

November 10th, 2008

*Growth through Civic
Engagement:*

A STUDENT VISION FOR
THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

Allison Anoll, 2009 (*ed*)

Nik Belanger, 2010

Reina Chamberlain, 2009

Amy Nicole Clinger, 2011

Margaret Summers, 2011

Samanthe Tiver, 2011

Michael Tsidulko, 2011

Jake Reeder, 2009 (*layout*)

Executive Summary

This paper is a collection of student essays that explores the depth of our experiences with social justice-oriented education and service learning. It uncovers our inner struggles as citizens who wish to effect changes and as students who still have things to learn. We present this as a paradigm for what student growth can look like when academics are infused with community action and complex, qualitative thought, guided by questions.

This collection of essays is designed around the questions that drive us. For most of us, we have found that our essence is in the questions. From them, we can begin to structure our lives, our methods, or means. With them, we can move forward in the directions that we believe we must, towards ends we believe are right. We will proceed cautiously, recognizing the flexibility and flaws of our structures, but simultaneously using them as a tool of empowerment for our work.

We're interested in making communities stronger, in restructuring the system, in seeking social justice. We're driven by our passion to do something useful, but overtime transformed by the work we do. Everywhere we look, we see students eager to grow. We're alive with the potential of change, hungry for the things we can learn, burning to be part of something we believe in. We're ready for our academics to be more than an engagement with ourselves.

The Future of Student Growth

In her time at William and Mary, **Allison Anoll** has been driven by the energy and passion surrounding her. Her essay "illuminates our inner struggles as citizens who wish to affect change and as students who still have things to learn." She sees around her the potential for student growth through social justice-oriented education and service-learning. Allison asks the College to see value in the transformative experience students have undergone through civic engagement and to support it as a main tenet of a William and Mary education.

The Transformative Process

For **Reina Chamberlain**, service is no longer the end goal; it is the beginning. In her four years at William and Mary, Reina has learned the importance of service as the catalyst for critical thought. She has searched for flexibility in her education to help her uncover and explore her questions. Reina explains that service "thrust me from a directionless freshman year into the passionate, curious, and determined whirlwind that has been my experience at the College ever since." She asks for the College to support others as it has supported her.

The Complications of Our Journey

Amy Clinger spent her childhood on the streets, learning to survive in a world of drugs, prostitution and violence. Her journey from this past has been one based in education, with

William and Mary providing a stepping stone towards knowledge and an understanding of society. Amy explains, “I am the conscious interpretation of my past mobilized into action in the present... At William and Mary, I have begun to understand my identity, my place in the world, and a social obligation I have felt ever-present in my life. This search is far from over and honestly, it excites me.” Service has provided Amy a way of integrating her past with her future as an activist for social change, as a part of the system working to relieve others who are suffering as she suffered. As she states, her journey has only begun.

This is Only the Beginning

The transformative experience of William and Mary’s service community happens quickly. For **Margaret Summers** it happened one night in Nicaragua after seeing the gross inequalities between nations. In her words, “I sat in a hammock that night and wrote furiously in my diary, wanting to remember all the people I met and conceptualize the community I was confronting.” But she is far from done growing. The system of support William and Mary provides has helped to guide her exploration, questioning and understanding of the world outside of Williamsburg. But there is more to be done.

Communities, Solidarity, Compassion

Nik Belanger understands the complicated problems that surround us. He understands the impenetrability of the system, the depth of the questions, the history behind rooted inequality. But even grasping the solemnity of these problems, Nik believes there is a way to move forward. “At William and Mary, we don’t do impossible,” he suggests, “We do solidarity. We do unity. We do community. And through that community, we do change.” This commitment to community action and organizing, to compassion for others that surround you, drives his work at the College and its surrounding community. Nik’s paper is a story of growth and aspirations, of vision for the future.

Who We Can Become

Samanthe Tiver is not the same person she was before stepping on William and Mary’s campus. Through her involvement in service and the Sharpe Program, she has critically evaluated her role as a student and as a citizen in society. She has learned the value and interconnectivity of education, public discourse, and action. She laments however, that the transformation that has taken place within herself through service, has not been experienced by her peers. She explains that “many students lack the skills to effectively engage within the community and actively work toward solutions; they can become stuck in a cycle of passive volunteerism where they are reactive rather than proactive.” Samanthe looks to the structure of William and Mary and to its administration to rectify this and “create the next generation of informed, engaged citizens.”

