

Salon Series on Leadership in Times of Crisis

Carol O'Connell '69, Fran Engoron '70 and Susan Magill '72

LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A SERIES OF ESSAYS

Introduction



(Image description: 14 of the first 24 women to enroll at William & Mary in 1918)¹

The entry of women into William & Mary in 1918 was born from two crises: World War I and the Spanish Flu pandemic. The College's very survival was based on replacing the men lost in these two tragedies with a new flow of students, so the College reluctantly admitted women for the first time. And because of the pandemic, after a single day of classes, the women were quarantined from the men which had two positive results: the women bonded among themselves and the men grew increasingly curious about their new classmates. As they say, the rest is history!

This anthology or series of essays addresses key aspects of Leadership in Times of Crisis. Each essay can be read as a stand-alone piece but we also encourage reading all of these short pieces to gain more insight. We have endeavored to provide examples, including outstanding women leaders who have exhibited exemplary leadership. And since W&M has a long tradition of strong women and women leaders, we have chosen to end the series with an essay about the current pandemic crisis and how President Katherine Rowe and her team have demonstrated their leadership skills at this critical time in the College's history. We have also included the early response of President Rowe to the late May and early June social and racial justice crisis.

In our research, we uncovered a few interesting observations specific to women and crisis leadership. The first was a recent discussion by Madeleine Albright on why she believes women are so adept at leading in crisis, based on their life experiences as women. Secretary Albright cites the following: women leaders are very good at multi-tasking, decisiveness, learning and adapting, telling hard truths, and have the relational skills to manage and influence people. We also found significant literature that women are often thrust into crises that men believe are unwinnable - the "glass cliff" - and women more than men are willing to take on these "lost causes" often achieving success but sometimes failing and damaging their careers.

Our essays cover the following topics. Please enjoy and add your own observations about leading in times of crisis and the women you admire for their success in meeting these challenges.

The Role of Leader and Organizational Values and Culture
Leadership and Organizing for Action
The Importance of Communications and Leadership Role Modeling
Innovation, Expertise, Collaboration, and Decisiveness Key to Leadership in a Crisis
The Power of Women Acting Collectively to Catalyze Change
William & Mary in the Current Crises

As a reader, you may want to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my personal experiences in managing crisis-what would I add to these essays?
- What are the best examples of crisis management I have observed in others?
- If I could give three pieces of advice to others, what would they be?



¹ <https://www.wm.edu/sites/100yearsofwomen/anniversary-story/index.php>

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William & Mary in the Current Crises

We close our series of essays about "Leadership in Times of Crisis" with the College of William & Mary and the leadership of President Katherine Rowe and her team during the current Pandemic.

The university has a long history of growing and fostering strong women leaders. Martha Barksdale was the first woman graduate of W&M in 1921, a campus leader, Miss William & Mary and Phi Beta Kappa. As a faculty leader, she championed women's sports at the University until 1966. Althea Hunt founded the W&M Theater and related academic program in 1926 and headed it until 1961. Millie West arrived at William & Mary in 1959, not as a student but as an instructor, professor, coach, and Women's Athletic Director. She was a bull dog for women's athletics long before Title IX. In 2017, Ms. West was awarded a degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from the university. Gillian Cell served as William and Mary's first female provost from 2003 - 2013 during the presidency of Tim Sullivan. During her innovative ten year tenure, Dr. Cell led the development of the college's first strategic plan, the redirection of financial resources in the face of declining state support, and advances in information technology.

And there have been over 50,000 other outstanding alumna living lives of principled achievement and strong women serving in key university leadership roles, including Provosts and Deans.



(Image description: Katherine Rowe Ph.D., President of William & Mary)¹

Dr. Katherine Rowe is the first female president of the university in 236 years. In the second year of her tenure, President Rowe was faced with the same crisis the university experienced in 1918-20 during the Spanish Flu---a crisis that caused the College to temporarily suspend classes after the first day of the 1918 Fall term. This essay highlights key aspects

of how W&M's leadership team has navigated the global pandemic crisis during the 2019-2020 academic year.

As importantly, given the events of late May and early June, we have included commentary on President Rowe's early reactions to the demonstrations for social and racial justice and reform. Her initial communication to the University community is attached in its entirety at the conclusion of this essay, and quoted in the body of the essay.

