

Student Life

Williams Home > Strategic Planning > Student Life > Report of the Committee on Undergraduate Life

Report of Committee on Undergraduate Life April 4, 2002

The Committee on Undergraduate Life (CUL) is a committee of Williams students, faculty, and staff. Students are elected to serve by the College Council, faculty are appointed to serve by the Steering Committee, and staff are appointed to serve by the Dean of the College. The committee's purpose is to look at issues pertaining to campus life, then provide feedback and recommendations for improvement to the Dean of the College. The Dean of the College makes the final decision concerning implementation and changes.

GOAL:

In September 2001, President Schapiro called on the CUL to evaluate our student life program as part of the College's strategic planning process. Our charge was to 'think big, and not get bogged down in detail.' The CUL has spent the last three semesters discussing, investigating, evaluating, and debating issues of student life. Particular attention has been focused on the residential experience, the meaning of community at a small residential college, and on general life for students outside of the classroom.

INPUT:

The following individuals or groups met with the CUL as the committee assessed Williams' current residential and social programs:

- President of the College, Morton Owen Schapiro
- Dean of the College, Nancy Roseman
- John Hyde, Brown Professor of History and former Dean
- Harry Sheehy, Director of Athletics
- James Hodgkins, Former Director of Dining Services
- House Presidents
- The College Council
- The Committee on Diversity and Community
- The Junior Advisor (JA) Advisory Board
- Minority Coalition
- Student Life Staff at Bowdoin College, Middlebury College, Haverford College, and Amherst College
- Six focus sessions with Williams College students

A survey of the following schools was undertaken to compare campus support services for students at other smaller residentially-oriented colleges: Amherst, Babson, Bates, Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Colby, Connecticut College, Emerson, Haverford, Macalister, Middlebury, Oberlin, Sarah Lawrence, Smith, Swarthmore, Trinity, Vassar, Wellesley, Wesleyan, and Wheaton. This information is attached (attachment A).

Committee members toured several Williams College residential areas to gain a better

grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the current housing stock.

CAMPUS COMMUNICATION:

Recognizing that input from students is important to the process, the CUL:

- Established a website which included notes from the focus sessions held with students, as well as the CUL proposal at the conclusion of the academic year 2000-2001.
- Encouraged members of the Williams College community to provide feedback to the CUL through an email address. All members of the CUL were able to read and respond to input.
- Invited *The Williams Record* to cover the meetings of the CUL during the Fall and Spring Semesters, 2001-2002.
- Thanks *The Williams Record* for a superb series on the history of residential life at Williams and how the Williams' program compares with other small liberal arts colleges.

PERSPECTIVE:

What does the CUL consider important as it looks to redesign a program for student living? Indeed, what has the CUL learned about the campus culture, now and in relation to the past? What have we moved away from? Is campus life in need of new initiatives? Where are we moving to? Why? How?

- **We understand that the College has a culture and fabric that is rich and varied, and we have worked to preserve what we feel Williams holds close.** While comparisons have been made to other schools in our research, we recognize that Williams has qualities that are special and Williams-specific. There are College values, such as student self-governance and social inclusiveness, that we wish to support and, in fact, to rekindle, nourish, and sustain.
- **We recognize the College has changed and will continue to do so.** Student needs today are different than they were even ten years ago, yet significant change to the way the College views residential life has not changed for nearly thirty years. In fact, our program has been amorphous and lacks the direction and continuous support that we have found so prevalent at comparable schools.
- **We feel that the CUL has a duty to look to the College's broader goals, identity, and value system as it appraises and redirects student life.** President Schapiro has indicated that this is the moment to strategize and think about what we want the Williams of the future to look like. While considering the longer term goals of the College, we have tried not to undervalue personal interests of the individual student. The central question, in the end, is what does Williams stand for, and do its programs truly reflect that stance?
- **We attach importance to the need for administrative support systems if we are to offer our students the out-of-class experience that a residential college, by its very definition, should afford.** Support of programs and opportunities to assist students and the community is, we believe, long overdue.

WE RECOMMEND:

The CUL's final proposal weaves together recommendations from its proposal of May 2001 and our continuing discussions into this year.