Leadership and Societal Change

Mike Tsidulko realized early the importance of leadership positions for the purpose of creating systematic change. But it was not until William and Mary that he realized how entwined the goal of leadership and systematic change was with his studies. Now, he has

“metabolized the importance of positions of power for establishing meaningful change in a community.” As a sophomore, he is craving an education based in social change as seen through the lens of history, philosophy, government and sociology. Realizing his capacity to be a leader, Mike asks the College to support his growth into a compassionate, knowledgeable individual capable of working within the system for the purpose of reform.



The Future of Student Growth

In her time at William and Mary, Allison Anoll has been driven by the energy and passion surrounding her. Her essay “illuminates our inner struggles as citizens who wish to affect change and as students who still have things to learn.” She sees around her the potential for student growth through social justice-oriented education and service-learning. Allison asks the College to see value in the transformative experience students have undergone through civic engagement and to support it as a main tenet of a William and Mary education.



Allison Anoll is a senior at the College. She is a double major in American Studies and Government with an interdisciplinary focus on citizenship. She was a Sharpe scholar freshman year and has continued her work with the program as a Community Scholar, a teaching fellow, and now a program assistant. She plans on pursuing a PhD in political science after graduation.

nevertheless i
feel that i cleverly am
being altered that i slightly am
becoming
something a little different, in fact
myself
-- ee cummings.

If there is something I have learned in my time at William and Mary, it is that untangling questions often leads to more tangles. The exploration of if-then statements, of statistics and premises, becomes complex and confusing, a darkened path we navigate with a dim lantern, at best. What I have also learned is that there is opportunity in this exploration.

This paper is a collection of student essays that explore the depth of our experiences with social justice-oriented education and service-learning. It illuminates our inner struggles as citizens who wish to affect change and as students who still have things to learn. We present this as a paradigm for what student growth can look like when academics are infused with community action, complex, qualitative thought, and guided by questions.

We designed this compilation around the critical questions that drive us. For most of us, we have found that our essence is in these questions. From them, we can begin to structure our lives, our methods, our means. With them, we can move forward in the directions we believe we must, towards ends we believe are right. We will proceed cautiously, recognizing the flexibility and flaws of our structures, but simultaneously using them as a tool of empowerment for our work.

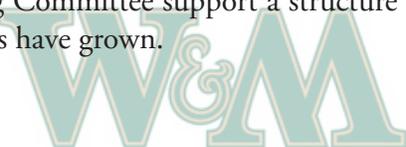
We're interested in making communities stronger, in restructuring the system, in seeking social justice. We're driven by our passion to do something useful, but overtime we learn that the work we do transforms who we are. Everywhere I look, I see students eager to

grow. We're alive with the potential of change, hungry for the things we can learn, burning to be part of something we believe in. We're ready for our academics to go beyond an engagement with ourselves.

Through this writing, we hope to show how we burn. We hope to demonstrate how the combination of community-focused education and reflective service-learning can transform students' lives to a point that the questions they uncover are inseparable from themselves. Our questions are inseparable from ourselves. We hope to show how education like this creates students who are both passionate and compassionate, both strong and cautious in their pursuit for social change. We hope to show a paradigm of student growth the College has only just begun to discover.

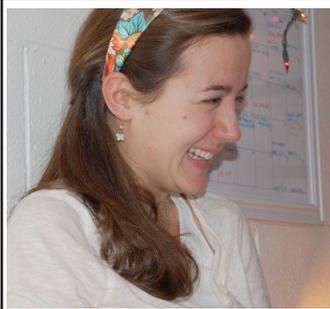
From this model of growth, William and Mary assumes two entwined responsibilities. The first is to help us uncover our questions. This requires an academic system based in reflective action. The second is to guide us into the working models derived from those questions which we can use in our action. This requires outlets for student exploration through service learning and civic engagement. It necessitates flexibility in education so students can directly address the questions that drive them. It requires a system of support that can guide, but not direct, our growth.

