New England Commission on Higher Education

Fifth-Year Interim Report

August 15, 2022
Introduction

Production of this report was guided by President Maud S. Mandel and carried out by the 2022 Interim Report working group of:

Danielle Carr Ramdath, Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement
James Cart, Associate Director of Institutional Research
John Gerry, Associate Dean of the Faculty
Meike Kaan, Associate Vice President for Communications
Courtney Wade (Chair), Associate Provost for Analytics and Institutional Research
Chris Winters, Associate Provost

with significant writing contributions from Sara Dubow, Associate Dean of the Faculty and Professor of History, and Keli Gail, Assistant to the President and Secretary of the College.

Our job was made significantly easier by all those on campus who contributed to our recent strategic planning process, particularly the members of the coordinating committee, each working group, and each strategic initiative group. We relied heavily on the strategic plan and working group reports, as well as other college documents (e.g., the Williams College Museum of Art’s recent strategic plan and the Writing Center’s annual report) in crafting this report.

Our team benefited from participation in the July 2021 New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) Fifth-Year Interim Report Workshop and was attended by team members Danielle Carr Ramdath, James Cart, John Gerry, and Chris Winters, as well as Dukes Love, Provost and Professor of Economics.

Thank you to everyone who read drafts of the report and gave feedback or copyediting support, including:

Liz Creighton, Dean of Admission and Student Financial Services
Pamela Franks, Class of ’56 Director of the Williams College Museum of Art
Jennifer Grow, Editor
Gretchen Long, Dean of the College & Frederick Rudolph ’42 Class of 1965 Prof. of American Culture
Dukes Love, Provost and Class of 1969 Professor of Economics
Amy Lovett, Editor in Chief
Eiko Maruko Siniawer, Provost and Class of 1955 Memorial Professor of History
Marlene Sandstrom, Dean of the College and Hales Professor of Psychology
Greg Shook, Managing Editor
Leticia Smith-Evans Haynes, Vice President for Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Michael Wagner, Vice President for Finance & Operations and Treasurer
Safa Zaki, Dean of the Faculty and Class of 1924 Professor of Psychology
Institutional Overview

Founded in 1793, Williams College is the second-oldest institution of higher education in Massachusetts. The campus is home to approximately 2,100 students who develop close intellectual and personal relationships, learning from and alongside some of the world’s leading scholars. Williams’ faculty is devoted to teaching, mentoring, and scholarly research. Today our student-faculty ratio is 7 to 1.

Williams College’s curriculum is rigorous and cross-disciplinary, spanning more than 60 areas of study and connecting students to the region and the world. A signature educational experience is the tutorial, in which a faculty member meets weekly with pairs of students to explore a single topic in depth for an entire semester. The college offers more than 65 tutorials per year and in nearly every academic discipline. Another distinctive opportunity is Winter Study, an intensive month when students can select a course from up to 150 offerings to deepen their understanding of a topic they have studied or to try something completely new.

In addition to more than 250 study-away programs in 60 countries, Williams students can take part in the Williams-Exeter Programme at Oxford (a collaboration with Exeter College) and immerse themselves in the intellectual and social life of Oxford University. Williams also operates Williams-Mystic in historic Mystic, Connecticut, where students can spend a semester in a unique interdisciplinary curriculum covering the literature, history, policy, and science of the oceans and coasts of the United States.

Williams also offers two graduate programs. One is a two-year master’s degree in the history of art in partnership with the nearby Clark Art Institute. The second, offered by the college’s Center for Development Economics, is a yearlong master’s program designed for economists from low- and middle-income countries who have some practical experience.

The college offers one of the most generous financial aid programs in the country. Admission decisions for U.S. students are made regardless of their ability to pay; once they are here, the college meets 100% of the demonstrated need of all students regardless of citizenship. More than half of our students receive aid, and the college recently implemented the country’s first all-grant financial aid program, replacing the work-study, packaged loans, and summer earnings portion of financial aid with institutional grants. Beyond tuition, housing, and meals, financial aid covers the cost of all course materials and textbooks, as well as health insurance, and it is available for a host of other expected and unexpected expenses.

Williams boasts a vibrant, diverse, and talented student body. Our roughly 2,100 students come from nearly every state and countries all around the world. Upon graduation, our students join an extraordinarily devoted body of alumni—the oldest society of alumni in the country—whose financial generosity makes every aspect of a Williams education possible. Alumni carry the lessons they learn as students into the world and throughout their lives, multiplying exponentially the impact of a small liberal arts college.
Special Emphases

Strategic Planning and Using Data to Inform Decision-Making

On July 1, 2018, shortly after we completed our New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) comprehensive evaluation, Maud S. Mandel was sworn in as Williams’ president. The self study, visiting team report, and letter of accreditation proved useful guidance on what to prioritize, and it was clear that it was time for us to create our first strategic plan. Almost immediately, President Mandel initiated discussions about how to plan, and by November 2018 she announced the creation of a strategic planning coordinating committee composed of senior leaders, faculty, staff, and students. By spring 2019, based on extensive community input, the coordinating committee created eight working groups and three strategic initiatives, composed charges for these groups, and solicited nominations for and assigned members to each group.

Over the 2019-2020 academic year, each of the working groups conducted comprehensive outreach to students, faculty, staff, alumni, local community members, and peer institutions. President Mandel held a campus-wide “planning day” on October 15, 2019, complete with a “pancake” breakfast and including many organized and informal discussions centered around each of the working groups and strategic initiatives. During the following winter, the strategic planning coordinating committee, eight working groups, and three academic initiative groups held a retreat to help transition from the outreach phase of planning to the report-writing process. Once each group had produced a draft, they shared it with the entire community for feedback. The announcement soliciting community feedback went out on February 12, 2020, with a feedback deadline of March 27.

The original goal was to have a draft strategic report by the end of April 2020. That goal was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to swiftly move students, faculty, and staff from campus. Strategic planning resumed in the following months, and the college was able to complete a draft plan in April 2021, one year later than originally planned. It was a fortunate coincidence that the bulk of the work of producing the plan was finished by the time the pandemic began to be felt in the U.S., and in some respects the one-year pause gave us time to ponder the plan and view it in the context of drastically different circumstances. The Board of Trustees endorsed the report at its June 2021 meeting, and we released the final version on September 9, 2021.

Of course, the release of the plan was only the beginning of the planning process. During the 2021-2022 academic year we started operationalizing the plan. Here we provide a broad summary of some of the plan’s proposals, but really the strategic planning process has deeply informed Williams’ progress on all of the standards, so this report frequently refers to it.

The plan is very ambitious. Quite broadly it:

- Proposes three new academic initiatives (standard four narrative)
- Expands experiential learning opportunities by increasing resources for tutorials, student research, internships and career exploration, community engagement, and year-round learning (standard eight reflective essay)
- Strengthens academic resources by proposing creation of a Center for Teaching and the centralization and expansion of academic support services (standards six and eight)
• Defines co-curricular learning goals, proposes changes to the residential life system, prioritizes integrative well-being, and pledges to make athletics and physical education more inclusive and more integrated into campus life (standards five and eight)
• Commits to “true affordability” by filling in the financial gap between all of the expenses of a college education and traditional financial aid methodology (standard five)
• Broadens alumni engagement in response to an increasingly diverse alumni population (standard eight)
• Makes crosscutting commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility and requires that all units across campus create diversity, equity, and inclusion plans (standards four, five, six, and eight)
• Pledges to deepen our commitment to sustainability by expanding educational opportunities related to climate change and the environment, publishing a climate action plan with ambitious goals for lowering emissions, and managing facilities and consumption in a sustainable manner (standards two and seven)
• Commits to increasing professional development opportunities for staff, further increasing staff diversity, and identifying a role for staff in shared governance (standards three and seven)
• Pledges to think strategically about what the future of shared governance at Williams should look like (standard three)
• Spells out a process for developing a campus-wide “framework plan” for facilities that considers factors including academic impact, sustainability, community engagement, and life-cycle costs (standard two)
• And, relevant to this area of emphasis, the plan commits to upgrading our enterprise data systems and investing in technology infrastructure that supports our core mission (standard seven).

While the strategic planning process was an opportunity for data to play a larger role in decision-making, the Covid-19 pandemic created an environment where data was a necessity for decision-making. It was a situation rarely experienced in higher education, and we needed to make many critical decisions quickly, based on ever-changing data. Departments that did not frequently interact needed to collaborate closely and create or adjust their processes quickly in order to generate regular reports for consideration by the leadership. In addition to taking into account national and local data, we collected our own Covid-19 testing data and made the aggregate results available to the public through a Covid-19 dashboard.

While we still have a long way to go in terms of systematically collecting, verifying, and understanding data necessary to enhance institutional effectiveness, this will be a major focus in the next five years. Like many of our peers, we’re preparing for a transition from our on-premise student, human resources, and finance data systems to a cloud-based system. These transitions always require a lot of work and coordination so as not to lose data capabilities, but we hope to greatly enhance our data capabilities as a result of this transition. We plan to go live with new finance and human resources systems in July 2024, and transition of the student system will occur after that. However, we know that we need to get our data in good shape well before this if we hope to make a graceful transition, so some long-needed data cleanup projects are already underway.

The demand for data and attitudes about data transparency on our campus have shifted notably in the past five years. We’re currently working on creating dashboards for academic unit chairs that will provide basic information about enrollments, FTE, and diversity. We’re also creating interactive visualizations for use by the dean of the faculty and Committee on Appointments and Promotions for use in decision-making. With so much work already underway, we are optimistic that we’ll have even better news to report with respect to our data capabilities and strategic use of data in 2027.
Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at the Institutional Level

In Williams’ April 2018 letter of accreditation, NECHE wrote, “While we note with approval that Williams has made great strides in assessing student learning outcomes, particularly at the course and program levels, we also recognize that the college has not yet established a comprehensive approach to systematically assess student learning outcomes at an institutional level or in the General Education program.”

With this in mind, the strategic planning process included a working group focused on student learning, comprising the Dean of the College, two students, two faculty members, and the Director of Quantitative Skills Programs and Peer Support. This group engaged in extensive community outreach and considered data gathered from Institutional Research (IR) and other sources. (The standard eight reflective essay later in this report discusses the work and findings of the working group in greater detail.)

Based on the working group’s findings, the strategic plan proposed creating a Center for Teaching to help faculty realize their fullest potential as teachers and mentors (discussed in the standard six narrative and standard eight reflective essay), while acknowledging the need to better organize and strengthen the college’s student learning resources. To this end, the group proposed hiring a single manager who would oversee those resources. Because the draft strategic plan was essentially complete pre-pandemic, some of its proposals felt too urgent to delay for a full year, so we enacted them before the plan was officially adopted. In fall 2020, we hired an inaugural Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement to oversee academic resources: the Writing Center, quantitative skills programs, the college’s Winter Study program, international education, and experiential education. This position is focused on assessing how well all of these programs are doing at helping students grow as learners and peer mentors.

One of the first assessment projects of the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement was an evaluation of student writing, run by the Interim Director of the Writing Center in consultation with the Director of Institutional Research. This assessment followed up on earlier work by the Interim Director of the Writing Center and was grounded in earlier findings and recommendations from various ad hoc committees on writing and an external review of our Writing Center. In the 2016-2017 academic year, the Committee on Educational Affairs created a Faculty Writing Group to discuss writing pedagogy. This group wrote in a 2017 report, “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.”

In spring 2021, the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement, Interim Director of the Writing Center, and Director of Institutional Research conducted six focus groups with a total of 35 students and three focus groups with a total of 10 faculty members to gather data about their experiences in teaching and learning writing skills at Williams. These focus groups revealed some lack of clarity around goals and expectations. On the faculty side, there was widespread acknowledgement that teaching writing is difficult and that many faculty are not trained in writing pedagogy.

This group’s next step was to try to determine whether there was a widespread problem with student writing. To this end, they worked with 11 faculty members on a pilot writing assessment project in summer 2021. They began by developing a rubric, designed to assess whether students were writing at a first-, second-, third-, or fourth-year college level. The categories the rubric used—argumentation, structure, style, grammar and mechanics, and overall—came from course catalog language describing the writing skills requirement: “The goal of this requirement is to improve student writing proficiency across
disciplines. Students in these courses will receive guidance on structure, style, argumentation, and other significant aspects of writing throughout the semester.”

Faculty members reviewed 66 student writing samples that students had submitted as part of their applications to work as writing tutors. Among the faculty, there was widespread surprise at the lack of errors in grammar and mechanics. (Facuity expressed that these papers did not represent what they typically see.) But faculty were dissatisfied with argumentation or description in many of the papers, as well as structural and style issues in almost every paper. However, faculty reviewing papers often came to very different conclusions about where each sample fell in each of the rubric’s rating categories. These findings support what students reported in focus groups—each faculty member has different expectations, desires, and reasons for grading as they do.

One of the most valuable aspects of this pilot writing assessment was the conversations it generated among faculty about teaching and assessment of writing. Faculty generally expressed interest in teaching argumentation and structure but thought that style, grammar, and mechanics should be taught elsewhere, early in students’ academic careers.

