

Executive Summary

- Within a competitive process open to all, W&M is aware of legacy status in admission decisions. As specified in Board-approved policy, that status may apply when other considerations are essentially equal.
 - Reflecting a competitive process open to all:
 - SAT scores for admitted students with legacy status fall within the range for the total admitted pool – with the 25th percentile being equal among both groups (1410 for both).
 - High school GPA for admitted students with legacy status also falls within the range for the total admitted pool – with the 25th percentile being within one hundredth of a point (4.23 vs. 4.24).
 - Waitlisted applicants – the pool of potential “next up” offers of admission if space is available – are less diverse than enrolling students. Further diversifying the student body will require attracting a more vibrant pool of highly qualified applicants. Legacy awareness has limited, if any, adverse impact in this regard.
 - W&M considers a variety of indicators of an applicant’s propensity to enroll. Legacy status is among these indicators alongside others available to all applicants such as interviewing (in-person or virtually) or visiting campus. Reflecting a higher propensity to enroll, the yield rate for admitted students who are legacy is more than double that for a general applicant (no visit/interview, 44% vs. 18%).
 - Supported by research, W&M is pursuing outreach and scholar program strategies as part of its continuing efforts to broaden the socioeconomic range of the student body.
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Background

William & Mary considers an applicant’s familial relationship with the university, commonly referred to as “legacy status,” in alignment with the institution’s admission policies (see policy on p. 9). As originally approved in 1973 and revised in 1978 by the Board of Visitors, those policies affirm “application for admission to [William & Mary] is open to all, acceptance to be decided on a competitive basis within the framework of certain concepts, balances and constraints.” Among those concepts, balances and constraints are its character as a publicly supported state institution, seeking students who bring academic excellence, enriching the fabric of the community by attracting a rich diversity of background and talent, concluding two considerations must remain paramount: (1) the potential benefit of the university to the student and (2) of the student to the university. Regarding legacy status specifically, “Other considerations being essentially equal, preference will be given to the applications of children of alumni of all schools of the [university].”

The Common Data Set (CDS) provides a common basis and format for higher education institutions to convey information about themselves. As part of its CDS, W&M annually and publicly conveys the relative importance of academic and nonacademic considerations in admissions decisions using the CDS scale of very important, important, considered and not considered.

As shown in Table 1, W&M considers an applicant’s propensity to enroll through a number of considerations, including alumni/ae relation. Any applicant may demonstrate interest

in the university by visiting campus, interviewing (in-person and virtual formats available) or engaging with a W&M admission counselor during a high school visit or college fair.

Table 1. Relative Importance of Various Factors in W&M Admissions Decisions (as of 2023-24)

| | Very Important | Important | Considered | Not Considered |
|-------------|--|-----------|--|--|
| Academic | Rigor of secondary school record; class rank; academic GPA; standardized test scores; application essay; recommendations | | | |
| Nonacademic | Extracurricular activities; talent/ability; character/personal qualities; state residency; volunteer work; work experience | | First generation; interview; alumni/ae relation; geographical residence; level of applicant's interest | Race/ethnicity; religious affiliation/commitment |

Analysis

A. Open to All, Competitive Admissions

In fulfilling the “other considerations being essentially equal” component of being aware of alumni/ae relation, it’s critical to honor the competitive basis for admission to W&M. When considering the admission stages (applied, admitted and enrolled) in the figures and tables below, it’s important to remember that admitted reflects **university decisions** on applicants (i.e., who the university offers the opportunity to enroll); enrolling reflects **student decisions** beyond the university’s control (i.e., which students choose to accept the university’s offer). Enrollment decisions are made by individuals among the institutions to which they have been admitted.

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 2, admitted students with legacy status’ high school GPAs fall within the overall range of all admitted students. For all admitted students and those with legacy status, the 25th percentile GPA was essentially the same, differing by one hundredth of a point (4.24 vs. 4.23) and reflecting a competitive admissions process regardless of familial relation to W&M. For admitted students who chose to enroll, the median high school GPA was essentially the same (again differing by three hundredths of a point, 4.36 vs. 4.33) for those with legacy status, who again fall within the overall range of admitted students.