We believe this growth is a main component of a liberal arts education. We believe this concept is built into the foundations of William and Mary's mission. We would like to see the Strategic Planning Committee support a structure that can help other students grow in the way we ourselves have grown.



The Transformative Process

For **Reina Chamberlain**, service is no longer the end goal; it is the beginning. In her four years at William and Mary, Reina has learned the importance of service as the catalyst for critical thought. She has searched for flexibility in her education to help her uncover and explore her questions. Reina explains that service “thrust me from a directionless freshman year into the passionate, curious, and determined whirlwind that has been my experience at the College ever since.” She asks for the College to support others as it has supported her.



Reina Chamberlain is a senior majoring in Community Health Studies. She is the co-leader of the Maasai American Student Association and a

will be returning to Kenya this summer to continue working to understand a complex community. After graduation she will be taking a year to pursue educational experiences beyond the academic sphere. She will then attend Eastern Virginia Medical School to pursue a medical degree and a masters of public health.

What is the point where it stops being simply volunteering and becomes instead an effort to change the world?

How naive, how idealistic, how ineffective service can be; volunteers with big hearts but few skills trying to patch the leaking dams of the world with band-aids and bubblegum. My service at William and Mary has not addressed the issue of housing inequalities in South Carolina, nor have I made a crack at the lack of health care in Kenya. Has my time spent with the terminally ill led to an improvement in end-of-life care in the United States? I seriously doubt it. Did I, individually, leave a lasting mark

of improvement in Petersburg, Virginia, after spending one summer there three years ago with the Phoenix Project? Absolutely not. Yet you will not find a stronger advocate for the continuation and expansion of service involvement here at William and Mary than me.

Why?

Because volunteers change the world. They do not solve, nor are they the solution to, the world's problems, yet volunteers care. They engage, they learn, they grow, and eventually they become citizens who can not sit back and allow injustices to go unaddressed. It is not the change they impart; it is that they themselves have changed. Service reminds people that they are part of the world and that there is no excuse for passivity in the face of another person's struggle. If civic engagement became the norm, instead of the exception, would the world not change?

The College of William and Mary has fostered this sort of growth in me in a way that I am convinced no other college could have. A personal transformation is not an intrinsic consequence of service. Though my volunteerism in high school was extensive,

it was not a significant force in my development. When I began to volunteer at William and Mary, suddenly I was expected to actively and critically think about service. I was not just volunteering to fix a problem; I was studying why the problem existed and being asked what my role was in addressing it. Every time I thought I had found the solution- gender equality, education, health care, public policy- someone would push me to think harder, to delve deeper.

This process became the driving current of my experience at William and Mary. Though in my first year I quickly recognized the value of service, volunteering did not satisfy my question of how I could best contribute to the world. When my freshman seminar introduced me to the world of health care, suddenly I had found my lens. Medicine allowed me the clarity I needed in order to look at the world and its challenges, and not be overwhelmed. My professor listened enthusiastically as I described pieces falling into place, and gently guided me to one of my most important realizations: a career in medicine could be my career in service.

This catalyst thrust me from a directionless freshman year into the passionate, curious, and determined whirlwind that has been my experience at the College ever since. Classes have made me more excited about service and service has made me more excited about classes. I have shadowed doctors in labor and delivery in the underserved city of Camden- it blew my mind. I worked as a scribe in the Williamsburg Regional Hospital, then traveled to rural Kenya, where there are no hospitals, and tested children for Trachoma. I conducted research in the Kinesiology department, and then took a medical semester abroad in the Dominican Republic, researching the challenges to infant survival in rural communities. With unfailing support from my advisers, I designed an Interdisciplinary Major in Community Health Studies and applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to return to the Dominican Republic. With the scholarship I could work with Physicians for Peace, studying the efficacy of their NGO-community partnership in addressing teenage pregnancy and infant mortality. It would be a dream come true.

