Covid-19 has affected almost every aspect of the college’s operation. Throughout the college’s response our focus has been on protecting the health and well-being of the community. We have tried to be especially sensitive to the perspective of students and their families. Williams was among the most generous of its peers in providing support to financial aid students transitioning off campus in the spring. And that same perspective motivated our decision to reduce by 15% this year’s price of tuition, room, and board for all students in recognition of the many ways that Covid-19 would impair their curricular and co-curricular experience. Virtually none of our peers have followed suit. We have heard from many of our students and parents who appreciate the ways that we have centered families in our decisions.

More importantly, the college was able to invest the resources needed to safely re-open campus in the midst of a global pandemic. This required the development of a full-blown testing program, completely redesigned dining options, fitting out quarantine spaces, and increased technology support for both in-person and remote classrooms. During the critical decision phase over the summer, we faced dozens of these spending decisions every day. Thanks to the financial strength of the college, we were able to put in place the programs and resources needed to re-open campus safely.

This was perhaps the most important role of the Alumni Fund and Parents Fund. While the endowment provides durable support for the highest priorities of the college, many of its funds are restricted to specific purposes, which cannot be diverted to support emergency spending needs in the face of the crisis. The Alumni Fund and the Parents Fund enabled us to quickly make the necessary investments in health, safety, and educational technology that made all the difference in our ability to open campus. And while this year will be more challenging than any in recent memory, it has been incredibly rewarding to see our students back on campus, masks and all.

It would be easy to conclude that Williams was in a privileged position in its ability to respond to the Covid-19 crisis. Few institutions have our combination of past and present generosity, as reflected in the size of our endowment, and our admirable rates and levels of annual giving from alumni and parents. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this response has come without sacrifice and without tradeoffs. In order to prepare for this year, the college carefully stewarded its resources and organized a financial response that entailed a sharp reduction in operational spending across the college, a dramatic slowdown in capital projects, a partial hiring freeze, and flat salaries across the board. In all of these decisions, we have sought to protect the core academic and co-curricular mission of the college.

Annual giving has played a crucial role in helping the college mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on so many aspects of our educational mission. The consistency of giving has provided a steady and flexible source of revenue at a time when needs have never been higher. And the support and care of our alumni and parents networks have made it clear to us that the most important asset of the college is its committed community of students, faculty, staff, parents, and alumni.

For more detailed information on selected costs, please refer to the following document:
https://tinyurl.com/Williams-Covid-Costs-Fall2020