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THE VIRTUAL PROFESSOR:
Deborah Hewitt at the Mason School of Business developing an online MBA course



DIGITAL FUTURE

THE NEW REVOLUTIONARIES

*With its Online MBA, W&M's Mason School
takes a Jeffersonian approach to business education.*

BY CORTNEY LANGLEY

WHEN TODD MOORADIAN SPENT THE SUMMER of '76 learning to program a computer with IBM punch cards, it seemed like a mandatory skill for a college student to master. But just four years later, Mooradian said, you couldn't find a card reader on campus.

That kind of obsolescence is exactly what faculty members at the Raymond A. Mason School of Business want students in the school's new Online MBA program to avoid.

"The specific tools that a lot of programs emphasize are ephemeral," said Mooradian, Mason's associate dean for faculty and administration. "They don't last."

In contrast, Mason's Online MBA, with its theme of "Renaissance Thinker, Revolutionary Leader," is offering an all-new, groundbreaking curriculum designed to endure. The first cohort of 25 students will log on in August 2015.

"The key themes of the program are those that have defined the William & Mary educational experience for over three centuries," Mooradian said. "We're emphasizing breadth of knowledge, communications, critical thinking and creative problem-solving: the Renaissance toolbox."

"The Mason School's all-digital MBA is an important initiative for William & Mary," President Taylor Reveley said. "It will teach us a lot about how to educate students in an all-digital environment and it will show us how to enlist students interested in getting a W&M education over the Internet."

"In my judgment, digital teaching — on campus and off — will play an increasing role in higher education, and do so much sooner than most of us expect," Reveley added. "At academically elite universities, however, digital instruction will succeed only to the extent it provides learning of a quality at least as great as that

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COLLEGE NAMES NEW POLICE CHIEF

Deborah “Deb” Cheesebro was named the first female police chief in William & Mary’s 321-year history in September.

Cheesebro came to the College from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA) in Winston-Salem, N.C., where she served as senior director of police, public safety and emergency management. She led UNCSA’s efforts related to police services, security, parking, emergency preparedness and response, and oversaw the school’s Business Continuity Plan. — SUZANNE SEURATTAN

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provided in our traditional classrooms. Congratulations to the Mason School for leading the way in this regard.”

While the basic MBA competencies (accounting, finance, marketing and organizational behavior) remain important, they represent “table stakes” that every student receives and hence give neither the students nor their organizations an advantage, said Jim Olver, associate professor of business administration, who led the effort to design the new online program.

“In a world where yesterday doesn’t predict tomorrow, that’s not good enough,” Olver said.

“Increasingly the concern in all of these organizations is that they don’t know what the right answer is,” he said. “Their industries are being completely disrupted, between globalization and technological change. Dealing with disruption requires a tolerance for ambiguity and intelligent risk-taking. You need a mindset that accepts the possibility of failure as an

the chosen solution is the best. He plans to begin with a case study of the financial collapse of 2008.

“That’s the kind of world I think we’re increasingly entering,” he said. “A lot of people have concluded that the wicked problems are getting wicked.”

Students will identify their own wicked problem, pulled from their professional or organizational lives, to grapple with while they are in the program. Each subsequent functional course, such as Finance, Integrated Technology and Economics, will have touch points that tie thematically to solving each student’s wicked problem.

In the first year the Mason School plans to start three cohorts of 25 students each, with the goal of adding more in subsequent years. Students will take two four-credit courses per semester, each lasting about eight weeks.

Olver said students will also be able to pick from a number of weekend events that will provide them contact with the larger W&M community, alums, other cohorts, and Mason School students and faculty for a required residency.

A final “Revolutionary Leader Practicum” ends the program, with students demonstrating their ability to integrate material from the previous 11 courses to frame a complex problem, develop a systematic approach to solving it, generate an innovative solution and persuade others of its value.

“You gain practice in this and gain confidence, and you actually learn to love it,” Olver said. “You become the person who is the go-to problem solver when things are really messy. That’s the kind of person we want to develop. They are going to be a huge value-add to their organizations, because they have a mindset that’s different from the typical, ‘Just tell me what to do and I’ll execute on it.’ And that’s what companies are screaming for.”

Making the program a reality has been a collaborative effort. Staff from units across campus — University Registrar, Information Technology and the Provost’s Office, to name a few — have partnered with the Mason School to make sure offices and systems are ready for the unique aspects of an online program, including the departure from the traditional semester calendar.

