

**An introduction to
Mary Washington College's
re-accreditation self-study
for the Commission on Colleges of the
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
using their alternative model**

**Moving to university status:
Assessing the opportunities and demands, ordering priorities,
and safe guarding existing strengths**

November, 2002

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Introduction

In October 2000, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (here in referred to as COC-SACS) approved Mary Washington College's application to use the "Alternative Model" to conduct its decennial re-accreditation self-study. This report is focused on the Strategic Topic aspect of that study, which in our case is the move from a college to a university. This section of the report includes a brief history of Mary Washington College, an explanation of how we have come to this particular juncture in the institution's development and to the current strategic topic, a list of the goals of the study, the approach used to conduct the study, an outline of how we hope to use of the consulting team, and a follow-up plan that includes an assessment plan to ascertain the effort's success.

The second section of the report is the Steering Committee's Final Report delineating its recommendations to the President and the Board of Visitors. The subsequent sections are the reports made by Sub-Committees to the Steering Committee reflecting the results of extensive research that included review of analog institutions, surveys of students and faculty, focus groups with alumni, and local community and business leaders, surveys of prospective students, and in-depth interviews with key administrators. The detailed results of the various research efforts are not included in this report; they are however available on the Mary Washington College Website, and on the CD enclosed with this report.

History and Development of the Institution

The College was founded in 1908 as the State Normal and Industrial School for Women in Fredericksburg. It was renamed Mary Washington College in 1938, after undergoing a transformation from a teacher's college to Virginia's public liberal arts college for women. In 1944, Mary Washington College became affiliated with the University of Virginia as its women's undergraduate arts and sciences division. In 1970

the entire University became coeducational and in 1972, by action of the General Assembly of Virginia, the College became an independent, state-supported liberal arts college for women and men, with its own governing board. In 1978, the College added to its traditional residential B.A. and B.S. degree programs, two new degree programs for part-time commuting adult students - the Bachelor of Liberal Studies and the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies. Then, in 1999, the College's James Monroe Center for Graduate and Professional Studies opened its doors on a new campus across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg in Stafford County.

Although it still serves a number of part-time commuting adult students (B.L.S. and M.A.L.S. programs together currently enroll between 400 and 500 students), the original campus in Fredericksburg focuses primarily upon full-time undergraduates, the majority of whom live on campus (see MWC Student Profile, Appendix 1). All of its degree programs are founded on the traditional arts and sciences. Highly selective and with an emphasis on academic quality, the B.A. and B.S. degree programs of the College attract students from all areas of Virginia, particularly the urban areas of Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Tidewater. In addition, approximately thirty percent of the on-campus residential students are from other states and foreign countries, with the largest population coming from Southern, Middle Atlantic, and New England states. Total current enrollment on the Fredericksburg campus approaches 3,800, and it is intended that this number will never exceed 4,000.

The new James Monroe Center of the College is designed to be academically independent of the Fredericksburg campus. It has a pronounced high-tech focus and caters to the local adult population within commuting distance. It strives also to address the manpower training needs of local businesses and industry, as well as those of nearby school districts and local government jurisdictions. It offers both degree and non-degree instructional programs in various professionally oriented fields of study at the baccalaureate and master's level. Its baccalaureate degree programs are "degree-completion" programs offering only upper level undergraduate courses. It offers no arts and sciences courses at all. Enrollments at the James Monroe Center (JMC) in its first year of operation were relatively small (between 200 and 300 at "census date" in November, 1999). But rapid enrollment growth was expected, and currently we are

pushing our capacity limits in evening classes at JMC. To date, there have been no caps placed upon enrollments on the James Monroe campus, and there is no plan to introduce them. It is anticipated that one day in the not-too-distant future its enrollments will exceed that of the Fredericksburg campus. Even now, the growth is challenging our existing resources.

