

An Interview with Eddie Cole

Amy Morgan Schmidt

The College of William and Mary School of Education is fortunate to welcome aboard Dr. Eddie Cole, assistant professor in the Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership Higher Education program. He hails from Indiana University where he previously served as a research project associate at the Center for Postsecondary Research and an instructor in the School of Education. This Fall, Dr. Cole teaches the graduate level course “The History of Higher Education” and the new course “Special Mission Colleges and Universities.”



The transition makes perfect sense for me.

Dr. Cole did not begin college with higher education aspirations. He earned his Bachelor of Science in speech communication with an emphasis in journalism at Tennessee State University. Journalism, it turned out, was his connection to higher education. As the editor in chief of his student journal, he was able to work with freshman and sophomore journalism students. He found this work a “ton of fun.” He took far more pleasure in showing them how the writing process worked as well as connecting them to parts of the university than in his own journalism. Seeing what he was doing with younger students, his professors suggested he pursue a graduate degree in student affairs. A notable experience with Dr. Shaun Harper, professor at Penn State University who works with student affairs and Black student leaders, also showed Dr. Cole that he had a future in student affairs.

What can I do to keep me on campus and involved with the learning process?

In his senior year, Dr. Cole turned down a few newspaper opportunities to pursue his Master's at Indiana University. There he was the co-editor of Journal of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association, an annual publication that focuses on higher education, specifically. He enjoyed working on the journal, which was 41-42 years old at the time. Indiana University gave him opportunities to grow in higher education and

build his repertoire. He graduated with a Master of Science in Student Affairs Administration.

When asked about the transition from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) such as Tennessee State University to a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) like Indiana University, Dr. Cole stated that HBCUs prepare students for making this leap. Looking back at the history of higher education and Black students, he explained that segregation led to the establishment of HBCUs. Since these schools did not offer graduate schools, students went to the Midwest or North to pursue graduate degrees. It has been argued that HBCUs do not give students real world experience, but this is a misconception. Students are well coached to make the transition with an understanding that the environment of the HBCU is not a reality. Students must be aware that the world is much more integrated, and they must be able to function within a more integrated world.

A Special Mission

Dr. Cole continued at Indiana University to earn his Ph.D. in Higher Education. While there, he had the opportunity to work with a professor to design a course in special mission colleges and universities. His name was brought up when this professor asked faculty to nominate students that would be good to help with the course. Dr. Cole was one of two students nominated, and he was chosen. For an entire year, the professor and he talked about class

readings, field trips, and guest speakers; and when they finished later that summer, the professor said, “This is yours. You can take this with you. You built it.”

This year, the School of Education is debuting Special Mission Colleges and Universities for the graduate level higher education course offerings. This class will discuss institutions outside of traditional four year institutions such as tribal colleges and universities, HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), single sex institutions, work colleges, for profit, and military academies. In addition to the Special Mission Colleges and Universities, Dr. Cole will teach The History of Higher Education. “How cool is it to say I teach history of higher education at the nation’s second oldest college?” he exclaimed.

Research Focus

Dr. Cole’s research agenda is to expand his focus on diverse campuses and special mission colleges, which is part of the reason why he is here. HBCUs reported higher campus involvement beyond the classroom. His previous research has focused on the history of university presidents and what has been said historically during student addresses. According to his research, what presidents say affects campus culture and shapes teaching practices and learning on campus. Virginia and The College of William and Mary are appealing to his research, since the state is southern and the college very historical. He still has plans to work with Indiana University and the redesign of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) project.

The William and Mary Educational Review welcomes Dr. Cole, whose energy and enthusiasm is palpable. We, as members of a student-run, graduate level publication, are fortunate to have someone with his experience in journalism join the faculty. We wish him the very best this year and look forward to learning more about his research and what he brings to the School of Education and The College of William and Mary.

About the author

Amy Morgan Schmidt is a PhD student in the Educational Planning, Policy, and Leadership program for Gifted Education. She is focusing on adolescent and adult giftedness.