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EVMS and W&M ask for \$1 million to study merger

Elizabeth Simpson
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Student assistant marshal Dr. Catesby Ware leads the 2012 Class of graduates of EVMS into Scope for their co on Saturday, May 19, 2012, in Norfolk.

NORFOLK

Eastern Virginia Medical School and the College of William and Mary said Friday they are requesting \$1 million from the state to continue studying the idea of merging the two schools.

The two schools announced in July they had agreed to "exclusively explore" the possibility of a partnership that would turn EVMS into the William and Mary School of Medicine, setting off a passionate debate about the future of the local medical school and community partnerships.

Each school formed a due diligence task force to explore the financial, cultural, academic, political and administrative impacts of a merger. They hired Dr. Jordan Cohen, former president and CEO of the Association of American Medical Colleges as a consultant.

Both schools want to make sure no financial or academic harm will be created by a merger.

Even if both schools were to support merging, it would have to be approved by the General Assembly and the governor.

A statement released Friday said the two schools are asking for a \$1 million budget amendment in the state's 2013-14 budget to "explore possible increased collaboration and development of integrated academic programs."

"We've benefited from the input of faculty, students, alumni and staff," James J. Izard II, EVMS Board of Visitors member and chair of the EVMS due diligence committee, said in the statement. "We owe it to them, to our colleagues at William and Mary and to the people of Hampton Roads to fully explore the possibilities for collaboration and to have a strong understanding of the benefits to EVMS and the community at-large."

EVMS President Harry Lester characterized the merger idea as one of mutual interest between himself and William and Mary President Taylor Reveley when he announced the study in July.

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Vincent Rhodes, director of marketing and communications at EVMS, said he didn't have any more specifics on how the money would be spent, but said it would likely involve hiring another consultant: "As the due diligence committee looked into this, they realized it's a very complex matter, and they needed an outside third party to navigate that process."

Rhodes emphasized that the schools were not looking solely at a merger, but at a range of collaborative efforts.

The exploration has raised questions throughout the community during the past few months, such as whether the distance between the two campuses would be an issue. Supporters of Old Dominion University questioned why EVMS wasn't instead exploring a merger with that school, with which it already partners on a number of health and science projects. Some viewed William and Mary more as a liberal arts school rather than a science institution, even though many of the school's pre-med students enroll at EVMS after graduation.

Some William and Mary supporters raised concerns about whether EVMS, which ranks low compared with other medical schools in terms of research and endowment dollars, would impact the quality brand that William and Mary enjoys.

EVMS received \$3.7 million in NIH grants in 2011, ranking it 120 out of 133 medical schools according to a National Institutes of Health database. Its endowment of \$46 million ranks 591 out of 839 education institutions in the United States and Canada, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers and Commonfund Institute. William and Mary has a \$624 million endowment, ranking it 121st.

Virginia schools affiliated with other medical schools far outpace regional ones in terms of federal research grants. The University of Virginia received \$119 million in NIH grants in 2011, Virginia Commonwealth University received \$80.7 million and Virginia Tech received \$20.8 million.

"The committees have worked hard over the past few months to do the due diligence necessary to get us to this point," William and Mary Provost Michael R. Halleran, who has led the due diligence effort at that school, said in a statement. "We think there is a great deal of potential here and this is a meaningful first step."

The schools do not have a timeline to finish the study.

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Elizabeth Simpson is the health reporter at The Virginian-Pilot.

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