

Report of the Working Group
Learning Beyond The Classroom

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PART I

Summary, Vision, Goals

We began by developing the following guiding principle:

Williams has an imperative to create the next generation of leaders, change-makers, and problem solvers of our communities and society. Graduates of Williams are expected to provide solutions to the most challenging, interdisciplinary, and systemic issues of our time: structural inequity, climate change, globalization, and the tensions born of those issues.

To operationalize this principle, we began to think of the lifespan of a Williams education as being both inherently valuable as an experience as well as laying the groundwork for the life which comes after it.

Our conversations with stakeholders and internally within the group as we processed the various focus groups and data sources were most vibrant when we considered two central topics:

1. What form could holistic, place-based learning at Williams as a residential liberal arts college take?
2. What would a truly valued co-curricular experience look like?

Our report will highlight the threads of diversity, equity, and inclusion and sustainability while highlighting areas of significant overlap with other working groups, namely:

- **Student Learning:** this is guided first and foremost by where, when, and how learning happens and our proposition that we reflect contextually on the concept of *intellectual vigor* at the core of a liberal arts education. On a broad, strategic level, this allows us to be more expansive in our notions of where, when, and in what fora learning happens in a residential liberal arts college. Within this context, it allows us to explore possibilities such as thinking of the learning arc as taking place over a 12-month year rather than in 2 semesters, or how to distill the distinctive qualities we value about the container of Winter Study and broaden it to the rest of the year.
- **Governance and faculty/staff development:** Two of our key pieces of learning are tied closely to these groups: that the co-curricular program of Williams and those staff who design, nurture, and support it are co-equal partners in the educational mission of the College; and transforming Williams' perceived "culture of stress" to a culture of mindfulness and sustainability is essential to meeting the student development goals articulated in our charge. Embracing these ideas and moving purposefully toward them will require philosophical, structural, and organizational change.
- **Built environment:** This is inextricably linked with both DEI and sustainability themes. We offer suggestions about how to think of place and the built environment as sites of learning, fellowship and community building, individual respite, and practice spaces for holistic wellbeing.

Further included in our recommendations are a fully-dimensional analysis of residential life as a four-year arc, considering the first-year and upperclass residential experiences as part of a programmatically intentional whole; proposing that we move toward structures that fully integrate

Winter Study, semester experiential learning, service, and activities, and a range of possible summer experiences into a 12-month learning arc; and finally, strong advocacy for embracing holistic wellness, of which pleasure and joy are essential components, as both theoretically important and something that we could move beyond the individual level to be practically implemented at both institutional and micro-community levels.

PART II

Appraisal, Description, Strategies

The obvious challenge for the Learning Beyond the Classroom working group has been one of scope: that it encompasses everything from the co-curriculum and experiential learning that fits hand-in-glove with inside-the-classroom learning to the richness of personal and relational development that comes from living and learning together in community.

As the working group spoke with more and more community stakeholders and probed deeper at questions and insights, we kept returning to two key themes:

1. Over the course of Williams' history and when a broad array of stakeholders imagines its future, the notion of place comes up repeatedly: **there is something special and valuable about the place where Williams is situated, and it matters that we have been and are a community here, together.** That opens discussion for topics ranging from an array of forms engagement with place can take, particularly as more of the world has become accessible than was ever imaginable at the time of Williams' founding; to responsibility for stewardship of the environment; to grappling with institutional history and present, and the complexity of experiencing the Williams campus and the Berkshires as "home."
2. The heart of Williams' mission and purpose is the undergraduate experience. This group of individuals has not always been and may not always be composed of people of a specific age group, but rather of a cohort of people in transition from one phase of life to another, and core to that transition is kindling lifelong curiosity about the self, other people, and the world we all inhabit. **The institution can and should think with intentionality about both what happens over the lifespan of a Williams education and its connection to everything that comes after, as well as what skills and frameworks can support that transition and growth.** Both the current engagement with one's own campus experience as well as the future outcomes of a Williams education are framed and driven by the differences of pre-college personal experience, inequities of socioeconomic status, and diversity of cultures represented in the student body. This lens provides focus on the depth and breadth of DEI-related issues to which we aim to call attention in our paper relative to the ways in which everyone navigates this place and builds capacity for a meaningful post-graduation life.

To those ends, we are grateful to each and every community member who joined us in both reflection about Williams' past and present and imaginative engagement with a Williams future whose shape is not yet possible to see, even as we start building toward it.

Intentional Community-Building

Some of our efforts on this theme have been to draw together and more clearly articulate a set of assumptions, internalized beliefs, historical narrative, and visioning about Williams' ethos that has been wrapped around Williams campus life for some time and continues to be present in visioning about Williams' future.

Over the course of the many outreach conversations that LBC engaged, and in examining a range of reports, executive summaries, and other archival materials, we distilled the following themes:

- Williams is, always has been, and will be made up of a kaleidoscopic collection of individuals, and a Williams experience fosters agency and self-determination in the time spent here and the individuality of courses pursued later in life.
- Perhaps the greatest single benefit of a Williams education is the opportunity to learn from and form relationships with all the other individuals who populate the community at the same time.
- Williams is an intentional community, and the success of both the community and of individual members depends on social cohesion, valuing the thriving and well-being of the collective at least as much as that of the individual, and the notion that one's identity is changed by being a part of the community even as the community is changed by one's presence in it.

These themes are not always clearly articulated. As to their relationship with one another, they sometimes operate in harmony and sometimes in direct tension or opposition. In the modern era of Williams, that planning has often been de-centralized or issue-specific can account for a portion of the incoherence we see in how these themes surface or fade across initiatives and over time.

We also need to grapple with the demographic changes over time of who comes to, and thrives at, Williams. The archives of the Davis Center and Sawyer Library record the lengthy and often fraught history of Williams' emerging acknowledgment and acceptance of the richness of intellectual life that exists across a much wider array of people than were previously admitted to the community.

As these shifts have happened, though, Williams is also confronted with the product of decades of broader national policymaking and systemic scaffolding: with some narrow exceptions, most people arrive at Williams from K-12 educational environments and residential neighborhoods that are heavily segregated by both socioeconomic status and race. While Williams itself is broadly diverse, it is still situated in a region of the country that experiences this same segregation and stratification, and many traditions and structures reinforce social and institutional norms that are highly legible and welcoming to some people while opaque or exclusionary to others.

Because of the amount and intensity of feedback we received on the topic, residential life occupies a major focus of our recommendations. Where and how students live together is inextricably linked with relationships in the classroom, in co-curricular activities, and in the day-to-day organization of life on campus.

Currently, the Williams College residential life system is bifurcated into a first-year and an upperclass program. The first-year program is overseen by the Dean's Office and the remainder of the system is overseen by the Office of Student Life, under the supervision of Vice President for Campus Life, though this will all move under the Dean of the College by the end of this strategic planning process.

The first-year system or entry system is a more student-led or autonomous program that consists of 3-4 JAs for each entry of 35-55 students. JAs are juniors who live with first-years to help them acclimate to life and academics at Williams; provide resource linkages during times of crisis; and provide community among a diverse group of people or *entry*, most of which do not know each

other before arriving to Williams. JAs are not official employees of the college and are not directly compensated by the College, meaning these student leaders are not delegated conduct responsibilities. JAs are supported by a dean with focus on first-year life, mainly through supporting the selection, training, and ongoing support and mentorship process as well as structuring and maintaining the college's overall First Days and First Year Experience programming to acclimate frosh to Williams; and ensuring JAs have institutional support.

The upperclass program is led by Residential Life teams that run the four residential sectors (North, West, South, and Central campuses). Residential Life Teams (RLTs) consist of six to eleven Housing Coordinators (HC) or student leaders that live in residence to support the residents; Residential Directors (RD) or student leaders that live in residence within their campus sector and provide support to HCs and one Faculty/Staff Program Advisor (who does not live on campus and whose function is somewhat amorphous and unclear). Within the Office of Student Life there are two Assistant Directors for Residential Life and Housing and one Housing and Residential Programs Assistant who together oversee this entire operation of residential life, including administrative duties, mentoring and programmatic support of student leaders, and the mechanics of the housing selection process for students.

The RLT of all four sectors work to enhance the “academic, intellectual, cultural, and social environment for its area.” This mainly consists of continual training for HCs and RDs to ensure student leaders are able to foster community and support within their houses; providing funding for HCs and RDs to provide resources, “snacks,” and programming for residents; and supporting RDs and HCs in their efforts to provide community activities like Williams After Dark (substance-free weekend night activities), large game nights, snacks (house program every other Sunday), and all-campus field trips (movies, concerts, amusement parks, haunted houses).

