

**Report of the Working Group  
Student Learning**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*The Student Learning group has identified the following 5 overarching goals and strategies:*

**Goal 1:** Encourage students to pursue intellectual breadth, draw connections between fields, and take risks.

***Strategies:***

1. Consider curricular, advising, and policy options that would encourage intellectual breadth
2. Consider greater flexibility in our academic policies

**Goal 2:** Provide the structure and resources necessary to position *all* students for academic success.

***Strategies:***

1. Revamp gateway courses
2. Consider a broader array of pre-matriculation educational options
3. Expand our writing curriculum and writing support
4. Address the assessment of student writing
5. Inject more active and experiential learning in students' first and second years.
6. Reconfigure first-year academic advising
7. Consider the utility of a First Year Seminar model
8. Consider more flexibility in academic policy

**Goal 3:** Promote the dissemination of innovative methods of teaching and learning

***Strategies:***

1. Develop a clearinghouse of best practices in pedagogy and inclusive learning
2. Promote in-house research and innovation in teaching
3. Promote effective use of technological innovations
4. Communicate staff expertise across the campus community
5. Encourage faculty to develop explicit learning goals for their courses
6. Consider establishing a Center for Teaching and Learning to aid in coordination of pedagogical offerings and development of educational assessment strategies

**Goal 4:** Optimize Winter Study term as an experiential and experimental component of students' academic trajectories

***Strategies:***

1. Revamp curricular offerings for Winter Study
2. Build more opportunities for career exploration and preparation
3. Expand co-curricular offerings that focus on life skills

**Goal 5:** Optimize summers as a core component of the Williams educational experience

## *Strategies*

1. Prepare and assist students in finding meaningful summer experiences
2. Provide an array of meaningful on-campus summer experiences
3. Provide opportunities for reflection and integration of summer experiences into the academic year

## **PROCESS**

The Student Learning working group, formed in the fall of 2019, began its work with the charge presented by the Coordinating Committee for Strategic Planning (Appendix 1). Using this document as a springboard, we built a set of organizing principles for conceptualizing the academic mission of the College (see below). Taken together, these documents coalesced into a set of questions about the extent to which the college is currently meeting its core aspirations (Appendix 2), and a list of constituents we hoped to meet in order to discuss ideas, concerns, and hopes. Over the course of the fall semester we met with a large number of individuals and groups (Appendix 3). We summarize what we learned below.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

Williams defines itself as a community in which all members learn with and from each other, and in which the intimacy of scale encourages students to construct a deeply immersive and personal education that centers relationships at its core.

The Williams curriculum presents students with a balance between breadth and depth; the college exposes students to a variety of disciplines with varied methods of asking and answering questions, as well as the opportunity to delve deeply into at least one field to experience the habits of mind and production of work that can lead to expertise. Beyond exposure to breadth and depth of knowledge, we believe the core objectives of the Williams curriculum should include:

- The **capacity to think critically, contextually, and creatively** (e.g., the ability to employ different ways of asking and answering questions and producing knowledge; the inclination and facility to draw connections between different modes of inquiry; the development of analytical and interpretive skills)
- The **ability to communicate effectively** with a diverse array of conversational partners (e.g., proficiency in writing, speaking, and producing images/data that convey information in compelling ways)
- The **ability to comprehend, interrogate, manipulate, and visualize data** (e.g., exposure to the uses of data and analytics across disciplines, the ability to interpret and analyze data; the ability to use data to communicate and collaborate with others)
- Development of a **global mindset** (e.g., the ability to approach problems and solutions from different cultural perspectives; the development of cultural awareness, the ability to recognize relationships between power structures and systemic inequities, the capacity to see beyond the limits of one's own experience; the ability to approach a diverse range of social, political, and ecological systems with intellectual curiosity and humility).
- Development of **community consciousness** (e.g., the ability to listen actively, to engage across difference, to seek out the beliefs that shape others' lives, to exhibit curiosity about

diverging world views, to seek out criticism for one's views, to change one's mind, to exhibit empathy, and to find areas of commonality amidst disagreement).

- Development of **personal effectiveness** (e.g., ability to engage in self-reflection, manage priorities, build a collaborative team, ask for assistance)
- Attentiveness to **wellbeing** (e.g., the ability to pursue academic goals while nurturing one's physical, psychological, interpersonal and spiritual needs)

## INTELLECTUAL BREADTH

**Challenge:** The Williams curriculum is designed to present students with a balance between breadth and depth. Our current academic requirements are designed to reflect this balance. To encourage depth, students are required to complete at least one major. To encourage breadth, students are required to take at least 3 courses in each of our academic divisions (Language & Arts; Social Studies; Science & Mathematics), as well as 2 Writing Skills courses, 1 Quantitative/Formal Reasoning course, and 1 Difference, Power & Equity course. In addition to these academic requirements, we aim to encourage breadth by providing a broad array of interdisciplinary programs, concentrations, and courses that explicitly span across academic fields.

One broad concern emerging from our outreach is whether students are intentional and thoughtful in their pursuit of intellectual breadth. Faculty and students alike report that many students approach the distributional requirement as a checkbox to complete rather than as a framework for achieving breadth. We have heard that students who are disinclined toward a particular division often look for “low risk” or “low investment” courses in order to meet the requirement, rather than taking the opportunity to examine a topic of genuine interest from a fresh perspective or applying the lens of one discipline to a compelling problem in another discipline. While our requirements are intended to foster integrative learning and ensure that students are exposed to a broad range of content and skills, there is a growing concern that the current structure encourages a “plug and chug” mentality rather than one that ignites students' innate curiosities and intellectual aspirations.

We have some limited data that speaks to how students approach breadth in their curricular choices. One metric is the number of students who take the *minimum* number of 3 required courses within each division. Of the graduating classes between 2011-2019, only 3-6% of students graduated with the minimum number of courses in Division 2. This figure ranges between 15 -17% for Division 1, and between 29-43% for Division 3. It is worth noting that the percentage of students taking the minimal number of Division 3 courses has decreased over time, while this metric has remained fairly constant over time for Divisions 1 and 2.<sup>1</sup> It remains the case that students do less “exploring” in Division 3 than they do in other divisions. It is also true that the majority of our students exceed the divisional requirements, suggesting that they have intrinsic reasons for seeking out courses that span across divisional lines.

Another metric is the breadth of courses students choose to fill their divisional requirements. A review of transcripts reveals that a majority of students are using the same 20-30 courses to cover

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A1 for percentage of graduates with minimum distribution requirements in a given division from 2011-2019.

the divisional requirements.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, these courses are mainly introductory courses, and also represent some of our courses with the highest overall enrollments per semester (i.e., they are “taught large” without a waiting list). A closer examination reveals that the courses students choose to complete their divisional requirements are highly consistent across majors, with only minor variations. These classes include ARTH 101, ARTH 102, ARTS 100 (in Division 1), ECO 110, ECON 120, PSYC 101 (in Division 2), and BIO 101, STAT 101 and MATH 105 (in Division 3).

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**Goal 1: Encourage students to pursue intellectual breadth, draw connections between fields, and take risks.**

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1. **We recommend that Williams re-evaluate our mechanisms for encouraging intellectual breadth.** Currently, we rely heavily on our divisional requirement to expose students to diverse “ways of knowing.” While we did not hear any groundswell of disapproval of the requirement, we did hear concerns about (a) whether the requirement does enough to help students chart a meaningful curriculum for themselves, and (b) whether the implementation of the requirement is successful in its current form.

One take-away from our outreach is that there is not a shared understanding about what we intend “breadth” of exposure to accomplish. Do we want students to sample different modes of asking and answering questions (e.g., emphasizing *exposure* as the primary goal)? Do we want students to draw connections (implicit or explicit) between fields of study (e.g., emphasizing *integrated/interconnected* learning)? Do we expect students to achieve some expected minimal level of competency within certain domains (e.g., writing, speech, quantitative comprehension and analytical reasoning, data fluency, etc.)? Or do we assume that *any* combination of 32 courses could provide a reasonable range of breadth?

As it stands, our current divisional requirement represents a common model for breadth; many colleges and universities engage in a similar practice. There are, however, a number of institutions that approach breadth differently. Rather than defining breadth by sampling various academic fields, some have focused on the acquisition of particular skills or competencies (e.g., see Columbia's core competencies, Ripon's catalyst curriculum, University of Vermont's core competencies, and University of Rochester's college competencies). Most of these skill/competency- based models are not framed as requirements, but rather as a set of aspirational goals.

Another approach to intellectual breadth focuses on encouraging students to pursue academic pathways that draw on input from multiple disciplines (e.g., Wheaton College’s Compass program; Connecticut College’s Connections program; William and Mary's college curriculum; Georgetown's core pathways; Hope College's grand challenges; Goucher's complex problem exploration courses; Guilford College's pathways). Within these structures, students can pursue core challenges (e.g., nonproliferation, environmental sustainability, poverty, inequality, intolerance) from a wide range of perspectives. Models such as these help to make learning pathways *explicit* to all students, so that they can identify

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A2 for the 20 courses most commonly use to meet divisional requirements between 2011-2019. Appendix A3 shows the most common courses used to meet the requirement for each of the three divisions.

an area of intellectual curiosity and explore it from a wide array of perspectives. Such an approach may be particularly useful for students who are less sure about how to chart an interdisciplinary path on their own.

A third model worth considering is the “linked” or “paired” course, in which two faculty members develop a set of linked courses that approach an issue or theme from complementary perspectives; these courses can be taught concurrently (including an integrative assignment between the courses) or sequentially (e.g., see Wheaton's connected courses [in pairs or trios], Carleton's linked courses, or San Diego State University's stacked courses).

Still other schools do not impose any divisional requirements, instead relying on students’ innate interests and adviser’s proactive guidance to produce meaningful curricular choices (see Brown, Amherst, Smith, Vassar, and Wesleyan as examples).

While we did not hear a groundswell of support for removing divisional requirements; we also did not unearth a coherent or consistent rationale for what we hope to achieve by “breadth.” Our current divisional requirement achieves the goal of exposure, and has the added benefit of simplicity. If we have more ambitious goals for breadth, however, we may need to rethink our requirements. We recommend that the Committee on Educational Affairs grapple with our goals around intellectual breadth as a first step moving forward. We would like to see the CEA consider the utility of some of the “interconnected” strategies described above (e.g., creating pathways or linked courses; tagging courses with core competency designations in order to encourage students to be more intentional about the range of skills they are developing as they chart their academic trajectory).

2. **Williams should consider incentivizing the design/implementation of courses/pathways that encourage students to be more intentional in their pursuit of intellectual breadth.** We recommend a “roundtable” or “workshop” approach in which a group of interdisciplinary faculty/staff members work together to develop innovative approaches to “mapped breadth.” The Dean of Faculty’s office has offered incentives to encourage development of tutorials and “critical reasoning” courses in the past with positive outcomes; the same method could be fruitful in this arena.
3. **We should provide faculty advisers with more tools/advice about how to encourage advisees to seek intellectual breadth in a meaningful way.** The initial two years of the undergraduate experience are formative for academic development, and a large subset of our students need guidance in how to make the most of our liberal arts model. Many students acknowledge that they seek to build meaning from their curricular choices, but don’t know where to begin. All too often in our current advising model, faculty advisers confirm students’ “plug and chug” mentality by simply reviewing advisees’ status toward completing their distributional requirements. This approach equates number of courses taken per division with achievement of “breadth,” and is a disservice to our students. If we aspire to encourage meaningful and integrated connections across the curriculum, then we need to create the sorts of intentionally integrated opportunities described above, and ensure that advisers are aware of these mechanisms so they can guide students accordingly. We recommend the development of web pages, videos and other resources about “pathways” and thematic interests which could include courses, programs, co-curricular activities, study away opportunities, internships, service and student work opportunities, alumni connections, and fellowships that feed into each broad theme. With this information at hand, faculty advisers

could help students see the inter-connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences more clearly, and help them chart an integrated path that has the capacity to become more than the sum of its component parts. The new Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement could play a leadership role in convening this effort.

**4. We should build in more intentionality and reflection in teaching and learning, so that students have more opportunities to draw connections between fields of study**

We recommend developing more structured opportunities for students to reflect upon and organize their learning so that they can construct a compelling narrative about their pathway through Williams. Reflection requires students to participate actively in the design and trajectory of their own learning, and encourages them to make connections between their curricular and co-curricular experiences. This active stance will serve them well as 21st century problem solvers who will need to take an integrative and agile approach to grappling with challenges of all kinds.

Intentional reflection can be built into students' developmental arc in several ways: (a) meetings with advisers should always include time to think about the "big picture" and how various experiences feed into each other in meaningful ways, (b) students should be expected to reflect on the ways that study away, internships, fellowships and other co-curricular opportunities deepen their understanding of their coursework at key moments (i.e., when they return from abroad or complete an internship), and (c) students could engage in "reflection seminars" explicitly designed to encourage the process of making visible the connections between their varied learning experiences (see Northeastern as an example). Such seminars could potentially fit well within our Winter Study session. All of these structures will necessitate stronger collaboration between academic faculty and key student-facing offices such as CLiA, Fellowships, Study Away, Center for Career Exploration, Davis Center, and more.

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**Goal 2: Consider greater flexibility in our academic policies**

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- 1. Williams should consider the viability of minors.** Both faculty and students have expressed interest in adding minors to our current array of academic options (i.e., majors, concentrations, certificates) as a means of encouraging pursuit of breadth. Currently, close to 50% of our students pursue a double major. Many of our double majors report that they choose this option in order to gain breadth while also receiving an extra credential that signals their experience to graduate schools and potential employers. Many students acknowledge that they are not interested in taking all of the 9-12 courses required to achieve a double major, but do so because this is the only way to obtain credentialed "evidence" of their work. Instituting minors would allow students to obtain both the breadth *and* credential they desire, while also maximizing room in their academic schedule to explore additional elective courses. Many of our peer institutions *do* offer minors (e.g., Bates, Bowdoin, Middlebury, Hamilton, Trinity, Colby), suggesting that this model can work well in a small liberal arts college setting. Some faculty have expressed concern that minors might inadvertently *increase* credentialization (e.g., students could continue to double major and then add on additional minors in a credentialing frenzy). We recommend that the Committee on Academic Affairs take up this issue in order to determine the potential utility of minors at Williams.

