

**MWC COC-SACS Alternative Self-Study  
2000-2003**

**University Mission & Image Committee Report**

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**Report of the University Mission & Image Committee  
for the  
SACS Re-Accreditation Self-Study  
Alternative Model**

**Executive Summary**

This committee's charge was to research, to analyze and to make prioritized recommendations regarding the changes which should be made to the institution's Mission Statement, in light of the planned move to "university status", and regarding the extent to which separate institutional images and identities for the two campuses should be promulgated and maintained.

We began by developing a vision for the new university: First and foremost, we are the public university located in the center of the busy Richmond—Washington, DC corridor. The university consists currently of two colleges serving two distinct missions. Mary Washington College, our original institution, is the public liberal arts and sciences college in Virginia. MWC endeavors to offer an education comparable to the traditional private Ivy League colleges, but at the cost of a public institution. James Monroe College is a growing school of applied sciences and professional studies. JMC aspires to define the high quality professional education college, offering higher quality programs than its private and for-profit counterparts, but at the cost of a public institution. Additionally, as a public institution JMC will offer programming, not merely in currently profitable areas (e.g. information technology), but also where there is a genuine regional need (e.g. education).

We are not, however, a large graduate research institution. We are a university with a small college 'feel.' We retain our traditional values of academic excellence, small classes, and a high degree of interaction between faculty and students. We have a number of graduate programs where appropriate to our mission, and research is an essential part of what our faculty (and students) do. However, research is not an end in itself. Rather, it enhances the teaching effectiveness of our programs, which is the central focus of our existence.

Thus, the University provides the administrative structure, much like a corporate holding company, for supporting two campuses serving two distinct populations: traditional age students seeking a residential, liberal education, and adult students pursuing professional or graduate education. Each campus has its own academic culture, appropriate to its mission<sup>1</sup>. The two campuses possess separate faculty, while sharing senior administrative staff, facilities services and other support infrastructure. The University is designed to remain flexible in response to the changing needs of the two communities.

This vision was developed using a number of sources: reviews of the websites of analog schools, alumni focus group results, and results of the student and faculty Self-Study surveys. With this background information, the committee then brainstormed during meetings to assemble a new vision for the university.

We developed mission statements for the university and the two colleges based on that vision. The philosophy behind the mission statements was that they were to be succinct statements of the institution's goals, rather than verbose descriptions of the programs.

Once the vision and mission statements are accepted, we can begin to develop and market images for the university and the two colleges. In this area, we recommend hiring a marketing/image consulting firm to begin work 18 months prior to the "birth" of the university. (See the timeline and general strategy taken by Arcadia University.) This is particularly important since we have an established image for MWC, which we do not want to diminish.

We have two principal recommendations regarding image. First, we believe that MWC and JMC should promote largely separate and distinct images. Second, we believe the images of the colleges should be promoted ahead of that of the university, at least for the first five years. These recommendations follow directly from the mission statements of the university and the two colleges: the university is charged with facilitating the missions of the two colleges. In addition, the two colleges have separate and distinct missions. In the five to ten-year time frame, we should revisit the question of the

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<sup>1</sup> Think of an analogy with parenting: in a family, values and quality of parenting are the same but children may be very different.

primacy of the university image, but for now (when there is no university image) we should focus on our strengths.

**Mission for the University and the Two Colleges**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that we adopt the following university mission statement:**

BLANK University is committed to serving as a premier public institution of higher education by cultivating an environment of academic excellence and fostering life-long learning. The University provides the structure to enable multiple colleges and centers serving distinct populations to fulfill their missions. The University is designed to remain flexible in response to changing needs.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that we adopt the following mission statement for MWC:**

Mary Washington College emphasizes excellence in the liberal arts and sciences through freedom of inquiry, personal responsibility, and intellectual integrity. Instructional and experiential programs provide students a sound general education, the understanding of their responsibilities as citizens in the broader, diverse community, and the skills necessary for creative and productive lives.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that we adopt the following mission statement for JMC:**

The James Monroe College supports regional economic development, professional advancement and personal life-long learning, by providing accessible, quality education. The College offers programs tailored to

the needs of adult learners and professionals, and to the business community.

The mission statements for the university, MWC, and JMC should be succinct and philosophical statements of our goals for the next decade. The mission statements for MWC and JMC were retained largely unchanged from what they were when the Self-Study began<sup>2</sup>. The majority of our efforts went into developing a mission statement for the overall institution. To that end, we began by compiling a list of values common to the two campuses, in hopes of melding them together in a logical, meaningful way. These values included: academic excellence, quality instruction, a high degree of interaction between faculty and student, not merely a low student-faculty ratio, but a personalized education addressing the needs of the individual student.

After reflection, we concluded that defining the university by emphasizing common denominators was likely to diminish the distinctiveness of each college. This led to the vision of the university as primarily an administrative structure or umbrella under which the campuses could flourish at their respective missions. Thus, the mission of the university is to provide a design that allows for shared economies and the flexibility to respond to the needs of our environment, allowing JMC to satisfy the growth in regional demand for professional education, while preserving and enhancing MWC as a small liberal arts and sciences college.

