

*“WILLIAM & MARY AS A LEADING LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:  
FROM CONVERSATION TO FUTURE DIRECTIONS”*

*Introduction and Process*

As part of its strategic planning, the College of William & Mary during the current academic year has held a campus-wide conversation on what will mean for the College to be a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This conversation has thus been critical to the College’s self-identity, future directions and overall strategic plan. The conversation has been extensive, lively and thought provoking. This report makes no attempt to rehearse all aspects of the conversation, nor does it seek to consider the characteristics of a liberal arts university in the abstract. Rather, informed and inspired by the many components of the campus-wide conversation, this report seeks a) to describe what it means for W&M to be a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; b) to chart a path for our future success; and c) to establish a framework for reviews of the both the curriculum and the merit process in the upcoming academic year, both of which are critical to our success.

A steering committee comprising three members of the grand challenge #1 subcommittee, two other faculty members and the Provost set up a series of events and venues for this conversation: seven formal public events (three with faculty panelists, one led by students, two featuring distinguished visitors, and a culminating session on a draft of this report), another faculty-panel session “on the road” for D.C.-area alumni, three faculty focus groups, and a web site with event summaries and opportunities for blogging. In addition, and in the spirit of the conversation, many other discussions rippled from the center – among departments, programs and school faculties, at staff meetings, with alumni and various boards, over lunches, via e-mail, and in the hallways and offices throughout the campus. The public sessions were well attended (the audiences including faculty, students, staff, administrators, alumni, emeritus faculty, BOV members and W&M Foundation Board members), and the many avenues of engagement insured that the full campus had the opportunity to take part in this important conversation. The conversation web site offers excellent summaries of the public events (<http://www.wm.edu/about/administration/provost/conversation/?svr=web>), but it should be borne in mind that while these events touched upon several key aspects of the topic

they were neither comprehensive nor exhaustive in their range of perspectives. This report is only as strong as the conversations that inspired it and thus it is gratifying that so many members of the College community participated in the process.

## *Defining the Liberal Arts*

What do we mean by the liberal arts? The conversation did not address this question *directly* but it ran as a leitmotif through the discussions. Based on a Latin phrase (*artes liberales*), the term liberal arts traces its history to ancient Rome and medieval Europe. In the latter period, one spoke about the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, music, astronomy) as providing the fundamentals of an education. Going back further and to its etymology, it refers to the education befitting a free person or, in another sense, the education that made one free – from ignorance, circumstances of birth, intolerance. In this sense, a liberal arts education is central to the American belief in opportunity, opportunity rooted more than in anything else in education. The subjects typically covered in a liberal arts curriculum come from the core areas of the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences and some hold that these areas are the defining characteristics of a liberal education and that study across these fields provides a broad-based foundation for lifelong learning and a richer and more satisfying understanding of the world. Others, however, will point more to the mode of education, with an emphasis on inquiry and discovery and the development of broad traits and habits of mind such as critical thinking, creativity, rational discourse, sympathetic understanding and persuasive argumentation.

These two emphases are not, of course, incompatible, but reflect different perspectives on the core values of a liberal arts education. An education based in, say, only classical studies or chemistry, would not be thought of as one in the liberal arts, no matter how inquiry-based it might be (insufficient breadth), but nor would an extensively broad-based curriculum in which courses operated by rote learning without debate or examination (inappropriate mode of study). The content of the liberal arts curriculum has changed over time (look at any college catalogue from 1910!); its fundamental mode of inquiry and examination has not. The value of a liberal arts education extends far beyond the degree it confers; it helps to generate those most valuable to society. These are people who those who can think broadly, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively, who can put information in context, not simply synthesize

data, who can approach differences of opinion sympathetically, not insist their views alone have merit, and who identify and test assumptions and want evidence to support conclusions; in sum, those who have learned how to think critically and crisply about ideas and their complexities and who can bring creativity and flexibility to a world of relentless change.

## *The Liberal Arts University*

In the course of the history of American higher education, liberal arts becomes most closely associated with a particular type of institution – liberal arts colleges, typically relatively small, residential institutions, offering a baccalaureate degree with students required to cover a range of core areas (breadth) while majoring in a particular discipline (depth). Although the particulars of liberal arts colleges’ programs vary, institutions identifying as liberal arts colleges have a recognizable design, scope and set characteristics. The liberal arts are often distinguished from professional or “practical” study, even if the boundary lines are not always clear. Traditional liberal arts colleges, for example, typically do not offer degrees in business, nursing or engineering. But one can find some of these degrees offered in more than a few well-recognized liberal arts colleges. In fact, the history of American higher education is rich in the changing perspectives, and at times even tension, in defining its appropriate curriculum, as the nation itself changed, expanded and developed over its history. One of the many strengths of American higher education is its very heterogeneity. Liberal arts programs are not the only programs universities provide. In fact, compared to a century ago, they represent a smaller fraction of the university curricula, although they continue to define undergraduate education at most, but not all, elite institutions in this country.

