



SEIZE YOUR POTENTIAL

The strategic plan of Richard Bland College of William & Mary, Fiscal Year 2020

"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew." – Abraham Lincoln

What is the role of a selective, two-year, residential, liberal arts transfer institution within the higher education landscape of the Commonwealth of Virginia? This is a key question that must be answered to ensure the success of Richard Bland College (RBC) and the constituency that the College serves. The 2020 RBC strategic plan's primary objective is to answer that very question so that the College, the community and the Commonwealth can engage successfully within this identity and purpose, to the benefit of all.

RBC has long been identified as the *hidden gem* of higher education in Virginia. The *hidden* adjective is based both on its relative obscurity—few are aware of RBC outside the Tri-Cities region—and its rural setting: 750+ acres of bucolic forest and wetlands, and home of the state's oldest and largest pecan grove. Additionally, on average, a student of Richard Bland College travels a mere 36 miles to arrive at campus. This keeps the knowledge of RBC in a tightly focused radius. The *gem* moniker refers both to the College's reputation for excellence and the undeniable sensation that the campus often elicits in its students, visitors, faculty and staff, the feeling of a warm and palpable embrace of care, compassion and support.

That sensation is where we start.

According the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), 99% of the 11.5 million new jobs created since the great recession require workers to have more than a high-school education. Students with a bachelor's degree have an earning potential almost double that of people with only a high school education. And yet, only 17% of residents in the Petersburg area have achieved a bachelor's degree, 15% below the national average. The obstacles in the way of education have been exhaustively researched and include college readiness, financial challenges, lack of self-esteem, slow college assimilation and immature levels of self-efficacy.

To combat this growing problem, Richard Bland College initiated a pilot program to determine the viability of a data-driven approach to improve retention and graduation rates. The program ultimately effected a cultural, organizational and operational shift at RBC, resulting in a personalized model of student support, the Exceptional Student Experience (ESE@RBC).

Originally many of the practices that RBC used for the basis of ESE@RBC were adapted from the four key principles found in the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project: 1) map pathways to student end goals; 2) help students choose and enter a program pathway; 3) keep students on path; and 4) ensure that students are learning. Unfortunately, limited resources made it necessary to skip some primary elements of guided pathways and to instead focus on specific projects that were immediately available for implementation and considered of the highest priority, namely centralized student support.

This strategic framework reimagines the way that RBC serves students, faculty and staff within the context of our existing culture, the principles of guided pathways and a hybrid work-college experience. Rather than thinking of a two-year college as a pipeline to a four-year university, this vision describes a more expansive menu of well-defined pathways to high-demand fields, all radiating from a curriculum constructed on the soft skills that define the liberal arts experience: critical thinking, written communication, analytical reasoning, civic engagement and oral communication. Furthermore, the impact of meaningful work is a resonating theme, providing avenues to participate in career-focused internships and jobs that develop important life & work skills, confidence, and character; all grounded on a foundation of assessed outcomes and continuous improvement.

The Richard Bland College Core Values

The following core values are the foundation of the culture and personality that are Richard Bland College. These values are what make our organization live and breathe; they direct the actions and decisions that are made every day. They help to define our long-term vision.

A friendly, family atmosphere

It is a consistent theme heard from faculty, staff and students - the comfort, the warmth, the family feeling that permeates the campus. An expansive atmosphere of support exists, allowing all members of the College to uncover and act on their inherent potential. That sensation is embedded at the core of Richard Bland College and is highly *valued*.

"We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return as results." – Herman Melville

Enthusiastic, student-focused service

Ask any faculty or staff member at Richard Bland College why they come to work on any given day and a single answer will resound: the student. We *value* that our mission centers on the success of our student body and we endeavor to provide service of the highest quality to support their journey to success. RBC processes and procedures are built, assessed and improved in the name of the student and all agree that nurturing that potential is our sole purpose.

The power of difference

Difference comes in many forms: diversity of the campus population; the myriad ways problems can be solved and risks mitigated, the various methods by which students learn and can be supported. RBC continually strives to build an inclusive and welcoming community of individuals with diverse talents and skills from a multitude of backgrounds who are committed to civility, mutual respect, and the free and open exchange of ideas. We *value* these differences because each new exchange gives our collective additional breadth of experience and knowledge and makes us stronger and better than we were.