### **Image for the University and the two Colleges**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the James Monroe Center become the James Monroe College.**

Renaming JMC a college clearly makes sense, given the likelihood that JMC will grow to exceed MWC in size. Moreover, it more clearly indicates the model of the new university as being composed of distinct, autonomous and co-equal operating units.

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<sup>2</sup> The MWC mission statement was streamlined to focus on mission per se, and references to the programs now resident at JMC were removed. The JMC mission statement was augmented with a few details.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends the hiring of a marketing/image-consulting firm to assist the institution in developing a large-scale institution-wide plan to promote the images of MWC, JMC and the New University to both internal and external audiences. An external organization can address the marketing and communication issues we face as we go to university status, and provide specific recommendations on how to address this transition.**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the new marketing/communication plan to promote the New University begin 18 months prior to officially becoming a university.**

While the committee has some experience with image questions, we are not professionals in this area. There are many significant questions where we could benefit from professional expertise. How can we avoid degrading our reputation as we move from our established image of Mary Washington College to the new image of an unknown university? What are the pros and cons from an image perspective of emphasizing the university as primary and the colleges as secondary versus emphasizing the colleges primarily, and the university secondarily, e.g. MWC of Blank University (i.e. the Harpur College of Binghamton University model)? As noted below, the committee has views on these questions, but we think much could be gained by consulting with an expert.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the university pursue a marketing strategy along the lines of Arcadia University (formerly Beaver College).**

Addresses a faculty concern of cheapening of the image of MWC by substituting the image of an unknown “university” for the established image of MWC.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends defining the image of the university as a premier public institution of higher education, both in the liberal arts and**

**sciences, and the growing areas of professional education and applied sciences. Academic images the committee recommends we develop and promote for the New University include: academic excellence; broad based and widely applicable curricula; challenging; diverse degree programs (undergraduate and graduate); highly respected; intellectual; personal; prestigious; and selective with an unwavering commitment to honor. The committee recommends promoting the following institutional images of the university: aesthetic environment and facilities; excellent location; and supportive, applicable across campuses. The committee also recommends promotion of the New University as state-supported and affordable.**

The committee evaluated the image of the university in light of its mission. This is an image that is open to growth, as the individual colleges evolve and their needs change. This image also allows for symbiotic exchange and engagement among the colleges. Note that for many audiences, e.g. students, the university is designed to be transparent; thus, the university image will be superceded by the image of one or the other college. The primary image for the university may only be the legislature.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends, over time, that the two colleges, MWC and JMC, develop and promote largely separate and distinct images in order to support their different missions.**

The question of image depends a great deal on the audience one wishes to address. In academia, this audience includes prospective students, current students, alumni, prospective, current and former faculty & staff, potential donors, the local community, and (for public institutions) the legislature. It is likely that the image may differ not just between colleges, or between colleges and the university, but also between different audiences within a college or university. That said, MWC and JMC serve two distinct populations: traditional age students (18-24 years old) seeking a residential, liberal education, and adult students (>24 years old) with at least some college background pursuing professional or graduate education. The difference is not merely a question of age, but rather life experience, focus and motivation. For example, many



traditional age students are assessing their interests and looking for a career. A liberal education is well suited to this search, as well as preparing individuals for life. By contrast, many adult students are pursuing their studies because of their specific career goals. Consider students in the M.Ed. program who need a master's degree to maintain/complete their teaching certification. Neither group is likely to be interested in the other campus' programs. Moreover, the markets in which the two colleges compete (e.g. College of William & Mary, James Madison University, and the University of Richmond for MWC; Strayer University and Averett, Bluefield, and Park Colleges for JMC for the B.P.S. and M.B.A. programs and George Mason and VCU for the M.Ed) are largely separate. There is one other point to consider. Some faculty have expressed a concern that in moving to university status, we need to protect against losing what we have worked so hard to develop, namely the perceived value of a Mary Washington College degree. In view of these reasons, it makes sense for MWC and JMC to promote distinct images to support their different missions. This should be true both for potential students, and also alumni. (See, for example, the experience of Harpur College at Binghamton University.)

**Recommendation:** The committee recommends that Mary Washington College retain its image as a public liberal arts and sciences college. This image should be expanded to reflect a vision of MWC offering an education comparable to the traditional private Ivy League colleges, but at the cost of a public institution.

**Recommendation:** The committee recommends that MWC's image as a public liberal arts and sciences college be promoted using the following academic and institutional descriptors. Academic descriptors include: access to technology; attentive faculty; challenging curriculum; diverse internship opportunities; emphasis on teaching; liberal arts; selective admissions; small classes; study abroad opportunities; supportive learning environment; and traditional. Institutional descriptors include: community values; friendly; residential campus; service learning opportunities; and varied on-campus housing. The committee recommends

**MWC continue to promote its affordable cost of attendance, relative to its private counterparts.**

In an attempt to appeal to and attract a wider range of academically qualified students, the committee also recommends that the MWC campus bolster its image by integrating stronger positive messages in the following areas: career preparation & prestige (academic images), and campus fun & intercollegiate athletics (institutional images).

