

# Aid comparison difficult

By Karla Kraynak Bruno

ARLINGTON

Comparing William & Mary with UVA can be a charming pastime, especially if you're talking about 2009's epic win in football or which fraternity has the best parties. Last Saturday, the Gazette took the comparison game to a new playing field: the financial aid offices.

After reading the Gazette article and reviewing the UVA website for more details, I concluded that the comparison game is not accurate. What we have is of a study in contrasts, not comparisons.

AccessUVA is the name for all financial aid at Mr. Jefferson's university. "AccessUVA offers loan-free packages for low-income students, caps on need-based loans for all other students, and a commitment to meet 100 percent of demonstrated need for every student."

Gateway is the name of one restricted-funding financial aid program for low-income students at Mr. Jefferson's alma mater. W&M has a general financial aid program in addition to Gateway.

## ESSAY

Access is part of UVA's desire that each "admitted student" enjoys the full range of educational programs regardless of economic circumstances. Access is available to all admitted students.

Gateway has no "admitted student" component in the official explanations offered by college administrators. All the college says is that Gateway's "primary intent" is for "the neediest Virginians" only. What's up with that? Don't students need to be admitted first?

Access (as part of the broader financial aid package, not part of the neediest cohort) includes "loan capping," a practice W&M says it shunned. But, according to the UVA Access website, Access "replaces need-based loans with grants" for the neediest cohort.

Grants are, by definition, free money without expectation of payback. Gateway doesn't give loans; Gateway gives grants. "Loan-capping" is irrelevant to all of Gateway and part of Access. Moot comparison. No shunning necessary.

UVA makes financial aid available to all admitted students, even the out-of-state needy ones, because it can afford to. UVA's endowment, as of May, stands at \$5.3 billion.

W&M cannot afford to give out-of-state

students a full Gateway ride since they are the backbone of the revenue used to cover costs now that the Commonwealth gives so little to the budget and we have so little in the coffers to cover the essentials. Our endowment stands at \$539 million.

Finally, the number of students who received Access funds in 2010-11 as cited in the Gazette last week was 5,056. That number represents the sum of all financial aid students at UVA, not the number of lowest income students.

As much as it burns my butter to admit that UVA might be superior in any way to W&M, I am afraid it is true when talking about financial aid structures.

UVA has one financial aid program, for all admitted students. It covers all the angles necessary to ensure that academic standards for admissions remain constant, while helping with finances as needed after the admit letters go out.

W&M has a financial aid program *and* a special program for needy Virginians. Why?

What are the criteria for finding Gateway students? Are only admitted students considered for Gateway, or does the admissions office have a team going out to Virginia high schools looking for needy students, trying to make sure that all needy students get a college education, regardless of academic readiness?

What is the success rate for Gateway students? How many drop out? How many graduate?

Curiouser and curiouser!

If the college would provide the Gazette with the official Gateway mission as documented in the Board of Visitors archives, as well as methods and statistics used by the Admissions Office, curiosity might subside.

Access to the document and wording might make Gateway more comprehensible and provide another opportunity to pitch our beloved college against that other school in central Virginia.

Right now, one of the few true comparisons for W&M and UVA is a dubious distinction among universities: We both have encased Christian crosses in glass cases in our chapels as artifacts.

At least providing financial aid makes some sense.

Karla Kraynak Bruno is a 1981 W&M graduate and former longtime resident of James City County.

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