geary continued, “How do we live our core values?” He recognizes that different programs use different vocabulary, but generally describe the same underlying conceptual values. The Mason School uses “discovery, diversity, and depth” to describe the education offered. Other programs may use liberal education, but Geary emphasized that the meaning behind the terms is the same. He noted “depth” for the Mason School involves “learning to learn,” which is applicable for a lifetime and a fundamental value of a liberal education.

Prof. Geary then addressed areas in which the professional programs offer an example to the institution. He listed cultivating external relationships, connecting with students for a lifetime, and developing citizens who give back, using the Mason School as an example of each. The experience of the professional programs in these areas can contribute their development in other programs. Geary concluded by focusing on embedding the values of giving back both to the institution and society at large in William and Mary students in all programs to meet the need for continual renewal of society through citizens.

Prof. Eddy, a relatively new arrival on campus, finds there is somewhat of an identity crisis at the College. She noted some conflicting characteristics: a public institution that in many ways acts like an elite private, a high value on research and a high value on teaching, a small hometown college feel at a complex national university. Eddy does not like the term “liberal arts university.” As research in this area describes, liberal arts colleges are numerically on the decline. She would prefer a less limiting term for William and Mary that avoids negative associations. Eddy emphasized shared meaning is important, so the term is crucial. She believes a liberal education to be a core value, described by the American Association of Colleges and Universities as:

An education that intentionally fosters, across multiple fields of study, wide-ranging knowledge of science, cultures, and society; high-level intellectual and practical
skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges. Within a liberal education, Eddy then asked, “Where do graduate programs fit?” She finds that graduate programs at William and Mary are indeed special, but not so special that applicable models cannot be found. Eddy emphasized that other models should be considered, including a rich body of higher education research.

Eddy then returned to the topic of language chosen to describe William and Mary, emphasizing the need for inclusive terminology. She finds language used by the School of Education fitting with the values of liberal education. As part of this ongoing discussion, Eddy suggested the College evaluate its place within higher education. She believes interdisciplinary collaboration will continue to take on greater importance in the future. The College should also give consideration to ongoing alignment with K-12, utilizing the expertise of Dr. McLaughlin, the dean of the School of Education, from her role on this statewide committee. Broadening the perspective further, Eddy suggests consideration to the position in the global marketplace. Within all these areas, she acknowledged an awareness of funding restraints. Eddy emphasized the need for inclusive language all the way down to the janitorial staffs role in the institutional mission before concluding, “We really are in this together.”

**Audience Questions and Comments**

- Dr. Halleran opened the questioning. Based upon the suggestions in the panelists’ written statements, he asked why they thought the College has not pursued some of these ideas for increasing collaboration.
  - Prof. Meese suggested there is a silo effect in which the focus is on the individual unit. Geographic distance between schools and the offices of colleagues in other disciplines also is a factor.
  - Prof. Eddy noted an organizational barrier in the reward structure of the tenure and promotion standards. Collaboration and interdisciplinary work take time. There has to be an encouraging reward structure, but also a willingness on the part of faculty to walk out the office door to connect with a colleague.
  - Prof. Geary noted it does take intentional efforts, but many quality programs do exist already.

- Joel Schwartz, Director of the Charles Center, pointed out a contradiction between the comments on the role of research at William and Mary between Prof. Meese and Prof. Eddy. He submitted that research should be a point of emphasis moving forward, even at the undergraduate level, as a unifying factor.
  - Eddy responded it was not her intent to downplay the role of research at the undergraduate level, but acknowledge its emphasis in the graduate professional programs.

- Tom Ball, a 2007 Mason graduate, observes that professors are overburdened. While acknowledging a silo effect is somewhat natural, Ball suggested that undergraduates could be encouraged to find the opportunities for collaboration as part of the GER experience before indoctrinated into a silo. He felt students could be
used as a resource in the work of finding collaboration opportunities. He suggested bringing student groups together to investigate these questions.

- Jon Krapfl, Associate Dean at the Mason School of Business, comes from a liberal arts background. As a strategy consultant, he notes an internal focus on the term “liberal arts university,” neglecting the external impact. Does identifying with this term have any impact on positioning William and Mary effectively? He believes the terminology confuses people and will ultimately damage the institution. An external view is required to effectively brand William and Mary.
  - Dr. Halleran responded that other institutions using the “liberal arts university” term are mostly former liberal arts colleges that simply changed in name to a university. Wake Forest, a similar peer, uses the term “collegiate university.”
  - Prof. Geary likes the term “collegiate university,” particularly for its emphasis on community. He found the former descriptor of “public Ivy” to have incorporated a strong peer group, where William and Mary was uniquely sized.
  - Prof. Eddy noted that how we talk about ourselves, both to internal and external constituencies, is important. We do need to develop a shared language.
  - Prof. Meese does not have problems with the term “liberal arts university.” All terms will be somewhat problematic.

- Sarah Stafford, Associate Director of the Public Policy Program, spoke about use of the term “professional,” which is exclusive as well by implying that other programs are “not professional.” She added perhaps a better term distinguishing between schools is needed as well.