We’re in the midst of planning a follow-up writing assessment, but, due to staff turnover and complications created by long-term remote work, we’re at a critical junction where we need to also take a step back to examine our more general approach to assessing whether students are developing the general skills we expect them to as part of a Williams education.

We’ve made good progress in hiring a Senior Associate Dean to oversee academic support and enrichment programs and conducting a pilot writing assessment. The new Center for Teaching will also play a role in future assessment projects. However, this is a good moment to figure out how this all fits together with the work of the faculty Committee on Educational Affairs and what role IR will play in a more coordinated assessment agenda.

Among our faculty, there is still widespread skepticism about trying to assess student learning, and they have a good point: Quantifying learning gains can be extremely time consuming and difficult to do. Yet, asking a faculty member about what skills they’re teaching their students, or about what concerns they have about their students, generates rich and thoughtful discussions. Part of the work we still need to do is find ways to engage in assessment projects that faculty members see as helpful. We look to some of our liberal arts college peers—particularly our New England Assessment Support Network (NEASN) peers—for models of how to do this well, and we are confident that it can be done with the right people in place.

We expect faculty conversations around learning goals to continue into the fall as the Center for Teaching gets off the ground, and we hope to report continued progress and a more coordinated approach in our next comprehensive self study.
Diversifying Faculty and Academic Staff and Supporting a Diverse Student Body

Williams has continued to make progress in diversifying its faculty and academic staff in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. We include in this definition anyone classified as “Instruction, Research, or Public Service” and “Librarian” for Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reporting, since we don’t employ any staff we classify as instructional designers. Under that definition, 26% of full-time faculty and academic staff identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or more than one of these identities, up from 22% in 2017. By comparison, 28% of U.S. citizens and permanent residents earning Ph.D.s between 2016 and 2020 identified as one or more of these categories. While the percentage of female faculty and academic staff has not increased since 2017, that number is already close to 50%.

The processes put in place to diversify the faculty prior to our last report to NECHE have continued to pay off, but at the time of that report, we had just started implementing new staff hiring processes in the Office of Human Resources, and today the procedures look very different. We now require all hiring managers and search committee members to attend a mandatory implicit bias workshop before reviewing application materials. Human Resources has standardized interview procedures according to best practices: we encourage hiring managers to redact identifying information from application materials prior to review, and search committees ask standardized questions and use a rubric to evaluate applicants according to predefined criteria. The Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion also reviews the diversity of each applicant pool at various points and will intervene when the pool doesn’t reflect the kind of diversity we hope to achieve on campus.

Despite this progress, our ability to understand and talk about faculty and staff diversity is still quite limited, because we don’t have our enterprise data systems configured to store information other than race and ethnicity and binary gender. As discussed in the special emphasis on strategic planning and using data to inform decision-making, we have a lot of foundational data work to do. In spring 2022 we began a project to better coordinate and update student identity data, followed shortly thereafter by employee identity data. We know we need to have readily available data on how many community members identify as transgender or nonbinary. While we do collect this information for new employees, our enterprise data systems aren’t currently configured to store it or to allow employees to view or update their data.

It’s also important to note that as an institution with more than 1,000 faculty and staff across many different departments, diversity can look very different in different units. In order to better understand our workforce, we need to look more closely at diversity within various units. Unlike faculty searches, which all draw from a national or international pool, some of our staff searches draw from a more homogeneous local pool, so we need to think about staff diversity in that context. Our strategic plan sets the goal of having every unit on campus develop its own diversity, equity, and inclusion plans with the aim of creating a more welcoming campus for students and employees who decide to study and work at Williams.

As part of the strategic plan, we’ve also started to think about policies and community factors that impact faculty and staff retention or sense of belonging. Despite making progress in diversifying our academic and other non-instructional staff, pre-pandemic staff turnover (excluding retirements) averaged 4% over five years. During this period, the turnover rate was 3.7% for white employees and 10% for staff of color. While this may partially be due to the creation of junior positions as pipelines with the expectation of
higher turnover and other differences in the composition of the workforce, we need a better understanding of the reasons underlying these differences in employee turnover so that we can better address them.

With respect to supporting a more diverse student body, we will not go into great detail here because standard five describes in detail the modifications we’ve made to try to support all students, and the standard eight reflective essay talks about our efforts to assess how we’re doing. In addition, one of Williams’ biggest accomplishments in the past five years was making changes to financial aid calculations, with the goal of making Williams more affordable. Traditional financial aid formulas focus very heavily on income and much less on assets, advantaging those who have benefited from intergenerational wealth transfers. By moving to protect more of a family’s income in the formula, we’ve tried to address this issue. We’ve also moved toward greater transparency with academic units about the demographics of students who are majoring, concentrating, and taking their classes to make it easier for units to track their progress. The goal of supporting a more diverse student body across many dimensions was suffused throughout the strategic planning process, and while we acknowledge that there can be great resistance to change and that we still have a long way to go, we consider the priority of supporting a more diverse student body into all of our decision-making processes.
Standards

Standard 1: Mission and Purposes

As we move our strategic plan from ideas to action, Williams is well positioned to develop a durable and concise mission statement reflecting our values and our distinctive take on the liberal arts. Our goal is to refresh the current mission statement through a consultative process that respects shared governance.

In the meantime, the admission, college relations, and communications offices—the college’s major external-facing units—have developed a summary of the 2017 mission statement with the encouragement of the president. This version is intended to guide the ways we talk about Williams to our external audiences. It will likely become a resource for future work on the institutional mission statement.

Summary Statement

At Williams, we believe that the most versatile, practical, and enduring education we can offer students is a liberal arts education. We seek to inspire creativity and imagination, openness and empathy, intellectual curiosity and academic vigor, and self-reflection and awareness through the powerful combination of students learning and living together.

Here, students become partners in the process of discovery. Instead of merely consuming lessons, they learn to contribute to knowledge in an intimate, supportive environment, developing close intellectual and personal relationships with professors, peers, and mentors, learning from and with each other through free inquiry and the open exchange of ideas.

Together, we create pathways and opportunities, connecting our students to the region and the world—linking classroom and community, the individual and the public, and ideas and actions.

We also place great emphasis on the learning that takes place outside the classroom and encourage wide participation in and student authorship of our co-curriculum. Students strengthen mind, body, and spirit by participating in athletics, the arts, discussions and debates, volunteer service, and other opportunities and organizations.

In all we do, we aim to be an inclusive learning community in which all can thrive: students, faculty, and staff. Concern for and interest in the needs and ideas of other people are both educational and intellectual imperatives at Williams that our students carry with them throughout their lives. Our deep commitments to caring, collaboration, and dialogue across differences transform how we relate to one another and to the world around us.

We teach and learn this way because we believe that such holistic immersion prepares students to make deep connections between ideas and people. By cultivating within students both the wisdom and skills they will need to become responsible contributors to their communities, we aim to prepare our alumni to create opportunities for others through service and leadership in society at large and to lead fuller, more impactful lives.
Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation

Strategic Planning

As discussed in detail in the first of our special emphases, we’ve completed an extensive strategic planning process since our last full reaccreditation. Here is a link to the final version of the plan and to the landing page that archives the goals of the plan, the process we undertook, and the extensive campus communications we issued about the plan.

Institutional Research

Integral to our planning efforts is our small but highly productive Institutional Research (IR) office. The work of the IR office is peppered throughout this interim report, but it is worth noting that after many years as a two-person IR office we recently authorized an additional FTE for IR. This will help the office expand its capabilities and its support for departmental efforts to use data to better inform decisions. Separately but relatedly, the college has also authorized two new FTE for business information analysts (BIA). The BIAs will officially be a part of the Office of Information Technology but will add to the college’s ability to use data to enhance institutional effectiveness.

Covid-19 Emergency Financial Planning

In March 2020 we made the decision to transition to remote education in light of Covid-19. The immediate need was to ensure academic continuity and to deal with the logistics of the transition. Over the next two years, hundreds of people at Williams spent thousands of hours dealing with the operational challenges presented by the pandemic.

Covid-19 also triggered a second, parallel emergency financial-planning process. We put aside the just-completed budget and pulled together an ad hoc committee on financial planning to articulate principles, priorities, and recommendations to senior staff to guide the college’s response to the financial impact of Covid. Given the sharp decline in financial assets and spike in unemployment in the spring of 2020, we needed to prepare for the possibility that the outcome could mirror that of the 2008 financial crisis or worse—consequences like: impaired financial markets, decreased revenue from net tuition and gifts, and increased volatility. The pandemic added other shocks, including a campus closure, a distance-learning environment, an expensive Covid-testing regime, a significantly reduced summer program, and the possibility of an impaired fall 2020 semester.

We had to assume we’d be facing endowment losses up to 20%. Given that the endowment pays for 60% of everything we do, such an outcome would have grave consequences for the academic program. The ad hoc committee had to plan for the way we might cut spending in response to such an income shock. Members of the committee spent several months planning for the worst-case scenario, which fortunately never came.

By August 2020 the asset markets had recovered from their March lows and, until recently, have performed remarkably well. The college’s financial response, however, was not in vain. The reductions that we made in the college’s operating budgets freed up additional capacity that allowed us to reallocate resources to core strategic priorities, as markets—and the college’s financial position—improved. These resource reallocations included our commitments to access and affordability, academic initiatives, mental health, and sustainability. They also helped to position us to respond to the current economic challenge of
managing inflation, which has put pressure on almost all aspects of our operation, including compensation, food purchases, energy and utilities, and capital spending.

Campus Framework Plan

On the heels of completing the strategic plan we engaged design firm Sasaki Associates to help us establish a long-term vision for the physical campus—to ensure that our decisions about each marginal new building will contribute to a holistic vision of the campus. We are calling this our “campus framework plan.” Sasaki will develop the plan over approximately 20 months, and it will build upon our strategic planning initiative and serve as a tool through which we can optimize capital investments that reinforce our goals and support student success.

Climate Action Plan

We continue taking the necessary steps to achieve our climate goals enshrined in the strategic plan, including an ambitious target to reduce emissions from fossil fuel combustion by at least 80% by 2035. We are now in the early stages of developing an Energy and Carbon Master Plan, which will serve as the road map for sharply reducing campus carbon emissions and will be finalized in the 2022-2023 academic year.

Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) Strategic Plan

In 2019 the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) engaged in its own strategic planning exercise. The plan identified seven mission-critical areas of strength and potential:

1. Teaching and Learning with Art
2. Mining and Diversifying the Collection
3. Nurturing the Cross-Disciplinary Arts
4. Partnering across the Cultural Ecosystem
5. Influencing the Future of the Arts
6. Advancing Infrastructure and Sustainability
7. Exploring a New Home for the Museum

Each area is fully described in the plan itself. It is worth noting that the progress toward item number seven, which literally involves breaking new ground, is well underway. Plans are being developed to site, design, fundraise for, and build a new museum on campus.

Standard 3: Organization and Governance

Overall, the 2017 accreditation team was complimentary of the college’s governance structure, and the Strategic Planning Governance Working Group found that much was working well. Both entities identified areas that needed attention, which prompted exploration by administration leaders with faculty, staff, and student leaders.
Faculty

Two long-standing criticisms of Williams’ faculty governance system are that a) there are too many committees, and b) committee service is less effective, satisfying, and transparent than it should be. The Faculty Steering Committee conducted a review of our entire faculty committee structure. The committee facilitated a discussion about the results, which led to plans for a tighter model, focused on areas of the greatest faculty interest, authority, and expertise: curriculum, hiring, research, teaching, pedagogy, and academic advising.

As a result of this process, the faculty voted to disband a number of legacy committees and allow others to sunset at the end of their terms:

- The Chapin Library Committee and the Library Committee were collapsed into one committee.
- The Faculty Lecture Committee was combined with the Lecture Committee.
- The Honor Committee and the Discipline Committee have been formally merged into a single committee.
- The scope of the Committee on Undergraduate Life was streamlined, and it was renamed the Committee on Student Life.
- The Faculty Review Panel will now only be convened as needed.
- The work of the Bookstore Committee, an advisory group, will henceforth be handled by administrative staff members.
- The Information Technology Committee has been disbanded given the growth of professional services now available from the staff within the Office of Information Technology.

Faculty also voted to disband the Curricular Planning Committee (CPC), a decision that generated the most debate. An Ad Hoc committee on Staffing Decisions and Curriculum was then tasked with distributing the work of the CPC to other existing committees and advisory groups.

Other recent ad hoc committees explored the creation of the Center for Teaching, organized a faculty position statement on free expression and inclusion, and led a re-thinking of our Winter Study Program. This streamlined approach supports more targeted and efficient decision-making, and the faculty can now direct their attention to the topics of greatest concern.

Staff

While faculty governance is deeply woven into Williams’ organizational DNA, staff do not have an equivalent structure. This has fueled staff concerns about representation in decision-making and transparency. The Strategic Planning Governance Working Group urged college leadership to rethink staff governance in a way that would recognize the existing Staff Committee (an elected body previously focused on advocacy) as the representative body for all staff. The recommendation was to give the committee the autonomy to set its own agenda and charge it to appoint staff for seats on campus committees and advisory groups.