This last point is worth parsing. While one frequently reads about the “decline” of liberal arts as a percentage of undergraduate degrees offered or student credit hours, the universities thought to be the leaders in the country – Yale, Stanford, Harvard, Penn, Northwestern, Princeton, Chicago, etc. – all have a strong liberal arts bias at the undergraduate level. If one looks at almost any list of elite American institutions, there are arguably only two clear exceptions to this characteristic: MIT and Cal Tech. (The military academies are extraordinary institutions but truly *sui generis*.) These leading institutions are not static and their offerings, curricula and degrees change with the times and in the future may change more radically than they have in the period since, say, World War II. But as we seek to continue to

attract the most talented and engaged students, we should remember that the liberal arts focus is the “gold standard” in most of American higher education. It is also noteworthy that many international partnerships with US universities are fuelled by an interest in the broad-based and self-critical education that we provide. Finally, there is reason to think that this core liberal arts focus will serve us very well in the coming decades. Although some level of emphasis on “practical” degrees will continue (see the current focus in the Commonwealth—and in many states around the country), the attributes of a liberal arts education will become more valuable as traits such as inquiry, flexibility, creativity and empathy are sought and needed in myriad fields around the globe. Tomorrow’s leaders will benefit greatly from such an education.

W&M is not a liberal arts *college*. It is a university by any common definition. It comprises five distinct faculties and offers advanced and professional degrees, including the doctorate, while over 30 percent of its students are in graduate/professional programs. The widely accepted Carnegie classifications define W&M as a “research university (high research activity),” which is the middle range in their tripartite taxonomy for doctoral universities, our SCHEV peer group is composed exclusively of universities, and, for what it’s worth, the most commonly followed rankings, those in USNWR, list W&M among “national universities.” In self-defining as a “liberal arts university,” W&M stakes out important terrain. Putting aside for the moment this phrase’s lack of ready resonance, this descriptor points to two essential features of W&M: its predominantly (but not exclusively) liberal arts undergraduate curriculum and its commitment to research and graduate and professional training. At the same time, W&M is not what is commonly called a research university. Without a school of medicine or engineering, only a handful of universities could be characterized as such. And most of these are much larger (and/or wealthier) than W&M. To put it another way, our focus is bi-focal: we don’t look only at a liberal-arts based undergraduate teaching mission; nor are we blinded by graduate and research metrics only. This dual commitment to teaching in the liberal arts tradition and educating at the graduate levels is our special claim—and among public universities a unique one.

Being a university has another consequence as well: it is one of our competitive advantages. We have five different faculties and our academic expertise covers a wider range than any college. This means that the intellectual richness of our campus is greater for faculty,

students and staff and the opportunities for collaborations and interdisciplinary initiatives (in research or teaching) more numerous. The recent creation of the marine science minor is one (important) example, as is the long-standing program in Public Policy, the relatively new major in neuroscience, and the bio-algae project joining together faculty from many units in a public-private partnership. I do not believe, however, that we currently take full advantage of our possibilities in this regard. This is also the opportunity to point to the etymological dimension of being a university: we are *one* entity. While respecting different missions and cultures in different schools, programs and departments, we will prosper best when we draw on the collective resources and talents of the institution.

When the strategic plan calls us to “embed the core values of liberal arts education in all parts of the university – undergraduate, graduate and professional,” what does this mean? It cannot mean that the subject matters of all programs are going to consist of the areas defined within the liberal arts orbit. MBA students won’t be required to study biology; Law students won’t have a breadth component insisting on competence in European languages. Rather, this embedding can occur primarily in two ways. The mode of education exemplified in the liberal arts as described above can infuse and strengthen the study in all programs across the campus, as inquiry-based instruction and intense learning apply to all disciplines at W&M. This embedding also occurs in the cross-fertilization between and among the different departments, programs and schools. When we embrace this mode of inquiry and engage fully with the campus’ rich array of intellectual talent, we can embed these core values throughout the university and live up to our claim to being a liberal arts university.