Values and Organizational Culture

From the beginning of the Pandemic, Dr. Rowe and her leadership team relied on and were inspired by the strong culture of W&M. President Rowe reflected those values in the key principles of the university's response:

- The health and safety of the university community – students, faculty and staff members
- Continuation of teaching and learning
- Maintaining research and university operations
- Flattening the curve on both health and economic impacts
- Maintaining a collaborative decision-making process
- Leading with innovation and creativity

And as of early May, the key principles had been distilled and communicated to the university community by Dr. Rowe as follows:

- *Safeguarding the health of our students, staff, faculty and surrounding community.* We will follow guidance from the CDC and the Virginia Department of Health to ensure that we can continue learning and working safely.
- *Creativity and flexibility.* An entrepreneurial mindset that begins by asking "how might we?" and acknowledges the different needs in our community.
- *Collaboration.* Any path forward we pursue must involve consultation with W&M student leadership, faculty and staff leadership,

colleagues in Virginia higher education, state leadership in Richmond and in the broader Williamsburg area. All generative questions and ideas are welcome.

What is most important is that these values and principles were "lived" as the Pandemic unfolded. For instance, feedback from constituents confirmed that President Rowe sought and the Leadership Team incorporated feedback from many constituencies in their decision-making.

Regarding the social and racial justice crisis, President Rowe also invoked W&M's values on May 31st as she communicated her view of the role of a university in times of crisis:

"As we search for paths forward during these uncertain times, the role of a university provides some clarity and William & Mary's core values of belonging, respect and integrity provide direction."

Moreover, she invoked the values of America:

"As a public university in Virginia, dedicated to the perpetuity of democratic institutions, it has never been more important that we commit ourselves to change that advances these values."

These value statements were followed by specific actions the university would take to address the issues of racial justice.

Communications and Role Modeling

A review of the university's communications during the Pandemic shows that from the beginning, there have been strong, clear and sensitive communications to the whole university community and its stakeholders. These communications have been characterized by:

- A consistency of message
- A recitation of the key values and principles to begin each key message
- A report on the "state of play" and what is known and what is unknown
- Differentiation between what can be controlled by the university and what cannot
- An emphasis on collaboration and grass roots action and innovation within the university community – a shared

responsibility for the crisis response.

President Rowe led communications efforts, and her style was highly empathetic and collaborative. This is reflected in both her written and oral communications with all constituencies, whether the topic is the pandemic or social and racial justice. Her weekly video “Community Conversations” always brought together different members of the community – faculty, staff members, administrators, students and even prospective students. Other members of the Leadership Team communicated detailed operational information from the early days of the Pandemic to guide the response. And the team employed varied and redundant forms of communication, including leveraging digital technology. As always, cascading those messages and practices throughout all the management levels of the organization could be inconsistent in some cases.

Eleanor Roosevelt – as cited in an earlier essay, said: “A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader. A great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.” Dr. Rowe’s calls to action by the community to create something new sparked an opportunity to move others forward to embrace and own the Pandemic response.

And the last line of her May 31st communication calls the University community to create a new and better future:

“The diverse communities and perspectives we convene — to grapple with our imperfections and our legacies of inequality — are our best hope for empowering those who study here to build our future together.”

Organizing for Action

Documents from the early days of the Pandemic revealed that university leadership took a measured but rapidly escalating approach to the crisis. In addition to value-based principles, from the beginning, Dr. Rowe established the following additional principles for decision-making:

- Phased decision-making given the uncertainties
- Consultation – leveraging multiple perspectives
- Listening to feedback
- Considering the impact on the whole university and its ecosystem

- Communicating big decisions centrally with distributed decision-making and problem solving locally, trusting other leaders throughout the organization

The team quickly mobilized to establish a website to centralize key communications and determine who would communicate with each of the constituencies. The team also quickly established a way to monitor key data and use it in decision-making. Work streams and task groups tackled all the aspects of the Pandemic response from student safety to controlling the financial impact to pursuing new practices for teaching and learning. Early letters to faculty and students stressed the cultural values of W&M and collaboration.

One of the key challenges for the leadership team was and is how to manage the significant financial impacts of the crisis. This is a multi-faceted issue – including fairness to students and their parents as well as dealing with the challenge to both the 19-20 and 20-21 fiscal year budgets with little likelihood of assistance from the state. President Rowe was transparent on these issues with all constituencies. As indicated in her communication of April 24th, “. . . we strive to flatten the curve of the financial impact on W&M, our faculty, students and families, staff and region. The global pandemic has created immense financial vulnerability. . . . Currently, we project losses ranging from \$13 million to \$32 million through August 2020.” The team made tough decisions regarding equitable refunds and freezing of future costs to students as well as curbing the university’s expenses. And for W&M, this was done within a value framework that sought to protect its current employees.