William and Mary can do this for its students. It has the potential to teach us to identify our passions, to discover who we are and where we fit into the global community. It is not accurate to say that service is an extracurricular activity when here service itself is an academic endeavor. But it is equally inaccurate to say that William and Mary does this for all of its students, or even for a majority of its students. Beyond providing the opportunities to serve, the College must provide the support and guidance that is necessary to awake in every student the yearning to seek their own passion, their own niche. For its students to become forces that change the world, William and Mary must actively facilitate the process by which individuals discover their clarifying lenses and refine their bigger questions. The service learning movement on this campus has the potential to profoundly impact the next mass of students to enter this university. If the multidimensional support that I have found at the College were to become fundamental to the William and Mary experience, I have no doubt that the next mass of students will discover their own potential to profoundly impact the world.

The Complications of our Journey

Amy Clinger spent her childhood on the streets, learning to survive in a world of drugs, prostitution and violence. Her journey from this past has been one based in education, with William and Mary providing a stepping stone towards knowledge and an understanding of society. Amy explains, “I am the conscious interpretation of my past mobilized into action in the present... At William and Mary, I have begun to understand my identity, my place in the world, and a social obligation I have felt ever-present in my life. This search is far from over and honestly, it excites me.” Service has provided Amy a way of integrating her past with her future as an activist for social change, as a part of the system working to relieve others who are suffering as she suffered. As she states, her journey has only begun.



Amy Nicole Clinger is a sophomore at the College. Freshman year she was a Sharpe Community Scholar. Amy

is an Anthropology major focusing on pre-Contact Native American sites and feminist African American archaeology. Upon graduating she plans to join the Peace Corps and afterwards pursue a PhD in Archaeology somewhere in the world.

In a certain time long ago, in a place even farther, before concepts such as identity or social obligation were understood, a young girl knew only survival. She quickly learned the harsh lessons of how to get by with whatever means possible; never underestimate the human will to survive. A little girl alone, robbed of childhood, learning too early only the worst of what she now understands as society, knew her way out: teaching herself to read in a world of chaos brought a sense of stability. She couldn't understand the world outside of drugs, prostitution, and continual

homelessness, but she could read about it. Attending school was a conscious choice—her mother nonexistent, being constantly “high” or with clients. Some mothers don't have time to take their children to school, or so the little girl told herself. School was a safe haven; even though she was less hygienic than the other kids, she was just as intelligent and given a certain respect. Years passed, never in the same place, each new place leaving its own scars. Knowledge, however, was constant. The little girl clung to her only constant, maybe too much, but it was her salvation, her way out. With the eventual incarceration of the girl's mother, the different and impermanent places she lived evolved into different and impermanent family members and, through the years, the girl moved toward an ever increasing security, in her home, in her education, and in her life.

This security came from the help she received along the way and with this help came guilt. Guilt for her comfortable life and those left in her old life that seemed to be slowly, continually fading into fiction, into a time better forgotten. She turned this guilt,

this ever accruing debt, into action, volunteering and attempting to make other lives better. She learned to function in society, to make friends, to love, and she slowly moved away from seeing the world in terms of survival. The world consisted of pain and suffering, but beauty as well, and there were merits to humankind. She wanted to help people, to make society better. She longed for a way to ensure that no child shared her experiences, that no other child had their innocence ripped away from them. In her heart she consciously replaced her cynicism with idealism, but her head clung to practicality. She was beginning to learn to use her past to help her. Her idealism for the first time allowed dreams, dreams beyond getting out of the world of chaos, dreams of success.

She applied early decision to William and Mary and found transformation. As an independent student she qualified for a program called Gateway, which alleviated the one issue that her practical brain contested about attending college. She knew college would open her world financially, but never expected the true extent to which college would open her horizons. She learned to define her constant guilt as social obligation and channeled her energies from day one into fulfilling this social obligation. Her freshman year she applied to Sharpe, a community of scholars with whom she could grow and explore the fundamentals of service with. She learned, defined, and redefined her personal understanding of community, poverty, inequality, and service from an academic standpoint. She learned to question everything. William and Mary offered her the knowledge she always longed for and the ability to apply her knowledge to help someone other than herself.

Her past became strength, strength she could use to help others understand what poverty and inequalities mean from her own distinctive point of view. She could enable, inspire, and become an asset for others. Service at William and Mary only created more questions, but provided the resources to seek them and in turn, channel them to a greater good. Her classes and service, while giving her an academic base, also made her fear intellectual superiority. She remembers all too well her life in the underground, her reactions to authorities who thought they knew best. The girl found herself in a unique position, gaining knowledge and understanding ways to best eliminate inequalities in the world, with an insider's vantage point forged through fire. She knew that with her education, she was securing her upward social mobility for the future firmly in the middle class, yet she continued to identify with the lower class. She continued to struggle with feeling classless in a class-based society, but this only enhanced her service. She strived to gain knowledge to understand her experiences to help the world to which she finally felt she belonged.

