

Williams College
College Council (CC) Consultation Report
Recommendations and Findings
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Introduction

Williams College is a small, highly selective liberal arts college located in rural Western Massachusetts. The college has approximately 2100 undergraduates and two graduate programs with less than 50 students. Out of the 2100 undergraduates, 52 percent are male, and 48 percent female; 22% of students are first generation, and 38% are students of color. 93 percent of the students live on campus. Maud S. Mandel, Williams President, embarked on a new strategic planning process in the Fall of 2018 that involves eight working groups with different topics, one of them being governance. It's an ideal time for the College Council to look at their own structure and process while the College is reviewing their own.

Staff, faculty and students know one another by name and there is a strong feeling of a tight-knit community, or as some students call it, living in the "purple bubble". Williams provides a wide range of activities that students can participate in: club sports, cultural groups, student government. NCAA III sports, and theatre and performance groups. Students are busy and academically focused; in fact, in my conversations, they often lamented that there is not enough time to do everything they want to do.

Senior staff, including the President whom students affectionately call by her first name, are clearly committed to their students and their college experience. Students strongly agreed that administrators make themselves available to hear new ideas, listen to student concerns and/or provide feedback on an issue. It's no secret that student autonomy is paramount and celebrated at Williams; students are driven and committed, yet are challenged by small windows of time where they are able to do everything, including leading and participating in student organizations. There is a variety of student organizations, varsity and club sports, committees and additional areas of co-curricular involvement for students, rounding out an excellent education. However, if the student government was strengthened, student apathy was at a minimum and involvement of a diverse representation of students in higher-level decision making was increased, the overall student experience would be better aligned with what the students want and the College mission, "We seek to capitalize on our character as a residential college by placing great emphasis on the learning that takes place not only inside the classroom, but outside as well, where students can strengthen mind, body, and spirit by participating in athletic teams, artistic performances, political debates, religious and volunteer groups, and nearly one-hundred-and-seventy extra-curricular organizations. We also urge students to see their college as a laboratory in citizenship."

The Issue

This is not the first time that the College Council has gone through significant changes to their structure. One student I spoke to said that CC had been through another version when she became involved as a freshman, and there were also several other versions before that. The lack of a clear structure combined with inconsistent decision-making, a vaguely developed Constitution and by-laws with exposed gaps in policies and protocol has contributed to College Council finding any real success in a strong and trusted student government.

College Council has been wrestling with the backlash of the outcome of funding and recognition decisions that were made in the Spring of 2019. WIFI, a pro-Israeli group, had applied for student group recognition in the Spring, and was subsequently denied by a majority vote at a College Council meeting. College Council's decision was later overturned by the administration during the summer of 2019, officially recognizing WIFI as a group on campus. While a good number of students agreed with the final decision, some took issue with the administration stepping in and overriding a student government decision that

should have ultimately been a student government's one to make. As a result of CC's decision, Williams College was investigated by the US Office of Civil Rights where the complainant alleged the College engaged in discrimination on the basis of national origin because CC rejected WIFI's proposal to become a student organization.

That same spring, two students of color came to a CC meeting, angrily expressing their frustrations with CC's vague financial processes and having to answer to questions about their proposed event that they felt other groups did not have to go through such scrutiny. At the time, CC meetings were being live-streamed, where these two instances in question spread like wildfire through social media and news outlets. Both decisions and proceedings were controversial and placed Williams College Council on a national radar, due to the public nature of the videos and the assumptions that people (from and outside of Williams) can make with little to no context of the larger situation.

College Council has since decided to no longer livestream their meetings and that a restructuring of council and revision of governing documents is needed. However, it still leaves in question how CC will continue to effectively communicate with their constituency that clearly has lost trust and confidence in their student government. In addition to students' frustrations of policies and clear decision-making, the government also struggles with lack of a diverse representation of council officers and typically there are no contested elections, therefore not forcing the student incumbents to run on any sort of platform. The apathy in the student body is significant; only 20% of the student body voted in the February 2019 election. In fact, Papa Smurf was a write-in candidate in the last election, demonstrating student apathy and lack of confidence in their government.