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 3, admitted students with legacy status’ SAT scores fall within the overall range of all admitted students. For all admitted students and those with legacy status, the 25th percentile score was 1410, reflecting a competitive admissions process regardless of familial relation to W&M. For admitted students who chose to enroll, the median SAT score (1440) was the same for those with legacy status, who again fall within the overall range of admitted students. Within W&M’s test-optional policy, test scores were submitted for consideration at the same rate by applicants with legacy status as all applicants at both the admitted (69.2% vs. 69.8%) and enrolled (59.7% vs. 59.0%) stages.

Figure 1. High School GPA by Admission Stage, Fall 2023 Entering Cohort.



Table 2. High School GPA by Admission Stage, Fall 2023 Entering Cohort.

| | | 25th | 75th | Median |
|----------|--------------------|------|------|--------|
| Applied | All | 3.93 | 4.44 | 4.20 |
| | With Legacy Status | 4.00 | 4.45 | 4.26 |
| Admitted | All | 4.24 | 4.59 | 4.42 |
| | With Legacy Status | 4.23 | 4.56 | 4.38 |
| Enrolled | All | 4.19 | 4.53 | 4.36 |
| | With Legacy Status | 4.18 | 4.50 | 4.33 |

Figure 2. SAT Score by Admission Stage, Fall 2023 Entering Cohort.

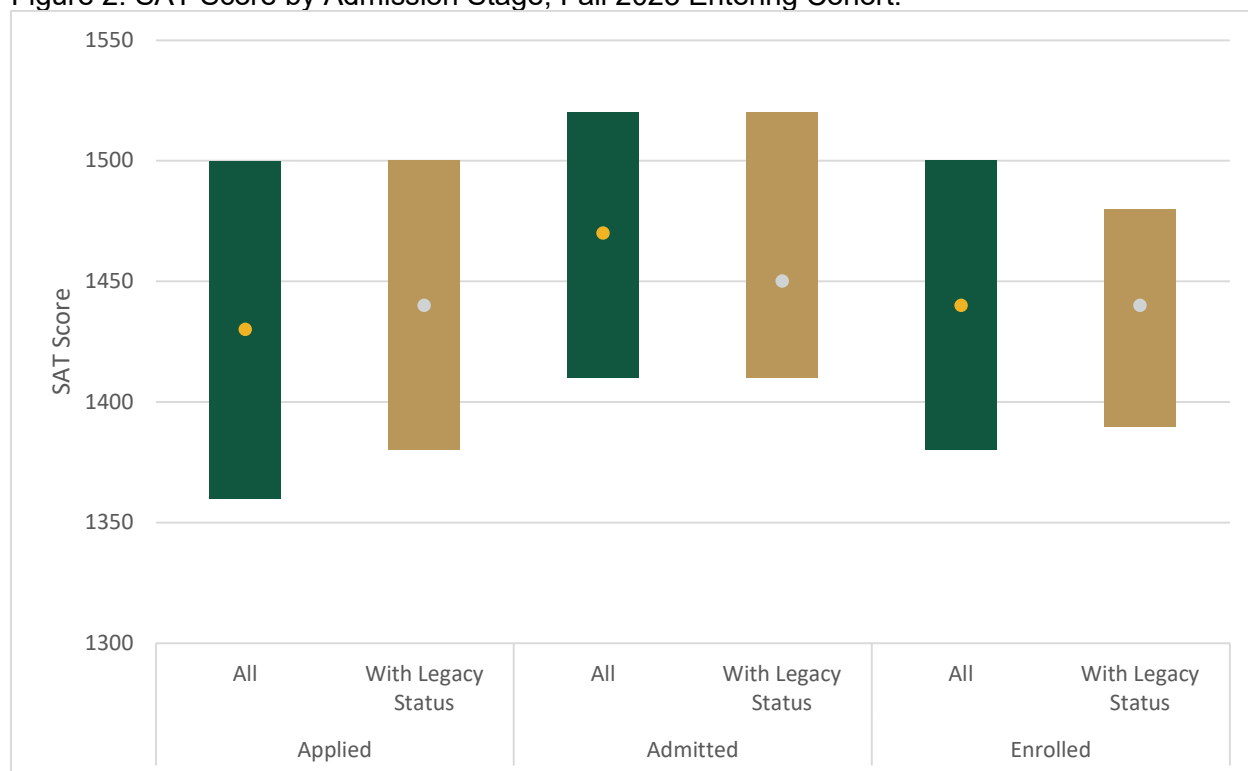


Table 3. SAT Score by Admission Stage, Fall 2023 Entering Cohort.