And this brings us to the present.

Simply put, William and Mary was the best choice I've ever made with my life. That questioning little girl is still inside me searching for answers. I am the conscious interpretation of my past mobilized into action in the present. And William and Mary has been the vehicle of this interpretation as well as action. Service is weaved into the very fabric of William and Mary. Most days, my formative experiences seem light years away. But some days, I wonder what I am doing, a sophomore in a prestigious college, thirsting for something as "useless" as knowledge; questioning not poverty itself, but the foundations of

poverty. I know what poverty *is* on a level that only experience can provide, but through Sharpe now I am trying to *understand* it to help others. Knowing and understanding, I've found, are not always synonymous. I have found that the principles taught at William and Mary have been tools I continue to use; it is here I have begun to understand my identity, my place in the world, and the articulation of the system of accruing social obligation I have felt ever-present in my life. This search is far from over and honestly, it excites me. I know, allowing the idealist to speak, that in a place as incomparable as William and Mary, I have access to the resources and knowledge base to continue questing, for myself and for others. Every day I feel stronger and more confident that I have something to offer humankind and I am ever-attempting to guide this energy into something far greater than myself.



This is Only the Beginning

The transformative experience of William and Mary's service community happens quickly. For **Margaret Summers** it happened one night in Nicaragua after seeing the gross inequalities between nations. In her words, "I sat in a hammock that night and wrote furiously in my diary, wanting to remember all the people I met and conceptualize the community I was confronting." But she is far from done growing. The system of support William and Mary provides has helped to guide her exploration, questioning and understanding of the world outside of Williamsburg. But there is more to be done.

Margaret Summers is a sophomore at William and Mary. She is majoring in Economics and Sociology. She is involved in Students for Healthy Communities, an inquiry based service-learning group focused on community health in rural



Nicaragua. She also tutors and mentors middle school students through Project Phoenix.

The first time I ever went to Wal-Mart was last spring. My classmates and I were doing some last minute shopping, picking up over a hundred tubes of Neosporin before going to the airport to fly to Nicaragua. Within twenty four hours of my initiation to this bastion of consumerism, I found myself in an entirely different environment. There are no Wal-Marts in Cuje, Nicaragua. There is a small co-op store, but that is it. There are no cars, no electricity, and during the dry season there is barely any

water to drink. I was physically and mentally exhausted after my service group's first day in Cuje, running a medical clinic and conducting ethnographic research to learn more about the community. I sat in a hammock that night and wrote furiously in my diary, wanting to remember all the people I met in triage and struggling with the concept that this community and Wal-Mart can exist at the same time.

In college I have come to realize how frustrating service is. After recognizing injustices and inequalities such as those in Nicaragua, it is easy to get excited about action and change. Actually making a positive difference in the world is more difficult. On campus I am surrounded by passionate students driven by diverse concerns including the environment, world hunger, local inequalities, and more. These problems are overwhelming. Still it is reassuring to be in a place where these frustrations can evolve into actions. Through the structure and support that William and Mary's service community has created, we can address these problems instead of pretending they don't exist.

I believe that for service to be effective, it is crucial to be thoughtful and informed. Helping somebody means not helping somebody else. The idea that I can't possibly help everyone scares me. It also emphasizes the importance of being deliberate in choosing and

pursuing my passions. The class associated with my service trip to Nicaragua is essential to my experience. I am challenged to consider not just how to make a difference, but why. William and Mary is teaching me to be careful and purposeful in my actions.

Learning about injustices in class is important, but not enough. Just doing service is not enough either. I can't imagine tutoring in local middle schools without knowing anything about the boy who I am practicing spelling words with. It would be inadequate to do medical work in Nicaragua without understanding the community in which the patients live. Service and knowledge are completely dependent.