- Dr. Halleran clarified some of the history of the term “professional” in describing programs.

- George Greenia, Professor of Spanish, likes the term “liberal arts university.” As a professor of modern languages, other disciplines are important to him as is interdisciplinary work. Greenia finds a struggle with articulation between the undergraduate and graduate programs. The unclear linkage between those levels clouds the understanding between the two. Greenia agrees that people are key to a collaborative environment, and suggests encouraging young faculty in particular early in their career to value interdisciplinary collaboration.

- Bill Cook, Professor of Physics, noted the structural difference between programs. (Arts & Sciences has a department chair between faculty and the dean. Professional schools have only a dean and faculty.) Arts & Sciences faculty expect to likely take on the administrative role of department chair at some point in a career. He suggests this can lead to increased collaboration. Is there a greater silo effect in professional schools due to the greater separation of administrative duties?
  - Prof. Eddy noted the School of Education has similar positions to department heads and that most faculty in that school have some administrative experience. There are definitely opportunities for faculty to gain administrative experience in the professional programs.
o Prof. Geary talked about psychic income resulting from the breadth of experience offered in the Mason School, including some administrative work, as a desire of faculty choosing to work in Mason.

o Prof. Meese responded that more law faculty are actively involved beyond the School of Law than Cook suggested.

- Kate Slevin, Chancellor Professor of Sociology, came to William and Mary in 1986 as an administrator and later joined the faculty. She often hears compliments from others at conferences on the excellence of William and Mary as a university. Slevin asked if the professional schools are perceived as the same as other professional schools, or does the undergraduate reputation enhance the professional schools?
  - Prof. Eddy could not speak authoritatively, but noted the recent faculty search yielded an extremely strong pool drawn to William and Mary as an institution.
  - Prof. Meese acknowledged no concrete evidence, but always thought the association with the values of William and Mary have supported attracting faculty and students to the law school.
  - Prof. Geary felt the expectations created for a learning environment does have an effect across all programs. It’s not necessarily a flow across from one level to another, but rather a shared value of the entire university.

- Andrea Sardone, Director of Marketing Communications for the Mason School of Business, shared a concern that the term “liberal arts university” requires some explanation, which is problematic. She suggests there is a natural positive “Oh, William and Mary” moment associated with the College. Any descriptor needs to capitalize on that association rather than require explanation. The final term needs to be believable, unique and distinctive. This identity does need to be shared from top to bottom and throughout the institution.
  - Dr. Halleran responded saying there are two different processes at work; one is developing a vocabulary for internal conversations, the other is to communicate to external constituencies. Halleran thinks “liberal arts university” may be a pretty good internal descriptor, but not necessarily an external attractor.

- Tom Ball noted the economic realities of getting students good jobs, grant money and drawing quality faculty in developing the William and Mary brand. He suggests describing the brand must be centered on action, rather than just description.

- Dr. Halleran asked, “How is the liberal arts environment a factor as a recruiting device?”
  - Prof. Eddy finds the idea of coming to a place where colleagues actively engage intellectually is highly attractive to prospective faculty. A major draw to William and Mary for faculty is the opportunity to work with thoughtful colleagues.
  - Prof. Geary noted a natural sorting process occurs revealing faculty who are looking for the kind of environment described by Eddy.
  - Prof. Meese noted that law faculty are attracted to the possibility of working with colleagues in other programs, though not sure that it’s a deciding factor.

- Dr. Halleran then posed the same question on attracting students.
- Ben Boone, Special Assistant to the Dean of Students and twice an alumnus of William and Mary, believes the synergy among departments and programs serves to attract students.

- Earl Granger, Associate Provost for Enrollment, believes that students can have the best of all worlds at William and Mary, and that is definitely a recruiting factor. He echoed the importance of language through an experience at a previous institution recruiting a faculty member’s child who considered William and Mary as a college rather than a university. What does it mean to be “William and Mary” rather than “The College of William and Mary?” If we choose the term “liberal arts university,” it will stick and we are going to be identified with the company that we keep. The nomenclature is important.

- Prof. Eddy suggested everyone present should take a campus tour to see what the students say about the College. How do people talk about us?

  - Sarah Stafford remarked past faculty candidates have talked about linkages between programs, but some artificial boundaries do exist. There are natural connections between some departments and programs, such as public policy and economics, but others may not occur as naturally. Graduate collaboration also occurs naturally, such as between public policy and business. William and Mary as an institution needs to continue to break down the artificial boundaries.

  - Julie Agnew, Assistant Professor in the Mason School of Business and an undergraduate alumna of William and Mary, finds it to be a distinct advantage of the College to have faculty of different perspectives working with students. As a working professional, Agnew found William and Mary graduates were best prepared to deal with problems because of the diverse perspectives offered to students. She concluded, “We are different. We’re great!”

Dr. Halleran concluded by thanking the panelists and the audience.

*Discussion notes compiled and written by Jeremy P. Martin.*