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences." – Audre Lorde

Building confidence

The dramatic transformation that occurs among students between Welcome Week and Commencement is incremental but astounding. Students move from the general idea of a college education to fully formulated plans that include academic majors, professional goals, and transfer programs that strategically match their skills and dreams. Faculty and staff grow personally and professionally, and they hit stride on their career goals as they interact and engage with the campus. We *value* that Richard Bland College is a place where all have the opportunity to assist someone into the next stage of their life and career with newly discovered confidence, or to cultivate their own individual potential and fortitude.

Quality outcomes

In the end, the result matters, and the faculty, staff and students of Richard Bland College *value* that we do our best to be the best. Through rigorous processes of assessment and adjustment, strategic change is continuously pursued to improve and ensure that every outcome is of the highest quality; that the effort and resources put into every initiative is used with the utmost responsibility and efficiency.

The Richard Bland College Core Mission

The core mission of Richard Bland College makes the heart of the organization beat and focuses the enthusiasm that all faculty and staff have for the success of the College and its constituency. As defined by our core values and the culture they create, our core mission is...

TO PREPARE OUR STUDENTS FOR A LIFETIME OF ENDLESS POTENTIAL

The Richard Bland College Student Value Proposition

Guided Pathways for Success (GPS@RBC)

The Commonwealth of Virginia has defined a vision to be the best educated state by 2030. To achieve this, four goals were defined as part of the framework for identifying key areas of focus: provide affordable access for all, optimize student success for work and life, drive change and improvement through innovation and investment, and advance the economic and cultural prosperity of the Commonwealth and its regions. Richard Bland College is well positioned to support this effort because the innovative program (ESE@RBC) that is used to remove barriers to education is well established, but it can be more.

Research and data collection done in support of our current strategic planning cycle strongly suggests that RBC should evolve ESE@RBC into a fully implemented guided pathways framework as it provides a well-defined **student value proposition**. This framework is composed of A) easy to navigate onboarding; B) clearly defined pathways that outline workforce-friendly majors and credentials, and effective processes for entering a pathway; C) fast track programs to get academically underprepared students into and through crucial English and math courses; D) high-touch, intensive student-centric support across the college; and E) tools for faculty,

staff and students that provide useful information about assessment and progress. The design and implementation of this comprehensive program, **Guided Pathways for Success at Richard Bland College** (*GPS@RBC*), is the primary focal point of the future-sighted strategic plan of the College.

This is an initiative that redesigns the entire college to improve the student experience for every student from entry through graduation and deliberately aligns faculty and staff under a clear, laser focused purpose. The primary directives involve reforms in advising and registration processes to help all students identify realistic and relevant goals as early as possible in their academic career. Well-defined and easy to follow program maps are developed to meticulously guide students in each program through the academic journey from beginning to end with the primary objective ... to avoid as much wasted time as possible

There is also a strong focus on how students are supported, monitored and tracked throughout their courses of study college-wide. A full redesign of academic programs, student services, administrative services, recreational services and any other service that touches the student in order to meet their needs is the focus in an effort to end the confusion that is created through acronym-filled lingo and ambiguous, bureaucratic processes.

And finally, alignment with local and other high-need labor markets is a major principle, ensuring that value exists as students leave with a defined credential and the skills to succeed in the workforce.

The Richard Bland College Student Value Proposition consists of two primary elements. These are defined as our strategic goals:

Strategic Goal: An educational product of high-value at a lower cost

Richard Bland College will provide access to educational programs that are streamlined and well-defined, thereby allowing learners to proceed deliberately and efficiently. These programs will be carefully vetted for transferability, academic rigor and relevance to the current market. They will provide unique experiences, including opportunities for research, internships and job appointments that cultivate in-demand soft- and industry-specific skills.

Strategic Goal: An unmatched student experience

Richard Bland College will provide a student-centric experience unlike any other in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Support and guidance at every stage of the student lifecycle will be provided enthusiastically with processes and procedures that are user-friendly and remove barriers. Through this focused service, RBC will ensure that learners have a clear path to graduation, transfer and beyond. When a student reflects back on their time at RBC, the only acceptable memory will be how amazing the experience was and how it helped them reach their potential.