I am excited for college reunions, when I can see how the intertwining of academics and service at William and Mary will have shaped my classmates' lives. The thoughtful service that we do today is not worthwhile just because it achieves the primary goal of helping others. It also prepares us to be attentive, active members of society once we graduate. With our knowledge and energy, the Tribe has tremendous potential to serve society. More than anything, we need the resources and structure to reach this potential.



Communities, Solidarity, Compassion

Nik Belanger understands the complicated problems that surround us. He understands the impenetrability of the system, the depth of the questions, the history behind rooted inequality. But even grasping the solemnity of these problems, Nik believes there is a way to move forward. “At William and Mary, we don’t do impossible,” he suggests, “We do solidarity. We do unity. We do community. And through that community, we do change.” This commitment to community action and organizing, to compassion for others that surround you, drives his work at the College and its surrounding community. Nik’s paper is a story of growth and aspirations, of vision for the future.

In high school, I didn’t know all the people in my classes nor had I met many of the families that lived on my block. Beyond awkward half-grins and the occasional nod, our neighbors didn’t acknowledge one another—much less develop any kind of meaningful relationships. I could name my Congressional representatives and had issues that were important to me, but why bother discussing them with the older woman next door or the young



Nik Belanger is a junior at the College, originally from Lafayette, Louisiana. A Government and French double-major, Nik’s interests include the Christian faith and social justice, community organizing, and simple living.

family with the twins across the street from me? After all, they’re not the ones that make decisions; to push for change, I’d have to write letters, call the Louisiana delegation in D.C., or maybe join an interest group. When I came to William and Mary, that understanding changed, and I have come to appreciate the power of community. Even more significantly, what drives us beyond words and towards actions is the understanding that the care we share for one another at the College has implications beyond the boundaries of Jamestown and Richmond roads. The exceptional strength and support found in the bonds of the community at the College can—or at least has the potential to—be found in neighborhoods across the United States. It is through these communities that we find avenues for real, lasting social change.

My passion for social justice, as I currently understand it, first arose freshman year when I became involved in the International Justice Mission, a Christian human rights and social justice organization. Members of the College community came together around an understanding of the Gospel as a story of God’s heart for the oppressed, and I began to understand this Jesus guy as a figure of radical social change. Despite having read through the book before, it was undoubtedly this community that awoke in me such fervor for the biblical Jesus’ explicit call for economic equality and demonstrated self-sacrifice. Students

across the W&M campus hear similar calls, just in different ways from different voices. Without community, pursuing such a charge would seem daunting, impossible even. But at William and Mary, we don't do impossible. We do solidarity. We do unity. We do community. And through that community, we do change.

When I first came to the College, I had a fractured understanding of the world in which I lived. While academics, community service, a handful of justice-oriented after-school activities and an intense involvement in my home church in Louisiana shaped my high school years, it was not until coming to the College that any common theme was realized. My faith remained separate from my social convictions. I grew up learning the importance of personal piety and the importance of fellowship. In school, questions of deep social brokenness never reached the surface. Service projects came and went, and my fifty hours were always dutifully reported. Then, a couple afternoons after school, I would gather with a dozen other students to write letters to world leaders or discuss issues of inequality. Worship, study, serve, talk, repeat. Activities—rather than community—defined who I was and what I did. Again, it was this William and Mary community that shaped my view not only of the world around me but also of the heart within me.

This semester, I began working with Virginia Organizing Project, a nonpartisan grassroots organization, and I am beginning to realize the implications of community beyond the university setting. Community not only plays a role in defining our identities; more than anything our communities—regardless of how gated, ignored or 'traditional' they may be—can serve as politically potent forces for change. While entire groups may find themselves ignored for the color of their members' skin or the thinness of their pocketbooks, a community-based approach not only puts the power in the hands of the people, but the process by which it does so calls to mind the potential of broken communities. By organizing, these families and individuals find themselves in position to demand more from their representative government; in short, communities make democracy work.

While I may not have known what *community* meant before fall 2006, my time at the College has fostered an understanding and appreciation of solidarity and unified action. Now, as a community aware of itself, we must turn our attention outward and cultivate strong communities in the Commonwealth, the country and beyond.