| | | 25th | 75th | Median |
|----------|--------------------|------|------|--------|
| Applied | All | 1360 | 1500 | 1430 |
| | With Legacy Status | 1380 | 1500 | 1440 |
| Admitted | All | 1410 | 1520 | 1470 |
| | With Legacy Status | 1410 | 1520 | 1450 |
| Enrolled | All | 1380 | 1500 | 1440 |
| | With Legacy Status | 1390 | 1480 | 1440 |

Within the competitive process, the 1978 policy document notes “in its need to enrich the fabric of the college community, to avoid rigidity, and to enlarge its possibilities, the [university] must try to reach out to a rich diversity of background and talent.” Considering the waitlist offers insight into the outreach during the admissions process. According to the university’s [website](#):

Knowing that some admitted students will decline our offer and elect to attend other institutions, we offer admission to more applicants than can be accommodated. The waitlist provides a means through which other capable applicants may be selected for admission if fewer students than anticipated accept our offer of admission.

Waitlisted applicants reflect the pool of potential “next up” admission offers if additional space becomes available in the enrolling class by virtue of admitted students evaluated as more qualified during the review process declining offers of admission. The composition of applicants

offered a spot on the waitlist (see Figure 3) and those responding affirmatively (see Figure 4) demonstrate limited possibility of further diversifying the enrolling class through the waitlist. The waitlist composition warrants monitoring in future years as the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions on affirmative action in college admission is observed.

Figure 3. Applicants Offered Waitlist Status for Fall 2023 Admission.

