

# **Faculty Representative Report to the Board of Visitors**

February 2025 Meeting

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Earlier this month, I was reminded both of why I am at William and Mary and why I am a researcher. I was reviewing an application for funding titled, “Balancing Progress and Preservation: Examining the Trade-offs Between Economic Development, Cultural Preservation, and Conservation in Nepal's Riparian Indigenous & Marginalized Communities”. I remembered that I had seen the research presentation with Provost Agouris last year. I was excited and impressed with their scope that perfectly encapsulated all the strategic pillars that W&M has adopted to build our future - water, data, democracy, and careers.

Specifically, the researchers were using undergraduates to collect data and be a part of the whole research process. This is high confidence in our undergraduates...they would be spending a semester in Nepal. Their purpose would be to understand the religious, economic, legal, political, technological challenges to managing the relationship of progress and conservation of their culture. The lead researchers come from Biology & Institute of Integrative Conservation (a geospatial data scientist), Religious Studies, Theatre & Performance, and AidData & Economics - that is an impressive string of “&’s”.

It is a worthy goal and important research that I do not imagine could happen at most other major research institutions. We are allowed to cross disciplinary lines and those are where the real challenges occur. I especially like this research project because religious beliefs play an important role. That might sound mundane (or controversial), but in research, we are trained to separate out belief systems from our analytics. Alternatively, much of culture is either our belief in something or our reaction against something. Nepal, as a dominant Hindu culture, tends to believe that the river that many live alongside has religious importance. Understanding how to both make progress and preserve communities along the river requires more than economic and social facts.

Dean Doug Schmidt of the new School of Computing, Data Sciences, & Physics addressed the Writing Retreat at the SWEM Library that I was participating in a couple of weeks ago. I was heartened to hear of his commitment to interdisciplinary research - he felt that it was W&M’s way forward to differentiate ourselves. This has been my career path also. I am a chaired, full professor in Marketing, along with being past and future Area Head, who does not have a single publication in marketing. No where else do I believe that I would have the opportunities that W&M has afforded me. They have allowed me to publish quality research in other areas of interdisciplinary importance. This has been a major reason why I am here. This is where many of the most interesting problems lie but are very difficult research topics and hard to get credit in most of our soon to be peer Research 1 institutions. We have much to be proud of here at this wonderful institution and much to be excited about for our future contributions.