All student leaders involved in residential life--JAs, HCs, and RD--are uncompensated by the college and are not official employees of the college. This significantly shapes the role and power of the student leaders within the residences, more of which will be discussed in later sections.

All residential programs are supported by staff, during the hours of 8am-5pm, Monday through Friday. However, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) provides most after-hours support and services for students. CSS during these hours has to patrol parties (often with just three cars for the campus operating); ensure student safety; and respond to disturbances within residences (smoking inside, altercations between residents; and other supportive roles (first response to mental health or medical crises) as well as first response on property maintenance issues (fire alarms, pest control, HVAC and plumbing issues, biohazard cleanup, lockouts, etc.)

Williams students are required to live on campus, with the exceptions of juniors studying away and approximately 125 seniors who live in off-campus, non-college housing options. On its face, this is in response to both student demand for greater independence and agency over their living spaces, as well as a current demand/capacity gap between the availability of on-campus beds and the number of students on campus in a given semester. Students living off-campus go through an application and release process in their junior year that involves some training provided by the college (bystander intervention and information on social host liability in MA). Otherwise, these students are solely responsible for securing their leases and managing their residential space and landlord relationships.

On the surface, there should be equity of access for all students to live off-campus regardless of aid status: aided students are able to apply the portion of their aid package dedicated to room and board to rent and other living expenses. However, financial aid money is only released in the summer before the current academic year. It is the current practice of nearly every Williamstown landlord seeking student renters to collect large deposits to secure leases anywhere from 1 to 2.5 years before occupancy.

As such, off-campus housing becomes *de facto* available only to a) those students with disposable income to place such a large deposit so far in advance; and b) those students whose social networks are likely to remain fundamentally intact over that time period. This has led the population of off-campus residents to be heavily comprised of wealthier students and athletic teams who hand down leases for a particular unit within their teams.

Strengths

There is no shortage of interest, creativity, or ingenuity among students and staff directed toward community-building. The overarching spirit of our conversations with both current students and alumni was that people deeply value their relationships with others and arrive at Williams excited to make connections with new people, including those different from themselves. Even among alumni whose relationship with the institution is more complicated or even negative, many still articulate deep gratitude for their enduring relationships with friends, staff, and faculty.

There is also no shortage of financial resources for community-building initiatives, though--linked to other recommendations we will mention--there may be a benefit to an analysis of how this funding is distributed and whether it could be deployed either more efficiently or to meet better-articulated goals.

Particularly in the area of student affairs, there are a large number of staff who are highly knowledgeable about community-building practices, developmental approaches to mentoring students in the transition from youth to adulthood, and how to appropriately supervise and support students in peer-mentor and peer-educator roles like those of JAs, the RLT, the Davis Center Community Engagement Fellows, Ephventures leaders, etc.

The RLT is effective at providing funding for communal spaces (dorms) and community programming. Events are often held in easily accessible areas, at no cost to students, and are at a consistent time each week. These activities are enhanced by other community-building programming across campus, especially student organizations and through the Davis Center and other student affairs offices or academic units, who each create events that target different student interests and the community more broadly.

Area for Improvement:

Despite student leaders like JAs and the RLT being tasked with enhancing the “academic, intellectual, cultural, and social environment” in their residential spaces and the community, they are often unsure of the exact form of community or communities they should be trying to cultivate within their residences. The lack of articulation of residential goals means student leaders are not pursuing the same things within their houses, held to similar standards, or even measuring student development as an outcome of four years in a residential system.

JAs and RLTs also operate and report to different offices on campus, the Dean's Office and OSL. The bifurcation of the systems leads the goals of residential life and learning to be disconnected. When first years leave the entry, they are placed within the RLT, which has different student leadership roles and expectations. Students do not utilize HCs in the same capacity as JAs, leaving some students in upperclass residences feeling isolated and unsupported from their residential system.

Residential student leaders struggle to practically execute the sometimes-vague mission statements outlined by the RLT and JA programs. Though many students articulate a value of student autonomy, they equally often articulate frustration and vulnerability stemming from a lack of professional training or supervisory support and institutional power to enforce rules of the college; handle and mediate cultural conflicts; create inclusive environments; or facilitate conversations across difference. This leaves student leaders unable to effectively manage conflicts or create inclusive spaces across diverse identities, leading residential spaces to become isolating and exclusive for some students.

These problems are compounded by the lack of housing staff and after-hours support staff. The small number of staff within OSL is not enough to manage the current need for professional oversight of residential and social student life. Staff presence is required both during business hours and at night and on weekends when student activities occur. The fact that Williams has no professional staff living in dorms leaves HCs and JAs alone to produce successful residential spaces and, in conjunction with CSS, to manage crises.

Many of the issues that HCs and JAs address most frequently are not directly related to the immediate safety of students, rather they are residents who are violating co-housing expectations related to noise and the use of common spaces or rules of the college related to substance use and social event hosting. The lack of community, weak articulation of residential goals, and reliance on CSS for an extremely broad range of issues is contributing to some students from marginalized backgrounds feeling excluded, unsafe and isolated from their residential spaces and campus more broadly.

The RLTs and registered student organizations (RSOs) (supported by OSL) along with the JAs (supported by the Dean's Office), and the Davis Center staff are the primary engines of community-building activities and organized student social spaces on campus. This mainly takes the form of hosting campus-wide events; providing funding for students to do group activities; working with other offices and groups on campus to create programming; and developing student leaders who can help foster inclusion and community within their dorms and organizations. In many instances, these efforts are disjointed and lack coordination. Each body has their own access to funding, methods of programming, and distinctive, yet in many cases vague, goals towards inclusivity, diversity, experiential learning, community building, and social time/space.

Finding more ways for residentially- and activity-based student groups and offices to collaborate and build coalitions to help create a more cohesive community could be valuable. A better articulation of residential life goals may help promote values like emotional and physical wellbeing, diversity, inclusion, residential leadership, connecting across difference, cultural competency, sexual health, leadership, etc., across many offices and programs.

Williams actively seeks to create a broadly diverse campus community where every member can live, learn and thrive. In many circumstances, there is an expectation that Williams students will be

able to operate as though they are living in an intentional community or co-housing arrangement, rather than as individuals in loosely-connected singles and pods. However, if we look at those models of communal living, both inside and outside higher education, those which are most successful rely on much more clearly-articulated goals, governance structures, and orientation and sustaining practices than Williams currently has.

Programmatic disconnection is not the only issue at play here; the built environment contributes in some ways to these concerns. The 2013 residential sector plan highlighted a long-term vision and building plan for residential life. One of the key statements in this plan are that buildings should support programming on campus, and indeed that is a core value across project planning on campus.

However, program sometimes has to be nimbler than built environment can keep up with. An example of this would be changes to the entry system in 2018-2019 occasioned by an (apparently) anomalous shortage of JA applicants. This resulted in entries of 35-55 first-years with 3-4 JAs. The initial findings after keeping the same structure in 2019-2020 are that this organizational change also supported some programmatic findings (that JAs felt better-supported by having more than one co-JA; that both JAs and frosh with minoritized identities felt less tokenized in larger entries with more people with whom they might share identity), but the challenge is that there are only a handful of spaces on campus that can accommodate groups of this size, most of which are either classroom spaces or common spaces in upperclass residential housing. This leaves little room in the currently-designated first-year buildings for things like snacks, entry meetings, or gathering spaces that can accommodate the entire entry at one time.

Further, because current college policy allows any student, student organization, academic unit, or certain offices to run events or parties in most residential building at any time, there is heavy demand on the communal spaces or spaces that are equipped with a kitchen or dining area within dorms. Students that live in some dorms with very heavily-utilized communal spaces, like Dodd, Currier, Morgan or Perry can quickly lose a sense of ownership over their residential spaces.

Williams is also experiencing difficulty in the existing built environment in balancing clearly articulated needs for different kinds of residential, social, and co-curricular spaces, which we would loosely categorize as communal spaces (place for connecting, eating, socializing, and meeting across groups), affinity spaces (place to gather in smaller affinity-based groups, which can include meeting and workshop spaces, rehearsal and screening rooms, smaller kitchen and dining spaces), and personal respite spaces (places to sleep, be away from public view or scrutiny, space for meditative or spiritual practice, and bathroom facilities).