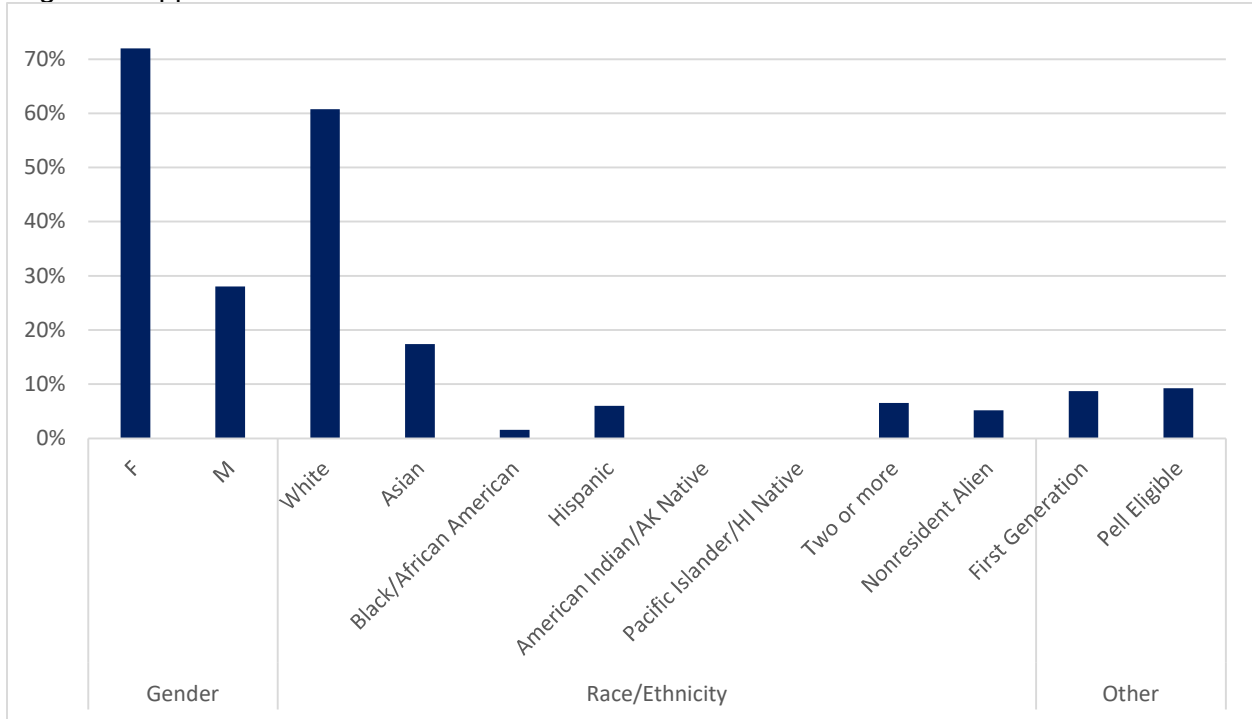
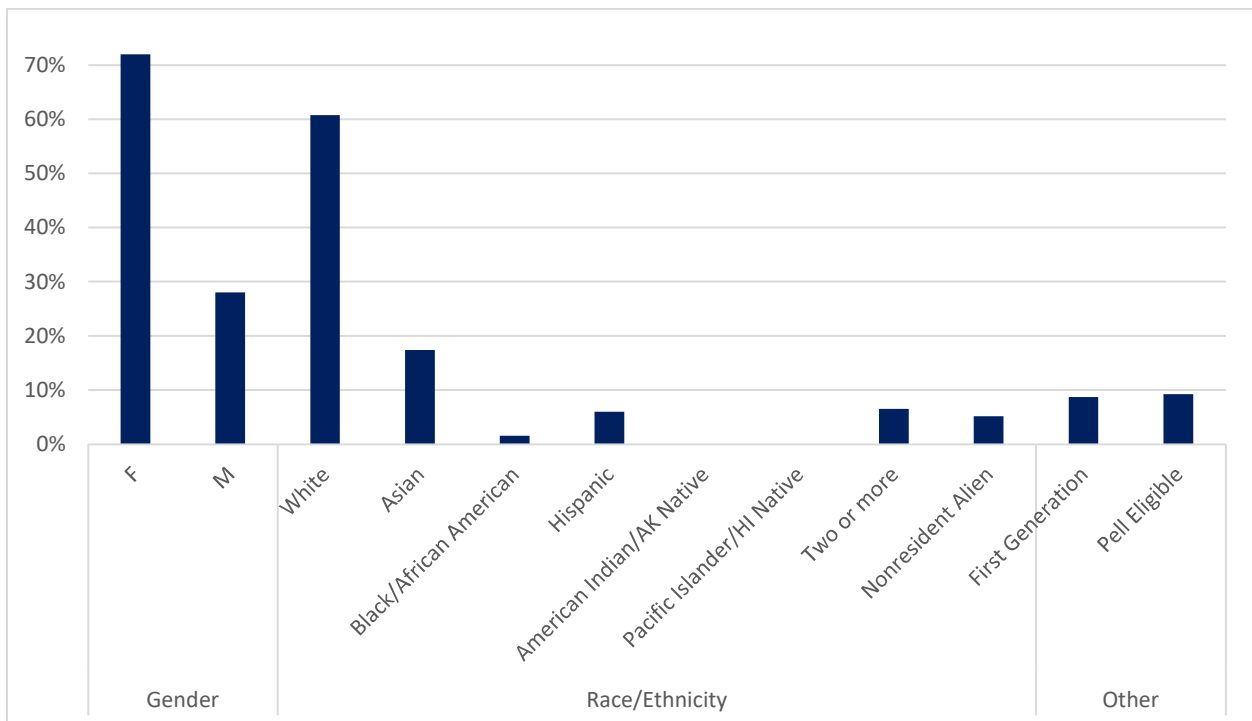


Figure 4. Applicants Affirming Waitlist Offers for Fall 2023 Admission.



B. Propensity to Enroll

While conducting a process grounded in the principles of being open to all and decided on a competitive basis, a fundamental outcome of the enrollment function is securing an enrolling class generating sufficient revenue to meet the operating needs of the university. Most often, this outcome is achieved by enrolling a sufficient number of students.

The emphasis revenue generation differs based on market demand for enrollment at a particular institution, which, in turn, drives the level of selectivity possible in admissions. W&M enjoys strong market demand, allowing it to be selective in admissions. Nevertheless, the university must be conscious of enrolling a sufficient number of students to meet institutional financial needs. Therefore, an applicant's propensity to enroll is considered during the admission process. (The following section, "Environmental Context," provides additional information on the broader environment.)