We have already taken steps in this direction: The president meets regularly with Staff Committee co-chairs twice a semester, and the committee is now in regular conversation with the Faculty Steering Committee on topics of shared interest. Most recently, the Staff Committee has also appointed staff members to several college hiring committees and the working group on remote and hybrid work.
Students

Student governance has evolved significantly since the last self-study and review. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year, College Council—the student government at the time—launched a process of rethinking the student governance system. The move was prompted by the student body’s vocal dissatisfaction with current governance, including concerns about very low voter turnout and the quality of representation. Ongoing disputes about College Council’s oversight and allocation of student organization funding brought the issue to a head.

Council leaders began the reconsideration of their role through a series of discussions with senior administrators and multiple campus-wide forums as well as internal discussions. Students engaged in an intensive Winter Study project to evaluate all aspects of the student governance system, working closely with the Dean of the College and Vice President for Campus Life. Council members also accepted the administration’s offer to fund an outside, independent consultant who then worked with College Council leaders to assess the situation and evaluate possible future governance models. At the conclusion of the process, the consultant tendered a proposal to fully restructure the system, with the proposal presented to the student body for a vote. The strong turnout overwhelmingly voted to support the new model, called the “Three Pillars.” This process has facilitated a complete, student-led overhaul of our student government system in a way that broadens participation and elevates a wider array of voices.

Senior Staff

The college is well served by the longstanding practice of convening a senior leadership team that combines the insight of faculty leaders with the expertise of professional administrators. During the past two decades, the number and functions of Senior Staff members have changed on the staff side. Most recently, the retirement of the Vice President for Campus Life opened an opportunity for the president and Board of Trustees to reorganize a number of reporting lines in ways that better reflect the way the college works: People and units involved in the student experience—both in and outside the classroom—were consolidated under the Dean of the College, while a number of operational units that previously reported to Campus Life, including Dining and Campus Safety, were moved under the Vice President for Finance and Operations, who already oversaw Facilities and other functions, thus fostering greater efficiencies among operational units.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has always prioritized governance best practices and continues to enhance its own effectiveness. It is through the work of the Executive Committee and the governance arm of the Nominations, Governance, and Degrees Committee that this work happens. The following outlines various changes to Board matters:

- The trustee term of service was shortened from a maximum of 12 years to a maximum of 10 years.
- The board created two new ad hoc committees that align with institutional priorities: sustainability; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The trustees have continued to explore the questions of optimal meeting frequency and content, considering what can be done remotely/virtually versus what can best be accomplished in person and on campus.
• The Executive Committee examined the process around trustee appointments and reappointments, including the identification and selection of trustees, and developed transparent communications about their decisions. Part of this review included a study of board size, which affirmed that the board is at its optimal size of 25 members.

• Led by the Committee on Nominations, Governance, and Degrees, the board revised its Committee and Committee Chair manuals and introduced required participation in state-initiated fiduciary training.

The board’s commitment to governance changes is fueled by an ongoing evaluation process, which happens through periodic surveying, along with committee and full board dialogue.

Standard 4: The Academic Program

Curricular Revisions

The faculty regularly engages in discussions about and reviews of the curriculum. Some of these discussions exist at the level of academic units, particularly at moments of self-study and external reviews; some rise to the level of committees with curricular oversight; and some generate proposals for changes that require a full faculty discussion and vote. Ultimately those changes are reflected in the curriculum presented annually by the Committee for Education Affairs (CEA) for discussion and vote at the March faculty meeting. Over the past five years, curricular revisions requiring a full faculty discussion and vote have been made in the following areas: departmental structure; requirements related to skills and competencies; divisional categories; and governance. This section describes some key changes made since our 2017 self-study, presenting them in the order in which they were implemented.

In fall 2017, the faculty voted to add two new departments to the curriculum: Africana Studies and Arabic Studies. Both had previously existed as curricular programs. In the case of Arabic Studies, the affiliated faculty proposed creating a stand-alone department from what had been a track in Comparative Literature. After receiving input from the Curricular Planning Committee (CPC) and the Committee on Appointments and Promotions (CAP), the CEA approved this proposal and submitted a motion to the faculty. The faculty approved the change in October 2017, and Arabic Studies became a department in the 2018-2019 academic year. Similarly, the Africana Studies faculty proposed changing Africana Studies from a program to a department. With review by and support from the CPC and the CAP, the CEA sent a motion to the faculty that was approved in December 2017. Like Arabic Studies, Africana Studies became a department in the 2018-2019 academic year. Both of these changes reflect the growth in student interest in these fields, the hiring of new faculty into those units, and the desire by both units to adopt a departmental governance structure.

In fall 2018, the faculty voted to change our Writing Intensive (WI) graduation requirement to a Writing Skills (WS) requirement, a change that went into effect in the 2019-2020 academic year. This change is subtle but important. The WI requirement was originally adopted by the faculty in 2002 with the goal of ensuring that all students would graduate with improved writing skills. In reviewing the success of the requirement, the CEA realized that the degree to which WI courses paid attention to student writing varied a great deal, with some courses primarily emphasizing a quantity of writing rather than quality. The CEA therefore decided to recast and rename the requirement to focus on its original purpose. As discussed in the special emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional level, the goal of the revised WS requirement is to improve student writing proficiency across disciplines. The primary function of the WS designation is to indicate that the course will provide consistent and ongoing
feedback on students’ writing. The amount of writing should be substantial and well spaced, followed by
timely evaluation and suggestions for improvement. Specifically, a WS course should require multiple
assignments, each returned with comments that address writing problems and strategies, as appropriate.
Because WS course instructors must pay attention to students’ writing skills as well as to their mastery of
the content of the course, WS courses have a maximum enrollment of 19. This change is one piece of a
larger college-wide conversation about the teaching of writing. As discussed in the special emphasis
section on assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional level, the Interim Director of
Writing Programs and the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement developed and led a pilot
program assessing the evaluation of writing and are currently working on designing follow-up
assessments.

In spring 2020, the faculty voted to move Psychology from Division II (Social Studies) to Division III
(Science and Mathematics), a change that was implemented in the 2021-2022 academic year. This shift
reflected the Psychology Department’s belief that the move would “result in a more accurate
representation of [its] departmental identity to students and faculty,” better reflecting the department’s
approach to the subject as a science and its emphasis on “systematic observation, careful
experimentation, and exact and quantitative reasoning, in order to equip students with factual and
methodological knowledge.”

In spring 2021, the faculty voted to replace the existing Asian Studies department with two new entities: a
Program in Asian Studies, centering on a concentration in Asian Studies and managed by a new Asian
Studies Advisory Committee; and a new Department of Asian Languages, Literatures, and Cultures,
which is now offering revised versions of the Chinese and Japanese majors and a new East Asian
Languages and Cultures major. This reconfiguration resulted from careful self-studies and external
reviews of the pre-existing Asian Studies department in 2017-2019. The newly configured offerings
provide greater intellectual focus, a more common academic experience for advanced students, and
enhanced inclusion of South Asian Studies.

Curricular Planning and Resource Allocation

As mentioned in standard three, in fall 2020, the faculty voted to dissolve the CPC. After five years of
work, the consensus was that the committee itself was not serving the identified need of long-term
curricular planning and that objective was better accomplished in two existing committees that oversee
the curriculum and the allocation of FTE. The faculty formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing
Decisions and Curriculum to do that rethinking and made several recommendations to the CAP and CEA,
which are under consideration. Faculty also decided that the data analysis project begun by the CPC could
be regularized and managed by IR. IR has since reproduced the most useful data visualizations from the
CPC’s annual report, showing each unit’s percentage of total enrollments and FTE over time, and moved
them into an online platform where they can easily be maintained and updated. The Office of the Dean of
the Faculty and IR have also begun creating new visualizations to help us better understand which units
rely most heavily on visitors and non-tenure-track faculty. Long-term curricular planning, and the best
way to accomplish that goal, remain central to conversations in various committees and in the Office of
the Dean of the Faculty.

A review of the curricular changes over the past five years shows an expansion in the following areas:
two new tenure lines focused on sustainability (one in Environmental Studies, and one in Geosciences);
three new lines in Computer Science (with two more coming in 2022-2023); one new line in Chemistry;
two new lines in Statistics; two new lines in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; one new line in
Looking Ahead

The strategic planning process also generated three key strategic academic initiatives that will have a long-term impact on the curriculum: technology and the liberal arts; the future of the arts; and global Williams. These initiatives, described below, are being led, developed, and implemented by faculty.

Technology and the Liberal Arts

This initiative is driven by faculty working together to: consider a program in data science and digital humanities; better 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; and consider 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.

Future of the Arts

This initiative focuses on campus-wide efforts to support interdisciplinarity, multimedia, and new media study of the arts; expand on the tradition of excellent arts programming led by faculty and Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) staff; optimize and reimagine our most prominent arts-related facilities, including WCMA and Lawrence Hall; coordinate scheduling and infrastructure across our arts programs on campus, as well as the region; recognize 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 partner 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

This initiative has articulated the following goals: Increase language opportunities for students through study away and summer language programs; coordinate 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; establish a global internship program aimed at fostering career opportunities abroad; create a signature, multi-year Global Scholars Program, 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 away options, among others; strengthen the international Williams community by encouraging further connections between Center of Development Economics students and the rest of campus, growing support for international students and further developing our international alumni network.
Other Plans

As the faculty and college develop these ambitious new initiatives, we are also paying close attention to the work we are already doing. While the pandemic has focused much of the faculty’s attention on the pedagogical changes required by the shift to remote and hybrid teaching, and then the shift back to in-person teaching, more intentional conversations continue about the ways our curriculum and pedagogy might and should change. For example, we continue to cycle through the schedule of self-studies and external reviews for all academic departments and programs, plus Physical Education (PE). We completed a dozen of these reviews over the last five years, even though the pandemic interrupted the anticipated rotation in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. To catch up, we now need to increase the annual pace. With more than 45 distinct units offering majors or concentrations, we need to average four to five external reviews annually. There are six scheduled for 2022-2023: Music; Political Science; Religion; Comparative Literature; Environmental Studies; and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

We are also reviewing other kinds of academic programs and policies. One notable example is a set of conversations about the function and purpose of Winter Study as it relates to goals of the college and of individual academic units. Those conversations began with the Winter Study Committee, then moved into a Winter Study Working Group—which developed a new Winter Study mission statement—and are continuing in an Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching and Learning in Winter Study.

Another example is the revised Difference, Power, & Equity (DPE) requirement, which was implemented five years ago. Courses that satisfy the DPE requirement include content that encourages students to confront and reflect on the operations of difference, power, and equity. They also provide students with critical tools they will need in order to be responsible agents of change. Employing a variety of pedagogical approaches and theoretical perspectives, DPE courses examine themes including but not limited to race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion. It is not easy to assess the efficacy of this requirement, but one way to understand the ways in which this requirement is woven through the entire curriculum is to note that, in a typical year, 110-120 DPE courses are offered; 30 units and 70-80 faculty offer DPE courses; and more than one-third of students take more than the one required DPE course before graduation.

The faculty has also been having an ongoing series of conversations about the role of pass/fail courses and has made a series of changes to the pass/fail policies. These changes include extending the deadline by which students need to decide whether to take a course pass/fail and allowing students to know what their grade would be before making that decision. These changes were proposed by the CEA and passed by faculty votes.

A final example of planning for change focuses on the PE curriculum. Passing a swim test or enrolling in a beginner’s swimming course has long been a degree requirement at Williams. We do not know exactly when or why this requirement was adopted, but justifications today tend to center on the prevention of drowning and learning an important life skill. While these are valid goals, some feel that passing a swim test or enrolling in a swimming course should not be a mandatory element of a liberal arts degree. Moreover, this degree requirement has a far greater impact on students of color and international students. For these reasons, at the May 2022 faculty meeting the faculty voted to eliminate this requirement. Beginner swimming will continue to be available like other PE offerings—as a voluntary option for those who wish to enroll.

We should note here that as discussed in the special emphasis section on assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional level, Williams currently lacks a formal approach to assessment of student
learning, but these examples illustrate that the faculty are constantly assessing our graduation requirements, considering what the goals of each are, and trying to discern whether or not students are achieving these goals.

**Standard 5: Students**

**Admission and Financial Aid**

**Pandemic Response**

In March 2020, just after we announced we were sending students off-campus, we immediately put a plan in place to pay for all financial aid recipients (including those studying away) to travel home or to other safe locations. We also paid out unearned work-study funds for the 2019-2020 academic year, later waived aided students’ summer earning expectations for 2020 and 2021, and waived term time work-study expectations for the 2020-2021 academic year, replacing those funds with grants that provided students with spending money during the academic year. In addition to cutting the cost of attendance for the 2020-2021 academic year by 15% on a one-time basis, which mostly helped students and families not receiving financial aid, we also reduced aided students’ parent contributions by 15%. We passed all Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) funds directly to aided students as three separate grants of $700, $700, and $1,700. Because international and undocumented students were not eligible for these grants, we used institutional funds to provide these students with similar grants. And, finally, we began reviewing all financial aid awards quarterly so that we could respond more nimbly to changes in families’ financial circumstances.

