GW Strategic Planning Committee Interim Report
High-Quality Undergraduate Education

Charge to the Committee

Under the assumption of a residential undergraduate population of 8400 students, of which 30% ultimately complete a STEM major, develop a strategy with measurable outcomes to attract and retain a high-quality student body, and recommendations for the educational opportunities that we should provide to our students.

The process for determining the strategy for high quality undergraduate education should involve consideration of two key elements: (1) a high-quality undergraduate student body, and (2) a high-quality and distinctive undergraduate education.

Current State

GW embarks on the strategic planning process from a position of strength. The University enjoys a unique location that attracts students and faculty while enabling opportunities for learning, service, and collaboration. Our student body has grown more diverse in the past 5 years, and our students are motivated and civic-minded. The building of the Science and Engineering Hall has helped to attract and retain STEM undergraduates, who are now academically on par with non-STEM students. We enjoy a national reputation for undergraduate programs in politics, media, and international affairs, while supporting robust programs in the humanities, fine arts, business, nursing, social sciences, and engineering.

At the same time, GW faces specific challenges in undergraduate education. Too many undergraduates describe their academic experience, especially in their early years, as a dispiriting exercise in “checking boxes”; others perceive introductory STEM courses as “weed-out” classes intended to eliminate low achievers. The quality of academic advising and student support varies across academic units. GW can do more as an institution to support student success for all, and it can strive to eliminate silos to permit and encourage students to pursue educational opportunities across schools and programs. Internships, service-learning, and study abroad are central to what GW students do but must be more thoughtfully and deliberately integrated into their educational experience.
With the right vision and resources, however, GW can address these challenges while increasing its “value proposition” in a competitive and dynamic academic marketplace. What follows are principles that the committee believes should guide GW as it pursues excellence in undergraduate education.

**Principles**

Today’s undergraduate students must develop the critical thinking and communications skills, creativity, and empathy that are the foundation of 21st-century citizenship. These qualities are valued by employers across sectors, including in science and technology. A high-quality GW undergraduate education should empower students to acquire and strengthen these competencies. It should be rigorous and demanding, giving students opportunities to discover and pursue their passions and interests so they can make the world better. A high-quality GW undergraduate education does not chase trends, since that is not strategic; rather, it is visionary and seeks to build upon GW’s distinctiveness. It builds community and is fulfilling, collaborative, and equitable. It values and supports skillful teaching while recognizing that important learning and opportunities for personal growth happen outside the classroom.

A high-quality undergraduate education:

1. Addresses the needs of the whole student, implementing a broad range of services (e.g., emotional, physical, social) that maximize student agency and opportunity.
2. Enacts a challenging and engaging vision of education—through dynamic curricula, great teaching, and opportunities for research, service, and creativity—that motivates and drives students to excellence and inspires their engagement with a complex and diverse world.
3. Attracts, includes, and supports a broadly diverse undergraduate student body.
4. Envisions intentional and thoughtful engagements with people and institutions in the DC area as an important aspect of every student’s learning.
5. Uses programs, curricula, and teaching to empower students with creative, cultural, historical, quantitative, and social competencies.

**Proposed Goals & Initiatives**

The committee’s recommended goals and initiatives are listed below. Strategies for attracting top students, both STEM and non-STEM, for maintaining or increasing diversity, and for reducing overall undergraduate enrollment will necessarily be part of separate efforts involving admissions. That said, we make these recommendations with an eye toward achieving the University’s plan to raise the percentage of undergraduate STEM majors while decreasing undergraduate enrollment by 20 percent. The
committee strongly endorses the Board’s and President’s public commitment to diversity and inclusion, broadly defined. For the purposes of this report, we use the Department of Homeland Security definition of STEM: with this definition, we can compare GW to other institutions through IPEDS data reporting. Nevertheless, we expect that further discussion of the definition of STEM will occur, particularly as programs grow and new fields emerge.

The work of the committee overlaps with that of the World Class Faculty committee insofar as faculty are at the center of a high-quality undergraduate education, as classroom teachers, mentors, advisers, and researchers.

The committee believes GW can best achieve its aspirations for excellence by building on the excellence that already exists here. In particular, the desired increase in STEM majors will result from efforts that seize and expand on GW’s current strengths in social sciences, humanities, arts, and business.

Efforts to achieve strategic planning goals must be fully resourced to succeed. Strategic planning efforts will need continuous evaluation and improvement to remain successful.