The distributive approach to decision-making and action enabled the development and adoption of solutions more quickly and effectively. And those big decisions made centrally had the benefit of consultation and feedback. Examples include the pass/fail decision which was heavily vetted and controversial but now viewed as the best solution. Another example was provided by business school faculty who valued the level of information and resources provided centrally accompanied by flexibility in implementing teaching practices.

One of most important but difficult tasks for the University was to pivot quickly to distance learning. As might be expected, despite best efforts, it was a work in progress. Some of the University’s schools already had vibrant distance programs and faculty with expertise who were able to help other faculty make this tough transition. The University was also able to provide resources through the Center for Innovation in Learning Design. Students and faculty report variable practices for the Spring 2020 semester. The lessons learned during the Spring semester can be applied to the challenge of distance learning in the future. This will be especially important if the 20-21 academic year requires a hybrid learning model – blending both classroom and distance learning for students. Planning is underway.

As the Pandemic proceeded, the Leadership Team moved from emergency management and adaptation to planning for the future – Fall 2020 and beyond. A small interdisciplinary team was given the month of May to recommend to President Rowe strategies to advance curricular flexibility, operational resiliency, de-densifying the campus, creating career pathways for graduates and engaging the diverse W&M community to support each other. In addition to the pragmatic decisions, President Rowe will be dealing with the significant anxiety of students and parents about the Fall. Nationally, it is expected that about 20% of university students will choose not to return to campus in the Fall. And all will want to be assured that they will be safe and provided a quality learning experience.

Based on the work of the interdisciplinary team, in early June, President Rowe announced the plan for the 2020-2021 academic year. The communications provided specific guidance on time frames, academic, residential living and other key issues, while acknowledging the need to remain flexible and deal with uncertainties.

Innovation

Dr. Rowe is a great proponent of Design Thinking – a discipline that supports creative, collaborative and experiential approaches to innovation and decision-making. That philosophy has been a consistent theme in coping with the Pandemic crisis and even ensuring that opportunities for innovation going forward are

identified and embraced. Hot spots for this kind of innovation include:

- Digitizing approaches to teaching and learning
- Digitizing communications and collaborative working across the university
- Developing innovative solutions to provide products and services needed by the community in these times
- Collaborative learning experiences
- New community projects for students

With timely foresight, in late 2019, the College established the Entrepreneurship Hub which is supported by the Alan B. Miller Entrepreneurship Center at the business school. The Hub and Center support creativity, innovation and design thinking for the entire student body. These mindsets and skills have been fully endorsed by President Rowe from the beginning of her tenure, and she has emphasized them during the pandemic. Future planning is using many of these practices and techniques, including casting a wide net for even radical solutions.

Creativity and innovation take many forms. The 2020 “virtual” graduation commencement was very impressive and inspiring. It included videos of each of the years the students had been on campus along with many other methods to personalize the experience, foster joy and make it memorable for graduates and their families.

Conclusion

We are sure that there will be many lessons learned as the university and its leadership team navigate the ambiguity and challenges of these crises. There is ample evidence to date that the leadership team mobilized for action and lived the values of W&M, calling on a tradition that blends respect for the past with a future defined by intellect, innovation, optimism, humility and generosity of spirit.

President Rowe’s communication of May 31, 2020.

The role of a university in a time of crisis²

I have been contemplating the role of a university, especially in times of great crisis, this last week of May 2020 when the right words are so hard to come by. At William & Mary, one important role is continually to call ourselves to awareness of our history, in the present. As the great American writer James Baldwin taught us, “not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

None of us can ignore the turmoil, the heartbreak, of the racial divisions in our country — a cascade of grief for Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd has brought it to the fore. The racism and injustice we continue to witness bring grievous hurt to our communities. It comes to us at a moment when so many in this nation and the world are vulnerable, intensifying the loss and weariness of pandemic. We are facing again the legacy of our country’s founding, that did not recognize the full humanity of all peoples. African Americans in our communities are asking, in this moment, *do you recognize my full humanity?* We do. We will face this with you.

A critical role of a university at moments of crisis is to rededicate ourselves to the propositions that sustain a pluralistic democracy. We recognize that we are still far from realizing them for all: fairness, respect for the human dignity of others, evidence-based argument, scientific discovery, the pursuit of opportunity and safety and equal justice under the law.