The conversation has also suggested some limitations with the phrase “liberal arts university.” Developed last year as a way to capture our hybrid nature, it effectively describes our duality encompassing undergraduate programs and research activity – at least internally. Yet, even within the campus community not everyone finds it a compelling phrase. It also runs into problems externally because it is not commonly used and does not have a linguistic purchase among alumni, potential students, etc. Also, to the extent that other institutions use this term as a self-descriptor, W&M stands out as a significant outlier in this group, which includes many non-elite liberal arts colleges that have added modest graduate programs. A consensus seems to have emerged that “liberal arts university,” although a useful internal

descriptor, may not be the most effective external attractor. The fact is that most institutions that look like W&M are elite private universities, many of which have sufficient “brand” power not to need any descriptor. For us, perhaps “public Ivy” or simply “William & Mary” will prove to be the best term for marketing. Whatever decision is made on that front, it remains true that W&M has strong characteristics of a liberal arts college and a research university; it is neither of these but rather a composite of the two.

### *Liberal Arts in a Rapidly Changing Age*

As the millennium turned over more than a decade ago, much fuss was made about the then new-sounding “21<sup>st</sup> century.” In our conversation, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has stood as a marker for relevance in a wildly changing age. The powerful and interrelated forces of globalization, information explosions and digital technology will shape the world in ways that no one can fully predict. The boundaries between traditional disciplines, the increased demand for accountability and ethics in all the professions, and the growing importance of creativity in problem solving in all areas are among the issues that we will face. Universities change in response to their times. Even a core curriculum shifts to changing emphases and trends. The rare exception--Columbia University’s two core courses (“Contemporary Civilization” and “Literature Humanities”)—proves this rule. The College’s vision statement refers explicitly to expanding its “interdisciplinary study” and “global relevance,” but we have yet to define the nuances of these expansions. A liberal arts education, or any education for that matter, in the coming decades will need to recognize the growing global context of energy, art, law, science, commerce, politics, health and so many other dimensions, and that global issues will be increasingly reflected in our curriculum and faculty research initiatives. The recent Faculty Survey is instructive here: already 41 percent of the faculty responding indicated that their scholarship focuses on international/global issues. The curriculum review this coming year will be the perfect opportunity to engage fully the implications of these changes. It will also be essential for W&M as a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to become diverse racially and ethnically, culturally and socio-economically. This direction will reflect the direction of the larger society and success will be found in part in reflecting more fully the rich diversity of the nation and the world.

Just as the “21<sup>st</sup> century” stands as a measure for relevance, it also refers to the students’ fundamental commitment to civic engagement in their learning. According to the most recent student survey on this issue (2006), students contributed 330,000 annual hours of community service. By many measures, our students and alumni are remarkably involved in service, and W&M has graduated the second most Peace Corps volunteers per capita of any university and was ranked eight nationally by the *Washington Monthly* in the “contributions students make to society.” We have also seen this attention to service in the recently established community studies minor, a program that integrates the academic and the service missions of the College, and the Office of Community Engagement and Service, sponsored jointly by the Office of Student Affairs and the Charles Center. The College’s Sharpe program serves as a model for integrating service, research and learning and faculty and students alike are drawn to this integrative nexus. A liberal arts education is not, as some critics would maintain, a less practical education. Rather, the areas in which it can be applied are less restrictive than others. Our students demonstrate that public service is one way in which they apply their broadly based education.

Service is not synonymous with leadership but they intersect and both resonate with the College’s vision that “our students come wanting to change the world and will leave with the tools to do it.” W&M offers no formal leadership program, but provides myriad opportunities for students to develop as leaders: athletics, student government, ROTC, and over 400 student-sponsored organizations, among them. The “tools to change the world” also include first and foremost the intellectual skills developed in students’ courses of study that will allow them to succeed and thrive as leaders in their chosen fields. Leadership does not develop in a vacuum; it is nourished in varied academic and para-academic activities and programs and in the crucible of living a full life as a W&M student. This civic engagement is not limited to the undergraduate student population. The School of Law has a tradition of producing “citizen-lawyers;” the faculty at VIMS play a vital advisory role for the Commonwealth; and master’s and doctoral students in Education develop numerous connections with neighboring schools and school districts. In short, service plays a role in research and learning at all levels and across all schools of the College.