We need better mechanisms for intentional inclusion and residential community-building that serve people from a range of life experiences and backgrounds. On the surface, all residential and community spaces are equally accessible to all members of the community. However, students with minoritized identities often report difficulty in accessing or fully inhabiting spaces on campus, particularly communal spaces. This often leaves students feeling isolated from the “community” created in residences, whether this be through an exclusion from social spaces in the dorm (because they perceive other students experiencing greater ease and comfort in reserving or utilizing kitchen spaces, common rooms, etc.) and residence activities (snacks, outings, etc.) or not feeling comfortable to express their identities or parts of cultural heritage in residential spaces. Often student residential leaders are unaware of these cultural rifts and feelings within an entry or house,

causing tension to build around activities of daily living until outbursts happen, mainly around identity and questions of safety and access.

Strategies

Residential life was one of the two most frequent and most substantive issues that we discussed in the majority of our outreach conversations. Given the breadth and complexity of residential life programs, and the centrality of this topic to the life of a residential liberal arts college, we are sharing some strategies that the College might consider as elements of a comprehensive analysis of a holistically restructured residential life program.

The process should start by developing a cohesive foundation of Williams-centric guiding principles that will drive every aspect of the program. The core of these principles would likely include the following elements at a minimum.

We heard strong support for the development of a programmatically integrated four-year residential program. This stands in contrast to the bifurcated approach we've traditionally taken that separates the first-year program from subsequent class years. This would also provide an opportune moment to reinvestigate the efficacy of class-specific first-year housing with the objective of either grounding that building block of the program in shared guiding principles or moving to an integrated approach to housing students across all four class years. In terms of the other three years, it would be valuable to fully assess the appropriate balance of community engagement-oriented programming in upperclass housing to ensure that we're matching those resources to the appropriate developmental phases of the residents across the system.

Regardless of whether first-year students remain in separate housing or are integrated across the entire system, the College might develop a spectrum of co-curricular programming in housing, starting with a seminar curriculum that connects all first-year students and carries across an ongoing living-learning program throughout all four years.

One of the most consistent themes we heard throughout our outreach discussions was strong interest in assessing how to incorporate a high-functioning affinity/theme/alternative housing program as an important element of a redesigned residential system. These conversations regularly began with the acknowledgement that informal social clustering in housing already exists and is typically formed around identity, socioeconomic class, and/or curricular and co-curricular interests. This social clustering is especially evident in the ways that off-campus housing has been operating alongside on-campus housing for many years; understanding its full impact on many aspects of undergraduate social life will be essential to this study. Early research illustrates the existence of substantial information regarding thriving affinity/theme/alternative housing programs at peer schools. This type of program is an important element of successful residential systems at other institutions that Williams can easily assess for adaptation within a future housing system.

In the same way, the College should consider reevaluating the current off-campus housing option for seniors. Once the guiding principles for the redesigned, comprehensive residential life program of the future are articulated, it will be important to appraise off-campus living through the lens of those principles to test its efficacy as a viable element of a Williams residential program. We recognize that there are several factors involved in making it possible for *all* students to live *on* campus, not the least of which would be the need to develop more beds in the system. At the same time, we believe the depth and breadth of concerns expressed about off-campus housing across our

conversations should lead the College to incorporate this issue as a key element of any principle-driven program study. We suggest that this aspect of the discussion would also benefit from connection to the possible expansion of the very popular on-campus senior co-op housing option which is perennially over-subscribed.

Another central component of a well-resourced residential program is the combination of staffing and related mentorship that supports students in housing. Our conversations touched on the many constituencies that would comprise a fully-dimensional support system. Unsurprisingly, the topic of student/peer leadership roles garnered the most discussion in this arena. It was universally recommended that these roles – considered to be integral to an integrated, four-year approach to the program – undergo a full redefinition and repositioning within the next residential life system. Comprehensive training programs should be systematically redesigned to ensure that students in these roles have extensive capabilities to support student development in residential life. Also unsurprisingly, compensation was discussed frequently as an essential issue for consideration. Williams is currently an outlier in not compensating student housing leaders and there are several options to evaluate in terms of how student leaders are compensated at other institutions.

We also discussed the incorporation of professional staff in housing. The paucity of professional staff on campus after typical work hours and its negative impact on multiple aspects of campus life is well documented, and was a major subject of many of our outreach conversations. There are many ways in which Williams can evaluate including non-student staff into a redesigned residential life system, with many peer programs available to research for best practices.

We touched on the important topic of how faculty might engage with residential programs, ranging from in-residence roles to program fellows to other creative associations with housing. Again, there are some interesting programs in the field to study in this regard and we think our future program would benefit substantially from taking this opportunity to think creatively about how best to ensure that faculty have a strong role to play in residential life.

A related and important topic that arose consistently during our outreach sessions concerned equitable access to community/social spaces across campus, with a particular focus on shared spaces in housing. We think it would be productive to initiate a formal social mapping study to identify social spaces across campus that exemplify the concerns expressed regarding inequitable access to social spaces, including libraries, residence halls, etc.

A second phase of this study of social spaces should review current policies that allow general events to take place in residential spaces, an issue that was consistently mentioned as creating challenges for peer leaders in upperclass housing. This topic underscored perceived issues of inequitable use of central social areas in residential spaces that often creates tension between groups. Consequently, we suggest that the comprehensive study of housing also include a formal review of event policies in residential spaces.

DEI Principles

Many of the areas for improvement in this realm are deeply tied to principles of equity and inclusion, and inextricably linked to investing in and nurturing structures and skills that can support a broadly diverse community in living and learning across difference.

We want to explicitly mention two others. First, space assignment and utilization operate as a statement of value. Those activities, groups, or uses that are given the most, most-central, or highest-quality spaces are those that are seen as most valuable to or valued by the institution, this is inescapable, and should be a consideration in any space- and place-based planning, design, or re-purposing conversations.

Additionally, as we consider the spaces in which co-curricular, social, residential, and recreational life happen, we are advocating for moving beyond Americans with Disabilities Act compliance-based basic access requirements to universal design principles so that people with a variety of access needs can use spaces comfortably and together.

Sustainability Principles

- **Social:** At the heart of this theme is the need to continually re-articulate and re-form the on-campus Williams community, as we are continually welcoming new members and existing members are growing, developing, and forging new relationships. This is also closely linked to the developmental goals for an undergraduate experience as a time of transition and capacity-building for later life experiences. The more the residential and community life program can support conflict facilitation, communication, and relationship-building skills, the better served and equipped students will be as they move on to other residential settings and communities.
- **Cultural:** Particularly in the last 10-12 years, Williams has worked hard to pivot away from a vision of a monolithic and archetypal “Williams experience” or “Williams [student]” to embrace a wide range of cultural traditions and expressions that enrich the individuals who carry them forward as well as the community. We should continue to actively engage with practices that encourage people to connect deeply and authentically with themselves, one another, the local community and environment, and the world.
- **Ecological:** To the extent that life and learning at Williams happens both indoors and outside, the implementation of this plan will require buildings and outdoor spaces that serve our current needs while also attempting to be forward-thinking and instructional in our building design, and be responsive to changing climate in the Northeast US. One very specific example is the lack of cooling in dorms, which has begun to prove challenging for the increasing summer residential population.
- **Economic:** Elite higher education in the United States remains, for the most part, a segment of society where the rigidity and inequity of income distribution is intimately and concretely visible, and the dawning realization of this reality and the lived experience of its effects is occurring daily in our residence halls, community spaces, and classrooms. Williams has made great efforts to bring equity to on-campus resource access, but another dimension of economic sustainability in community life is the possibility of future equitable access to and ownership of resources and economic mobility, and we should try to foster that in our community-building. Some of the ways this emerged in feedback was in dialogue about how to establish as robust an alumni mentoring and recruitment network for sectors outside of finance and consulting as exist in those sectors. Other mechanisms could include broad adoption--in curricula, governance structures, and student affairs policies--that takes a broader notion of costs and benefits into account than those which emerge in a purely accounting-based framework.

Intellectual Vigor, Vibrancy of the Co-Curriculum, and Learning Beyond the Classroom

Williams has an imperative to create the next generation of leaders, change-makers, and problem-solvers of our communities and society. Graduates of Williams are expected to provide solutions to the most challenging, interdisciplinary, and systemic issues of our time and the tensions born of those issues. To this end, a Williams education, regardless of where it occurs, should be seen as an essentially valuable holistic developmental experience while laying the groundwork for the fully-dimensioned life that follows.

