

‘STRONG AND TRUE AND CLEAR’

A Q&A WITH W. TAYLOR REVELEY III, THE COLLEGE’S 27TH PRESIDENT

BY MELISSA V. PINARD

ON SEPT. 5, 2008, W. TAYLOR REVELEY III WAS SWORN IN AS THE 27TH PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY, AFTER SERVING AS INTERIM PRESIDENT SINCE FEBRUARY. IN OCTOBER, I SAT DOWN WITH THE PRESIDENT IN HIS OFFICE AND DISCUSSED HIS PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF WILLIAM AND MARY AND HIS REFLECTIONS ON WHAT IT TAKES TO LEAD THIS COLLEGE.

You were a finalist for the William and Mary presidency during the search in 2004. How have your thoughts on the presidency changed since then?

After the search ended early in 2005, I stopped thinking about the presidency and went back to being a very happy law school dean. [Reveley was appointed dean of the William and Mary Law School in 1998.] When the presidency suddenly reappeared in February 2008, my view of what the job would likely entail hadn’t changed, though it was clear the context in which I would get started had shifted dramatically. In 2005, William and Mary was moving forward briskly at the end of a long, successful Sullivan presidency. In February 2008, we were awash in controversy and the College’s progress had slowed quite a bit, because of the stormy weather through which we were moving.

As the son of a college president, how have you seen the role of college president change over the last few decades?

My father was president of Hampden-Sydney College from 1963 to 1977. Certainly, over the last 40 years, a job that was always demanding has become even more demanding. American higher education has grown radically in size and complexity. If you compare the William and Mary of 40 years ago to today’s William and Mary, the university is much larger; has far more moving pieces, is enormously more diverse, and lives in a seriously more competitive and transparent world. Similarly, students and their parents — the consumers of higher education — are much more insistent about getting value for their money and first-rate service in many areas, not just the classroom. Like much else in American society, higher education has changed a lot over the last 40 years — and it’s going to keep changing.

What have been the biggest surprises — positive and negative — with this position?

No significant surprises, but it has been grand to discover the depth of loyalty to William and Mary from all parts of the family — students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends. If there hadn’t been such a powerful underlying commitment to the welfare and progress of the university, it would have been *much* more difficult for the College to come back together again so quickly after its recent time of troubles, when we became entangled in the national culture wars and caught up in Virginia politics, as well as becoming the butt of much negative attention from the print and electronic media.

I suppose one minor surprise has been to learn how hard it is to see all the people, talk to all the groups and go to all the events important to William and Mary. On this score and a lot of others, it would be really helpful to be able to be in several different places at once.

What are your plans for the next six months and the next three years?

Well, first, we must keep doing that which William and Mary does so well — teaching, learning, advancing human understanding. Then, too, there is the vast range of activities outside class at which the College and its people excel, from athletics to the performing arts to service trips to the far ends of the Earth.

Beyond our customary missions, there are four additional areas of emphasis on which we began working last academic year as soon as the crisis passed. I’ve begun calling them RPFC. Sadly, “RPFC” can’t be pronounced. In bare outline, we are heavily into the following areas.

First, *relationships*. They became frayed within the William and



PHOTO: MARK MITCHELL

Mary family during the recent controversies. We have to restore the ties of trust and affection within the family that are so crucial to the happiness and success of the College.

Second, there is the need for *planning*. It's been 15 years since our last strategic plan. It's essential that we take a fresh look at what we're doing, why we're doing it, where we hope to go during the next five to 10 years, and how we plan to get there (for instance, how we will pay for it).

Third, the wolf was at our financial door long before the global economic meltdown began. Very focused attention must go to how we propose to *finance* the university going forward. The old model — primary reliance on state support — no longer works. That era has passed, never to return. We have become, inescapably, a privately funded university that also receives some taxpayer support. The crucial question is how we make the new financial model work.

Fourth, there is a mix of *communications and culture*. There is no point having a new strategic plan if you don't have the capacity to communicate it effectively to all interested and affected parties, and no way on earth to raise lots of new private money if you can't explain why it's needed to potential donors, and no point in sending messages via forms of communication that don't get through to those whom you need most to reach. So, what are our most compelling messages — what is the essence of William and Mary? What would be lost to America if the College ceased to exist? Do we send our messages by

print, by e-mail, by video, by Facebook, by blogs, by all of the above and more, keyed to different subsets of our alumni and friends? How often should we communicate? Then there is culture — how do we build a more powerful tradition of giving back and of mutual support among William and Mary alumni wherever they are in the world, starting while they are on campus?

So: RPFC — *relationships, planning, finance, communications and culture*. William and Mary is in full cry now on all four fronts.

Whom do you look to as a role model of leadership?

No one person. But there have been many people who've seemed to me to be very effective leaders — starting with my parents. Another person who comes immediately to mind is Bill Bowen, a highly successful president of Princeton and then of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, as well as a leader in many for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

What sets William and Mary apart from other institutions?

All sorts of things — William and Mary is immeasurably rich in things money can't buy. We're certainly richer in things that money can't buy than any other institution of higher education in the United States. What sort of things? Things such as roots running deep into American history. Such as more William and Mary people having seminal roles

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in the revolutionary and early national eras in our country than those associated with any other university. Such as generation after generation of extremely able and public-spirited people — students, faculty, staff and alumni. Such as a great constellation of physical and architectural beauty on campus. Such as being the school where the honor system began in American colleges and universities, where Phi Beta Kappa began, where legal education began. Such as being among the first U.S. colleges to become coeducational.