A university's excellence flows first and foremost from the intellectual richness, creativity and engagement of its community. With its clear expectation that faculty be scholar-teachers and not only teachers or scholars, W&M makes a firm commitment to both dimensions of a liberal arts university. Any ambitions to be a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be based on having the strongest faculty possible, the implications of which are worth outlining. First of all, we must effectively recruit, retain and reward scholar-teachers who possess a love of learning and teaching in equal measure. This means we must maintain rigorous standards in decisions about hiring, retention and promotion. It means that we must have a competitive and principled compensation system that rewards what we value most. (Work undertaken this year and next on faculty compensation and the reward system provides an unusual opportunity to sync our values and our rewards.) It means that we must have the resources – space, equipment, research support, competitive graduate stipends, where applicable – so that faculty can conduct their research and teaching. And it also means, perhaps most importantly, that we sustain an environment that fosters intellectual exchange, excitement, growth and is characterized by collegiality, respect across disciplines and a commitment to the university as a whole. In addition to the core support mentioned above, this can take the form of facilitating research groups, interdisciplinary teaching opportunities, joint appointments, “internal leaves,” teaching “free agency,” space for collaboration, to name but a few possibilities. It is not that we do not do any of these things now (and the Faculty Survey reflects a very high level of overall faculty satisfaction) but we will be most successful as a liberal arts university if we take full advantage of our talents and promote intellectual engagement and excitement across all areas of the campus. We will also, along these lines, need to be nimble in exploring possibilities that emerge internally or externally.

One critical question that emerged from the conversation was the “balance” or “blend” of teaching and research. All seemed to acknowledge that arriving at the right balance or achieving the most potent blend was important, but there was no clear consensus on what the best balance or blend looked like. The issues here are important for how we move forward. To some degree the question of balance is answered by field or department or school. Some fields of research require a team, including graduate students and/or post-doctoral fellows, to conduct experiments and to gather and analyze data. Other faculty can carry out cutting-edge research, publications and creative work individually in an office, library, archive or studio.

Some faculty expressed concern that we risk moving too far from our historic roots focusing on undergraduate instruction; others believed that we were not sufficiently ambitious in our aspirations in graduate education or research. Perhaps the question of balance can never be answered in the abstract or *a priori*. It reflects a tension that inheres in the multiple missions that we carry out. The constraint is ultimately a temporal not an intellectual one. Research and teaching are *not* opposed but time is finite. While exciting research changes the pedagogical dynamic and classroom discussions can affect one's research questions, and ideally one will realize synergies between one's teaching and research, we must also acknowledge that there are limits to how much one can accomplish in either or both arenas. We seem to have found an attractive blend in this regard; maintaining or perhaps tweaking it will be challenging and important.

But the conversation has been clear that W&M is committed to the highest levels of scholarly quality (though not quantity) and to providing excellent teaching in the core areas of the liberal arts and selected graduate and professional programs. Whether teaching an introductory course in Asian history, an advanced elective in educational policy or finance, or a graduate seminar in quantum mechanics, faculty bring to every situation their expertise as active scholars, someone deeply involved in the discipline(s) and topics under exploration. The goal of advancing knowledge is foundational to the modern university and embraced fully by W&M faculty as both scholars and teachers. Whatever the precise blend of teaching (undergraduate, graduate or professional) and research for an individual faculty member (and individual faculty variation reflects the College's overall balance in this regard), it is indeed the W&M blend that is special.

The conversation also explored the role of undergraduate research as a valuable differentiator from other schools. Research helps to define what we mean by our faculty being scholar-teacher and research is required of all graduate students. Should research and discovery also characterize our undergraduate education? Many of our undergraduate students engage in research activities during their years here. (Depending on the definition of "research experience," the percentage of undergraduate students graduating with such an experience is approximately 40 percent.) We have well-established programs such as the Monroe Scholars, Murray Scholars and Dintersmith Fellows. As part of our SACS re-accreditation we chose for

the required QEP (Quality Enhancement Program) extending research experiences into the “routine” curriculum. There are also many exciting examples of research being incorporated into classroom activities, such as in the HHMI-sponsored program in Biology. Undergraduates are key contributors to many research projects, and an undergraduate’s honors thesis proved to be the genesis of W&M’s impressive AidData project, the world’s largest dataset for analyzing foreign aid activities. In short, the conversation highlighted something that is already special about W&M and suggested how we might capitalize on it, making research-based learning fundamental to our curriculum.