In admission, we adopted a very flexible gap year program for the students originally expected to enter in fall 2020 and fall 2021, giving them the opportunity to take a year or even two off before entering. Because of this we had more volatility in our enrollment than is typical. It was important to us that future applicants not be penalized by these changes, so we expanded the enrollment for the class of 2025. In early April 2020, when we realized that many students wouldn’t have access to standardized testing facilities, we announced a one-year break in our standardized testing requirement, which we later extended to three years (through the 2022-2023 admission cycle). While we knew that a test-optional policy would cause applications to increase, we didn’t anticipate the large increase in applications that actually occurred. (For the incoming Class of 2026, first-year applications were 57% higher than our pre-pandemic count.) This increase has presented a new host of challenges and opportunities to refine the admission process. Now that we have some academic outcome data from the first class to be admitted on a test-optional basis, we will work to evaluate that policy and whether we wish to extend it beyond the 2022-2023 admission cycle.

**Strategic Work**

We’ve spent a lot of time over the past five years working to understand the experience of our aided students on campus and how supported their families feel by the financial aid program. We looked at data from our most recent parent survey that asked, “What has been the impact on your family of paying for your child to attend Williams?” This revealed that more than half of families making $75,000 to $200,000 a year reported either a “considerable” or “severe” impact. This echoed feedback from students and data from focus groups with families of admitted students who chose not to attend and cited financial aid as a reason for their decision. We are in the extremely fortunate financial position that we’ve been able to
spend time over the past five years thinking about how we could invest additional resources in the financial aid program to try to relieve some of this pressure.

In fall 2020, we introduced what we call the Available Income Initiative, which arose from thorough research into our financial aid methodology. Williams has long employed Institutional Methodology, which was developed by the College Board and is used by most of our peer institutions to award financial aid. This methodology offers some flexibility in areas such as treatment of home equity, how cost of living is taken into account, and which expenses are included in calculating a family’s available income. When we looked closely at our formula, we identified some areas where we thought it wasn’t accurately taking into account the resources families need to live day-to-day, so we made some changes that protect more of the income that families earn each year.

In November 2021, we announced a new Summer Exploration Initiative, which eliminated the summer earnings requirement for all students on financial aid and replaced that money with grant funds. In the past, we typically asked students to contribute $1,700 of their summer earnings, which impacted choices they made about how to spend their summers.

In the past few years, we’ve also introduced a health insurance grant, so that any aided student who doesn’t have health insurance can opt in to the Williams health insurance plan and have the full cost of it covered by grant aid. Nearly three-quarters of our aided students now participate in this program, which costs about $2,500 per student per year.

In April 2022, the college announced that it would replace the work-study requirement and packaged loans with institutional grants, creating the nation’s first all-grant financial aid program. In addition to making the college more affordable, these changes will both simplify the financial aid process for families and allow students to pursue more opportunities during the academic year and in the summer.

Finally, we heard from many different areas of campus about a variety of emergency needs students were encountering and wanted to figure out a way to centralize resources and simplify the process for tapping into emergency funds. The Admission and Student Financial Services offices worked closely with the Office of the Dean of the College and the Director of Pathways for Inclusive Excellence to create a Critical Needs Fund, which covers everything from emergency travel home to see a sick family member to a new pair of eyeglasses.

Academic Resources, Student Services, and Residential Life

New Administrative Structure

Williams has transformed its student body to reflect its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, creating a broadly diverse community in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, ability, and socioeconomic status. The Williams community aims to be a learning community in which all members learn with and from each other inside and outside the classroom. To this end, the college used the following student learning goals as guides during strategic planning discussions throughout the fall of 2019:

- Community consciousness: the ability to listen actively, engage across differences, and seek out the beliefs that shape others’ lives.
- Personal effectiveness: the ability to engage in self-reflection, manage priorities, and build a collaborative team and ask for assistance.
- Attention to well-being: 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 while modeling ethical, caring behavior.

In order to capitalize on these learning goals, we used the retirement of the Vice President for Campus Life, as described in standard 3, to realign operations so that student life services are integrated fully with the Dean of the College’s area. The Dean of the College and Vice President for Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are now the two senior staff members (formerly three in 2017) who oversee academic support resources, student services, and residential life. The following sections describe how staff in these areas provide essential co-curricular and extracurricular programming for all Williams students. It should be emphasized that these programs are not done in silos—staff collaborate closely and regularly to ensure that every student has the resources to construct a deeply immersive, holistic, and personal education.

Academic Resources

The missions of Williams’ academic support programs are to ensure that students from varied levels of academic preparedness are on track in their courses and have opportunities to apply their classroom knowledge to real-world problems. In May 2019, the Dean of the College invited an external team from Middlebury, Smith, and Amherst colleges to review Williams’ academic support programs, designed to assist students to learn more effectively in their courses. At the time of the review, the following three programs were housed together in the student center: the Writing Center, Quantitative Skills Programs & Peer Support, and Accessible Education. Following the review, the academic support programs were reorganized. The Quantitative Skills Programs & Peer Support was split into two separate but closely linked programs, and the resulting three areas—Writing Center, Quantitative Skills Program, and Peer Support—moved to Sawyer Library (humanities and social sciences library), where they are now in close proximity to students as they do their coursework and research. In addition, the Dean of the College embedded Accessible Education (AE) in the Dean of Students Office so that deans and AE staff can work more closely together on individual student accommodations. Below are highlights of other programmatic changes in each area:

- The Writing Center offers the Writing Workshop, a one-on-one, drop-in peer tutoring program for students enrolled in all Williams courses, and the Writing Partners Program, which connects one peer writing tutor to a student for the entire semester. During the academic year, the director collaborates with faculty and staff to design workshops aimed at improving and facilitating the writing process (including thesis writing). During the summer and Winter Study, the director offers writing workshops in collaboration with OIDEI, the libraries, and deans. The director is currently leading a faculty-led writing assessment, which is explained in detail in the standard eight essay.
- The director of Quantitative Skills Programs trains peer tutors for courses in the sciences and the social sciences and meets with students who are having trouble with quantitative content. The director also oversees the Math & Science Resource Center and Economics Resource Center, which are drop-in, group, peer tutoring sessions for all introductory and core courses in the sciences and social sciences, respectively.
• Formerly Peer Support, the Peer Academic Support Network (PASN) is now a stand-alone entity that provides course-specific peer tutoring for students in all courses, including introductory language courses. The Writing Center director and Quantitative Skills Programs director work with the PASN coordinator to train peer tutors and help instructors find real-time help for their students.

• The Office of Accessible Education (AE) leads campus discourse on accessibility, ability, and disability. AE works with individual students on securing reasonable academic, housing, and dining accommodations. In February 2021, AE expanded as a result of the external review. The director recruited an assistant director—an expert in universal design, who is charged with facilitating student-faculty relationships.

Throughout their time at Williams, students have the opportunity to reinforce and expand classroom learning through the following academic opportunity programs:

• Pathways for Inclusive Excellence, a program within OIDEI, administers two summer programs—the Summer Science Program and the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences programs—for incoming students from underrepresented minority groups or who are first-generation college students—as well as three fellowship programs aimed at transforming and diversifying the academy—the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, the Allison Davis Research Fellowship, and the Public Humanities Fellowship.

• The Winter Study program is Williams’ signature program for students to explore, experiment with, and experience different ways of learning beyond the curriculum during winter term. 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. In fall 2021, the college updated the Winter Study Program mission statement to emphasize student exploration and experiential learning opportunities, including courses that teach well-being, mindfulness, health, and life planning.

• The International Education and Study Away Office provides travel and immersive cultural experiences for all students. Williams offers two of its own programs—the Williams Exeter Programme at Oxford and the Williams-Mystic Program (a partnership with the Mystic Seaport Museum)—and connects students to more than 200 approved domestic and international partner programs available in 65 countries. Despite the pandemic’s pervasive disruption of domestic and international travel, the number of students who plan to study away for fall 2022 has not dipped. Students who major in Economics, Computer Science, Mathematics, and English study away the most, and the most popular programs are the Williams Exeter Programme at Oxford, DIS Copenhagen, and the Budapest Semester in Mathematics.

• The Center for Learning in Action (CLiA) offers extensive experiential learning opportunities in service of the teaching goals of Williams faculty, the civic aspirations of Williams students, and the needs of the wider Berkshire community. In 2020, CLiA programming expanded to include more remote and hybrid opportunities, such as the virtual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, online hands-on science lessons for elementary students, video tutorials for the incarcerated, and a campus-wide student voting engagement initiative.

• The Fellowships Office helps students find opportunities to extend their learning outside the classroom and after graduation. This office works with undergraduates and alumni to prepare competitive applications for internal, national, and international fellowship opportunities. Since 2007, Williams has been a top producer of Fulbright Fellowships.

As mentioned in the special emphasis section on assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional level, the strategic planning process exposed a need to coalesce these co-curricular programs
around a single manager to make them more visible and accessible to students throughout the academic year. In fall 2020, the college hired its first Senior Associate Dean of Academic Engagement, who works to strengthen connections between these offices and other campus stakeholders, including the deans, faculty members, the libraries, and the Class of 1968 Center for Career Exploration. This new dean is also working with the First-Year Class Dean, the Sophomore Class Dean, and the Registrar’s Office to improve pre-major advising.

Student Services

In the fall of 2020, Williams moved to a class dean model, which streamlines and coordinates academic advising and resources to all four classes. Each dean partners with faculty advisers, instructors, and various staff across campus to connect students with appropriate resources in a timely and accessible manner.

- The First-Year Class Dean works with many campus partners (including chaplains, librarians, athletics staff, and staff in the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) on orientation, first-year programming, and first-year advising.
- The Sophomore Class Dean is also the dean for transfer students and veterans. While this group of students has some college experience, this class dean is essential in helping students navigate the major declaration process, encouraging consideration of study away, and building and sustaining robust yet individualized advising teams across multiple areas of the college.
- About a quarter of the junior class studies away, and the Junior Class Dean, in collaboration with the Director of International Education and Study Away, provides support for juniors on and off campus. The Junior Class Dean also encourages connections with the Class of 1968 Center for Career Exploration, the Fellowships Office, and CLiA.
- The Senior Class Dean works closely with the Career Exploration Center to help seniors graduate on time and begin their lives after Williams.

Williams Firsts is a program that helps first-generation students transition to and succeed at Williams and is directed by the Junior Class Dean, who partners with the Senior Class Dean and staff in OIDEI on program development. The Director of International Student Services serves as the dean for international students who may need assistance with navigating various visa processes as well as the social and cultural differences they encounter throughout their time at Williams. Both deans provide pre-orientation programs to help their cohorts learn how to navigate curricular and residential life at Williams.

The Senior Associate Dean of Students oversees the Class Deans (5.0 FTE) and the Office of Accessible Education (3.0 FTE). The dean leads weekly meetings with these staff to discuss students in need of academic support, oversees the support of students who are at risk for academic disruptions due to medical or psychological challenges, and holds monthly meetings with deans and staff in the following areas to coordinate support for students outside the classroom:

- Student Health and Wellness Services offers medical, psychotherapy, psychiatry, and on-call crisis services to all students. Williams’ Integrative Wellbeing Services (IWS) provides a holistic approach to mental health services and offers a full range of crisis and ongoing mental health and well-being services for all enrolled students.
- The Chaplains’ Office provides pastoral support for all students, faculty, and staff. The college has a full-time Protestant Chaplain, Jewish Chaplain, Catholic Chaplain, and Muslim Chaplain, increased from half time in summer 2021 in response to students concerns.
• In addition to Williams’ varsity teams, the departments of Physical Education, Athletics, and Recreation offer physical education and recreation classes that promote self-care and contribute to student physical, social, and emotional well-being. This department also created a Director for Intramural Sports to reinvigorate the college’s intramural options and programming.

• The Davis Center provides critical student support relevant to the experiences of historically marginalized or underrepresented communities. The Davis Center also advances broad campus engagement on issues of identity, history, and culture, and it promotes dialogue and programming related to access, equity, and inclusion. Two rotating faculty members (typically one from a STEM+ field) serve as Davis Fellows, working alongside the center’s staff to advance pedagogical and curricular initiatives that foster inclusion. In 2020 the college embarked on an ambitious building project to renovate and expand the three-building complex that currently houses the center, the Pathways for Inclusive Excellence, and several affinity student groups.

Like other colleges around the country, Williams has experienced a surge in demand for mental health services. Since 2017, IWS has more than doubled its capacity for ongoing in-house psychological care through strategic hiring of full-time therapists, primarily through a post-graduate training program. The clinical team grew from one staff therapist of color in 2017 to five full-time staff therapists of color in spring 2022 to align with the college’s diverse student population. IWS also expanded its administrative structure during this time, formalizing leadership roles in two key areas: Community Well-Being and Training, Education & Assessment.

