

The Democracy Initiative

William & Mary Joint Board Meeting Pre-Read | February 2024

W&M has played a pivotal role in the shaping of Democracy since the founding of the United States, and since 1693 our university has been a home to and educated some of our country's most exceptional leaders – great minds, scholars, innovators, and thought leaders. Our alumni have influenced and shaped the nation and the world. W&M's Vision 2026 affirms that we are committed to leading “essential efforts to practice and promote democratic ideals in the pursuit of a more perfect union.” We recognize that the future of Democracy depends

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on active citizens who understand the ideals that undergird a healthy democratic society and who are practiced in the skills of democracy. The Alma Mater of the Nation is committed to producing scholars and graduates who bring those critical capacities to the communities where they live, work, and lead.

The Democracy Initiative is organized around two broad themes: (1) civics education and (2) scholarship and research. Civics education requires us to understand and practice the skills of democracy, including especially

the practice of engaging across lines of difference. We focus on scholarship and research by elevating research and the people doing democracy-adjacent work across our community, in local communities, and across the world. We are particularly attentive to our nation's origin stories, ensuring they are expansive, honest and unite us in a commitment to knowledge as a public good. The following are examples of key initiatives to date. The Democracy Initiative Committee supports the scaling these efforts throughout the W&M community including in classroom settings and in student clubs and organizations:

CIVICS EDUCATION

Self-Determination in Residence Halls

Philosophy of residential living at W&M for 50 years – representative, student self-governance; a living-learning Democracy laboratory for the first two years (required residency) and usually longer

Aspen Institute's Principles for Better Arguments
Framework discussed with all undergraduates during New Student Orientation, since 2021

- Take winning off the table
- Prioritize relationships & listen passionately
- Pay attention to context
- Embrace vulnerability
- Make room to transform

Constructive Dialogue Institute *Perspectives*

W&M served as pilot institution in 2021;
Now in a SCHEV Cohort: “educational tools based on cutting-edge behavioral science research.”

SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

Democracy Podcast – Leading researchers, teachers, students and practitioners consider the critical pillars of William & Mary's strategic plan, diving into the compelling ways democracy intersects with data, water and careers.

The Bray School Initiative – Joint venture with Colonial Williamsburg, a focal point for research, scholarship and dialogue around our nation's history as we approach 2026 and beyond

Office of Strategic and Cultural Partnerships

Provides the foundation for interconnected work related to local and national history; preparation for the United States' 250th celebration

The Lemon Project – Contributing to the scholarship on the 300+ year relationship between African Americans and W&M

By studying, teaching, and illuminating the rights and obligations of 21st Century citizenship, the Alma Mater of the Nation is uniquely positioned today to ensure that democratic ideals thrive for generations to come.