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# COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?

## What's in a name

**I AM ASKED QUITE REGULARLY WHETHER BERRY IS PLANNING TO BECOME A UNIVERSITY.**

Sometimes the question is posed in terms of whether Berry is qualified to be a university. These inquiries reflect honest confusion about what it means to be a university or a college. The simple truth is that institutions today are more or less free to choose their own label. The choice is one that relates to core identity.

Historically, there are two differentiating factors between colleges and universities: the emphasis on undergraduate teaching versus advanced research and the importance of a residential learning community. America's earliest colleges were founded as residential colleges in the model of England's Oxford and Cambridge universities. Thus, New College (now Harvard University), the College of William and Mary, and the Collegiate School (now Yale University) began as small learning communities in which students were housed and fed and instructed by residential tutors. Other residential colleges gradually emerged throughout the colonies.

Over time, some of these institutions added doctoral and professional programs as they evolved into more complex institutions. Harvard was officially recognized as a university in 1780 at about the time it opened a medical school. In 1876, however, a more radical change occurred when The

Johns Hopkins University was founded in the model of a Germanic university with a focus on research specializations and the scientific discovery of new knowledge. Johns Hopkins became the first university to teach through seminars rather than lectures and to offer undergraduate majors rather than a purely liberal arts curriculum. Many research universities now emphasize graduate education more than undergraduate education. This focus is true even for an institution such as Harvard; only one-third of its current students are undergraduates – the other two-thirds are pursuing graduate or professional degrees.

Today, we can point to superb examples of both types of institutions. *U.S. News and World Report* provides separate categories and rankings for national research universities and national liberal arts colleges. One model is not superior to the other; these two models of excellence have distinctive purposes and emphases. The prototypical research university focuses on doctoral and professional programs and is often a large, dispersed, decentralized enterprise, whether state-supported or independent. The prototypical liberal arts college emphasizes undergraduate education in the context of a small, focused, residential learning community.

Although these two models can be distinguished in their purest forms, the

reality is that many institutions combine elements of both: There are small research institutions with a strong residential and undergraduate focus, and there are comprehensive teaching institutions that are decentralized and largely non-residential. The matter is further complicated by additional models, including community colleges, technical schools and for-profit institutions. As a result, *college* and *university* have become interchangeable terms in many ways.

Berry could choose to adopt the label of university at any time. We have accredited graduate programs and separate schools for business and education, so we could do so quite legitimately. Across the country, other less established schools use the university label, presumably because they believe it positions them beneficially.

Berry's identity, however, is defined in large part by its residential nature and setting. We date our founding to 1902 when Martha Berry deeded over part of her inheritance to create a residential campus that superseded her day schools. She made this high-risk, "all in" decision because she recognized the power of a residential learning community. Berry's exceptional campus with its multiple residential settings reflects the value we have long placed on the living-learning experience.

In this regard, Berry is akin to the nation's top liberal arts institutions. These institutions are deliberately residential because they understand that the most powerful forms of undergraduate learning occur when students are immersed in an experience. Such opportunities might involve a research tutorial with a professor in a laboratory, a leadership experience with a campus organization or a study abroad experience living with a family in an unfamiliar culture. In-depth learning has little to do with sitting in a lecture hall; it has much to do with investing fully in a project and making it one's own.

Among the nation's top 50 liberal arts institutions (including Williams College, Amherst College and Davidson College), more than 80 percent use the term *college* to signify their commitment to excellence in undergraduate education. In the case of those using the *university* label, several have professional programs that complement their undergraduate emphasis: for example, Washington and Lee University (law) and Sewanee – The University of the South (theology). Interestingly, several nationally ranked doctoral-granting institutions have retained the name college, presumably to convey the lasting importance of undergraduate education at these institutions, including the College of William and Mary, Dartmouth College and Boston College (which was chartered as a university).

Berry chooses to be called a college, thereby affirming our core identity and committing ourselves to excellence in residential undergraduate education. The idea of a learning community is critical to Berry in that it provides the context (the living laboratory) for a firsthand education. Campus life is integral to, not separate from, the educational experience. The living-learning community provides lessons not only for the head, but also equally for the hands and heart.

Consider three ways in which this living-learning community promotes engagement and service. First, when students enter the college community together, they form class bonds as they learn from and with one

another. As they live in close proximity – sharing rooms and bathrooms and meals – students adapt and bend and understand. For a good number of our students, it is the first time they have had to share a bedroom. Given a choice, many of them would probably prefer not to share, but the life lessons learned and friendships that emerge would not be the same without this close proximity. Living together tests their capacity to be civil and courteous, to work through differences and disagreements, and to act on behalf of someone else's needs.

Second, students come to lead the community over time, helping shape and define it. New students benefit from and enjoy the warmth and generosity of a community that is created for them. As seniors, these same students are responsible to and for this community – they have the privilege and opportunity to create anew a warm and welcoming environment for entering students. Seniors sometimes yearn to be independent; they appropriately want to take on more of their own affairs. Yet, this desire for increased independence can also be fundamentally self-centered and disengaging. An important lesson of the heart is to recognize our responsibility to sustain and improve the community in which we live. Engaging in one's community as a leader, whether informally or formally, is a great lesson for life and one that can be learned practically in the senior year.

Finally, Berry's residential community provides the context for its extraordinary Work Experience Program. In its early years, Berry operated as a self-sustaining community as much as possible. Although the world has changed in the ensuing century, there remains something attractive and ambitious about this model. Thus, Berry once again is highlighting ways in which students can contribute directly and meaningfully to the operations of the college, including opportunities to use the college's extensive campus assets to generate funds that will support the educational enterprise. The robustness of the Work Experience Program is rooted in Berry being a living-learning community.

Berry's choice to be a residential college has several practical implications. It points in part to things we are not likely to pursue strategically as an institution: extensive part-time undergraduate programs, distance-learning programs or multiple "branch" campuses. It points also to the kinds of things we are likely to emphasize strategically and through resource allocation. Thus, in recent years, we have invested in continuing improvements to the residential character of the campus: the Cage Athletic and Recreation Center; residence hall renovations and the addition of Morgan and Deerfield halls; the expansion of the Krannert dining and event spaces; improvement of campus walkways and bikeways; and the creation of gathering spots such as Kilpatrick Commons and the hammock zones. Our goal is to ensure that Berry is a wonderful home, a place that is as inspiring today and tomorrow as it was 80 years ago when the Ford Complex and the Normandy barns were constructed.

In the last four years, Berry has increased its residential capacity from 76 percent to 86 percent. We are now in the process of determining whether to increase this goal to 95 percent, a target that is consistent with other top liberal arts colleges. The president's cabinet recently visited three other highly regarded colleges to review their residential master plans. Given continued strong enrollment patterns, we will need to decide in the coming year whether to add additional residential facilities, especially for our senior-year students. We are actively studying options relating to the type and location of these residential units.

Residential colleges offer the pinnacle of undergraduate education in the nation. Berry represents this tradition in the state of Georgia and for students in this region of the country who seek a national-caliber education. Berry's residential nature is part of what sets us apart. We expect students to be active participants in the life of the college, and we are committed to a residential community that facilitates that expectation. Make no mistake, we are proud to be called Berry College. **B**