

**Williams
College**

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Strategic Plan

Williams College Strategic Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A great learning institution is made up of a few special elements. Excellent teachers and scholars. Committed students. Skilled and devoted staff. Sufficient and well-managed resources. A sense of community and place. And ambitions that keep pace with the times while holding true to enduring values.

One of Williams' great qualities is our ability to maintain this balance between innovation and fidelity to our core values. It is a type of excellence that has to be continually re-earned, and we take joy in that work.

The 2021 strategic plan, developed from extensive community input, will help us extend our excellence by:

- ▶ *Defining a new academic excellence:* Redoubling our commitment to the liberal arts while tapping new opportunities to match emerging academic strengths with global challenges.
- ▶ *Providing a complete education:* Expanding on what we do best through a 4-year/12-month model that supports intellectual, personal and professional development.
- ▶ *Expanding access and affordability:* Further investing in our capacity to attract exceptional students and ensuring their access to all elements of a Williams education.
- ▶ *Engaging alumni:* Honoring our graduates as partners by creating new opportunities to engage with Williams, our students and each other.
- ▶ *Substantially increasing our commitments to Sustainability and to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility as fundamental societal challenges:* Transforming our values into shared commitments by weaving them throughout all aspects of the college's program and operations.
- ▶ *Caring for the resources we depend on:* Fully leveraging our most important assets—people, facilities and financial resources—and stewarding them for the long run.

We are enacting this plan in a very different world from the one we knew even a few years ago. Our lives are being transformed by many forces, including a global pandemic; sweeping movements against racism, and for equality and justice; new phases of globalization, and of resistance thereto; emerging redefinitions of knowledge, expertise and authority; and the sharp effects of climate change, technological innovation and economic realignment. These and many other forces interact and contribute to a complex and continually shifting societal mix. Our shared duty is to prepare future graduates—that is, Williams alumni-to-be—to thrive and lead in circumstances that none of us can foresee.

By translating our goals into practical programs over the coming years, we will be equipping Williams to excel once again, in new times: preparing students to thrive and contribute to a changing world while holding true to the principles that make us proud to say, “We are Williams.”

INTRODUCTION

WHY NOW?

Since our founding in 1793, Williams College has educated tens of thousands of students who have gone on to influential roles in academics, government, nonprofits, business, law, medicine, science, technology and the arts. We have done so in the belief that a true liberal arts education transcends career preparation, teaching students to appreciate connections across areas of human knowledge and creativity, and to apply that understanding to their moral, intellectual and social lives, as well as their economic ones.

At Williams much of our success in this work is thanks to the deep connections we encourage between teacher and learner—recognizing that, as in any true learning community, we are each sometimes the teacher and sometimes the learner.

Moreover, as a great *residential* liberal arts college, we have long appreciated that the ideal education is a blend of curricular and cocurricular excellence, further enriched by unstructured time and experience, including the development of friendships, explorations of place and of self, and simple reflection. When smart, passionate people are provided with the resources to live and learn in a special setting, the result is Williams: an exceptional college and an exceptional community.

This generous approach to learning transcends individual interests to prepare all our students for an uncharted and perhaps unchartable future.

The college's commitment to our ideals is steadfast. But the ways in which we achieve them have to shift

with the times, as they always have: from the time when Williams was a single building to today's expansive campus; from the time when our curriculum comprised [Livy, Horace and Euclid](#) to [our fullest offerings today](#); from a time of relative homogeneity to the far more diverse population at Williams now; and from a time of presumed stability and localized change to the rapid and global effects of climate change, increased inequality and technological disruption, among other challenges.

Williams is both an established institution and a living community, and the two are on a journey together.

Even in this challenging climate Williams stands out, for both our overall educational excellence *and* our distinctive capacity for sustaining that excellence from one era to the next. These capacities are gifts to the institution from our

academically distinguished faculty, skilled and devoted staff, talented and diverse students and an alumni community legendary for its commitment. One of the goals of the strategic planning process is to envision how we can make the wisest use of such gifts to continue our trajectory of excellence for years to come.

Williams is both an established institution and a living community, and the two are on a journey together. Now we are ready to start on the next leg of that journey: to *build on* a history of excellence and *extend it* into the future. Translated into operational terms and properly resourced, the plan will enable us to prepare current students for successful, rewarding lives as thoroughly and lovingly as the college has prepared other generations before them.

PROCESS

President Mandel [announced](#) the beginning of a new strategic planning effort in fall 2018. The process was designed to be broadly inclusive and deeply collaborative. Its 18-month timeline (later extended due to the pandemic) reflected this commitment. This deliberate approach allowed time to invite participation by a generous cross section of the Williams community, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, families and area residents. Our [eight working groups and three strategic academic initiatives](#) all together held more than 120 campus outreach meetings with departments, offices and student and staff groups. These included 13 [Tuesdays at the Log events](#), each co-hosted by a pair of working groups, which often attracted capacity crowds. An all-campus [Planning Day](#) drew healthy attendance, as did listening sessions for residents of Williamstown, Pittsfield, North Adams and Bennington and drop-in hours for Williamstown residents. College leaders hosted phonecasts attended by hundreds of alumni and families, and more than 200 comments were submitted via our [online feedback form](#).

Through this process, Williams was able to draw out diverse ideas and build a sense of shared ownership. In fact, one of the unquantifiable benefits is simply the way the discussions sparked connections and

creative thinking across all kinds of boundaries: disciplinary, faculty/staff/student and so on. Although we naturally could not incorporate every good idea from those discussions into the final plan, many more were adopted directly into everyday operations. Meanwhile, every element of what follows is rooted in those community discussions and deliberations.

It is revealing to return to this project after a yearlong delay caused by the pandemic. The interruption was a natural test of sorts, since effective strategic plans need to be high-level and flexible enough to stay relevant even when unexpected challenges arise—and the last year certainly fits that bill.

The process does not end here. We will now need to establish an operational plan for moving forward with the initiatives articulated in this document. There will be wide consultation during this next phase. Such operational work will focus on tactics, costs and timing for non-curricular initiatives, as well as standards for transparency and assessment. Curricular and academic programs, meanwhile, will need to be vetted through the faculty governance process.

But thanks to you, no matter who you are, the plan set out in these pages is a very good start.

A WILLIAMS EDUCATION

Among liberal arts colleges, Williams stands out as an exceptional “generalist” institution: one that excels across multiple academic domains rather than in a particular niche. To be successful, our strategic plan requires continued attention to the full range of existing strengths alongside investment in new curricular and research opportunities and work in emergent fields. Our strategic plan embraces the value of a liberal arts education that spans the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences while identifying opportunities for strategic investment in new curricular and research opportunities and work in emergent fields.

ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

At the outset of strategic planning the college invited proposals for “strategic academic initiatives.” These were defined as “ideas that substantially reimagine an existing area of strength or respond to evolving definitions of a liberal arts education in the 21st century ... a chance to ‘think big’ about programs and investments that will have a magnified impact on our students, inspire new knowledge and creativity, and deepen our connections to the wider world.”

From a fascinating array of proposals—many of which were absorbed elsewhere into this plan or our ongoing curricular work—the selection process surfaced three initiatives that spoke powerfully to Williams and the world we live in: technology and the liberal arts; the future of the arts; and a global Williams.

These three initiatives collectively touch almost every academic area on campus, as well as connect with each other. Rather than elevating them over the rest of the curriculum, they are proposed as areas of

emerging potential (“emerging” in terms of both our capabilities and student interest) that would benefit from targeted investment alongside ongoing support for existing departments and programs. Broadly interdisciplinary, innovative and steeped in the humanities, they are perfect examples of Williams as a home for the “living liberal arts.”

TECHNOLOGY AND THE LIBERAL ARTS

A liberal arts education at its best teaches students to ask good questions. Although the particular questions vary by discipline and approach, data-driven methods and technologies are creating opportunities to ask and answer them in ways that cross those conventional boundaries. Meanwhile, these technologies have raised ethical, methodological and substantive questions in their own right.