In August 2019, Williams partnered with Talkspace (telemental health services) giving all students, including those studying away, year-round access to unlimited messaging therapy. Beginning in January 2020, the college expanded live video sessions and now offers 12-month access to live video psychotherapy and psychiatry prescriber services at no additional cost in addition to the full range of on-campus services through IWS.

In March 2020, as Covid-19 impacted colleges and universities across the country, IWS provided guidance and support to the entire Williams community by launching an online directory of resources organized around ChooseWell principles: self-compassion, rest, mindfulness, gratitude, meaning, connection, community, and growth. In fall 2021, student demand for mental health services exceeded the college’s capacity. The college acted swiftly and added a second contract psychiatrist and expanded contract therapy hours by 50 per week. As of March 2022, no student is on the waitlist for mental health services.

Residential Life

The Senior Associate Dean of Campus Life and team are responsible for Residential Life & Housing, Student Involvement & Events, and Campus Life Leadership & Support. The residential life system consists of a first-year program and an upper-class program, both enjoying robust and well-trained student leadership structures.

• The first-year program, overseen by the First-Year Class Dean, is run by student Junior Advisors (JAs) who help first-years connect to appropriate resources as they transition to college.

• The upper-class program, overseen by the Office of Residential Life & Housing, is led by Residential Life Teams consisting of Housing Coordinators (HC) (students who live in the halls), Residential Directors (RD) (students who support the HCs and live in residence within their campus sector), and one Faculty/Staff Program Adviser.
During the strategic planning process, members of the Residential Life Working Group heard from students and student leaders that it is problematic to rely on Campus Safety Services (CSS) for student wellness support in the evenings and during the weekends. The presence of a uniformed police-like entity within student residential spaces can result in significant anxiety and misunderstandings of CSS’ role at the college. During summer 2021, the college hired four student life professionals as Area Coordinators. These staff members work closely with student residential leaders and other professional staff members to develop community standards, enhance community building, resolve conflicts, and direct students to appropriate campus resources. The Area Coordinators are not designed to surveil students, rather they support, advise, and augment student leadership and make it easier for students and student leaders to work together to address low-level community issues. The goal is to increase student autonomy—with staff support—and reduce the need to involve CSS in residential life issues.

The strategic planning process also exposed the need to pilot theme/affinity/programmatic/special interest housing, known as TAPSI Housing. TAPSI housing provides students who share a particular programmatic or special interest to live together in an intentional community with shared values and goals, allowing these students more resources to explore their interests and share them with the larger Williams community. This type of housing serves to enrich the campus life of residents by providing educational, cultural, and social programming, thereby promoting additional opportunities for co-curricular learning.

Each TAPSI community has a Community Coordinator (similar to a House Coordinator) who liaises with the Area Coordinators, as well as one faculty adviser and one staff adviser. The program is optional for upper-class students; first-years cannot participate in this program. In summer 2021, the college invited students to apply for TAPSI Housing, and, in its inaugural year, students successfully proposed and developed the Sustainability Living Community, a house committed to environmental justice and sustainable practice. (This community will continue next year.) In addition, three new TAPSI houses are currently in development with a focus on international life, the Black student experience, and interfaith initiatives, respectively. The college will assess the benefits of these houses over time and work to ensure that these spaces remain fully inclusive rather than devolve into de facto fraternity or sorority-like spaces, which the college made clear over 50 years ago would no longer be part of its culture.

In February 2022, the college moved forward with providing compensation for student leaders (JAs, RDs, HCs, and TAPSI Coordinators) beginning in the next academic year. Compensation comes in the form of a fellowship stipend designed to reflect the ways in which these unique leadership positions offer students opportunities to learn and practice skills in community building, effective communication, finding commonality amidst difference, and effective use of campus resources.

Next Five Years

On July 1, 2022, a new faculty member will begin their three-year, renewable term as Dean of the College. Despite the change in leadership, the college will continue to build upon the significant strides it has made to streamline, coordinate, and revitalize co-curricular and extracurricular student programming. Specifically, over the next five years, the college will focus on:

- Well-being as a Competency: IWS is part of a campus-wide strategic planning initiative to establish well-being as a competency. Using four research-supported themes of meaning, connection, belonging, and contribution, the college is engaged in an interdepartmental planning process where faculty, staff, and students are working on ways to prioritize well-being alongside striving, competition, and achievement.
• Four-year Arc of Residential Education: The Residential Life team will continue strategic planning efforts to create a four-year arc of residential education that aligns a student’s developmental trajectory with the college’s shared learning goals (community consciousness, personal effectiveness, attention to well-being, and leadership).
• Student Success & Academic Engagement: The deans in collaboration with OIDEI, the Registrar’s Office, and Institutional Research will gather and review student usage data of the various academic support units to find ways for students to avail themselves of the various co-curricular and extra-curricular programs.

Standard 6: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

As always, the college has remained focused over the past five years on supporting the work of the faculty, both as teachers and as scholars. That work was particularly important during the pandemic. The faculty had to shift gears very quickly in spring 2020. Their students recessed for spring break and didn’t return for the second half of that semester. All classes went fully online and remote, some conducted live by video while others went asynchronous, and some students were sent lab or studio supplies by mail so that their experiential courses could carry on. The logistics were challenging, and the incremental time commitment was significant. But the faculty worked together to share ideas and to begin learning a new approach to teaching. The Office of Information Technology (OIT) facilitated that work in heroic fashion, offering training and workshops, supplying new software, and distributing new equipment wherever it was needed.

OIT then partnered with several librarians, instructional staff members, and faculty leaders in the summer of 2020 (and again in summer 2021) to offer a full program of strategies for hybrid and online teaching. Those strategies were not just about the tools and the mechanics of teaching via video but also about promoting active learning in a hybrid classroom, ensuring inclusive and accessible practices, and assessing student performance online. The team also offered strategies for establishing community and one-on-one connections in a distance-learning environment.

When students returned to Williamstown for the 2020-2021 academic year, the faculty were more fully prepared and ready to teach in a variety of ways, and they were given the choice of whether to conduct their classes in person or hybrid. Many chose the latter, not just out of concern for public health but also because they had grown comfortable with the new pedagogy. For the 2021-2022 academic year the college restored all classes to in-person instruction, quite a few in outdoor spaces, under tents and in the open. Many of the techniques, strategies, and tools adopted during the pandemic have proven effective and are still in use.

In addition to supporting new ways of teaching during the pandemic, it was also necessary to accommodate challenges to scholarly and creative pursuits. One of the biggest challenges was finding the time. The usual balance between teaching and research tipped much more heavily in the direction of teaching. Also, research travel was difficult or impossible for most of the last two years. In particular consideration of the untenured faculty, the Committee on Appointments and Promotions made several policy adjustments.

• Reappointment and tenure clocks: In April 2020, all assistant professors were given the option to pause their reappointment or tenure review clocks by one year. In March 2021, an additional year was offered, extending the normal tenure clock from six years to as many as eight. Likewise,
non-tenure line faculty with renewable contracts (lecturers, artists in residence, PE faculty) were given the option to delay their renewal reviews by up to two years.

- Leave schedules: In May 2020, faculty were invited to change the timing of anticipated leaves in 2020-2021, given the many obstacles to research efforts during the pandemic.

- Evaluation: Student course evaluation results from the 2020 spring semester were exempted from the official record for evaluation. In considering the course survey results from fall 2020 onward, as well as scholarly progress, all academic units were instructed to comment in their evaluations on the lasting impact of the pandemic on an assistant professor’s performance.

- Teaching release: In January 2021 the Winter Study term was canceled. Since all faculty were released from teaching that year, those scheduled to teach in January 2022 were also given a release. Moreover, all current assistant professors were released from Winter Study teaching obligations until the January after they submit their tenure packets.

- Research funding: In spring 2021, a one-time, $2,000 research stipend was awarded to all assistant professors to support their research and creative work.

Building the Faculty

As of spring 2022, the faculty comprises 272.50 FTE tenure-line faculty of which 159 (58%) are full professors and 37.50 (14%) are tenured associate professors. The remaining 76 (28%) are assistant professors. The ratio of tenured to tenure-eligible faculty now stands at 2.6:1, as compared to 2.3:1 in 2017. At that time we anticipated the ratio to move in the other direction, i.e., that a wave of junior faculty hires would outpace promotions, retirements, and resignations. But because of the pandemic we only hired four new assistant professors in 2021. Otherwise, we averaged 15.2 new hires each year since 2017, including a total of 68 new assistant professors. Over the same time period, 33 assistant professors were promoted to the rank of associate with tenure, three were denied tenure, and one was denied reappointment. Since 2017, we also had 34 retirements and 26 voluntary resignations.

In addition to the tenure-line ranks we have 34.5 FTE non-tenure-track academic faculty members (senior lecturers, lecturer, instructor, artists-in-residence), and another 37 FTE in the Department of Physical Education and Athletics. Finally, each year we host a significant number of short-term visitors, about 55 FTE per year for the past 5 years. These include dissertation and postdoctoral fellows, term appointees, leave replacements, and distinguished senior scholars.

Over the last two decades, with deliberate attention to recruitment, retention, and career development, the college has made significant gains in diversifying the faculty. Female-identifying professors now make up 47 percent of all tenure-line faculty, as compared with 33 percent in 1994, 38 percent in 2007, and 45 percent in 2017. Looking forward, the gender balance among assistant and associate professors, who represent the faculty for the coming decades, is 52% female and 48% male. (The college’s current tracking and reporting is restricted to binary gender identity, and we are working to remedy this constraint.) In terms of racial and ethnic diversity, faculty of color now make up 30 percent of the tenure-line faculty, as compared with 14 percent in 1996, 19 percent in 2006, and 24 percent in 2017. This trend toward an increasingly diverse faculty applies across almost all curricular areas, and in Athletics as well. Additional commentary about diversifying the faculty and academic staff can be found in the section on special emphases at the beginning of this report.
Faculty Development

A variety of new and expanded efforts to support faculty development in the areas of teaching, scholarship/creativity, and service are underway.

Teaching

Through the Strategic Planning Process, the college identified a need to offer more focused and coordinated support to help faculty at all stages in their careers develop their teaching. Most notably, and as mentioned elsewhere in this report, the college is moving forward with the plan to open a new Center for Teaching in time for the 2022-2023 academic year. The inaugural Faculty Director—a rotating position with a three-year term—has been appointed, as has a Senior Faculty Fellow, and the search for a full-time associate director and a part-time administrator will be launched in the summer of 2022.

We have also continued and expanded other kinds of support for faculty interested in developing their pedagogical approaches and teaching practices. For example, our First 3 program continues to provide a biweekly forum for faculty in their first three years at the college to discuss their work with students. We also continue to support Teachers’ Roundtables, which bring together faculty in groups of four for a round-robin schedule of class visits and lunch discussions about effective teaching practices. New programs include course-design workshops and teaching support groups offered by a local consultant, as well as workshops on inclusive and accessible teaching practices led by new staff members with expertise in those areas. A number of these efforts will be brought under the umbrella of the Center for Teaching when it opens this summer.

In the midst of these new and ongoing efforts, we discontinued the Design Thinking initiative as described in our 2017 self-study for accreditation. For three years (2017-2020), we employed a non-faculty fellow to work with faculty, students, and staff to incorporate Design Thinking into the curriculum and to enhance critical thinking and teamwork skills. During that time, this approach to problem-solving, critical discourse, and collaborative learning was successfully employed in a number of situations. For example, our PE department conducted their decennial self-study using Design Thinking principles. But the initiative did not gain broad traction among the faculty. Given the lack of interest, and because the program had always been envisioned as an experiment, it was phased out when the fellow’s contract expired.

Scholarship and Creativity

In terms of scholarship, the Grants Office has moved from the Office of College Relations to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty and has expanded to include a new Associate Director position focused on federal grants. This shift and expansion will allow the Grants Director and Associate Director to spend more time working directly with individual faculty and offering a range of workshops for particular cohorts. It will also provide, for the first time, more direct support in the complex process of applying for federal grants, particularly NSF and NIH grants.

The Office of the Dean of the Faculty has continued to offer a variety of programs to support publishing and scholarship, including sponsoring faculty interested in finding more public venues for their scholarship in the Op-Ed Project; sponsoring faculty who are working on book proposals in a course offered by Manuscript Works; supporting more faculty requests for developmental editing support; and expanding support for the the National Center for Faculty Diversity and Development’s Faculty Success
Program by paying the full cost of the program for pre-tenure faculty and half the cost for tenured faculty. As our faculty grows and becomes more diverse, and as the landscape of research and publishing opportunities evolves, faculty have different interests and needs, and the Office of the Dean of the Faculty is continuing to work closely with faculty to identify the kinds of support they would find most helpful.

Service

In terms of supporting faculty taking on leadership roles in their departments and at the college, the Office of the Dean of Faculty developed a series of chairs’ workshops on a variety of topics including evaluation and mentoring, conflict management, and budgeting. We have hired new consultants to support our efforts in hiring faculty as diverse as possible and have expanded those hiring workshops to include a more intentional focus on retention and mentoring. We have also sponsored a series of virtual workshops on mentoring offered by the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity.

