

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Memorandum

TO: Distance Learning Committee

FROM: P. Geoffrey Feiss, Dean

DATE: November 16, 1998

SUBJECT: Charge to the Committee

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Arts and Sciences Distance Learning Committee. The Arts and Sciences report is one of five requested by the Provost in her September 24, 1998 memo to the academic deans (copy attached). That memo spells out five broad questions she would like us to answer. The deadline is April 1, 1999.

I ask that you provide me with your report by March 19, 1999 so that I may review it and forward it to the Provost in a timely manner.

Of the Provost's five questions, I believe you will find three particularly relevant to A&S concerns, i.e.:

- How can distance education enhance undergraduate and graduate learning?
- Will we accept transfer credit of distance learning courses at other institutions and, if so, how will we evaluate them?
- How will we ensure that standards are met for distance learning courses offered by our own faculty (either as W&M courses or, if appropriate, as non-W&M courses where the W&M affiliation is acknowledged)?

Before you address the specific questions listed above, I believe the committee may find it useful to consider some broader issues that bear on the questions that the Provost poses. I ask that the committee be guided and instructed by the College's mission statement, statement of core values, and, where appropriate, by the 1994 Strategic Plan.

I consider the task of clarifying the broader context in which we should evaluate distance learning daunting. Part of your mandate should be to limit discussions of distance learning and information technology in the instructional setting to those practices that are appropriate to the William and Mary tradition and the Arts and Sciences mission. We may wish to think in terms of what I will call "technology-enhanced education" with emphasis on *enhancement*, on adding real value to what we already do well. I am convinced that the faculty at W&M will embrace any reasonable technological initiative that can be demonstrated to enhance the quality of our students' experiences, that strengthens the fundamental relationship we value between the teacher and the student.

The issues are not saving money -- teaching more students for less -- or using technology because it is there. The issues are using technological enhancements to do things we cannot now do, to improve learning, and to enliven the learning environment in authentic ways.

Several prior questions seem to me to require consideration before addressing the Provost's more specific concerns. These include:

- Control: Does the faculty feel it has sufficient control of the educational policy aspects of technology on campus and, if not, what procedures must be developed to assure this control?
- Outcomes: In general terms, what unique educational outcomes, consistent with core institutional values, can technology-enhanced initiatives in general and distance learning in particular achieve? How might we characterize and define those circumstances in which technology adds value or fundamentally transforms the educational process in positive ways?
- Standards and Procedures: What generic standards, criteria, and procedures can we develop that will assure that educational technology initiatives meet explicit goals and objectives?
- Competencies: Do technology-enhanced learning initiatives require any unique competencies among faculty or new procedures beyond existing course-approval, peer evaluation, and assessment procedures?
- Faculty Development and Resources: What on-going resources and faculty development initiatives are required to assure that the educational technology initiatives we support are implemented and sustained in a manner consistent with W&M standards of excellence?
- Priorities: How should A&S go about setting priorities for technology-enhanced instruction and appropriate distance learning initiatives?

I suggest that that the committee proceed in the context of the following assumptions:

- William and Mary is a learning community where person-to-person, faculty to student interactions are fundamental to our educational objectives.
- Our mission is to offer the finest residential, liberal arts experience possible to traditional undergraduate students (i.e., 18- to 22-year olds).
- William and Mary prizes above all else the high quality of its learning environment and the authentic learning experiences of our students.
- William and Mary insists upon, in all technologically assisted learning ventures, the highest standards of demonstrable excellence. This includes the development of appropriate outcomes assessment in any technology-enhanced educational initiative.

I encourage the committee to seek whatever expertise it requires on campus and off to address these concerns. I recognize that many of these questions are large and unlikely to find resolution in a short time. I will be content with the identification and articulation of

issues that need resolution or further study while we move forward on distance learning or any other technology-enhanced educational venture. Your clarification of specific questions to be asked of proponents of technology-enhanced educational initiatives or of information that might be sought from other institutions will be useful.

Please feel free to call upon my office for any assistance.