As this study began the College's mission statement was focused primarily on liberal arts programming on the Fredericksburg campus. The mission statement had been revised in 1992, to include being "*sensitive to the educational needs of the growing population within its commuting region.*" The statement further discusses the development of the "*James Monroe Center for Graduate and Professional Studies (located at a new campus in nearby Stafford County).*" The current mission statement makes it clear that "*Pursuant to its own distinctive mission, the James Monroe Center is designed to offer programs appropriate to the region's economic development needs and to provide educational opportunities for the personal life-long learning and professional advancement objectives of the citizens of the region.*" This mission is very distinct from the mission of the Fredericksburg campus; in fact, the James Monroe Center had elaborated its own Mission statement, which was revisited during the self-study. New mission statements for the "University" and the two "Colleges" are proposed in this report.

Moving Towards University Status

The foregoing sketch of institutional history and the two distinct mission statements of Mary Washington College show an institution in transition. For many years the College concentrated single-mindedly and almost exclusively upon "liberal education" in the arts and sciences for eighteen-to-twenty-two year old traditional full-time residential students. That part of the mission is at the core of what transpires today on the original Fredericksburg campus, and it dominates the academic culture on that campus. But beginning in the early nineteen eighties, the College began slowly to expand its part-time adult student enrollment and created an office of "graduate and continuing education" to look after that clientele and to develop non-credit programming in response to the demands of a growing local population and business community. By

the early nineties, formal plans were in place to develop a second campus, which would focus exclusively upon serving the continuing education needs of the greater Fredericksburg commuting region, returning the original campus to its historic agenda of traditional liberal arts education. The two campuses would have very different agendas, and they would need to operate with a considerable degree of autonomy, one from the other.

In the fall of 1997 a very broadly representative (faculty, students, staff, alumni, governing board, foundation board, local community) task force was created by President Anderson to look at the implications of opening the new campus, especially with respect to institutional image, and to recommend a name for new campus. The task force recommended, among other things, that the institution “move toward university status,” and call the new campus the James Monroe Center for Graduate and Professional Studies.

In September 1998, bearing in mind the task force recommendations and anticipating a new level of institutional complexity that would come with the opening of the new campus the following fall, the College’s Board of Visitors adopted a resolution officially committing the College to seeking university status. It also proposed using the SACS “alternative” Self-Study mechanism as the vehicle for accomplishing the strategic planning and decision making that “becoming a university” would require.

In July of 1999, in his annual message to faculty and staff about matters to bear in mind and refer to during the upcoming academic year, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty reminded everyone about the Board’s September resolution, proposed a time line for the upcoming SACS self-study, set forth some issues that would need to be addressed by an “alternative model” self-study which would focus upon moving to university status, and sought faculty input.

During the 1999-2000 academic year, plans for the alternative model self-study progressed. In February, a Self-Study Director was named and a committee structure was proposed. An “issues” list evolved reflecting input from the College community. In the late spring a steering committee was named and met to flesh out the composition of each of the proposed self-study committees. In July, at its annual summer retreat, the Board of Visitors reviewed the up-date of self-study planning as it stood at that point.

At the beginning of the 2000-2001 academic year, the Steering Committee, in a retreat with President Anderson, received its formal self-study “charge” and put final touches on the actual plan for the alternative model self-study. The Board of Visitors approved this plan for submission to SACS at their September 2000, meeting, and it was subsequently submitted to and approved by COC-SACS.

Goals of the Self-Study

The plan was to use the SACS Alternative Self-Study Model to define a development and transition plan that will move Mary Washington College to “university status,” and allow for the development in the future of additional schools and colleges. The goals of the study were:

- To assess the opportunities and demands associated with a move to university status,
- Define administrative and resource changes required to support the move to university status and to provide support for any proposed changes.
- Propose possible new programming, including additional colleges, graduate and undergraduate programs.
- Propose enhancements to existing programs.
- Define resource development needs and opportunities.
- To define priorities, and assure that development occurs in ways that meet the educational needs in the region
- Define a timeline for implementation of needed changes in administrative systems, and resource allocation
- Define a timeline for implementation of enhancements and new programs
- Define a timeline for resource development
- Assure that development occurs in ways to maintain the reputation for faculty and academic excellence and quality in higher education.
- To safeguard existing strengths as the institution grows to meet the educational needs in the region.
- To assure that faculty and academic excellence and quality remain at the forefront of all development efforts.