**Goal 1**

Through innovative programming, every student will have access to structured, creative exploration of academic opportunities and majors.

A. Faculty and students will be able to generate “pop up” courses (e.g., of 0 or 1 credit) on topics that facilitate intellectual exploration and address students’ passions.

B. GW will develop interdisciplinary “discovery tracks” (e.g., management and industry; health, wellness and medicine; arts, culture and design; technology and innovation; sciences and the environment) to give students tools to strategize about their intellectual development and develop career readiness.

**Goal 2**

GW will implement a standard of personalized advising and student success across the university, with a distributed model of implementation in each school.

A. GW will create a University-wide first-year experience that will foster students’ sense of belonging and cultivate community and connectedness.

B. GW will define a standard of service for advising based on best practices; adhering to this standard will mean that select units will need to lower their students-per-adviser ratio.
C. The first-year schedule for most STEM majors will be re-arranged so that these programs are more supportive and increase retention.

D. GW will establish a pre-professional advising center (for pre-health and pre-law students) that draws upon and works with personnel in the Medical, Nursing, and Law schools.

E. GW will establish a First-Generation Student Support Center to connect students to resources and ensure that excellent financial aid advising is available to all students.

Goal 3

GW will be thoughtful and intentional about making “outside” and/or experiential learning opportunities—including study abroad, internships, service learning, and other forms of community engagement—part of the curriculum of every student.

A. GW will devise a strategy to create and foster coordinated relationships across schools with a wide variety of DC institutions--scientific, cultural, political, social-justice oriented, etc.—to enrich students’ learning. It will develop and enrich strategic partnerships that will enhance the student experience; institutionalize connections with internship and service locations; and create staff positions to foster connections to a variety of DC partners. It will maintain an up-to-date repository of these partners / agreements / opportunities.

B. GW will create meaningful mechanisms through which students will earn academic credit from experiential learning opportunities (including internships, off-campus research, service learning, and other forms of community engagement); these would go beyond GW’s current “10 pages-per-credit” model to include, for example, courses that give students opportunities to reflect on their experiences in relation to their professional and academic/intellectual goals.

C. GW will draw on its resources and location to provide STEM-specific outside and experiential learning opportunities. These might include (but are not limited to): town halls with STEM professionals; support for student-led STEM organizations; opportunities for students to work on project- and problem-based learning with partner organizations in the DC area; and opportunities for leadership and teaching in STEM. Expansion of the existing District Connections program will benefit all of our students across all disciplines.

Goal 4

Every GW student will have access to an interdisciplinary problem-based learning experience.
A. Schools or units will develop problem-based, cross-disciplinary courses, course groupings, and/or problem-solving research teams on topics of broad and pressing interest. Students will be given opportunities to propose ideas for teams from different disciplines.

B. GW will launch a cross-disciplinary and cross-college teaching initiative to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration.

Goal 5
GW will support inclusive, interdisciplinary teaching based on research and best practices; it will empower faculty to develop cutting-edge courses and curricula.

A. GW will expand dramatically the University Teaching and Learning Center to support the above goal; it will increase instructor engagement with the University Teaching and Learning Center; it will support infrastructure in emerging education technologies; and it will enable personalized and connected learning for all GW students.

B. GW will reward faculty and graduate student involvement in teaching innovation and curriculum development.

Goal 6
GW will expand opportunities for every student to acquire quantitative and computational competencies while empowering STEM students with social, historical, and cultural competencies that draw on its location and academic resources.

A. GW will differentiate its STEM offerings from those at other institutions by linking to GW’s strengths, including our location (i.e., proximity to government agencies, research centers, and non-profit organizations), and by creating and expanding educational opportunities that articulate STEM to public policy, ethics and social justice, culture and the arts, and science/technology. For example, GW could create or enhance programs in science policy, cybersecurity (drawing on ESIA), environmental studies, social media and society (humanities, social sciences).

B. GW will consider creating a STEM honors program that can be used as a recruitment/retention tool.

C. GW will create pathways for joint-degree and/or certificate programs that combine STEM with (other) liberal arts disciplines; it will identify and eliminate barriers to double-majoring.

D. GW will support emerging initiatives to provide differentiated competency in data analytics for students across the University. It will concurrently explore initiatives to foster students’ computational and digital literacies in ways that include, but go
beyond, the acquisition of specific coding skills. The latter effort might tap into existing GW resources in the arts, humanities, and social science.

E. GW will make good on the recommendation from its previous strategic plan to create a program or structure to support first-year STEM students. This might include a bridge program and/or the creation of a STEM support center (similar to the Writing Center).