Strengths

Williams is perennially ranked as one of the top liberal arts colleges in the country, based on the intellectual curiosity and high level of engagement of students and faculty, as well as the college's consistently substantial investment in academic resources. Students and faculty are regarded internally and externally as remarkably hard-working and productive academics. In addition, students are deeply engaged and highly accomplished in their outside-the-classroom endeavors as well, including performing arts, studio art, athletics, scores of student organizations, and other creative and recreational activities.

Other core assets of Williams' curricular and co-curricular programming include more than 160 registered student organizations in which students lead and participate; Winter Study; the expanded work of the '68 Center for Career Exploration; study away programs; athletics, physical education and recreation programming; fellowships and internships; and experiential education and community engagement opportunities as supported by the Center for Learning in Action (CLiA). The missions of these offices underscore the themes of both broad engagement and deep personal development:

The Center for Learning in Action aims directly at our community-oriented goals for post-Williams lives of consequence, as underscored in CLiA's mission statement:

“Experiential learning at Williams fits with the College's broad philosophy of enhancing student capacity to improve society. The educational effects of community engagement work, when done ethically and effectively, are powerful, adding real-life complications to classroom discourse and developing essential leadership and citizenship skills.”

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“At the '68 Center for Career Exploration, we empower students to explore, define, and achieve their post-graduate goals. We believe all students need a way to find out what they are interested in and how to pursue those interests with confidence and excitement!”

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“The Williams Office of Fellowships helps students extend their learning outside of the classroom. A national fellowship or a Williams College award may help you fund

graduate study in the US or abroad or support travel, study, and experiential learning as an undergraduate.”

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*“The **Office of International Education and Study Away** promotes high quality curricular and co-curricular opportunities for Williams students to experience beyond the Purple Valley. [...] Students are given this unique opportunity to understand difference through diversity of thought, both domestically and internationally. Studying away also strengthens linguistic aptitude, deepens knowledge of the liberal arts, and teaches students to adapt to cultures different from their own. It is our hope that through study away, students learn to become more informed global citizens and meaningfully contribute to the greater issues and challenges of our day.”*

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*“[The **Office of Student Life**] works closely with registered student organizations (RSOs), student government, and student businesses, and walks students through the process of starting new RSOs. OSL also helps students explore their leadership and identity development through trainings, workshops and programs.”*

These offices and programs provide substantive support for personal growth and critical co-curricular experiences beyond the classroom, as well as delivering direct guidance on post-graduate planning and development.

Conventional wisdom in education distinguishes between the terms “co-curricular” and “extracurricular.” The former includes activities that are outside of but complementary to the regular curriculum, while the latter refers to activities that are organized within the structure of an educational institution but not tied to the curriculum.

Our outreach work has revealed that there are two forces currently at work at Williams that have blurred the distinction between these two terms. First, student affairs work with experiential learning, athletics, student organizations, and arts-related activities, all of which were formerly deemed extracurricular or something extra and somewhat undervalued, are increasingly viewed as co-curricular, in that all these activities make valuable contributions to student learning in areas such as teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal and intergroup communication, as well as critical thinking. All these skills not only support students’ academic learning but also foster skill sets which are valuable across their lifetimes.

A particular strength the college has is a team of dedicated educators serving the “co-curricular” and working beyond the classroom, namely, student affairs professionals across a broad range of offices, athletic faculty, chaplains, as well as arts and performance professionals. In our listening sessions, the latter group emphasized their understanding of themselves and their professional roles as educators who are as professionally trained as academic faculty in helping students acquire knowledge, cultivate intellectual agility, and develop lifelong personal development skillsets.

Second, ideas such as experiential learning and design thinking have brought academic learning well outside the physical classroom. Grounded in the philosophical understanding of “learning by doing” and the uniting of theory and practice, these forces reaffirm the liberal arts ideal that

Williams College is built on and embodies. In an ideal world, such forces would push the co-curriculum to the foreground and make it as equally valued as the curriculum, as the two share the same goals and equally engage students in learning.

Areas for Improvement

In nearly every conversation, stakeholders consistently remarked on the high intensity of faculty, students, and the academic environment at Williams. This intensity is double-edged, generating social capital in a culture that highly values this kind of productivity on the one hand, while also taking a significant toll on its practitioners' wellbeing on the other. As a case in point, students have been discussing the recent Princeton Review survey that named Williams students as the hardest-working in the country. The lack of scientific precision behind such ratings notwithstanding, students consistently shared their observations that they are subject to substantial workloads, which are intensified via double-majoring (which students report as being something they enjoy, despite the additional workload) and the layering on of a number of extra- and co-curricular activities and, for many aided students, jobs. To that end, a consistent message we heard during our outreach sessions was that many students struggle to not only develop effective work-life equilibrium during their time on campus, given the stressful culture of busy-ness and tremendous perceived pressure to produce that they experience as scaffolding their academic lives, but also time for discernment and metabolizing of their learning and development opportunities.

Academic rigor is closely associated with the excellence that a Williams education entails, leading many students and student-facing staff to report a persistent feeling of tension between a push for "productivity" on the one hand and making time to engage intentionally in the experience of *being in college* on the other. The latter perspective, pursuing personal development with tools that more completely prepare students for a fully-dimensional post-Williams life, includes skills listed in the preceding section. This emphasis on rigor also generates a tension--born of the scarcity around student time and attention--between the curricular and co-curricular. In addition, there is growing pressure arising from the careerist panic and consumerist mentality that more and more frames popular culture's perspective on higher education. One key behavior in which this manifests is the growth of double-majoring at the expense of less-structured curricular exploration, as well as the minimization or de-legitimization of certain fields and learning modalities (the arts, languages, humanities, experiential education) in favor of the legitimization or elevation of other fields and learning modalities (data science, programming, data analysis and meta-analytical experiences).

With regard to the relationship between learning *in* the classroom and learning *beyond* the classroom, the "co-curricular" and the "curricular" seem to be at odds with each other. In our conversations, many stakeholders bring up the limited resource of student time and interest. We have understood that challenge slightly differently, not as one of a scarce resource on which we need to better articulate a hierarchy of claims, but instead as a symptom of the need for a holistic, mission-driven re-articulation of the many types of learning that comprise Williams' educational mission.

Strategies: Within the broader context of preparing students for meaningful and rewarding post-Williams lives, we focused on the notion of re-envisioning the historic emphasis on *academic rigor* within a more expansive context of *intellectual vigor*, the latter of which is itself connected to the essential nature of the liberal arts.

Our concept of vigor shares rigor's focus on intellectual strength, energy, and force and filters it through the lens of an essential capacity for personal development through *balanced* growth. A transformed focus on vigor trades rigidity for intellectual elasticity; austerity for the pursuit of creative passions and experiential learning. Our goal should be to transform the current perceived culture of stress to a vigorous ethos of personal development, mindfulness, and beneficial self-realization.

Many stakeholders--current students, alumni, faculty, and staff--spoke to Winter Study in particular as a potential model for reorienting aspects of the pace, rhythm, and pedagogical approach of the academic year, particularly relative to a stretched 12-month approach to higher education. The positively regarded, distinctive characteristics of Winter Study include intentionality regarding how that time is used to reflect on both being in college and, for many of our students, for being here in this place at this time. Students spoke appreciatively of being able to take classes that teach and cultivate a broad number of life skills via co-curricular syllabi without the nagging feeling that they're being academically unproductive. Having space for being mindful of one's sense of place, making time for self-reflection, being more self-directed in general with how one approaches the temporal boundaries of their college experience – these are all elements of Winter Study that students told us they hoped might be distilled and infused across a reconceived academic year.

On a broad, strategic level, reorienting toward a culture of *intellectual vigor* allows us to be more capacious in our notions of where, when, and in what fora learning happens in a residential liberal arts college, both inside and outside the classroom. Temporally, working within this context allows us to explore the possibilities inherent in a learning arc that takes place throughout a twelve-month year rather than within the framework of more rigidly intervallic semesters; of distilling the above-mentioned distinctive qualities we value about the container of Winter Study, for example, and expanding it strategically to the rest of the year.

Expanding the container of a Williams education from episodic semester structures to a more holistic 12-month framing will provide more margin for joining a student organization, working in the local community, accessing regular physical exercise, cultivating the regular practice of mindfulness and taking advantage of beneficial down-time; exploring artistic passions, emotional wellbeing, spiritual endeavors, pleasure and joy – not as add-ons to one's work, but as essential, load-bearing components of a robust college experience.