Standard 7: Institutional Resources

Human Resources

Great Resignation

Like many colleges and universities at this moment in time, Williams is feeling the effects of the “Great Resignation.” Many long-serving faculty and staff members have reached retirement age (or beyond) and are choosing this moment to retire. We are feeling the effects of this especially in dining services, campus safety services, and the skilled trades (e.g., electricians, architectural, HVAC) where hundreds of years of combined institutional memory will leave us in the next few years. We are faced with the significant challenge of trying to document and transfer key information to the next generation of campus caretakers. The Office of Human Resources has been doing a tremendous amount of searching, hiring, and on-boarding of new employees.

Ombudsperson

One recent addition to the staff is the newly created position of Ombudsperson to serve as a resource for staff and faculty seeking neutral, informal, and confidential assistance with a wide variety of workplace issues and concerns. The Ombudsperson will provide guidance and improve the understanding of the college’s policies and procedures while also helping to create a fair, equitable, and respectful work environment for all faculty and staff. The half-time position, which reports to the president, will also support administrative and academic units seeking help with communication, conflict resolution, and interpersonal dynamics. Many faculty and staff have advocated for an Ombudsperson position at Williams, and we are excited to have taken this important step.

Remote and Flexible Work Policy

Covid-19 introduced a number of temporary changes to the nature of work at Williams. Most notably, a large number of administrative staff moved to full-time remote work in order to protect public health. Nearly all such employees have since returned to campus. However, the experience with remote work raised questions of whether Williams is best served by allowing alternative work arrangements in the future.
We formed a Working Group on Staff Remote and Flexible Work Arrangements, which was tasked with drafting a remote work policy in light of the questions raised and lessons learned during the pandemic.

The working group engaged with a broad range of campus constituents and considered the following:

- Does the current remote work policy serve the college and its diverse workforce well? If not, what changes could be made that would better address current needs?
- Would a change in approach strengthen or hamper our efforts to reach our longer-term goals for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; sustainability; and centering Williams as a residential learning community?
- If the college changed the remote work policy, what other changes would need to be considered as a consequence? In other words, are there particular structures or ways of organizing work that could allow for more flexibility without compromising the college’s core mission? Do we have the right human resource and other structures in place to support a more flexible workforce? If not, what changes would have to be made to support such a move? Are they advisable?
- Are there models from academic and non-academic institutions that are worth considering at this stage in the college’s history?

The working group produced a final report with recommendations. Broadly, it anticipates that future alternative work arrangements will fall into three broad categories: flextime, hybrid, and primarily remote work. The group’s recommendations will be implemented in three phases that will end in July 2023 and will culminate in an exercise in which we will collect feedback from all stakeholders and assess whether our mission has been supported by the new policy. We will also seek to assess whether the new policy has strengthened our commitments to DEI and sustainability.

Compensation Review

Williams has retained AIM HR Solutions to assist the college with a pay equity audit. The audit will:

- Analyze staff positions by gender for compliance with the Massachusetts Pay Equity Act.
- Analyze staff positions for any race and ethnicity-based disparities.
- Advise on reorganizing job responsibilities to ensure equal pay for equivalent work.
- Analyze current practices for starting pay, pay increases, promotions, and bonuses for gender bias and advise on policy and pay decision documentation.
- Advise on regular pay audit practice and policy.
- Advise on an evaluation process where we can equitably provide merit increases.

Financial Resources

Last year we invested $122,500 in each of our students, resulting in total expenditures of $240 million. 63% of that spending went toward compensating our employees. Maintaining our campus and repaying the debt that financed its construction consumed another 15% of the budget. The remaining 22% of the budget included everything that is neither a person nor a building, such as food, fuel, electricity, books, computers, and travel. Prudent fiscal management has allowed us to preserve the scope and quality of our educational programs, retain our faculty and staff, and sustain our fundamental commitment to financial aid.
Three primary revenue sources supply the funds required to educate our students. The largest source of funding is the endowment. Last year the endowment contributed $130 million, which covered 54% of the total cost of running the college. Families collectively paid $58 million. Annual giving is the third critical revenue source, contributing $41 million to Williams’ operating budget last year. The difference between the $122,500 that we spent on each student and the $63,200 that we charged for tuition and fees reflects the approximately $59,000 annual subsidy enjoyed by every full-pay student, thanks to the resources provided by endowment earnings and gifts. Half of our students receive additional grant aid, based on the ability of each family to pay. Our commitment to need-based aid explains why our actual net tuition revenue per student falls $31,800 short of full tuition and fees.

The $90,700 subsidy per student (equal to the difference between spending per student and revenue per student), multiplied by 2,000 students, leaves a $181 million annual gap. We rely on the endowment and donations to fill this gap; they provide nearly 70% of every dollar we spend.

To secure the college’s current level of excellence for future generations, we must maintain the real purchasing power of the endowment in perpetuity. Assuming that the Investment Office can, over the long run, earn 5% better than inflation, we must limit our annual spending from the endowment to 5% of its total value. Annual giving is the key to the financial puzzle, supporting not only the students of today by providing 17% of everything we invest in their education, but also the students of tomorrow, by ensuring that the endowment will be there for them, too.
Risk Modeling

Williams was fortunate to enter the pandemic in a position of financial strength, thanks to generous support from alumni, the careful stewardship of resources, and a prolonged economic expansion. Nonetheless, even institutions of extraordinary strength must be able to respond to radically changed circumstances.

The college spends time every year modeling and preparing for changes in economic circumstances. That exercise helps us ensure we have the capacity to respond to severe economic shocks while protecting core priorities, including our educational mission, access and affordability, and support for staff, faculty, and students. These models have also underscored the importance of acting promptly and deliberately, in order to avoid having to make larger adjustments down the road.

Investment Objective

The investment pool contributes financial support to both the present and future needs of the college as well as provides liquidity to meet campus needs on a timely basis. Our overall investment objective is to achieve the highest level of return compatible with our risk tolerance. Investment performance is measured by two integrated long-term objectives: 1) the stated return objective (5.5% real); and 2) the investment policy portfolio benchmark.
## Governance

The Investment Committee of the Board is responsible for setting asset allocation, investment policy, and the strategic direction of the Investment Pool. Further, the committee approves the operating budget and annual goals for the Investment Office and monitors its results to help ensure that policy objectives are being met.

## Impact Investing

We continue to pursue impact investments in companies, projects, or technologies focused on the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions. We pursue these investments in a manner that is consistent with our fiduciary duty to pursue the highest risk-adjusted returns. We made our first impact investment in fiscal year 2017 in a fund that provides debt financing to small- and mid-sized alternative energy projects in North America.

The Board of Trustees’ Investment Committee committed to no new investments in funds engaged in oil and gas extraction. Our remaining investments in current real asset funds will thus phase out over time, a process that we anticipate will be complete by 2033, once these partnerships are liquidated.

## Standard 9: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

Both the 2017 visiting team and the Strategic Planning Governance Working Group called for more robust campus communication and greater transparency in governance matters. That work is underway, with efforts to better educate our community about decision-making processes and standards and to provide accountability. The college regards these efforts not only as promoting awareness about college operations but fostering understanding, participation, and a shared sense of purpose. Following are a few of the early steps in this work:

- The president now sends out an all-campus email after each Board meeting, describing the major agenda topics, deliberations, and actions.

- The president, sometimes joined by other Senior Staff, now meets regularly with the leadership of the Williams Staff Committee and at least annually with the committee as a whole.

- The college has launched a new governance website that describes our governance philosophy and major governing bodies. The site also links to pages with information about all standing and ad hoc campus committees and advisory groups. Those committees and groups will be asked to
keep their membership and charge information updated, and to publicly post agendas from past meetings, to help make clear who is making particular decisions and how community members can provide input or ask questions.

- The college has created its first-ever campus communications and leadership communications plans, which lay out goals in the areas of outreach, inclusion, and transparency.

In addition, our strategic plan set goals with respect to transparency about who is on campus, transparency about environmental goals and tracking, transparency with employees about expectations, and financial transparency for donors. We believe we’ve made a lot of progress on this in the past five years, in that transparency in these specific areas and in general has been elevated as a goal. In many areas, the work that remains to be done is in developing processes to get information out to our community and the public in a timely manner. At the most basic level, in preparing for our last decennial review, we realized that no one office or individual was responsible for making sure all of our legally mandated public disclosures are up to date, so we’ve now developed an annual process for making sure all links are working and that information is current. We have a number of projects underway to improve our data infrastructure and processes so that we can deliver information more efficiently and be confident that that information is correct.

Standard 8 Reflective Essay: Educational Effectiveness

Assessment of Student Learning in Strategic Planning

One of the eight strategic planning working groups focused on student learning, and its work was the most exhaustive and holistic examination of student learning Williams had undertaken in many years. In addition to gathering data from Institutional Research, during the fall 2019 semester representatives of the Student Learning Working Group held 30 meetings with existing governance bodies and other interested parties, including the (now disbanded) CPC, CEA, the Diversity Action Research Team (DART), the Board of Trustees, the President’s Administrative Group, the Winter Study Committee, Academic Department and Program Chairs, the Student Leadership Roundtable, admission office staff, library staff, career center staff, and many others.

The group’s extensive outreach, and resulting qualitative data gathering, helped them to identify strategic goals and to recommend strategies to achieve those goals. We will briefly summarize each one.

Goal 1: Encourage Intellectual Breadth and Risk-Taking

The Student Learning Working Group’s campus conversations identified concerns that not all students view the college’s distributional requirements as an opportunity to explore the curriculum and diversify their education, instead treating them as a series of checkboxes and sometimes seeking out “low risk” or “low investment” courses to satisfy requirements. The working group also reviewed data showing how many students take the minimum number of courses required in each academic division. Division 3 (Sciences & Mathematics) is the area most avoided by Williams graduates. While most students exceed the three courses required, in recent years approximately one-third of graduates have taken only the minimum number of courses. Furthermore, the group noted that “a majority of students are using the same 20 to 30 courses to cover the divisional requirements.”
The working group reported that while Williams relies heavily on its divisional requirements to achieve educational breadth, they heard concerns that this alone doesn’t help students create a coherent or meaningful curriculum. To that end, they proposed the following strategies:

- The CEA should discuss what the college’s goals should be with respect to curricular breadth and consider more interconnected approaches used at other institutions like creating pathways, linked courses, or tagging courses with core competency designations.
- Consider incentivizing the design and implementation of courses to encourage students to be more intentional in their curricular choices.
- Provide faculty advisors with more guidance about how to encourage students to choose courses that together form a coherent whole.
- Consider adaptations to the pass-fail policy as a way to encourage students to pursue courses that may not “play to their known strengths.”

Goal 2: Position All Students for Academic Success

Williams has worked hard over the past two decades to attract a diverse student body and to meet every student’s financial needs. As discussed throughout this report, a central theme of our work, particularly in the past decade, has been building new structures to support this more representative student body. As the final report of the Student Learning Working Group says:

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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 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 working group’s recommendations for achieving this vision are to:

- Encourage departments to reimagine gateway courses to emphasize pedagogical strategies that are active, inclusive, and universal.
- Consider a broader range of pre-matriculation options in addition to the existing five-week Summer Science Program and Summer Humanities and Social Science Program.
- Consider expanding the writing curriculum and writing support
- Consider the implementation of a pre-matriculation writing assessment to identify students who would most benefit from writing courses taught by professionally trained writing instructors.
- Consider integrating more active and experiential learning into students’ first and second years.
- Consider more flexibility in academic policies, such as the rules around making up course deficiencies, possible credit for experiential work, and others.

Goal 3: Support Faculty and Staff in Their Roles as Educators

The Student Learning Working Group noted that the report from the visiting team after our 2017 review observed, “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.”

The working group report responds, “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.” Specific strategies the group recommended are to:
Students change majors for lots of reasons. As you made your decision, how important to you were each of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I need to get a better job in my major</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was undecided when I started college</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The introductory course(s) in my planned major turned me off the subject</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My grades in my planned major were not as good as I would have liked</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My major (or intended major) interests me more than my originally planned major</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the students in my major (or intended major)</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not as poor as I thought</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My planned major was too competitive or stressful</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
● 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.
● Promote in-house research and innovation and teaching.
● Promote effective use of technology in support of teaching and learning.
● Communicate staff expertise across the campus.
● Encourage all faculty to develop explicit learning goals for their courses.
● Consider establishing a Center for Teaching and Learning.

Goal 4: Take Advantage of Winter Study and Summers

Student Learning Working Group conversations revealed that while Williams’ three-week January term, referred to as the Winter Study Program (WSP), was originally conceived of as a way for faculty to experiment with different pedagogical approaches and a way for students to pursue wider interests with less stress and risk, many were concerned about whether it currently accomplishes these goals.