F. In collaboration with the Medical school and the School of Nursing, GW will bolster its undergraduate pre-med/pre-health programs and curricula (for example, by aligning such curricula with the competency-based model of current medical education; identifying and advising pre-health students early in their academic careers; creating a central, physical hub for pre-health resources).

G. GW will conduct a review of STEM programs to ensure we are offering majors our students want; this might include evaluating the desirability of enhanced opportunities in emerging fields or in interdisciplinary fields in which GW can be distinctive.

**Goal 7**

GW will strive to attract an ever more broadly diverse undergraduate student body and devise strategies for including and supporting all students in an equitable manner.

A. GW will continue to move toward its goal of covering 100% of financial need for admitted students

B. GW will continue or enhance faculty and staff training in diversity best practices and provide needed resources to support these practices.

C. GW will develop and fund a coordinated support structure to provide resources for various student cohorts, including first-generation students and students with financial need; through this structure, students with varying needs will be made aware of resources available to them, both at GW and through the local, state, and federal government (See Goal 2).

**Metrics**

In addition to the metrics that correspond to goals and subgoals, the committee has identified four overarching metrics to measure excellence in undergraduate education:

A. 1st-year retention rate
B. 4-year graduation rate
C. 6-year graduation rate
D. 1st-year retention, 4-year graduation, and 6-year graduation rates of students that are defined as “At Risk”
Goal 1: Through innovative programming, every student will have access to structured creative exploration of academic opportunities and majors.

A. Rates of student participation in new learning initiatives (e.g. pop-up courses; discovery tracks)
B. Survey of student satisfaction with new learning initiatives (e.g. pop-up courses; discovery tracks)

Goal 2: GW will implement a standard of personalized advising and student success across the university, with a distributed model of implementation in each school.

A. Percentage of students involved in first-year experience
B. Student satisfaction with first-year experience
C. Student satisfaction with pre-professional advising
D. Ratings measuring student satisfaction with advising: trust of adviser, empathy of adviser, adviser’s understanding of the whole student

Goal 3: GW will be thoughtful and intentional about making “outside” and/or experiential learning opportunities—including study abroad, internships, service learning, and other forms of community engagement—part of the curriculum of every student.

A. Number of partnerships in different fields and learning opportunities for students generated
B. Number of credit hours dedicated to, and percentage of students engaged in, experiential learning opportunities
C. Survey of students’ perception of the availability and value of such experiential learning opportunities
D. Survey of students’ perception of the incorporation of outside and experiential learning with GW coursework
E. Percentage of STEM students engaged in outside and experiential learning

Goal 4: Every GW student will have access to an interdisciplinary problem-based learning experience.

A. Number of credit hours earned in interdisciplinary problem-based learning courses
B. Number of interdisciplinary problem-based learning courses available
C. Percentage of students taking these courses

Goal 5: GW will support inclusive, interdisciplinary teaching based on research and best practices; it will empower faculty to develop cutting-edge courses and curricula.

A. Number of schools and departments that offer teaching excellence tenure track
B. Number of faculty promoted on teaching tenure track
C. Percent of faculty and graduate teaching assistants who engage in pedagogical innovations
D. Proportion and range of courses that receive support (including funding) for revision and incorporation of evidence-based teaching practices

Goal 6: GW will expand opportunities for every student to acquire quantitative and computational competencies while empowering STEM students with social, historical, and cultural competencies that draw on its location and academic resources.

A. Number of credit hours earned in STEM courses
B. Number of students who graduate with at least one STEM major (for comparison to market-basket schools)
C. Number of STEM students who report a meaningful exposure to issues of ethics, society, and/or culture in their STEM discipline
D. Number of credit hours earned by STEM students in courses that emphasize ethics and societal and cultural issues related to science and technology
E. Qualitative surveys of student exposure in pre-admission period to pre-med and pre-health opportunities
F. Number of non-STEM courses that incorporate quantitative and/or computational methodologies
G. Number of non-STEM students who pursue STEM learning opportunities (e.g., through differentiated data analytics certificates or through certificates in computer programming)

Goal 7: GW will strive to attract an ever more broadly diverse undergraduate student body and devise strategies for including and supporting all students in an equitable manner.