**2. Williams should consider adaptations to our current Pass-Fail policy:** Students, faculty and staff have identified our current policy on the use of the pass-fail designation as a potential barrier for students' pursuit of intellectual breadth. Specifically, students cannot use the P/F option to meet distributional requirements. As a result, students who feel less comfortable with a particular division often choose courses that they believe will be easy or likely to result in a good grade, rather than courses that might integrate their academic portfolio or extend their interests in significant ways. Concern about the impact of individual courses on overall GPA looms large in students' minds, and perhaps nowhere more intensively than in courses that don't necessarily play to their known strengths. Allowing students to take advantage of the P/F option more frequently (perhaps raising the maximum from 3 to 4) as well as allowing students to use P/F for at least one of their required courses in each division could encourage students to use the distributional requirement as intended – to pursue courses outside their comfort zone in a manner that will augment their intellectual curiosity – rather than as a checklist to be completed as expediently as possible. We note that our peer institutions almost uniformly allow 4 or more P/F options per student, and are mixed in their approach to allowing the P/F designation to be used for required courses.<sup>3</sup>

The Pass/Fail option has been available at Williams over the last four academic years. A great majority of P/F options were taken at 100 and 200 levels (1076 at 100 and 1294 at 200 level), which is consistent with the primary purpose of the policy, namely exploring the curriculum. We have seen a slight increase in the number of P/F courses taken each academic year.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, we have not seen strong evidence of students using P/F as a mechanism for doing the bare minimum necessary to pass a course. Undoubtedly some students do this, but it seems that the majority do not: 318 students would have received an A type grade, 1315 a B type grade, 812 a C type grade, while only 204 grades would have been in the D range. There were 50 F grades and 18 withdrawals in the four years.<sup>5</sup>

We recommend that the Committee on Educational Affairs consider this issue carefully, with the caveat that faculty would retain control over whether or not to list their course as available for the P/F option.

## **POSITIONING STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

**Challenge:** For several decades now, the college has committed itself to making a Williams education accessible for all admitted students, regardless of their family's financial circumstances. Satisfying that financial obligation is just the beginning of the college's responsibility to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive on campus. Although financial aid is vital to a Williams education, the college's curriculum must reflect a central truth: students come to Williams with a variety of high school academic opportunities and lived experiences that reflect the vast inequalities in American education. While we've made strides over the last decade in recognizing these two essential factors in student academic success, the

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A4 for data on how peer institutions utilize their pass-fail options.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A5 for total number of P-F courses taken between 2015-2018.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A6 for data on distribution of letter grades earned by students who opted for the P/F designation

college can and should do more as part of *a* comprehensive effort to support all students' academic development.

Our promise to incoming students should be that *every* student has a realistic path to reach their highest academic aspirations, regardless of whether they came from an under- or extravagantly resourced high school, or in between; from community colleges; or from the armed services. In other words, once admitted and regardless of prior exposure to specific content areas, tools, or frameworks, *every student* should be given the necessary tools to pursue their chosen academic path. We know that a failure to do so puts many students at risk of abandoning their initial academic interests, especially when they face gateway courses that presuppose prior exposure or pre-existing skill sets that do not reflect their actual experiences.

The problems we believe the college should address span a range of different areas of students' academic experiences, and we want to underline that there is no quick fix in working toward the goal of positioning all students for academic success. Rather, faculty and staff will need to engage multiple initiatives, some presumably at the same time. In addition, much of this work will require departments to take responsibility for the examination of individual courses and pathways through their major. Although we believe all the strategies below require the college's attention, this list also indicates our priorities (the most important at the top). We recognize, however, that as the college works to meet these objectives, the order of these priorities may change.

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**Goal 3: Provide the structure and resources necessary to position *all* students for academic success.**

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**1. Encourage departments to re-imagine gateway courses to emphasize pedagogical strategies that are active, inclusive, and universal.**

A significant theme emerging from our outreach is concern about perceived impediments in our current curriculum, especially in Div. III and some Div. II departments, that may be preventing some students from sticking with the pursuit of their incoming academic interests. In particular, we heard that certain "gateway" courses create a high-stakes environment: if students don't do well in these classes (which are designed to be taken in students' first semester at college), then the chances of those students' continuing in the discipline drop dramatically.

There is some indirect data to support this concern. For instance, the most recent Enrolled Student Survey reveals that while 35% of students remained committed to their initially intended major over time; 30% changed their mind, and another 30% did not arrive with an intended major in mind. Of course, many students will change their intended major at Williams for all the right reasons. However, of those students who changed their intended major, a significant proportion cited their reasons as (a) feeling unprepared, (b) feeling "turned off" by the introductory course, and (c) perceiving faculty in the major to be unapproachable.<sup>6</sup> In addition, DART data demonstrates that there is significant under-representation of students of color, first generation college students, and women in particular

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B1 for 2019 Enrolled Student Survey Data on why students change their proposed major

majors.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, members of DART reported to us that students from these groups are more likely to alter their intended majors from the sciences and math-oriented subjects to alternatives in Divisions 1 and 2. These patterns align with national trends. Faculty and staff also voiced frustration with their sense that a subset of students, through no fault of their own, finish their first semester or first year at the college already significantly behind in the skills they need to advance in a major. This too highlights the reality that the expectations of certain introductory classes may not match the experiences that incoming students bring with them to Williams.

Ultimately, changing the way gateway courses are conceived and launched should be departments' and programs' responsibilities. They do not, however, need to reinvent the wheel: considerable research on the design and implementation of gateway courses has emphasized their importance in students' academic trajectories, and schools around the country have been working on what combination of factors create the most effective entry points into an academic field (e.g., Gasiewski et al., 2012). As we will note in a subsequent section of this report, a Center for Teaching and Learning could play a key role in making these kinds of pedagogical resources more visible and available to faculty.

We recommend that, under the auspices and coordination of the Dean of Faculty's office, each department and program do a targeted self-study of their introductory classes. The purpose of this exercise will be to identify how well these classes provide a pathway for *all* interested students to continue their course of study in that field; departments can ask themselves: *what strategies will work best to bring down barriers for students hoping to advance to more advanced courses?* By launching this college-wide process, we share in the hope that one group of faculty members expressed to us: that *"we could make this -- ensuring that all students admitted to the college can succeed in any area of study they wish to pursue -- a fundamental institutional value, and adapt our pedagogies accordingly."*

## **2. Consider a broader array of pre-matriculation educational options**

A related issue is the kind and variety of educational experiences we offer students in the summer before they matriculate at Williams, as well as in subsequent summers. Our current 5-week pre-matriculation programs (Summer Science Program and Summer Humanities & Social Science Program) are constructed, in part, to address the "gateway" problem. Both of these programs are open to a small number of students from historically underrepresented groups and first-generation college students and are designed to acclimate students to college life, highlight the vitality of academic research, and create social bonds among students. These programs do much to develop confidence and specific skill sets among a selected group of students. Participants report that they enjoy both the structured class time and instruction/advice on how to navigate an intensive liberal arts college environment. In addition, students who attend these programs describe a smoother transition into their first year at Williams.

We recognize that there is a much larger group of incoming students (including those who would not meet criteria for SSP and SHSSP) who could nevertheless benefit from the

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B2 for DART data showing over- and under-enrollment in majors as a function of gender, race and ethnicity

opportunity to fill in gaps from their high school curricula. We recommend putting more energy and resources into summer opportunities for students wishing to develop foundational skills early in their college career (e.g., see examples at [University of Richmond](#), [Swarthmore](#), [Washington & Lee](#), and [Hamilton](#)). These opportunities could be provided by Williams itself through on-campus opportunities, such as “boot camps” that take place just prior to the start of the semester. Space on campus during the summer months is currently at full capacity, so any additional programming will require prioritization. Another strong option involves participation in online instruction or placements at other institutions.

We are particularly interested in the efficacy and affordability of online options. For example, both [Brown](#) and [Yale](#) offer a 6-week pre-calculus program designed to better prepare incoming students with fundamental quantitative skills. Both institutions have released assessment data suggesting that completion of this program has a positive impact on retention in STEM courses. As an online module, students can benefit from the program remotely, without having to give up employment opportunities or other important summer commitments, while still retaining the benefit of interacting with a supportive group of peers and mentors. We recommend that Williams explore a broader range of online programs and on-campus bridge options, with an eye toward building [clear links](#) between the learning objectives of such programs and the expectations built into gateway courses.

### **3. Consider expanding our writing curriculum and support by hiring professionally trained writing instructors**

Based on significant student and faculty feedback, there is a strong and consistent sense that our current curricular and resource options for writing do not adequately or equally serve all students. According to an external review of our writing program conducted this summer, faculty are “widely dissatisfied with the ineffectiveness of the Writing Skills requirement and what they perceive to be the inadequacy of support provided to students through the Writing Workshop, recent improvements notwithstanding” (*Review of the Center for Academic Resources*, 2019).<sup>8</sup> Our outreach revealed that many students arrive at Williams feeling insecure about their writing ability; this issue is especially pertinent for ESL and First-Gen/low-income students, as well as international students. Students also describe a lack of coherent and clear guidance on “specialist” writing style within specific disciplines, noting that they faced difficulty “decoding” the vocabulary and style of their reading assignments as well as producing their own written work. First generation and low-income students discussed how gaps in language and vocabulary constrained their ability to digest and express their understanding of class material, especially in their first year.

Faculty members who have taught our expository writing courses over the past 2 decades told us in no uncertain terms that their courses are *not* designed to provide nuts and bolts instruction about the writing process, and do not adequately meet the needs of students who arrive at Williams with little to no preparation in college-level academic writing. This is in direct contradiction to the advice that faculty advisers are told to give their advisees (i.e., that ENG 150-level courses are the right option for students who feel ill-prepared for writing).

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix B3 for the Writing section of the 2019 CAR External Review

Finally, the *Committee on Academic Affairs* unanimously endorsed a plan to hire a set of writing professionals to teach writing courses explicitly focused on writing instruction rather than content, and to provide individual tutoring for students whose needs extend beyond the capacity of the peer-run Writing Workshop<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, the CEA recommended "...a special Writing Program at Williams, led by three instructors trained specifically in writing pedagogy, each specializing in writing for a different division." Their recommendation also notes that, "faculty hired to teach writing skills should be able to cover, in addition to basic mechanics of writing, the skills and conventions needed for a wide range of writing assignments, such as the literary essay, the analytical paper, the research report, ethnographic observation, the lab report, informational poster, and so on." A similar proposal was made by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Teaching of Writing in June of 2017.<sup>10</sup>

Our outreach revealed strong support from students, staff, and faculty for the CEA recommendation to (a) hire a set of writing professionals who are skilled in composition and rhetoric, (b) expand the number of courses that teach the fundamentals of writing, and (c) broaden our support for communication to include public speaking and presentations in addition to written assignments. We believe that hiring professionals who could augment both curricular and tutoring options for writing would take pressure off the Writing Workshop, which was never designed to address pervasive skill deficits. Ideally, students should have options for professional *and* peer-based support in order to address the entire spectrum of need as well as individual preference (some students describe feeling stigmatized by having to rely on peers for aid, while others report that peer tutoring is a preferable way to receive "low stakes" support). Several of our peer schools offer professional writing support in conjunction with peer tutoring, including Smith, Carleton, Middlebury, and Amherst.

#### **4. Address the assessment of student writing**

Outreach revealed some concern about our current approach of not assessing the writing skills of our incoming students. Currently, placement in writing-based courses at Williams is determined almost entirely by student choice, with some informal guidance provided by high school credentials such as AP and/or IB exam results. Some faculty have expressed the opinion that this method of assessment is not comprehensive and fails to address the needs of all students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, due to lapses in advising and lack of appropriate assessment, some first-year students find themselves out of their depth in upper-level seminars, and quickly lose confidence in their writing abilities. Conducting writing assessment prior to enrollment would help to ensure that students are placed into courses that meet them where they are and constructively and sequentially develop their writing abilities. In addition, early assessment would allow us to identify those incoming students who would most benefit from the kinds of introductory writing courses that would be offered by the professionals described above.

#### **5. Inject more active and experiential learning in students' first and second years.**

For well over a decade, research on student engagement has demonstrated that students thrive when they are exposed to interactive and experiential learning opportunities (e.g., Kuh, 2009). Williams strives to prioritize these kinds of high impact practices across disciplines

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix B4 for the Writing proposal unanimously approved by the Committee on Educational Affairs

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix B5 for the final report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Teaching of Writing (June, 2017).

and divisions. For many departments, however, these experiences become the norm *after* students have chosen a major (e.g., in their junior and senior years). Giving students the opportunities *early on* to engage in hands-on research and/or gain other kinds of field, interactive, or experiential projects can have an extraordinary influence on their academic trajectories. Such opportunities offer the chance for faculty to mentor students more closely, thus providing the additional benefit of more personalized advising for students. We recommend that departments look for ways to incorporate these high impact practices into gateway and intermediate courses so that first- and second-year students can gain academic confidence and envision what more advanced work in particular fields might look like.

## **6. Reconfigure first-year academic advising so that students receive more effective and timely guidance.**

Students have perennially identified the first-year advising system as a significant weakness at the college. In contrast to the high marks that students give to the faculty, first-year advising receives an array of complaints, ranging from the belief that the whole system is broken to more specific complaints about advisers' lack of training, availability or ability to convey useful information to their advisees.<sup>11</sup>

While there are notable challenges in creating an effective advising system, many of our peer schools have made strides in this area (e.g., see examples at Haverford, Vassar, and VCU). We recommend that Williams consider some fundamental changes in structure and practice of advising, including: (a) whether *all* faculty should participate in the advising process, (b) whether the current method for matching advisers and students is effective, (c) whether incoming students and advisers could benefit from more information/resources about what to expect and how to get the most out of advising, and (d) whether advising should be built into a larger curricular structure (e.g., a First Year Seminar model).

## **7. Consider the utility of a First Year Seminar (FYS) model.**

In the FYS model, incoming students participate in small discussion-based seminars designed to meet several goals: (a) introduce students to the kind of intellectual curiosity and engagement that forms the cornerstone of higher education, (b) expose students to college-level writing, and to the skills and competencies students need to develop into critical thinkers, problem solvers, planners, academic collaborators, and effective communicators; (c) provide an advising cohort for new students; and (d) introduce students to the network of offices, advisors, mentors, organizations, and activities that can support their transition to college and enrich their academic trajectory.