The Richard Bland Core Promise

In order to execute our core mission and provide our unique **student value proposition**, resources are required to fund and support the operations and infrastructure of the college. The Richard Bland Core Promise states that:

All faculty and staff will support the success of our learning community by aggressively pursuing fiscal stability, operational efficiency and a culture of excellence and innovation.

Strategic Goal: Sustainability in Operation

Higher education costs are increasing, and unfunded mandates are multiplying while state funds and the number of high school graduates continue to decrease. This results in a dependency on tuition and auxiliary revenue to cover expenses. To prevent unduly shifting the financial burden to students, RBC is committed to identifying alternative funding streams, improving internal financial management tools, and using all available resources in a sustainable and responsible manner.

To ensure a more robust endowment, philanthropic giving and alumni engagement will be invigorated with a focus on student success. Current trends in fundraising highlight interest in one-to-one giving, making appeals for more and varied scholarships a smart strategy. Leveraging the gift of alumni time and talent for program development, internship support, and job placement builds relationships and creates support systems beyond financial gifts. To ensure clarity of goals, targeted giving and legacy campaigns will be established.

RBC has ample opportunity to innovate internally. Automating systems where possible will free up staff to manage more strategically important challenges. Expansion of data dashboards that are transparent and adaptable will clarify expectations and push accountability to drive continuous improvement.

Making the most of every resource that Richard Bland College has is paramount, which includes initiatives in environmental sustainability and recycling. Lower operating costs mean more funds that can be applied to the student value proposition.

These are the tenets that will drive the resource engine at Richard Bland College.

Strategic Objectives

The following strategic objectives have been crafted to ensure that the student value proposition is well developed and the Core Promise is kept.

- A. Construct and/or update programs that prepare learners for entry into employment or to advance further education in fields of economic importance to the RBC service area. It is crucially important that these programs are clearly documented and presented in a user-friendly manner, with well-defined course sequences, critical milestone points, and available targeted opportunities.
- B. Refine recruitment and admissions processes so that they are clearly presented, easy to follow, and keep prospective students accurately informed of requirements and next steps. Onboarding should be effortless and will: a) expose the student to career/transfer opportunities so that pathway decisions can be made; b) develop full program plans based on the chosen path; c) remove all barriers to starting the education process.
- C. Initiate partnerships with high schools that provide college-level credit and/or motivate and prepare students for college-level coursework. Create programs that provide support for underprepared students in college-level math, English and key gateway courses that are intrinsic to a majority of program pathways.

- D. Develop/improve the processes and tools that support the students during their educational journey at RBC. Progress and risk alerts should be accurate and provide information that can be used for in-time interventions by students, faculty and staff.
- E. Administrative processes, particularly those that have a direct impact on the student, will be evaluated and redesigned to provide the smoothest, most user-friendly experience possible. Barriers to every facet of the educational system will be removed including, but not limited to, registration, course availability, event and activity participation, housing & dining plan enrollment, and bill processing & payment.
- F. Continue to develop and fine-tune college-wide assessment systems and reporting mechanism to stimulate a culture of continuous improvement in all academic and administrative areas.
- G. Using institutional assessment results, create targeted, professional development opportunities for faculty and staff that improve the quality of the RBC student value proposition and the job satisfaction of all employees. Develop processes and programs that ensure equity and reward excellent performance and encourage engagement.
- H. Ensure that students have various opportunities to participate in experiential learning activities, including internships, service learning, job placements and other similar programs that are deeply embedded in the curriculum; the chance for a student to receive financial relief from tuition and other educational costs should always be top of mind. Assessment of effectiveness is paramount.
- I. Develop high-quality, practical learning spaces, both physical and virtual, that support innovative, effective learning through cutting-edge instructional technologies and pedagogies.
- J. Increase non-tuition revenue streams through: a) efficient practices and projects that sustain campus resources and promote environmental stewardship; b) aggressively pursue opportunities for grant-based funding; c) identify new or improve current auxiliary revenue streams; d) a deeply engaged partnership with the RBC Foundation to guide and support fundraising campaigns, community initiatives and alumni relationships.
- K. Institute or expand processes, policies and activities that cultivate a campus environment where physical, psychological and cultural safety and health are of the highest priority.
- L. Produce initiatives and curriculum that promote global thinking and perspectives to expand problem solving capacity, develop communication skills and encourage cultural awareness, understanding and mutual tolerance.