We recommend communications and governance strategies to begin tackling the challenge of dismantling some of the calcified institutional structures that maintain a hierarchy between the curricular and co-curricular. This could include an assessment of the opportunities to describe--across a variety of platforms and in a variety of settings--the co-equal contributions of the curriculum and co-curriculum to the educational mission and the work of those who are specialists in each area. It could also include an evaluation of governance structures to more meaningfully include those staff who are non-academic faculty in significant decision-making about institutional policy and process. Finally, encourage and support with resources formal fora and incentives for more collaboration and development of innovative pedagogy between curricular and co-curricular educators to support student learning both inside and beyond the classroom.

More specifically, we recommend a closer look at the frameworks and opportunities described in the community-engaged research academic initiative. This proposal highlights both intellectual vigor and the vibrancy of the co-curriculum as well as points to a need for more intentional

coordination across the variety of stakeholders involved in the nexus between the curriculum and co-curriculum.

DEI Principles

We have identified the following principles at play in both this analysis and our strategic and tactical recommendations:

Though this phenomenon is not specific to Williams, the existing emphasis on the postgraduate value of some areas of study, co-curricular experiences, or ways of approaching the notion of “productivity” that best align with the particular interests of a handful of industry sectors is producing a wide range of DEI challenges on campus.

A commitment to DEI and the philosophy of a liberal arts tradition both point toward developing multi-perspective, interdisciplinary fluency and an ability to view complex problems through a number of lenses. At the same time, students, faculty, and staff are describing either the implicit (via incentive structures) or explicit (via recruiting opportunities, roadmaps and timelines) discouragement of certain disciplines (humanities, arts, ethnic studies and critical theory fields) and activities (arts and performance, community service, spiritual life, cultural and racial affinity groups). Further, students who do not have the financial resources to be exploratory or experimental in their curricular, co-curricular, or postgraduate choices or who have assumed a financial support role for their families and communities report being particularly squeezed out of the opportunity to take advantage of the very wide range of opportunities available at Williams.

Sustainability Principles

This area of focus engages the following dimensions of sustainability:

- **Social:** By not only embracing but concretely supporting the co-curricular, Williams fosters collaboration, openness, and trust within our own community as well as in the institution’s relationship to the Berkshires, region, and world more broadly.
- **Cultural:** Much of the co-curricular as well as an emphasis on intellectual vigor is closely tied to our other themes about wellbeing and intentional community. It not only fosters skills about self-reflection and self-determination as aspects of personal growth, but also encourages students to engage outward-facing questions about purpose and community connection.
- **Ecological:** We expect that both Williams in the World and the Sustainability working groups will speak to this more specifically, but there are place-based challenges in the Berkshires around issues of climate change resilience and mitigation that need the partnership of the Williams community. We also need to engage the questions of how air travel and frequent vehicle travel connect with the climate crisis and how we both continue to connect with experiential learning and communities outside the Northern Berkshires in a way that is ecologically sustainable.
- **Economic:** One of the key challenges we are raising is an attempt to counter and reconstruct prevailingly industrial concepts of productivity and value. Some of the strategic and tactical recommendations we are making will support other working groups’ and academic initiative groups’ engagement with opportunities to empower and strengthen the local Berkshire economy. Opportunities to work in the broader community as well as to pair theory and

concept with practice supports and cultivates students' social entrepreneurship to create sustainable solutions to local and global challenges.

Embedding Wellbeing Into Campus Culture and Structure

Our focus in this area emerged out of what was initially a wider angle, distilled from our working group charge, from emerging conversations on campus, and early outreach: emotional wellbeing and development; spiritual exploration and expression; pleasure and joy; and mind, body, spirit.

As we talked with more and more individuals, we continued to encounter these themes, but a widely held impression that while students, staff, and faculty all aspired to greater wellbeing, for complex reasons, it seemed continually out of reach. As such, we are framing this segment around wellbeing generally, with the understanding that it is a construct made up of a number of separate elements.

Further, we are positioning wellbeing and the focus on fostering it structurally as a critically important focus of the institution moving forward, on par with the focuses on diversity and sustainability. We are drawing heavily in this framework from the Okanagan Charter, an international charter for health promoting universities and colleges, which “calls on post-secondary schools to embed health into all aspects of campus culture and to lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally.”

The Okanagan Charter puts forward the shared aspiration that “health promoting universities and colleges infuse health into everyday operations, business practices and academic mandates. By doing so, health promoting universities and colleges enhance the success of our institutions; create campus cultures of compassion, well-being, equity and social justice; improve the health of the people who live, learn, work, play and love on our campuses; and strengthen the ecological, social and economic sustainability of our communities and wider society.”

Strengths

As with nearly every other aspect of Williams campus life, there is already a professional community of practice highly engaged in the study and practice of various components of wellbeing, ranging from Integrative Wellbeing Services and the health center, to the chaplains office, to the faculty members who study the effects of sleep and nutrition, to those gathering for various forms of contemplative and mindfulness practice.

Athletics, physical education, and recreation are all important elements of what Williams offers outside the classroom, engaging mind and body. Together they represent a critical introduction to the life-long values inherent in the core principles of good health: exercise, skill development, collaboration/group problem-solving, coping skills and overall wellness habits. Much of what athletics and physical education brings to outside-the-classroom skill development addresses the formation of resilience in the face of a core activity – athletic competition in this case – that has public failure actually built into its practice. Athletics faculty speak passionately about their collective focus on coping skills, efficacy and agency, empathy, inspiration, and motivation.

Overall, the College is keenly aware of, and directing major innovative efforts and resources toward, the crisis in student mental health that Williams is experiencing alongside higher education and society more broadly. This is an area in which the offices who are focused on core elements of mental health can clearly articulate their contributions to and resonance with the educational mission of the institution:

“[IWS hears] that students don’t feel like there’s a place for them or that they belong. That can be around representation, a feeling of being heard, access to things from home (food, etc.). But students can feel disconnection on a very micro level. Belonging can also be related to busy-ness, that there is an inherent conflict between achievement and connection. Thinking about a Williams of the future, I would like us to not have to choose, for there not to be that conflict, that you’re not choosing between rest and getting a paper done. Some of it is structural, and some of it is related to reinforcing messages about productivity, how can we interrupt that. We could explore more embodied practices in meetings and classrooms, a chance to arrive in the room before jumping in to content and ensuring the ways that classes are taught or meetings are run has a trauma-informed lens.”

“[Athletics] contributes to overall promotion of health and wellbeing, collaboration and working in groups, individual and group problem-solving, bringing a sense of belonging and connection to the college as a whole and something greater than yourself, and pride for what you’ve done that leads to wanting to give back to the institution. Problem-solving might be direct in the competitive setting or outside of that in the form of time-management and how to balance the demands of friends and family with my other obligations.”

“Participating in sports fosters coping skills, dealing with both personal success and failure, working with people you don’t necessarily like but have to collaborate with.”

“Athletics involves creating a positive, thriving organization that students learn to be a part of, co-create, and lead. My hope is that they learn how to do this and then can transfer those skills into lots of different realms, from family to living space to work space. We do that by investing in the person next to you. Alums will come back and say that’s been one of the most valuable things, they become their best selves when they’re working toward something beyond themselves. Sport reveals character, and people get to decide if they like what is being revealed to them. The mentorship that is intact can help people change or cultivate themselves depending on whether they like what they see.”

“More opportunities [for the Chaplains Office] to help students engage in meaning-making could look like asking big spiritual questions when students seem open to it, like “Who are you as a person? What are you doing with your life?” These are tantalizingly destabilizing questions that invite more exploration and thoughtfulness.”

“[One of the roles of the Chaplains Office] is to help slow down the achievement machinery, and slow down the treadmill students have been on for many years. We invite them to create spaces of pause and reflection and take a deeper dive, with

their ownership. We accompany that process, not lead it, which is hopefully both empowering and humbling. This has symmetry with the rest of the college's mission."

Areas for Improvement

One of the most prominent pieces of feedback that emerged from nearly every conversational prompt that posed questions about opportunities for personal development, reflective practice, relationship building, pleasure and joy, or rest and ease contained some element of precarity about the equilibrium between those aspects of campus life and academic or career-focused work. Not only students, but staff and faculty as well, noted that there is a prevailing sense that it's very difficult to say no to things, but also that there is no bandwidth left to continue adding obligations and opportunities.