Currently, Williams does not offer such a course, although some departments do offer seminars geared toward first year students that accomplish some of the above goals. However, the FYS model exists at many of our peer institutions,<sup>12</sup> and for good reason: research on first-year seminars suggests they have value in terms of “retention” and “persistence.” While Williams has an enviable retention rate of 98% after the first year and

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix B6, the most recent *Enrolled Student Survey* showing student (dis)satisfaction with faculty advising.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix B7 for a list of peer institutions with strong First Year Seminar models

very strong graduation rates, we believe that a first-year seminar could provide a valuable academic experience that we don't currently offer.

It is important to note that apart from our *First Days* orientation program, Williams currently has no comprehensive approach to supporting students as they face the predictable academic challenges of their first year. These challenges are often magnified for low income students, first generation college students, and historically under-represented students of color. Required first-year seminars, especially in the fall semester, can introduce students to a range of experiences and skills that will benefit them going forward: everything from practical academic skills to immersion in college-level inquiry in a small seminar setting. It also opens up many opportunities to integrate a more robust and personal form of first-year advising with the first-year seminar program.

In our outreach over the fall of 2019, the idea of a required first-year seminar met with a mixed reaction. The Curriculum Planning Committee, for instance, was not in favor of this model, noting their sense that “other institutions have had mixed results in this area” and that “[s]uch seminars are sometimes used as a branding tool that ends up being burdensome in terms of the demands on faculty and curricular resources.”<sup>13</sup> Some faculty remembered the demise of Williams’s own First-Year Residential Seminar program and believe that should caution us from proceeding with a first-year seminar program. On the other hand, we also heard faculty and staff reminisce about their own or their children’s very positive experiences in such seminars at other institutions. While research on this issue in the higher-ed landscape is not terribly developed, it does suggest academic benefits.

Anecdotal and sparse national evidence aside, we believe Williams should consider the potential value of a first-year seminar. The college would benefit from exploring how well first-year seminar programs have worked at peer schools that use them. Clearly, were the college to go down this road, it would not want to simply copy what other schools are doing but initiate a program that would work best at Williams. And even if we choose not to develop such a program, the inquiry process itself will inevitably lead to improvements in how we introduce students to college-level work, and support them in that endeavor.

## **8. Consider more flexibility in academic policy**

The college should embark on a broad and deep analysis of the ways that our general curriculum (4 courses required per semester) and other academic policies pose barriers for students who experience academic difficulty. Should we allow students to use extra graded courses to make up subsequent deficiencies? Should we allow more flexibility in making up course deficiencies, the opportunity to take distributional requirements P/F, more latitude to withdraw from courses, and provision of partial credit for labs, studios, other types of experiential work? This is a large and complicated issue to unpack and our outreach scratched the surface of what we recognize is a complicated and interlocking set of issues. Nevertheless, we believe that a comprehensive evaluation of academic policies is timely, with an eye toward removing unnecessary boundaries to student success.

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix B8 for the CPC memo to our working group

## SUPPORTING FACULTY AND STAFF IN THEIR ROLES AS EDUCATORS

**Challenge:** President Garfield is quoted as saying that *"The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other."* Williams faculty take this adage to heart in the ways they interact with students. And yet, as our college demographics, course content, and classroom climate have shifted over time, faculty are actively seeking ways to expand their pedagogical skill sets.

The most recent report from the evaluation team representing the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges for Williams' 2017 reaccreditation found that *"Though the mission statement speaks to the 'teaching gene' that characterizes the institution's faculty, the self-study did not provide nor did the Team elicit much specificity about the college's approach to teaching, nor about expertise or resources the college provides in support of teaching."*

Our outreach supports this assessment. Indeed, faculty are actively asking for resources and guidance as they attempt to reinvigorate their pedagogical strategies, and to identify opportunities to address inclusion and equity in their teaching. Some of our newer faculty members are coming out of graduate programs with known and visible support for pedagogical innovation and experimentation and are looking for similar support at Williams, while others (including more experienced faculty) find themselves seeking resources around new teaching challenges and are unsure how to access resources.

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### **Goal 1: Promote the dissemination of innovative and evidence-based methods of teaching and learning (with an eye toward promotion of pedagogies that give all students equal opportunity to learn)**

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#### **1. Develop a clearinghouse of evidence-based pedagogy and inclusive learning so that faculty can experiment with new techniques and network with colleagues who are grappling with similar challenges.**

Enrolling a broadly diverse student body has been an institutional mission for decades, and we have succeeded in recruiting students representing a wide range of ethnic and racial identities, as well as the full spectrum of socioeconomic diversity. Our admitted students are deeply talented, high achieving students of great promise, and yet their academic preparation and lived experience varies greatly; even the most highly achieving students from under-resourced primary and secondary schools will have exposure gaps. Unless we are committed to meeting students where they are upon arrival and building on their considerable strengths, they will not have full and unfettered access to success at Williams. Acknowledging students' comprehensive array of strengths/challenges, and empowering them toward success requires faculty to have a broad toolkit of teaching practices.

Faculty interest in active, engaged and evidence-based pedagogies and inclusive practice is growing. The Associate Dean of the Faculty and the Director of Quantitative Skills and Peer Support have seen an increasing number of requests for materials and guidance. Teach Week

2019, developed by a group of staff, provided an array of workshops and sessions on student centered pedagogy; over 45 faculty participated in these events. The Dean of Faculty Office's [Networks for Faculty Development page](#) includes a link to a [Guide to Inclusive Practice published by the Chronicle for Higher Education](#). Both of these projects represent dedication to showcasing innovative and solution focused strategies for effective teaching. Williams does not yet have, however, a centralized or comprehensive collection of resources on teaching.

[Amherst](#), [Bowdoin](#), and [Colby College](#) all have on-line resource guides for inclusive practice tailored to the needs of their faculties. Larger universities with fully developed Centers for Teaching and Learning have webpages that catalog promising pedagogical practices as well as pointers to specific individuals who have that expertise on campus (e.g., see [Vanderbilt](#)). We recommend the development of a resource guide specific to the needs of the Williams campus. A clearinghouse for the kinds of strategies faculty at similar institutions have found to be effective, as well as those found to be successful at Williams, will enhance the culture of collaboration of teaching and learning here.

Two newly-created roles -- Associate Director for Inclusive Learning Environments within the Davis Center and Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement within the Dean of College Division -- are additional steps toward establishing pathways for faculty and staff to consult about a wide variety of pedagogical approaches. We have a number of existing members of faculty and staff in other corners of campus (e.g., the Dean of Faculty office, the Quantitative Skills program, the libraries, the Center for Academic Resources, Special Academic Programs, faculty located in multiple departments) who are invested in and knowledgeable about inclusive practice. Connecting the work of these individuals with our new hires and with the broader campus will create conditions for a more inclusive learning environment for all.

## **2. Promote in-house research and innovation in teaching**

Williams is fortunate to have several faculty members whose research relates to the scholarship of [teaching and learning](#) (e.g., [Kornell](#), and [Engel](#)). Williams is a founding member of the Liberal Arts Consortium for Online Learning, and is currently participating in research about the effectiveness of supplementary online modules in STEM+ courses (see the [LACOL NSF grant for QLAB](#)). We benefit from an array of fora for discussing pedagogical innovation (e.g., First3, teaching roundtables, and more). Despite demonstrated interest in evidence-based pedagogy, our dissemination of information is not centrally coordinated or well-disseminated. We should take advantage of our strong student and faculty enthusiasm to increase opportunities for pedagogical scholarship. For example, Amherst and [Smith](#) have found success with “pedagogy partners” programs in which faculty select students to work with them on pedagogical innovation in a particular course. In addition, scholarship around teaching and learning should be valued (alongside discipline-specific research) in reappointment, tenure and promotion decisions.

We note that junior and untenured faculty at Williams report that they often avoid engaging in pedagogical innovation for fear of negative repercussions in their SCS scores. Indeed, we heard that Williams students are often harder on faculty who teach in a method other than traditional lecture, despite evidence that students in courses utilizing active techniques often report better learning outcomes (see [Deslauriers et al., 2019](#)). We recommend that the CAP

consider ways to reward innovation in teaching, and to adjust for its potential negative impact on traditional student assessment methods. One approach might involve the adoption of alternative methods of assessment.

Finally, financial incentives such as summer salary, would also be helpful in encouraging faculty to revitalize their teaching. Funding currently exists for the development of new tutorials as well as more general teaching innovation. We recommend an increase in these sorts of incentives.

### **3. Promote effective use of technology in support of teaching and learning**

Literature on fundamentals of effective pedagogical practice consistently highlight the importance of technology (e.g., see Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Partnering with other LACOL institutions has allowed us to offer courses we would otherwise be unable to offer (e.g., Data Science and language courses). Additional strategies for blending classroom and on-line technologies could further enhance the authentic learning we value (e.g., see Bryn Mawr). We recommend that we continue to augment the creative use of technology to enhance learning opportunities for our students, faculty and staff.

### **4. Communicate staff expertise across the campus**

When the Collaborative for Faculty Development (CFD) was formed in 2016, its primary goals were to (a) elevate the visibility of relevant expertise on campus, and (b) improve accessibility of campus experts by clarifying schedules and points of entry. In 2019, a subgroup of the CFD, Teaching and Learning Partners, organized an inaugural Teach Week (and are now in the process of organizing Teach Week 2020). Despite these important strides, many faculty and staff remain unaware of our existing resources. We recommend increasing the visibility of the CFD even more in order to connect more faculty who would like to take advantage of consultation and collaboration.

It is also important to note that our faculty-facing staff (e.g., librarians, OIT, Writing and Q Directors, deans) are not the only ones with expertise that might be valuable for the classroom. Staff in other areas (Bursar's Office, Facilities, Chaplains and others) may have skill sets or content expertise that could provide interesting connections to our courses. Our outreach revealed that many of these staff members, who otherwise have little or no contact with students and faculty, are very willing to share their expertise across campus.

### **5. Encourage all faculty to develop explicit learning goals for their courses**

Research demonstrates that clarity in faculty expectations leads to increases in student learning and sense of belonging in the classroom (e.g., Bolkan, 2015). During our outreach process, we heard that many Williams students feel that faculty expectations are unclear; they report having difficulty deciphering assignment prompts or understanding the purpose of assignments. These concerns appear to be particularly prominent among students who come to Williams from under-resourced or international high schools. We recommend that faculty engage in a self-study of their course offerings in order to identify ways to be clearer and more transparent about their learning outcomes. The inclusion of explicit learning goals (in course syllabi as well as individual assignments/exams) will not only bolster student success, but will also allow departments and programs to be more effective in scaffolding courses and creating a smoother trajectory for students moving through majors.

## 6. Consider establishing a Center for Teaching and Learning

Our faculty are avid about teaching, and have chosen Williams because they want to be at an institution that puts undergraduate education at the very heart of its mission. Our outreach revealed tremendous openness and interest from faculty in continuing to improve and evolve their teaching skills. We also benefit from a set of staff members with considerable expertise and investment in supporting pedagogical growth. A Center for Teaching and Learning would help to coordinate our efforts toward offering the highest quality of teaching, tracking the broad spectrum of activity around pedagogy on campus, and increasing the visibility of this work. There are different models for such a center. Some CTLs physically house all of the people doing this work (e.g., Yale, Duke, Davidson); others have small staffs that coordinate with staff members and offices across campus without being co-housed in a central location (e.g., Macalester, Colby, Amherst, Smith). Regardless of the structure, we believe that a CTL would improve the efficacy of our current work in advancing innovative pedagogy, and allow us to expand in important directions.

We imagine that a CTL would take the lead in designing and implementing a variety of “communities of practice” that would support faculty with shared pedagogical interests. Existing programs such as our teaching roundtables and multi-session workshops on data visualization, critical pedagogy, and Teach Week are examples of this kind of support. A CTL would offer infrastructure for the formation of these groups, as well as for the additional programming ideas that grow out of such conversations.

Another important role for a CTL is the development and implementation of campus-wide assessment strategies to ensure that our courses are accomplishing their learning objectives. The 2017 NEASC accreditation letter specifically asks that the College create “ a comprehensive approach to assessing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and in the General Education area.” While that work must be done by faculty members, oversight by a person or group of people with assessment expertise would be of great benefit to the College. The CTL would be a natural home base for providing guidance and strategy for assessment.

## REIMAGINING WINTER STUDY

**Challenge:** Winter study is advertised as a time for both students and faculty to reach outside of the standard Fall-Spring curricula to explore, experiment, and experience different ways of learning. It was originally envisioned as a “pedagogical laboratory” for faculty to experiment with innovative pedagogical practices and for students to pursue eclectic interests in a less stressful environment. During our outreach, we heard broad concern about the mission and effectiveness of Winter Study in its current form.

A major theme of criticism from both students and faculty involves Winter Study’s lack of an overarching curricular philosophy. Currently, courses are developed in a decentralized manner; individual faculty members within departments are tasked with proposing and designing their courses without a clear set of directives, or a sense of how individual offerings might fit into a larger “master plan.” The resulting set of courses typically represent a hodgepodge of topics and

approaches without regard for student interest or synergies with students' other curricular or co-curricular interests.

The range of courses is broad; some faculty offer more traditional fare (e.g., seminar models involving the close reading of a single text or deep inquiry into a particular concept), while others design courses that are more experiential and action oriented. Students report a strong desire for courses that focus on experiential learning, independent research, and career exploration. Currently, there are caps placed on some of the more experiential courses (e.g., SPEC courses offered by the Center for Career Exploration), resulting in a subset of students who are dropped from their first and second choices, and find themselves enrolled in courses that hold little intellectual appeal. Finally, there is currently little to no connection between regular semester courses and Winter Study coursework.

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**Goal 1: Optimize Winter Study as an experiential and experimental component of a student's academic trajectory**

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**1. Williams should reimagine its curricular offerings**

Students are most interested in WSP courses that offer fieldwork, independent research, travel, hands on experiences, and career exploration. Our current approach to developing courses does not prioritize this demand, and does not produce a cohesive curriculum. We recommend a reconfiguration of the Winter Study Committee into a body that centralizes the oversight and planning of the entire WSP curriculum. In such a model, the Winter Study Committee could survey students about their topical interests as well as the ways in which they would like to make connections between Winter Study and their other curricular and co-curricular interests. The committee could then use this data to build a unified and meaningful catalog of offerings.