We will need to be careful not to act like Procrustes and fit all our offerings into this single mode, but this approach seemed to resonate deeply with many faculty and students. Active learning, or what one might call intense learning,” is the most effective. Such learning comes in different forms but undergraduate research is one powerful way to insure it and this dovetails nicely with our identity as a liberal arts *university*. Furthermore, such learning, by more directly engaging students, empowers them in developing the tools to change the world. If we accept research-based learning as fundamental to our success, we will need to explore carefully the implications of this for our curriculum during next year’s curriculum review. This does not mean that all undergraduate students should be required to engage in a high-level research experience, as pedagogical, logistical and fiscal reasons likely argue against that mandate. But making such learning fundamental to the W&M education would require both innovation in design and recognition of the shifts such a strategy entails.

By most measures we attract very talented and motivated students into our programs. Graduate and professional programs across the board attract an increasing number of high quality students. Looking at undergraduate admissions from the traditional metrics, we enroll a stronger cohort of students than any state university in the nation. The private universities in the benchmark data, however, fare better, in some cases much better, in this regard, relying as they do on significant resources and merit scholarships. More anecdotally, our students are unusually committed to learning and care deeply about ideas and ideals. The conversation was silent on whether we entertained aspirations for a stronger student body as judged by the usual measure, but implicit in being a leading liberal arts university in a highly competitive environment are such aspirations. At the very least, we want to insure that our students

continue to be as talented and intellectually lively as they currently are and the opportunities we offer continue to attract students of this caliber. If we are successful in the ways laid out in our strategic plan, a natural corollary is that we will become an even more attractive institution for prospective students and their families and will be stronger in the years ahead.

### *Attributes into Advantages*

Having described W&M as a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from several perspectives, which of our characteristics are central to our identity and current standing? Which ones will be most important to our future success? It is dangerous to generate a list of such characteristics, as everyone will have a somewhat different one – shorter, longer, narrower, more expansive. But our campus conversation has outlined several features that, although while not individually unique, seem to define us more than others. Here is a partial list (in unranked order), highlighting some of the observations made above:

#### *Academic excellence and intellectual commitment*

All universities lay claim to academic excellence but few have it as deeply in their DNA as W&M does. This excellence is manifest in the quality of faculty and students and even more in our dedication to learning. It is this dedication, combined with a well-known rigor, that sets us apart from many other similar institutions.

#### *Tradition*

The second-oldest university in the country, “*alma mater* of a nation,” home of presidents – however one phrases it, W&M has a storied history and rich traditions. The history is also reflected in our campus with its natural beauty and evocative architecture, and these, along with our proximity to Colonial Williamsburg, bespeak an ethos as much as does a firm commitment to the liberal arts. To study and to live here is special – for its history and for its present-day community.

#### *Engaged learning*

Engaged learning is the most powerful learning. This engagement occurs in many forms – taking an intimate freshman seminar, participating in our program in LaPlata, working in a faculty member’s lab or on her research program, co-authoring a paper with a faculty

mentor, pursuing independent research. We value, facilitate and promote such learning and the close interactions of faculty and students. In providing this learning environment, we most effectively prepare our students to make a difference in the world. Our students are also remarkably engaged outside the classroom – in community service, athletics, clubs, etc. Their commitment in the world reinforces active participation and deep learning.

### *Balance/blend*

More than anything else, the conversation has reinforced the notion that one of our most special traits is our particular blend – of scholarship and teaching, of academic intimacy and scope, of liberal arts undergraduate core with important graduate and professional programs. Our size is also defining: no public university looks like us; no private university is priced like us. The “Public Ivy” label may come to mind but even at those institutions called “Ivy” undergraduate education is less valued than it is here.

If the above characteristics define W&M, where do our greatest opportunities lie? Our attributes define our best possibilities and building on these strengths, articulated above and throughout this report, is the best strategy. First and foremost we must maintain these strengths. Here I point to just a few ways in which we can mine more deeply these characteristics, citing the principle of turning attributes into advantages.

### *Greater Interdisciplinary Work*

Back to the word university: one institution, we are five schools, which provide rich potential for intellectual and programmatic exchange for faculty and students alike. We will strengthen our strong liberal arts and our other programs when we connect intellectually across areas, departments and schools. We have been successful in creating several inter- or multidisciplinary programs in research and curriculum; capitalizing on these programs and ensuring that they and similar ones can flourish will be true to our ethos and benefit our future intellectual capital. Of course such work can only thrive when disciplines are strong; the fundamental approach is to promote, stimulate and facilitate the activities of faculty and students who pursue questions that fall outside traditional and ultimately arbitrary organizational structures.