As shown in Figure 5, two-thirds of students who enroll – reflecting individual decisions to accept the university's offer of admission – participate in a campus visit before applying. Recall that enrollment decisions are made by the individuals admitted by the university – not the university itself. It's unsurprising that a higher percentage of individuals who ultimately choose to accept W&M's offer of admission undertake a campus visit before applying. Those individuals had a high level of interest in the university, which is often heightened by experience with the campus as a prospective student. The same holds true for applicants who interview.

Likewise, though admitted students with legacy status are five percent of the total admitted pool, these students comprise eight percent of the enrolling class. They have a higher propensity to enroll when admitted.

Yield rate conveys the percentage of admitted students who enroll. A higher yield rate overall indicates greater strength within its target market (students to whom it offered the opportunity to enroll). Yield rate for various subcategories of applicants reveals their propensity to enroll, thereby allowing the institution to meet the fundamental outcome of enrolling sufficient students in an entering class. Figure 6 shows the yield rates for these categories of applicants.

Figure 5. Percentage of Applicant Pool by Admission Stage, Fall 2023 Entering Cohort.

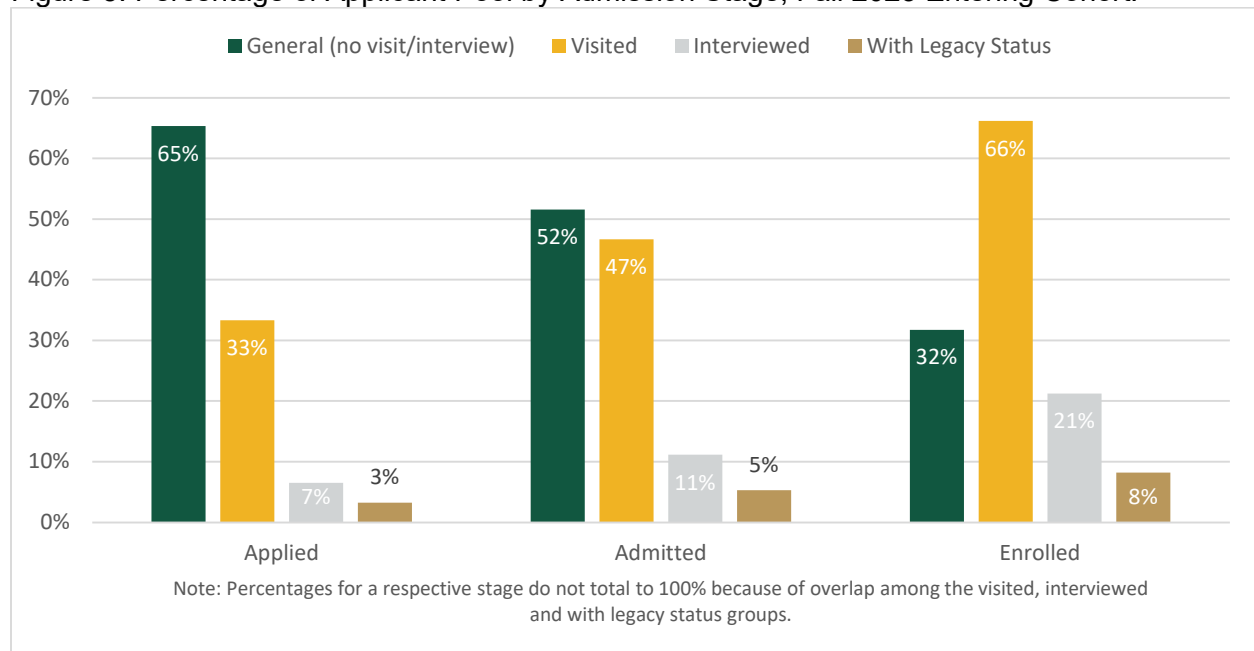
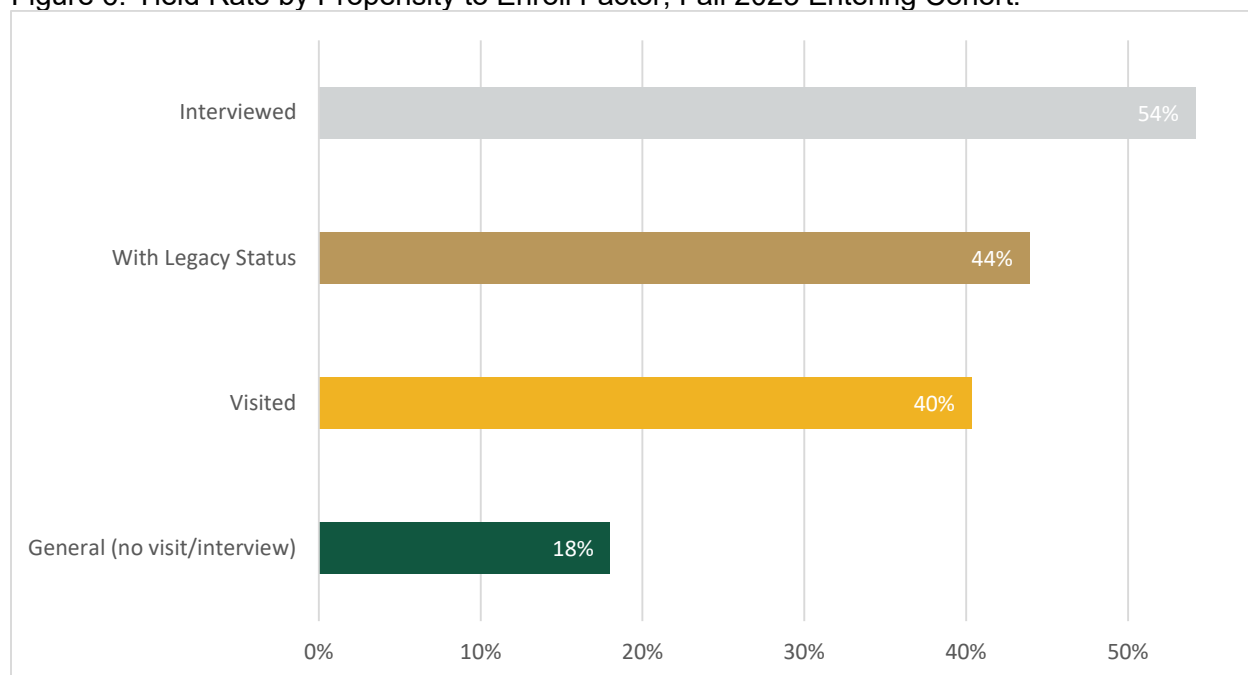


