



By Steve Hojnicki

Editor's Note: This blog post originally appeared on the William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business [Full Time MBA blog](#) in March 2019 and has been republished with permission.

This post is part of the FTGN Army Broadening Series that we are running from March 15-30, 2021. Each day, we will publish new insights into the Army's various broadening assignments, starting March 15th, 2021 with an overview of AIM 2.0 and a discussion on how to educate others on assignment selection criteria.

The decision to go back to school mid-career in any profession is a hard one to make. For me, this meant leaving a position I was thriving in, on a team that I was deeply committed to, in order to pursue an advanced degree. When I reflect on my thought process which ultimately led to pursuing [an MBA](#) at the Mason School, and the experience I have had thus

far, I can undoubtedly say this program is truly special.

The Decision

I ultimately applied to and joined the [Major General James M. Wright MBA fellowship program](#) after countless hours of research, discussions with mentors, and self-reflection. Everyone should come up with their criteria and priorities based on analyzing their own personal situation; but for me, three key factors stood out.

Career timeline: No one will care more about your career than you. So, while I was trying to determine whether it was the right time to go back to school, I realized that there is no right time. There will always be something pulling you away from going. What you can manage is identifying windows of time that work better than others. For me, that meant reviewing my professional timeline with a trusted mentor and working with my branch assignment officer to key in on the best time to apply.

Self-Reflection: Introspection is key to development. Taking an honest look at yourself and recognizing your strengths and weaknesses is crucial in determining your next career move. Early in the process, I identified several key areas I wanted to develop to prepare myself for future service in the army at higher levels. Specifically, I wanted to improve my ability to properly frame complex problems, work to solve them using modern computational tools and methods, and better communicate my findings in order to impact the organizations I serve.

Family considerations: Some of the best advice I received early on in my military career was that life in the Army is limited, your family is forever. When evaluating my next career move, it was important that graduate school would provide a great experience for both my family and me.

The Differentiators

After determining what was important to me, I decided graduate school was the appropriate next step. The MGJW program stood out from all the options available for a few reasons. First, it allows its students to complete their MBA in 13 months. This was attractive because it would allow me to return to the army relatively quickly, with skills that would add value on my first day back. Second, William & Mary is known for its faculty and educational programs. While many MBA programs direct their efforts solely on the recruitment process or academic research, the Mason School, while doing the aforementioned well, takes pride in providing a world class business education. These efforts were recently recognized with Bloomberg Businessweek (2019) ranking them [#1 school for learning](#). As someone who is not seeking a job, the premium William & Mary places on education was a huge selling point.

Lastly, what distinguishes the Mason School from every other MBA program, is their [Executive Partner program](#). In the military, having a good mentor who can help you navigate career decisions is essential. The Executive Partner program is highly integrated into the curriculum, and very personal as each student is assigned an individual coach. These mentors provide their unique perspective to your ideas, offer career advice, and leverage their personal networks to see that you succeed. I partnered with a gentleman who spent his formative years in the army leading combat soldiers in Vietnam before going on to a very successful, 26-year career at General Electric. This relationship has been a highlight of my experience and one I hope will endure long after I leave Williamsburg.

My Experience

The MGJW program starts with two summer courses, with one focusing on how politics impact our National Defense system and the other concentrating on the federal budget's influence on National Defense strategies. These courses gave me a much-needed ramp up into graduate work. They provided me a wider perspective of the Army's relationship with our federal government that I had not been previously exposed to.

Following the summer session, our MGJW cohort joined the rest of our class for bootcamp, orientation and the fall semester. What stuck out most to me is the real diversity that the Mason School attracts to the full-time MBA program. My classmates were students from all walks of life including students from 20 different countries, a variety of industries, and even different generations. This exposure has given me a wide range of perspectives on how to view leadership and tackle problems.

Academically, William & Mary pushed me to constantly think through multifaceted problems. Classes rotate on a session basis where approximately every seven weeks, you start a new set of courses. This rotation provided a fast-paced learning environment where I was continually exposed to new ideas from an array of world class professors who truly care about their students and go to great lengths to get points across. In fact, my economics professor helped me understand production functions through the lens of a howitzer crew! Talk about tailoring subject matter to your audience.

Assessment

I can truly say that William & Mary has been a transformative experience in many ways. I have developed as a leader through classroom exercises that have pushed me to try new things and the daily interaction I have had with people and their different perspectives. I have acquired new technical skills in computer programs ranging from Microsoft Excel to Python, some of which I had no clue existed prior to enrolling last June. Lastly, but probably most importantly, I have found a supportive and encouraging community that wants to see me succeed. From day one, they embraced my family and I and assured me that I was welcome here. This tribe of professionals is truly special and something I look forward to continuing to be a part of as I return to the operational Army.

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