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Agnew installed as Kraemer Professor of Business

William & Mary graduate inspires next generation through teaching, research

WILLIAMSBURG, Va.—Julie Agnew found a love of learning in a surprising new field as a student at William & Mary. Now she works to impart that same passion for discovery, understanding and application to her students in the Raymond A. Mason School of Business.

Agnew was formally installed Tuesday as the Richard C. Kraemer Business Professor, a position endowed with a gift from Kraemer, president of Chartwell Capital Inc., a private investment firm, and a William & Mary alumnus.

Kraemer's gift supports the professor serving in the role by providing funds for research and sharing knowledge in the academic and business worlds. For Agnew, the new role enhances her commitment to helping students discover the worlds of economics and finance—sometimes through surprising turns in their lives, as she experienced.

"I went to William & Mary, and it changed my life," Agnew said. "I was going to be a physics major, and if I hadn't gone to a liberal arts school, I probably wouldn't have taken a class outside of science and mathematics. But at William & Mary, I was forced to take a course in economics, and it changed my whole direction."

She added: "Part of me coming back to William & Mary was I felt I owed the school a lot. I had some incredible experiences after I left—living in Singapore, authoring a book on a Fulbright Scholarship and working on Wall Street. But those doors would not have been opened for me—and I wouldn't have even known they existed—without William & Mary. My love of learning has been fostered here. I want to make those kinds of opportunities available to our current students."

Dean Lawrence B. Pulley of the Raymond A. Mason School of Business, said, "Julie is a bright light on our faculty and a wonderful teacher of our students. She knows firsthand the benefits of a William & Mary education. This endowed professorship is further recognition of the value she brings to our campus and our students every day."

Agnew has served as a professor of finance and economics at William & Mary since 2001. She also served as the inaugural director of the Boehly Center for Excellence in Finance from 2014 to 2016. Her research focuses on behavioral finance, especially how people make financial decisions.

"I look at people's decisions, how the environment can alter those decisions and how we can change the choice environment so people can make better decisions," she said.

Some of her recent research has examined how consumers choose financial advisers for their personal investments, such as their retirement funds.

“I was fortunate in my past to work for a broker who had the best interests of his clients always in mind,” Agnew said. “But when I went to Wall Street, I met several brokers who were the opposite. I was intrigued by what caused people to choose these types of advisers and build relationships with them.”

As part of her research, Agnew and her partners produced videos with actors portraying different types of financial advisers. The team then showed the videos to consumers and assessed their reactions.

“We were able to find that an adviser who provides good advice on easy topics in the beginning of a relationship can build a high level of trust,” Agnew said. “Later, when that same adviser provides bad advice on more difficult issues, people still trust them. Our research helps us understand how people are influenced and what we can do about it.”

For example, Agnew said, consumers are heavily influenced by financial advisers’ credentials. But there are more than 100 adviser credentialing options—some more easily obtained than others. Clarifying and streamlining credentials may be one way to help consumers make better choices. Another way may be simplifying choices for some investors.

“People are really intelligent, but they also can be really busy,” Agnew said. “If we can do things such as designing 401(k) plans to make decision making easier for people, we should do that. We should try to help people.”

Agnew earned a bachelor of arts degree in economics from William & Mary in 1991, graduating magna cum laude. She earned a doctorate in finance from Boston College in 2001. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, she worked as an investment banking analyst for Salomon Brothers in New York City and as an equity research associate for Vector Securities International in Chicago. As a Fulbright Scholar in Singapore, she co-authored a book examining strategic business opportunities in Southeast Asia.

In 2012, she was a senior visiting fellow at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. She is a TIAA Institute Fellow, sits on several industry boards including the Pension Research Council at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business, serves on an experts panel for the Wall Street Journal and is a member of the C&F Bank Board of Directors.

At William & Mary, Agnew helped students start the Howard J. Busbee Finance Academy, designed and implemented William & Mary’s first finance study abroad program in Singapore and helped create student events such as “From DoG Street to Wall Street” and the Women’s Leadership Summit and Stock Pitch Competition. More information about Agnew and her research is available [here](#).

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