The next step involves matching faculty to courses. Rather than starting with the assumption that all faculty members should be required to teach Winter Study courses, we recommend that Williams lay out its curricular goals first, and *then* seek out instructors whose skill sets match the desired curriculum (in contrast to the current model in which we encourage faculty to develop idiosyncratic course offerings built around their personal interests). Once the curricular goals are clear, Williams could consider expanding the use of adjunct, alumni, and staff instructors with skill sets that are particularly relevant to domains of student interest.

During the outreach process, many faculty expressed a misgiving that the burden of teaching Winter Study fell disproportionately on certain groups of faculty. Expanding the role of non-permanent instructional staff in teaching Winter Study would allow a greater connection to ideas and voices outside the Williams environment, a greater connection to Williams alumni, and a greater ability of students to broaden their exposure to new forms of pedagogy. Further, faculty who were no longer tethered to instructing Winter Study courses could focus on research and pedagogy that would further benefit the students they teach.

**2. Williams should build in more opportunities for career exploration and preparation**

The student body has broadly expressed support for coursework related to career exploration. In the latest iteration of the Enrolled Student Survey, career-oriented skills were cited as one

of the gaps in the Williams curriculum.<sup>14</sup> Further, we have seen a consistent pattern of high enrollments in Winter Study courses that emphasize career exploration. Both students and faculty note that there is a palpable tension on campus between a traditional description of liberal arts as distinctly “*not* pre-professional” and student hunger for opportunities to link the “ways of knowing” they learn about in the classroom with opportunities for real-world application. We believe that career exploration (when offered in thoughtful ways) can and should be a fundamental part of the liberal arts project.

In the past two years, over 100 students have been excluded from career exploration opportunities during winter study due to course enrollment caps. We recommend the expansion of these experiential offerings (e.g., SPEC 19 Healthcare Internships, SPEC 21 Experience in the Workplace, and alumni sponsored internships options). We would like to see the Center for Career Exploration work closely with the CPC and the CEA to ensure that these options and others could be expanded while maintaining high standards for the quality of placements and supervisors.

Students also report a need for increased guidance and practice in interviewing, networking, resume building, and connecting with alumni, as well as opportunities to better prepare for standardized tests such as the MCAT, LSAT, GRE, and GMAT. Winter Study is an ideal time for students to focus on these goals, and could provide equitable access to resources for all students, rather than those who are privileged to have independent means and connections. In addition, providing a dedicated time for these time-intensive projects during Winter Study would provide students with more breathing room to focus on their coursework during the fall and spring semesters. We recommend that the Winter Study committee work closely with the Career Center and Alumni Relations when retooling the WS curriculum.

### **3. Williams should expand co-curricular offerings that focus on life skills**

In our mission to prepare students to be successful in their lives after Williams, Winter Study provides a unique opportunity to ensure students are well-rounded in areas that aren’t strictly academic. Students have expressed an interest in areas including wellness, interpersonal effectiveness, financial and legal literacy, cooking, automotive and household maintenance, among others. The Winter Study Coordinator recently launched a co-curricular workshop initiative to meet this need, and we have seen more than 60% enrollment growth over the past two years. These efforts should be continued and expanded in future years.

## **OPTIMIZING SUMMER OPPORTUNITIES**

**Challenge:** Williams has historically viewed its academic curriculum as consisting of the fall and spring semesters and the Winter Study term. We tend to think of the summer as “time away” and not a formal component of the Williams experience. However, the summer has increasingly become an integral part of students’ undergraduate years. Many students report that some of their most meaningful undergraduate experiences take place over the summer and that these experiences complement and enhance the learning that takes place during the traditional academic semesters.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix C1

Although faculty and staff recognize the value of summer experiences and encourage students to make the most of their summers, Williams lacks a coordinated and deliberate effort to promote the summer period as an opportunity to complement the academic year. There is great variability and inequity in the extent to which our students are able to build meaningful summer experiences for themselves. Furthermore, our curriculum does little to integrate and reflect on these summer experiences after the summer is over, and to allow students to share their experiences with others.

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**Goal 1: Provide an array of meaningful on-campus summer experiences**

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**1. Expand the number of opportunities for meaningful on-campus summer experiences**

Williams currently excels in providing 9-week summer opportunities for nearly 200 students in the sciences each year. This summer science research session is one of the most robust and successful research programs offered by a predominantly undergraduate institution. Division 3 + P faculty are fortunate to have a funding structure that provides interested students with on-campus housing and a stipend while they engage in summer research. Currently 1/2 to 2/3 of student requests are covered by endowed funds explicitly targeted for summer students; the rest comes from unrestricted budgets in the Science Center. Another limiting factor involves manpower; not all faculty are interested in working with summer students, and those that are interested are limited in the number of students they can reasonably accommodate each summer. Because preference is typically given to rising senior thesis students, the students who don't receive spots tend to be rising sophomores or juniors—students whose scientific interests and skills are just taking off. The Office of Admissions widely promotes student/faculty collaboration in research, driving student expectations that they will be able to work with faculty early in their college career. Ultimately, there is shared disappointment among students and faculty when interested students cannot be accommodated over the summer. We recommend increasing the number of available summer spots to allow more students to participate in this valuable opportunity by increasing available funding and encouraging more faculty to participate.

Likewise, the number of summer opportunities outside of the sciences is extremely limited. A small number of students (5-10) have the opportunity to pursue scholarly activities with faculty in Divisions I and II, but these opportunities are restricted by sparse funding and faculty availability. We recommend expanding the number of opportunities in the humanities and social sciences through stipend programs, especially those proposed by the *Future of the Arts at Williams* and *International* strategic initiatives working groups. We could also expand the summer experiences currently offered through the Center for Learning in Action, the Zilkha Center, and the Davis Center.

Because faculty availability is another reason for limited on-campus opportunities, we recommend providing incentives for faculty to work with students on meaningful activities over the summer. Currently some faculty work with students over the summer in a 40 h per week experience while other faculty restrict their student contact to a 9-month schedule, thus creating unequal teaching/mentorship responsibilities and expectations. It should be noted that faculty who work with students over the summer currently receive no summer salary (unless covered by external grants) and no summer research funds. Providing incentives to

Division III faculty and others to work with students over the summer will help to acknowledge the summer workload and create new opportunities for students. These incentives could take the form of faculty stipends for summer mentorship, or individual increases in divisional research funds.

**2. Use the pre-matriculation period and/or first summer as an opportunity to develop academic skills (see page 12 in *Student Success* section)**

**3. Provide students who are on campus with opportunities to build professional development skills**

Williams currently hosts several hundred students on campus each summer; students describe this time as an opportunity to be immersed in a more focused way than during the academic semesters when they are engaged in a full course. In our outreach sessions, students described their desire to build skill sets in public speaking, communicating and presenting with slides, interviewing, drafting professional emails, etc.). We recommend formally offering workshops and sessions on these topics during the summer months.

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**Goal 2: Prepare and assist students in finding meaningful off-campus summer experiences**

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**1. Create a formal database of summer opportunities for off-campus experiences**

Advising on summer opportunities is highly decentralized. Students interested in summer internships, research experiences, fellowships, and opportunities abroad typically pursue options on their own, or speak with individual faculty/staff members, each with differing spheres of knowledge and expertise. Occasionally academic departments or campus offices offer information sessions, but these offerings tend to be infrequent and non-comprehensive.

We suggest creating a more formal, centralized clearinghouse for all existing summer opportunities, combining the efforts currently offered via the Center for Career Exploration, the Fellowships Office, CLiA, individual academic departments, the Zilkha Center, the Davis Center, etc. A database of available opportunities could include prerequisites, due dates, contact information/reviews from previous students who participated in these programs, application portals, etc.

**2. Assist students in the application process for applying to competitive summer programs.** Because many of the summer opportunities described above are extremely competitive, students would benefit from a centralized effort to learn about how to apply to such programs, including writing statements of interest, soliciting letters of recommendation, and composing competitive CVs. This assistance is provided informally via individual faculty and staff, through occasional workshops offered through student groups (e.g. the Biology Majors Advisory Committee), or through the Center for Career Exploration. We recommend a more formal, coordinated effort to assist students across all class years and fields of interest.

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**Goal 3: Provide opportunities for reflection and integration of summer experiences into the academic year**

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Once the summer ends, students rarely have the opportunity to share their experiences with others. Some departments, such as Computer Science and Geosciences, offer a dedicated “What I did over the summer” event in which students have a formal opportunity to share their experiences. Similarly, the Environmental Sciences program runs a Log Lunch event in which students can present their summer experiences. Academic departments and campus offices should make these opportunities for meaningful reflection and integration more ubiquitous.

**CONCLUSION**

Producing this report has been a rewarding experience for this working group. We enjoyed the privilege of engaging in outreach and witnessing tangible commitment to student learning from all corners of campus. It is clear that faculty, students, and staff are deeply committed to a shared goal: continually improving our ability to provide a meaningful, agile, and enduring education for all students – an education that launches students into the lives they aspire to lead. We are excited about the goals and strategies that lay before us, and grateful to be part of this important work.

Marlene Sandstrom, Dean of the College & Hales Professor of Psychology

Matthew Carter, Associate Professor of Biology

Adam Jones '21

Aria Mason '20

Karen Merrill, Professor of History; Frederick Rudolph' - Class of 1965 Professor of American Culture

Laura Muller, Director of Quantitative Skills Program and Peer Support

## Appendix 1: Working group mission and charge

### Enhancing Student Learning

The group's scope includes:

- Curricular and educational structure
- Advising structure and resources
- Academic support resources
- Connections between the curricular and co-curricular
- Winter Study and summer opportunities

### Group Members

Matt Carter, Department of Biology

Adam S. Jones '21, Student

Aria Mason '21, Student

Karen Merrill, Department of History

Laura Muller, Academic Resources

Marlene Sandstrom, Office of the Dean of the College and Department of Psychology

### Working Group charge

Williams College is dedicated to providing an education that is both broad and deep, offering students a strong foundation for principled leadership, citizenship, and adaptability in an evolving world. Our curriculum is designed to foster strong writing, speaking and quantitative skills, the ability to analyze and synthesize information across a wide range of disciplines, and the capacity to consume and produce knowledge. Our intimacy of scale allows students to create highly personalized academic pathways through our liberal arts curriculum.

This working group is charged with examining Williams' curricular goals, strategies, and programs, and providing recommendations that will strengthen the links between our mission and curriculum, including:

- Organizational structure
- Curriculum/pedagogy
- Academic support resources
- 12-month learning
- Links with co-curriculum
- Assessment

### This working group should consider the following questions:

- What skills/competencies do we hope all Williams graduates will develop/strengthen during their time here?
- Is our curriculum sufficiently flexible, fresh, innovative, and powerful in ways that allow us to embody our educational goals? How do we balance the transmission of content-specific knowledge with ways of learning and knowing?

- Are the various structures and policies that govern our curriculum (e.g., departments, programs, majors, divisions, academic calendar and schedule, academic credit) the right ones?
- How can we expand on the ways we support student success in learning and faculty success in teaching?
- How might we encourage deep and frequent self-reflection about the connections across courses, and how can we make sure students' whole academic program adds up to a sum greater than its parts?
- How might we improve the ways we currently support students during Winter Study and summers to optimize and extend learning?
- How do co-curricular experiences complement our curricular goals? How might they challenge or change them?
- Do we have the right structures and processes for assessing if and how we are achieving our goals for students' learning?

Each working group will collaborate with the Office of the President on a list of resources needed for its work, including internal data sets and models from peer institutions. In addition, each working group is charged with:

- Developing an open and inclusive process for gathering input from all sectors of the campus;
- Developing a communications strategy throughout the fall and early spring of 2019-20;
- Coordinating with other relevant working groups and the Coordinating Committee as necessary;
- Recognizing that resources are limited and thinking carefully about ways to achieve programmatic change without necessarily increasing total spending;
- Operating with the understanding that new initiatives may replace existing ones and thus an inventory of possible reductions/eliminations should be developed.

## Appendix 2: Outreach topics and questions

### How can we best support student writing?

- Is our curriculum sufficient or do we need to offer something different/additional?
- Is our peer-led writing workshop working well? What should it be doing differently?
- Additional writing support for students? What might those look like?
- What sorts of support would be most helpful to faculty in their teaching of writing?
- What role could a center for Teaching & Learning play in supporting students and faculty in writing?
- Are there specific kinds of writing skills that students need in your discipline?
- What are your thoughts about our current writing requirement

### How should we encourage intellectual breadth?

- We currently use our divisional requirement and interdisciplinary courses/programs to accomplish this goal; are there different/better ways to encourage breadth? What are the pros/cons of alternative methods?
  - Minors
  - Pathways
  - Modes of inquiry
  - Do divisions still make sense as a useful category at Williams?

### First Year Seminar Model - What might it offer Williams?

- Highlight the goals that these seminars accomplish
- Ask whether we are accomplishing these goals in other ways
- Could this model be useful at Williams? (pros and cons)

### How should we address preparation/opportunity gaps among incoming students?

- We currently host the Summer Science Program and the Summer Humanities & Social Sciences Program (5 week program; 25 students each; taps students who are from historically under-represented groups or first generation college students)
  - Are there other populations that we are not serving?
  - Are there other sorts of programming/structure that could be useful to our incoming students?

### How can we better use WS?

- Could we do more to allow our students to focus on experiential education, career exploration, and travel during the January term?
- Should students be given more lee-way to receive “credit” for professional development off campus (e.g., taking a test prep course; shadowing a professional)?
- Should Williams offer more professional development opportunities on campus during WS?

### **Do our academic policies support student success?**

- What are the pros and cons of our course credit system (i.e., 1 course = 1 credit) and 8 semester rule (no acceleration or slower path) as compared to other models?
- Many of our policies stem from these 2 principles. Are they serving our students well?
  - e.g., Cannot use an extra course to make up for a subsequent deficiency
  - Can't take a summer course for academic credit
- Are our 3/2 programs working well?

### **A Center for Teaching & Learning - What might it offer Williams?**

- What are the existing problems that (only) a T&L Center could solve?
- What kinds of support do students feel they need in order to be fully successful? (other services that Academic Resources doesn't currently provide)?
  - Academic and personal effectiveness?
- What kinds of support do faculty feel they need in order to be fully successful? (other services that Academic Resources doesn't currently provide)?
  - Academic and personal effectiveness?
- Is this a structure or is this glue?
- Are there aspects of current academic support offices that we want to make sure not to lose in a potential integration of additional services?