These issues are already being addressed in many areas of our curriculum and scholarship at Williams. But the strategic planning process surfaced a strong interest in increasing our emphasis on technology, both as a tool and as a topic of investigation. This includes interest in developing our expertise with new tools, using technology and data to address important questions across the curriculum, and fostering a critical perspective that allows us to understand the social, economic, ethical and psychological dimensions of technological change (to mention just a few relevant areas of inquiry).

Faculty from all three academic divisions collaborated on proposals to build two programs that together would provide a digitally sophisticated education in a liberal arts mode, helping students make use of data and technologies and critically understand their societal significance and impact.

[One of the proposals suggests creating an interdisciplinary data science program](#) that will enhance our ability to teach students to use data in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in STEM. The proposal envisions a new form of liberal arts inquiry tailored to various disciplines and interdisciplinary fields that taps into the potential of data-informed approaches. It comprises *data science*, which merges techniques from computing, applied math and statistics with critical expertise from various domains of inquiry; and *digital humanities*, which uses digital tools, methods and approaches to explore questions relating to people, cultures and communities.

[The other proposal](#) seeks to increase curricular opportunities in fields such as science and technology studies that prepare students for the technological changes shaping our world. The goal of this proposal is to equip students to think critically about how scientific knowledge is produced, consider technology's social effects and reflect on ways that depictions of science and technology shape public opinion and everyday life.

These proposals are two among many ways Williams could educate students about the uses of data and their consequences, and about how technology can enrich or usefully complicate work in the humanities. Insofar as these submissions lead to proposals for new curricular programs, those programs will, as in all cases, need to be developed and voted on by the faculty.

Building on existing strengths in terms of student interest, course offerings, faculty scholarship and interdisciplinary potential, we have the chance to:

- ▶ Consider a program in data science and digital humanities, teaching data-driven approaches across the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences;
- ▶ Support student and faculty research addressing pressing contemporary challenges through the use and critique of digital methods;
- ▶ Promote the coherent, clear and credible use of data and digital technology in scholarship and communication as well as the ethical use of technology and data;

- ▶ Formalize efforts to encourage interdisciplinary bridges and conversations among disciplines and divisions, creating programs and opportunities that bring Williams into deeper conversation with scholars and thinkers from other institutions; and
- ▶ Create new pathways through the curriculum that use data science techniques to address issues in public health, sustainability, the climate crisis and structural racism, among others.

THE ARTS AT WILLIAMS

A commitment to the arts has defined Williams for over a century. It can be seen in the legendary impact of our art department and its graduates. It can be seen in our museum's reputation and the remarkable collections housed at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) and in Archives and Special Collections. It can be seen in the caliber and range of our academic offerings in performing arts, as well as in the abundance of student and professional performances. And it can be seen in the thriving literary arts, with students being taught by prominent poets, writers and scholars and invigorated by guests from across many literatures and borders. The college's commitment to the arts extends to supporting the Graduate Program in the History of Art, one of only two graduate programs at Williams. Administered jointly with the Clark Art Institute, the GradArt program attracts exceptional students whose presence contributes to the overall richness of our arts education and community and has the potential to do so still further.

Williams is also fortunate to be situated in a region rich in arts institutions, including nationally prominent programs at MASS MoCA, the Clark, Jacob's Pillow, Tanglewood and the Williamstown Theatre Festival, as well as a host of lesser-known but marvelous theater, music and dance organizations and, of course, our own Williams College Museum of Art.

Through strategic planning we can tap more fully into this richness, ensuring that the arts on campus and in our community remain vibrant, relevant, diverse and inclusive. This could be done by making the arts an even more central part of the curriculum at Williams that speaks to all members of our community, regardless of background. Steps would include:

- ▶ Further supporting interdisciplinarity, multimedia and “new media” study of the arts;
- ▶ Expanding on the tradition of excellent arts programming led by faculty and museum staff;
- ▶ Optimizing and reimagining our most prominent arts-related facilities, including the museum and Lawrence Hall;
- ▶ Coordinating scheduling and infrastructure across our arts programs on campus, as well as the region, to encourage collaboration and programming synergies;
- ▶ Recognizing the full range of arts opportunities across our curriculum, including the visual, performing and literary arts, and celebrating their value to a comprehensive liberal arts education, regardless of students’ majors or career goals; and
- ▶ Partnering with regional arts organizations to make the regional arts more integral to the student experience and to continue supporting a diverse and inclusive arts ecosystem in the Berkshires.

GLOBAL WILLIAMS

A third area of strength is the college’s engagement with global issues through the undergraduate curriculum and our master’s program at the Center for Development Economics (CDE), which is unique in the landscape of U.S. higher education. The college has successfully attracted and supported scholars whose work focuses on understanding some of the most important and challenging problems around the world, including climate change, global economic policy and public health. It has also invested heavily in faculty and programs aimed at understanding social and artistic connections within diverse communities in the U.S. and across borders, including Africana Studies, Arabic Studies, Asian Studies and Latino/a Studies, with Asian-American Studies expected to join that list. Meanwhile, our study away programs include the distinctive Williams-Exeter Programme at Oxford, the Budapest Seminars and other high-level offerings.

But despite the prominence of cross-cultural topics in the curriculum, the recruitment of international students and faculty, the unique presence of the CDE and the availability of top-flight study away options, Williams is not as widely known as we want to be for our extensive global educational offerings. Nor have we in recent years had a comprehensive vision that could guide investments in further international programming.

The college needs to make this convergence of strengths more visible on campus and to prospective students and alumni by:

- ▶ Increasing language opportunities for students through study away and summer language programs;
- ▶ Coordinating our many international course offerings, programs, services and opportunities, making them more visible and depicting them more coherently and systematically than the college has done in the recent past;
- ▶ Establishing a global internship program aimed at fostering career opportunities abroad;
- ▶ Creating a signature, multi-year Global Scholars Program (GSP), through which cohorts of students would fully explore the international dimensions of a Williams education. Such a program could integrate traditional semester courses, Winter Study and study abroad options, among others; and
- ▶ Strengthening the international Williams community by encouraging further connections between CDE students and the rest of campus, growing support for international students and further developing our international alumni network.

LEARNING BY DOING

Few things are more challenging than making the transition from consuming ideas to producing them. Watching a play is easier than writing, producing or

acting in one. Reading about an experiment is (generally) easier than designing and executing one. Williams has long believed that students learn best by working directly and closely with faculty pushing the scholarly

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and creative frontiers. This is a labor-intensive mode of education that requires a low ratio of students to faculty. But it would be a mistake to misread the effort as inefficiency: Our program is profoundly and distinctively transformative.

Indeed, this approach has become a Williams hallmark. It underpins our commitment to tutorials, student-faculty research, creative opportunities in the arts and even students' personal development, which is enhanced by the closeness of teacher-student relationships. The Williams-Mystic ocean and coastal studies program provides an example of how effective experiential pedagogy can be. Every class is enhanced through travel, field seminars, hands-on skills training and applied research, and its campus is literally a living museum. Students routinely describe a semester in Mystic as life-changing, personally as well as academically.

Williams needs to grow and expand these opportunities, ensuring that every student gains crucial experience in research, tutorials, engaged learning, study away, entrepreneurship or other modes of "learning by doing." In order to do this work well, the college will support efforts to enhance and expand our existing collaborations among faculty and student-facing offices, including the Center for Learning in Action (CLiA), the Fellowships Office, Study Away, the '68 Center for Career Exploration, the Zilkha Center and the Davis Center. Plans include an improved information and communications system that gives students easy access to the full range of pathways, including courses, programs, cocurricular activities, study away opportunities, internships, service and student work opportunities, alumni connections and fellowships.

