

William & Mary

Strategic Visioning & Positioning

W&M Preeminence Framework



WILLIAM & MARY

CHARTERED 1693

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Project Context



HURON

William & Mary's Mission Statement

William & Mary's mission highlights preeminence. This process has served to clarify what preeminence means to the institution and identify opportunities to enhance W&M's preeminence across mission areas.

A **preeminent, public research university**, grounded in the **liberal arts and sciences** since **1693**, William & Mary is a **vibrant and inclusive community**. Through close mentoring and collaboration, we inspire **lifelong learning**, generate new knowledge, and expand understanding. We cultivate **creative thinkers, principled leaders, and compassionate global citizens** equipped for lives of meaning and distinction. William & Mary convenes great minds and hearts to meet the most pressing needs of our time.



Defining “Preeminence”

Striking the right balance between inputs will be essential to establishing a shared and widely understood definition of preeminence. It will be critical to calibrate W&M’s definition of preeminence to resonate with its intended audiences.



Prominence

Implementing initiatives that position William & Mary as a **leader** amongst higher education institutions and enhance **undergraduate demand, alumni engagement, and national influence.**



Data & Accountability

Utilizing **institutional data** to demonstrate performance across key metrics and inform future decision-making about investments and strategic initiatives.



Peer Comparison

Evaluating how the institution compares to **competitive** and **aspirant peers** in specific areas to understand where the institution outperforms or lags behind.



Institutional Rankings

Assessing performance across various **national and global rankings systems** (e.g., U.S. News & World Report, Princeton Review, Wall Street Journal).



Storytelling

Broadcasting a compelling, authentic narrative **from the institution** that resonates with diverse **internal** and **external stakeholder groups**, showcasing the institution’s history, values, performance, and future vision.

Focus Areas of Huron’s Analysis

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W&M Preeminence Framework



W&M Preeminence Framework: Overview (1 of 2)

W&M leadership has identified three key objectives that should be central to the institution’s future:



Strengthen undergraduate demand



Deepen alumni engagement



Expand national influence

W&M has referred to itself as preeminent, as indicated in its mission statement, but has not systematically assessed its performance beyond rankings. This preeminence framework, distinct from prior W&M rankings work, is adapted from other preeminence models and refined to fit W&M’s institutional context, comprising four dimensions:

Dimensions of Preeminence

Student Demand

Academic Excellence

Research & Innovation

Student & Alumni Outcomes

Each dimension within the preeminence framework includes:

- **Preeminence Criteria:** Key metrics used to evaluate W&M’s performance against national and Virginia benchmarks, with associated drivers that show the strongest observed correlation
- **Problem Statements:** Key questions W&M must answer to inform strategic direction and institutional priorities
- **Inventory of Strategic Options:** A targeted, non-exhaustive set of ideas surfaced through leadership interviews that support long-term aspirations

The preeminence framework is intended to serve as a tool to guide strategic planning and decision-making. The framework provides a structured lens to surface institutional challenges, identify areas of opportunity, and inform future investments.

W&M Preeminence Framework: Overview (2 of 2)

The Preeminence Framework was shaped by a robust benchmarking analysis and interviews with W&M leadership. Achieving and sustaining national preeminence across each key metric will require targeted institutional investment and strategic planning.

Benchmarking Overview

The Preeminence Framework defines the core criteria and benchmarks necessary to achieve national preeminence.

The following comparator groups were used to establish relevant national benchmarks:

- Current / Aspirant Peers (currently recognized by W&M)
- Enrollment Competitors (top institutions where W&M admits choose to enroll)
- Public Ivy Institutions
- Ivy League Institutions

Investment Implications

William & Mary is approaching national benchmarks across several key metrics, with some already surpassed. **William & Mary will need to prioritize investment in targeted areas** to achieve remaining national benchmarks and sustain long-term progress.

Achieving National Preeminence

Through benchmarking against various comparator groups and discussions with W&M leadership, eight key metrics were identified as critical indicators of national preeminence:

1. An **applicants per seat** ratio of 15.6 or higher for full-time, first-time-in-college students
2. An **undergraduate acceptance rate** of 22 percent or lower
3. An **undergraduate enrollment yield** of 42 percent or higher
4. Total **annual research expenditures per faculty FTE** of \$397,000 or more
5. A **freshman retention rate** of 97 percent or higher for full-time, first-time-in-college students
6. A **4-year graduation rate** of 86 percent or higher for full-time, first-time-in-college students
7. A post-graduation outcome rate of 94 percent for **undergraduate students employed or pursuing further education within six months of graduation**
8. A **median starting salary** of \$75,000 or higher for undergraduate students

W&M Preeminence Framework: Problem Statements

W&M leadership can leverage the preeminence framework to generate targeted problem statements that can be addressed through subsequent strategic planning efforts.

