

MISSION AND PURPOSES

Williams seeks to provide the finest possible liberal arts education by nurturing in students the academic and civic virtues, and their related traits of character. Academic virtues include the capacities to explore widely and deeply, think critically, reason empirically, express clearly, and connect ideas creatively. Civic virtues include commitment to engage both the broad public realm and community life, and the skills to do so effectively. These virtues, in turn, have associated traits of character. For example, free inquiry requires open-mindedness, and commitment to community draws on concern for others.

We are committed to our central endeavor of academic excellence in a community of learning that comprises students, faculty, and staff, and draws on the engagement of alumni and parents. We recruit students from among the most able in the country and abroad and select them for the academic and personal attributes they can contribute to the educational enterprise, inside and outside the classroom. Our faculty is a highly talented group of teachers, scholars, and artists committed deeply to the education of our students and to involving them in their efforts to expand human knowledge and understanding through original research, thought, and artistic expression. Dedicated staff enable this teaching and learning to take place at the highest possible level, as do the involvement and support of our extraordinarily loyal parents and alumni.

No one can pretend to more than guess at what students now entering college will be called upon to comprehend in the decades ahead. No training in fixed techniques, no finite knowledge now at hand, no rigid formula can solve problems whose shape we cannot yet define. The most versatile, the most durable, in an ultimate sense, the most practical knowledge and intellectual resources that we can offer students are the openness, creativity, flexibility, and power of education in the liberal arts.

Toward that end we extend a curriculum that offers wide opportunities for learning, ensures close attention of faculty to students but also encourages students to learn independently, and reflects the complexity and diversity of the world. We seek to do this in an atmosphere that nurtures the simple joy of learning as a lifelong habit and commitment.

We place great emphasis on the learning that takes place in the creation of a functioning community: life in the residence halls, expression through the arts, debates on political issues, leadership in campus governance, exploration of personal identity, pursuit of spiritual and religious impulses, the challenge of athletics, and direct engagement with human needs, nearby and far away.

To serve well our students and the world, Williams embraces core values such as welcoming and supporting in the College community people from all segments of our increasingly diverse society and ensuring that College operations are environmentally sustainable.

From this holistic immersion students learn more than they will ever know. Such is the testimony of countless graduates—that their Williams experience has equipped them to live fuller, more effective lives. Ultimately, the College's greatest mark on the world consists of this: the contributions our alumni make in their professions, their communities, and their personal lives.

Therefore, we ask all our students to understand that an education at Williams should not be regarded as a privilege destined to create further privilege, but as a privilege that creates opportunities to serve society at large, and imposes the responsibility to do so.

At the same time, being itself privileged by its history and circumstances, Williams understands its own responsibility to contribute by thought and example to the world of higher education.

The above description arises on its surface from public statements made by Williams presidents and others associated with the College, from which it borrows, and at a deeper level from the felt experience of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents over many decades. It was approved by vote of the Board of Trustees on April 14, 2007.