- To assure that the strengths, character and image of the Fredericksburg campus are maintained.
- To refine mission statements to assure appropriate focus, allowing for future development on both campuses.

Approach to the Study

While the effort developed over time, the study was designed to be highly participative, involving stakeholders in the design of the research. Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews gathered input from appropriate constituencies and involved these same constituencies in the analysis and interpretation of the resulting data. To manage the process and further develop the research questions, a set of committees was established. The definition of the committee structure was in part driven by the development of an initial set of research questions. Since the initial research questions were to be used as an initial measure of the studies success they are included here to provide such an anchor.

Initial Research Questions

- In light of “university status,” what changes should be made to the institution’s Mission Statement?
- What new degree programs, graduate and undergraduate, should be developed, and what organizational entities (centers? Schools? Colleges?) should be created to deliver them?
- Should new degree programs be considered for the Fredericksburg campus as well as for the James Monroe campus?
- In what ways and to what extent will the two “semi-autonomous” campuses be truly independent, and in what ways will they be interconnected?

- What new functions and policies need to be developed for each campus and for the university as a whole?

- Specifically how can these questions be answered for the following areas:

• administration and organization	• appropriations, budget and resource allocation
• facilities management	• information technology, networks, and instructional technology
• institutional relations, development, and alumni affairs	• curriculum (course duplication, academic credit, program overlap, etc.)
• planning, academic program review and assessment, institutional research	• academic rules, regulations and procedures
• student records	• admissions
• financial aid	• governance (faculty handbook, etc.)
• faculty appointments, promotion, tenure	• faculty benefits & compensation
• academic staffing	• library
• student services (advising, ADA accommodations, career services and internships, etc.)	• athletics
• student life and co-curricular student programming	

- To what extent will separate institutional images and identities for the two campuses be promulgated and maintained; particularly in the following context?

• Publications (catalog, admissions materials, handbooks, track-books, etc.)	• college guides, ratings, etc.
• commencement ceremonies	• accreditation

- What unintended consequences might result from any of the proposed changes, and how might negative consequences be avoided?

- What can be learned from the experience of others? What, for example, has been the experience of other institutions, similar to Mary Washington,

which have moved to “university status” in recent years? Are there other institutions, within which exist “semi-autonomous” units, which might serve as models for our new university?

- With respect to all of the above, what are the priorities? What facilities, spaces, and other resources will need to be secured beyond what is currently available or confidently anticipated? What action steps will need to be taken? Who will be responsible for taking each of those steps? What timelines should be projected?

Initial Assumptions

We also started with the following assumptions that guided the work of the self-study from the beginning.

- This institution is, and will remain, devoted to the pursuit of excellence in higher education, and the delivery of educational services of the highest quality.
- The current strengths of the institution will be safeguarded and, where possible, enhanced.
- The Fredericksburg campus will remain an academically self-contained, selective, primarily residential, undergraduate college of arts and sciences, with its own faculty and governance system, independent of the academic units on the James Monroe campus.
- The long-standing enrollment cap of 4,000 (headcount) on the Fredericksburg Campus will remain in place indefinitely.

- No matter what names are eventually decided upon for the institution and its various parts, the name "Mary Washington College" will be prominently preserved.
- With the establishment of the James Monroe Center for Graduate and Professional Studies and the second campus, this institution has committed itself to becoming a "university".
- The addition of baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, already begun at the James Monroe Center, will continue into the future.
- The newly initiated and future academic programs at the James Monroe Center will be independent of the established academic programs, faculty, and governance system of the Fredericksburg Campus.
- Program development and enrollment growth at the James Monroe Center will move forward without any pre-established limits or enrollment caps.