The College Council Co-Presidents are currently engaged in the process of dissolving College Council in its current state and engaging in a "grassroots" effort of re-establishing a more effective, communicative and trusted student government. As of November 12, 2019, CC passed a resolution to form a committee charged with drafting a proposal for a new student government.

Analysis of Findings

In early August, I had conversations with the Vice President for Campus Life, Steve Klass, about the current state of student government and that there was interest from both the administration and the College Council executive board that change was needed. I also had introductory conversations with Carlos Cabrera-Lomeli and Ellie Sherman, current co-presidents of College Council, to discuss in depth their proposed changes, their roles and to gain more insight on last spring's events. Through those conversations we were able to establish a plan moving forward, and agreed on a visit in the early fall semester. It was the intent to have me visit during a student town hall CC was holding to solicit feedback from constituents on proposed changes to College Council, however, due to scheduling challenges, I was not able to make the forum. However, I did visit the campus over the course of two days in mid-October, and met with a variety of student leaders and OSL and Davis Center staff. I met with members of the Executive Board of the College Council, past members of College Council, current student leaders of WIFI and SJC and other students interested in making changes. I also spoke on the phone with the president of the Equestrian Club, one of the club sports on campus.

From these conversations, I was able to develop salient themes and recommendations for the College Council. I found that students and staff alike were engaging and forthcoming, and all were eager to see changes made to the current structure and management. Students caring about making these needed

changes and are willing to work collaboratively with administration is key to how this process will move forward. The following are recommendations that I have identified for moving forwards:

Recommendations

- 1. Develop a relationship statement that clearly outlines the relationship between College Council and Williams College.** This relationship statement should clearly define the accountability functions and decision-making of College Council has to Williams. How/when/if does the College administration intervene with College Council matters? How is a Williams student organization defined? What is expected of a student organization? What are organization's privileges, rights and responsibilities? What relationship does CC have with OSL? How does OSL staff interact with CC and what oversight and guidance do they specifically provide? The relationship statement should also frame how much funding is provided to students, how it is allocated, and how and when money is exchanged between the College and the Council. I have provided several examples that can be looked at as models that provides a framework of clear distinction between an institution and its student organizations and the responsibilities one has to the other. **(See Appendix 1 for examples in full)**
- 2. Clarify the vision and purpose of College Council.** As the student representative body on campus, College Council should operate as such with a clear vision and purpose. The Funding Board should be an arm of the CC, but it should *not* be the central focus of its work and charge. Although CC advertises faculty and student committees on their website, the board is currently not taking applications and it is not clear on how students can get further involved, what committees students can sit on, and what the purpose of those committees are. Each CC officer is charged with coming up with a "project" to focus on and that they are passionate about related to bettering the student experience at Williams. However, student leaders reported that these "projects" can be time-consuming, and students have little direction on how to see them through and/or their overall purpose to their role. Therefore, these projects are often dropped and not seen through. Rather than a project, the executive board and its members should focus on 2-3 overarching goals for the academic year and then have the remainder of its focus be on committee work.

CC should be brought into larger conversations and decision-making that is happening at the College, such as the protest policy, a policy change which took place over the summer and some students felt that they were not involved in. Involving CC into decision-making processes would not only raise its importance among the senior administration, but also would impact the current apathy among students. Students want to be involved in an organization that makes *meaningful, positive impacts*. Right now, they do not see College Council as that organization. However, with a critical eye at the constitution, by-laws, transition plans and re-working of roles coupled with support from the senior administration, this can be possible. When students see their involvement could enact positive change, voting will increase as well as seeing a more diverse representation of students running for positions. **(See Appendix 2 for links to suggestions on how to structure a funding board as an extension of CC and overall constitutional models.)**