As a public university in Virginia, dedicated to the perpetuity of democratic institutions, it has never been more important that we commit ourselves to change that advances these values. We must find it within ourselves to look for hope. And as we face unspeakable acts, we must be there to help lift one another’s heavy hearts — so we can study together, learn and work together, toward a more humane and free world. The past week’s events demonstrate how much farther we have to go.

As we search for paths forward during these uncertain times, the role of a university provides some clarity and William & Mary’s core values of belonging, respect and integrity provide direction. The diverse communities and perspectives we convene — to grapple with our imperfections and our legacies of inequality — are our best hope for empowering those who study here to build our future together.

— Katherine A. Rowe
President, William & Mary



1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/02/20/after-325-years-college-of-william-mary-names-its-first-woman-leader/>

2 https://www.wm.edu/about/administration/president/reflections/the-role-of-a-university-in-a-time-of-crisis.php?utm_source=instagram&utm_medium=socialmedia&utm_campaign=053120-statement&fbclid=IwAR2dg9Ga2GYWcRsX1T6fXnn6fn_4fT9zJxDdnHCv1N70P_dYa25Sw38DJ7Y

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The Power of Women Acting Collectively to Catalyze Change

“I raise my voice not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard” — Malala Yousafzai



(Image description: Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize laureate)¹

Malala began her fight for girls — from an education activist in Pakistan to the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2014 — and now she continues her worldwide campaign through the Malala Fund. She came to the world's attention on October 9th, 2012 when she was 15. While on a bus in the Swat District of Pakistan after taking an exam, Malala and two other girls were shot by a Taliban gunman in an assassination attempt in retaliation for her activism in her home district where the Taliban opposed education of girls. Since then, Malala has inspired women and girls around the world to ensure all girls receive 12 years of free, safe, quality education. She travels to many countries to meet girls fighting poverty, wars, child marriage and gender discrimination to go to school. The Malala Fund invests in developing country educators and activists, through Malala Fund's Education Champion Network. And they hold leaders accountable for their promises to girls.

One of the amazing phenomena of the last hundred years is the power of women to effect great social change when they band together around a cause or crisis. Often, they attack seemingly impossible problems with success. And the efforts of these women have had long term impacts on legal rights, culture, norms and millions of people's lives. Often the initial movement creates organizational structures and constituencies that can be activated in the future. This essay provides some inspiring examples of women acting collectively and discusses common themes among these disparate experiences.

The passage of the 19th Amendment providing the right of women to vote was the culmination of decades of suffrage activities by thousands of women. This movement began a century earlier in churches in 1820 and then at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. The movement had well-known leaders like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton but it was really the tenacity, energy and visibility of these many women that achieved the goal — women had the right to vote 144 years after the US was founded. And it took another 45 years until African American women had that same right secured. And women like Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Judy Richardson and Ella May Brayboy inspired and activated the support of other women. Black women in the 1960s not only organized and led protests for civil rights, but expanded their reach into issues such as poverty, feminism, and other social matters.

But the story of securing women's rights does not end there. Similar to the suffrage movement early in the 20th Century, large groups of women came together again in the 1960's and 1970's to demand equal treatment under the law for women, as well as a culture shift to recognize the many faceted rights of women to achieve their true potential. “We're a *movement* now,” proclaimed Kate Millett to tens of thousands of women who marched on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan on August 26, 1970—the largest U.S. women's march up to that point—to demand full gender equality. Leaders like Gloria Steinem, Dorothy Pittman Hughes, Betty Friedan, Eleanor Holmes Norton and Bella Abzug inspired hundreds of thousands of women across the country. These efforts were the catalyst for both culture change and securing legal rights against workplace discrimination.

While the Equal Rights Amendment did not receive the required ratification votes and women's reproductive rights are still being attacked by the States today, great progress has been made in the last 50 years. Much of that progress has been enshrined in legislation at the federal and state levels. However, the MeToo Movement has highlighted that discrimination and abuse still exist. And women demonstrated in the last four years that they will again rally to defend their rights and go to the polls to vote for other women candidates for office who share their views. A recent article in

The Economist says “Much of it (center-left activism) is rooted in the Women's March in 2017 that drew millions onto the streets shortly after the president's inauguration to protest against misogyny. Indeed, some of the many grassroots groups spawned by that protest have been involved in organizing demonstrations in recent days. One such, in Pennsylvania, a state-wide organization called Pennsylvania Stands Up, which campaigns on voting rights, immigration reform, racial justice and other center-left issues, helped boost turnout and marshal crowds in Lancaster and Pennsylvania.” The article continues “academic research into the long-term political effects of the Women's March and Tea Party movement of 2009 suggests such protests do not merely reflect public opinion. They also increase voter turnout.”