Self-study committees and support

The “strategic topic” facet of the self-study used eight committees to explore these questions. A ninth committee was devoted to the criteria compliance facet of the self-study. The eight committees are briefly described in an appendix to this section of our report. By design, the Compliance Committee functioned independently. The eight committees were chaired by Mary Washington College faculty, or in one case by an administrative staff member, and included the variety of constituents that are directly concerned with the issues being addressed by the committees. The committees directly involved 33 faculty members, 32 administrators/staff members, 10 students, a member of the Mary Washington College Board of Visitors, a member of the Mary Washington

College Foundation, two College alumni, and two representatives from the local Fredericksburg community. In addition to the resource allocation evident in the numbers of faculty and administrators involved in the committees, the self-study director was given a three-course-per-semester load reduction, moved to a temporary twelve month assignment, provided with dedicated office space and given financial support to include a part-time administrative assistant. The budget included support for additional computer equipment, travel, and meeting expenses. Funding was also provided for two steering committee retreats, and stipends were paid to steering committee members on nine-month appointments for a series of meetings during the summer of 2002.

Research methods

As mentioned earlier, the self-study used a variety of methods. Initially we collected various in-house documents appropriate to the research questions being explored by the various committees. We identified other schools that have gone through similar transitions and conducted phone interviews with key personnel. We also used data available through their web sites to gather data. During the first academic year, all committees were charged to do any archival research that would help them further develop research questions and to develop appropriate methods to address those questions. During the second year of the study, the research questions and the associated methods were coordinated through the Steering Committee to develop joint efforts where appropriate: e.g. a single faculty survey covering questions from several committees. Data collection methods included archival sources, surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. The numerous constituents were kept abreast of developments as the study progressed. A web page with an on-line discussion forum was established at the very beginning of the study and has served as the primary communication tool (<http://www.mwc.edu/sacs>). We have not presented a lot of the detailed work that lead to the recommendations presented in this report. That material is available however at the website listed above. Most of the major data collection efforts occurred during the Fall of 2001, with analysis and report writing beginning in the Spring of 2002.

Follow-up Efforts

The success of this effort will be difficult to ascertain in the short term. However, already changes have been introduced based on the results of focus group discussions and the President has formed a Strategic Planning Committee made up primarily of Senior Staff who are working on establishing ways to implement many of the recommendations contained in this report. We believe that we have to a large degree answered the research questions posed above. We have prioritized our recommendations and in some cases implementation has already begun. A second early measure of the success of this effort is the acceptance of the recommendations by the Mary Washington College Board of Visitors.

Long-term follow-up of the implementation efforts will be tracked, managed, and measured by the Office of Planning, and Institutional Research, or its “university” successor. We presume that this report will be reviewed in five years and updated as needed.

This study occurs at a very opportune time. The region is growing rapidly. With this rapid growth come significant changes in the educational needs of the region, and a demand for very different programs and services from schools in the region. During our last self-study, a new campus was envisioned, one specifically designed to meet the educational needs of the growing number of working adults in the region. In 1999 the first building on the new campus opened its doors, and the second building is currently on the drawing boards.

With that promise come new challenges. The culture of the Fredericksburg campus, while ideal for the traditional 18 to 22 year old residential liberal arts student, does not fit the needs of the growing numbers of part-time non-residential adult students interested primarily in educational programming focused on their professional aspirations. The flexibility required to meet the new demands at the Stafford campus is at odds with established traditions that have served the Fredericksburg campus well. The current infrastructure has been experiencing the effects of both the growth and the cultural differences for some time now. We must develop the requisite infrastructure and programming that will allow these two very different campuses to flourish, each in its own way. We believe that this can be accomplished within the new “university”

structure proposed in this report. We hope that the recommendations contained in this report will provide the blueprint for the next step in our ongoing efforts to pursue educational excellence in all of our programs, as well as to better meet the educational needs of this region.