

FROM PURPOSE TO POLITICS

The Decline of Three
Liberal Arts Institutions

Shannon Watkins



August 2025

THE JAMES G. 
MARTIN CENTER
FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL

THE JAMES G.
MARTIN CENTER
FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL

353 E. Six Forks Road Suite 200
Raleigh, NC 27609

919.828.1400

Fax: 919.828.7455

www.jamesgmartin.center

Copyright 2025 James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal

This paper is available on the Martin Center website:
www.jamesgmartin.center

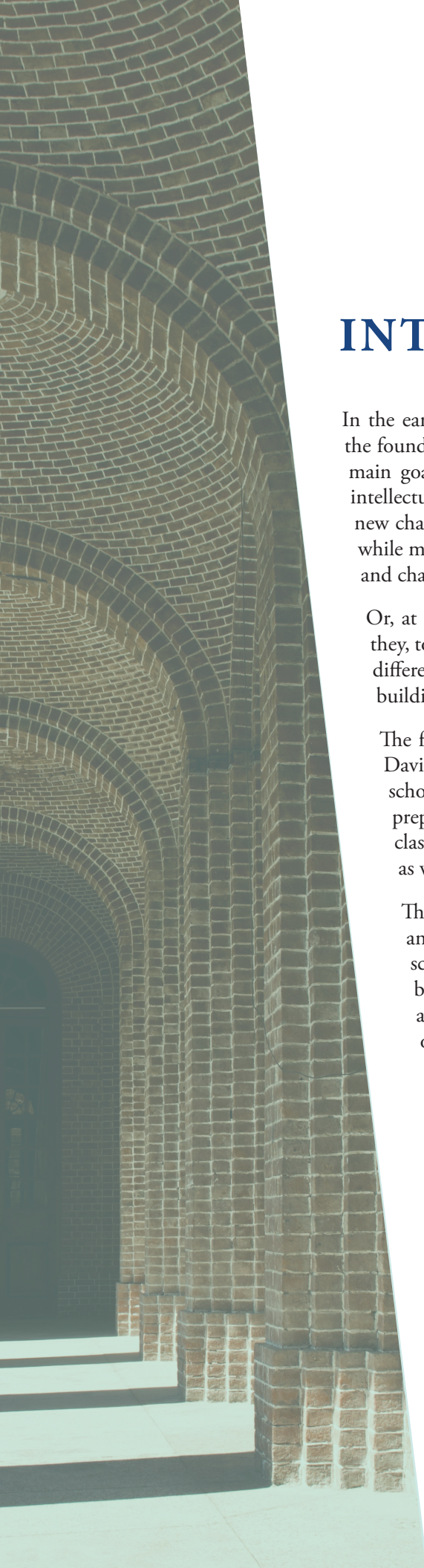
Distribution of this paper is encouraged as long as proper credit
is given to the author and the Martin Center.

ISSN 1935-3510

Cover Image: Photo by Akash Ravuri on Unsplash

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Davidson College	5
○ DRIFTING FROM ITS MISSION	5
○ DAVIDSON TODAY: A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN FOCUS	7
• FIRE Survey Results	7
• Institutional Neutrality	7
• Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Faculty Hiring	8
○ CURRICULAR CHANGES	8
• Changes in General Education	8
• Changes in Undergraduate Programs	9
○ CONCLUSION	9
Washington and Lee University	10
○ DRIFTING FROM ITS MISSION	10
○ WASHINGTON AND LEE TODAY: A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN FOCUS	11
• Free Speech	12
• Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	12
○ CURRICULAR CHANGES	13
• Undergraduate Program Changes	15
○ CONCLUSION	15
Williams College	16
○ DRIFTING FROM ITS MISSION	16
○ WILLIAMS TODAY: A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN FOCUS	17
• Free Speech	18
• Ideological Diversity versus Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	19
○ CURRICULAR CHANGES	20
○ CONCLUSION	21
Conclusion	22



INTRODUCTION

In the early years of our nation, the increasing demand for an educated population led to the founding of many small colleges. Almost all of them had religious roots and had as their main goals the moral development of students. Education was strongly tied to Western intellectual traditions dating back centuries. Over time, they underwent adaptations to meet new challenges, such as the growing need for professional and technical workers. But even while modernizing their curricula, they held firm to their foundations in religion, tradition, and character-building.

Or, at least they did until the mid-20th century. Like many other American institutions, they, too, succumbed to the assault on Western traditions. In the process, they became very different organizations from what their founders intended: out went faith and character-building, in came critical theory and grievance studies.

The following report examines the historical and recent changes at three such colleges: Davidson College, Washington and Lee University, and Williams College. Today, these schools are almost unrecognizable from their early years. All three were founded to prepare students for leadership roles in the church and society. Students studied a classical liberal arts curriculum, which included an in-depth study of Greek and Latin, as well as moral philosophy.

Their curricula grew, as required by scientific discoveries and the consequent industrial and technological revolutions. But more recently, the education offered at the three schools has been fundamentally reshaped. Their religious orientations have either been eliminated or severely weakened. Their expanded curricula lack coherence and are replete with ideologically charged themes. The same pattern can be found at other small private institutions across the country.

Many remain unaware of the dramatic shift that schools like Davidson College, Washington and Lee University, and Williams College have undergone. This report aims to draw back the curtain and ask whether the values and knowledge taught at these schools are the ones that donors, alumni, and parents wish to support? And whether these are the values and knowledge that students need?



DAVIDSON COLLEGE

Davidson College is an example of an institution that has lost sight of its founding mission. Davidson is located in Davidson, North Carolina, and was founded in 1837 by Presbyterians of North Carolina. It was named after William Lee Davidson, a general in the Revolutionary War and father of one of the college's founders, William Lee Davidson II.⁸ From the beginning, the founders envisioned the institution as a four-year college, even though some early accounts refer to it as a “manual labor school.” The initial plan was for students to perform three hours of manual labor a day alongside their studies. The exchange of labor for a reduction in housing expenses was the strategy to make the college accessible to lower-income students. The manual labor system, however, did not last more than a few years.⁹

AT A GLANCE

Tuition & Fees:	\$69,065 ¹
Undergraduate Enrollment:	1,901 ²
Administrative spending per student:	\$16,291 ³
Acceptance rate:	14.0% ⁴
4-Year Graduation Rate:	86% ⁵
Percent Male:	46.8% ⁶
Percent Female:	53.2% ⁷

Drifting From Its Mission

Today, Davidson College describes itself as a “liberal arts college dedicated to cultivating humane instincts and disciplined, creative minds.”¹⁰ But its original mission was inextricably entwined with inculcating a religious perspective. The resolution establishing Davidson College was penned by a minister named Robert Hall Morrison, who became the college's first president. The resolution read:

“Resolved, that Presbytery deeply impressed with the importance of securing the means of Education to Young Men within our bounds of hopeful talents & piety, preparatory to the gospel Ministry, undertake with humble reliance upon the blessing of God, the establishment of a Manual Labour School.”¹¹

A college unmoored from religious grounding, in Morrison's view, was doomed. To him, higher education and religion were inseparable:

"No wonder the friends of the Church feel a deep and growing solicitude, that religion and education, should blend their influences in advancing the... interests of the rising generation... acting in conjunction they promote order, temperance, justice, benevolence, faith, humility, and holiness... Array them against each other, and vice, corruption, misery, barbarism, tyranny, and usurpation carry on the work of individual and national degradation and ruin."¹²

"The Christian foundation that has served the College and its students so admirably for 184 years has clearly been fundamentally altered."

The school's close ties to the Presbyterian Church, however, did not alienate it from those of other religious persuasions. It was open to "persons of all religious denominations." The formation of Christian ministers was a central aim of the school, but its mission was broader: to make education available to members from "all classes of the community."¹³

All faculty members had to make a public profession of faith as part of the inaugural process. According to the college's 1860-1861 catalogue, professors were required to accept the Presbyterian Confession of Faith and were prohibited from teaching anything "subversive of the fundamental principles of Presbyterianism."¹⁴ Religious requirements were less stringent for students; most were not Presbyterian or members of a particular denomination. They could not, however, deny the existence of God and the Bible's authority. And they were required to participate in specific religious observances, including Sunday service and daily morning and evening prayer services.¹⁵

About 100 years later, those requirements began to wither away. The process started as a logistical problem. Although the church and college had undergone expansion and modernization to accommodate a growing student body, services in the 1960s were very crowded. In 1963, to alleviate the overcrowding, the faculty permitted students to attend morning and evening services at any church in the area.¹⁶ This decision was also made in light of growing student resistance to mandatory religious observance.

