

Summary of University Feedback on SPSC Subcommittee White Papers

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The SPSC charged all departments and units to engage with and respond to the external trends and environmental scans outlined in the subcommittee whitepapers. We received 45 briefs in response to the subcommittee white papers. We recognize and greatly appreciate the time that the departments, units and their leaders committed to this important review.

The briefs received will be incredibly useful for increasing awareness of the work being done across the university in different departments, programs, divisions and committees. The Provost will share these submitted briefs with the respective deans and in the coming months with the new deans in Arts & Sciences, Education and Law, as part of their onboarding.

*What follows is a high-level summary of feedback received, organized by areas where units saw **alignment**, **divergence** and/or **omission** with respect to the subcommittee environmental scans (i.e., **gaps or missing trends that will affect their core missions**.) As expected, given the breadth of input sought through these briefs, viewpoints within the university converge as well as differ on the same topic. Not every comment is reflected in the summary below. Instead, we attempt to capture dominant threads in the cumulative feedback from the community in order to share them widely in a way that allows many to review and reflect on them.*

To the best of our ability, the responses below represent the views of the 42 units and groups responding, as well as comments made through the online web form. The units who submitted briefs are listed alphabetically at the end of this document.

– PA & JPM

Feedback on Areas of Alignment

- A boundary-transcending education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences best prepares our graduates to flourish as citizens and professionals in a rapidly changing world. Student respondents underscored that deemphasizing grades (to the extent possible) encourages adventurous course selection, in a “boundary-transcending” mode – i.e., beyond courses in which they expect to do well. Students also emphasized the importance of data literacy as vital preparation to competing in today’s job market.
- The community expressed broad support for Teaching & Learning’s cherished principles: collaborative teaching and learning across boundaries; research-based teaching and learning; personalized mentoring; and global and experiential learning opportunities.
- Undergraduate research strengthens and differentiates W&M as a research university.

- The diversity advanced via demographic change in our nation and communities is a source of strength and vitality.
- W&M *is* a “preeminent, public research university” (mission). Appreciation expressed for identifying as a research university as well as recognition that reputation and rankings do matter for preeminence and factor into managing the university well.
- Signature areas of excellence (some of which should be bolstered even further) enhance W&M’s distinctive identity, driving market awareness and differentiating W&M in the marketplace. A lack of engineering programs disadvantages W&M in the increasingly competitive market for undergraduate students.
- W&M’s organizational infrastructure should enhance our ability to transcend boundaries, facilitate efficient decision-making and incentivize collaboration and innovation.
 - Current infrastructure is inadequate to support continued excellence in research, particularly in existing graduate programs. “Infrastructure” includes physical plant and, perhaps more importantly, organizational structures, resource management and incentives.
 - Current faculty evaluation/review process lack – at least in part – alignment with W&M’s espoused vision, mission and values.
 - Breaking down silos requires significant effort on the part of the individuals transcending established boundaries. Reducing silos advances whole-institution thinking.
 - Broad-based support exists for interdisciplinary teaching and research/scholarship, though current structures often embed disincentives needing attention (e.g., proposal for an interdisciplinary collaborative working group, proposal for university-wide searchable database of subject matter experts, etc.).
 - An overstretched Office of Sponsored Programs exacerbates its limitations.
 - W&M needs a more robust internal and external communications organization to tell our stories in the most powerful ways to wider audiences. Feedback included calls for investment in staffing and resources in this area.
- To fulfill its mission, W&M’s reach must extend far beyond its Williamsburg and Gloucester campuses. Developing and strengthening partnerships, better utilizing a D.C. presence and extending beyond a regional awareness are vital to future success. Community partners also matter beyond partners from industry who may provide funding.
- Faculty and staff feel sometimes overwhelming expectations in regard to often-conflicting demands for productivity and personal touch.

Feedback on Areas of Divergence

- To some, the white papers seemed overly focused on STEM research areas. Some sought more nuance regarding arts, humanities and humanistic social sciences. These other disciplinary approaches also require personalized mentoring. Current ways of structuring undergraduate research in the humanities, in particular, encourage student-driven projects rather than a faculty-driven projects, and individual research rather than team-based research.