Today, William and Mary is one of the few universities that actually — not just rhetorically, but for real — combines a heavy emphasis on faculty research and scholarship with a heavy emphasis on teaching, and not just teaching graduate students or professional students, but also teaching undergraduates. This is rare. Usually as a university turns toward research, undergraduate teaching gets pushed onto the back burner. That hasn't happened here. Tenured and tenure-track professors still teach undergraduates in a very rigorous and engaged fashion. Professors know their students by name. They care about them in class and outside class. They involve them in their research. They do not view them as impediments to their work as scholars.

Another way in which we are quite unusual is our extraordinary combination of academic excellence, on the one hand, and limited financial resources, on the other: The schools that we are most like academically are all private and all wealthy. From a financial standpoint, we are remarkable overachievers. This is, of course, very admirable and a source of seemingly pride. It is also, I fear, not sustainable in a highly competitive, transparent environment.

What lessons have you learned over the past years being on campus as dean of the Law School?

While at the Law School, I did learn a good bit about the rest of the university. This gave me a powerful leg up last February when I moved over to the main campus.

You don't have to be at William and Mary very long, in any capacity, to realize that people care intensely about this place. Our students, faculty and staff are here, with rare exception, because they have enthusiastically chosen to be here. They want the College to be as good as it can be. Most of our alumni feel the same way. They have the deep loyalty that I mentioned before — it comes from all directions and keeps us moving forward. But it's a loyalty that needs to be honored and cultivated — never taken for granted.

One lesson I'm still learning — words to the "Alma Mater." I've nailed the tune, but the words beyond "William and Mary, loved of old" keep slipping through the brain cells. Got to work on this.

How does it feel to relate to undergraduates compared to law students?

I've found that all William and Mary students, graduate and undergraduate, combine exceptional ability with exceptional collegiality. That's an extremely engaging combination — people who are very smart and who do a lot with their lives both in class and out, who are also very nice, not arrogant, not obsessed with how special and entitled they are. It's how I found the law students for years and now find the undergraduates.

How do you connect so well with people from different generations?

People as a species, as a whole, interest me — what they're doing and thinking. I've never been hung up on whether someone is young, middle aged, or old. And, of course, the older I get, the more I keep pushing back when old age begins. It's back to 85 and likely to keep moving north. Getting along with different generations probably has its roots, too, in my close ties to my parents and grandparents.

What book are you reading now?

I've almost finished a book written by Nick Katzenbach about his time

working for Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. The book's title is *Some of It Was Fun: Working with RBK and LBJ*. What a perfect title, I thought, "some of it was fun"! This resonates. I just finished a big book that exceeded all my expectations — Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s *Journals: 1952–2000*. I grew up in the 1950s and early '60s, so a lot of what Schlesinger talks about brought back memories. The book is also fun because Schlesinger was perfectly willing to say exactly what he thought about everyone. Reading for a while is my reward at the end of the day.

If there was one thing you could change about yourself, what would it be?

Well, off the wall, I guess — this would take a true magic wand — if I could have all of the stamina and enthusiasm I had when I was younger, coupled with the practical wisdom I've amassed over the years; this would be a dynamite combination. Or, equally good, if the tooth fairy came through with the \$5 billion in unrestricted endowment for William and Mary I keep asking for, that would certainly brighten my day. Actually, a billion would be OK; it doesn't have to be five all at once.

What is your favorite spot on campus?

Over time I'm going to have a revolving list of favorite spots. At the moment, it's walking out the front door of the President's House down the marble steps into the Wren Yard with all its trees and red brick walks, past Lord Botetourt and on to the ancient Brafferton. This is a really extraordinary stroll in the cool of the morning.

What would surprise alumni to find out about you?

Sticking to a relatively tame one — I still build sand castles at the beach. You get to build them, they go up quickly — you build them as the tide is coming in — you watch what you've built resist the invading water until, ultimately, the waves triumph. I get a kick out of all that. Only one of Helen's and my four children has stuck with me over the years building sand castles. He inherited the sand-castle gene.

Something else you would like to communicate?

I'm honored and pleased to be William and Mary's 27th president. It's both a privilege and a challenge. It's exciting to be about the business of nurturing William and Mary with the aid and comfort of so many others equally devoted to this grand old school. ■

PRESIDENT TAYLOR REVELEY: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Before assuming his current post, Taylor Reveley served as dean of William and Mary Law School for almost a decade, starting in August 1998. He is the John Stewart Bryan Professor of Jurisprudence.

Reveley received his A.B. from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs in 1965. At Princeton, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and rowed on the lightweight crew for two years. Reveley went to law school at the University of Virginia, receiving his J.D. in 1968. During the United States Supreme Court's 1969 term, he clerked for Justice William J. Brennan Jr.

Reveley has studied and written extensively about the constitutional division of the war powers between the president and Congress. In 1972-73, he spent 13 months studying the war powers while an international affairs fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City and a fellow of the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. He is the author of *War Powers of the President and Congress: Who Holds the Arrows and Olive Branch?* (University of Virginia Press, 1981).

Before joining William and Mary, Reveley practiced law for many years at Hunton & Williams, where he specialized in energy matters, especially those involving commercial nuclear power. He was the managing partner of the firm for nine years.

Much of Reveley's extracurricular time over the years has gone to nonprofit organi-

zations. He has served on many educational and cultural boards, including those of Princeton University (where he is a trustee emeritus), Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, St. Christopher's School, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, JSTOR, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the Richmond Symphony and the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation.

Reveley and his wife, Helen, have four children — Taylor, Everett, Nelson and Helen Lanier — and a daughter-in-law, Marlo.



The Reveley family poses for a photo while celebrating Mrs. Reveley's birthday (l to r): Nelson, Everett, Marlo, Helen, Taylor, Taylor IV and Helen Lanier.