This manifests in students' daily life--significant sleep deprivation; high rates of anxiety and depression; concerns that asking friends or classmates for basic levels of fellowship and connection is a distraction from those individuals' more-important pursuits--but also in the complexity of demands around the Winter Study period in the calendar. That is, people see in Winter Study the space for the kind of rebalancing around a wide range of wellness practices that seems impossible at other points in the year.

Similar to sustainability, the institution is at an inflection point in determining how we address wellbeing. There is a tendency to frame wellbeing (and its mirror image, unwellness) as primarily the responsibility of the individual and their choices, with some oversight or contribution of the healthcare system and possibly some narrow band of student affairs professionals. This is a crisis-management structure, not a structure designed for wellbeing promotion.

Strategies

Holistic student wellbeing was a core topical thread woven throughout all of our outreach sessions. Many of our recommendations – including a renewed focus on intellectual vigor, an expanded vision of what shapes an academic year outside its current semester-framed boundaries, etc. – spring from this sweeping and essential topic. There are current movements on campus envisioning curricular and co-curricular classes and programming in this matrix of disciplines as required subject matter that we believe the College should consider cultivating and formalizing.

As one very recent example, Wendy Adam and Alysha Warren, Director and Associate Director of IWS respectively, designed a 2020 Winter Study course called “Towards a Fuller Life” – on living a meaningful life, joy, creativity, play and gratitude. The syllabus is adaptable and scalable as a PE class, a residential life-based living-learning course, or as a fully curricular academic class.

Additional strategies that the College should consider include a continued focus on expanding self-care practice offerings and creative initiatives to include in curricular and co-curricular formats. Members of the Athletics Department have been strong collaborators in this arena and have the capacity to help launch these kinds of classes, particularly through the vehicle of Physical Education classes as the loci for mindfulness and similar skills-building co-curricula.

There are also some specific calls to action in the Okanagan Charter which particularly align with this moment of strategic planning, namely:

- “Create supportive campus environments. Enhance the campus environment as a living laboratory, identifying opportunities to study and support health and well-being, as well as sustainability and resilience in the built, natural, social, economic, cultural, academic, organizational and learning environments.
- Generate thriving communities and a culture of well-being. Be proactive and intentional in creating empowered, connected and resilient campus communities that foster an ethic of care, compassion, collaboration and community action.
- Support personal development. Develop and create opportunities to build student, staff and faculty resilience, competence, personal capacity and life enhancing skills – and so support them to thrive and achieve their full potential and become engaged local and global citizens while respecting the environment.
- Integrate health, well-being, and sustainability in multiple disciplines to develop change agents. Use cross-cutting approaches to embed an understanding and commitment to health, well-being and sustainability across all disciplines and curricula, thus ensuring the development of future citizens with the capacity to act as agents for health promoting change beyond campuses.”

Some of these strategies intersect with and depend on strategies we’ve described elsewhere, like integrating notions of vigor, focusing on community-building structures, and considering a 12-month learning cycle, as well as adjacencies to related strategies raised in other working groups.

We have attached the Contemplative Practice Center (CPC) academic initiative¹, which we admire for its recommended phased-in approach to incorporating mindfulness and self-care in campus life. We believe that the broad base of faculty and staff support for the idea speaks to its universal appeal and potential for effective pedagogical outcomes.

Further, building on the principles around the relationship between space utilization as a statement of institutional value discussed elsewhere in relationship to the built environment and community, we suggest a strategy slightly larger in scope: that the College assess the efficacy of a bricks-and-mortar, unified holistic wellbeing space that joins physical movement (workout and athletic spaces, dance and yoga studios), contemplative practice (meditation/mindfulness space), spiritual practice (chaplains’ offices and some religious group space), and social-emotional space (IWS offices or group spaces). There are good examples on other campuses that can be studied and adapted.

¹ See Appendix 3.1

APPENDIX 1

Learning Beyond the Classroom

Working Group Members

- Bilal Ansari, Assistant VP for Campus Engagement, OIDEI
- Meg Bossong, Director of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response
- Steve Klass, VP for Campus Life
- Steve Kuster, Assistant Professor of Physical Education and Head Swim Coach
- Essence Perry, '22
- Brenda Xu, '20
- Li Yu, Professor of Chinese

Working Group Charge

Student development is an essential purpose of higher education and includes cognitive, physical, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, personal, and intellectual dimensions. Williams believes that growth along this entire continuum of attributes is enhanced both inside and outside the classroom. As this working group frames the shape, scale and content of the co-curricular elements of a Williams student campus experience – with a clear focus on these developmental virtues – it will recommend the resources we should provide to prepare students to lead healthy, productive, and meaningful lives while at Williams and beyond.

This working group will articulate the guiding principles for future development of the optimal student-facing programs, services, staffing, and facilities to enhance the aforementioned qualities and competencies with which we aim to arm our students. The following topics and framing questions are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive. We will leave room to include organic outcomes of our initial conversations as the group builds its ongoing agenda together.

Framing questions will include, at a minimum:

- How can we take full advantage of the small residential liberal arts college experience to prepare students with the knowledge and skills needed to be leaders of our global society, including: empathy and perspective-taking; resilience, persistence and problem-solving; moral courage derived from coherent values and ethical standards; inclusiveness, mutual support, and collaboration; and creative risk-taking?
- What are the characteristics and dimensions of a fully inclusive student community? How can appropriately resourced co-curricular programming best support the intentional engagement of students in that community?
- What resources – particularly staffing, programming, facilities – are necessary to support the fully inclusive community and personal developmental goals to which we aspire for our students? Additionally, do we have the appropriate administrative structures at all levels to ensure the success of our staff and programs?
- In what ways are our goals for curricular and co-curricular learning most effectively connected? How do we build on that mutually defined pedagogical framework?
- How can our co-curricular planning and resources most effectively support Williams as a 12-month learning institution?

Areas of programmatic focus will include, at a minimum:

- Holistic student Wellbeing
- Residential life
- Religious and spiritual life
- Experiential education and community engagement
- Co-curricular activities and programming (including music and performing arts, athletics/recreation, registered student organizations and clubs, etc.)

APPENDIX 2

Outreach Activities & What We Learned

Outreach

Learning Beyond the Classroom engaged in 25 distinct outreach initiatives, ranging from dedicated conversations with specific offices to large sessions open to the entire campus community. Our outreach audiences included student leaders, members of the Board of Trustees, a wide variety of administrative offices, two sets of faculty members (Athletics and the Arts Academic Initiative Working Group), open-ended conversations with the President’s Administrative Group, community meetings at the Log, and multiple Strategic Planning group retreats.

While we remained cognizant of our charge to remain at the “30,000-foot” strategic perspective throughout, much of our discourse focused on, or wound up examining, people’s lived experience. This latter approach necessarily tends to refocus us toward a more tactical ground-level point of view. Consequently, throughout the process, we found ourselves regularly toggling between the meta-level of guiding principles and the operational level of programs and services. Our report reflects what we learned from all altitudes over the course of the process.

What We Learned – Emerging Themes

Learning Beyond the Classroom’s charge begins with the statement that “student development is an essential purpose of higher education and includes cognitive, physical, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, personal, and intellectual dimensions. Williams believes that growth along this entire continuum of attributes is enhanced both inside and outside the classroom.”

Our original list of core dimensions included emotional wellbeing & development; spiritual exploration and expression; learning & engaging in residential life; co-curriculum development; leadership development in student organizations; experiential education & community engagement. Our outreach methodology allowed us to explore many of these topics in detail. At the same time, we were a bit surprised during the open-ended sessions that not all of these topics arose organically, but had to be cued up by our group discussion leaders instead.

As evidenced in the body of our report, the key issues that most frequently emerged as most meaningful were centered around the following core topics:

- Student work-life equilibrium and holistic wellbeing, along with envisioning the associated curricular and co-curricular paths toward cultivating these practices as lifelong core competencies.
 - Centering the concept of *intellectual vigor* alongside the frequently mentioned ethos of *academic rigor*.
 - This included a renewed emphasis on the related concepts of pleasure and joy that fed into a significant number of our most interesting conversations.
 - These topics connect directly with the Contemplative Practices academic initiative found in Appendix 3.
- The development and implementation of a comprehensive residential life program, described in detail above in Part II.