A. Movement toward GW goal of meeting 100% of need for students
B. Percentage of enrolled students who are underrepresented minorities, Pell-eligible, first-generation
C. Percentage of faculty and staff who have had diversity and other training (e.g. accessibility technologies, transparent design in teaching)
D. Number of required books and course materials made available to students through the library system or which are Open Educational Resources (OERs) (i.e. affordability)

Capabilities

Goal 1: Through innovative programming, every student will have access to structured creative exploration of academic opportunities and majors.
A. Resources to plan and develop new academic opportunities; these may vary among schools/units
B. Dedicated resources for faculty to develop and implement new courses or for students to initiate pop-up courses
C. Faculty training in best practices

Goal 2: GW will implement a standard of personalized advising and student success across the university, with a distributed model of implementation in each school.

A. Resources for Student Affairs to develop and implement a University-wide first-year experience
B. Hiring of additional advisers where students are underserved (industry standard is 250:1)
C. Continued adviser training and assignment of work load in specific disciplines (rather than, for example, by alphabetical order)
D. Pre-professional advising review to assess needs and to ensure the full implementation of existing resources; focus on connecting GW’s professional schools (e.g. Medicine, Law) to undergraduate advising
E. Task Force to devise a plan for a First-Generation Student Support Center; resources to implement the task force’s recommendations

Goal 3: GW will be thoughtful and intentional about making “outside” and/or experiential learning opportunities—including study abroad, internships, service learning, and other forms of community engagement—part of the curriculum of every student.

A. Full-time staff resources for building and maintaining strong and active DC based relationships / agreements / opportunities (whether centralized or school-based)
B. Faculty resources for integration and teaching of experiential opportunities with curriculum
C. Faculty resources (including stipends) for integration and execution of experiential opportunities within the curriculum

Goal 4: Every GW student will have access to an interdisciplinary problem-based learning experience.

A. Interdisciplinary curriculum planning unit: staff and faculty time for planning, implementing, and teaching
B. Modified incentive structures to encourage faculty to teach interdisciplinary courses and to enable team teaching
C. Enhanced infrastructure to support outreach to the DC community to cultivate real-world problems for students to engage in and to identify relevant faculty expertise needed to build the interdisciplinary faculty teams
Goal 5: GW will support inclusive, interdisciplinary teaching based on research and best practices; it will empower faculty to develop cutting-edge courses and curricula.

A. Study of faculty-to-student ratios to determine how these are distributed (e.g., across units, majors, year of study)
B. Resources to move GW to a faculty-to-student ratio (currently 13:1) that is closer to our market-basket median of 10:1
C. Resources to move GW to a GTA- or learning assistant-to-student ratio that is closer to our market-basket median
D. Training for GTAs and learning assistants in best practices in teaching techniques
E. Time and resources for faculty to update courses and create new courses based on strategic planning
F. Provision of additional full-time staff members for University Teaching and Learning Center

Goal 6: GW will expand opportunities for every student to acquire quantitative and computational competencies while empowering STEM students with social, historical, and cultural competencies that draw on its location and academic resources.

A. STEM Task Force to plan and implement GW STEM differentiation strategies
B. STEM Program Review Task Force - review of existing and new programs
C. Interdisciplinary curriculum planning unit: staff and faculty time for planning and implementing
D. Planning and implementation resources for a Digital Literacy Support Center
E. Planning and implementation resources for a STEM Honors Program
F. Dedicated staff support for Gelman Library workshops on STEM competencies (e.g. Python) for non-STEM majors; availability of such workshops in evenings and on weekends (outside of 9-5) to better integrate with student schedules
G. Support for more workshops via Libraries and Academic Innovation
H. Support (time, training, and incentives) for faculty to develop interdisciplinary courses to connect humanities to STEM based curriculum
I. Faculty training to incorporate quantitative content into these courses

Goal 7: GW will strive to attract an ever more broadly diverse undergraduate student body and devise strategies for including and supporting all students in an equitable manner.

A. Increased support for diversity and inclusion initiatives; these could also include initiatives addressing the cost of attending GW (e.g. purchase of clickers and textbooks) or for raising faculty and staff awareness of social and economic issues
B. Creation of a physical office or hub where students can get information about social and economic resources available to them (See Goal 2)
C. Support for faculty to rework courses in order to incorporate Open Educational Resources in lieu of expensive textbooks
D. Monetary support for GW Libraries & Academic Innovation to increase access to required course textbooks

Questions/Thoughts for Consideration

The committee's work on this report is ongoing. Topics for future revisions include foreign language learning at GW and the interplay between the committee's recommendations and general education requirements in different units.
High-Quality Undergraduate Education
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