- 3. Develop a clear and concise process for funding applications, allocations and recognition decisions for student organizations.** One of the reasons why College Council struggled last spring

in their decision making is that their by-laws and Constitution were vague and some of the rules were confusing which impeded the council's ability to make sound decisions. The by-laws and protocols of student proposals were not clear to the officers involved in the voting as well as the students whom were looking for funding and recognition. The Constitution needs to be re-written, looked at annually for any revisions and updated accordingly. The process should also clearly outline each executive board member's role, elections process, conduct process, removal and impeachment of officers and members, power of the body and its relationship to the senior administration. Funding Board allocations process should be clearly outlined in a step by step process where students and student organizations can understand what is expected of them prior to their budget presentation and proposal. Furthermore, the student group decision process should be formalized and made on a set criteria that is non-discriminatory, decisions are based not on matters of opinion but rather a consistent set of principles where each group offers a unique, distinct purpose to Williams students and is open in its membership and its constitution reflects the values of the College. Framework and criteria for student organization recognition can be outlined in the relationship statement, a student organization handbook, and in the by-laws. They should be clear and student officers that are responsible for recognizing groups should be familiar and abide by the criteria rather than decide on groups on a case by case basis.

(See Appendix III for links to Constitutional models to review). (See Appendix II for models of funding boards and rules).

- 4. Assign an advisor that is a faculty/staff member whom is well trusted and respected by students.** Students and staff overwhelmingly agreed that the College Council needs an advisor that is a staff or faculty member of the College. This person needs to be able to hold a neutral space and provide adequate guidance and support as well as be well-versed in student affairs issues and "hot topics" such as race relations, health and well-being, housing and food insecurity, sexual assault and hazing. There needs to be a clear definition and agreement outlined with expectations and responsibilities of what it means to be an advisor to CC and to be careful to delineate the power that an advisor can and cannot hold within their position. The advisor is meant to advise and guide, *not* make decisions unless a specific issue calls upon the college for the advisor to intervene. The advisor needs to be trustworthy, be capable of gaining student respect and rapport, a good listener, and know if and when to intervene. No matter the advisor identified, OSL and CC should identify strategies in increasing trust between both organizations, as OSL staff works closely with CC (and should continue to do so) in order to provide advisory oversight and guidance on student organization fiscal matters and student organization recognition (i.e. sit on funding and group recognition boards). OSL staff should also be involved in Club Sport Funding, and consider a separate Club Sports Council where two representatives sit on CC. **(See Appendix IV for models to review where advisor responsibilities are outlined as well as models of Club Sports Councils.)**
- 5. Clarification on all executive board roles in College Council.** All student leaders in executive board roles need to be able to understand their role, their tasks and responsibilities. There should also be a smaller number of executive board members and the elimination of "co-presidents" as roles. Co-President roles can be confusing and the lines blurred between responsibilities. There should be a clear and transparent delineation between tasks for the President and Vice-President (to replace Co-Presidents). Having co-presidents can present a challenge to students and

administration of whom to turn to and when/why. I would not recommend a Speaker *and* President as part of the government structure (see University of Rochester's structure). I find that two roles more often than not work against one another than work cooperatively. If this structure is chosen, I would make responsibilities and expectations extremely clear for each of the roles and how they will work together for the greater purpose.

There was also a concern of "too many cooks in the kitchen" whereas CC officers had either little understanding of their role or there were too many officers involved to come to a decision in a timely and productive manner. There also needs to be a clear transition plan for all officers; how will roles and responsibilities be passed down and communicated to succeeding officers? Transition plans could easily be created and stored in a shared drive, such as Google Drive or Dropbox. History needs to be translated from council to council more than just through word of mouth; students will need to identify an agreed upon tool to use to accurately document minutes from meetings, policy changes, resolutions and decision-making notes. I would also recommend that there is *an annual turnover* of CC representatives rather than each semester. The rapid turnover makes it challenging for students and administration to know who is in leadership positions and the consistency of decision-making and participation throughout the year.