### **Academic Advising**

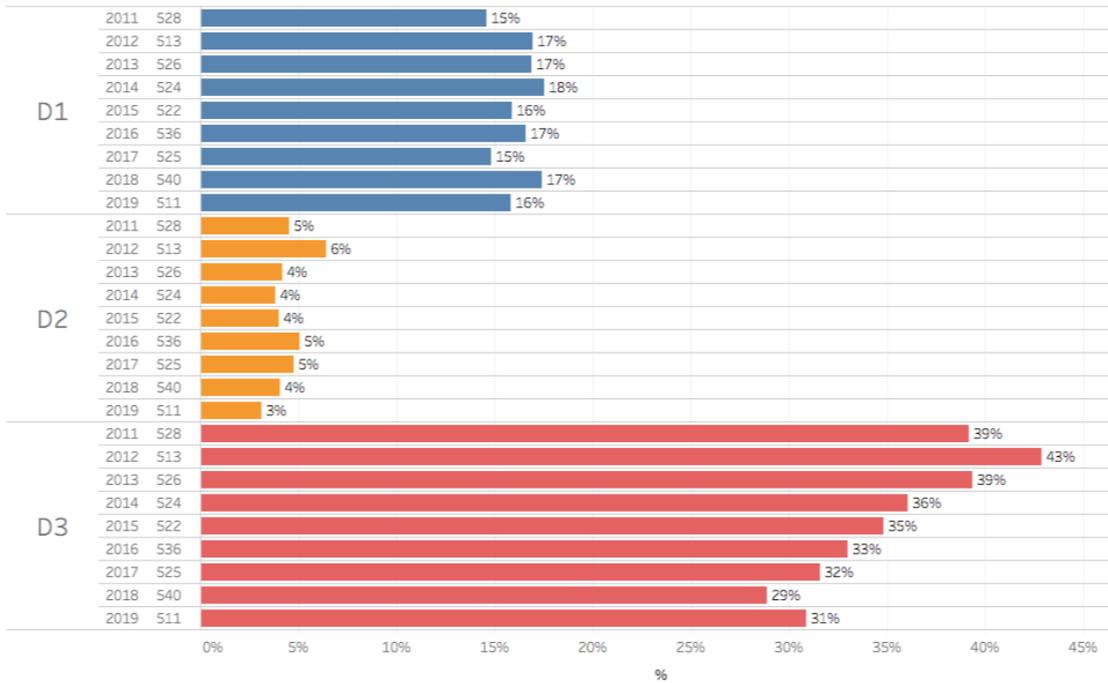
- Does our academic advising system serve our students well?
- How are students and faculty advisers matched?
- What purpose should advising serve? (advising vs. mentoring?)
- How can faculty be best prepared and supported to be effective advisors?
- How should students be prepared to make the most of academic advising?

### Appendix 3: Summary of outreach sessions

| Date     | Session                               |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| 9/9/19   | Standing working group meeting        |
| 9/10/19  | Tuesdays at the Log                   |
| 9/16/19  | Standing working group meeting        |
| 9/18/19  | Associate Dean's Lunch                |
| 9/19/19  | Career Center                         |
| 9/23/19  | Writing Initiatives - key faculty     |
| 9/24/19  | Collaborative for Faculty Development |
| 9/25/10  | CPC                                   |
| 9/26/19  | CEA                                   |
| 9/30/19  | DART                                  |
| 10/2/19  | Associate Dean's Lunch                |
| 10/3/19  | Strategic Initiative CTL group        |
| 10/7/19  | Working group meeting                 |
| 10/8/19  | Athletics                             |
| 10/8/19  | Science Lunch                         |
| 10/9/19  | Dean's Office                         |
| 10/11/19 | Board of Trustees                     |
| 10/14/19 | Study Away/Fellowships                |
| 10/15/19 | Strategic Planning Outreach Day       |
| 10/17/19 | Student Leadership Roundtable         |
| 10/21/19 | First 3                               |
| 10/21/19 | Librarians                            |
| 10/21/19 | Chairs Meeting                        |
| 10/22/19 | First Year Experience Committee       |
| 10/28/19 | Chairs Meeting                        |
| 10/28/19 | Admissions Team                       |
| 10/29/19 | Tuesdays at the Log                   |
| 11/1/19  | PAG                                   |
| 11/4/19  | Strategic Planning Retreat            |
| 11/4/19  | Guy Hedreen: Arts and the Curriculum  |
| 11/11/19 | Standing working group meeting        |
| 11/12/19 | Winter Study Committee                |
| 11/15/19 | First-Gen Board meeting               |
| 11/18/19 | Standing working group meeting        |
| 11/25/19 | Standing working group meeting        |
| 12/2/19  | Standing working group meeting        |
| 12/9/19  | Standing working group meeting        |
| 12/16/19 | Faculty interested in CTL             |
| 1/6/20   | Standing working group meeting        |
| 1/13/20  | Standing working group meeting        |
| 1/22/20  | Standing working group meeting        |

## Appendix A1: Students who take minimum # courses to meet divisional requirements

% of graduating classes that took only the minimum number of division courses (3) by division



## Appendix A2: Courses most commonly used to complete divisional requirements

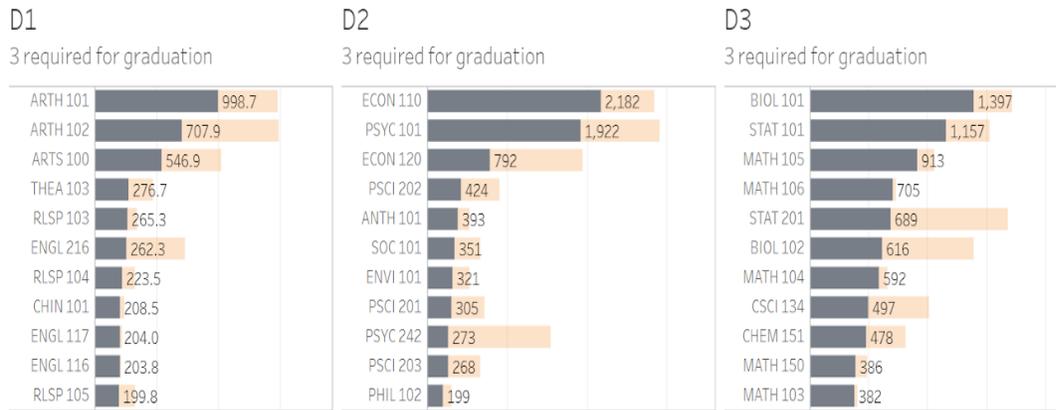
| TOP 20<br>(unique students) |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| PSYC 101                    | 2,917 |
| ECON 110                    | 2,851 |
| ECON 120                    | 1,954 |
| BIOL 101                    | 1,725 |
| STAT 201                    | 1,681 |
| PSYC 242                    | 1,551 |
| STAT 101                    | 1,531 |
| ARTH 102                    | 1,497 |
| ARTH 101                    | 1,487 |
| BIOL 102                    | 1,395 |
| ECON 251                    | 1,194 |
| CHEM 156                    | 1,145 |
| ECON 255                    | 1,076 |
| ECON 252                    | 1,068 |
| MATH 105                    | 1,058 |
| ARTS 100                    | 1,032 |
| CSCI 134                    | 1,011 |
| PSCI 202                    | 911   |
| CHEM 251                    | 850   |
| BIOL 202                    | 812   |

## Appendix A3: Courses most frequently used to satisfy requirements by division

**Overall:** Which courses are most frequently used to satisfy distribution requirements for graduation?

**Grey Bars:** The number of requirements that course satisfied for our student body. *i.e. Students get partial credit for meeting requirements - so if you have 1 div 3 course left to take and you take 3 in the next semester, each counts as 1/3 of the requirement.*

**Orange Bars:** The number of students who took that course, where that course counted toward their requirements.



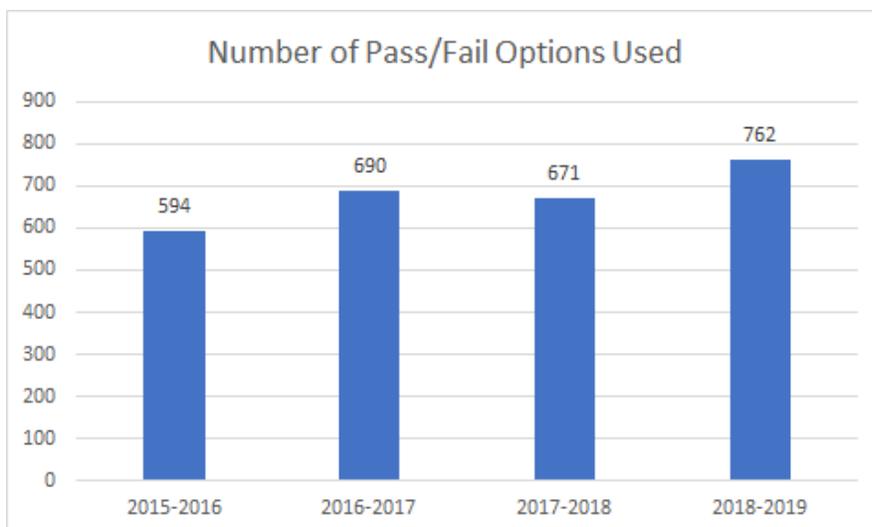
\*\* Note that due to re-numbering within the Math Department, Math 105 and Math 150 are equivalent courses.

## Appendix A4: Pass-Fail options at some peer institutions

|            | Option | Total    | Criteria     | Req courses? | Notes                                      |
|------------|--------|----------|--------------|--------------|--|
| AMHERST    | P-F    | 4        | D- or better | Y            |  |
| BATES      | P-F    | 2        | D- or better | N            |  |
| BOWDOIN    | CR-D-F | 4        | C- or better | N            |  |
| TRINITY    | P-LP-F | 4        | C- or better | N            |  |
| HAMILTON   | C-NC   | 4        | C- or better | Y            | Not for first semester first year students |
| COLBY      | S-US   | 4        | C- or better | N            |  |
| TUFTS      | P-F    | 8        | D- or better | N            |  |
| MIDDLEBURY | P-D-F  | 2        | C- or better | N            |  |
| CONN COLL  | S-US   | 4        | C- or better | N            | Only juniors and seniors                   |
| WESLEYAN   | Cr-US  | No limit |              | Y            |  |
| BROWN      | S-NC   | No limit | C- or better | NA           |  |
| YALE       | Cr-D-F | 4        | C- or better | N            |  |
| PRINCETON  | P-D-F  | 4        | C- or better | Y            |  |
| HARVARD    | P-F    | 8        |              | Y            |  |

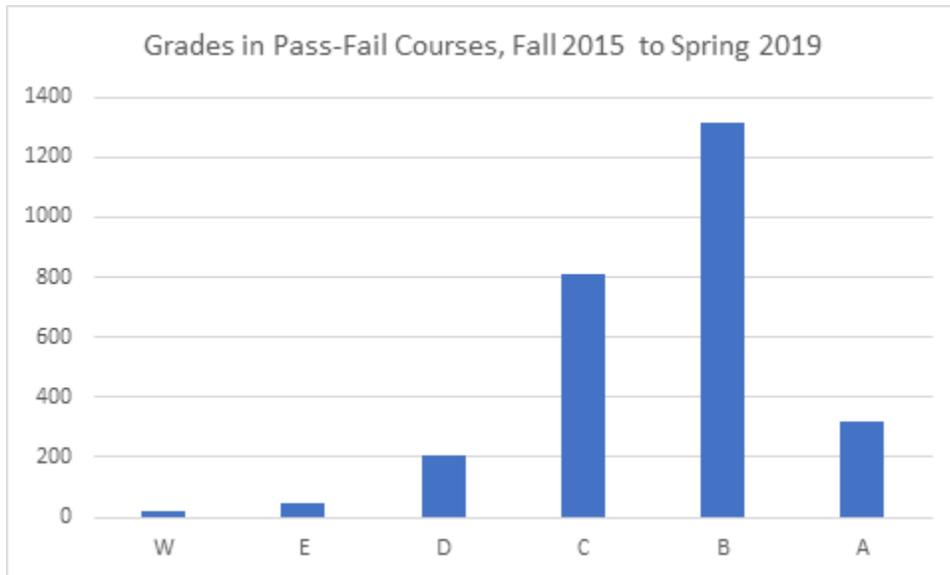
## Appendix A5: Frequency of use of Pass-Fail option (i.e., grades that

*would have been earned had the course been graded)*





## Appendix A6: Grades earned in Pass-Fail courses



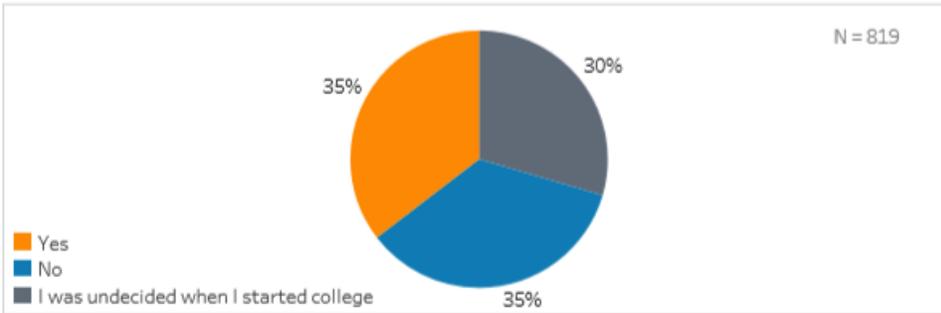
## Appendix B1: 2019 Enrolled student survey data on why students change majors

2019 Enrolled Student Survey : Frequency Report

Williams College

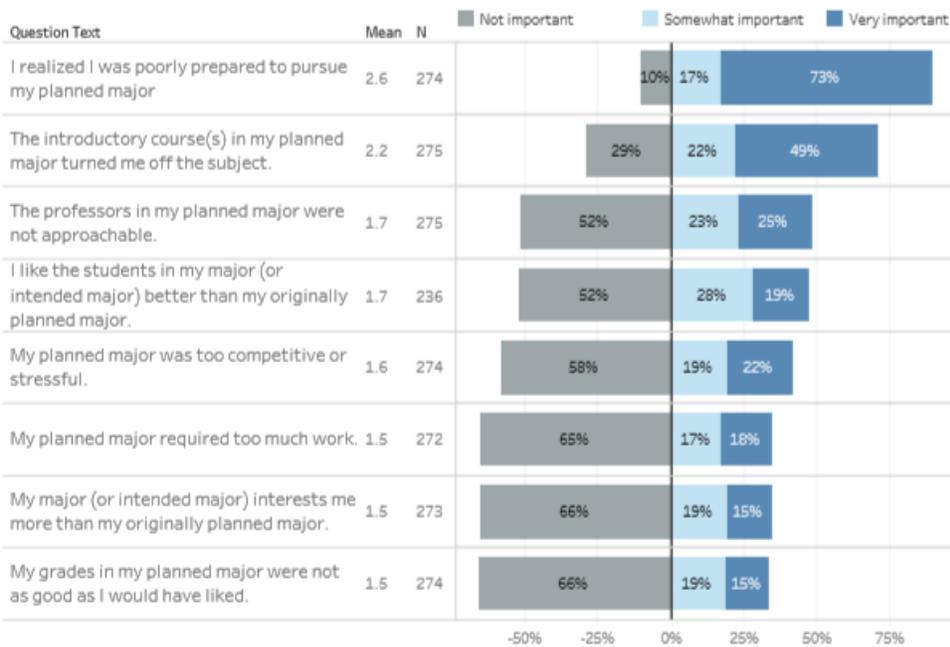
### College Outcomes & Expectations: Major

Has your planned major changed since you began college?