The committee evaluated the image of the Mary Washington College campus in light of its mission as the residential campus of the university serving a traditional age population in a traditional undergraduate degree program. To justify our liberal arts mission in a climate of tight budgets, we suggested emphasizing the theme that MWC provides an Ivy League education at a modest cost.

The recommended descriptors assigned to the MWC campus are consistent with data collected from the Admitted Student Questionnaire (2000) [Admissions Office]; First-year Student Satisfaction Survey (2000, 2001) [Admissions Office]; notes from the Mehfoud Committee; and *College Image: Correlating Perceptions of Current and Prospective Students* (2002).

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that JMC continue to emphasize that it provides Graduate & Professional Education, rather than Graduate & Continuing Education. JMC aspires to define the high quality professional education and applied sciences college, offering higher quality programs than its private and for-profit counterparts, but at the cost of a public institution. The committee recommends that the JMC develop and communicate this image as an institution committed to the education of adult students in undergraduate and graduate programs. As a new college, JMC is in the process of developing its image for both internal and external constituents. In light of the development of, the committee recommended specific academic, institutional and financial descriptors to shape the image. Academic descriptors recommended for JMC include:**

**advanced degrees; career enhancement; faculty with diverse experience; graduate programs; and innovative. Institutional descriptors include: accessible facility; adult-friendly; convenient; promotes/supports economic development; flexible schedule; nontraditional; responsive to educational needs of the students and community; and technology-oriented. The committee also recommends JMC continue to promote the image of affordable programs and professional advancement (financial).**

The committee evaluated the image of the James Monroe College in light of its mission as the college for adult students pursuing professional and graduate studies. Research indicated several important ways in which a JMC education is superior to that from its major private competitors—that as a public institution, JMC is more concerned with offering a quality education than with profits. Additionally, the cost of a similar certificate or degree is lower at JMC. For additional information, see JMC vs. Strayer document in the supporting documents.

#### **Other Issues for the University and the Two Colleges**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that a major effort be made to communicate the on-going progress of the self-study towards university status to all stakeholders, including students, faculty & staff, and alumni. This should be done on an on-going basis to get stakeholders to buy into the process.**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that there be separate alumni groups for MWC and JMC who work under the auspices of a university alumni council. Timeline: this can be done immediately, but no later than Fall 2004.**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that separate graduation ceremonies be held for MWC and JMC. Timeline: End of 2002-2003 academic year.**

This was the universal feeling of all stakeholders as expressed in surveys and focus groups; it follows from distinctness of the two colleges, where B.A./B.S. students identify with MWC, and B.P.S. students identify with JMC.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the MWC Faculty Committee on Academic Affairs and the JMC Academic Council develop guidelines to address the question of B.A./B.S. students taking B.P.S. courses for degree credit and vice versa. This should be done within the first five years (preferably within the first year or two).**

At present, because the James Monroe Center is part of Mary Washington College, baccalaureate students on either campus may take courses from baccalaureate programs on the other. Additionally, students may receive major credit for such courses with the permission of their major department. This is a significant concern of some faculty, who worry that the liberal arts focus of the B.A./B.S. degrees could be adversely affected by the professional focus of B.P.S. courses. Since the two colleges are to be academically autonomous, it makes sense for their respective academic affairs councils to make a judgment about this issue.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that there be a single academic catalog for the university, but separate admissions catalogs for MWC and JMC. Timeline: As soon as possible.**

We know this is difficult to implement, but as the academic catalog is a major tool for developing the image of the university, this ought to be implemented, perhaps by referring to documents that change more frequently than the catalog. For additional information, see the memo in the appendix entitled, "Should There Be a Single University Catalog or Two College Catalogs?"

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that planning, academic program review and assessment should be the responsibility of the university, operating under the Provost's Office. This should begin with the birth of the university.**

The principal reason for this recommendation is that PAIR is an oversight function that can be done most objectively at the highest level. Additionally, this would avoid duplication of efforts. (This is not to suggest that planning, program review and assessment should not be done at the college level—indeed, it is expected that the university PAIR will be drawing heavily from data and conclusions developed at the colleges.)

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that accreditation for both campuses should be a university-level responsibility. Timeline: Fall 2003**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that there needs to be a “seamless” admissions process on both campuses. Registration, payment of fees, record keeping, and administration of the admissions process should be separate support services, from the students’ point of view, on each campus. Timeline: Fall semester 2004**

The recommendations made by the committee were a result of statements made by alumni focus groups, student focus groups, a survey of the faculty on both campuses, and a survey of students on both campuses. MWC and JMC should be parallel, but separate, entities on the same level. There was a need for each campus to develop its own culture.