1. Changes to the Room Draw Procedure.

We believe that by changing our room draw process, we can improve student's opportunities to meet a wider variety of their peers, strengthen the residential community, and foster social development and understanding, thus increasing learning

outside of the classroom. While we believe it can be beneficial for small groups of friends to room together, larger group sizes can lead to homogeneity in houses, which we consider contrary to the mission of the residential college. Therefore, we propose:

- Other than co-op houses, a reduction in the group size to 4 students per group, so that any special interest group may not 'take over' a house. For students in the class of '03 and '04 special exemption be made for people who previously picked-in with a group size of 5 or more, to avoid splitting up pre-formed residential groups.
- Other than co-op houses, a gender balancing of houses, so that no more than 60% of any house may be of the same gender.
- That the procedure of the posting of names on the WSO be dropped.
- Suggested implementation for changes: Spring 2002.

(all items approved by the Dean and implemented for 2002-03, except for the second half of item 1 (all student group sizes are reduced to 4))

2. The establishment of an Office of Community Life, eventually to be located in Baxter Hall.

There is no central office at the College to establish the basis for a productive, lively, better-planned residential experience. The initiatives we propose cannot be accomplished without strong leadership. We find this to be one of our distinguishing features when we compare Williams with other schools. This office could be temporarily located in a renovated Log (see attachment B). Working through this office, we recommend:

- A Dean or Director of Community Life.
- At least 4 or 5 Community Life Coordinators (CLC), who will live in residential areas. These staff members would have responsibility for advising students, working with the Campus Activities Office, House Coordinators and other campus leaders, organizing intramurals, community service, assisting with student planning of social and campus-wide events, and providing support to the Office of Community Life.
- Suggested implementation: Begin immediately with the hiring of the Dean or Director of Community Life, and the hiring of 4 or 5 CLCs.

(all items approved by the Dean. Item 1 will be implemented for 2003-04, though the official title is unknown at this time. Item 2 is implemented for 2002-03 as advertisements for 4 Community Life Coordinators were placed nationally on 4/19/02. The CLCs will begin on August 1, 2002)

3. Enhanced role and training for House Presidents as house leaders.

This particular initiative, a carry-over from last year, has already met with some success. There is much opportunity for additional growth, through sustained sponsorship by the administration. Students in these positions are eager to learn more about the College and are interested in enhancing their own leadership skills. The House Presidents Committee continues to be led by students and the agenda is set by the Co-Presidents. A job description and a regular working relationship with the Dean/Director of Community Life and the Community Life Coordinators will serve to strengthen and further define this role. We recommend selection and not election of these key leaders. Admittedly, this component of the plan merits further discussion as to implementation. Suggested implementation: Ongoing, High Priority for Dean or Director of Community Life

(this item was approved by the Dean and implemented for 2002-03. please note

*that House Presidents will become **House Coordinators** in 2002-03, reporting to the Community Life Coordinators. Their role will become that of facilitator, leader, and community-builder. Both the House Coordinators and Community Life Coordinators will receive extensive training before the start of employment)*

4. Adequate funding for the Renovation of Mission Park and Prospect House.

This is a high priority item, and we strongly believe that these renovations should be included in the College's capital plans. As currently configured, these houses make it almost impossible for any sense of residential community to develop. In both cases, however, architectural analysis show that dramatic improvements could be made by opening up horizontal spaces on individual floors, adding lounge areas and small kitchens, and making significant improvements to the large social rooms that already exist. Suggested implementation: Add to capital plan at once, begin work as soon as funding permits.

(no decision has been made by the Dean or administration concerning this item)

5. Increase the number of Co-op Houses and Small Residential Units (25 or fewer).

Students express a strong desire for residential settings that allow for smaller numbers to live together. The demand for Co-ops and smaller houses far exceeds the supply and we strongly urge that consideration be given to increasing their number. Suggested implementation: Study any and all possibilities for additions, begin work as funding permits.

(no decision has been made by the Dean or administration concerning this item)

6. Possible Establishment of an Anchor House Affiliation System.

A primary aim of the College and the CUL is to improve the sense of community at Williams. It is hoped that with the changes in Room Draw and with new staffing and support structures our new housing system will help to create a sense of community that crosses existing social boundaries. If adequately funded and staffed, the new Office of Community Life will be able to bring together individuals and divergent communities and help them to interact in more positive ways.

The CUL would also like to foster student participation in, and enthusiasm for, community service activities, social and educational programming, and an intramural sports program. In addition, we want to increase faculty and staff interaction within the residential community by affiliating them with the specific houses or entries. Towards these ends, we recommend consideration of the establishment of an Anchor House Affiliation.