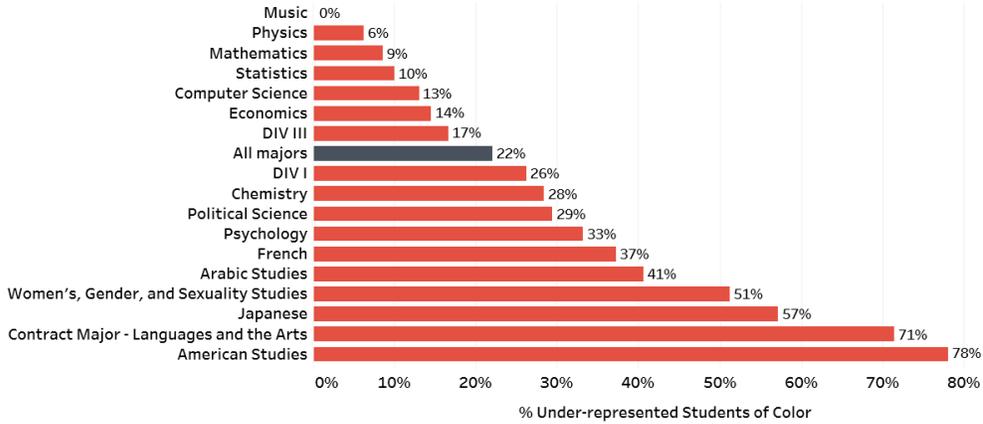
Students change majors for lots of reasons. As you made your decision, how important to you were each of the following?

1 "Not important" 2 "Somewhat important" 3 "Very important"

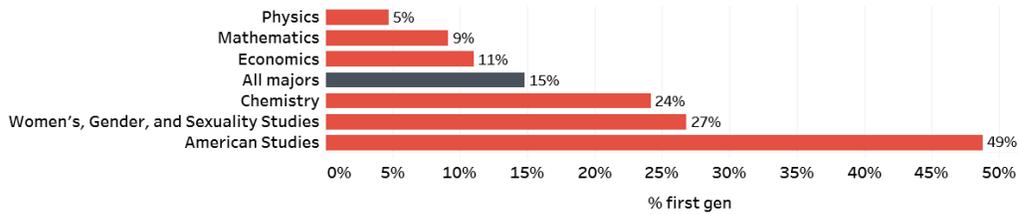


## Appendix B2: Over- and underrepresentation in majors

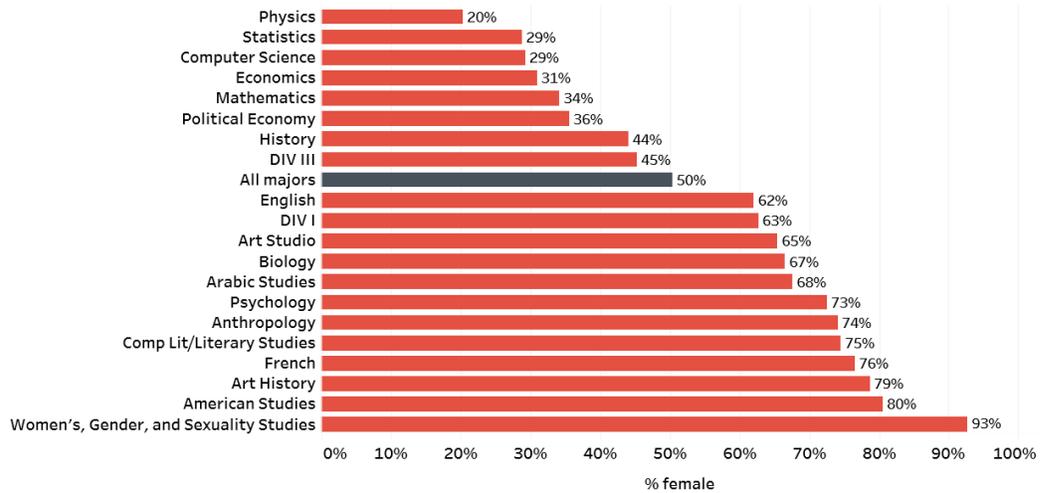
Majors Where Underrepresented Students of Color are Significantly Over- and Underrepresented  
(Classes of 2015-19)



Majors Where First-Generation Students are Significantly Over- and Underrepresented  
(Classes of 2015-19)



Majors Where Women are Significantly Over- and Underrepresented  
(Classes of 2015-19)



**WRITING PROGRAMS  
JULIO ALVES**

**CURRENT STRENGTHS**

Williams is in the enviable position of having exceptionally strong students, faculty, and staff, and a group of faculty administrators with a deep understanding of the institutional culture. Everyone at Williams works hard and expects much from themselves and one another. I hear the current faculty complaints about student writing as an expression of worry and a call for help from a deeply committed faculty with high standards and expectations. The moment is thus ripe for deep thinking about writing and innovation. The above-referenced complaints are not unexpected. Indeed, they are symptomatic of growing pains, as Williams admirably expands its outreach to a greater variety of high schools and students than ever in its history, students who would not have enrolled in the past. Progressive change inevitably raises questions and concerns about teaching and learning, standards, responsibility, equity, and power. Transition to college can be difficult under the best of circumstances, but can be especially difficult during periods of institutional transformation. Professional support staff can play a critical role in helping students, faculty, administrators, and other staff make the necessary adjustments for an inclusive culture of excellence.

Over the past ten years, Williams has taken important steps in creating a culture of inclusiveness by hiring professional support staff and, recently, co-locating them in hopes of greater collaboration among them. These professional staff are already challenging the Williams culture, for example, by professionalizing the peer tutors and partnering with faculty around faculty development. I was not able to meet with the peer writing tutors or see the tutor training schedule and materials, but my understanding is that the tutors are now a better trained and more diverse group than they were ten years ago. The Writing Workshop generously offers peer support twelve hours a day five days a week, and eight hours a day the other two days.

**CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Still, worries persist. Williams faculty and staff worry that the institution is not structured to support a diverse student body. The faculty, in particular, are concerned about the lack of administrative leadership on writing-related matters. In their view, the administration does not communicate that writing well is a top priority for the college, and it provides little or no support for faculty and students. In the words of one faculty member, “writing has no cultural capital at Williams.” The faculty are also widely dissatisfied with the ineffectiveness of the Writing Skills requirement and what they perceive to be the poor quality of support provided to students through the Writing Workshop, recent improvements notwithstanding.

Like other faculty at peer institutions, Williams faculty hold the general view that Williams has a lot of money and can do more. They would like to see more administrative initiatives on writing, a greater visibility of the administration on writing-related matters, and a greater financial investment of resources in the teaching of writing. They would also like to see more high-profile talks on writing by visiting speakers, more faculty development workshops, and more writing expertise on campus. In particular, they would like to see more support for multilingual writers, both international students and domestic non-native speakers. Faculty are particularly concerned about the sentence-level challenges their students are presenting, and they believe that the

Writing Workshop is not addressing the problem. They would like to see more courses specifically designed for underprepared students, and more options for students beyond ENG 150—or instead of ENG 150. They believe that Dr. Dunson could provide this support but is not doing so. They would like her to be more present and do her job differently.

The faculty clearly feel challenged in meeting the needs with which the more diverse student body presents them. Time is their greatest challenge, because they already feel overworked and overstretched. They work in highly individualistic environments, and feel that they have no time for more. In conversations, the phrase “faculty independence” and the word “silo” come up often. What this means is that faculty commitments go primarily to their own students, then to the department, then to the division, and finally to the institution. Though many faculty are currently not interested in teaching writing (which they usually narrowly define as “grammar”), they still want to know that something is happening regarding the teaching of writing at Williams and that there are resources available to them. They would like the administration to reach out to them with these resources. This is not a bad place for the college to be in, I do not think. I did not hear the faculty saying outright that they would never teach writing. What I heard them saying is, tell me what you would like me to do, show me how you can help me, and I may be tempted to (re)consider. My guess is that the outcome will be successful if the effort is grassroots and faculty-led.

Students face their own challenges. Like faculty, they feel overstretched and hurried. I heard more than once from both faculty and staff that students do not make smart decisions in balancing their course load, and that they often take too many writing-heavy courses in a semester. Consequently, even when they are aware of support services, they are so busy keeping up with the work that they have no time to take advantage of them. But they also face other challenges in seeking academic support. They operate in a culture of “effortless excellence” (an often-used phrase, as opposed to “earned excellence”) in which seeking help is stigmatized. Consequently, they do not want to be identified as students who struggle. According to Dr. Dunson, the stronger writers, the ones who have more confidence in their abilities, take most advantage of the Writing Workshop resources. When struggling students do show up for services, they are already panicked and in crisis mode with little time and ability to take advantage of the support available. It is useful to remember here that all students at Williams were among the best in their high schools, and that struggling may come as a shock to them. They are students who have never had to ask for help before, so it is also possible that they do not know how to ask for help.

International students who come from different cultures and rhetorical traditions face additional challenges that can lead to Honor Board violations. They may come from a tradition where the standards of evidence are different from our own, for example. If syllabi and writing assignments do not clearly spell out expectations, they do not receive instruction and feedback that alerts them to rhetorical differences, and they do not have the opportunity to revise their work, they run the risk of unexpected and unnecessary failure, which has a high price at Williams.

Dr. Dunson is an experienced writing teacher and writing program administrator, but she is only one person, and even in the best of circumstances there is only so much she can do. She feels challenged by a lack of support from faculty, by the lack of institutional means to reach the struggling students she wants to reach, and by the revolving leadership in the Office of the Dean

of the Faculty. Additionally, she is spatially separated from the writing tutors, which hampers her ability to provide consistent, effective, ongoing training and mentoring.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Institutional**

I recommend that the deans charged with faculty development take on a greater leadership role in the teaching of writing. Strong leadership will incur favor among faculty around writing, facilitate their recruitment for future faculty development efforts, and communicate that the teaching of writing is a top priority for the college. The director of the writing program should report to a dean charged with faculty development.

In time, I imagine that Williams will create a faculty-run Teaching and Learning Center that develops and coordinates programming, with whom the Director of Writing Programs will collaborate closely. In my experience, after a certain point in faculty development, only faculty can lead faculty, and Williams already has a great model for this kind of collaborative work in the Oakley Center. In the meantime, however, I recommend setting aside regular time for faculty development in the form of small events throughout the year and more sustained events in May (Teach Week). At least to start the tradition, Williams should consider incentivizing faculty collaborations and training in writing, especially if work and commitment are being asked of them. Small events are important. While faculty want to address institutional issues, they also crave teaching tips, the kind that have become commonplace in Writing Studies but have not become standard in graduate student training outside the discipline. Faculty would also benefit from sharing and hearing about the good work that they are already doing as a body. It is hard to imagine that this is not already happening with a faculty as talented, motivated, and ambitious as Williams's. Unfortunately, I heard nothing about it. Students might also benefit from panels in which faculty talk about how they write, organized at the departmental, divisional, and/or institutional levels.

One productive place to start this work is in the First Three program. My impression is that First Three faculty are eager to be better teachers and want a more robust focus on pedagogy, especially in making it more inclusive. The Director of Writing Programs should be actively involved in the training and support offered to the First Three. Academic life at Williams does not end after the first three years, however, and it behooves the institution to develop a lifelong plan that continues to focus attention on writing.

Faculty development extends to advising. Advisers help students make sound choices about their workload and help them understand the role of peer support in academic success. Any one semester, the amount of writing students undertake should feel manageable for them, but they may need expert guidance on balancing courses that are writing-heavy with courses that favor other kinds of work and assessments. Due to their history of success in high school and their inexperience with college-level work, first-year students are especially handicapped at making these decisions. They get carried away by their interests or their unrealistic ambitions and do not foresee the unintended consequences of their choices. Advisers can remind them.

To address the bigger institutional questions, I recommend that the deans, in consultation with the Director of Writing Programs, form an all-division committee on writing and task it with the college's most pressing questions, whatever they are decided to be, for example:

- What does it mean to write well at Williams?

- Writing is a complex task. Which aspects of it are Williams students already doing well, and which are too many struggling with? How will the institution determine this? (Anecdotal evidence can unhelpfully skew the discussion.) What pedagogical implications do the results have?
- Should Williams move away from a skills-based and toward a thinking-based approach to writing? A skills-based approach to writing easily lends itself to outsourcing the teaching of writing to professionals. A thinking-based approach places faculty squarely at the center of the process. From the latter perspective, no one is more qualified to teach writing than the faculty.
- What are the goals of a first-year writing course?
- Is ENG 150 an effective way to meet student writing needs? Should it be more clearly defined in terms of goals and target population? What are the implications of the way it is currently staffed? Is this a good model going forward?
- What should students be able to do after a WS course—and by the time they graduate?
- Should drafting or face-to-face conferencing after instructor feedback be required in all WS courses? What about in the rest of the curriculum? Close dialogic work between faculty and students is at the core of teaching in the liberal arts. Because it fosters meaningful, authentic relationships, it not only promotes learning but also contributes to students' sense of belonging.
- How does Williams replace the discourse of help-seeking with one of normalized use of resources? Because students are more likely to take advantage of peer support if it is part of a course, should all faculty be encouraged to integrate peer learning into their courses, encourage students to take advantage of tutoring, and have links to academic support opportunities on their course management sites?
- What do advisers need to know about writing and how can the college effectively communicate that information?