- Discussions regarding what the elements of a truly valued co-curriculum might consist of and how it might be presented across the continuum of a Williams undergraduate experience.
 - On a broad, strategic level, a reorientation toward the aforementioned ethos of *intellectual vigor* allows us to be more capacious in our notions of where, when, and in what fora learning happens in a residential liberal arts college, both inside and outside the classroom.
 - Within this context, we can explore the potential of engaging the formal learning arc across a 12-month year rather than in two semesters; of distilling the distinctive qualities we value about the container of Winter Study and broaden it to the rest of the year. Winter Study, in particular, was observed by many of our discussants as a potential model for reorienting aspects of the pace, rhythm, and pedagogical approach of the academic year, particularly relative to an extended 12-month approach.

APPENDIX 3

Residential Life – Operational Outline

Residential life was the most frequent and most substantive issue that we discussed in the majority of our outreach conversations. Given the breadth and complexity of residential life programs, and the centrality of this topic to the life of a residential liberal arts college, we are strongly recommending that the College undertake a comprehensive, multi-year analysis of what a holistically restructured program should look like at Williams. At a minimum, the following components of a fully-dimensioned program should be assessed and, where possible, benchmarked against both Williams' own goals for this area as well as success with similar goals at other institutions:

- Guiding principles
 - Develop Williams-centric guiding principles that will drive every aspect of the program from a cohesive foundation
- Integrated 4-year residential program
 - We strongly recommend developing a residential life program that consists of four programmatically connected years versus the bifurcated approach we've traditionally taken between the first year and subsequent years
 - We recommend reinvestigating the purpose of class-specific first-year housing with the objective of either grounding that building block of the program in shared guiding principles or moving toward an integrated approach to the housing of students across all four classes
 - We recommend fully assessing the appropriate balance of community engagement-oriented programming in upperclass student housing to ensure that we're matching those resources to the appropriate developmental phases of the residents across the system.
- First-year seminar and ongoing living-learning programming
 - We recommend locating robust co-curricular programming in housing, starting with a seminar curriculum that connects all first-year students
- Theme/alternative/affinity housing
 - We start by recognizing that social clustering in houses exists currently, formed around identity, socioeconomic class, and curricular and co-curricular interests as shared in our many outreach conversations. This is especially evident in the ways that off-campus housing has been operating alongside campus housing for many years.
 - Peer schools have developed many successful programmatic variations on what Williams students are calling affinity housing. We strongly recommend that Williams assess and adapt the best attributes of these programs as alternative residential opportunities within a future housing system.
- Off-campus housing for seniors
 - We strongly recommend that Williams assess the elimination of the current off-campus housing option for seniors.
 - Since more housing would have to be developed on campus to provide adequate capacity, we recommend that it consist of coop-style housing for seniors. As most of the small houses that are currently used for coop housing (as well as the houses in Dodd Circle that aren't coops) need to be renovated, we recommend taking advantage of these opportunities to develop a new, expanded cluster of senior-year coop housing on campus as an intentional element of Williams' residential life programming for seniors and that

it provide enough on-campus capacity to eliminate the current off-campus housing option.

- Staffing
 - Student/peer leadership – redefine these roles in the context of the recommended four-year approach to residential life – and whatever is decided regarding first-year housing (i.e., either continuing with separate first-year housing or integrating all four years of students across campus).
 - Training programs must be comprehensively redesigned to ensure that students in these roles have adequate skills and competencies to support their role descriptions
 - Compensation – there are several options to evaluate in terms of how student leaders in housing are compensated. Williams is currently an outlier in not compensating students.
 - Professional staff – the paucity of professional staff on campus after typical work hours and its negative impact on multiple aspects of campus life is well documented and was a major subject of many of our outreach conversations. There are many ways in which we can incorporate staff into our residential life program with many peer programs to benchmark against.
 - Faculty – there are many ways to incorporate faculty into residential life, from in-residence roles to program fellows to other creative associations with housing. Again, there are some interesting programs in the field to study in this regard.
- Equitable access to social space in housing
 - Review party/event-planning policies in residence halls
 - The fact that the college allows general event use of residential spaces was another area that was mentioned as creating challenges for peer leaders in upperclass housing. This issue also underscored perceived issues of inequitable access to space mentioned below that often creates tension between groups over use of central social areas in residential spaces in particular. We recommend that a formal review of these policies in residential spaces be undertaken.
 - Social mapping initiative
 - A consistent theme that arose during our outreach sessions concerned perceptions of inequitable student access to public spaces on campus. We recommend the initiation of a formal study in collaboration with student leaders to identify social spaces across campus that are exemplars of the concerns expressed regarding inequitable access to social spaces, including libraries, residence halls, etc.

APPENDIX 3.1

Academic Initiatives

As part of the Strategic Planning process, Williams faculty and staff were invited to propose Strategic Academic Initiatives. The request was for projects that “substantially reimagine an existing area of strength or respond to evolving definitions of a liberal arts education in the 21st century.” We have included two of them in this appendix – “Justification for a Contemplative Practices Center (CPC)” and the “Community Research Initiative.” Each is formed on existing curricular and co-curricular strengths and is supported by crucial interdisciplinary collaboration.

Justification for A Contemplative Practices Center (CPC)

CPC can help Williams emerge as a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable community where students, faculty, & staff work, live, and thrive on a campus committed to individual and collective resilience. CPC may help stem the rising prevalence of mental health issues in adolescence:

- 40% of college students will experience a significant mental health issue
 - 50% of all mental health diagnoses begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24
 - suicide is the second leading cause of death for college students today
- CPC can promote exposure to contemplative practices and embodied knowledges/learning among students, faculty, and staff and help build bridges that promote inclusivity between and among diverse groups. It can help individuals engage in self-care practices to reduce burn-out, despair, and other forms alienations on campus.
 - CPC can increase access to contemplative practices and the challenges of embodiment in order to address the intersectionality within and across enduring community divisions such as race, class, gender, sexuality, & ethnicity that currently produce suffering and harm within our community.
 - CPC seeks to build empathy and compassion across and within diverse groups and their allies including tending to the emotional needs of minority, LGBTQ, and marginalized students, staff, and faculty so that they are welcomed to all manner of contemplative spaces and practices within our community.
 - CPC can foster a set of wide-ranging conversations around community needs for safe spaces where affinities can develop and flourish, while addressing ongoing and unspoken white and male privilege as well as existing communal conflicts. CPC could promote witnessing of and compassion for ongoing social suffering, while harnessing efforts towards social justice and social change, as well as improvement in daily interactions and campus climate.
 - CPC can help create and sustain alliances between existing efforts on campus so that individuals and groups working independently can build upon their collective knowledges and experiences, while limiting the isolation that individuals and groups feel due to existing fragmentation and alienation.
 - CPC could sustain morale and cooperation between faculty, staff, and/or students by promoting simple, habitual practices of interdependence that highlight our human propensities for adaptation, altruism, resilience, and growth while reducing anger, anxiety, stress, conflict, and self-harm.

Concrete Steps:

- Create a Contemplative Practices (CP) ‘virtual space’ or website that cultivates a virtual dialogue between all individuals and groups that work and teach CP on campus, curricular and extra-curricular. The user- friendly CP website would allow individuals and groups to post upcoming events and list ongoing classes or informal practices open to faculty, staff, & students that could include but are not limited to yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, Qigong, spiritual or ritual practices within Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sufi and other faiths, as well as contemplative dance & music practices.
- Grow curricular and extra-curricular offerings around CP to expand access to faculty, staff, and students who may not be aware of these practices. Expand Winter Study offerings within CP to include more intense and professional study of practice/theory, expand travel trips (Asia & domestic), and facilitate campus- based workshops that take advantage of nearby teachers at Kripalu, Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Mind & Life Institute, Garrison Institute, and local yoga studios.
- Provide sustained resources and programming around self-care practices and CP programming that actively engage with critical race/gender theories and post-colonial pedagogies to cultivate awareness of multiple micro-aggressions & privileges within our community. Consider ways that CP programming can help individuals and groups deconstruct ongoing dynamics of social suffering while reflect upon histories of structural violence within and beyond our campus community.
- Repurpose Greylock as a CP hub with dedicated meditation room, yoga rooms, dance studios, classrooms, and lending library that houses a collection of CP guides and texts. Recommend upgrades to existing heating systems & flooring, conversion of kitchen into changing rooms, and expanding use of and access to existing lockers and bathrooms while preserving large windows and excellent natural light. We understand this will require further conversations with all stakeholders currently using Greylock (dance, theatre, physical education, etc).
- Encourage cross-pollination between student and faculty/staff that engage in CP and other embodied learning rather than isolating groups from one another. Rather than expecting a single alignment or coordination of all practices on campus, encourage an emergent process whereby diverse and eclectic practices are celebrated and able to experiment, grow, and adapt as needed to changing circumstances.