College Council should consider a replication of the representative makeup of their Student Government Task Force for College Council officers. For example, representatives from MinCo, Student Athlete Advisory Committee, Club Sports Council (new) representative, faith-based RSO representation, performance-based RSO and a community service-based RSO. This would be in addition to their executive board. I would eliminate class representatives as it stems from older model of student government structures. **(See Appendix V for links to recommended officer structures).**

- 6. Support and involvement from senior administration.** Overwhelmingly, the student forum in October discussed the impact that College Council currently has – or does not have – on campus. Currently, the College Council is seen as a funding body and the group that does "Pub Nights". College Council executive board, specifically the newly appointed President and Vice-President, should be seen as the "go-to" representative body that would elect student representatives to sit on various faculty committees. At the Student Forum, students made the point that "student faculty committees are really the ones that have power" and that College Council is seen as "just playing government." In order to elevate representative student interest, increase diversity on council, and increase voting, the CC should be the clearinghouse for those student representatives. For example, CC could develop a "Nominations Committee", whereas the CC holds the power to advertise and facilitate student nominations for faculty/student and other College committees. CC Leadership would then put forward those student names to the committees to consider. Furthermore, executive board members' roles could include a seat on those committees based on the specificities of their roles. See this article for more information: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/09/21/study-majority-student-government-leaders-feel-influential-campus>

There is a sense that students can ask for something to happen, and "Steve and Marlene will just make it happen" which the work then can trickle down administratively to staff. Senior administration should instead rely on the officers within College Council to be the "go-to"

students when it comes to all college matters. For example, College Council representatives can “nominate” students through a nomination board to sit on various committees and boards. How to get involved in these committees should be more prominent on the CC website and actively marketed to students.

7. **Implicit bias training for all College Council executive and committee members.** Based on incidents in the spring of 2019, it would be important that all CC executive and committee members participate actively in implicit bias training and CC should make diversity and inclusion an integral part of their officer’s leadership development. Knowing that CC would place value on diversity, inclusion and cultural understanding, this could increase diverse representation coming to the table. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for the students to engage in workshops/scenarios where they can practice effective and civil dialogue, such as dialogue circles and how to participate in difficult conversations. It would be good to identify a professor and/or staff member on campus that has expertise in these areas that could come in and facilitate a program and work with the students. While there are some good programs that other schools do, I would hesitate offering those models until you speak directly with experts on campus and what is already being done in these areas. Topics such as these are particularly sensitive, and I have found that first seeking out what’s already being done “at home’ versus elsewhere is always best, particularly given that climates and ethos can vary from campus to campus.
8. **The Davis Center and Office of Student Life should be in congruence with funding and event policies.** There needs to be a clearer understanding from staff in both of these offices on what the other office does and what their specific functions involves. The communication between the two offices is currently fractured and in need of repair. Students are very quick to pick up on tensions that exist between colleagues and offices they will subsequently create their own group tensions and end up “picking sides”. Therefore, these two offices should create more a collaborative working relationship with one another as a model to student groups, and groups should then follow suit. If funding policies are seen as more “lenient” from one office compared to the other, students will question why that is the case. There needs to be an agreed upon criteria and framework where the two processes are similar to the other so there is no discrepancy on support that is given to student organizations from either MinCo or CC. Furthermore, MinCo should have at least two representatives on College Council to strengthen transparency and trust between the groups.
9. **An annual student organization training (Summit) should be robust and cover nuts and bolts of policies and procedures.** Although there is currently training offered through the Student Organization Summit, this program should be reviewed to be more robust and is required of all organizations to attend. This training can be an introduction to funding processes, running an event on campus, financial transactions and reimbursements, how to get involved on various committees, diversity and inclusion training, delegation and transition workshops, etc. It should also involve a variety of staff and administration to engage with students and/or present on a variety of topics. Consider “model” student organizations co-facilitating on a topic in regard to transition, new member recruitment and orientation and event planning. There are many, many models out there of student organization training and I find that the best ones often take up a good part of the day or even are spread out over the course of a month, with workshops being offered during the evenings and/or during meal times.