The CUL spent a great deal of time and energy exploring the Anchor House concept as a four-year community-building enterprise that would transcend class-year and interest-group identification and provide a richer social and intellectual life for our students. Our thinking as we submit this report is that this system has great merit, but we believe implementation should not be undertaken until our Community Life staff is on board, the new room draw procedures have gone into effect, and the reorganization of the House Presidents is complete. These new initiatives may be sufficient to accomplish our residential life goals; only time will tell. If they prove inadequate to the task, then we believe the Administration, in concert with the Community Life staff and the then-sitting CUL, should very seriously consider implementing the Anchor House program.

Anchor Affiliation System:

- Create a number of Anchor Houses to serve as social centers and a means for broader community interaction. These Anchor Houses would most likely be Wood, Agard, Garfield, Perry, Spencer, Brooks, Tyler, Currier, and Dodd.
- The random assignment of all students to an Anchor House either prior to arriving on campus for their first year or during Winter Study. The affiliation would continue until a student graduates from Williams, and on into his or her alumni years.
- Each CLC be assigned to work with at least two specific Anchor Houses in order to help strengthen community and build cohesion, not only within a specific house, but also within that Anchor Affiliation system.
- All faculty and staff be assigned to an Anchor House.
- Each CLC be given an appropriate Anchor Affiliation major events budget to support their community-building efforts (\$10-15,000 each Anchor House - at minimum).
- Anchor House dining is an important component of our proposal, and the creation of Anchor House Dining should be undertaken if at all possible. Without the dining component we fear that the 'glue' necessary to make the Anchor system work may be lacking.

(a decision on this item by the Dean and administration is on hold pending the arrival and implementation of the Community Life Office and staff)

7. Make sure that student groups are adequately funded.

Last year's CUL proposal called for the elimination of chargebacks from B&G, Dining Services, Baxter Mailroom, and Security in order to increase the likelihood of club or house sponsored events. This recommendation was considered by the administration but, we believe, was rejected for sound reasons. Nonetheless, current budgets are insufficient. Student groups should be funded at a level which would allow them adequate resources to purchase services from the College for their events. A clear table of costs and charges should be available to all student groups. Suggested implementation: As soon as possible.

(the administration has substantially increased funding for programming and other student life initiatives. all service offices have begun to provide their pricing up-front, so students and other members of the community may be better able to adequately plan for their events and budget expenditures...implemented Spring 2002)

8. Continuation of guest meals (now called Student/Faculty Meals) at the Faculty Club.

Also a carryover from last year's proposal, we recommend this as a way to gather students together with faculty and staff. Three guest meals were organized during the fall semester and were very successful and the program continued this spring with growing enthusiasm among all who have attended. Regular funding should be provided for these events.

(approved by the Dean for 2002-03 implementation)

9. An analysis of first-year housing to determine whether the space available to house a class size of approximately 527 is sufficient.

Moving away from the qualitative to the quantitative, the CUL looked at the question of whether the supply of housing is adequate to meet the needs of the first-year class. Many first-years are housed in doubles that seem small. The CUL recommends that the College study this issue.

(no decision has been made by the Dean or administration concerning this item)

It is likely that the academic year 2002-2003 will be a period of intense planning and transition. It is important the the CUL continue to work with the College Council (CC), Minority Coalition (MinCo), All Campus Entertainment (ACE), the Dean's Office, campus service providers and offices, and especially the new Community Life staff (CLCs and HCs) to implement the changes we have outlined above.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Dew, Professor of History & Chair	Jean Thorndike, Director of Campus Safety
Maja Carr '02	Norma Lopez, Assistant Dean of the College
Elliott Morrison '04	Donna Denelli-Hess, Health Educator
Andrew Nathanson '04	Medha Kirtane, former MCC Asst. to the Dir.
Susan Combs '04	Denise Buell, Assistant Professor of Religion
Khurram Ahmed '03	Richard Kelley, Campus Activities Coordinator
Joslyn Nolasco '02	Steve Kuster, Asst. Prof. of Physical Educ.
Karen Untereker '05	Will Dudley, Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Stephen Collingsworth, Assistant Director of the MCC and Coordinator of LGBT Issues	Susan Engel, Lecturer in Psychology and Director of Education Programs
Tom McEvoy, former Director of Housing	John Phillips '02

E-mail Your Comments

on Residential Living and Student Life to: cul@williams.edu

E-mail the Committee on Undergraduate Life: cul@williams.edu

Report technical problems with these pages: hclmow@williams.edu