Convinced that "Required religious exercises are a vital and necessary part of the program of Davidson as a Christian college," the trustees initially resisted relaxing religious standards. Their resolve soon faltered, however. In May 1966, the board went along with a faculty vote to end mandatory religious services for a two-year trial period. Before the end of the trial, the trustees passed a faculty recommendation that "compulsory church attendance for the students be discontinued." This recommendation didn't remove the required morning prayer service, but that, too, was abandoned in 1969.¹⁷

Expectations for trustees and faculty were also relaxed. In 1957, the board consisted of 55 trustees, 43 of whom were elected by the presbyteries. An advisory committee in 1968 was charged with studying the college's relationship with the church. It aimed to maintain the college's religious affiliation, but in a "less formal and less restrictive" manner. The committee decided that the church elected too large a percentage of the board, a belief that influenced the 1976 revision of the college's bylaws that "established a board of forty, twenty-four to be elected by presbyteries, eight by the alumni association, and another eight by the trustees."¹⁸ This marked a significant change in the make-up of the board.

In 2021, the college again revised its bylaws by dropping two requirements:¹⁹ that the college president be a faithful Christian and that 80 percent of the board of trustees members be "active members of a Christian church."²⁰ A group of alumni, which included former Davidson professor and North Carolina governor James G. Martin, penned a letter voicing their opposition to these changes, stating that "the Christian foundation that has served the College and its students so admirably for 184 years has clearly been fundamentally altered."²¹ They also criticized the process by which these changes were made, arguing that it was rushed and lacked transparency.

Davidson Today: A Significant Shift in Focus

Today, the college's mission or "primary purpose" is to "assist students in developing humane instincts and disciplined and creative minds for lives of leadership and service."²² In the same statement, the college emphasizes that its ties to Presbyterianism remain "close and strong"—despite the fact that many students are unaware of the school's religious connection.²³ Davidson is currently affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA),²⁴ a progressive branch of Presbyterianism that promotes global engagement, inclusion of LGBTQIA+ groups, and anti-racist trainings.²⁵ This mindset is reflected in the following addition to its mission statement:

"The Christian tradition to which Davidson remains committed recognizes God as the source of all truth, and believes that Jesus Christ is the revelation of that God, a God bound by no church or creed. The loyalty of the college thus extends beyond the Christian community to the whole of humanity and necessarily includes openness to and respect for the world's various religious traditions. Davidson dedicates itself to the quest for truth and encourages teachers and students to explore the whole of reality, whether physical or spiritual, with unlimited employment of their intellectual powers."²⁶

Clarity of vision is a key component of a successful college. Just as vital, however, is putting the expressed vision into effect through concrete actions. Unfortunately, an examination of Davidson's current policies and free speech climate suggests that Davidson falls short of its declared aspirations. Firstly, it has weakened its relationship with the church and secularized its leadership. Second, the college has promoted a climate hostile to free expression and open inquiry, one that is inconsistent with Davidson's dedication to the "quest for truth." Although Davidson was the first private school in the Carolinas to adopt²⁷ the Chicago Principles, a set of guiding principles released²⁸ by the University of Chicago in 2014 expressing dedication to free and open discourse, work remains to make the campus hospitable to opposing views.

FIRE Survey Results

In its annual evaluation of higher education institutions, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression surveys students about their views on 1) openness to difficult conversations, 2) tolerance for speakers (conservative and liberal), 3) disruptive conduct, 4) administrative support for free speech, 5) comfort expressing ideas, and 6) self-censorship. Davidson ranked 127th out of the 257 examined schools.²⁹ A closer look at the specific categories in the rankings reveals areas where improvement is urgently needed. The college ranked 225th, very near the bottom, on students' comfort about expressing their thoughts in class and among their peers. For the "disruptive conduct" metric, which is based on students' approval of shutting down on-campus speakers, Davidson ranked a dismal 210th.

The college has promoted a climate hostile to free expression and open inquiry, one that is inconsistent with Davidson's dedication to the "quest for truth."

Institutional neutrality

In recent years, Davidson alumni have urged the college to adopt a commitment to institutional neutrality, a concept popularized by the University of Chicago's Kalven Report.³⁰ According to the report, institutions should strive to remain neutral on questions of current political significance. "To perform its mission in the society, a university must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures," states the report. In 2024, Davidsonians for

Freedom of Thought and Discourse circulated a petition for institutional neutrality, which received over 300 signatures from alumni, former trustees, students and parents, members of Congress, and others.³¹ As of this report's publication, the college has not committed to institutional neutrality.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Faculty Hiring

Davidson claims³² to seek faculty of diverse backgrounds, including diverse worldviews, but its hiring practices indicate otherwise. Hiring notices for various faculty positions explicitly require candidates to demonstrate adherence to “inclusive” pedagogy. One example is a 2023 listing for an Assistant Professor in Environmental and Natural Resource Economics.³³ To qualify for this tenure-track position, candidates were required to submit a cover letter describing their “approach to inclusive pedagogy and diversity in the classroom.” Another listing for a tenure-track English professor states that the college is “particularly interested in candidates who can design courses in critical theory,” and their cover letter must also discuss their “approaches to inclusive pedagogy.”³⁴ The list of job requirements includes “Commitment to inclusive pedagogy and diverse teaching methods.”

It is extremely doubtful that non-DEI-conformist candidates could progress through this screening process.

A 2022 listing for a tenure-track position in bioanalytical chemistry expresses particular interest in “candidates that have benefited from, contributed to, or created programs directed toward diversity and inclusion.”³⁵ In addition to teaching chemistry, the college seeks a professor interested in “justice/equality/community.”³⁶ Applicants must submit a statement on their teaching philosophy, which should include how they would “foster inclusivity and diversity in the classroom.”

Based on the college's transparently strong preference for DEI-aligned professors, it seems that conservative-leaning candidates are unlikely to be hired. The use of “Equity Advisers” in the hiring process makes the presence of conservative scholars at Davidson even more unlikely.³⁷ Equity advisers are non-voting faculty and staff search committee members who advise the committee on best

practices for inclusive searches. Students also participate in the process through the Student Initiative for Academic Diversity (SIAD). These students conduct on-campus interviews with faculty job candidates to determine their stance on DEI. It is extremely doubtful that non-DEI-conformist candidates could progress through this screening process.

Curricular Changes

Curricular changes are necessary as society develops and changes. Davidson has appropriately adapted its curriculum to reflect new insights and knowledge, particularly in the sciences. Much of its expansion in the humanities, however, signifies a loss of academic vision and rigor.

Changes in General Education

In Davidson's early days, all courses were required. The college had a “solidly traditional” curriculum, reflecting the classical curricula that dominated American colleges and universities through the Civil War.³⁸ According to an 1842 catalog, students took four Latin courses, two Greek courses, and one algebra course in their freshman year. The following years included studies in rhetoric, logic, astronomy, moral philosophy, political economy, chemistry, and other sciences. The school's religious commitment was reflected in its curriculum: all students in their senior year took a course called “Evidences of Christianity.”

Over time, the curriculum grew as new courses were added. Today's Davidson students must complete a 32-credit-hour general education program that includes requirements aligned with DEI.³⁹ The first DEI-focused requirement is the "Cultural Diversity" requirement, which can be satisfied by taking courses such as "Black Feminist Art Practices."⁴⁰ The course description explains that the "recent onslaughts of reproductive rights, and the rights of trans and gender non-conforming people, have irrevocably crushed our illusions of a taken-for-granted sovereignty over our own bodies."

The second is the "Justice, Equality, & Community" category, which can be satisfied by taking "Understanding Leadership through the Female Marvel Universe." This course apparently gives "leaders like Black Widow, The Wasp, Shuri, Kamala Khan, She Hulk, and countless other Marvel women the attention they deserve through a critical analysis of their origin stories, leadership characteristics, and contributions to the Marvel universe."⁴¹

Another course option is "Queer(ing) Québec," in which students learn about the "formation and the representation of LGBTQIA2S+ epistemologies and identities in Québec."⁴² Yet another is an English course titled "Representing Fat Bodies," which can be taken to satisfy either the "Justice, Equality, & Community" requirement or the "Lit, Creative Writing, Rhetoric" requirement.⁴³ The course description reads, "Lushly enfleshed in America and want favorable representation? Fat chance." The course aims to explore the question: "What beliefs does fatphobia inscribe, both about and beyond the fat body?"

Changes in Undergraduate Programs

In the 1871-1872 academic year, Davidson began offering two major courses of study.⁴⁴ The "classical course of instruction" took four years and led to a bachelor of arts degree. The "scientific course of instruction" took three years and overlapped with the classical course, except for the Latin and Greek requirements. By 1900, the scientific course took four years to complete and led to a bachelor of science degree.⁴⁵

Today, the college offers 31 majors and over 40 minors.⁴⁶ The college's STEM offerings have expanded to include genomics, bioinformatics, public health, computer science, neuroscience, and data science. All well and good. But also proliferating are identity-based and global studies. For example, students may major in Africana studies, Arab studies, East Asian studies, gender & sexuality studies, Latin American studies, Hispanic studies, and global literary theory. Minors include South Asian studies and Middle East studies.