TUTORIALS

Adapted from the University of Oxford style of education, the tutorial is a distinctive Williams academic experience and a beloved feature of our curriculum. With the support and guidance of faculty, every week pairs of students take turns developing and critiquing independent work, including essays, lab reports or creative works. The tutorial gives Williams students a sense of ownership of and responsibility for the learning process; teaches research and expressive and critical skills; and inspires deep exploration in ways that make our graduates exceptionally well prepared for careers and life after college.

The tutorial program is extremely popular, and enrollment demand is high. While many faculty are experienced in teaching tutorials, Williams could open such opportunities to even more students and further our distinction by:

- ▶ More fully funding our tutorial program;
- ▶ Reliably introducing new faculty to the program, which may be unfamiliar to them; and
- ▶ Training all faculty in the particular art of teaching tutorials.

Already, roughly 60% of Williams students take at least one tutorial during their time here. If the college takes a thoughtful approach to growing those opportunities, we would help ensure that as many graduates as possible benefit from the depth of intellectual engagement and the joys of learning by doing that are emblematic of Williams tutorials.

STUDENT RESEARCH

The traditional image of a student at one end of a log and a teacher at the other takes its more modern form as student and professor huddled over a scanning electron microscope, poring through the archives or standing side by side, critiquing a work of art. Few liberal arts colleges can equal Williams in this area. Our success depends on factors including the recruitment of research-active faculty, investment in modern equipment and buildings, and (most saliently) a low student-to-faculty ratio. To continue our program, over the next 10 years Williams could:

- ▶ Create more engaged learning opportunities by supporting course development;
- ▶ Sponsor more student-faculty projects; and
- ▶ Provide or connect faculty with more research funds.
- ▶ Ensure that students have one-stop access to career support and opportunities.

These efforts should also tap into the potential of Winter Study and summers, explored in a later part of the chapter.

INTERNSHIPS AND CAREER EXPLORATION

Recent years have seen rapidly escalating demand for internships and other career exploration opportunities, as well as related coursework. The increase is due to a combination of factors, including earlier exposure to internships and volunteering in high school, realignment of global economies and job markets, the enthusiasm of alumni to mentor and offer experiential opportunities, and the commitment of the '68 Center's staff.

Williams is poised to and should make career exploration an integral part of our liberal arts education, connecting students' learning to their broader personal and professional goals. The college will deepen its commitment to providing students with opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills in real-world settings and to understanding how their education can empower them to work for positive change—even as the future of work is itself changing. To do so, the college should:

- ▶ Expand our experiential and cocurricular offerings and ensure high standards for domestic and global internships, post-graduate employment and graduate school outcomes;
- ▶ Invest in supporting students' career preparation through interviewing, networking, résumé-building and exploration, including entrepreneurial opportunities that reflect the creative and translational spirit of a liberal arts education;
- ▶ Strengthen career and graduate-school advising; and

ENGAGED LEARNING: WILLIAMS IN THE WORLD

Student engagement in our local community and region has multiple benefits: providing students with opportunities to enact their passion and learn from practitioners while getting an introduction to the complexity of real-world challenges; providing our region with access to the talents and care of our people, most of whom live here and all of whom are deeply concerned about quality of life; and earning Williams the respect and trust of our neighbors and fellow citizens.

The college's health depends on the wellbeing of the community in which we are based: Our fates rise and fall together. There are serious and enduring challenges for many residents of our region, but by working with local partners we hope to become even more engaged in fostering healthy change for the Berkshires and beyond.

Student engagement for this purpose is organized largely through the Center for Learning in Action (CLiA). Currently, approximately 1,200 students a year take part in CLiA's programs every year. The Center also connects faculty and staff to opportunities to the degree possible. Over the next decade, Williams will expand CLiA's scope to include more support for faculty in their professional and curricular development. Other strategic goals in this area include:

- ▶ Establishing civic engagement and contribution as a core value of our form of liberal arts education.
- ▶ Doing more to introduce incoming students to community engagement as a valuable part of their Williams experience.
- ▶ Expanding our offerings to include opportunities during Winter Study and summer.
- ▶ Offering federal work-study possibilities for community engagement beyond our current and very popular program in the local schools.

- Exploring possibilities for post-graduate fellowships that encourage young alumni to stay and contribute to our region through research, work and advocacy.

YEAR-ROUND LEARNING

Winter Study is a time for students and faculty to reach outside the standard curriculum to explore, experiment with and experience different ways of learning. At its best it is a time for educational risk-taking, whether that involves studying a subject way outside of one's comfort zone, learning new and challenging skills or doing engaged scholarship in unfamiliar parts of the country. The program is further enhanced by the participation of alumni and friends of the college as guest teachers who bring a passion for and expertise in novel fields and disciplines.

As is to be expected in a program that encourages experimentation, Winter Study offerings have developed in a grass-roots fashion and vary widely on almost every dimension (content, mode of inquiry, linkages to the curriculum, etc.). Williams needs to take a more comprehensive and even approach to this well-loved and unusual feature of our curriculum by supporting high-quality offerings, integrating Winter Study more fully into curricular planning and encouraging consideration of how our offerings intersect with students' broader educational goals and interests. This could mean reimagining our menu of Winter Study offerings, creating more opportunities to use Winter Study as a time for career exploration or expanding cocurricular offerings that help students develop life skills as well as academic ones.

The possibilities for expanding summer opportunities are equally exciting. Many students report that some of their most meaningful undergraduate experiences take place over the summers and that those experiences complement and enhance academic-year learning. Similarly, many faculty look forward to summers as a time to delve deeply into research, scholarship and creative work, often in close partnership with students.

At their best, summers—a time when people are free from most of the scheduling constraints of the

academic year—are a time to see Williams' commitment to the faculty-student relationship in full bloom.

Looking at Winter Study and summers as complements to Fall and Spring semesters, Williams has a chance to imagine a four-year, 12-month arc during which students make use of their time to learn, grow and explore career options to the fullest.

As we expand opportunities into the winter and summer, the college will also need to ensure that students have access to critical structural supports, such as Health Services and Integrated Wellbeing Services, that are currently only available from September through June.

SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE

CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Williams is renowned for its teaching. Faculty enjoy discussing successes and challenges that they face in the classroom. They constantly seek to learn new techniques and refine their craft. And they have so much to share with each other. We envision a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) as a place that allows faculty to realize their fullest potential as teachers and mentors. Such a center would serve as a hub for resources and services and a space where faculty could reflect on their own teaching practices, learn about new strategies and approaches and benefit from peer mentors and conversation partners.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

In parallel with a CTL focused on teaching, we also need to further organize and strengthen our student-learning resources, including the Writing Workshop, Quantitative Skills and Peer Tutoring. These programs are in high demand, and the college has increased investment in them in recent years. But they would benefit from coalescing around a single manager, among other efforts to make the offerings more legible and widely available to students.

THE CO-CURRICULUM AND RESIDENTIAL LIFE

Williams is a residential liberal arts college: a school where living with one's fellow learners (and in proximity to many faculty and staff) is central to students' education and development.

The residential life and cocurricular aspects of this experience have evolved more organically than the curriculum, which is carefully curated by the faculty. Plenty of strategic thinking has gone into various features of life outside the curriculum, but this plan is a time to step back and look at the four years students spend with us as a whole: How do the things they learn in classroom and research settings interact with experiences and lessons in the dorms, in student organizations, in performance spaces or on the field of play, or even in the endless unstructured moments of late-night conversations with friends or time spent alone?

Given that this generation is growing up in what has been labeled a distraction culture, with high stress levels, the last thing we should do is overdetermine students' lives. But as a top-notch residential liberal arts college in a small community, we are exceptionally well-poised to define a set of broad personal and social development goals for all students analogous to our academic goals of ensuring that all graduates have experience conducting research, analyzing data and communicating effectively, to name a few.

