

From: **Gene R. Nichol** <gnichol@wm.edu>
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Subject: [W&M Young Guard] A Statement from President Nichol
To: alumni2-1@wm.edu, young-guarde-1@wm.edu

Dear Members of the William & Mary Community:

I was informed by the Rector on Sunday, after our Charter Day celebrations, that my contract will not be renewed in July. Appropriately, serving the College in the wake of such a decision is beyond my imagining. Accordingly, I have advised the Rector, and announce today, effective immediately, my resignation as president of the College of William & Mary. I return to the faculty of the school of law to resume teaching and writing.

I have made four decisions, or sets of decisions, during my tenure that have stirred ample controversy.

First, as is widely known, I altered the way a Christian cross was displayed in a public facility, on a public university campus, in a chapel used regularly for secular College events -- both voluntary and mandatory -- in order to help Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religious minorities feel more meaningfully included as members of our broad community. The decision was likely required by any effective notion of separation of church and state. And it was certainly motivated by the desire to extend the College's welcome more generously to all. We are charged, as state actors, to respect and accommodate all religions, and to endorse none. The decision did no more.

Second, I have refused, now on two occasions, to ban from the campus a program funded by our student-fee-based, and student-governed, speaker series. To stop the production because I found it offensive, or unappealing, would have violated both the First Amendment and the traditions of openness and inquiry that sustain great universities. It would have been a knowing, intentional denial of the constitutional rights of our students. It is perhaps worth recalling that my very first act as president of the College was to swear on oath not to do so.

Third, in my early months here, recognizing that we likely had fewer poor, or Pell eligible, students than any public university in America, and that our record was getting worse, I introduced an aggressive Gateway scholarship program for Virginians demonstrating the strongest financial need. Under its terms, resident students from families earning \$40,000 a year or less have 100% of their need met, without loans. Gateway has increased our Pell eligible students by 20% in the past two years.

Fourth, from the outset of my presidency, I have made it clear that if the College is to reach its aspirations of leadership, it is essential that it become a more diverse, less homogeneous institution. In the past two and half years we have proceeded, with surprising success, to assure that is so. Our last two entering classes have been, by good measure, the most diverse in the College's history. We have, in the past two and a half

years, more than doubled our number of faculty members of color. And we have more effectively integrated the administrative leadership of William & Mary. It is no longer the case, as it was when I arrived, that we could host a leadership retreat inviting the 35 senior administrators of the College and see, around the table, no persons of color.

As the result of these decisions, the last sixteen months have been challenging ones for me and my family. A committed, relentless, frequently untruthful and vicious campaign - - on the internet and in the press -- has been waged against me, my wife and my daughters. It has been joined, occasionally, by members of the Virginia House of Delegates -- including last week's steps by the Privileges and Elections Committee to effectively threaten Board appointees if I were not fired over decisions concerning the Wren Cross and the Sex Workers' Art Show. That campaign has now been rendered successful. And those same voices will no doubt claim victory today.

It is fair to say that, over the course of the past year, I have, more than once, considered either resigning my post or abandoning the positions I have taken on these matters -- which I believe crucial to the College's future. But as I did so, I thought of other persons as well.

I thought of those students, staff, faculty, and alumni, not of the religious majority, who have told me of the power of even small steps, like the decision over display of the Wren Cross, to recognize that they, too, are full members of this inspiring community.

I have thought of those students, faculty, and staff who, in the past three years, have joined us with explicit hopes and assurances that the College could become more effectively opened to those of different races, backgrounds, and economic circumstances -- and I have thought of my own unwillingness to voluntarily abandon their efforts, and their prospects, in mid-stream.

I have thought of faculty and staff members here who have, for decades, believed that the College has, unlike many of its competitors, failed to place the challenge of becoming an effectively diverse institution center stage -- and who, as a result, have been strongly encouraged by the progress of the last two years.

I have thought of the students who define and personify the College's belief in community, in service, in openness, in idealism -- those who make William & Mary a unique repository of the American promise. And I have believed it unworthy, regardless of burden, to break our bonds of partnership.

And I have thought, perhaps most acutely, of my wife and three remarkable daughters. I've believed it vital to understand, with them, that though defeat may at times come, it is crucial not to surrender to the loud and the vitriolic and the angry -- just because they are loud and vitriolic and angry. Recalling the old Methodist hymn that commands us "not to be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong," nor "afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich." So I have sought not to yield. The Board's decision, of course, changes that.

To my faculty colleagues, who have here created a distinctive culture of engaged, student-centered teaching and research, I will remember your strong and steadfast support until the end of my days.

To those staff members and alumni of this accomplished and heartening community, who have struggled to make the William & Mary of the future worthy of its distinctive past, I regret that I will no longer be part of that uplifting cause. But I have little doubt where the course of history lies.

And, finally, to the life-changing and soul-inspiring students of the College, the largest surprise of my professional life, those who have created in me a surpassing faith not only in an institution, but in a generation, I have not words to touch my affections. My belief in your promise has been the central and defining focus of my presidency. The too-quick ending of our work together is among the most profound and wrenching disappointments in my life. Your support, particularly of the past few weeks and days, will remain the strongest balm I've known. I am confident of the triumphs and contributions the future holds for women and men of such power and commitment.

I add only that, on Sunday, the Board of Visitors offered both my wife and me substantial economic incentives if we would agree "not to characterize [the non-renewal decision] as based on ideological grounds" or make any other statement about my departure without their approval. Some members may have intended this as a gesture of generosity to ease my transition. But the stipulation of censorship made it seem like something else entirely. We, of course, rejected the offer. It would have required that I make statements I believe to be untrue and that I believe most would find non-credible. I've said before that the values of the College are not for sale. Neither are ours.

Mine, to be sure, has not been a perfect presidency. I have sometimes moved too swiftly, and perhaps paid insufficient attention to the processes and practices of a strong and complex university. A wiser leader would likely have done otherwise. But I have believed, and attempted to explain, from even before my arrival on the campus, that an emboldened future for the College of William & Mary requires wider horizons, more fully opened doors, a broader membership, and a more engaging clash of perspectives than the sometimes narrowed gauges of the past have allowed. I step down today believing it still.

I have also hoped that this noble College might one day claim not only Thomas Jefferson's pedigree, but his political philosophy as well. It was Jefferson who argued for a "wall of separation between church and state" -- putting all religious sects "on an equal footing." He expressly rejected the claim that speech should be suppressed because "it might influence others to do evil," insisting instead that "we have nothing to fear from the demoralizing reasonings of some if others are left free to demonstrate their errors." And he averred powerfully that "worth and genius" should "be sought from every condition" of society.

The College of William & Mary is a singular place of invention, rigor, commitment, character, and heart. I have been proud that even in a short term we have engaged a marvelous new Chancellor, successfully concluded a hugely-promising capital campaign, secured surprising support for a cutting-edge school of education and other essential physical facilities, seen the most vibrant applicant pools in our history, fostered path-breaking achievements in undergraduate research, more potently internationalized our programs and opportunities, led the nation in an explosion of civic engagement, invigorated the fruitful marriage of athletics and academics, lifted the salaries of our lowest-paid employees, and even hosted a queen. None of this compares, though, to the magic and the inspiration of the people -- young and older -- who Glenn and I have come to know here. You will remain always and forever at the center of our hearts.

Go Tribe. And hark upon the gale.

Gene Nichol