Ongoing Practices to Promote:

- Extend and deepen offerings of contemplative practices (yoga, meditation, dance, etc) that deepen the practice and theory of bodily disciplines and embodied knowledges being taught on campus.
- Annual trainings for faculty, staff, and students, that expand the accessibility, inclusivity, and integration of contemplative practices and embodied knowledges within teaching or creative work to heal divisions & promote well-being in and outside the classroom such as exercises that improve listening, awareness, compassion, kindness, self-reflection, and self-monitoring
- Self-care trainings that promote collaboration & cooperation within and between groups while helping to reduce anxiety, stress, and alienation exacerbated in times of challenge

or crisis.

- Empirical gathering of data that reports the degree of anxiety and other mental health disorders on campus, stressors and contributing factors for those disorders, and ways that contemplative practices might help individuals cope with these stressors and factors.

Faculty & Staff Allied with Initiative

- Wendy Adam, Integrative Wellbeing Services
- Barbara Casey, Winter Study
- Ashley Cart, Classes & Reunions
- Maria Cruz, Integrative Wellbeing Services
- Paula Consolini, Center for Learning in Action (CLIA)
- Joe Cruz, Philosophy & Cognitive Science
- Georges Dreyfus, Religion
- Mary Edgerton, Yoga Instructor
- Valerie Bailey Fischer, Chaplain to the College
- Mary Edgerton, Yoga Instructor
- Ezra D. Feldman, English
- Kim Gutschow, Religion & Anthropology
- Laurie Heatherington, Psychology
- Jason Josephson, Religion
- Peter Just, Anthropology
- Susanne Ryuyin Kerekes, Religion
- John Kleiner, English
- Betsy Kolbert, Environmental Studies
- Scott Lewis, Outing Club Director
- James Manigault-Bryant, Africana Studies
- Christine Ménard, Head of Research Services & Library Outreach
- Laura Muller, Quantitative Skills Program
- Bernie Rhie, English
- Shantee Rosado, Latina/o Studies
- Pallavi Sen, Art
- Olga Shevchenko, Sociology
- Christina Simko, Sociology
- Ben Snyder, Sociology
- Anand Swamy, Economics
- Seth Wax, Jewish Chaplain
- Rob White, Parent and Family Program

COMMUNITY RESEARCH INITIATIVE

A proposal to enhance curricular experiential learning at Williams through collaborative community-based academic research.

Experiential learning is more critical to liberal arts learning than ever. Williams students come to us smart, hungry to learn, and eager to use what they learn immediately. Their passion to address civic challenges is evident in the degree to which they engage in extracurricular community work and apply for support for participatory action research through programs such as Mellon/Mays, Alison Davis, Center for Environmental Studies, and the Sentinels Summer Research Fellowships.^[1]

Academic opportunities for students to bridge theory and practice through experiential learning^[2] have grown over the last decade at Williams, as more majors and concentrations require or encourage applied research, either in capstone or specialty courses (examples include Political Economy, Public Health, Statistics, and Environmental Studies). Nevertheless, the work students do in their classrooms is often divorced from its real-world application. At the same time, student community engagement sometimes lacks a rigorous intellectual foundation. More work needs to be done to bridge the classroom and fieldwork-based learning.

Fortunately, opportunities abound to do community-based research that is both intellectually meaningful and useful. Local community organizations face knowledge gaps that they are unable to address with their limited resources. We have many innovative nonprofits and public agencies in our region that are unable to mount the data-driven research projects necessary to secure funding for critically needed expansion or improvements. Leaders of the school districts, especially Pittsfield Public Schools (PPS) and North Adams Public Schools (NAPS), in particular, are eager to partner with us.

Campus offices and faculty do an admirable job of providing or connecting students to small-scale fieldwork opportunities with local community partners. In a few cases (such as C3D and CLIA's collaborative Teach 2 Learn Initiative), they provide more substantial evidence-based research options.^[3] Disparate faculty often engage in community-based research projects in their classes without much communication or knowledge of what other faculty are doing. We can build more effective scaffolding for our students' learning while simultaneously broadening and deepening the public good that Williams provides to the local community.

The initiative would be led by a team of faculty from a range of disciplines and staff in collaboration with community partner representatives. It would aim to generate multi-year community-engaged research projects with discrete components that could be tackled as individual or group projects for a course, student internships or independent study courses. These projects would address compelling civic problems while providing curricular research opportunities tied to one or more academic units.

The Teach 2 Learn Initiative could serve as a model for how this initiative could work. In September 2013, Center for Learning in Action leaders met with North Adams School District

leaders to discuss the district's interest in expanding the Elementary Outreach hands-on science teaching program to include all their elementary schools. While brainstorming, the group was alerted to a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant opportunity which inspired the development of a successful joint NSF proposal with MCLA and NAPS. The four-year \$800,000+ grant, awarded in September of 2014, funded both the desired program expansion and research on a variety of learning metrics. Along with the participating NAPS faculty, Williams students teaching in the program received enhanced training, as well as curriculum development opportunities and guidance from participating Williams and MCLA faculty^[4].

Through existing community outreach programming with other area schools, nonprofits and the Berkshire County House of Correction, CLIA staff have become aware of the potential for long-term collaborative research projects. Possibilities include studying the impacts of a) educational offerings for the incarcerated, b) innovative support systems for immigrants and refugees, c) creative arts programs for at-risk youth and d) public humanities projects. Here is a concrete example of a project that already has energetic student and community partner interest and the possibility of financial support from outside sources: an impact study of school-wide professional development training in diversity, inclusion and trauma-informed educational practices at Reid Middle School in Pittsfield.

Williams faculty have also identified significant local research possibilities, especially in public health. One notable example: an innovative statewide health care initiative in Vermont to shift to an all-payer accountable care organization to try to move to a population health model rather than a fee-for-service model. The experiment will involve coordinating services across health care and social service agencies providing multiple and multi-layered collaborative research possibilities.^[5]

Projects like the ones described could provide opportunities for students to do pioneering frontline research on a set of issues about which they are passionate. They would help community organizations get support for research and improvements they otherwise would be unable to undertake. They would also make it possible for faculty to combine their research and teaching interests locally.

In general, such community-engaged projects could include research opportunities during the summer and Winter Study, possibly linked to semester courses; specialty courses (especially during WSP) or modules offered within semester courses providing research training skills that would be useful across a range of projects. These include basic coding, statistical methods, survey design methodology, participatory action research methodologies, training in informed consent, professional etiquette/conduct, and basic software skills. Projects might also include paid student fellowships similar to those offered through the Mellon/Mays and Allison Davis Programs--but begun earlier in a student's time at Williams (ideally during the first year but also possibly during the summer before matriculation).

There are multiple ways this type of initiative could be structured. One possibility is to arrange for faculty from each of the three divisions to serve as Community Research Fellows working with designated staff and relevant community partners. This team would reach out to community entities^[6] and relevant faculty to develop research wish lists and provide support for project

development. The initiative could also support an annual research showcase and student attendance at relevant conferences.

This proposal, drafted by Paula Consolini and Tara Watson, has been circulated to more than two dozen faculty and staff, and incorporated feedback from many of them. Nevertheless, we believe that a more robust conversation is warranted across the campus about how to structure a community research initiative that fulfills the promise of engaged liberal arts learning.

^[1] The results of some Williams students' local research work can be viewed in the [Student Work Showcase](#) section of the CLiA website.

^[2] The term, "Experiential Learning," covers a wide range of pedagogical approaches. For definitions, see [CLiA's Experiential Learning Glossary](#)

^[3] Currently available vehicles and examples are described in CLiA's [Community Field Research Opportunities](#).

^[4] Faculty from the Williams Psychology, Biology, Geology and Physics Departments served as advisors. Details

at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9qute8hn5XdWHZDRURZZTdEbkptSmJWRkN3dGdFX0NqUUI4/view?usp=sharing>

^[5] <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/case-study/2018/may/vermonts-bold-experiment-community-driven-health-care-reform>.

^[6] Including other institutions of higher education