What We Can Become

Samanthe Tiver is not the same person she was before stepping on William and Mary's campus. Through her involvement in service and the Sharpe Program she has critically evaluated her role as a student and as a citizen in society. She has learned the value and interconnectivity of education, public discourse, and action. She laments however, that the transformation that has taken place within herself through service, has not been experienced by her peers. Samanthe looks to the structure of William and Mary and to its administration to reify this and "create the next generation of informed, engaged citizens."



Samanthe Tiver is a sophomore majoring in Economics and Mathematics. She works in the Office of Development and is part of the Student Environmental Action Coalition. She was a Sharpe scholar freshman year and has continued her work with the Academy for Life and Learning, the alternative education program, since that time.

When I entered the College of William and Mary as a freshman, I did not understand that I was also taking on a role within the broader community. Prior to ever entering a classroom, I was assigned a pre-civic engagement essay evaluating my role in service and exploring my understanding of the Williamsburg community. Like many William and Mary students, I had many years of experience in volunteerism and community service. But rarely did I critique my work in the context of larger

community-wide solutions. Soon I was thrown into this world of Sharpe Community Scholars, where I realized that who I am, what I study, and how I serve are inherently connected.

The Sharpe program provides participants with a structured guide for community interaction by providing a program that directly links academic courses with community partners. While all William and Mary students have the primary role of student, Sharpe Scholars are expected to embrace multiple roles as students, community advocates, and service providers simultaneously. Acting as an advocate for an underserved population as I did with the Academy for Life and Learning is a unique opportunity for students to both engage in the process through which fundamental community decisions are made as well as to interact with the community's power structures. This kind of direct action requires participants to confront challenges and develop skills to negotiate and compromise with the diverse interests that converge on a particular project. They see the importance of civic engagement because the fewer the voices involved in a social and political discourse, the less accountability, creating an elite class of decision makers who unduly influence decisions that affect the majority.

Once outside the Sharpe program, I realized that my peers throughout campus had not been exposed to the same social challenges to which I had been exposed nor did they develop the skills for effective community interaction. Over the past three months I have grown increasingly frustrated as I struggle daily to better understand my community and the solutions this community demands, while many of my peers have yet to consider their individual roles in society. When I go out to serve the needs of my community, I find it necessary to critically evaluate my role in working towards solutions to better educate at-risk populations of students. Back on campus, I have encountered students who have tried to work towards similar ends with very little critical evaluation of the means they are using to achieve their goals. Many students lack the skills to effectively engage within the community and actively work toward solutions; they can become stuck in a cycle of passive volunteerism where they are reactive rather than proactive. After having participated in engaged scholarship and having benefitted from the critical evaluation skills it gave me, I recognize the importance the importance of encouraging such engaged scholarship among all students in order to improve to create a campus wide community informed and critical citizens.

Still the challenges we face and questions we encounter do not end with the semester. When service-learning courses are over, we are still involved with our community partner. William and Mary needs a structured system of service resources that provides civically engaged students with opportunities to interact with faculty, hold dialogue about service and social responsibility, and develop community partnerships. There are students like me throughout the campus, involved in projects in a wide-variety of communities. We require support from the College in answering the questions faced and in developing the skills for informed, effective service and social change. I look to my administration to take the first steps to lead the College in the right direction to create the next generation of informed, engaged citizens.

What We Can Become

Mike Tsidulko realized early the importance of leadership positions for the purpose of creating systematic change. But it was not until William and Mary that he realized how entwined the goal of leadership and systematic change was with his studies. Now, he has “metabolized the importance of positions of power for establishing meaningful change in a community.” As a sophomore, he is craving an education based in social change as seen through the lens of history, philosophy, government and sociology. Realizing his capacity to be a leader, Mike asks the College to support his growth into a compassionate, knowledgeable individual capable of working within the system for the purpose of reform.

The first time I strived for a position of leadership was my sophomore year of high school. I ran for class president because I realized the problems my grade was hindered by and that I was passionate about facing them. Since then I’ve *metabolized* the importance of positions of power for establishing meaningful change in a community. It is a relationship that has been engrained in me through experience and has manifested itself in how I see the world.

