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Launching William & Mary School of Business Center for Online Learning

\$10 million Gift Enables Expansion of Online Programs

WILLIAMSBURG - William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business is launching a new William & Mary School of Business Center for Online Learning to grow its portfolio of online graduate business degree programs and to build on its tradition of delivering high-engagement and student-centric experiences. The center is being created thanks to a \$10 million gift from Virginia Beach-based philanthropist Jane P. Batten HON '17. This is one of the largest gifts ever given to a business school in support of online learning.

Batten's enthusiasm for President Katherine A. Rowe was the impetus for making this transformational investment in the Mason School.

"Katherine Rowe's mantra is innovation and mission-driven transformation, so I thought what better way to show my support for the university's new president than to invest in an innovative endeavor at the business school," said Batten. "Through the new Center for Online Learning, we are ensuring that a William & Mary business degree is within reach of so many more professionals, no matter where they live or work in the world. This is very important to me and my gift reflects that."

The gift, which provides capital to get the center up and running and to develop a robust infrastructure in support of additional business degree programs, is having an immediate impact according to Raymond A. Mason School of Business Dean Larry Pulley '74. By increasing its online presence, the Mason School is better positioned to offer professionals greater access to a high-caliber business education that prepares them to lead lives of principled achievement.

An honorary alumna, Batten and her late husband, Frank Batten, have been longtime friends of the university and have given generously to many areas, including scholarships, the Fund for William & Mary and the Mason School's residential MBA program. Batten is an ardent supporter of education – including increasing access to education – and the environment, helping to advance the causes of many Virginia organizations and foundations.

While the business school's first foray into the online world began with its MBA program more than four years ago, it expanded its online offerings with the addition of a new master of science business analytics program this summer. Both programs are now housed in the new William & Mary School of Business Center for Online Learning.

In the coming years, the Mason School expects to see a four-fold increase in its online portfolio. While the number of programs grows, there will also be an increase in the number of faculty and staff dedicated to the mission of the new center. As all of the programs, support systems and associated structures are established, Pulley has charged everyone within the center to advance a culture that is nimble, innovative and entrepreneurial.

"In my short time here, I have been impressed with how the business school continually evolves and expands into the online learning space and has done so while still keeping true to its core mission," said Rowe. "This gift represents a significant step forward for the Mason School and William & Mary as a whole and I am very thankful to Jane for her vision in bringing this center to life."

Pulley said the business school, like the entire William & Mary enterprise, takes pride in maintaining a low student-to-faculty ratio, including in its online programs. In fact, William & Mary is continually ranked as having one of the lowest student-to-faculty ratios in the nation.

At the Mason School, this low ratio allows for enhanced interaction with prominent professors while ensuring robust professional networking opportunities among each cohort online. This could explain why the student retention rate for the online MBA program cohorts is in the mid-80's to high 90's— well above the national average and why 96 percent of students would recommend the program to a colleague or friend, Pulley said.

Echoing the popularity of the program is a 2017 online MBA grad, Harris Ligon, who was in the first cohort and now leads the marketplace solutions function at Uber Freight.

"I felt especially connected to a wide array of my professors and was particularly impressed with their focus on applied research, on leadership development and how to disrupt the traditional mindset through the use of design thinking," said Ligon. "I was attracted to the online MBA program because the business school is so well-respected and well-regarded, and all of the professors and alumni I met were, frankly, quite exceptional.

"But perhaps most importantly, I chose this program because it offers unique learning experiences in which you focus on a 'wicked problem,' where you dig really deep into tough issues and present solutions by the end of the program. I continually practice what I learned and apply it almost every day at Uber. I can only imagine all of possibilities that will come with this new center."

Five years ago, the development of the online MBA program was designed from soup to nuts by more than a dozen faculty members. The William & Mary School of Business Center for Online Learning, too, will be built by a team of faculty and staff at the business school. They are responsible for bringing to life Batten's vision for the Mason School's new online venture and are heavily invested in ensuring its success.

"There has been an incredible amount of time and effort on the part of our faculty and staff to develop and deliver high-quality and high-touch online programs. I am eager and thrilled to see this venture move forward," said Pulley. "It is a very exciting time to be at the business school thanks to Jane's vision and support!"

About the Raymond A. Mason School of Business: William & Mary's business school is rebuilding the global economy by training the next generation of revolutionary business leaders. It offers undergraduate and graduate instruction, including full- time, part-time evening, executive and online MBA degree programs, one-year masters programs in accounting and business analytics, as well as corporate education. The school develops successful business leaders by providing world-class instruction and unparalleled opportunities for mentorship and experiential learning.

For more information:

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