Williams should develop and communicate a four-year developmental framework for integrating these lessons into students' Williams experience. While each student will be unique in their needs and developmental sequence, a support framework that broadly defines goals by class year will help us scaffold and support students' learning overall—learning that already happens in many cases, but too often unevenly or by chance.

In this as in other areas of the strategic plan, Williams starts from a position of strength. Our Junior Adviser (JA) program and our talented deans, staff and other student leaders do extraordinary work for the college. We need to bring greater intention and coherence to our offerings, address gaps and tap into areas of promise and overall ensure that our system works harmoniously to advance students' personal growth, wellbeing and effectiveness—just as our curricular offerings support them so well academically.

The following general development and learning goals are a good starting point for discussion:

- ▶ *Community consciousness*: the ability to listen actively, engage across differences, seek out the beliefs that shape others' lives, exhibit curiosity about diverging world views, seek out criticism for one's views, change one's mind, exhibit empathy and find areas of commonality amidst disagreement. This also extends into civic engagement and a sense of belonging and of responsibility to others.
- ▶ *Personal effectiveness*: the ability to engage in self-reflection, manage priorities, build a collaborative team and ask for assistance.
- ▶ *Attention to wellbeing*: the ability to pursue academic goals while nurturing one's physical, psychological, interpersonal and spiritual needs.
- ▶ *Leadership*: the ability to distill shared goals and motivate people to work together toward them; to communicate clearly and listen deeply; and to inspire others by modeling ethical, caring behavior.

To do so, Williams will need to:

- ▶ Define and publish a four-year developmental framework with clear goals, accompanied by initial ideas on how to assess the consistency with which the college is teaching these skills;
- ▶ Encourage students to be intentional and reflective about how all their Williams experiences—residential as well as academic and cocurricular—fit into and enhance their “Williams story”;
- ▶ Support efforts to teach personal effectiveness, which encompasses study skills, time management and prioritization, contemplative and restorative practices, emotional resilience, physical health and other approaches; and
- ▶ Teach students to recognize discomfort as a natural part of learning and life that one can survive and learn from—sometimes called “discomfort with a purpose”—and distinguish such opportunities from structural problems or injustices that ought to be actively challenged.

In the big picture, we need to ask what skills students need beyond academics in order to lead healthy, rewarding and meaningful lives, to make sure those skills are taught and encouraged along diverse pathways, and support this work with ways to assess our effectiveness.

While the details will be determined in operational planning, we know that the work will be focused in a few key areas:

RESIDENTIAL LIFE

Our philosophy in regards to residential living has evolved over centuries, from our early history when students lived in local boardinghouses, often not to good effect, to the opening of the first dormitories; the rise and fall of fraternities; the creation of freshman (later renamed first-year) entries; and co-education and beyond.

This timeline also spans from the era when Gaius Bolin was prohibited from living with his white fellow students, or when women could only enter dorms by

invitation, to the diverse mix of people who call campus home today and the ongoing efforts to expand that welcome to populations and people not yet fully included.

In short, the evolution of residential life at Williams more or less tracks the history of ideas about whom we should educate and what a residential liberal arts education entails. The college should use the current strategic plan as a chance to again assess our goals and develop a thoughtful, forward-looking, flexible approach: one that equips students to thrive in a

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global, diverse and respectful society; to inhabit and navigate between overlapping communities, including times when those identities are in tension; to navigate challenges and discomfort effectively and learn from these experiences; to manage their time and priorities; and to value the pleasures of unstructured moments, friendship, joy and exploration.

- ▶ Adding a small number of professional staff to support student leaders (JAs, HCs and RDs) in ensuring that residence life is inclusive, enjoyable and personally enriching, and to help sustain our focus on residential learning objectives. These Area Coordinators will also help students learn to negotiate residential challenges that arise after hours, rather than relying on an anonymous tip line or the involvement of Campus Safety staff in non-emergency conflicts.
- ▶ Offering additional housing options, including Theme, Affinity, Program and Special Interest (TAPSI) housing: mentored living-learning opportunities for groups of students who share interests or aspects of their identity. Along with engaging across differences, spending a portion of one’s college years with people who share one’s interests or background can be a valuable opportunity for learning and growth. Through mentoring, support and programming, this

approach can create new learning opportunities within residential life in a structured way, instead of the kinds of ad hoc self-segregation that are more common on college campuses.

- ▶ Developing housing options for non-traditional students, who may arrive with partners and children, are accustomed to independent living and may not feel at home in undergraduate dorms.

INTEGRATIVE WELLBEING

A crucial role of college is to prepare people to live well. Williams excels at this through our liberal arts approach to academics, and we need to devote similar attention and resources to providing students with the skills they need for their holistic health. Indeed, the two go together: students need to be supported in attending to their mental, physical and spiritual health in order to be the best at whatever they do in life. They need to know when to take a break, when to ask for assistance, how to support and be supported by other people, how to manage the unexpected and how to tolerate distress. Our future society is depending on graduates who are not just leaders in their fields but healthy leaders in their fields, in whatever way they define that idea.

Williams already offers a wide network of resources to support wellbeing on campus, ranging from Integrative Wellbeing Services, the Health Center and Accessible Education to the Chaplains' Office and the Davis Center, to Physical Education, Athletics and the Outing Club, to the numerous student-run organizations that encourage students to embrace their various identities; engage in sport, dance and other forms of movement; and advocate for health and wellbeing on campus and beyond. We are therefore well-positioned to develop an overarching framework for student wellbeing to nurture students' physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and social development.

To do so, Williams should better organize our many existing offerings and invite all faculty, staff and students to prioritize wellbeing alongside striving, competition and achievement. The college will:

- ▶ Define a set of developmental goals for students and identify how various curricular, cocurricular and residential experiences contribute to those goals;
- ▶ Recognize that people bring a range of experiences and perspectives to their lives in our community and that definitions of and approaches to wellness should continue to take these into account as fully as possible;
- ▶ Identify a set of skills, practices and areas of knowledge that constitute the "integrative wellbeing" construct;
- ▶ Develop a portfolio model through which students can document and reflect on key experiences that connect back to integrative wellbeing;
- ▶ Introduce wellness as a consideration in the work of a new Center for Teaching and Learning; and
- ▶ Develop assessment tools to track the impact of this work on both individual and institutional levels.

ATHLETICS, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION

Athletics, physical education, club sports and recreation are important pathways for introducing students to core principles of good health: exercise, skill development, collaboration and group problem-solving, coping and overall wellness. These opportunities also teach resilience in the face of (sometimes public) defeat or struggle.

Such experiences take many forms. The college's varsity athletics program has won the Directors' Cup (a national competition for NCAA Division III schools) 22 times out of the 24 years it has been awarded. Many alumni athletes report that the time they spent in practice, on the field of play and with coaches and teammates was a particularly meaningful aspect of their education and equipped them for successful and rewarding lives. Similarly, Williams benefits from an extraordinary outdoors program—the Williams

Outing Club—and opportunities that range from club and intramural sports to yoga in the museum, as well as for-credit Physical Education options. These offerings are unified by a belief that they offer students the chance to learn self-care and appreciate the value of caring for one’s body in harmony with mind and spirit. Many of them also teach principled leadership, fairness and teamwork in ways that pair wonderfully with our curricular and research experiences.

In short, Williams has been quite successful in many aspects of our athletics and physical wellness programming. The caliber of our programs attracts students and is central to their learning experience. To take this the next step forward, Williams will:

- ▶ Integrate varsity athletics more fully into college life in ways that show how athletics can deliver value for the entire campus community and, conversely, help student athletes strengthen the diversity of their campus relationships;

- ▶ Reframe varsity athletics as one on a continuum of options for physical fitness and personal development that also includes club and intramural sports, the Williams Outing Club, and many other options for students of different interests and ability types;
- ▶ Tap into the potential of athletics recruitment as a source of diversity and more fully support the efforts of faculty, staff and students to make Williams athletics fully inclusive;
- ▶ Replace our current field house and invest in other facilities that are outdated but essential to a strong athletics and wellness program; and
- ▶ Provide a range of options for people with diverse abilities.

ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

Williams is among the small set of schools that do not consider financial circumstances when admitting U.S. applicants (known as “need blind” admission) and that meet the full demonstrated financial need of all admitted students. Over the past two decades we have gone beyond need blind to *need seeking*. We actively identify and recruit exceptional students whom we know cannot afford to pay the cost of attendance.

In recent years the college has also expanded our recruitment goals to include veterans, transfer students from community colleges and other so-called non-traditional students. Though few in number they have a disproportionate positive impact in academics, student leadership and life outside the classroom.

In regards to financial aid, the Office of Admission and Financial Aid has introduced a series of enhancements, including a health insurance grant, an increased personal allowance, free campus storage, support for critical needs, expansion of our Book Grant program to include Winter Study course materials and, notably, the elimination of one summer’s earnings requirement with an option to petition for waiver of a second summer’s requirement.

These and other changes have greatly increased Williams’ financial accessibility and affordability across the board. Even so, many families—especially middle-income families¹ and people who cannot count on intergenerational transfers—tell us that paying for Williams is still financially challenging.

Meanwhile, our financial aid packages do not comprehensively account for the cost of programs that

are becoming educationally essential, including internships, summer opportunities and language fellowships. This poses a further problem for equity.

To make strategic progress toward these goals, Williams will:

- ▶ Make Williams affordable for all families, including middle-income households, by expanding our “Free Summers” program, adopting a more generous financial aid methodology and increasing the number of fully endowed scholarships;
- ▶ Expand our definition of affordability to address the financial barriers that families still encounter in our system, while continuing to meet 100% of their demonstrated need;
- ▶ Ensure that, once enrolled, students do not have to repeatedly disclose their socioeconomic or financial aid status to take advantage of academic and campus life opportunities;
- ▶ Increase the number of funded internships available across diverse fields;
- ▶ Seek to fully fund access to the range of experiences and opportunities we believe are essential to a Williams education. These include faculty-led academic and cocurricular activities, research opportunities, academic fellowships and summer internships; and
- ▶ Intensify our recruitment, yield and retention of exceptional veteran and community college transfer students and provide the resources necessary to help them thrive at Williams.

¹ We define “middle income” families as those earning between \$75,000 and \$200,000 a year, which includes families who would fall outside more conventional measures of middle income.

ENGAGING ALUMNI

Since the formation in 1821 of what is apparently the oldest alumni association in the country, Williams alumni have become justly famous for their devotion to the college. Alumni have sustained the college over 200 years through a multifaceted generosity that at certain moments in our history literally rescued the college from insolvency or collapse. Their loyalty is also the “secret ingredient” that helps Williams excel as the country’s great residential liberal arts college and one of its great institutions of higher learning, period.

Alumni generosity takes many forms, including talent, wisdom and expertise; volunteer service; mentoring and support of students; and, of course, the philanthropic resources needed to build and support a college of uncommon strength. Our defining commitment to uniting teacher-scholars and -artists at the top of their fields with a diverse body of the most educationally committed and able students, regardless of students’ financial means and often to a need-seeking degree, is largely dependent on alumni support.

This commitment is rooted in experiences and deep relationships formed during one’s time as a student. For many alumni, engagement with the college over decades is a way of giving back to and staying connected to a place they associate with tremendous personal and intellectual growth and the forging of meaningful, enduring relationships.

If such connections were guaranteed, this chapter of the plan could end here. But we know that others among our graduates have less of a connection. Data gathered over the last decade shows that Williams, like many institutions of higher learning, can expect a lower degree of engagement from more recent graduates who have more skeptical views of institutions

or the value of philanthropy and engagement with the college.

As the diversity of our alumni community has increased, an increasing number of people have described how Williams was insufficiently supportive or inclusive of them during their time here, or of other people who shared their identities, or simply of people whom they cared about. Such experiences have an effect on loyalty and need to be addressed for reasons that are principled, personal and also practical.

We want to ensure and celebrate the involvement and support of *all* alumni. Such engagement is, indeed, critical to the success of this entire plan and the college as a whole. As a strategic step, and building on the Society of Alumni Bicentennial programming, Williams will intensify its efforts to help alumni reimagine their connections to the college.

Central to these efforts will be a wider range of alumni service options in the form of professional expertise, critical advice, service, philanthropy, mentorship, career guidance and opportunities for lifelong learning. We will also begin constructing a series of intergenerational connections that will renew and redefine what it means to “be” Williams through alumni relationships with the college and with one another.

This work over the next 10 years will be rooted in three principles:

- ▶ Developing new engagement mechanisms, outreach methods and programming that reflect the college’s strategic goals and match them to alumni interests and expectations;

- ▶ Strengthening career support and networking to support increased interaction among current students, young alumni and older graduates; and
- ▶ Making a greater share of Williams' education accessible to alumni throughout their lives, through such opportunities as Winter Study teaching and special alumni learning programs.
- ▶ Offer lifelong learning programs for alumni in areas that reflect Williams' priorities and strengths, including sustainability and diversity, equity and inclusion;
- ▶ Expand engagement opportunities for all alumni, particularly those who have traditionally felt marginalized;

Toward these goals, the college will:

- ▶ Deepen links between alumni and the Center for Career Exploration, with a focus on alumni-supported internships and career exploration opportunities for current students;
- ▶ Extend mentorship opportunities between alumni and students and among alumni to provide career support for undergraduates, as well as alumni at every age and career stage who are experiencing professional transition;
- ▶ Collaborate more closely with the Society of Alumni;
- ▶ Hone our communications for alumni; and
- ▶ Make a compelling case and create opportunities for alumni to annually financially support Williams.

CROSSCUTTING COMMITMENTS

Woven into the plan are two crosscutting commitments that are expressions of our mission and values: one is Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility; the other is Sustainability. While they must be part of everything we do, the two are described here in order to make the commitments clearer and more easily legible.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Williams' aspirations are based on an understanding that diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) are inextricably linked to educational excellence. To [quote from our 2017 accreditation report](#), "Through the increasingly global reach of our curriculum, as well as the diversity of our campus community, we seek to develop in students, staff and faculty the capacity to see beyond the limits of their own experience. So many of the world's problems—from racism to sectarian and nationalistic violence to everyday forms of disrespect—stem from a failure to imagine our way into the lives of other people, a failure to understand the beliefs and contingencies that shape their lives, a failure to hear the stories that other people are trying to tell us."²

Part of this imaginative exercise is acknowledging the gap between our aspirations and the lived experiences of people in our community. These gaps are evident in the struggles of faculty overburdened by

demands for informal mentoring, committee service and management of departmental frictions; staff seeking inclusive working environments who are supporting students through crises that simultaneously affect them personally; and people saddled with unexamined assumptions or implicit biases. These inequities have personal, professional and institutional consequences.

To address them, Williams needs to close the gap between aspiration and action, now even more urgently in the shadow of ongoing racist hatred and violence.

FACULTY AND STAFF RECRUITMENT

In the coming decade, Williams commits to actively recruiting talented faculty and staff of all backgrounds and to making a more welcoming campus for all members of the community. The college will:

- ▶ Establish diversity, equity and inclusion plans across all units on campus to align each area's approach with the college's aforementioned goals in this area;
- ▶ Expand efforts to deepen and diversify pools of candidates in faculty and staff searches;
- ▶ Build pipelines of qualified staff for positions that are hard to fill by means of internships, apprenticeships and educational opportunities for professional development;
- ▶ Streamline the collection and use of data for faculty, students and staff to encourage more effective and transparent communication about who is on campus;

2 Williams College 2017 Accreditation Self-Study to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, accessed on 3/15/21 at https://provost.williams.edu/files/Williams-Self-Study_September-2017.pdf

- ▶ Review compensation to support goals around recruitment and retention;
- ▶ Diversify our vendor and construction workforce to deepen the breadth and scope of services delivered to the college and seek vendors with their own robust DEIA plans; and
- ▶ Support career development through targeted training, professional development opportunities and access to career coaching.
- ▶ Support and elevate the work of the Committee on Accessibility;
- ▶ Provide training on accessibility-related issues and concepts for all members of our community; and
- ▶ Infuse accessibility into all initiatives, programs, policies and building projects, with the goal of ensuring the full inclusion and thriving of all campus members.