Similarly, while Williams has traditionally had a strong summer science research program and a handful of other programs, faculty and staff recognized that summers have become an increasingly important part of students’ undergraduate experiences and that Williams’ approach as a whole should be considered more carefully. Moreover, students have unequal access to meaningful summer experiences that can help them build their research capabilities, explore career options, or engage in other forms of experiential learning.

Strategies recommended to address these considerations are:

● Consider creating more WSP coursework that focuses on career exploration and preparation.
● Consider how to use the pre-matriculation period and/or first summer to develop academic skills (as discussed under goal #2).
● Consider expanding and developing WSP and summer co-curricular offerings that focus on life skills and professional development skills.
● Create a centralized repository with information about off-campus summer activities.
● Consider providing opportunities for reflection and integration of summer experiences into the academic year.

Together, all of these goals and recommended strategies lay out a very ambitious agenda for the future of student learning at Williams. While not all of these recommendations made it into the final strategic plan, some of them will inevitably resurface as we begin to operationalize it.

Student Learning Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan made the following recommendations, in alignment with the Student Learning Working Group’s recommendations around expanding summer and Winter Study opportunities:

● Focusing on year-round learning by thinking more intentionally about Winter Study and summers.
• Partnering with regional arts organizations to integrate the regional arts more fully with the student experience and to continue supporting a diverse and inclusive arts ecosystem in the Berkshires.
• Increasing language opportunities for students through study away and summer language programs.
• Creating a signature, multi-year Global Scholars Program that might integrate traditional semester courses, Winter Study, and study away opportunities.
• Ensuring that every student gains crucial experience in research, tutorials, engaged learning, study away, entrepreneurship, or other modes of experiential learning.
• Establishing civic engagement and contribution as a core value of our form of liberal arts education.
• Expanding opportunities for civic engagement during Winter Study and summers.
• Making career exploration an integral part of a Williams education.

Although the strategic plan did not explicitly address the working group’s recommendation that Williams encourage intellectual breadth, there are many ways in which these proposals might also have that effect.

The strategic plan directly addressed the working group’s recommendations for supporting faculty and staff in their roles as educators. As mentioned in special emphasis #1 (assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional level) the strategic plan proposed the creation of a Center for Teaching to help faculty realize their fullest potential as teachers and mentors. As discussed in the standard six narrative, we plan to open this center in the coming academic year. An ad hoc committee has drafted a mission, values, and vision statement for the center that centers support for inclusive and accessible teaching practices that serve all of our students.

The Student Learning Working Group’s recommendations around positioning all students for academic success are reflected in many areas across the strategic plan as well. As mentioned in special emphasis #1, the plan deepened the institution’s commitment to providing academic support resources. The Dean of the College’s office is already beginning to operationalize this commitment, as discussed extensively in standard five. We’ve also begun conversations about ongoing assessment of our reorganized programming in terms of who it’s serving and how well it’s accomplishing its goals.

The strategic plan also made a firm commitment to improving access and affordability by expanding opportunities for aided students to fully participate in summer and Winter Study programs. These include faculty-led curricular and co-curricular activities, research opportunities, academic fellowships, and summer internships. At the time the plan was published, Williams had already waived the summer earnings requirements for one year, requiring students to contribute earnings from only three of their four summers. As mentioned in the standard five narrative, starting with the 2022-2023 academic year, we’ll no longer require aided students to contribute any of their summer earnings. While not directly related to student learning, this policy change grew out of the recognition that summer experiences have become increasingly important for gaining work or research experience and that the need to earn a certain amount of money (over and above their living expenses) was limiting some students’ opportunities.

Another substantial focus of the strategic plan was co-curricular learning and student well-being. In accordance with the focus on year-round and more hands-on learning, the plan states, “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.” The plan goes on to propose the
goals mentioned in standard five: community consciousness, personal effectiveness, attention to well-being, and leadership.

In order to accomplish this, the plan states that 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.
- 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 summary, the plan concludes, “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.”

Follow-Up From Strategic Planning

We’ve already mentioned elsewhere much of the follow-up work coming out of strategic planning: the Center for Teaching, work on writing assessments, curricular changes proposed by various academic units, considering new summer bridge programs, and reconsideration of the role Winter Study plays in the curriculum. The faculty has begun having discussions about whether or not courses fulfilling distributional requirements should be eligible to be taken pass/fail, as recommended by the Student Learning Working Group. Recent faculty meeting discussions about the issue revealed concerns that this would allow students to achieve less breadth by not engaging fully. The Curricular Planning Committee and Institutional Research are tentatively planning an analysis to try to understand how many students seek out “easy” courses to fulfill their distributional requirements and how many seem to be challenging themselves more.

In all of the work we have on our agenda coming out of strategic planning, we will be looking for ways to understand whether or not new policies and programs are achieving their intended goals. In some cases, this will be through focus groups, informal discussions, or surveys. In other cases we’ll need to collect new behavioral data to try to understand the student experience more fully. In short, we have a lot of assessment work ahead of us that needs to start with conversations about how to organize and prioritize this work. In the next section, we’ll discuss the types of assessment work we’ve been engaging in for many years and how that work has evolved.

Assessing Support of a Diverse Student Body

Since 2008, Williams has had a faculty/staff committee called the Diversity Action Research Team (DART), which uses data to better understand emerging issues of diversity and inclusion. It is the only committee at Williams where there is a specific focus on data, and DART has always had at least one member of the institutional research staff among its membership.
As discussed in our last interim report, DART developed Thriving metrics, later renamed the Diversity Equity and Inclusion metrics (DEI metrics), which look at 13 key indicators, broken down by different factors.

The metrics considered are:

A. Admission reader rating  
B. Four- and six-year graduation rates  
C. GPA at graduation  
D. Who is doing a senior thesis  
E. Who is majoring in each of the three academic divisions  
F. Who serves as Junior Advisors  
G. Study away participation  
H. Participation in varsity athletics  
I. Who takes tutorials

And responses to the following survey questions:

J. Would you encourage a high school senior who resembles you when you were a high school senior (same background, ability, interests, and temperament) to attend Williams?  
K. How many faculty members know you well enough to provide a professional recommendation concerning your qualifications for a job or advanced degree work?  
L. During the current school year, have you ever felt overwhelmed by all you had to do?

These are all broken down by race and ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, family income quintile, participation in the summer bridge programs for incoming students, and race and athletic participation status and are tracked longitudinally. Although a helpful starting point, some shortcomings of the DEI metrics are that they produce an overwhelming amount of information and look at many bivariate relationships without considering the interaction of some of the factors. It can also be tempting to infer causality when looking at graphs that show big differences in behavior by group, when in fact there are other, more influential, omitted variables. For example, for several of the measures of academic engagement, such as taking a tutorial (I), doing a thesis (D), or knowing faculty members well enough to ask them for a recommendation (K), the biggest predictor is actually GPA. Nonetheless, over the years, the DEI metrics have served as a good way to spark conversations and identify areas that may need a closer look.

After observing that there were quite a few differences between groups in measures of academic engagement, DART moved on to the next logical question: What can we do about it? Often these challenges are some of the most intractable at institutions like Williams with history, institutional structures, and traditions that can perpetuate barriers to full inclusion. As a result of this, the DART Enrollment Project was created. DART began a pilot of the Enrollment Project in fall 2015. Members of DART reached out to a few academic units whose curricula are sequential to find out the typical course sequence of majors in their unit. Institutional Research then developed graphs to look at how student diversity might change from one point in the sequence to another. Next, the chair of DART, an Associate Dean, and the Director of Institutional Research attended a department meeting to present the data and discuss the following questions:

- Has your department ever discussed diversity goals? If so, do you have areas of agreement? What are they?
● What challenges do you see facing your department as you think about how to achieve diversity goals?
● What, if any, strategies have you adopted with the goal of increasing the gender/racial/other diversity of students in your courses/major? How do you think these strategies have been working?
● What academic support is available for students in your classes? Do you have a sense of how widely the support is used? Would you like more/different kinds of support?
● When you need to limit enrollments in certain courses, how do you make these choices?
● What might give a student some form of distinction visibility in your department (e.g., majors committee, Honors, Class of ’60s Scholars group, RAs, TAs)? How do you select students for these different roles?

These conversations have helped to surface some departmental climate issues and also often helped DART to compile a list of best practices that could be shared with other academic units. Eventually the Office of the Dean of the Faculty incorporated some of these questions into the guidelines provided to academic units undergoing decennial reviews.

While the DART Enrollment Project continues on and tries to incrementally improve the data available to academic units, we’ve begun to consider ways to better reach all academic units. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the units that reach out to DART to learn more about their diversity are already among the most diverse. As mentioned previously, the strategic plan made a commitment to developing DEI plans for all units, both administrative and academic. This has led to more conversations about academic units’ access to data. We have tended to take a rather conservative approach to sharing any student identity data, but as the demand for data and transparency around what we’re doing with data have increased, we’ve begun to reconsider some of these policies.

The Office of the Dean of the Faculty, the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, DART, and Institutional Research are currently developing a dashboard for academic unit chairs with some basic information about their units, such as enrollment, major, and FTE counts over time, as well as data on the representation of their majors and students enrolled in their courses. The following figure is an example of some of the information we’ll be providing to all academic units.
Demographics of All Graduates (g) vs General Studies (x) majors - Classes of 2017-2021
Total General Studies majors: 139

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of all graduates in this group</th>
<th>% of GENS majors in this group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We’ve also started working on developing similar visualizations using peer comparisons (see the series E forms). While the information we’ll provide to units through the dashboard is fairly basic, we hope that it will help to start more conversations about why there are group differences in particular majors and how those differences might be addressed.

Curricular patterns are only one small aspect of supporting a diverse student population, and DART has taken on other topics in recent years, including mental health, campus issues faced by men of color, an examination of diversity and athletics, and the college’s requirement that all first-year students either pass a swim test or take a beginning swim course as part of their PE requirements.

The strategic plan also recommended that the college “streamline the collection and use of data for faculty, students, and staff to encourage more effective and transparent communication about who is on campus.” As mentioned previously, we’re beginning work on a project to better collect, manage, and maintain race and ethnicity data and to collect and maintain more nuanced data on gender identity. Although data collection and maintenance in our enterprise software can feel quite removed from our core educational mission, it’s critical that we’re able to answer questions about campus identities efficiently and accurately, and it’s a necessary prerequisite for assessing effectiveness of many different programs.
Retention, Graduation Rates, and Enrollment Patterns

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the story of Williams’ graduation rates was unchanged from 2017. While graduation rates remained very high overall, they had declined slightly, mostly due to increases in voluntary student leaves. The start of the pandemic had little effect on the graduation rate for the fall 2016 cohort (expected to graduate in 2020) but a dramatic effect on the graduation rate for the fall 2017 and 2018 cohorts, due largely to students choosing to sit out all or part of the 2020-2021 academic year by taking leaves. Fortunately, the 5-year graduation rate for the fall 2017 cohort rebounded to 95%, surpassing expectations. We expect to see similar patterns for at least the next couple of years as students who took leaves in the 2020-2021 academic year finish up their degrees.

While the pandemic’s sharp effects on graduation and retention rates were temporary, it has already proven to have lasting effects on student mental health and academic performance. Although still anecdotal at this point, reports from faculty teaching during the 2021-2022 academic year show that some students are struggling. It remains to be seen whether these struggles are the result of insufficient high school (and college) preparatory work due to the pandemic, ongoing mental health struggles resulting from the pandemic, or a combination of the two. We have plans to conduct a series of faculty interviews in fall 2022 to better understand the sources of struggle and what support might be put in place to help.

Between spring 2020 and fall 2021, we temporarily changed a number of academic policies and requirements in an attempt to better support students (and to accommodate other pandemic-related concerns), including canceling the 2021 Winter Study term and allowing students to take any eligible course on a pass/fail basis. One of the unforeseen effects of a liberal pass/fail policy has been exposing a
weakness in our systems for identifying students who are struggling academically. Even prior to the pandemic, as grade inflation had become a topic of concern and discussion, the Dean of the College’s office started the work of identifying students who were meeting minimum standards but who may need extra help. This work continues in earnest, as Institutional Research is working with various groups to explore and define other metrics that might better help identify those students.

What Students Gain as a Result of Their Education

While self-reported learning gains aren’t always the most reliable indicator of student learning, we still find them useful and informative. We benefit from a consortium of institutions that coordinate a suite of shared surveys that are regularly administered to students for timely consideration of their experiences. Results from these surveys provide information on trends and enable useful comparisons to peer institutions with similar student populations and experiences. Recognizing that our graduates’ perspectives evolve over time—as life experience affords context and time for reflection—we also survey our alumni. Our alumni surveys gather helpful feedback and allow us to see how attitudes about Williams might shift after graduation.

The Senior Survey

In five of the past eight years we surveyed our graduating seniors in their respective spring terms. Across those five graduating classes the overwhelming majority of students report being satisfied on some of our most broad and high-level measures. Specifically, they are “generally satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their:

- Overall undergraduate education (88% and higher, in each year of the survey).
- Overall quality of instruction (96% and higher).
- Satisfaction with the level of intellectual excitement on campus (93% and higher).