- Several briefs noted concern regarding expansion into technical fields – new technologies in their disciplines;
- Externally funded research often requires institutional subsidies (i.e., sponsored research as a cost center, not a net revenue generator).
- The white papers’ focus on classroom instruction overlooks the teaching and learning occurring outside the traditional classroom (e.g., in labs, maker spaces and libraries) and often led by non-tenure eligible faculty and staff. W&M’s faculty underutilize these co-educators as partners.
- Graduate programs received limited attention in the whitepapers – reflecting a consistent lack of inclusivity for these schools and programs within a whole-institution perspective. Students echoed a lack of emphasis on the graduate student perspective.
- Existing graduate programs require thoughtful evaluation to ensure sustainable support is in place before considering an expansion of the number or scope of graduate research programs.
 - Additional graduate programs could diminish an area’s existing focus, often to the detriment of undergraduate education.
- Existing strengths should be leveraged rather than diverting support to new startup programs.
- Supporting interdisciplinary teaching and research meaningfully stretches some smaller departments within existing infrastructures and resources.
- The quality of W&M’s undergraduate education, enhanced by the COLL curriculum, is the university’s primary competitive advantage. However, to some respondents, COLL has fallen short of its interdisciplinary promise. Fulfilling COLL’s promise and leveraging it as a strength were widely noted in feedback.
- The quality of student research experiences depends upon sufficient research-active faculty to provide mentoring. Tenure status poorly reflects “research-active” faculty status in many disciplines and individual cases, though tenure status generally regulates the university infrastructure for research support.
- Existing models of online learning may not advance the instructional requirements of all fields, particularly those in which sensory perception is fundamental (e.g., presence enhances perception of objects/materials, touching, doing, etc.).
- An innovation hub, as described by Research & Innovation, risks duplicating rather than expanding Office of Sponsored Programs’ capacity. Supporting innovation would be best accomplished by incentivizing existing strengths rather than adding a layer of bureaucracy, which would introduce additional costs. These costs would detract from resources that should be directly devoted to faculty work. A collaborative, information-sharing clearinghouse is the missing function.
- When engaging external partners for research funding, scholars (not private interests) should set research agendas.
- The positive tone of the white papers limits exposure of negative, potentially ugly, aspects of W&M, particularly in regard to campus climate – a necessity for addressing those issues productively.

- W&M needs to consider the entirety of its community, not just the academic aspect of the university (e.g., Housekeeping, Facilities Management, Dining Services, and others). Staff viewpoints and contributions were underrepresented.

Observations on Areas that were Missing in the External Scan

- Specific departments and programs (staff and faculty) desired direct representation on the SPSC or subcommittees (e.g., representation by ranks and disciplines, middle management, etc.).
- Despite the fact that all three subcommittees used diversity, equity and inclusion as a critical lens in their external scans, these concepts were noted as absent or deserving even greater emphasis. Students noted diversity of faculty and staff as crucial to flourishing and engagement, for themselves and for everyone in our community.
- Information Technology underlies most, if not all, potential university responses to the trends identified in all three subcommittee white papers.
- W&M continues to avoid an open discussion on the expected balance of teaching and learning, including the seemingly taboo subject of undergraduate research as hindering our ability to be at the cutting edge in some fields.
- Informed conversations require consistent, university-wide data on instructional workloads.
- More exploration is needed into the role of joint faculty appointments spanning departments and programs.
- W&M must recognize and address the inherent risk in innovative, interdisciplinary research. Enhanced financial support mechanisms are necessary to embrace that risk, including bridge funding between grants.
- Opportunities created by the forthcoming Arts Quarter received little or no attention.
- Facility shortfalls for programs not directly served by recent construction/renovation projects received limited attention. Students noted improving dorm conditions as a high priority.
- Enhancing cross cultural learning experiences would better attract international students.
- Critical thinking needs to be named as an explicit outcome of teaching and research.
- W&M needs to define viable peers for realistic comparison, rather than aspirational peers (far wealthier private or much larger public institutions).
- The meaning of “silo” needs clarification. The metaphor is used ubiquitously, potentially indiscriminately, in the subcommittees’ white papers. What does it mean and is there agreement on the phenomena it names?
- National trends of eroding tenure and academic freedom, also felt at W&M, were unaddressed.
- W&M lacks leadership development and career pathways – the ability to grow in place – for faculty taking on additional responsibility as well as staff. Mentoring, for faculty and staff, is needed (and also time-consuming).
- Focus on faculty retention as a factor in teaching and research as well as diversifying W&M.
- Limited partners, such as K-12 education systems or community colleges, were engaged in considering W&M’s future students and their preparation entering the university.

- Compensation, particularly for W&M's lowest-paid employees, deserved more attention as an aspect of wellness within the community. Graduate student support, including stipends and university-subsidized healthcare options, also received insufficient attention. Concerns for faculty compensation, salary compression and lack of incentives were shared.

Submitted Briefs

Africana Studies
American Studies
Anthropology (separate briefs for R&I, T&L)
Applied Science
Art & Art History
Arts & Sciences Committee of Chairs and Program Directors
Arts & Sciences Committee on Graduate Studies
Biology
Center for the Liberal Arts
Computational Applied Mathematics and Statistics (CAMS)
Computer Science
Concerned students, non-tenure-eligible faculty and staff
English
Environmental Science & Policy
Office of Finance
Film & Media Studies
French & Francophone Studies
Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Geology
Global Research Institute
Global Studies
Government
History
Information Technology
Linguistics
Marine Science
Mathematics
Modern Languages & Literatures
National Institute of American History & Democracy
Native Studies
Neuroscience
Philosophy
Physics
Psychological Sciences
Raymond A. Mason School of Business Curriculum Committee
Raymond A. Mason School of Business Diversity & Inclusion Committee
Raymond A. Mason School of Business Research Committee
Religious Studies
Robert J. Scholnick, American Studies and English (individual brief submission)
Sociology
Staff Assembly
Student Assembly
University Libraries
W&M Athletics