Our ability to recruit the best and most diverse faculty and staff will also depend on Williams' ability to acknowledge the "invisible" work some people do to support students who share their identity or backgrounds. This work is crucial to the flourishing of an inclusive learning community. Schools are experimenting with different solutions, and our own success in addressing this widespread problem will directly impact our ability to recruit and retain the best educators.

ACCESSIBILITY

The degree of accessibility of our physical campus, as well as our technology, curricular and cocurricular opportunities, can either enhance or limit our ability to create a community where all members can thrive and participate. The college has invested in this effort through the work of the Office of Accessible Education, which supports students from differently abled backgrounds. On the faculty and staff side, Williams is increasingly focused on issues of disability and accessibility through the work of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and on making the relevant resources available in a consistent, comprehensive and clear manner. To continue to expand our efforts in these areas, Williams will:

- ▶ Proactively and comprehensively support students with disabilities;
- ▶ Recruit and retain staff and faculty with expertise in the area of accessibility;
- ▶ Empower a Center for Teaching and Learning to support our diversely abled students;

RACIAL JUSTICE

The United States has a long history of disparate treatment and discrimination of people on the basis of race—including human chattel enslavement and the forced removal of people from their ancestral homelands and colonialism. Racial and ethnic communities continue to bear the brunt of that harmful treatment, particularly those who are Black or African American; Latina/o/x; Asian, South Asian or Asian American; Native American or Indigenous; Middle Eastern or North African; and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders. In the coming decade, the college will deepen and broaden its commitment to furthering racial justice by:

- ▶ Expanding fellowships, internships and related opportunities for students to learn alongside racial justice advocates and promote racial justice initiatives;
- ▶ Connecting these internships and our other racial justice efforts to projects in Williamstown and throughout our region, as well as nationally;
- ▶ Seeking to recruit and retain staff and faculty with expertise in racial justice and related issues; and
- ▶ Embedding racial justice questions into curricular and cocurricular offerings.

ENGAGING WITH INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

The Williams history that many community members know begins as a narrative of struggle for survival: the founding of the college in 1793 as a result of the

bequest of Ephraim Williams; Zephaniah Swift Moore's abdication along with half the student body to found Amherst College in a more hospitable place; and the establishment of the Society of Alumni to save the college in 1821. The college that survived these challenges was a white, male Christian institution. As many of those who have researched Williams' history have shown, this history is notably incomplete. Going forward, the college will build on the efforts of prior students, faculty, staff and alumni to more fully come to terms with institutional history. Strategies include:

- ▶ Taking restorative actions in response to the college's history and establishing a historical record that gives all members of the community a stake in our shared story;
- ▶ Developing collaborative relationships with the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation and other historically oppressed communities with deep ties to the geographic area; and
- ▶ Providing support for public-facing historical work that serves the college and wider community.

THE DAVIS CENTER

One of the most visible commitments to DEIA at Williams will be a fully reimagined Davis Center. Originally known as the Multicultural Center, the Center was established in 1989 in the wake of student demands that the college recognize the need for support for students from underrepresented backgrounds. In 2012 it was renamed the Davis Center in honor of W. Allison Davis '24 and John A. Davis '33.

Since its founding, the Davis Center has been an essential part of the college community, providing critical support relevant to the unique challenges and experiences of racial, ethnic and religious minorities; women; those of LGBTQIA+ identities; and international students who are members of the Williams community. Today the Davis Center is alive with programming around urgent topics facing our campus and community. Its physical home, however, is in desperate need of attention. In 2020 the college embarked on an ambitious building project aimed at

renovating and expanding the three-building complex that currently houses and supports the Center, as well as the Office of Special Academic Programs and several affinity groups.

SUSTAINABILITY

Williams is committed to the responsible stewardship of its campus environment and recognizes that our actions have impacts beyond its borders. Our commitment to sustainability starts with the recognition that

Our commitment to sustainability starts with the recognition that climate change and environmental degradation are defining challenges of our time.

climate change and environmental degradation are defining challenges of our time. Many of the consequences of climate change will disproportionately fall on the world's most vulnerable and historically disadvantaged populations, but no one will escape the impact. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will require a fundamental shift in the world's approach to technology, resource use, international cooperation, inequality and social justice, and decisions about consumption, production and transportation.

As a leading liberal arts college, Williams has a responsibility to confront these challenges through our teaching, research and actions. In 2015 the president and board of trustees established an ambitious suite of sustainability goals for 2020. The goals stimulated investment in renewable energy, high-performance buildings, carbon neutrality, impact investing and academic programming, all of which created substantial progress.

Nevertheless, fossil fuels continue to heat and cool our campus, and some of our advances in renewables and improved building efficiency have been offset by increased travel emissions and the expansion of our campus footprint. Strategic planning is an opportunity

to build on our earlier successes, reflect on what we have learned and make new, transformative commitments to sustainable practices, teaching and research.

The strategic planning process identified six key areas where Williams will increase its commitment to sustainability: Education and Research; Climate Action; Buildings, Landscaping and Land Use; Responsible Consumption; Community, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Accountability and Transparency.

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Perhaps the foremost contribution a college can make in this area is introducing students to ways of thinking that situate humanity within an interdependent global ecosystem and affirm how our individual and collective health (physical, mental, spiritual) is deeply entwined with the health of our environment. Williams has the opportunity to become one of the top institutions at which to study sustainability and the environment through strategic hiring, curricular and pedagogical innovation, and educating the campus community about sustainable practices. Strategies include:

- ▶ Actively considering sustainability and environmental studies in hiring decisions;
- ▶ Supporting curricular development in areas such as climate science, environmental justice, agriculture and food systems, and sustainability in the arts and architecture;
- ▶ Creating sustainability pathways through various majors and concentrations;
- ▶ Expanding opportunities for students to engage with climate change and the environment through internships, on-campus research and community projects;
- ▶ Increasing ways for students to engage with projects in our regional communities;
- ▶ Educating the entire campus community about sustainable practices; and

- ▶ Providing opportunities, as at Williams-Mystic, for students to engage with the impact of climate change on indigenous and minoritized communities that are grappling with land loss, displacement and climate refugee status.

CLIMATE ACTION

Williams will develop and publish a climate action plan by 2022 that identifies ambitious goals and specific strategies for lowering emissions in both the short run and the long run. These commitments will reduce our reliance on carbon offsets, while *at least* maintaining carbon neutrality, and they will move us in the direction of eliminating fossil fuels from our power plant and purchased electricity. Specific strategies include:

- ▶ Sharply reducing emissions from campus combustion through energy conservation measures and shifting to renewable energy sources;
- ▶ Reducing travel emissions through reduced vehicle and air miles and improved vehicle fleet efficiency;
- ▶ Maintaining carbon neutrality with a view toward achieving net-zero emissions through investment in high-quality, verified carbon offsets and carbon removal;
- ▶ Incorporating a carbon damage charge in decisions about travel and a carbon shadow price in decisions about energy use and buildings;
- ▶ Securing 100% renewable purchased electricity and continuing to increase on-campus solar generation;
- ▶ Pursuing opportunities to reduce the amounts of embodied carbon in building materials, packaging, water and food;
- ▶ Partnering with local communities and investing in emissions-reduction projects off campus; and

- ▶ Continuing to invest the endowment in impact investments that promote measurable reductions in global carbon emissions.

BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPING AND LAND USE

Williams will manage its facilities to optimize environmental performance and follow rigorous, established standards in the renovation, construction and maintenance of its buildings. The college will take an approach that is holistic, data driven and focused on campuswide sustainability goals. Specific strategies include:

- ▶ Embedding high-performance building criteria in design standards for new construction and developing rigorous internal sustainability standards for maintenance and renewal;
- ▶ Optimizing the implementation and use of our high-performance buildings;
- ▶ Creating a campus planning framework to make the most efficient use of resources and to limit or contract campus square footage;
- ▶ Developing a comprehensive landscape design and management plan that addresses sustainability, access, aesthetics, equity and connections between campus and town; and
- ▶ Protecting college lands, such as Hopkins Forest, for research, teaching and recreation.

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

The college's sustainability choices are perhaps most visible in relation to the necessities of daily life: food, waste, water and purchasing. Williams will make measurable improvements in the sustainability of its food, water and other procurements and substantially reduce its waste stream. These improvements will create multiple benefits aside from natural resource conservation, such as preserving natural habitats, improving public health and mitigating climate change. Strategies include:

- ▶ Reducing use of single-use plastics, reducing electronic waste and increasing bulk purchasing;

- ▶ Sharply increasing composting and recycling as a percentage of total waste;
- ▶ Increasing the use of sustainable products throughout the college;
- ▶ Developing a hard goods management system to reduce new purchases and encourage reuse and decrease waste; and
- ▶ Educating our community about the importance of water conservation and management.

COMMUNITY, DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

As an institution of higher education, we have a responsibility to learn from others in the field, share innovative strategies and magnify our impact through collective action. Opportunities for supporting community, diversity, equity and inclusion include:

- ▶ Partnering with local organizations to reduce emissions in the community;
- ▶ Collaborating with other colleges and universities to increase impact;
- ▶ Developing inclusive decision-making processes, which clarify how decisions are made, ensure a range of perspectives are represented and heard at the table, and provide opportunities for feedback;
- ▶ Making clear connections between our environmental actions and social justice; and
- ▶ Strengthening diversity and inclusion in campus sustainability programs and initiatives.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Williams will set ambitious and measurable goals, report regularly on its progress and communicate openly and honestly. We will build our reputation in sustainability through ambitious actions and consistent, principled and effective decisions. Strategies include:

- ▶ Establishing sustainability as a core priority supported by a clear leadership structure;

- ▶ Creating department-level sustainability plans and integrating sustainability into job descriptions;
- ▶ Clearly communicating goals and progress toward goals; and
- ▶ Targeting at least a gold rating in the sustainability tracking, assessment and rating system (STARS).

Taken together, these goals define sustainability as a central commitment of the college and one that is integrated into our operations, educational mission and community.

THE STRUCTURES THAT SUSTAIN THE PLAN

The success of the strategic plan depends on the quality of our people, our campus, our operations and our finances. We as a college and a community have to assume responsibility for caring for those resources. This includes a pragmatic willingness to reconsider our strategic goals if circumstances change significantly.

FACULTY AND STAFF

Williams' success depends on attracting and supporting dedicated teachers who are also outstanding researchers and creators. Our athletics faculty are similarly devoted to developing the student athletes on their teams and promoting the physical education of all students. Williams is also graced with a skilled and loyal staff, whose duties range from supporting infrastructure through the Office of Information Technology, Facilities and Dining to engaging in the intellectual life of the college through work at the Williams College Museum of Art, the College Libraries and Archives, or the '62 Center, among many examples.

In short, Williams' most important resource is its people. As an educational institution, we should incorporate learning into all aspects of our operations and should encourage and celebrate professional development. We need a culture rooted in strong performance management, training and support for leaders and managers and a commitment to acquiring new skills as well as encouraging curiosity and informed risk-taking.

The college also needs to continue actively recruiting a broadly diverse workforce. One of the most effective ways we can do so is by supporting and retaining talented staff and faculty, especially from groups still underrepresented at the college, in higher education or in the northern Berkshires. This requires inclusive hiring, assessment, community building, professional development and recognition, along with educational efforts to minimize bias and increase cultural competency.

Finally, Williams needs to communicate expectations for its employees clearly and transparently. Resources should be made easier to find and access, and changes in policies and procedures must be clearly communicated. Staff and faculty should understand how decisions are made at the college. The college will further its commitment to these goals by:

- ▶ Supporting and rewarding faculty innovation in teaching across their careers;
- ▶ Increasing support for research and scholarship, and helping faculty better identify and access outside funding sources;
- ▶ Organizing resources to help faculty and staff build capacity as effective leaders, mentors and listeners;
- ▶ Recognizing a governance role for staff that acknowledges the diversity of staff roles, perspectives and needs, as well as the unique employment circumstances of staff as distinct from tenured faculty;

- ▶ Identifying excellence in management as a goal, and investing in a system of professional development opportunities and standards to support high-quality management across administrative and academic areas, including ongoing training for department chairs;
- ▶ Enhancing performance assessment and ensuring regular, meaningful evaluations for all staff; and
- ▶ Ensuring transparency, including clear communication about how governance operates, decision-making processes, opportunities to contribute and organizational charts or other ways of illustrating reporting relationships.

SHARED GOVERNANCE

The principle of shared governance can be opaque to people outside higher education, but it is central to protecting Williams’ academic integrity and all-around excellence.

The [College Laws](#), like the founding documents of many of our peer schools, assign decision-making authority to our board of trustees, president and faculty.

In practice, though, decision-making at Williams involves a more diverse and complex ecosystem of standing committees, advisory groups and representative bodies. Colleges like ours are highly consultative places, to say the least. That consultation can at times be cumbersome, as was noted in our [2018 accreditation report](#). Innovation is hard when you have to ask everyone’s opinion. But we value that quality of consultation for the participatory character it lends to our culture. Inclusion and efficiency both have value and must be balanced.

While our governance system has shaped the curriculum and ensured our educational excellence for decades, changes in the institution—including our community demographics—and in the world require that we think strategically about what a next iteration of shared governance should look like. From broad

discussion and research, the following values emerged as central:

- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ Agility
- ▶ Inclusion
- ▶ Fairness, in terms of both representation and duties (formal and invisible)
- ▶ Legibility and accountability
- ▶ Capacity for objectively assessing competing demands and tradeoffs

Ultimately, it is our hope that the college can strengthen its governance model by expanding outreach, inclusion, communication and transparency. By streamlining some elements of the committee system while closing gaps in others, and by practicing inclusion and transparency, Williams should be able to work efficiently while still ensuring that community members have a voice in decisions they are invested in.

FACILITIES

The core academic mission of the college has remained relatively unchanged over centuries. But as our methods and community have evolved, so has the physical campus. Although Williams had exceptional scholars and teachers in 1921, none of them trapped ions in their labs or created video art installations. Our entire library once fit inside Lawrence Hall, which today wouldn’t accommodate a fraction of our collection, much less digital resources unimaginable at the time. Faculty, staff and student needs have changed, too, both as a function of the times and of our greatly increased diversity and interest in accessibility.

The past decade and a half have seen substantial investment in campus facilities. This encompasses major building projects supporting the sciences, social sciences, humanities and athletics, including the Science Center, Stetson-Sawyer, Hollander/

Schapiro and Weston Field. It also comprises increased attention to infrastructure projects, range from unflashy-but-essential improvements like drainage to high-visibility projects like the new Williams Inn, The Log and the Williams Bookstore.

These projects have led some on campus and in the community to ask when Williams will “finally stop building.” With a campus as complex as ours, including buildings dating back as far as the late 18th century, there will *always* be work to do. These needs, however, have to be considered alongside affordability, inclusion and accessibility, and sustainability. We also want to honor expectations of financial transparency from campus and from alumni and donors.

