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Colleges ponder name change

Villa Julie, Loyola might switch to university status

By Kevin Rector

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Two local colleges are in the process of joining the growing ranks of universities, and one of them is contemplating changing its entire name.

As universities, Villa Julie College and Loyola College in Maryland would be part of a national renaming trend that includes state institutions like Towson University, Morgan State University, Coppin State University and Salisbury University.

For Villa Julie, the change could be more radical, as the Baltimore County college's board of trustees is expected to decide tonight whether to adopt a new name as it becomes a university.

The trend of colleges taking advantage of the prestige and recognition that many think come with being a university has been going on for years, experts say.

About 120 public and private four-year colleges changed to universities between 1990 and 2002, according to a study in *The Review of Higher Education*, and Christopher C. Morpew, the study's author, says the trend is continuing.

"There still seems to be a relatively large number of institutions looking into doing it," said Morpew, an associate professor at the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education.

Loyola's board of trustees voted in April to move forward with the renaming process, pending the results of research on how the change will be taken by college community members. If the research "continues to bear out that the name change is a good idea," the college will request university status from the state later this summer, said spokeswoman Courtney Jolley.

Villa Julie has already received state approval for university status.

Administrators say Villa Julie's current name doesn't reflect that it separated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1967, went coeducational in 1972 and became a four-year college in 1984. It was started by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1947 as a women's school.

"We had to look at names that represent our organization," said Glenda LeGendre, vice president of marketing and public relations. Four names will be considered today: Tufton University, Greenspring University, Stevenson University and Rockland University, all names with geographic or historic significance.

Administrators at Villa Julie and Loyola said the word *university* better represents their institutions. Generally, universities are bigger institutions with a broader spectrum of academic offerings.

Villa Julie President Kevin J. Manning noted in his request for university status that the college built a new campus in Owings Mills in 2004 to accommodate ballooning enrollment and increasingly diverse academic programs. Loyola's April announcement noted "the institution's significant growth and evolution over the past 10 years."

But administrators might have more in mind than programs.

"Their brand is crucial," said Rodney Ferguson, managing director of the Lipman Hearne brand consulting firm, which spearheaded Western Maryland College's name change in 2002, when it became McDaniel College. "Colleges are revenue-driven institutions, just like any other company or organization. If they retreat from putting their brand out in the marketplace, their competitors will not, and they know that."

But, LeGendre says, renaming Villa Julie is "not like a pharmaceutical company naming a new drug."

Many "constituent" groups - students, parents, faculty, alumni, prospective students - feel personally invested in the change, LeGendre said. High school guidance counselors, employers, institutions providing grants and countless others must also be considered.

It's a process that most college staffs don't handle alone.

Loyola hired the Washington-based higher education marketing firm SimpsonScarborough to conduct market opinion research. Villa Julie hired Baltimore-based HCM Marketing Research to conduct similar research and also hired History Associates Inc. of Rockville to investigate the history of its proposed names.

Successes at other institutions, including McDaniel College in Westminster, are helpful examples as well, LeGendre said.

McDaniel dropped the name Western Maryland College because it gave people the impression it was a state institution that was far from Baltimore. The new name has solved those problems and bolstered the school's reputation nationwide, said Joyce Muller, associate vice president for communications and marketing.

"Our name change has certainly borne the test of time and did what we wanted it to do when we set out on this mission," Muller said. "I think the first year we changed our name we had a thousand more applicants."

McDaniel's success makes LeGendre confident in Villa Julie's decision, she said. "It seems the right thing to do from many perspectives."

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