

## The Public Ivy

In its December 2010 report, Virginia Gov. McDonnell's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and Investment recognized the Commonwealth's "commitment to having a distinctive public ivy at William & Mary." Let me say why I believe William & Mary is *the* "public ivy" and why sustaining the College's extraordinary place in higher education matters.

Richard Moll's 1985 book *The Public Ivies: A Guide to America's Best Public Undergraduate Colleges and Universities* used the term to emphasize inexpensive quality. That's important, but there is more to being "a public ivy" than "inexpensive quality."

No doubt William & Mary stands among the very best public universities in the country. A cold and suspicious eye must be cast on all rankings, flawed as they are, but regardless of the ranking and the criteria used, William & Mary does well.

In addition to compelling quality, what are the other dimensions of being "ivy"? And why are these dimensions so useful in describing William & Mary?

First, Ivies have long distinguished histories, most reaching back well into the Colonial Era. Their graduates played large roles in our Revolutionary and Early National Eras, in establishing our fundamental national principles, and in building the architecture of our institutions. The Ivies have sustained their excellence over the centuries, providing a large share of our national leaders including many presidents. William & Mary, the alma mater of the nation, stands in the forefront of this league.

Second, the Ivies have an abiding commitment to the liberal arts. William & Mary is one of the world's great liberal

arts institutions, with the strength of a research university and the heart of a liberal arts college.

Third, the Ivies have relatively compact, often beautiful campuses, developing a strong sense of community. William & Mary's undergraduate student body of 6,000 fits this model. We celebrate our human scale. The beauty of our campus and the quality of our residential experience have few peers.

Fourth, the Ivies attract exceptionally strong students. William & Mary is highly selective, and our undergraduates earn their degrees at a rate among the best in the country (90%).

Fifth, the Ivies place much more emphasis on teaching undergraduates than is customary in research universities. They have low student-faculty ratios that allow them to keep class sizes small and offer opportunities for truly engaged learning. William & Mary has the lowest student-faculty ratio of any public university, and almost half our classes have fewer than 20 students. To a remarkable degree our undergraduates pursue real research with their professors.

Sixth, the ivy tradition, embodied in the Ivy League itself, celebrates athletics but not at the cost of academic excellence. There are no easy tracks in the curriculum. Athletes have to meet the same academic requirements as everyone else, and graduation rates for varsity athletes are comparable to those for the student body as a whole. Again, William & Mary fits seamlessly in this tradition.

Seventh, Ivies have strong national brands and international reputations. They inspire robust alumni support. We have a strong national brand, and growing



prominence abroad. We take pride in our national and international students who add great diversity and talent to our student body. Our alumni giving percentages are among the very highest for a public university, though not yet at private ivy levels.

With this constellation of characteristics, William & Mary is the quintessential public ivy. This high station is well worth preserving for the good of the Tribe, for the great benefits that flow to the Commonwealth, and for the importance to higher education of having a school like W&M among the publics.

Those of us at William & Mary are the inheritors of a magnificent tradition, honed to contemporary excellence over three centuries. This inheritance does not come free. We have to earn it every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. Taylor Reveley III". The signature is written in a cursive style.

W. Taylor Reveley III  
President, College of William & Mary