Conclusion

From its small beginnings, Davidson was meant to be a place where Christian piety and academic excellence would mutually thrive. Indeed, Davidson's first president envisioned an institution that would combine the positive influences of religion and education for the benefit of society. An education that excludes religious observance and virtue formation from its central aims would have been unfathomable to the founding Presbyters. Although the college today touts its association with Christianity, the gradual distancing from religion reflected in its policies and curriculum suggests that its affiliation is more of a facade than a genuine commitment. The college's recent track record of ideological bias in faculty hiring and failure to foster an environment conducive to free inquiry are further abdications of its educational mission. If Davidson values the quest for truth, it must reverse course.

An education that excludes religious observance and virtue formation from its central aims would have been unfathomable to the founding Presbyters.



WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

AT A GLANCE

Tuition & Fees:	\$68,045 ⁴⁷
Undergraduate Enrollment:	1,884 ⁴⁸
Administrative spending per student:	\$12,761 ⁴⁹
Acceptance rate:	17% ⁵⁰
4-Year Graduation Rate:	91% ⁵¹
Percent Male:	48.8% ⁵²
Percent Female:	51.2% ⁵³

Washington and Lee University is another example of a private liberal arts institution that has drifted from its founding mission. It was founded in 1749 as Augusta Academy, named after its location in Augusta County, Virginia.⁵⁴ Throughout its history, the institution has been known by several other names: Liberty Hall Academy, Washington Academy, Washington College, and finally Washington and Lee University in 1870.

The two famous namesakes, George Washington and Robert E. Lee, played important roles in the institution's history. In the 18th century, Washington saved the struggling institution with a generous financial gift. Lee was president of the then-named Washington College from 1865 until he died in 1870. The university's website describes Lee's presidency as "transformative."⁵⁵

Drifting From Its Mission

Today, however, transformations of a very different nature are changing the character of the institution that became Washington and Lee in ways that its founders and subsequent leaders would disapprove. The school was established to educate young men for the Presbyterian ministry.⁵⁶ This meant providing them a solid liberal arts foundation: a 1776 announcement in the newspaper described Liberty Hall as an institution where "all the most important branches of literature, necessary to prepare young gentlemen for the study of physick, and theology, may be taught to good advantage."⁵⁷ George Washington gave considerable financial support to Liberty Hall because he desired to "promote literature in this rising empire, and to encourage the arts."

Henry Ruffner was a Presbyterian minister, a member of the faculty, and the W&L president from 1836 to 1848. In summarizing the college's early history, Ruffner noted that it was open to all Christian denominations.⁵⁸ The goal, he said, was to "manage it on such liberal principles that all the country might enjoy the benefits of the institution." Ruffner clarified that character formation remained central to the college. Indeed, Ruffner insisted it was a "duty" for

the Presbytery to “give a religious and moral education to the pupils of their academy,” adding, “but not to manage it with the sectarian view of making Presbyterians of all who might resort to it.” Consequently, the college did not teach one particular catechism or creed, but recited prayers “in terms common to all Christians.”⁵⁹

Ruffner believed in the positive influence of education on society, highlighting the need for the “influence of science and religion over the whole community” and warning against the “popular vice of ignorance.” Ruffner’s vision for American education was the training of “virtuous and intelligent citizens.”⁶⁰

The college honored that vision for many years. In 1852,⁶¹ students took a moral philosophy course in their senior year that included reading *The Evidences of the Christian Religion* by Archibald Alexander, the first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary.⁶² The book discusses the right use of reason in matters of faith.⁶³ The 1852 catalog also describes a program of “regular morning and evening worship.” On Sundays, students participated in Bible recitations, attended a theological lecture,⁶⁴ and were required to attend “one other public exercise” at a Christian church of their parents’ choosing.

Robert E. Lee continued the traditions established by Ruffner. Lee insisted that the most needed and important addition to the college was a chapel, not a new residence for himself.⁶⁵ “I shall fail in the object that brought me here unless all these men become consistent Christians,” said Lee.⁶⁶ In 1867, the chapel was erected in the center of campus and is now a national historic landmark.

Lee also brought significant academic changes to Washington College. He was an advocate of a robust liberal arts curriculum, but also introduced programs that prepared students for practical pursuits in law, business, and engineering.⁶⁷

“I shall fail in the object that brought me here unless all these men become consistent Christians,” said Lee.

Washington and Lee Today: A Significant Shift in Focus

W&L’s emphasis on character formation slowly waned through the 20th century. By the 1970s, chapel attendance had become optional. Today, the university is formally secular, although religious symbols such as Lee Chapel remain on campus.

W&L still identifies as a liberal arts university, highlighting its values of honor, integrity, and civility. Its current mission statement reads:

“Washington and Lee University provides a liberal arts education that develops students’ capacity to think freely, critically, and humanely and to conduct themselves with honor, integrity, and civility. Graduates will be prepared for life-long learning, personal achievement, responsible leadership, service to others, and engaged citizenship in a global and diverse society.”⁶⁸

The institution’s stated commitment to free thinking and civil and humane conduct is laudable. Recent actions by the university, however, suggest that these aspirations are only skin-deep. Instead, the university’s free speech policies are unsatisfactory, and its fidelity to DEI has manifested in open hostility toward the university’s history and namesakes.

Free Speech

Although W&L has adopted the Chicago Principles, expressing its dedication to free and open discourse, obstacles to free expression remain.

The Generals Redoubt, an alumni group focused on issues of free speech and civil discourse, told the Martin Center that the W&L administration outwardly supports free expression, but deliberately places roadblocks that make it difficult for guest speakers to come to campus.

The university's policy on events is one example of the red tape student groups must navigate. The largest venue on campus is Lee Chapel (now called University Chapel). However, as of a few years ago, *only non-major events* can bring outside equipment needed for recording and live streaming into the chapel.⁶⁹ The University Facilities Use Policy defines a major event as an event that includes one or more of the following: it has more than 50 people in attendance, requires the presence of security personnel, it is "likely to interfere with other University business, functions, or activities," or if alcohol is to be served.⁷⁰ Events sponsored by conservative groups, which attract large crowds and require security, would qualify as "major" under this definition. The new policy, in effect, allowed opponents of conservative student groups to effectively silence them, or at least limit their "reach."

The W&L administration outwardly supports free expression, but deliberately places roadblocks that make it difficult for guest speakers to come to campus.

Some large events are excluded from this definition (and therefore are presumably allowed to bring in outside equipment for recording purposes). These include graduation and honors induction ceremonies, candlelight concerts,⁷¹ and other affairs "for the primary benefit of the University community" as long as they are held in a "timely manner" and authorized by the appropriate high-level administrators.⁷²

Yet it seems that the rules for exceptions were made in an arbitrary—or even discriminatory—manner. As long as the talk is held in a "timely manner," there seems little reason for administrators to decline the request for a student group to reserve—and livestream from—the University (Lee) Chapel.

According to students and alumni, if exceptions have been made, they haven't been for conservative-sponsored events. On the contrary, there is reason to believe this policy was inspired to discourage such events. In March 2023, the university's College Republicans partnered with Young America's Foundation (YAF) to host Daily Wire host Matt Walsh to speak about his documentary, *What is a Woman?* Announcement of the event sparked widespread student backlash and calls for the speech to be canceled. Fortunately, W&L president William Dudley refused to do so.⁷³

Walsh, however, had to postpone the event at the last minute for personal reasons. The event was rescheduled for September. It was during that interim that the university crafted its current policy regarding outside equipment and major events. Once the Walsh event was rescheduled, the university attempted to enforce the policy, which would have prevented the event from being held on campus. Ultimately, the university conceded and allowed the talk to continue as planned. Since then, however, conservative-sponsored events featuring speakers such as Michael Knowles⁷⁴ and Carol Swain⁷⁵ have had to be held at different venues. Some students have expressed disinterest in organizing events on campus due to the bureaucratic obstacles they face.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A further notable shift in the university's focus is its emphasis on DEI. This dedication is reflected in its goal to prepare students to be citizens in a "global and diverse society."

The institution's historical connection with slavery, particularly its ownership of slaves and to many, Lee's role as a general in the Confederate army, is viewed as undermining the school's current commitments to DEI. Consequently, the university has taken steps to distance itself from this history. After the fatal protest of a Lee statue in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, W&L joined a host of other institutions in examining its historical ties to slavery. A Commission on Institutional History and Community was created to address this task. In 2018, the Commission considered calls to change the university's name, but ultimately retained it. It did, however, make other recommendations that were adopted. One recommendation was to "Display only portraits of Lee that portray him in civilian attire, not as a Confederate general."⁷⁶ Images of Lee in his general's attire were consequently removed.

