



WILLIAM & MARY

CHARTERED 1693

REPORT OF THE W&M FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE FEBRUARY 2023

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

The assessment of student learning is one important aspect of the teaching role of faculty members. Sometimes improvements in technology make this work both more efficient and more effective. Familiar examples include electronic homework submission and grading tools, often used in large introductory classes, and the use of annotation software in Microsoft Word or with PDF documents. However, technology can also provide setbacks or challenges to our ability to assess and grade student work. Recent developments in AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools in natural language writing, such as ChatGPT, are an example. Such AI tools now enable a student to generate a paragraph or even few-page length essay on a given prompt (without ever themselves understanding the material!), and so this may require significant changes to the way some course work is assigned and assessed. In Arts & Sciences, Acting Dean Suzanne Raitt has recently charged a working group, in partnership with the Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation, to investigate best practices to tackle this very new challenge.

Many faculty members continue to follow the developments of the proposal for a new Computing, Data Science and Applied Science entity with interest, and are looking forward to providing input and suggestions to the newly announced Steering Committee for this initiative.

The recent announcement of the new Applied Research & Innovation Initiative is exciting and certainly welcome – I hope this serves as a successful model for supporting multidisciplinary research that has important societal applications, and that engages faculty and students across departments and schools in solving problems which require techniques and approaches spanning multiple academic disciplines.

Finally, several colleagues have expressed their concern to me about recent developments in Higher Education (in other states) which threaten, or seem to threaten, freedom of speech and of academic inquiry. Freedom of thought, of inquiry, and of speech, within our classrooms, our laboratories, and throughout the university, is central to our mission. I am reminded of the statement of Rights and Responsibilities that opens our Faculty Handbook, and I am happy to be a member of a university that treats those rights and responsibilities as fundamental. I hope that William & Mary continues to adhere to those aspirations.