Williams will pursue these goals by:

- ▶ Developing a campuswide, flexible “framework plan” that considers factors including academic impact, sustainability, community engagement and life-cycle costs;
- ▶ Engaging major stakeholders on campus and beyond, including students, faculty, staff and the local community, with regard to outreach on individual projects and framework planning as a whole;
- ▶ Removing physical barriers to accessibility and providing accessible accommodations in any cases where barriers are intrinsic. This includes introducing a policy of universal design for new construction and renovation;
- ▶ Pursuing and completing prominent projects, including the new Davis Center, field house, and the Williams College Museum of Art and Lawrence Hall, among others;
- ▶ Making targeted renovations or replacements of residence halls, with an eye toward creating sustainable and accessible living spaces for our students;
- ▶ Systematically identifying and analyzing opportunities to repurpose existing spaces instead of adding square footage when possible;

- ▶ Fully calculating environmental impact throughout building life cycles, from construction materials to recycling demolition waste;
- ▶ Developing a comprehensive plan for summer use of our campus (including Mystic) that accommodates the move toward a 12-month educational experience while allowing for necessary maintenance and renovation work;
- ▶ Recognizing the importance of landscaping and prioritizing sustainable vegetation, including native and low-maintenance species, where possible, while also preserving viewsheds on the surrounding mountains; and
- ▶ Re-evaluating outdoor lighting to ensure safety while limiting energy use and light pollution.

TECHNOLOGY

The shift to remote teaching and work during the pandemic demonstrated the importance of technology infrastructure on campus. The pandemic also highlighted areas that will require attention in the coming years. Williams has an opportunity to reimagine how we collect, maintain, analyze and protect data across all areas of campus.

To address these evolving needs, Williams will:

- ▶ Invest in technology infrastructure that supports our core mission, including new types of instructional technology and technology that supports advanced research and scholarship;
- ▶ Upgrade our enterprise data systems, whose scope includes academic information, finances and human resources. This change is driven by the pending obsolescence of our system and also presents an opportunity to rethink business operations and data use;
- ▶ Continue strengthening data security and governance through standards, technical protections and intensive educational efforts across campus;

- ▶ Increase our capacity to collect, use, analyze and protect information across all areas of campus; and
- ▶ Clarify and communicate policies related to privacy and use of personal data, including educating students about these issues.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Williams is in an enviable financial position thanks to the tuition contributions of Williams students and families; the generosity of alumni, parents and other friends of the college; and our careful stewardship of resources. Our most important source of revenue remains the endowment, which supports more than half of all spending each year. The success of this strategic plan rests on the careful management of our financial resources and the continued strong performance of financial markets. As always, the college must be prepared to respond responsibly and swiftly to changing financial circumstances.

To do so, the college will:

- ▶ Ensure that all of our commitments and strategic directions are financially sustainable during both good times and during downturns and market corrections;
- ▶ Strive for transparency regarding financial decisions and stewardship of our resources;
- ▶ Educate our entire community about choices and tradeoffs, including the way the college's values and priorities influence our resource allocations; and
- ▶ Exercise discipline in spending across all areas of the college and remember that the vast majority of our financial resources come from the past and present generosity of alumni, parents and friends of the college.

FUNDING THE PLAN

As stewards of the financial resources that keep the college running and enable us to fulfill our mission, the college leadership needs to develop a strategy to fund major commitments embedded in this strategic plan, including financial aid enhancements, new academic or cocurricular programs, staffing changes and capital projects.

The most important principle is that the college should not make any commitments that would imperil Williams' financial health. A second key premise is that we need to balance investments in our future with commitment to affordability today, since both have to be funded from the same large but ultimately limited pool of resources.

To achieve this, Williams needs to maintain fiscal discipline. This includes funding building construction and other capital projects through a mix of debt and gifts and aiming to keep our ratio of debt service to annual spending at or near 10%. We also need to proceed cautiously in considering new position requests, while recognizing that some hiring will be essential to support commitments in this plan in addition to our existing academic programs and operations. And we should only allow increased spending that we can manage within our policy of drawing less than 5% from a 12-quarter average of the endowment's value. Financial discipline was highlighted as one of Williams' strengths in our [2018 accreditation report](#). It sustained us through the financial crisis of 2008 and the pandemic and related market volatility of 2019-20, and we want to sustain comparable discipline for the future.

That applies to our commitments in the strategic plan, as well as to routine work. It will not be possible to estimate the cost of commitments in this plan until we translate them into operational terms in the next phase of work. But any effort to do so will have to be rooted in the three options we have for funding new initiatives: increasing resources, reducing spending or a combination of the two.

- ▶ On the *revenue* side, Williams benefits greatly from the past and present generosity of our alumni, parents and friends. Many aspects of the strategic plan that are necessary to provide the best education possible for the 21st century will only be realized with their continued philanthropic support.
- ▶ On the *spending reduction* side, we need to manage expenses and costs through the annual budget process and identify tradeoffs that help us strike the right balance of existing strengths and new directions. The process cannot simply be additive.

Finally, we must also continue paying close attention to the strength of our endowment as both our most important source of funding and our largest source of risk. If financial circumstances change, the college will reevaluate plans to ensure the long-term integrity of our core academic mission.

CONCLUSION

Williams has traveled a very long way since 1793. Our campus, curriculum and community today would be largely unfamiliar to our predecessors. But certain essential features would be familiar indeed: our commitment to liberal arts excellence, our appreciation for the transformative potential of an education rooted in teacher-student relationships, our sense of community and connection, and our love for this Purple Valley in which it all happens.

The strategic plan is an effort to sustain our distinctive form of educational excellence for the coming decades and amidst enormous changes. It evolved out of a year's worth of exploration and discussion involving hundreds of faculty, staff, students, alumni, families, neighbors and community partners. We are grateful to them for their contributions and care.

From those discussions, a number of imperatives emerged:

- ▶ Williams needs to affirm our existing strengths while investing in new areas of potential;
- ▶ We need to think about learning in a way that blends classroom and research opportunities with lessons gained from vivid life experiences;
- ▶ We should think of and value our community as encompassing our diverse campus, our region and our worldwide network of alumni;
- ▶ We need to invest in our values and find ways to enact commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and sustainability throughout our work and lives; and
- ▶ We should balance fidelity with innovation, honoring and expanding on the best traditional aspects of Williams, while evolving to keep pace with the times.

In short, people asked for a plan that envisioned the future wellbeing of Williams as both a college and a community.

The strategic plan describes a way to do so in a new and very different era than the one most faculty, staff and alumni have grown up in. The plan is not a rejection of the past—just an acknowledgment that Williams has to periodically update ourselves to suit the times. Indoor plumbing and electricity, telephones and tablets, diversity and DREAMers—all have made a difference in the ways we work, even if the purpose of that work stays the same. As we turn next to the question of how to realize these goals in operational terms, our job—and our calling—is to ensure that Williams will continue to educate students to thrive in the world as it is now and as it will become during their lifetimes.

We are grateful for that opportunity.

APPENDIX:

Reports of the Working Groups and Strategic Academic Initiatives

The ideas and proposals described in this plan are almost entirely drawn from reports produced by eight working groups and three strategic academic initiatives (SAIs) during the 2018-19 academic year, after months of research, benchmarking and community input. The efforts of these 11 groups were organized through a [Coordinating Committee](#) with faculty, staff and student membership. Readers interested in understanding the process and the many ideas explored by these groups are invited to review their reports below.

WORKING GROUP REPORTS

[The Built Environment](#)

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)

[Faculty and Staff Development](#)

[Governance](#)

[Learning Beyond the Classroom](#)

[Student Learning](#)

[Sustainability](#)

[Williams in the World](#)

STRATEGIC ACADEMIC INITIATIVE REPORTS

[Future of the Arts](#)

[International Initiatives](#)

[Technology and the Liberal Arts: Data Science and Digital Humanities](#)

[Technology and the Liberal Arts: Science and Technology Studies](#)

To learn more about the strategic planning process as a whole, visit www.williams.edu/strategic-planning.