The commission also recommended that key university events such as freshmen orientation and the ritual signing of the Honor Book no longer be held at Lee Chapel, which was perceived as a shrine to Lee and the Confederacy.⁷⁷ This recommendation was accepted.

The university's Black Law Student Association (BLSA) argued that merely turning the chapel into a museum wasn't enough to distance itself from its history. The university should open a new museum that thoroughly chronicles its "full history," the BLSA argued.⁷⁸ That same year, the board approved plans to construct a new Institutional History Museum.⁷⁹

Additional changes occurred in the wake of the nationwide 2020 race protests. The university's board of trustees voted in 2021 to remove the images of Washington and Lee from all future diplomas and renamed Lee Chapel "University Chapel."⁸⁰ The university announced that "The board will oversee and approve interior changes to restore [the chapel's] unadorned design and physically separate the auditorium from the Lee family crypt and Lee memorial sculpture." The museum in Lee Chapel was closed to the public and has yet to be reopened. The board also discontinued a tradition known as "Founders' Day," which was a celebration held on Lee's birthday, January 19.

In its announcement of these decisions, the university expressed regret for its past association with racial injustice, particularly its participation in slavery and ties with the Confederacy. It announced plans to form a board committee on DEI and emphasized its enthusiastic embrace of its "future of diversity, equity and inclusion."⁸¹

Part of that embrace has involved required DEI training for freshmen. In 2023, the university mandated that all freshmen take mandatory training titled "Continuing Education: Diversity, Inclusion and Community."⁸² During the training, students were asked questions such as "Which part of your identity are you most open to exploring?" and "Which part of your identity gives you the most privilege?" The training informs students that "all identities are fluid" and covers topics such as intersectionality and privilege. Although the university's diversity statement expresses support for diverse perspectives and backgrounds and the flourishing of many "points of view," there seems to be little room for varied opinions on the content covered in the DEI training.

A further notable shift in the university's focus is its emphasis on DEI.

Curricular Changes

Until the mid-1800s, the curriculum was heavily classical⁸³ and emphasized Christian values. Students were required to take courses in Latin, Greek, Western civilization, and moral

philosophy. Latin and Greek were taken during all four years. An 1852 catalog outlines the following curriculum for the freshman year: Latin (which included reading Livy and Cicero), Greek (Xenophon and Herodotus), mathematics, and “composition and declamation.”⁸⁴

Lee played a key role in modernizing the curriculum. During his presidency, the university increased its offerings by including electives, modern languages, applied mathematics, chemistry, and engineering.⁸⁵ The university also added professional programs by opening a law school and a school of civil and mining engineering in 1866. The beginnings of the business school were established in 1867, and a (short-lived) journalism program in 1869.

The changes to the curriculum were Lee’s efforts to revive and rebuild a struggling post-war South. The war destroyed much of the South’s infrastructure and permanently altered its economy. Lee recognized the need for skilled workers who could meet the region’s acute and rapidly evolving needs. According to Lee,

“The great object of the whole plan is to provide the facilities required by the large class of our young men, who looking forward to an early entrance into the practical pursuits of life, need a more direct training to this end than the usual literary courses.”⁸⁶

Even with its broadened curricular scope, a strong emphasis on traditional character values remained. Students were expected to behave with honor as gentlemen and exhibit personal and academic virtues. Even though the institution expanded to include professionalized training, this expansion did not subvert or replace the traditional liberal arts, but complemented them. According to biographer Emory Thomas, Lee’s educational vision was to “blend the practical nature of an engineering course at West Point with the enlightened aesthetic of Ovid.”⁸⁷

In 1901, all students were required to take the following courses in their first year: “Junior Rhetoric and Literature, Junior Mathematics, at least one of the languages Latin, Greek, French, German, Spanish,” and any additional classes needed for their course load to reach 15 credits.⁸⁸

Lee’s educational vision was to “blend the practical nature of an engineering course at West Point with the enlightened aesthetic of Ovid.”

Like many colleges of the time, W&L’s curriculum expanded in scope and flexibility throughout the 20th century. But the traditions remain, at least in name. Today, the university claims that “Providing an outstanding liberal arts education is the core of our mission.”⁸⁹

That may be about to change. The university is currently revising its general education program to be implemented in 2026,⁹⁰ and the changes seem hardly intended to maintain W&L’s character-building and strong liberal arts emphases. Or, perhaps, they are designed to produce a different type of character than the ones favored by George Washington and Robert E. Lee. The proposed W&L core includes several requirements focused on DEI. An earlier version of the proposal from February described a year-long sophomore seminar dedicated to studying how various “identities” have shaped “experiences and systems in the United States and beyond.” The identities students were proposed to explore for an entire academic year included “gender, sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or class.” The February

version of the proposal also had a requirement titled “DE&I Passport,” centered on experiences related to DEI. The most recent version of the proposal that the Martin Center could find from June reworded this requirement to “engaging worldviews,” in which students participate in experiences such as lectures or field trips, that reinforce courses on a “global and diverse society.” It also reworded the seminar requirement, describing it as a course that “encourages understanding of the ways that various identities have shaped experiences in the United States and beyond.”⁹¹

Currently enrolled students have a variety of DEI-focused courses to choose from to fulfill their requirements. One example is “The Body Electric: Queer Theory, Film, and Text,” which fulfills the literature distribution requirement. In this course, students learn to analyze literature and film through “methodologies grounded in LGBTQI2+ studies.”⁹² The course is organized around key words such as “body,” “horror,” “identity,” “filth,” “desire,” “meet cute,” and “futurity.”

Another example is “Gender and Sexuality in Latin America.”⁹³ This course fulfills the humanities distribution requirement. The course examines “femininity, masculinity, queerness, machismo, and transgender experiences that intersect with topics of nation-building, suffrage, racial equality, religion, authoritarian governments, and revolutions.”

These are just a couple of examples of DEI-centered courses at W&L. The Generals Redoubt found 70 courses offered between Fall 2023 and Spring 2025 that explicitly mention race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and diversity in the course descriptions.

Undergraduate Program Changes

By the end of the 19th century, W&L’s curriculum reflected academic and professional degrees that enabled students to specialize. The bachelor of arts degree required students to complete at least 12 “points” in a single department. The departments at the time included Latin, Greek, modern languages, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology and biology, English, philosophy, economics and political science, and history. Professional degrees in law and engineering were also available.

As of 2025, W&L offers 47 majors and 44 minors.⁹⁴ There are many professional-focused majors such as business administration, strategic communication, accounting, and journalism and mass communications. The university has expanded its STEM offerings, including majors in integrated engineering, chemistry and biochemistry, and neuroscience, as well as specialized biology minors and a minor in data science. But there are also programs in social justice and identity studies, such as minors in Africana studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Middle East and South Asia Studies, Poverty and Human Capability Studies, and Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies.

The institution’s original missions, religious identity, and dedication to a traditional liberal arts are barely perceptible in the modern-day W&L.

Conclusion

The institution that George Washington and Robert E. Lee envisioned has largely disappeared. Notably, the images and traditions connected to the university’s namesakes have been hidden or discontinued. Furthermore, the institution’s original missions, religious identity, and dedication to a traditional liberal arts are barely perceptible in the modern-day W&L.

Although Lee would likely approve of the continued growth of professionalized and STEM programs, he would just as likely balk at the other changes. In particular, he would be disheartened by the threat to the integrity of the humanities at W&L posed by the proliferation of shallow and politicized coursework. And he would also be troubled that his institution hampers students’ abilities to engage in open and civil dialogue, as such limitations deprive students of the opportunity to grow in both character and wisdom. The university’s desire to signal its conformity to the dictates of identity politics has led it not only to hide its history but also abandon its legacy of forming virtuous citizens.



WILLIAMS COLLEGE

AT A GLANCE

Tuition & Fees:	\$72,510 ⁹⁵
Undergraduate Enrollment:	2,060 ⁹⁶
Administrative spending per student:	\$20,043 ⁹⁷
Acceptance rate:	10% ⁹⁸
4-Year Graduation Rate:	85% ⁹⁹
Percent Male:	48.1% ¹⁰⁰
Percent Female:	51.9% ¹⁰¹

Drifting From Its Mission

The schools in this report exhibit a pattern of gradually sliding from a religious college focused on character-building to a secularized college with activist aims. Williams College does not deviate from this trend. It was named after Colonel Ephraim Williams. In his will, Williams, who was killed at the Battle of Lake George during the French and Indian War, stipulated that a large portion of his resources be directed toward the founding of a “free school.”¹⁰² In 1785, trustees were appointed to manage Williams’ funds for this purpose and The Free School admitted its first students in 1791. The trustees sought a headmaster of “good moral character” and an instructor of the “Protestant religion;”¹⁰³ they hired Reverend Ebenezer Fitch. In June 1793, the school was incorporated into a college with Fitch as its first president.