Category	Strategic Problem Statements	Operational Problem Statements
Student Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What scale of undergraduate enrollment should W&M seek to achieve? How can W&M become a top-choice for out-of-state students? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What strategies can help strengthen and expand a high-quality applicant pool? What factors most influence admitted students' decisions to enroll (e.g., offerings, affordability, campus culture), and how can those drivers be strengthened?
Research & Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which disciplines should W&M make targeted investments in to expand research productivity? What investments are needed in those disciplines (e.g., cluster hiring, PhD program expansion, etc.)? How should W&M balance targeted investment in specific research areas (e.g., computer science, marine science) with broader efforts to elevate research across the entire institution? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What sources of funding should W&M pursue to support research growth amid a challenging external environment (e.g., private, corporate, etc.)? How should W&M structure, resource, and incentivize research to foster a culture of research and increase faculty research productivity while maintaining teaching excellence?
Academic Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What risks, if any, to W&M's historically strong retention and graduation rates might the institution need to address? How can W&M foster an environment that prioritizes academic excellence, student support, and belonging? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where would additional, incremental spending on academic instruction and support yield the greatest impact on students? What academic or co-curricular experiences will continue to drive W&M's high student persistence?
Student & Alumni Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does W&M offer the right mix of high-demand academic programs that align with strong post-graduate outcomes? What initiatives can W&M implement to improve post-graduate outcomes across disciplines while staying true to the institution's public service identity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where are there opportunities to expand experiential learning to improve post-graduate outcomes? How can W&M's messaging more effectively balance affordability and ROI—reinforcing strengths in cost compared to private comparators, while addressing gaps in post-graduation earnings?

W&M Preeminence Framework: Next Steps

W&M leadership has an opportunity to refine the Preeminence Framework through further conversations with a broader group of stakeholders during the institution's forthcoming strategic planning exercise.

Before Strategic Planning

1. Engage Cabinet in a discussion around the draft preeminence framework, with objectives to:
 - Augment criteria, metrics, and targets
 - Refine problem statements
 - Expand inventory of strategic options
2. Bring the draft preeminence framework to the Board for discussion and feedback

During Strategic Planning

1. Socialize the draft preeminence framework with a broader group of stakeholders to invite input and feedback
2. Leverage the preeminence framework and problem statements to generate priorities, initiatives, and success measures for the strategic plan
3. Finalize the preeminence framework

After Strategic Planning

1. Launch the strategic plan and finalized preeminence framework
2. Establish an approach and cadence for reporting on progress against the strategic plan, as well as the preeminence framework

Additional Detail: Student Demand

W&M is underperforming on applicants per seat relative to the national preeminence benchmark. W&M has historically admitted students at a higher rate – and converted admitted students to enrolled students at a lower rate – than national benchmarks.

Preeminence Criteria

Criteria	W&M	National Benchmark	Virginia Benchmark	Potential Drivers
Applicants per Seat	10.0	15.6	9.4	Median Starting Salary
Acceptance Rate	37%	22%	40%	Total Applications
Enrollment Yield	27%	42%	28%	Acceptance Rate

Problem Statements

Strategic

- What scale of undergraduate enrollment should W&M seek to achieve?
- How can W&M become a top-choice for out-of-state students?

Operational

- What strategies can help strengthen and expand a high-quality applicant pool?
- What factors most influence admitted students’ decisions to enroll (e.g., offerings, affordability, campus culture), and how can those drivers be strengthened?

Initial Inventory of Strategic Options

- Develop a strategic national enrollment strategy
- Expand infrastructure to offer more competitive out-of-state financial aid packages
- Market / increase visibility of “programs of distinction” to drive application growth
- Address gaps in median starting salary to drive prospective student interest
- Conduct analysis of out-of-state lost admits to inform yield strategies
- Strengthen campus culture to drive prospective student interest
- Leverage alumni networks in target markets to increase W&M visibility
- Refine and clarify messaging around sticker price vs. net price
- Expand K-12 partnerships (e.g., free applications, FAFSA support, etc.)

Additional Detail: Research & Innovation

W&M’s research expenditures per faculty FTE fall below state and national benchmarks, highlighting a need for continued investment – especially amid rising research costs – to sustain R1 status and boost productivity. W&M has an opportunity to build upon recent investments and initiatives in this area.

Preeminence Criteria

Criteria	W&M	National Benchmark*	Virginia Benchmark	Potential Drivers
Research Expenditures per Faculty FTE	\$100,000	\$397,000	\$200,000	Doctoral Student FTE, Percent of Full-Time Faculty

Problem Statements

Strategic

- Which disciplines should W&M make targeted investments in to expand research productivity? What investments are needed in those disciplines (e.g., cluster hiring, PhD program expansion, etc.)?
- How should W&M balance targeted investment in specific research areas (e.g., computer science, marine science) with broader efforts to elevate research across the entire institution?

Operational

- What sources of funding should W&M pursue to support research growth amid a challenging external environment (e.g., private, corporate, etc.)?
- How should W&M structure, resource, and incentivize research to foster a culture of research and increase faculty research productivity while maintaining teaching excellence?

Initial Inventory of Strategic Options

- Implement cluster hiring strategies to attract faculty with strong research funding track records
- Incentivize departments to launch new PhD programs to strengthen research output and institutional reputation
- Assess research and PhD funding models (e.g., subsidization by UG tuition revenue, IDC strategy, etc.)
- Expand corporate partnership infrastructure to support research initiatives
- Incentivize faculty to engage with national media outlets (e.g., NPR, etc.) to publicize their research
- Expand W&M communications around research impact and individual success stories
- Build on existing efforts to clearly define research-active faculty and assess faculty workloads to drive research while maintaining teaching excellence