I suggest that the committee be co-chaired by a well-respected senior member of the faculty with a strong interest in writing and the Director of Writing Programs, and that it also have representation from the Curricular Planning Committee and the Committee on Academic Affairs. Institutions often do not take full advantage of the expertise already extant in the faculty. Liberal arts colleges, in particular, often have a substantial group of faculty who were trained to teach writing and can be tapped for committee and leadership positions. Many faculty worked in writing programs as graduate students—for example, at Princeton, NYU, or Yale—and acquired expertise in the process. It is also imperative that this committee be inter-divisional. Much writing happens in the STEM+ disciplines, and faculty express disappointment that the writing program is not addressing writing pedagogy in their fields. (Down the road, Williams may consider a writing program position in science writing.) The Director of Writing Programs can do much to promote and facilitate the teaching of writing across the campus, but she will need faculty partners also tasked with the work.

I recommend asking the committee to make three-year and five-year plans with goals and actions for each year. Maybe even a ten-year plan. These plans will focus the work of the committee as administrators and committee members rotate in and out.

No matter how dynamic and successful its director, a writing program of one can only have so much expertise and reach. To start, I recommend that Dean Sandstrom consult with Human Resources to write a detailed job description for Dr. Dunson, which currently does not exist. As

part of her job interview, Dr. Dunson, the candidate, submitted a “List of Possible Projects for the Writing Programs at Williams,” a document that echoes some of the recommendations I make here. Despite the breadth of the document, Dr. Dunson has spent the last ten years on two sub-items of item 7—faculty writing support—which I imagine was a priority at the time. Because this is no longer the case, I recommend that a new, comprehensive job description be written.

If a college has only one writing-designated position, it is often that of a writing center director, focused on student support. Some colleges also have a writing program director, however, a faculty-facing position focused on institutional curricular planning and assessment (Pomona, Bryn Mawr, Davidson, Colby). Some institutions, like my own Smith College, have one position fulfilling both functions, which is inadequate (and something we hope to change soon). I recommend that Williams think about how it wants to position itself in this regard in the short and long term.

I also recommend hiring a multilingual writing specialist to address the concerns of faculty, students, and staff. This is a very common position in writing programs and centers across many types of institutions. Additionally, the writing program should have some designated administrative support.

Finally, let us turn to space, which can either hinder or enhance the work done therein. I was not able to speak with the Writing Workshop tutors and spoke with only one student client, so I do not know how they feel about the space. I did, however, speak with many faculty and registered their dissatisfaction with the space, which they thought dark and uninviting. I visited the space and have to agree, especially as it contrasts with the well-lit, extremely inviting Sawyer Library. The college should find a well-lit, welcoming space for the Writing Workshop with a common area where students might actually want to spend time. (Some faculty suggested Dodd or Goodrich as appropriate spaces for the Writing Workshop.) The director’s office, and that of any future staff, should be on the premises, where the peer tutors can benefit from ongoing training and support.

### **Writing Program**

I recommend that the Director of Writing Programs shift the focus of her work from working with faculty on their writing to working with them and the Writing Workshop tutors on teaching writing. My impression is that this shift is already occurring. Dr. Dunson could possibly take over the functions now performed by the Student Coordinators. The work she is currently doing with faculty on their own writing can be facilitated in the short term by the Dean of the Faculty in the form of faculty writing groups, and eventually be owned by a Center for Teaching and Learning.

Because effective faculty development does not happen in a vacuum or from above, I recommend that Dr. Dunson do listening sessions with faculty around writing. She could talk with chairs at a chairs meeting and/or with entire departments at departmental meetings, listening for the ways in which writing and writing support services may be better integrated with content teaching. Bringing aggregate data to these meetings often helps get the discussion started. Faculty must understand in advance, however, that the engagement of which these visits are part is a college initiative. It will also be important to close the loop on this qualitative assessment by

reporting back to faculty how the writing program and the college are responding to their concerns.

I heard complaining that Dr. Dunson is not much present at the college on a daily basis. I recommend that she have a regular daily schedule. Also, even if not co-located with other academic support directors, it is important for Dr. Dunson to continue to coordinate with her colleagues. This work has started but could go much further. For example, all tutors require basic, non-discipline bound skills. Could a portion of tutor training be combined? Might Drs. Dunson and Muller collaborate on faculty development on numeracy and argument making?

### **Writing Workshop**

In the Writing Workshop, the role of the tutors needs to be clarified, perhaps with updated job descriptions and a revised mission statement in keep with the institutional goals once they have been clearly established. Currently, the faculty expectations of the tutors do not align with Dr. Dunson's, and, I imagine, that of the tutors themselves, causing great frustration on both sides. The greatest frustration centers around sentence-level issues, what are often referred to in Writing Studies as lower-level concerns—as opposed to higher-level concerns like argument, evidence, and organization. Tutors tend to be most effective in working with peers on higher level concerns, and while they could edit their peers' papers, this is not teaching and no learning is likely to happen. Faculty must understand the difference between tutoring and editing, and that it is unreasonable to ask peer tutors to teach sentence-level writing, a task faculty themselves generally deem beyond their training and competence. Though not the most important aspect of good writing, both students and faculty can reasonably argue, however, that lower-level issues should be addressed somewhere at the college, because they are far from unimportant. At the moment, lower-level concerns are a source of much anxiety and dismay among the faculty, as they appear to have emerged suddenly and unexpectedly. The administration can either task the writing committee with responding to the faculty's concerns or act unilaterally by hiring (part time?) professional tutors to work alongside the peer tutors to address the issue. Or maybe both.

I did not receive the training plan for the peer tutors, but my guess is that the tutors need more and more regular training and supervision. (I gave Dr. Dunson a copy of Smith's Peer Writing Tutor Training Manual, which may help supplement extant materials.) I was not surprised to hear that Williams students are ambitious and like to accumulate honors and qualifications for their resumes. Down the road, I suggest that the academic support directors consider applying for CRLA (College Reading & Learning Association) certification. CRLA tutor certification is internationally recognized and widespread among many different kinds of institutions

**Proposal for a College Writing Program**

March 2019

For the Committee on Educational Affairs (CEA): Bojana Mladenović, Chair.

CEA members:

Marlene Sandstrom, John Gerry, Kath Dunlop, Sarah Allen, Sarah Jacobson, Cesar Silva, Corrina Campbell, Laura Martin, José Constantine, Amy Qiu, Brenda Xu, Jonathan Deng, Serapia Kim, Haoyu Sheng, Nathan Medow, Ruari O’Cearuil and Benton Leary

2018/2019 CEA, building on the work of the Faculty Writing Group led by 16/17 CEA chair David Edwards, proposes **the creation of a special program in college writing, staffed by at least three newly hired full time instructors with graduate training in writing pedagogy**. We see this program as necessary for addressing current disparities in students’ college preparation, but we also imagine it as the seed from which a more ambitious project would grow, which would serve all students: an interdisciplinary Center encompassing all three divisions and cultivating students’ skills in communicating in many different mediums, for different purposes and for different audiences.

*Background*

In 2016, CEA formed an ad hoc committee to discuss writing at Williams. This “Faculty Writing Group” was chaired by David Edwards and included Ronadh Cox, Laura Ephraim, Nick Howe, John Kleiner, Bojana Mladenović, Emily Vasilauskis and Alan White. The group’s final 2017 report identified a number of problems with Williams students’ writing skills, and made two recommendations to improve them: first, that the College should formulate more explicit guidelines for Writing-Intensive Courses, and second, that the College should establish a three-year pilot program in introductory writing for which it would hire two instructors trained in the teaching of writing.

The current CEA has followed through with the first recommendation: in fall 2018 we developed a proposal to replace the Writing-Intensive (WI) requirement with a new, more specific Writing Skills (WS) requirement, which emphasizes consistent instructor feedback on students’ writing skills. The new requirement was approved by the faculty and will be in effect starting with 2019/2020. Our current proposal is to expand and implement the second recommendation.

Theoretically, Williams provides an ideal context for teaching effective writing: our classes are small, our library and technological resources are excellent, the faculty is highly competent and enthusiastic about teaching, and our students are talented and often highly motivated. In addition, we have the Writing Skills requirement, a student-staffed Writing Workshop, a vibrant Tutorial

Program, and an unusually high number of writing-based independent studies. In practice however, the available resources are simply not sufficient to address the increasing problem of poor writing skills among our students. As the Faculty Writing Group noted, “most classes taught at Williams are content-driven, and faculty members invariably have a great deal of material to get through over the course of our brief 12-week semesters. In this context, student writing is usually a consideration secondary to course content. While the production of multiple drafts is a vital precondition to good writing, few instructors can afford to devote the time required to assigning rough drafts, with faculty providing detailed, in-person commentary and correctives at each stage of the writing process.” Moreover, many faculty who write well and can teach excellent discipline-specific writing skills, are not trained to teach the mechanics of writing; nor do they especially want to be burdened with this task. This often leaves our weakest students without help and guidance where they need them most.

### *Campus Inclusion and Equity*

Our students come from a diversity of high schools. Some of these schools provide excellent writing instruction, while others provide no writing instruction whatsoever. Many of our students are also coming from other countries and other contexts in which English was not the primary language of instruction. Because we see great disparities among first year students in their English writing skills, we also see very different outcomes in their transition to college-level writing. The absence of focused writing instruction hobbles students, especially students from less privileged school districts. Writing proficiency is needed not only for academic success at Williams, but also after graduation. Internships, fellowships, graduate programs, and of course many jobs, are increasingly competitive; students who cannot write well are facing serious disadvantages in all of these markets. As Williams works towards increased diversity in the student body, it is imperative that the marked educational gap between different high schools be closed in the college, so that initial inequities do not affect our student’s chances to do well in academically challenging, writing-oriented classes at Williams, and in subsequent careers.

### *Recommendation*

We recommend establishing a special Writing Program at Williams, led by three instructors trained specifically in writing pedagogy, each specializing in writing for a different division. These three instructors would each teach two courses a semester, and a writing-intensive winter study every second year. Each course would be capped at 10 students. This would allow up to 140 students a year (without taking leave patterns into account) to receive the benefit of this dedicated instruction in the mechanics of writing and in field-specific writing conventions. Good writing is important, and importantly different, in all three divisions. We think that the faculty hired to teach writing skills should be able to cover, in addition to basic mechanics of writing, the skills and conventions needed for a wide range of writing assignments, such as the literary essay, the analytical paper, the research report, ethnographic observation, the lab report, informational poster, and so on.

The Faculty Writing Group proposed, and the current CEA endorsed, the idea of an initial advisory committee—similar to the committee formed to help get Arabic Studies off the ground—that would supervise the instructors, monitor the courses, and otherwise help ensure the program’s success. This advisory committee should include faculty from all three divisions, especially those who have experience in teaching Writing Skills courses.

We don't believe that the program should be contained within any of the existing departments. Interdisciplinary Studies program has a mandate that would easily include a new Writing Program, although of course it may turn out that a different home for the program is more suitable. This depends on how exactly the program is structured, and whether the College is willing to imagine its expansion.

This is indeed what we would enthusiastically propose: the Writing Program that would address the burning need of our educationally most underprivileged students could also serve as a starting point in developing a cross-disciplinary program in communication skills. We imagine, first, the hiring of the three instructors; second, the creation of a welcoming Writing Center space in which Writing Workshop would find its new home; and then, gradually, the formation of a network of faculty whose research and teaching include various aspects of old and new communication skills: writing of course, but also rhetoric, public speaking, video and media studies and production, online information design, performance studies and skills, and so on. We cannot now anticipate all of the forms of communication which will emerge in the decades to come, but we hope that the College will create the intellectual infrastructure capable of understanding and teaching their effective use.

### *Conclusion*

Williams College already invests in teaching writing, but these efforts could be centered – in the college mission, in the curriculum, and in promotional materials – and significantly expanded. There are at least three reasons to make focused writing instruction a strategic academic initiative. First, writing proficiency is essential for fulfilling liberal arts education; without this skill, students simply cannot benefit from many academic opportunities that Williams has to offer. Second, a writing program shaped and monitored by faculty from all three divisions would benefit all of us, students and teachers alike, whatever our main interests are; and it would provide opportunities for stronger inter-divisional connections and for cross-fertilization of argumentative and writing skills and styles. Finally – and in our view, most importantly – early focused writing instruction is central to creating a more inclusive and equitable campus.

In sum, our students cannot lead if they cannot write. Fortunately, good writing is a teachable skill. We very much hope that Williams will invest in the resources necessary to enable all our students to become proficient writers, and that this project will lead to the creation of a cross-disciplinary, diverse program in research and teaching of effective communication in multiple and rapidly growing forms.

### Introduction

The Committee on Educational Affairs announced at the December 2015 faculty meeting the creation of a faculty seminar during the 2016-17 academic year that would discuss the teaching of writing. The goal of the seminar would be to explore methods to make the process of developing writing skills more rewarding and enjoyable for students and faculty alike. A call went out to faculty who were interested in joining this seminar and who would be teaching introductory writing classes in the Spring 2017 term. The plan was for the faculty to meet in the Fall 2016 in order to plan for courses that would be offered in the spring. Participants in the seminar included Ronadh Cox (Geosciences), David Edwards (Anthropology/Sociology), Laura Ephraim (Political Science), Nick Howe (Environmental Studies), John Kleiner (English), Bojana Mladenovic (Philosophy), Emily Vasilauskis (English) and Alan White (Philosophy).