Williams resembled other early American colleges by its offering a classical curriculum and cultivation of a Christian atmosphere intended to prepare young men for service in the church and society. The college did not appear to have a formal association with a specific denomination. It did, however, have at least one president who was a well-known pastor in the Congregationalist church. The college’s faculty handbook describes its historic affiliation with the Congregationalists as “extremely informal.”¹⁰⁴

Early writings from the time of Williams’ founding convey a strong commitment to a traditional and rigorous liberal arts education, as well as the inculcation of virtue and religious piety. Early trustees and donors envisioned a college that would prepare its students to lead upright and productive lives.

The college's 1793 charter stated that financial resources “shall be” directed to its endowment “in such manner as shall most effectually promote virtue and piety, and the knowledge of such of the languages, and of the liberal arts and sciences...”¹⁰⁵ And in May of 1811, a donation was made to the college to aid “pious and indigent young men in their preparation for the Christian ministry.”¹⁰⁶ Consequently, religious observation was a central feature of a Williams education. An 1860 book on Williams commented, “Williams College was evidently intended, in the economy of God, to subserve a religious end.”¹⁰⁷

An 1857 catalog notes that “punctual attendance is required at church, and at morning and evening prayers...”¹⁰⁸ Another catalog from 1881 has a dedicated section on “public worship” that outlines a daily prayer service schedule—every morning and most evenings—and emphasizes that, “The religious services of the Sabbath are considered so important a part of the College life that students will not be excused to be absent from town on the Sabbath, except in cases of urgent necessity.”¹⁰⁹ Theological instruction was a required component of the curriculum. In their senior year, students had to study a commentary “on the catechism every Saturday forenoon.”¹¹⁰

The religious emphasis even contributed to an important event. When a thunderstorm interrupted a group of students meeting for prayer, they retreated to a haystack for protection. During the meeting, the American Protestant foreign missions were born.¹¹¹ This became known as the Haystack Prayer Meeting.

Over time, the religious influence on campus declined. Catalogs from 1909¹¹² and 1933¹¹³ show that religious attendance was still required, but, except for Sundays, decreased from twice a day to once a day. The college stopped requiring its senior year theology course as early as 1887.¹¹⁴ The gradual loss of religious fervor through the 20th century was described by the current Williams staff handbook as a “gradual but steady erosion.”¹¹⁵ By 1962, the college ended all compulsory church attendance.

From the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the college gradually moved away from its early dedication to religious formation and robust liberal arts standards. This gradual shift began in the late 19th century with an increased demand for technical training. Like other institutions at the time, Williams, which had historically struggled with enrollment, experienced an uptick in matriculation. As enrollment grew, fewer graduates became clergymen and more became “men of affairs.”¹¹⁶

“Williams College was evidently intended, in the economy of God, to subserve a religious end.”

Williams Today: A Significant Shift in Focus

In recent years, Williams has struggled to articulate its mission succinctly. A statement adopted in 2017¹¹⁷ was about 1,800 words in length and described by Provost Eiko Maruko Siniawer as “anomalous in its length, unconventional in its style, and ineffectively expansive in its content...”¹¹⁸

The new statement adopted in April 2025¹¹⁹ is briefer and lacks previous references to “diversity” and “need-blind admission,” but Siniawer holds that the cuts do not reflect a change in values. The 2017 statement was written in anticipation of the institution’s reaccreditation. However, the accreditor, the New

England Commission of Higher Education, criticized the school for failing to distinguish itself from other institutions. According to its memo, Williams' mission statement lacked "a sharp articulation of a forward-looking liberal arts mission distinctive to Williams."¹²⁰ The revised 2025 statement reads:

"[...] Williams strives to foster academic vitality, nurture intellectual curiosity, and inspire creativity. In the vibrant Berkshire hills, we bring together students of unusual promise to learn how to develop and express their own ideas, discover broadly and deeply, expand the bounds of knowledge, and converse across differences of thought, experience, and perspective ... Moved by this distinctive mission, we aspire to endow graduates with an enduring spirit of inquiry and exploration, and a firm desire to lead lives of meaning and purpose."¹²¹

The college's early leaders would no doubt approve of much of the above statement. The commitment to prepare students with the knowledge and dispositions necessary to "lead lives of meaning and purpose" likely would resonate with their vision. Noticeably absent, however, is any mention of virtue or piety. To the college's early leaders, a life of meaning and purpose was inseparable from living the Christian virtues in practice and worship. Today, the college is not affiliated with Christianity or any religious entity and does not appear to articulate what leads to a life of meaning and purpose.

The college's professed dedication to helping students "develop and express their own ideas" and "converse across differences of thought" is fitting for a liberal arts institution, particularly one that strives to "foster academic vitality." A review of the college's current policies and programming on free speech and DEI, however, reveals a gap between what it claims to value and what it does in practice.

Free Speech

If Williams truthfully encouraged students to express and discuss their ideas openly, it would have a healthy free speech climate. But evidence suggests that the college falls far short of this aspiration. Williams has a yellow-light free speech rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), which means it has at least one policy that limits protected speech or could potentially limit speech due to its vague wording.¹²² The college has also fared poorly in FIRE's annual national free speech rankings. Last year, Williams ranked 145th out of 248 schools in FIRE's report.¹²³ This year, the ranking slightly worsened by slipping to 156th out of 257 schools.¹²⁴

Notably absent from its definition of diversity is any mention of diversity of viewpoints or ideas.

The lack of free speech protections provoked some pushback from Williams faculty. In 2018, six of them drafted a proposal to have the college adopt the Chicago Statement, a set of guiding principles expressing dedication to free and open discourse.¹²⁵ Since then, a growing number of institutions have adopted their own version of the statement.

Almost half of all voting faculty signed a petition to adopt the statement.¹²⁶ During faculty discussions on the proposal, student protestors interrupted, carrying signs that read "free speech harms." A professor recounts how students were disruptive throughout the meeting and at one point told the white professors present to "sit down and admit their 'privilege.'" The event sparked a months-long controversy that resulted in an institutional report on "Inquiry and Inclusion"—described as a "mixed bag" by FIRE, largely

due to its rejection of the Chicago statement. In November 2019, a faculty steering committee adopted a "Statement on Free Inquiry and Inclusion,"¹²⁷ which some have described as a weakened version of the Chicago statement.

Ideological Diversity versus Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A climate open to free expression and civil discourse requires a willingness to “converse across differences of thought,” an ideal the college commits to in its mission statement. Williams’s zealous promotion of ideas surrounding DEI, however, undermines this ideal.

Williams’ Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion states that “Diversity is central to Williams’s mission.”¹²⁸ Notably absent from its definition of diversity, however, is any mention of diversity of viewpoints or ideas. The office highlights its commitment to cultivating a diverse campus community “respectful of all social identities.” It defines diversity as all the ways people are different, emphasizing “race, ethnicity, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religion/spirituality, age, (dis)ability, and military/veteran status.”

That diversity of thought is missing from this statement should come as no surprise. The college unabashedly states that “We consider diversity through a lens of intersectionality.” Intersectionality, a term coined by critical race theory activist Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how different marginalized identities overlap to produce various degrees of oppression. According to this view, someone who is white, LGBTQ, and low-income, for example, would be viewed as less oppressed than someone who is black, LGBTQ, and low-income because the latter has a greater number of marginalized identities. This theory assumes a distinctly progressive worldview. Those who disagree with the intersectional framework appear to fall outside the university’s conception of diversity.

Those who disagree with the intersectional framework appear to fall outside the university’s conception of diversity.

Student housing is another example of the college’s strong commitment to DEI. The Theme/Affinity/Program/Special Interest (TAPSI) housing program offers housing for particular groups that share common identities or interests to live together. The Theme/Affinity housing is identity-based, and the houses are designed to promote “a stronger sense of solidarity among students of marginalized identities.” There are eight TAPSI houses,¹²⁹ and a new Queer Home will be added in the 2025-2026 academic year.¹³⁰

The other identity-themed houses are Eban House, International House, La Casa, and the Asian American Affinity space. There is also a Sustainable Living Community, a Global Diplomacy and International Finance community, an Interfaith Dialogue House, and a performing arts house. Eban House’s mission is to “serve as a welcoming and safe place for Black students at Williams College.” The house is open to “Black students and/or students committed to fighting against anti-black racism.” International House was established as a “safe place” for international students, but it is reportedly open to all students interested in other cultures. La Casa’s mission is “to be a safe and embracing place for Williams’ Latinx identifying students and their allies.” Because the houses claim to be open to all interested students, they do not appear to discriminate based on race, despite their racial and international themes. Nevertheless, after the Trump administration’s February 14th Dear Colleague letter¹³¹ made clear that institutions that continue to employ discriminatory policies and programming risk losing federal funding, Williams took down its TAPSI housing webpage.¹³²

The college’s dean, Gretchen Long, told the student newspaper, the Williams Record, that the webpage was temporarily taken down to ensure it accurately reflected the housing program.¹³³ “No policies regarding TAPSI will change,” she told the paper.