Figure 6. Yield Rate by Propensity to Enroll Factor, Fall 2023 Entering Cohort.



C. Environmental Context

Given the present focus on the role of legacy status in admissions nationwide, additional environmental context is helpful. A number of studies have documented the role that socioeconomic status plays in securing admission to colleges, particularly highly selective colleges and universities. Often, such studies focus on “Ivy-Plus” institutional cohorts that include the Ivy League universities as well as other elite selectivity institutions such as Chicago, Duke, MIT and Stanford. Table 4 compares these institutions' admissions statistics to W&M.

A recent study of Ivy-Plus institutions as well as leading public flagship institutions (W&M was not among the latter cohort) concluded:

Highly selective public colleges also have a larger share of students from very high-income families than middle-class families, but the gap there is driven by disparities in application rates rather than admissions rates. Thus, increasing socioeconomic diversity going forward will require different approaches at different types of colleges. ...At public colleges, interventions to increase application rates from qualified students, such as the HAIL intervention at the University of Michigan¹, changes in out-of-state tuition, and outreach policies are likely to be more impactful.²

W&M is evaluating several strategies aligned with the recommendations for public institutions.

¹ Dynarski, S., Libassi, C.J., Michelmore, K., & Owen, S. (2021). “Closing the gap: The effect of reducing complexity and uncertainty in college pricing on the choices of low-income students.” *American Economic Review* 111(6), 1721–56. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20200451>.

² Chetty, R., Deming, D.J. & Friedman, J.N. (2023, July). *Diversifying society's leaders? The causal effects of admission to highly selective private colleges*. (NBER Working Paper No. 31492). National Bureau of Economic Research, see p. 51. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31492>.

