



WILLIAM & MARY

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REPORT OF THE W&M FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE SEPTEMBER 2022

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The Fall semester is the first since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that feels like a “normal” one for most of the faculty. Following guidelines from the CDC and from the W&M Public Health Advisory Team, classes are mostly in-person, social distancing is not required, and many faculty, staff and students are now comfortable teaching, learning, and socializing without masks. Of course, some continue to choose to mask-up, depending on their personal and family health circumstances and degree of comfort with risk. I have not heard of any questioning of these individual choices. Most of us are happy to be back in person and on campus. However, a recent upswelling (as this is being written) of COVID cases amongst the students demonstrates that we are not entirely back to normal.

One “silver lining” of the pandemic is the growth in the competence for many of us in the use of various technologies (ably aided by the expertise of the Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation and our IT department). This has made it evident that some of these tools can enhance our teaching, research, and service, even post-pandemic. For example, it can be more efficient and inclusive to hold certain meetings via Zoom rather than in-person, and in those cases we should, and are, doing so. In contrast, the pandemic has also made it crystal clear that some academic activities (such as in laboratories, musical ensembles, *etc.*) in online form are only pale imitations of their effectiveness when held in-person. We should continue to learn from the pandemic, to adopt technology and remote interaction when it enhances our mission, and eschew it when it does not.

While the faculty continue to be concerned about challenges to the university’s fiscal situation the welcome round of raises was very positive for faculty and staff morale. It was welcomed that merit was used for much of the raise pool; rewarding especially those who were able to be highly productive in research, scholarship, teaching, and service during the pandemic.

An important new employment framework has been developed for those faculty in Arts & Sciences who are not tenured or tenure-eligible. These are valued colleagues who are central to our educational mission. The draft plan provides a clear promotional path, more appropriate titles which are better harmonized with those used in the Schools, and better defined expectations for these faculty. Many of us hope that this framework will be approved and in place before the next academic year.

The continued growth of undergraduate enrollment, while generally welcomed, does provide challenges and pressures in some units. The elasticity of our response to more students varies considerably across the departments and schools. As one example of a stress point – the limited number of appropriate laboratory rooms available for General Chemistry and Organic Chemistry,

coupled with increased undergraduate demand due to rising enrollments have necessitated evening labs - and we are on the verge of requiring Saturday labs. This is not ideal for staff, students and faculty, especially as we recognize the importance of “wellness”. Academic work, no matter how enjoyable and important should not be allowed to take over all personal time.

Another stress point is our innovative and ambitious general education curriculum for undergraduates, the “COLL” curriculum. Each undergraduate is required to take approximately 30% of their credit hours from COLL courses. A recent study has that we have been meeting these needs, but often just barely and only after late adjustments to the course schedule, and sometimes with students not being able to select the courses that best meet their needs. Continued growth in undergraduate enrollment underlines the importance of constantly monitoring how we are handling the increased number of students, and how we shift and add resources in response.

The fact that all five of academic Deans are new in their positions is exciting, and the faculty cautiously welcome innovation and new perspectives from their Deans. Many of us eagerly await the opening of the new Fine and Performing Arts Complex, which will so dramatically improve the facilities for teaching and performing in the Arts. The excitement is palpable. Similarly, many have been engaged in the planning and design for Phase IV of the Integrated Science Center and look forward to that project breaking ground.