(Image description: Rose Schneiderman, Union activist)²

Securing the vote and defending women's rights have always demonstrated political power for the common good. The New York City Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911 provided the catalyst for another social movement focused on working conditions and safety. Rose Schneiderman, a prominent socialist and union activist, gave a speech at the memorial meeting held in the Metropolitan Opera House on April 2, 1911, to an audience largely made up of the members of the Women's Trade Union League. She used the fire as an argument for factory workers to organize. In New York City, a Committee on Public Safety was formed, headed by eyewitness Frances Perkins -who 22 years later would be appointed US Secretary of Labor — to identify specific problems and lobby for new legislation, such as the bill to grant workers shorter hours in a work week. Through the efforts of these groups of women and their male collaborators, New York State passed thirty-eight new laws regulating labor in the state, earning a reputation as leading progressive

reformers working on behalf of the working class. These progressive labor laws inspired other states and the US Government to implement similar reforms. Perkins even credited the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire activism with inspiring Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930's.

Determination to find solutions in the midst of prolonged conflict can spur action here and abroad. One of the most inspiring and touching examples of women uniting for change during crisis occurred in Northern Ireland. After decades of intractable religious strife and violence, two women founded Women for Peace, which later became the Community for Peace People, an organization dedicated to encouraging a peaceful resolution of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Large numbers of mothers organized to say they would not tolerate their sons killing each other. Betty Williams, a Protestant, and Mairead Corrigan, a Catholic, won the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize for their leadership of this effort.



(Image description, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Former President of Liberia)³

In 2003, hundreds of Christian and Muslim Liberian women, dressed in white, prayed publicly to end the country's 14-year civil war. Their collective action paved the way for Africa's first democratically elected female head of state, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. A champion of post-conflict transformation and women's rights, her structured list of priorities and leadership led to her proudest accomplishment "that after 30 years of conflict, the power in Liberia now rests where it should - with the people, grounded in rule of law and in strong institutions." In 2011, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and in 2017, she received the Mo Ibrahim Award for African Leadership after Liberia became the only country on the African continent to improve in every category and subcategory of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

Back in the US, as if recalling the energy of the Women's Temperance Movement of the early 20th Century, the crisis of drunk driving deaths has been attacked effectively by women taking collective action. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was founded on September 5, 1980, in California by Candace Lightner after her 13-year-old daughter, Cari, was

killed by a drunk driver. The group had its greatest success with the enacting of a 1984 federal law, the National Minimum Drinking Age Act. In addition, MADD deserves some of the credit for reductions in deaths from alcohol, having championed sobriety checkpoints, efforts to reduce the legal limit for blood alcohol and victim impact panels at court hearings in which judges require DWI offenders to hear victims or relatives of victims of drunk driving crashes relate their experiences.

A very current example of progress toward change is the election of Ella Jones as Mayor of Ferguson, Missouri as the first black mayor of that community. Since 2014, and the shooting of Michael Brown, the community has banded together to fight systemic racism and reform the police and justice system. Ms. Jones was a member of a city council that had to work out a consent decree with the federal government that required Ferguson to change its police department and government. Now this majority black community is closer to achieving self-determination.

And there are many more examples of women acting collectively for change. The New York Historical Society Gallery of Women's History documents women pursuing political and social activism against slavery and Indian Removal, and supporting Civil Rights, conservation and environmentalism. The curator believes that these movements were successful because it gave otherwise unempowered women who were called to action to have great impact while maintaining some safety in numbers. She also noted that photographs catch the great visual impact of thousands of women marching.

There are other reasons for this phenomenon. Each of these examples displays a compelling mission that drives these committed women to create a force for change. Often without positional authority, women collaborating have found ways to catalyze major change at the national, state and local levels. Each of these, to a great extent, is a grass roots advocacy effort united by a powerful, inspiring mission. And in many of these examples, women acting collectively embody a passion that goes beyond mission and embraces identity because it springs from a core sense of who we are and what matters to us.



1 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2014/yousafzai/biographical/>

2 <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/schneiderman-rose>

3 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42748769>