It is difficult to see how such politically-charged subjects further the goals of a liberal arts education.

Despite Long's comments, the college's decision to disable the webpage (which is still disabled as of this report's publication) is suspicious. The college may have put itself in a precarious position. The very nature of racially based housing suggests discriminatory practices. The college may say that, for instance, black student housing is open to "all" students. The reality is, however, that all housing has limited space and, given space constraints, special preference will likely be given to black students over others.

Even if the housing is not overtly discriminatory, it is difficult to see how race and sexual orientation-based housing benefits students. One student describing his experience with TAPSI housing stated, "I've seen firsthand how self-segregation reinforces a sense of alienation rather than fostering broader integration... I withdrew into spaces that reaffirmed my feelings of exclusion."¹³⁴ Such housing doesn't appear to be aimed at furthering students' interests in a particular academic endeavor, but to validate their grievances.

Curricular Changes

An examination of the college's curricular history reveals a notable increase in academic offerings. It also shows how shallow and politicized content has become omnipresent.

In the college's early years, neither general education requirements nor majors were features of a Williams education. All students took a prescribed classical curriculum with a focus on Latin and Greek authors. The college enforced rigorous academic standards, and knowledge of Latin and Greek was a requirement for admission. Freshmen in 1824,¹³⁵ for example, read Livy, the *Graeca Majora*, and Horace. In 1857,¹³⁶ they read Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Homer's *Iliad*, and Cicero's *de Immortalitate*. Training in logic, rhetoric, philosophy, and the natural sciences, as well as mathematics, was also a hallmark of an education at Williams.

Over the years, the curriculum has both expanded and become more flexible. Today, there are still no required courses at Williams, but students need to fulfill a broad set of general education requirements.¹³⁷ The distribution requirements are organized in three divisions: 1) languages and arts, 2) social studies, and 3) science and mathematics. Students must take three courses in each division. With minimal limitations, students can choose to satisfy these requirements by selecting courses from a wide range of departments. For the language and arts requirement, students can pick from courses offered by 23 programs, including Arabic, classics, coastal and ocean studies, dance, and English. As long as two of the courses are from different programs, students appear free to construct their course of study from these numerous offerings.

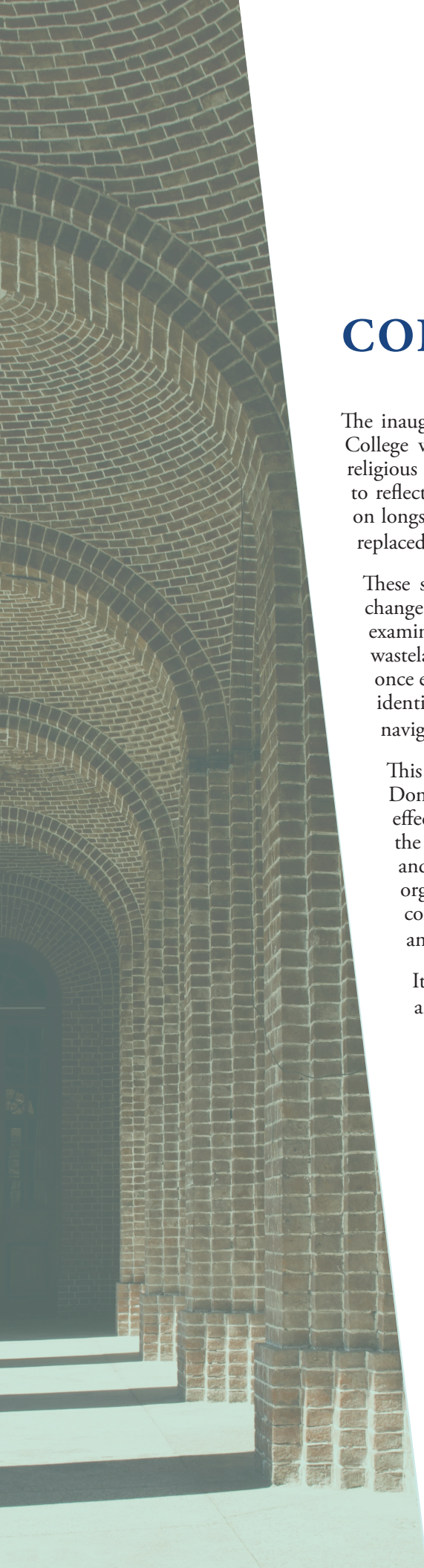
In addition to the division requirements, students must take two writing-intensive courses, one quantitative/formal reasoning course, and one "difference, power, and equity" course. Examples of courses that fulfill the diversity requirement include "Trans Film and Media,"¹³⁸ "Angela Davis and Abolition,"¹³⁹ and "Queer in Asian America."¹⁴⁰ It is difficult to see how such politically-charged subjects further the goals of a liberal arts education.

Academic majors became a clear part of the curriculum by the 1920s. In 1925, students could choose from 14 majors, nearly all of them traditional liberal arts subjects such as English, Latin, history, philosophy, mathematics, economics, and chemistry.¹⁴¹

Today, the number of majors has jumped to 35, with 13 concentrations. Many new majors and concentrations are STEM subjects, including computer science, neuroscience, cognitive science, biochemistry & molecular biology, and astronomy/astrophysics. A large number of the new majors are “studies” majors, such as American studies, environmental studies, women's, gender, & sexuality studies, and Africana studies. There are also concentrations, for example, in global studies and Latina/o studies.

Conclusion

The change over time of Williams’ stated mission, its religious affiliation, and the curricular design of its general education and major programs have resulted in an institution that has wandered far from its founding mission. The college’s weak protections for freedom of thought and its ardent promotion of ideologically-charged DEI initiatives and curricula are inconsistent with the college’s original goal of cultivating an intellectually flourishing and virtuous community. The clear, focused, and classical curriculum of Williams’s early years has given way to an unstructured general education program. Such an unfocused core program, coupled with the numerous opportunities to focus on grievance studies, threatens the academic seriousness of a Williams education. The original board of trustees would no doubt be dismayed to see the institution for which they held such high hopes descend to such mediocrity.



CONCLUSION

The inaugural boards of Davidson College, Washington and Lee University, and Williams College would struggle to recognize their institutions today. Originally established with religious and classically oriented missions, these schools, like numerous others, have evolved to reflect a new set of ideologically infused values. The robust liberal arts education based on longstanding Western intellectual traditions that flourished on these campuses has been replaced with academic programs that have overt political agendas.

These schools, unfortunately, are not isolated cases. They are examples of a larger sea change occurring in private liberal arts education across the country. In too many cases, an examination of course descriptions, activities, and policies reveals an intellectual and moral wasteland of compromised missions and abandoned values. Campus environments that once encouraged character formation and the cultivation of virtue now promote DEI and identity politics. From the classroom to the hiring committee, students and faculty must navigate campuses hostile to open inquiry and free expression.

This is the current state of many liberal arts schools, but it doesn't have to stay that way. Donors, alumni, and parents can influence the direction their institution takes. To be effective, however, their efforts must be focused and organized. Some schools, including the ones in this report, have started alumni groups dedicated to restoring civil discourse and freedom of thought to their campuses. These groups are chapters of a national organization, the Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA).¹⁴² They are a sign of hope for colleges that have lost their way. More concerned alumni should consider establishing an AFSA chapter at their alma mater.

It is up to today's alumni, boards, and concerned stakeholders to restore the integrity and purpose originally envisioned for their institutions.