I observe the people around me and I see the inequalities and injustices that continue to persevere. At the same time I recognize and can literally visualize the power mechanisms that underline expressions of influence. Essentially this struggle is about attaining influence within the system in order to achieve progress, and this struggle is a personal one. I know there is something to be done and that I am capable of fulfilling such a role. I know that one day I will have to be ready. The question is how? When? I need William and Mary to help answer my questions.

While I can see the mechanisms and the problems, that alone is not enough. I need to *know* and I need to *practice*. So far, the College has indirectly taught me important lessons through select classes and professors I chose to engage. However, I need to have a comprehensive guideline to my education. I’m interested in absorbing not only the theory, but the history and the implementation. This is not just about breathing the mechanisms; this is about learning how to think and how to approach.

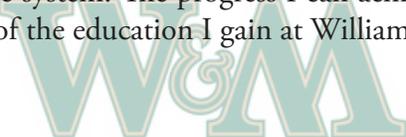
An encompassing and complete education should be a marriage between



Michael Tsidulko is a sophomore at the College, who hails from Brooklyn, NY. He is currently designing an interdisciplinary major focusing on political and social philosophy. Michael serves as a senator for the class of 2011 and has been active in student government since high school. He is also a presenting member of One in Four, a sexual assault peer education group on campus. He plans on attending law school after graduation.

instruction and application. Our education system needs to be one of *engaged* learning. I recognize the fundamental necessity of practice, otherwise I am simply memorizing facts to pass an exam instead of developing the tested, engaging, and influential skills I know I need. While William and Mary offers practice through campus involvement and organizations, it comes at the price of a disconnect with one's studies. The Sharpe Program begins to remedy this by incorporating individualized service projects as a critical supporting leg of its instructional structure. However, I realized the potential of this organization after the opportunity to participate in it had passed, and am searching earnestly for an alternative route.

Today, my hunger is being fed by the potential of a new approach. I am excited about creating a self-designed interdisciplinary major to address my interests and guidelines. The interdisciplinary approach will provide me with broad perspectives and valuable flexibility. At the same time, I'm reminded of one of William and Mary's most important and effective resources—its students. Every time my eyes sweep over the faces of those who share my classrooms, I remember how much my fellow students burn with questions of their own. I know my peers are brimming with inquiry and knowledge, and command skills that can be taught and spread to others to put the answers to their own questions closer within reach. As such, today more than ever I'm hopeful I will reach the answers to my own questions during my time at the College. My first leadership position in high school provided me with the entry point into the system. The progress I can achieve by influencing it will be determined by the strength of the education I gain at William and Mary.



Conclusion

We believe in the powerful structure of academic support that the College of William and Mary provides. We believe in its foundations, in its future, and in its beauty as an institution that prepares students for the world. We also believe in its ability to grow.

Every one of us has undergone a transformative experience, driven by a William and Mary education. But in many ways, we are a select few who stumbled onto Sharpe freshman year, who happened upon the Office of Volunteer Services, who, early on, encountered professors willing to guide our questions. We are a select few, but we are a paradigm for the many.

William and Mary holds the ability to make all of its students burn the way we burn. The College has the resources to steep us in the communities that surround us, allow us to explore the injustices we face, and help us to confront the problems that we, as the upcoming generation, will encounter in our future. We wish to make clear that this experience should not be confined to traditional routes and needs support that is not isolated within a few departments and programs. We come from a variety of academic backgrounds including neuroscience, economics, mathematics, and American studies. We plan to be doctors and lawyers, scientists and writers. Our circumstances and our futures are diverse, but we are bound together by our craving to do something more, to extend our questions to the world. We have a shared passion for humanity and a sense of responsibility driven by commitment. We will, undoubtedly, push forward and apply our skills for change.

We believe in the importance of this cause. We believe in academics that foster social awareness and service that sparks attentiveness. We want to be available to this committee. We have provided you with our journeys as students, as well as with our names and our contact information. Our personal experiences prove the importance of this work; we have ideas of how to do this for others.

The Strategic Planning Committee is charged with “identifying grand challenges and opportunities;” We present the Committee with the ultimate challenge. How do we develop students to be leaders in the world, to engage with compassion, direction, and commitment? This mission is the creed of William and Mary; it is the responsibility of all of us to realize it.

Thank You

Jake, Allison, Nik, Mike, Reina, Amy, Samanthe, and Margaret