



WILLIAM & MARY

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REPORT OF THE W&M FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE SEPTEMBER 2023

DAVID S. ARMSTRONG, PHD
W&M BOARD OF VISITORS, FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE

There have been several recent positive developments that have, I believe, raised the spirits of the faculty. The inaugural performances in both dance and music in the new Arts Buildings were well received, and it was a delight to see these new facilities. The visible progress on the construction of ISC4 is also exciting to see (although it does mean that traversing this corner of campus on foot will continue to be a challenge for a while!). The increase in salaries for this academic year were, of course, welcome, and the news that the Commonwealth budget will include an additional 2% salary pool midway through this year was heartening to hear. Finally, after several years of little or no faculty hiring, but attrition in the ranks due to retirements and other departures, there were a significant number of new hires authorized in the past year, most of whom have arrived on campus with this semester. It has been invigorating to meet such accomplished and energetic new colleagues.

Also, in Arts & Sciences, the new Teaching Faculty framework has been implemented. This framework, for faculty not on the tenure track, redefines position titles, standardizes contract lengths, clarifies expectations and responsibilities, as well as merit and promotion criteria. All those faculty members who were previously “Lecturers” or “Senior Lecturers” were reclassified as Assistant Teaching Professor, Associate Teaching Professor, or Teaching Professor, dependent on qualifications and experience. I believe this long-awaited new policy is an important step in recognizing and rewarding the essential contributions of those A&S faculty whose primary focus is instructional.

Several colleagues have expressed concern to me about a couple of issues. The recent tragic event at U.N.C. Chapel Hill in which a faculty member was shot and killed by a graduate student have reminded us that campus safety is continuing issue, and that we cannot be complacent about the possibility of an active shooter incident affecting W&M. While W&M has an active Emergency Management Team, and provides online training on how to respond to such an event, it may be that there is more that we can do to prevent a similar tragedy, and to be ready to deal with it should it occur.

Another concern that I have heard is in the growth of some administrative offices, at a time in which the total size of the faculty has been essentially flat. This is a nationwide concern of higher education faculty, and is not unique to W&M. The fraction of administrative support and “middle management” positions, relative to the faculty who are on the front lines of teaching and research, has been steadily growing over time. Some of this growth can be attributed to increasing compliance and assessment requirements at the state and federal levels, and from accrediting bodies, but it is unclear to many of my colleagues that all of this growth is warranted.

Finally, many of us have noted the apparent effects of pandemic-related learning loss at the K-12 level in the preparation of some of our incoming students, in particular in mathematics. Fewer of our students appear to be coming to us with advanced math (eg. AP calculus) in their portfolio, and anecdotally, the general mathematical skills of our bright and talented students seem, on average, somewhat weaker than in years past. This matches nationwide trends. This learning loss could adversely affect on-time graduation rates, and create an equity gap for some students wanting to major in STEM fields. We may need to look into ways that we can ameliorate these effects in our curriculum, and by using our academic support systems.