Table 4. Admission Statistics for Ivy-Plus Institutions, 2020-21

| Institution Name | Applied | Admitted | Enrolled | Admit Rate |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Stanford University | 55,471 | 2,190 | 1,757 | 3.9% |
| Harvard University | 57,786 | 2,318 | 1,951 | 4.0% |
| Massachusetts Institute of Technology | 33,240 | 1,365 | 1,177 | 4.1% |
| Columbia University | 61,110 | 2,524 | 1,641 | 4.1% |
| Princeton University | 37,601 | 1,647 | 1,290 | 4.4% |
| Yale University | 47,240 | 2,509 | 1,786 | 5.3% |
| Brown University | 46,568 | 2,568 | 1,705 | 5.5% |
| University of Pennsylvania | 56,332 | 3,304 | 2,418 | 5.9% |
| Duke University | 49,703 | 2,927 | 1,744 | 5.9% |
| Dartmouth College | 28,356 | 1,750 | 1,221 | 6.2% |
| University of Chicago | 37,974 | 2,460 | 2,053 | 6.5% |
| Cornell University | 67,380 | 5,852 | 3,718 | 8.7% |
| <i>Median: Ivy-Plus</i> | <i>48,472</i> | <i>2,485</i> | <i>1,751</i> | <i>5.4%</i> |
| William & Mary | 17,475 | 6,386 | 1,684 | 36.5% |
| W&M: In-State | 7,089 | 3,110 | 1,068 | 43.9% |
| W&M: Out-of-State | 10,386 | 3,276 | 616 | 31.5% |

Sources: IPEDS, W&M Fact Book-Admissions



POLICIES GOVERNING THE ADMISSION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TO THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA

Application for admission to the College of William and Mary is open to all, acceptance to be decided on a competitive basis within the framework of certain concepts, balances, and constraints discussed below.

The College accepts and seeks to blend the diverse aspects of its character. As a publicly supported state institution it must be responsive to the needs of higher education in Virginia. As a selective institution it must look for students who can bring academic excellence to the college community. As an institution wishing some sense of continuity and sustained interest it must relate to its alumni. And in its need to enrich the fabric of the college community, to avoid rigidity, and to enlarge its possibilities, the College must try to reach out to a rich diversity of background and talent. In all of this, two paramount considerations must be the potential benefit of the College to the student and of the student to the College.

As a state supported institution of higher learning, the major responsibility of the College is to Virginia residents. The Board of Visitors specifies the ratio of in-state to out-of-state students to be admitted to the College. Recognizing that the infusion of talent from other parts of the United States and from foreign countries allows William and Mary to achieve a greater complexity and diversity, the College will continue to admit a significant percentage of out-of-state students.

The College expects high academic qualifications from its entering students. An entering freshman must have shown an ability to perform well in his pre-college years, both scholastically and on standard examinations. An entering transfer student must have shown an ability to perform well at the college level. Evidence of imagination and tenacity are considered indicative of promise in academic matters as well as in special interest areas. A student unable to meet the academic challenge of William and Mary will be frustrated in attempting to realize his potential. A binding limitation on admissions, therefore, is that the student should, in the best judgment of the Admissions Office, be able to meet this challenge.

The College recognizes strong bonds with its alumni. Other considerations being essentially equal, preference will be given to the applications of children of alumni of all schools of the college. The College also recognizes an obligation to give special consideration to applicants from Richard Bland College, and from the Virginia Community Colleges, who desire to transfer to William and Mary.

Along with these considerations, the College desires to incorporate into its community a wide variety of backgrounds, attitudes, and interests. This has meant a commitment to recognize and to try to meet the educational needs of members of minority groups. Diversity of geographical and economic backgrounds is sought. There is also a conscious effort to include in each class men and women with special talents and abilities or interests, whether artistic, athletic, scientific or in some other area. In some instances acceptance of such a student is based upon a special skill, subject again to the general premise that the student should be judged capable of solid academic accomplishment.

Admission policies are made by the Admissions Policy Committee in consultation with the Admissions Office and are subject to review by the Board of Visitors. Admissions procedures are developed by the Admissions Office in consultation with the Admissions Policy Committee.

*Approved by the Board of Visitors
May 19, 1973*

Revised October 28, 1978