10. Access ways to reduce financial barriers to student involvement in student leadership roles.

There are barriers to students taking on major leadership roles, including not being able to have a part-time job while having to balance classes, internships and a student government position all at the same time. Williams should access ways to reduce financial barriers for student leaders and how these approaches could help to off-set student's financial burdens. It varies from institution to institution in their approach to supporting to student government leaders; some provide stipends or off-set costs of supplies/materials needed for the role or offer coverage for conferences and travels, or even covering partial tuition. For those schools that choose to pay student government leaders directly, there are a number of things to consider prior to choosing this option; financial complexity and sustainability of paying student leaders (and identifying who gets paid and who does not), the spirit of student volunteerism vs. a paid student worker, affecting the overall recruitment of students, etc. There can be a difference between paying a student leader vs. providing work study forgiveness, for example.

See link for article on the what is the "going rate" and complexity of paying student government presidents. <https://apnews.com/5685601f081a4ae2bf45981d4ad35f9f>;
<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2012/04/05/college-student-leaders-divided-on-benefits-of-student-government>

11. Hire a temp for administering College Council's financial paperwork and processes. There is currently too much financial paperwork and administrative responsibilities placed onto the CC Treasurer that demands much of their time. This time could be better spent in updating CC's website on financial processes, communicating with student groups and chairing the new funding board (to a name a few possible tasks that are more advisory than operational). I would recommend, if budget allows, hiring a temp for 20 hours a week to take care of financial paperwork, run reports for groups and answer emails about budgets, expenses and the like. It is not clear how much of this is taken on by OSL but this person could work directly in OSL and help the Treasurer with time-consuming paperwork.

12. Establish a Club Sports Council that sits separate from College Council. Students agreed that club sports funding often caused disagreement and dispute among College Council and club sports officers. Club sports officers often feel as if they have to explain the large costs of their expenses every time College Council brings on new members, when there is turnover, and/or first year students take positions that hold funding power. This causes undue anxiety among Club Sports officers each year in fear that they will be unfunded simply due to lack of understanding of those costs among College Council officers. Therefore, due to the typical costly materials of all club sports and expenses that can differ significantly from other clubs, I would recommend that there be a separate funding body, such as a Club Sports Council, where club sports could go and ask for funds. This could be separate from the College Council., but I would recommend that a representative of CSC sit on CC. **(See Appendix IV for links to recommendations on Club Sports Councils).**

Conclusion

The College Council at Williams College is uniquely positioned to make significant positive change to their current governmental structure. The current Co-Presidents of CC have dedicated their time and energy to

collecting student feedback, working with senior administration and also discussing changes with the consultant in what the future of College Council should look like. It's an exciting time for the College but also will bring about significant culture shifts and change. Students will either be very much on board with these changes and, understandably so, there will be resistance. Therefore, it is important that students and administration alike be transparent and communicative about changes along the way and to involve a diverse amount of student representation in future conversations and decisions.

Transparency and the cooperation of current College Council members and the administration will be paramount to moving these changes forward. While it is the desire for College Council to put these changes into place by February 2020 when new executive members are elected, it would be strongly recommended to take these changes one step at a time, to ensure to solicit feedback from all constituents and to have a sustainable and clear plan in place for moving forward. Therefore, it might be more realistic for the new structure to roll out for Fall 2020. For College Council to rush decisions forward without involving advisement from administration and other staff would be a poor move and would move them back into a similar place in which they started.

Ultimately, given President Mandel's current work on a strategic plan, the changes to College Council are timely and needed – and well positioned to be embraced by students and administration alike. It will take some time for apathy of the student body to subside, but as is often the case, when such big changes are put into place and the normalization of “how things have always been done” is shook up, students will start to pay attention and want to get involved to be part of William's history.

Appendices: Recommended Structures and Governing Documents

The following structures, website and governing documents I would strongly recommend for College Council and administration to consider; these models are clear, concise, policies and procedures are user-friendly and understandable. Bowdoin, in particular, mention their values to non-discrimination and their clear stance on that. Their funding guidelines and recognition processes are clearly stated and has a “positive” tone that is helpful, engaging and presents themselves as an organization that is open and not intimidating. Student government should have a website that *invites* in new members, not turn them away and/or intimidate. Dartmouth also has a great layout and inviting website.