The seminar (hereafter the Faculty Writing Group) met six times during the fall term. Among the questions we considered were the following:

- *What is the nature of high school writing, and how can we help students make the transition to college-level writing?*
- *What do we want students to get out of their writing assignments?*
- *How do we manage writing assignments to get the most out of them and to make them less onerous to grade?*
- *How can we help students formulate productive paper topics?*
- *How do we teach both good general writing skills and the expectations associated with specific disciplines and genres (the literary essay, the analytical paper, the research report, ethnographic observation, the lab report, etc.)?*
- *What are the best ways to communicate our comments and concerns to students about their writing, particularly in the case of students whose writing is weak?*
- *Are there useful techniques to help students make the jump from initial idea, to research, to writing?*
- *How do grades factor into the teaching of writing? How can grades be used in conjunction with comments to encourage better writing habits and results?*

While the Faculty Writing Group delved into all of these aspects of the teaching of writing, we viewed our conversations as preliminary. We had neither the mandate nor the resources to conduct surveys or to produce other kinds of background research documenting the problems related to writing that participants in the seminar perceive from their own classroom experience. However, despite the absence of such research findings, we did reach consensus on several issues, and we present these to the College for further consideration.

The Faculty Writing Group believes that the College needs to devote far more focused attention to the teaching of writing than it has up to this point. The Faculty Writing Group believes that it

is essential for the College to provide more focused instruction on writing to incoming students. The absence of such instruction hobbles students, especially students from less privileged school districts, throughout their careers at Williams.

Participants in the seminar recounted their experiences working with first-year and sophomore students who have come to Williams with minimal opportunity to improve their writing. Many of our students are also coming from other countries and other contexts in which English was not the primary language of instruction. Even students who were fortunate enough to have gone to good English-medium secondary schools often arrive at Williams knowing only how to produce the most basic kind of 5-paragraph essay typically taught in high school composition classes. While Williams focuses considerable energy on ensuring that under-prepared students receive the attention and resources they need to succeed in quantitatively based classes, the College does not pay as much attention to ensuring that students can write proficiently.

Hiring a Director of Writing Programs was a commendable first step, but this step is inadequate in itself, in large part because the Director has limited resources at her disposal and little opportunity for the kind of hands-on teaching that writing requires. To a great extent, the Director is limited to working with student writing tutors who themselves have limited time and do not themselves have sufficient training or experience to provide much more than a band-aid solution to the problems they are presented with, often at the last minute, by students seeking their assistance. The Director also provides training to faculty members through workshops and other kinds of training sessions. While such training is clearly beneficial, it also represents only a partial solution to a more general and systemic problem.

Most classes taught at Williams are content-driven, and faculty members invariably have a great deal of material to get through over the course of our brief 12-week semesters. In this context, student writing is usually a consideration secondary to course content. While the production of multiple drafts is a vital precondition to good writing, few instructors can afford to devote the time required to assigning rough drafts, with faculty providing detailed, in-person commentary and correctives at each stage of the writing process.

Just as the hiring of a Director of Writing Programs was an important and positive step in the right direction, so too was the institution of required writing-intensive courses. These courses have focused attention on writing as an important component of a liberal-arts education; however, this initiative has also not been effective as it could be, in this case because we have paid relatively little attention to what such courses should include or how they should be organized. From anecdotal student comments, it would appear that some classes designated as Writing-Intensive do not focus on the drafting process and, in a few instances at least, faculty have not provided any specific feedback on student papers until late in the semester.

## **Recommendations**

As previously noted, our understanding of the landscape of writing at Williams is far from comprehensive. Much of our “research” is personal and anecdotal in nature, and the College might conclude that more focused research is required before it should devote resources to the problems we have identified and the solutions we outline below. That would be understandable,

but we have nevertheless decided to present some recommendations for consideration. They are as follows:

***The College should formulate more explicit guidelines for Writing-Intensive Courses.***

In its recommendation to the faculty on revising the diversity requirement, the Committee on Educational Affairs offered its view that the College should treat all three college-wide requirements (diversity, quantitative skills, and writing) the same. Included in this recommendation was the suggestion that individual academic units should come up with criteria for courses receiving the DPE designation, and the Faculty Writing Group believes that, in keeping with this recommendation, faculty in each academic unit should also decide among themselves what they are looking for in Writing-Intensive classes and to establish their own guidelines and expectations.

At the same time, the Faculty Writing Group recommends that the College maintain some basic expectations for Writing-Intensive courses, including the following: (1) the assignment of at least 20 pages of writing during the semester, (2) the division of writing assignments into at least 4 separate exercises, and (3) the provision by the instructor of feedback within the first 4 weeks of classes. The Faculty Writing Group also agreed that it is desirable (although it should not be required) to give feedback on weekly or bi-weekly basis.

The Committee on Educational Affairs should assume the role of encouraging departmental discussion of writing intensive courses and the annual distribution to the faculty of a memo encouraging the creation of Writing Intensive courses and the general expectations for what these courses should include in terms of assignments. The CEA should also advise faculty of the additional expectation that the faculty teaching required courses (writing, quantitative skills, diversity) should indicate on their syllabus how the course they are teaching satisfies the requirement in question.

***The College should establish a three-year pilot program in introductory writing and hire 2 instructors trained in the teaching of writing.***

The Faculty Writing Group recommends establishing a three-year pilot program for teaching introductory writing led by two instructors trained specifically in writing pedagogy. These two instructors would each teach two courses a semester. Each course would be capped at 10 students. This would allow up to 80 students a year to receive the benefit of this dedicated instruction in the mechanics of writing.

In recommending the establishment of this program, the Faculty Writing Group recognizes that there are a number of questions that need to be answered for such a program to be successful. While we have discussed some of these questions, we understand that more focused and concentrated work will be needed to get this program launched. Here are some of the questions we have considered:

*Where should the program be located and how will it be managed?*

While we did not come up with a definitive answer to this question, we did identify and agree on certain principles. Because we understand that the issue of good writing crosses over divisional

boundaries, we don't believe that the program should be contained within any of the existing departments. One possibility that was discussed was including the program under the umbrella of the Interdisciplinary Studies program, whose mandate, as expressed in the program's description, provides an obvious match.

An additional consideration has to do with the management of the program. As noted, our recommendation is that the program be established on a pilot basis, and it would be advisable to set up an advisory committee—similar to the committee formed to help get Arabic Studies off the ground—that would supervise the instructors, monitor the courses, and otherwise help ensure the program's success. This advisory committee should include faculty from all three divisions, along with the Director of Writing Programs and Williams faculty members who have taught English 150 or other Writing Intensive courses.

*What should be the content of these courses?*

It is important that these courses be viewed as academic in nature and not as remedial classes. To this end, it might be advisable if some of the courses offered in the program were associated with specific divisions or departments in terms of focusing on the modes of argumentation and writing associated with particular divisions and/or disciplines. The focus on disciplinary modes of representation would attract a broader swath of students, which is good, but priority in admission to these classes should be given to students most in need of this additional instruction.

In choosing these students, the instructors can draw on a number of resources, including referrals from the Admissions Office and perhaps a writing test similar in nature to the one administered by the Math Departments during First Days. Faculty teaching first-year students during the fall term can also refer students for inclusion in spring term classes to the writing program. Given the success of quantitative skills courses offered by the Math Department, it would be advisable to discuss these and other questions related to the initial implementation of the program with Math faculty members who have taught these courses in order to gain from their experience.

*Who should the College be looking to hire to fill these positions and what should be the nature of the positions?*

The committee believes that it is important to hire instructors who are training in writing pedagogy and want to be doing this work and doing it in a liberal arts context. Universities have the option of hiring graduate students and/or post-docs in a variety of fields to teach writing. That provides a ready response but not necessarily an adequate solution to the problem of teaching writing, since the commitment of these instructors tends not to be to teaching writing but to securing stable positions in their actual fields of study. The Faculty Writing Group believes that it is important to recruit students with both experience in teaching writing and continuing knowledge of and interest in the pedagogical tools that enhance this kind of teaching.

*Should these courses count towards fulfillment of the Writing Intensive requirement?*

The committee believes that it is important to ensure that the students who need this assistance the most be ensured places in the classes that are available. For this reason, we think the class should not be used to fulfill the Writing requirement.

*What would happen to ENGL 150 and the intensive writing course offered during WS as a makeup course?*

These are issues that should be taken up by the CEA, in consultation with the English Department.

**Appendix B6: Student satisfaction with Academic Advising, 2019**

How satisfied have you been with the following aspects of your experience at Williams College during the current academic year?

1 "Very Dissatisfied" 2 "Generally Dissatisfied" 3 "Generally Satisfied" 4 "Very Satisfied"

| Question Text                  | Mean | N   | Percentage Distribution |  |     |     |
|--------------------------------|------|-----|-------------------------|--|-----|-----|
| Overall quality of instruction | 3.5  | 831 |                         |  | 44% | 53% |
| Academic advising              | 2.9  | 827 | 22%                     |  | 51% | 21% |

**Appendix B7: Sampling of peer institutions with First Year Seminar Models**

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Amherst</b>            | <b><u>Majors   First-Year Seminars</u></b>                        |
| <b>Bates</b>              | <b><u>First-Year Seminar   Orientation</u></b>                    |
| <b>Bowdoin</b>            | <b><u>First-Year Seminars</u></b>                                 |
| <b>Brown</b>              | <b><u>First-Year Seminars   The Brown Degree</u></b>              |
| <b>Carleton</b>           | <b><u>First-year Seminars</u></b>                                 |
| <b>College of Wooster</b> | <b><u>First-Year Seminar</u></b>                                  |
| <b>Duke</b>               | <b><u>First-Year Seminar Program</u></b>                          |
| <b>Gettysburg</b>         | <b><u>First-Year Seminars</u></b>                                 |
| <b>Hamilton</b>           | <b><u>Academic Advising - Courses for First-Year Students</u></b> |
| <b>Harvard</b>            | <b><u>Freshman Seminar Program</u></b>                            |
| <b>Middlebury</b>         | <b><u>First Year Seminar</u></b>                                  |
| <b>Oberlin</b>            | <b><u>First Year Seminar Program</u></b>                          |
| <b>Pitzer</b>             | <b><u>First-Year Seminar Program Offerings   Academics</u></b>    |
| <b>Princeton</b>          | <b><u>Freshman Seminars</u></b>                                   |
| <b>Smith</b>              | <b><u>First-Year Seminars</u></b>                                 |
| <b>Swarthmore</b>         | <b><u>First-Year Seminars :: Academics</u></b>                    |
| <b>Trinity</b>            | <b><u>First-Year Seminar Program</u></b>                          |
| <b>Wellesley</b>          | <b><u>First Year Seminar</u></b>                                  |
| <b>Whitman</b>            | <b><u>Encounters</u></b>  |
| <b>Yale</b>               | <b><u>First-Year Seminars</u></b>                                 |

**Appendix B8: CPC Memo about the First Year Seminar model**

To: Marlene Sandstrom, Dean of the College  
From: Christopher Nugent (for the Curricular Planning Committee)  
Re: questions from Strategic Planning Student Learning Group  
Date: November 8, 2019

The Curricular Planning Committee met on October 30, 2019 with all members present other than President Mandel (who was travelling) to discuss the questions you brought up with me on our meeting of October 10th. I presented the following questions (with CPC answers below each set):

*1. Issue of “intellectual breadth” in relation to divisional requirements:  
What are our curricular goals? Is the current set up achieving our goals? If not, what would the best possible alternatives be? What does the CPC think about the divisions and divisional requirements in this context?*

CPC’s thoughts:

Our curricular goals should include exposure to a wide variety of disciplines and approaches in keeping with the fundamental liberal arts model. We can think of this from a number of different angles. The development of good citizens requires exposure to different approaches, to different core frameworks through which to view the world and engage with it. We might also think of this in terms of facilitating interactions with a wide range of different faculty members who use these different approaches, who have and have lived different notions of the “life of the mind.” When describing these goals, we might think of them as different values that we would rank differently in different contexts (breadth vs. specialization, autonomy vs. guidance, etc.).

The current divisional structure does encourage engagement with a variety of disciplines, but does not necessarily require exposure to different methods of learning. At the same time, it is a “light” requirement that encourages that exposure without binding students too strongly. It does not seem that the division requirements get in the way of our curricular goals, but there are many ways in which it might be tweaked to be more effective. Some possibilities would include changing the specific constitution of the divisions (i.e. which units are in which divisions), allowing some divisional requirements to be taken pass/fail (or some version of pass/fail) so as to provide fewer disincentives for taking “hard” courses in divisions different from one’s own, and so forth. Note that this endorsement of the divisional structure (and a tepid endorsement at that), applies only to aspects of structuring the curriculum, not to dividing up faculty representation (an issue for a different working group).

*2. A number of faculty have raised concerns that there is a wide spread among our incoming students in terms of their level of preparation for college level work, especially in the sciences and economics. Some students have a very high level of preparation, but some have a very low level. Some faculty believe that there are substantially more with a low level of prep, so low that they cannot even pass certain intro classes without a great deal of additional help (more than the faculty can provide with current staffing levels). How can we ensure that students who we are heavily recruiting can succeed academically in whatever field they choose at Williams? Some suggestions have included: ramping up the summer sciences program, hiring more faculty so that we can have smaller classes in these the fields where the challenges seem the most acute, and creating first-year seminars that focus on skill building through courses on specialized*

*topics (as such courses would be on topics new to all students). What might first-year seminars would look like?*

CPC's thoughts:

What are the data concerning these changes? Do we have evidence for a shift over time in, for example, the scores on our own quantitative assessments? The CPC overall felt strongly that we should address these issues with coursework, such as more introductory courses. We should also continue to look into ways to teach intro courses in particular that can be more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible. There are new and innovative pedagogies that could be very helpful here. We could, for example, have departments specifically address the extent to which they are using or investigating such pedagogies. In short, we could make this—ensuring that all students admitted to the college can succeed in any area of study they wish to pursue—a fundamental institutional value, and adapt our pedagogies accordingly. There might also be possibilities for ramping up the number of slots in summer programs, work with the LACOL consortium for non-semester possibilities, and so forth.

The CPC was not enthusiastic about pursuing the idea of first-year seminars. There is a sense that many other institutions have had mixed results in this area. Such seminars are sometimes used as a branding tool that ends up being burdensome in terms of the demands on faculty and curricular resources. One possibility that could work better is to encourage units to develop more 100-level courses (such as those in English and History), that provide intensive introductions to specific fields and disciplines but are not necessarily aimed only at first-year students.

## Appendix C1: Student perception of gap in career-related knowledge and skills

2019 Enrolled Student Survey : Frequency Report

Williams College

### Self-Evaluation

To what extent has your experience at Williams contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

1 "Very little or none" 2 "Some" 3 "Quite a bit" 4 "Very much"

Very little or none    Quite a bit  
Some    Very much