“My colleagues and I are excited about this new stage in William & Mary’s evolution as a world-class university,” said University Registrar Sara L. Marchello. “Not surprisingly, processes that work well in a face-to-face environment don’t translate directly to a virtual environment. We’ve worked



BREAKOUT: In May 2013, a group of faculty members spent two days brainstorming the new curriculum and participating in breakout sessions to develop their concepts.

opportunity to learn, not something to be avoided by not accepting the challenge.”

So when students in Mason’s Online MBA program begin their coursework, they won’t begin with Accounting or Operations. Instead, they’ll start with Olver’s “Renaissance Thinker, Revolutionary Leader” class, introducing them to the nature of problems, modes of thinking and inquiry and innovative problem solving.

Olver’s class centers on what he calls “wicked problems,” or problems with an unknowable set of possible solutions, no necessary agreement on the nature of the problem and no way to know whether

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hard to test different strategies and understand the challenges that we are likely to face. We're now prepared for the new online relationship with students in ways we would not have imagined at the start of this process."

The online MBA market has become far more crowded and competitive than when Pam Suzadail, W&M deputy director of eLearning initiatives and Online MBA director, began in distance education in 2000. For a long time, schools merely converted their on-campus programs to a digital platform, sometimes roughly, and threw them online, relying on convenience to sell their programs.

"This isn't enough anymore," Suzadail said, crediting Mason School faculty for taking the time and effort to develop a uniquely W&M Online MBA.

In May 2013, a group of faculty members spent two days brainstorming the new curriculum in the Jim and Bobbie Ukrop Design & Innovation Studio in Alan B. Miller Hall. On the second day, they split into two teams meeting in separate corners of the room to develop their concepts. Olver said he was "astonished" when they reunited and had independently developed the idea of an entirely fresh curriculum

centered on the Jeffersonian themes of Renaissance thinking and revolutionary leadership.

"Thomas Jefferson isn't just an interesting historical fact of the College," Mooradian said. "He's prototypical of the person we wanted to produce in the 18th century and that we still want to produce in the 21st century: well-rounded, adept at solving problems with the paradigms and ways of knowing gleaned from every discipline of human knowledge."

Central to that Jeffersonian approach is preserving the student-faculty relationship essential to the William & Mary experience.

"At its core, what really is that special relationship? It is responsiveness and concern for students," Olver said. "We believe we can create this relationship just as well in an online environment."

"Our faculty have responded to a real and growing need in business education: preparing the next generation of business leaders to manage the increasing complexity of a global workplace," said Mason School Dean Lawrence B. Pulley '74. "The Mason Online MBA program will be a best-of-breed program weaving the strengths of a William & Mary education and the real-time needs of the marketplace."



CAMPUS FACELIFT

FORWARD PROGRESS

William & Mary has raised \$22 million in private funds to renovate Walter J. Zable Stadium. Two \$6 million gifts, one from Hunter J. Smith '51 and the other from Frances G. '66 and James W. McGlothlin '62, J.D. '64, LL.D. '00, will enable the university to move forward with the project to enhance the 79-year-old football facility. • The renovation project, which is expected to cost a total of \$27 million, also benefited from an initial \$10 million gift in

2012 from the estate of the late Walter J. Zable '37, LL.D. '78. • "Zable Stadium, though elegant and venerable, has seen better days," said President Taylor Reveley. "It desperately needs rejuvenation. The gifts of these extraordinarily generous members of the William & Mary family will go a long way toward ensuring that many more generations of Tribe faithful will get to enjoy a stadium worthy of its glorious past and of the exceptional athletes and students who compete within its precincts." • Renderings of the design to renovate and enhance Zable Stadium show a new upper deck, suites and a press box on the west side of the stadium. The overall design features Flemish bond brickwork, slate roofs and gables creating aesthetic continuity with the west and north ends of campus. • The renovated stadium will have improved safety and accessibility features — including wider aisles, updated restroom facilities, enhanced egress lighting, additional hand rails, an upgraded sound system, additional concession and retail locations, and a new entrance and ticketing location. The renovation, scheduled to begin early next year, is expected to be complete in time for the 2016 football season. • Fundraising for the stadium continues. For more information, go to zable.wm.edu.

— TRIBE ATHLETICS