## *Greater Global Relevance*

The world will become more interconnected – whether we like it or not. We have the foundation in the Reves Center to harness the energy emerging across the campus in the many and often disparate areas connected with internationalization. The newly established International Advisory Committee will help to direct and focus our efforts in these areas, but most importantly faculty and students progressively will engage in the world and will insist on our moving forward in this area. Finally, Washington, D.C. is only 150 miles away, and our Center in D.C. offers enormous opportunities for our students and faculty.

## *Greater Diversity*

Diversity is a loaded word, referring to many dimensions of the academy and not always without contestation. Here it refers to two broad and at times intersecting categories: intellectual breadth and racial, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic representation. Universities cannot be excellent without an openness to a full range of ideas, informed opinions, perspectives and theories. One way to insure this openness – and to attract the most talented faculty and student body – is to have a community that reflects the nation and the world in its composition. W&M will be most successful in being a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if it becomes a more diverse and inclusive community.

## *Next Steps*

This report is meant to serve in part as a guide to next year's curriculum review. More details on what such a review might undertake will be described in a later document, but it should follow from this report that the review provides a great opportunity for reflection and invention.

- How can we marshal our full resources (five distinct, complementary and strong faculties) to provide students with the most intellectually exciting education?
- How will we best prepare our students as they leave W&M to enter a global workforce?
- What should be required of all our students and what only encouraged or made available?
- If research is to become fundamental to our curriculum, what corollary changes does this suggest or even mandate?

- How will we increase what some call “high impact educational practices”?
- As students become increasingly involved in civic engagement, how do we make deeper connections between this and the curriculum?
- How will we harness technological advances to enhance and even change our modes of instructions?
- What emerging fields do we need to embrace more fully and how will they mesh with our existing foci and offerings?
- What degrees of freedom do we want for our students – in constructing majors, minors and their whole course of study?
- How do we structure faculty appointments and rewards to promote most effectively creative and robust research and teaching?
- How do we recruit and reward talented staff who contribute vitally to the success of all of our programs?
- How do we tackle difficult choices and trade-offs as we develop plans for change?

In sum, we have a great foundation to build on – and an equally great opportunity to build in profound and imaginative ways.

Although the current budget woes did not inhibit the campus conversation, these woes must be acknowledged. We are experiencing the worst economic times since the Great Depression. The state has cut 32 percent of their operational support to W&M in a two-year period and there is no expectation that operational funding will do anything other than decline further in the years ahead. At the same time, we will continue to face political pressures or even legislative mandates to enroll more Virginian undergraduate students. Nationally, unemployment remains high, prospects for job growth are dim, and the overall economic outlook is mixed. Liberal arts education as typically delivered, we must acknowledge, is expensive and, some fear, unsustainable in its current forms. The College is in the process of developing a new financial model in which it relies progressively less on state support for operations. Even when fully developed, however, it will face political scrutiny and could have unforeseeable impacts on applications, yield rates, quality of students, etc. In short, we are charting our course on rough seas and we will need to be prepared to tack as we move forward with our ambitions but without losing sight of our goal as we do so. As we proceed in the

strategic plan and in the curriculum review especially, we will have the opportunity and necessity to shape our future in this context, as well as amidst the macro forces adumbrated above. It will be critically important to focus on what is core to our identity, our values and our ethos and to map our ambitions on the twin grids of a changing world and a new fiscal reality.

Socrates is famous for his claim that the unexamined life is not worth living and his own life offered his personal commitment to this claim. The importance of the “examined life” is two-fold in this context. It refers to a core tenet of liberal arts thinking in its restless call to question, explore, contemplate, challenge and probe existing ideas, orthodoxies and beliefs for faculty in their research and teaching and for students to develop as critical thinkers, confident (if at times skeptical) lifetime learners, and future leaders in any of the varied walks of life they might choose. It also serves as a challenge to W&M as a leading liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We too need to explore and examine and be ready to adjust or even jettison our own practices and orthodoxies in order to lead in the future. This future orientation is no repudiation of the past; rather it calls forth, as our most recent winner of the Thomas Jefferson Award has reminded us, a recurring motif in W&M’s glorious history: taking bold steps at critical moments. This final point connects with being a *leading* liberal arts university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Leading has two senses: first and more obvious, to be among the best. Second, and equally important, is to innovate, to be out in front of the pack in our vision. This is the legacy of W&M; this is our greatest resource and opportunity.

Michael R. Halleran

Provost

The College of William & Mary

Version 3.0