It is reassuring to see high satisfaction levels sustained across the better part of a decade, but satisfaction is not the same as educational gain. That said, we do know satisfaction consistently and significantly correlates with other survey questions that do measure educational gains.

One such question asks them to indicate how much Williams has “contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development” across 26 items. The following figure summarizes the results from the 2018 survey, the most recent survey completed before the onset of the pandemic. For 23 of these components, more than 60% of respondents indicate Williams contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to their development in a variety of areas, including “leadership skills,” “identifying moral and ethical issues,” and “understanding the complexity of social problems.”
Williams contributed the least to “reading or speaking a foreign language” according to this survey. Half of respondents chose “very little or none” for that item, but as Williams does not require students to take foreign language courses, the low score is unsurprising. More concerning are the relatively large proportions indicating Williams contributed only “some” or less to their “career- or work-related knowledge and skills” or to their “[ability to] develop self-esteem/self-confidence.”

It is fitting that just a short time after the results of this survey were available, Williams rebranded its career center as The ’68 Center for Career Exploration to better support our students in their preparation for employment. In 2019, and as previously mentioned, we also partnered with The Jed Foundation to improve how we support the mental health of our students across a variety of factors, including promoting self-esteem and self-confidence, while also investing significantly in mental health resources.
In addition to considering each item of this question independently, we also consider them in aggregate using factor analysis. This approach considers the design of the survey question along with how answers from each item correlate with one another and then groups certain items together based on those relationships. We utilized a similar approach in our 2012 interim report, following a framework outlined by Colby College. In this iteration, we concluded 13 of the “skills, knowledge, and abilities” did represent four distinct categories as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Liberal Arts Academic Ideals</th>
<th>Scientific Understanding and Facility</th>
<th>Aesthetic and Ethical Awareness</th>
<th>Interpersonal Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating original ideas and solutions</td>
<td>Understanding and using quantitative reasoning and methods</td>
<td>Placing current problems in historical/cultural/philosophical perspective</td>
<td>Functioning effectively as a member of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing clearly and effectively</td>
<td>Understanding the process of science and experimentation</td>
<td>Critical appreciation of art, music, literature, and drama</td>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating well orally</td>
<td>Career- or work-related knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Reading or speaking a foreign language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically</td>
<td>In-depth knowledge of a field or discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mean: 3.36; Std: 0.55 | Mean: 2.80; Std: 0.79 | Mean: 2.77; Std: 0.73 | Mean: 3.11; Std: 0.81 |

The bottom row of this table displays the average and standard deviation of the combined items in that group. An average score of 3 on this question aligns with students’ indication that Williams contributed “quite a bit” to their experience. It is encouraging to see the largest average contribution appears in the “traditional liberal arts academic ideals,” followed by those of “interpersonal skills.” Together, those two categories best align with the general, broad mission of a liberal arts education. The other two categories, “scientific understanding and facility” paired with “aesthetic and ethical awareness,” better correlate with gains in specific skills and abilities.

We issued this survey to seniors in 2020 and 2021 but removed several of the long-standing survey questions and added some newly formulated questions in response to the pandemic. Since our response rates on those two surveys were significantly lower than in previous years, the analysis focuses on the 2018 iteration. However, it is worth noting that the items that did persist across iterations had remarkably similar averages.
Alumni Survey

As mentioned in the beginning of this report, the strategic plan includes several goals, including “broadening alumni engagement in response to an increasingly diverse alumni population,” and clarifying and improving our “commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility … includ[ing] emphasis on global perspective and support.” With these in mind, our Office of Alumni Relations partnered with the Executive Committee of the Williams Society of Alumni (SOA) and an outside vendor to design and analyze a survey for the entire alumni body. The primary goal was to gather feedback from former students on how Williams successfully supported its students and alumni but more importantly to better understand where to dedicate resources for improvement.

When asked “How important is it to you that you are a Williams alum?” 78% of the more than 4,800 respondents indicated it was important, with 47% claiming it was “very important.” Eighty-three percent of respondents indicated they were “very satisfied” with their undergraduate education, while 86% reported having made a financial gift, and 72% said they visit campus at least every five years. These answers represent only a few of the areas where our alumni body indicate a clear and strong appreciation for Williams, but it is essential to consider how different groups answered the same questions to be able to improve our approach to supporting diversity and reinforcing a global mindset. Respondents who self-identify as alumni of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and/or those who graduated in 2000 or later all report lower levels of satisfaction with their undergraduate experience than traditionally non-marginalized groups of alumni. While 5% of all respondents report never returning to campus after graduation, more than 10% of the LGBTQ+ alumni, as well as alumni of color, fall into this category. The SOA presents three overarching pillars in its approach to supporting alumni (to be global, inclusive, and relevant), and while 66% agree with these pillars in principle, only 25% agree that Williams currently delivers them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, alumni who graduated in 2000 or later, alumni of color, alumni who identify as female, and alumni who identify as LGBTQ+ all are less likely to agree that the pillars are currently being delivered and simultaneously are more likely to support them in principle.

Williams boasts a nationally recognized alumni body with remarkably high levels of alumni participation and support for the institution. Eighty-five percent of alumni report their undergraduate experience plays an important role in contributing to their life, and 97% are either satisfied or very satisfied with their undergraduate education. But such positive sentiment runs unevenly among many of the historically marginalized populations in our alumni body, exposing rifts where the undergraduate experience leads to uneven satisfaction and gains in education. By including the alumni body directly in the strategic planning process, Williams is benefitting from the wisdom of its past students and improving the experience and educational gains for those to come.

Everything Gained From a Liberal Arts Education

For five consecutive years, among bachelor’s degree granting institutions, Williams has been one of the top 10 producers of Fulbright Scholars, the “U.S. government’s flagship international educational and cultural exchange program.” In addition, at least 94% of our students regularly graduate within six years, and our graduates leave with among the least debt of liberal arts institutions in the country. In our most recent longitudinal alumni survey, 81% indicated they had “enrolled or completed a higher degree” within 10 years of graduation. Forty percent of our graduates achieve a median income in the top 10% by adulthood (age 34), according to a 2017 study. Such direct measures might be informative, but they are incomplete in explaining what students gain. By definition, a liberal arts education is broad in scope and consequently difficult to concisely define or quantitatively measure. For example, that same 2017 study also ranks Williams 49th (out of 64 elite schools) in our probability to increase the earnings of graduates
by the time they reach adulthood. Success, for a liberal arts graduate, is a relative term and unique to the individual seeking it. By continuously reevaluating our approach to the overall undergraduate experience, Williams strives to provide the resources and experiences necessary to maximize the likelihood our students will be successful, however they define success.

Institutional Plans

Our strategic plan lays out a very ambitious agenda that will take more than five years to accomplish. Here are some key initiatives from the plan, all discussed earlier in this report, on which we expect to make significant progress in the next five years.

New Art Museum and Integrative Arts Plans

In October 2021, the Board of Trustees voted to move into the design phase for a new Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) facility. Plans for a new museum building have been many years in the making and are rooted in our commitment to placing learning with objects at the center of a liberal arts education and in our vision for WCMA to grow and thrive as a leader and innovator among college art museums. The decision to move forward now is driven by practical and pressing needs related to the care and display of a global collection as well as to the care of visiting public and campus audiences through greater accessibility and other accommodations not possible in the current facilities.

The new museum grows out of our commitment to the arts. Each year, faculty, students, and museum staff incorporate our collections into dozens of courses, including art history, anthropology, biology, environmental studies, and mathematics, while our curators mount exhibitions that engage campus and diverse public audiences. The new museum’s educational and exhibition spaces will open up new possibilities for our work with campus and community. In the process they’ll also create further opportunities for collaboration with the thriving arts community of the northern Berkshires. We envision this project as far more than a building—it’s the next step in Williams’ commitment to the vibrancy, relevance, and educational importance of the arts.

The building project will proceed on a timeline aligning with WCMA’s centennial year of 2026-2027. We will design the new museum with students in mind, fostering a sense of belonging for campus members and the wider community and an inclusive experience for all visitors. The building will offer substantial gallery space for showing more of the 15,000 works in the museum’s collection, as well as facilities for easy access to collections for student, faculty, and visiting scholar requests. It will also feature more object study classrooms, accommodating an enthusiasm for teaching and learning with objects that currently exceeds the capacity of the museum’s Rose Study Gallery. Sustainability will be a driving force in all of the design and operations decisions.

Data Science and Digital Humanities

We’ve identified considerable interest in creating programs in data science and digital humanities. This interest comes both from faculty, who recognize the relevance of these topics to today’s world and see an opportunity to leverage existing faculty strengths, and also from students, who want to acquire more knowledge in these areas. One of the challenges of building programs in areas where there is already considerable student interest is that units like Computer Science and Statistics are already seeing unprecedented growth. For this reason, the near-term work toward building this curricular component will
be on infrastructure and people. We’ve already started growing staffing in Computer Science and Statistics and plan to work more on making sure these units have the spaces they need and the right faculty in place. While this is happening, faculty will work to develop a proposal for a new academic program, which will be brought to all faculty for a vote.

Global Scholars Program

As mentioned in the standard 4 narrative, we’ve already started planning for the creation of a Global Scholars Program that will be a signature initiative at Williams, akin to the tutorial program. It will be a multi-year program, integrating traditional courses, Winter Study, and study away. Our vision is that students will be selected during the spring semester of their first year. Over the summer, students will have assigned reading related to the overarching theme for the year. Sophomore year will be the core of the experience, including regular meetings in the fall and a choice of two international trips—each relating to a particular theme—during Winter Study. Students will then take a required interdisciplinary course in spring of their sophomore year. The following summer, they will have the opportunity to return to the culture they visited during Winter Study, followed by optional study away for one or two semesters in their junior year. In their senior year they will participate in a series of colloquia on their class year’s international topic and will mentor the new class of sophomore Global Scholars.

Clearly such a program requires significant funding and collaboration between many academic units and administrative offices. Academically and administratively, the Global Scholars Program will be based in the Center for Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, together with Global Studies, and it will involve collaboration with International Education and Study Away, the Winter Study Program, the Office of Fellowships, the Center for Learning in Action, and many academic units. We’re already proceeding toward these goals and expect to make significant progress in the next five years.

Center for Teaching

We’ve discussed the new Center for Teaching extensively throughout this report. We’ve appointed a faculty director and senior faculty fellow and are preparing to launch the search for an associate director and part time administrator in summer 2022. The center will open during the 2022-2023 academic year. In subsequent years, we will work to develop programming, measure engagement, and assess the effectiveness of different efforts as the center grows.

Davis Center Initiative

Despite its success at diversifying the student body, Williams has not always been equally successful at creating conditions where everyone can thrive. We continue to work on creating the infrastructure to support every student who enrolls. For students who come from backgrounds that are the most different from Williams, the Davis Center (formerly the Multicultural Center) often serves as a crucial bridge to a sense of belonging in two important ways: first by investing in cohort-building programs that support collective student success; and second by creating equitable student success programs and pathway programs to guide students throughout their academic experience. Much academic research points to the fact that students are more likely to succeed in college when they move through as a cohort. The Davis Center fosters subcommunities within the wider Williams community to ensure that students thrive while on campus, and it does so by helping students find connections with other students who come from similar backgrounds, identities, and communities.
The Davis Center is also a resource on campus for learning to talk across differences. It facilitates conversations about important topics, including race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and many other complex issues. In doing so, it often raises the “third rail” issues that make us all uncomfortable, which means it’s also supporting students in learning how to engage in the most uncomfortable conversations—and how to do so successfully. This works because students grow to know each other well, to respect each other, and to trust each other, the key attributes required to successfully engage in difficult conversations.

The physical space of the Davis Center is currently spread across three buildings, all in need of refurbishment or renovation. The new Davis Center will offer students a modern space to feel safe and be comfortable—a place to connect with Davis Center staff and Community Engagement Fellows, cook a group meal, watch a movie, or plan for and host campus awareness campaigns, lectures, conversations, film series, and more.

We plan to increase our ability to develop the Davis Center’s programming by investing in and growing it. We will bring students, faculty, and staff together in a dedicated space that symbolizes the college’s commitment to and progress toward a fully inclusive community. Like the new museum project, this is not simply a building project but one part of a larger investment into a critical institutional priority. The physical renovation began seven months ago and is expected to conclude during the 2022 calendar year.

Student Wellness

Our strategic plan highlights opportunities for better organizing and further investing in our student well-being resources. As the plan states, “Our future society [will depend] on graduates who are not just leaders in their fields but healthy leaders in their fields, in whatever way they define that idea.” While the specific work this entails—from reflective practices to physical activity to health resources—is just getting off the ground now, we anticipate significant progress in the next five years. We’re currently thinking about what programs and structures we need in place to do this work and assess its efficacy. In conjunction with this planning, as discussed in standard five, we’ve already made significant new investments in mental health resources on campus. We’ve also partnered with JED Campus, a program of the Jed Foundation, that helps to assess and build mental health resources on campus.