

Breaking Boundaries

William & Mary, “loved of old,” has a powerful tradition of innovation reaching back hundreds of years. In the 1760s, Professor William Small broke the mold of rote memorization then characteristic of undergraduate education; he taught through lectures and hands-on experience, with Thomas Jefferson 1762 among his students. Phi Beta Kappa, the nation’s preeminent academic honor society and its first Greek fraternity, began at William & Mary in 1776. The nation’s first law school was created in 1779 at William & Mary under the leadership of George Wythe, whose creative curriculum set the early standard for legal education. That year also saw William & Mary become the first American university, as well as adopt the first elective curriculum and create the first school of modern languages.

In 1888, William & Mary was the first in the Commonwealth to combine the liberal arts with teacher training. In 1918, the College became the first public institution in Virginia to become co-educational. Through the efforts of a William & Mary biology professor, the Virginia Fisheries Laboratory, now the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, was founded in 1940 and began its cutting-edge work with marine resources.

Professor Small would be delighted with today’s campus, especially the newly renovated and expanded William Small Hall. There, the day after the discovery of the Higgs boson was announced in Europe just a few months ago, our physicist Marc Sher put an undergraduate to work examining raw data from the Large Hadron Collider, where the boson was discovered, to test Professor Sher’s theories on the particle’s nature (p. 44).

Two hundred and fifty years after George Wythe included training in mock courtrooms and legislative assemblies as part of his ground-breaking legal curriculum, the Law School’s Center for Legal and Court Technology, led by Fred Lederer, is home to the world’s most technologically advanced trial and appellate courtroom.

More than 400 years after the Virginia Company founded Jamestown for entrepreneurial reasons, our Mason School of Business continues to fan this innovative flame through its Alan B. Miller Entrepreneurship Center.

While it’s not possible to capture an iconic place like William & Mary in a few words, it’s important to try because the effort forces us to think hard about what we believe we are and where we need to go. During the last couple of years, William & Mary people (faculty, students, staff, alumni and Board members) have taken a run at crystallizing a “vision” of the College. That effort has been informed by our long tradition of innovation. Here is the current state of our labors:

William & Mary: The Liberal Arts University

William & Mary redefines the academic community: building on more than 300 years of innovation and excellence, we break the boundaries between teaching and research, student and instructor, living and learning. People come to William & Mary wanting to change the world – and we do.

Let’s elaborate on this statement a bit. While William & Mary is a “College” for “all time coming” because of its Royal Charter, in reality it has become “William & Mary: The Liberal Arts University,” with professional programs reaching back to 1779, and Ph.D. programs for almost 50 years. We do things very differently from other leading public universities. As one faculty member put it, William & Mary mates the brains of a research university and the heart of a small liberal arts college. This entails a powerful commitment to the liberal arts and to both teaching (including tenured professors teaching undergraduates) and expanding the bounds of human understanding through research. What other leading public university provides the kind of intimate instruction we do for each of our undergraduates and the sort of opportunities for even freshman to work closely with professors in meaningful research?

To keep delivering this sort of engaged learning, we must become more interdisciplinary in our curriculum and global in our



reach, even more committed to student-faculty research, and very attuned to how technology can help advance our mission at sustainable cost.

From Washington and Jefferson to Monroe, Tyler and Gates, William & Mary’s record of service to the country is stunning. Our students follow in this tradition even before graduation. Last year, more than 333,000 hours were given by students to service on campus, in the community, around the country and even around the world.

William & Mary prepares its students to think rigorously and critically, to engage new ideas openly and tackle problems creatively, to grasp something of the enormity and diversity of the world in which they will live, and to communicate effectively. We do not drill our undergraduates in the specifics of any one job but rather we give them the intellectual prowess to evolve vocationally across a range of jobs in a rapidly changing marketplace. William & Mary prepares its people to lead in whatever context they find themselves — and to devote part of their talent and energy to leading for the larger good.

To stay preeminent, the College must keep breaking boundaries. That is our challenge.

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