1. Davidson College, "Cost of Attendance," Admission and Financial Aid, Davidson College, https://librarysearch.williams.edu/discovery/delivery/01WIL_INST:01WIL_SPECIAL/12289191000002786
2. Davidson College." College Scorecard, U.S. Department of Education. <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/school?198385-Davidson-College>
3. "Davidson College." How Colleges Spend Money. Washington, DC: American Council of Trustees and Alumni. <https://www.howcollegesspendmoney.com/institution/profile/davidson-college-198385>
4. Davidson College." College Scorecard.
5. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Institution Profile: Washington and Lee University (Unit ID 198385) – Retention and Graduation. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/198385#retention-and-graduation>
6. U.S. News & World Report, Student Life at Davidson College. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/davidson-college-2918/student-life>.
7. U.S. News & World Report, Student Life at Davidson College.
8. Mary D. Beaty, *A History of Davidson College* (Davidson, NC: Briarpatch Press, 1988), 13.
9. Beaty, 22.
10. Davidson College, "History & Traditions," About Davidson College. <https://www.davidson.edu/about/history-traditions>
11. Beaty, 3.
12. Beaty, 3–4.
13. Beaty, 4.
14. Beaty, 84.
15. Beaty, 85.
16. Beaty, 384.
17. Beaty, 384.
18. Beaty, 393.
19. Jay Schalin, "On Boiling Frogs and Forked Tongues: Alumni Fight Back at Davidson," James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, July 26, 2021. <https://jamesgmartin.center/2021/07/on-boiling-frogs-and-forked-tongues-alumni-fight-back-at-davidson/>
20. "Martin Group Letter to Alumni July 19," Google Docs. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yZg8m6uWEf0lyFW3Hgmg9PnmkTw8PVe/edit>
21. "Martin Group Letter to Alumni July 19."
22. Davidson College, "Statement of Purpose," Mission and Values, About Davidson College. <https://www.davidson.edu/about/mission-and-values/statement-purpose>
23. Davidson College, "Reformed Tradition," History & Traditions, About Davidson College. <https://www.davidson.edu/about/history-traditions/reformed-tradition>
24. Davidson College, "History & Traditions," About Davidson College. <https://www.davidson.edu/about/history-traditions>
25. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Racial Equity Ministry," Inclusion & Equity. <https://pcusa.org/how-we-serve/inclusion-equity/racial-equity-ministry>
26. Davidson College, "Statement of Purpose."
27. Jim Martin, "College DEI Programs Can Be Saved, but They Need to Change," *The Charlotte Observer* (Opinion). <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/article287699535.html>
28. Committee on Freedom of Expression, Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago, September 22, 2015, Foundation for Individual Rights & Expression. <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/report-committee-freedom-expression-university-chicago-september-22-2015>
29. Foundation for Individual Rights & Expression and College Pulse, 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. <https://rankings.thefire.org/rank>
30. Kalven Committee: Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action, (Chicago: University of Chicago Record, November 11, 1967). https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/KalvenRprt_0.pdf
31. Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse, "Petition to Adopt Institution-wide Policies at Davidson College," published June 16, 2025 (or 2023 if that's the date indicated), Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse. <https://www.dftdunite.org/petition-to-adopt-institution-wide-policies-at-davidson-college>
32. Davidson College, "Employee Diversity & Inclusion," Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. <https://www.davidson.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion/employee-diversity-inclusion>
33. Davidson College, (October 3, 2023), Assistant Professor in Environmental and Natural Resource Economics [Jod ad]. https://www.aeaweb.org/joe/listing.php?JOE_ID=2023-02_111472707
34. Davidson College, (August 2024), Assistant Professor of English, [Job d]. https://www.tealhq.com/job/assistant-professor-of-english_a0048328-c952-436b-a012-50fe2ec7d6db

35. Davidson College, (July 1, 2023), Tenure-Track Faculty Position in Bioanalytical Chemistry, [Job ad]. <https://www.davidson.edu/media/7747/download?attachment?attachment>
36. Davidson College, "Justice, Equality, and Community," Graduation Requirements. <https://www.davidson.edu/offices-and-services/registrar/graduation-requirements/justice-equality-and-community>
37. Davidson College, "Employee Diversity & Inclusion," Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. <https://www.davidson.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion/employee-diversity-inclusion>
38. Beaty, 20.
39. Davidson College, "Graduation Requirements," Graduation Requirements. <https://www.davidson.edu/offices-and-services/registrar/graduation-requirements>
40. Davidson College, "AFR 355 - Black Feminist Art Practices," Davidson College, archived catalog. https://catalog.davidson.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=26&coid=51017
41. Davidson College, "GSS 190 - Understanding Leadership through the Female Marvel Universe," archived catalog. https://catalog.davidson.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=26&poid=1714&returnto=1219&print
42. Davidson College, "FRE 352 - Queer(ing) Québec," Davidson College, course catalog. https://catalog.davidson.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=27&coid=55235.
43. Davidson College, "ENG-376-I - Representing Fat Bodies," course catalog. https://catalog.davidson.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=27&coid=55196
44. Davidson College Catalog, 1913–1914, Davidson College, DigitalNC (North Carolina Digital Heritage Center). <https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/30961>
45. North Carolina Collections, Davidson College Catalog, 1900–1901, North Carolina Digital Heritage Center. <https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/31082>
46. Davidson College, "Academics at Davidson College." <https://www.davidson.edu/academics>
47. Washington and Lee University, "Tuition and Costs," Admissions. <https://www.wlu.edu/admissions/tuition-and-costs>
48. U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard: Washington and Lee University, 2025. <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/school?234207-Washington-and-Lee-University>
49. How Colleges Spend Money, "Washington and Lee University," <https://www.howcollegesspendmoney.com/institution/profile/washington-and-lee-university-234207>.
50. College Scorecard: Washington and Lee University.
51. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Institution Profile: Washington and Lee University (Unit ID 234207) – Retention and Graduation. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/234207#retention-and-graduation>
52. U.S. News & World Report, Student Life at Washington and Lee University. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/washington-and-lee-3768/student-life>
53. U.S. News & World Report, Student Life at Washington and Lee University.
54. Washington and Lee University, "University History," About W&L. <https://www.wlu.edu/about-w-l/university-history>
55. Washington and Lee University, "University Namesakes," University History. <https://www.wlu.edu/about-w-l/university-history/university-namesakes>
56. Ollinger Crenshaw, General Lee's College: The Rise and Growth of Washington and Lee University (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 3.
57. Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 12.
58. Henry Ruffner, Early History of Washington College (circa 1857), [PDF]. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/5cebf5fae79c7041accd0b8/1558967806678/Ruffner%2C+Henry%2C+Early+History+of+Washington+College.pdf>, 14.
59. Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 58.
60. Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 58.
61. Washington and Lee University, "Catalogue of Washington College, Lexington, Virginia, for the Collegiate Year Ending July 3, 1852, Together with a List of Alumni," Washington and Lee University Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wlu.edu/islandora/catalogue-washington-college-lexington-virginia-collegiate-year-ending-july-3-1852>
62. James W. Alexander, The Life of Archibald Alexander, First Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007).
63. Archibald Alexander, Evidences of the Christian Religion (New York, NY: Jonathan Leavitt, 1832). https://ccel.org/ccel/a/alexander_a/evidences/cache/evidences.pdf
64. Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 82.
65. Robert W. Winston, Robert E. Lee: A Biography (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1934), 376.
66. Winston, Robert E. Lee, 377.
67. Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 184, 186.
68. Washington and Lee University, "Strategic Plan," The W&L Story. <https://www.wlu.edu/the-w-l-story/strategic-plan>

69. Washington and Lee University, "University Chapel Use Guidelines," University Chapel and Galleries, Facility Use. <https://www.wlu.edu/academics/institutional-history-museum-and-galleries/university-chapel-and-galleries/facility-use/university-chapel-use-guidelines>
70. Washington and Lee University, "University Facilities Use Policy," Code of Policies, General Counsel, issued January 30, 2018; revised August 17, 2021. <https://my.wlu.edu/general-counsel/code-of-policies/international-issues/general-administration/university-facilities-use-policy>
71. Washington and Lee University (December, 2024) Lessons and Carols 2024, [video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MeeLi57eYU&t=4s>
72. "University Facilities Use Policy."
73. Spivey, Kamron M, "Dudley responds to Matt Walsh Petition," The W&L Spectator, March 29, 2023. <https://www.wluspectator.com/articles/2023/3/29/dudley-responds-to-matt-walsh-petition>
74. Caden Brousseau, "The Spectator Presents: Michael Knowles," The W&L Spectator, September 2, 2024. <https://www.wluspectator.com/articles/spectator-michael-knowles>
75. Steamboat Institute, SI-CLT-W^0L Debate 10.11.2023_jb (Washington & Lee University, Lexington, VA, October 11, 2023). https://steamboatinstitute.org/app/uploads/2023/10/SI-CLT-W%5E0L-Debate-10.11.2023_jb.pdf
76. Report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community (Washington and Lee University, May 2, 2018). <https://my.wlu.edu/document/report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community>
77. Report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community.
78. Scott Jaschik, "Washington and Lee Faces Unusual Challenges Confronting Its History," Inside Higher Ed, May 29, 2018. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/05/29/washington-and-lee-faces-unusual-challenges-confronting-its-history>
79. Washington and Lee University, "Institutional History Museum and Galleries," Institutional History Museum and Galleries. <https://www.wlu.edu/academics/institutional-history-museum-and-galleries/institutional-history-museum>
80. Washington and Lee University, "The Future of Washington and Lee University," Messages from the Board, Board of Trustees, June 4, 2021. <https://www.wlu.edu/about-w-l/leadership/board-of-trustees/messages-from-the-board-2/the-future-of-washington-and-lee-university>
81. Washington and Lee University, "The Future of Washington and Lee University."
82. Dominic Vogelbacher, "Freshmen DEI Training Forces Speech," The W&L Spectator, December 22, 2023. <https://www.wluspectator.com/articles/2023/12/22/freshmen-dei-training-forces-speech>
83. Alfred E. Eckes Jr., "Revisiting President Robert E. Lee's Accomplishments at Washington College," The General's Redoubt, June 29, 2022. <https://www.thegeneralsredoubt.us/press/revisiting-president-robert-e-lees-accomplishments-at-washington-college>
84. Washington and Lee University, Catalogue of Washington College, Lexington, Virginia, for the Collegiate Year Ending July 3, 1852, Together with a List of Alumni, Washington and Lee University Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wlu.edu/islandora/catalogue-washington-college-lexington-virginia-collegiate-year-ending-july-3-1852>
85. Eckes Jr., "Revisiting President Robert E. Lee's Accomplishments at Washington College."
86. Report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community, Washington and Lee University, May 2, 2018. <https://my.wlu.edu/document/report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community>
87. Report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community, Washington and Lee University.
88. Catalogue of Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, for the Year Ending June 1901, and Announcements for 1901–1902.
89. Washington and Lee University, "Strategic Plan."
90. Josh Darrow, "W&L Deploys New Gen Eds for 2026," The Ring-tum Phi, April 7, 2025. <https://ringtumphi.net/10143/news/wl-deploys-new-gen-eds-for-2026/>
91. Washington and Lee University, "Mission and Curriculum," General Education Implementation Committee, Provost's Office, archived February 10, 2025, Web Archive. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250210203332/https://my.wlu.edu/provosts-office/administrative-resources/committees/temporary-or-ad-hoc-committees/general-education-implementation-committee/mission-and-curriculum>
92. "ENGL 264 - The Body Electric: Queer Theory, Film, and Text," 2025-2026 University Catalog, Washington and Lee University.
93. "HIST 237 - Gender and Sexuality in Latin America," 2025-2026 University Catalog, Washington and Lee University.
94. Washington and Lee University, "Academics." <https://www.wlu.edu/academics>
95. Student Financial Services, Williams College, "Tuition and Fees," Williams College. <https://www.williams.edu/sfs/manage-your-account/tuition-fees/>
96. U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard: Williams College. <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/school?168342-Williams-College>