<https://students.dartmouth.edu/coso/about/coso-board>

<https://students.dartmouth.edu/coso/funding/applying-coso-funding>

<http://students.bowdoin.edu/bsg/>

Appendix I

a. Lehigh University Club and Organization Statement:

<https://studentaffairs.lehigh.edu/content/club-organization-relationship-statement>

Lehigh’s Relationship statement outlines the relationship between clubs and organizations and their Office of Student Activities. Could be expanded upon to include student government and its accountability to the college.

b. Pepperdine University Student Organization Relationship Statement

<http://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/student-life/content/student-org-handbook-15-16.pdf>

Pepperdine utilizes a “contract agreement” to confirm clubs and organizations relationship with Pepperdine University. Uses the term “working relationship” when it refers to both parties, which aligns them more as partners rather than adversaries. It also has a clear definition and role of organization Faculty Advisors.

c. Texas State University Relationship Statement

<http://www.lbjsc.txstate.edu/soc/organization-resources-html>

Texas State’s relationship statement is short, succinct and to the point. Does not necessarily outline roles and responsibilities of student organizations/government and the Student Involvement staff, but rather defines their relationship as “partnering” with registered student organizations to enhance the University Community. Again, the word partner is one I recommend as it sets up students and administration right away as working together towards a common goal.

d. University of Maryland (College Park) Procedures for Student Organizations

<https://www.president.umd.edu/administration/policies/section-v-student-affairs/v-100f>

UMCP's statement is an interesting one; it is a procedural outline for student organizations that is actually written on behalf and approved by the College President. This demonstrates Senior Staff buy-in and partnership with the Office of Campus Activities, and helps when having to support difficult decisions when it comes student organization recognition and de-recognition. Lengthy and not so much a relationship statement, but a procedural outline.

Appendix II

a. Macalester College

<https://www.macalester.edu/mcsg/about/constitution/>

Macalester College's constitution is clearly laid out and the funding guidelines are particularly strong. They also have a relationship statement that defines the partnership between the Office of Student Activities and Student Government. What is key about their guidelines is that they are transparent in how funding is rolled over each year and where it goes, who administers, etc.

b. University of Chicago

<https://leadership.uchicago.edu/sgfc>

Clearly defined funding procedures and protocols.

c. Bowdoin

<https://www.bowdoin.edu/student-activities/pdf/SAFC%20Guidelines%20%20Reviewed%20November%202018.pdf>

Clear processes and guidelines. Openly invites to student organizations to apply for funding and not an intimidating process bogged down with too many rules and protocols.

Appendix III

a. Bowdoin

<http://students.bowdoin.edu/bsg/about-us/constitution-bylaws-2/>

I find that Bowdoin's website, well developed and laid out process, policies and procedures the strongest of all the peer institutions identified. Their website is open, positive and makes you want to get involved. You will see that I recommend their structure the most when it comes to transparency, tone and procedures.

b. Princeton

<http://usg.princeton.edu>

Very clear organization and funding processes.

- c. University of Chicago

<http://sg.uchicago.edu/governing-documents>

U Chicago's website is fantastic; they clearly define executive and cabinet roles and their roles and responsibilities. Documents and process are clear and transparent.

- d. Virginia Commonwealth

<https://sga.vcu.edu/constitutions-and-bylaws/>

Well laid out website, clear processes and procedures. The government outlines their goals clearly and governing documents are strong. The titles of the officers are a bit over the top, but otherwise strong structure. This one has Senate and VP responsibilities, so a different government structure that I don't necessarily recommend for College Council in a new restructuring process.

Appendix IV

- a. University of Chicago

<http://sg.uchicago.edu>

Good model for how funding is split between a Club Sports Council and Student Government. Also, strong advisor relationship from the Director of Student Life – outlines their oversight and responsibilities.

- b. University of Rochester

<http://sa.rochester.edu/sa/document>

Well defined process for how funding and decision-making is split between student government and funding committee for club sports.

Appendix V (recommended officer structures)

- a. University of Chicago

<http://sg.uchicago.edu/>

- b. Dartmouth

<https://sa.dartmouth.edu>

- c. Bowdoin College

<http://students.bowdoin.edu/bsg/>