97. How Colleges Spend Money, “Williams College.” <https://www.howcollegesspendmoney.com/institution/profile/williams-college-168342>.
98. U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard: Williams College.
99. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Institution Profile: Williams College (Unit ID 168342) – Retention and Graduation. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/168342#retention-and-graduation>
100. U.S. News & World Report, Student Life at Williams College. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/williams-college-2229/student-life>.
101. U.S. News & World Report, Student Life at Williams College.
102. Calvin Durfee, A History of Williams College (Boston: A. Williams, 1860), 47.
103. Durfee, 60.
104. Williams College, “History of Williams,” Staff Handbook. <https://handbooks.williams.edu/staff/campus-life/history-of-williams/>
105. Williams College, College Charter, [pdf file]. <https://president.williams.edu/files/College.Charter.August.20133.pdf>
106. Durfee, History of Williams College, 99-100.
107. Durfee, History of Williams College, 110.
108. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of Williams College, with the Secret Societies (1857), College Archives Selections.
109. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Williams College (1881), College Archives Selections.
110. Catalogue of Williams College, with the Secret Societies (1857).
111. Williams College Museum of Art, “Haystack Monument,” Public Art Collection. <https://artmuseum.williams.edu/collection/public-art/haystack-monument/>
112. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of Williams College (1909), College Archives Selections.
113. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of Williams College (1933), College Archives Selections.
114. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Williams College (1887), College Archives Selections.
115. “History of Williams,” Staff Handbook.
116. “History of Williams,” Staff Handbook.
117. Williams College, “College Mission,” Office of the President, archived April 18, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180418171508/https://president.williams.edu/college-governance/college-mission/>
118. Bao, Rebecca, “College Releases New Mission Statement,” The Williams Record, April 23, 2025. <https://williamsrecord.com/469686/news/college-releases-new-mission-statement/>
119. Williams College, “College Mission,” Office of the President. <https://president.williams.edu/college-governance/college-mission/>
120. Bao, “College Releases New Mission Statement.”
121. Williams College. “College Mission,” Office of the President.
122. Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), “Williams College.” <https://www.thefire.org/colleges/williams-college/>
123. Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, 2024 College Free Speech Rankings, published September 2023. https://www.thefire.org/sites/default/files/2023/09/CFSR%202024_final_updated.pdf
124. Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, College Pulse, 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. https://5666503.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na2.net/hubfs/5666503/FIRE_CFSR_2025.pdf
125. Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, (September 22, 2015), Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago. <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/report-committee-freedom-expression-university-chicago-september-22-2015/>
126. Maroja, Luana, “Freedom of Speech at Williams College: Are the Walls Closing In?” in Jerry Coyne, “A Williams College Professor Describes Her School’s Fight against Free Speech,” Why Evolution Is True (blog), November 29, 2018. <https://whyevolutionistrue.com/2018/11/29/a-williams-college-professor-describes-her-schools-fight-against-free-speech/>
127. Williams College, Faculty Steering Committee’s Statement on Free Inquiry and Inclusion (memorandum to the faculty from the Steering Committee and President Mandel, November 13, 2019), Office of the President. <https://president.williams.edu/faculty-steering-committees-statement-on-free-inquiry-and-inclusion/>
128. “Diversity at Williams,” Institutional Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Williams College. <https://diversity.williams.edu/diversity-at-williams/>
129. Lin, Megan, “We Just Want to Be Heard’: TAPSI Decisions Leave Students Frustrated, Confused,” The Williams Record, February 15, 2023. <https://williamsrecord.com/463064/news/we-just-want-to-be-heard-tapsi-decisions-leave-students-frustrated-confused/>

130. 130. for 2025–26 Academic Year,” The Williams Record, May 1, 2025. <https://williamsrecord.com/468681/news/college-approves-queer-tapsi-housing-for-2025-26-academic-year/>
131. Dear Colleague Letter: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act in Light of Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, February 14, 2025. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/dear-colleague-letter-sffa-v-harvard-109506.pdf>
132. Williams College, TAPSI Housing,” Campus Life, <https://campus-life.williams.edu/tapsi-housing/>.
133. Pallesen, Phoebe, & Zinkin-Meyers, Sonia. “College Removes TAPSI Website Out of ‘Abundance of Caution,’” The Williams Record, March 12, 2025. <https://williamsrecord.com/469316/news/college-removes-tapsi-website-out-of-abundance-of-caution/>
134. Williams Free Speech Alliance, “A Student’s Reflection on How Identity Politics Undermines Inclusion.” <https://www.williamsfreespeech.com/students-reflection-how-identity-politics-undermines-inclusion>
135. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Williams College, and of the Berkshire Medical Institution Connected with it (1824-10), College Archives Selections.
136. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of Williams College, with the Secret Societies (1857), College Archives Selections.
137. Williams College, “Areas of Study,” Academics.
138. “AMST 364: Trans Film and Media,” Course catalog entry, Williams College, spring 2026. https://catalog.williams.edu/amst/detail/?strm=1263&cn=364&crsid=022206&req_year=0
139. “INTR 320: Angela Davis and Abolition,” Course catalog entry, Williams College, spring 2026. https://catalog.williams.edu/intr/detail/?strm=1263&cn=320&crsid=021664&req_year=0
140. “WGSS 306: Queer in Asian America,” Course catalog entry, Williams College, spring 2026. https://catalog.williams.edu/wgss/detail/?strm=1263&cn=306&crsid=022812&req_year=0.
141. Williams College Library Special Collections, Catalogue of Williams College (1925), College Archives Selections.
142. Alumni Free Speech Alliance. <https://joinafsa.org/>
143. "Davidson Chambers Building" by FlipFlopFlorida, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
144. "Washington and Lee University Campus" by Robert of Fairfax, CC BY-NC 2.0
145. "Williams College Aerial" by pics721 - stock.adobe.com

About the Author

Shannon Watkins

Shannon Watkins joined the Martin Center in March 2017 as a reporter focused on North Carolina higher education. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in Spanish and Linguistics from the University of California, Los Angeles. She also studied at the University of Carlos III in Madrid, Spain.



Her articles have appeared in *Townhall*, the *Washington Examiner*, *The Daily Caller*, *Rare Politics*, *The Carolina Journal*, and *The Heartland Institute*. In her free time, Watkins enjoys reading philosophy, history, and classic literature. She lives outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, with her husband and four children.

About the Martin Center

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal is a private nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education policy. Our mission is to renew and fulfill the promise of higher education in North Carolina and across the country.

We advocate responsible governance, viewpoint diversity, academic quality, cost-effective education solutions, and innovative market-based reform. We do that by studying and reporting on critical issues in higher education and recommending policies that can create change—especially at the state and local level.

353 E. Six Forks Road Suite 200
Raleigh, NC 27609

919.828.1400

Fax: 919.828.7455

www.jamesgmartin.center

THE JAMES G. 
MARTIN CENTER 
FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL 