

# GW Strategic Planning Committee Report

## High-Quality Undergraduate Education (HQUE)

### 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. 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 an exercise in “checking boxes.” Many in our community express concern about GW’s affordability. Students, faculty and staff find the University burdened by silos that impede our creativity and ability to be responsive to curricular and other needs in a dynamic learning environment. Internships, service-learning, and study abroad are implicitly associated with a GW education, but the University could do more to meaningfully integrate these into the student experience and undergraduate curricula.

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, communications and quantitative skills, creativity, and empathy that are the foundation of 21st-century citizenship. As Career Services data show, these qualities are valued by employers of GW students across job sectors. A high-quality GW undergraduate education should thus 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 builds upon GW's distinctiveness and existing strengths. It 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, financial) that maximize student agency and access.
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 students' learning.
5. Uses programs, curricula, and teaching to empower students with creative, cultural, historical, quantitative, and social competencies.

## Proposed Goals & Initiatives

The goals and initiatives below reflect the input of our community of students, staff, administrators, and faculty. In our town halls, student focus groups, and meetings we heard a strong wish for the University to embrace a clear vision of GW's distinctive identity as an undergraduate institution. Sometimes this wish was conveyed tacitly, in the form of wanting to protect what GW "is." After listening to the community, we believe this distinctive GW identity *reflects and affirms core values of leadership, civic and community engagement, and social justice*. To achieve its aspirations for excellence, GW should embrace and elevate these values, which transcend particular schools and academic disciplines.

Regarding the committee's charge: Early on in this process, we determined that specific strategies for gradually reducing undergraduate enrollment by 20% were outside of the scope of our charge. Yet we echo the broader community in insisting that these reductions not come at the expense of student diversity, broadly defined. Such diversity is key to the University's excellence and its future success. We also urge the University to embrace this committee's recommendation that GW work to meet a goal of covering 100% of undergraduate student financial need. This goal will uplift our community, bring focus to our fundraising efforts, and put us in a position to be competitive with our peer and aspirational institutions, many of which have already committed to meeting 100% of student need.<sup>1</sup>

Faculty are at the center of a high-quality undergraduate education, as classroom teachers, mentors, advisers, and researchers. Our University's over-reliance on contingent instructors in certain sectors of undergraduate education, such as required introductory courses, can be corrosive to the well-being of those professionals and adversely affect student experience (e.g., letters of recommendation).

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

## Goal 1

GW will support strategic curricular innovation while working to eliminate bureaucratic and other impediments to such innovation. The following subgoals, individually or in combination, would contribute to such an effort.

- 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 build on the success of existing interdisciplinary programs and curricula that are accessible to students across fields and schools (e.g. the sustainability minor) and seek faculty input in identifying and implementing future interdisciplinary educational opportunities (e.g. a differentiated data sciences minor).
- C. GW will seek to eliminate barriers to double-majoring and create pathways for joint-degree and/or certificate programs. ESIA's creation of a BS track is a good example of innovation in this area, but much more can be done.
- D. In collaboration with the Medical school and the School of Nursing, GW will bolster its undergraduate pre-med/pre-health programs and curricula. It might, for

<sup>1</sup> <https://money.com/colleges-that-meet-full-financial-need/>

example, align such curricula with the competency-based model of current medical education. Excellent and accessible pre-med and pre-health advising is key to this subgoal (see Goal 2).

- E. The committee recommends that the general education requirements in each of the schools be reviewed to incorporate the goals of the strategic plan.

## **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. Schools should have autonomy in these efforts but the Provost's office should work with deans in creating and administering standards.

- A. GW will create a University-wide first-year experience that will foster students' sense of belonging and cultivate community and connectedness. While there are some core elements applicable to all students, we recognize that each school may have unique experiences, as well. The committee acknowledges that there are many excellent models of first-year programs to emulate or draw from, and we leave it to others to determine how to provide a first-year experience to all at GW.
- B. GW will define a standard of service for advising based on best practices, including adherence to industry standards for student-to-adviser ratios in academic advising.
- C. The first-year schedule for most STEM majors will be reviewed with an eye toward making these programs more supportive of students and increasing 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 seek community input to assess and strengthen its existing targeted support for first-generation students. Such support should include excellent financial aid advising.
- F. GW will assess whether it is sufficiently investing in the University Writing Center and if necessary commit resources to expand and/or expand access to its services.

## Goal 3

GW already excels at attracting students who are civically engaged, service-minded, and drawn to internships and study abroad.<sup>2</sup> GW will build on this strength by being more thoughtful and intentional about integrating these “outside” and/or experiential learning opportunities into student curricula and experience.

- 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 and ensure equitable access to these opportunities. 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 consider strengthening GW’s “brand” as a preeminent destination for broadly engaged students who value *leadership, civic and community engagement, and social justice*. We will aspire to make the University a place that supports and elevates these values of passionate engagement with our city, our nation, and our world.

## Goal 4

GW will commit to more support for inclusive, equitable and interdisciplinary teaching based on research and best practices and will empower faculty to develop cutting-edge courses and curricula.

- A. GW will expand the University Teaching and Learning Center to support the above goal; it will increase instructor engagement with the University Teaching and Learning Center; and it will support infrastructure in emerging education technologies.

<sup>2</sup> <https://serve.gwu.edu/>

- B. GW will reward faculty and graduate student involvement in teaching innovation and curriculum development.
- C. GW will investigate barriers to interdisciplinary faculty collaboration (e.g. team teaching) and seek faculty input on ways to erode these barriers to foster a more creative and cutting-edge environment for teaching and learning.

## Goal 5

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

- A. GW will support faculty-led initiatives to provide differentiated competency in data analytics and other computational or quantitative skills for students across the University, recognizing that these skills are valuable for all of our students. (See Goal 1B)
- B. GW will concurrently explore initiatives to foster digital literacies that are crucial to good governance, informed citizenship, and social justice. These literacies include but go beyond the acquisition of specific coding skills. To develop them we would draw upon existing GW resources in the arts, humanities, and social sciences while exploring areas of future investment.
- C. GW will aspire to become a national destination for citizen scientists and science leaders. It will differentiate its STEM offerings from those of our peer/aspirational institutions by linking them to GW's distinctive identity (see Goal 3C), existing academic excellence, and proximity to government agencies, research centers, and non-profit organizations. It will create and expand educational opportunities that articulate STEM to fields such as public policy, ethics and social justice, culture and the arts, and science/technology. Examples of such programs include science policy, cybersecurity, environmental studies, and social media and society.
- D. GW will invest resources in a humanities center or institute to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and cutting-edge teaching and research in humanities fields. There are many models for such centers/institutes; the GW model could be built out in light of other strategic planning goals.
- E. As GW seeks to broaden its appeal to potential STEM students, the University will do more to invest in the success of first-generation students, some of whom may be disadvantaged by coming from high schools that lack STEM resources.

## Goal 6

GW will commit itself to attracting a broadly diverse undergraduate student body and to including and supporting all students in an equitable manner.

- A. GW will aspire to cover 100% of financial need for admitted students within the 5-year strategic planning period. It will lead fundraising efforts around this goal, which supports the sustainability of many of GW's enterprises around diversity.
- B. GW will continue or enhance faculty, student 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"

The metrics listed below are not exhaustive. As goals change, metrics need to be tweaked.

**Goal 1:** GW will support strategic curricular innovation while working to eliminate bureaucratic and other impediments to such innovation.

- 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)
- C. Number of credit hours earned in interdisciplinary problem-based learning courses
- D. Number of interdisciplinary problem-based learning courses available
- E. Percentage of students taking these courses

**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:** GW will commit to more support for inclusive, equitable and interdisciplinary teaching based on research and best practices and 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 5:** GW will expand opportunities for students to acquire quantitative and computational competencies while empowering students with social, historical, and cultural competencies that draw on its location and academic resources.

- A. Number of non-STEM courses that incorporate quantitative and/or computational methodologies
- B. Number of non-STEM students who pursue STEM learning opportunities (e.g., through differentiated data analytics certificates or through certificates in computer programming)
- C. Number of credit hours earned in STEM courses
- D. Number of students who graduate with at least one STEM major (for comparison to market-basket schools)

- E. Number of STEM students who report a meaningful exposure to issues of ethics, society, and/or culture in their STEM discipline
- F. Number of credit hours earned by STEM students in courses that emphasize ethics and societal and cultural issues related to science and technology
- G. Qualitative surveys of student exposure in pre-admission period to pre-med and pre-health opportunities

**Goal 6:** GW will commit itself to attracting a broadly diverse undergraduate student body and to 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, students, 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:** GW will support strategic curricular innovation while working to eliminate bureaucratic and other impediments to such innovation.

- 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
- D. Interdisciplinary curriculum planning unit: staff and faculty time for planning, implementing, and teaching
- E. Modified incentive structures to encourage faculty to teach interdisciplinary courses and to enable team teaching
- F. 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 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 and individual schools to develop and implement a first-year experience with baseline commonality

- 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. Staff resources to review existing student success measures, identify best practices, and build upon what's working well to increase our ability to support students to success; resources to implement the 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:** GW will commit to more support for inclusive, equitable and interdisciplinary teaching based on research and best practices and 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 5:** GW will expand opportunities for students to acquire quantitative and computational competencies while empowering 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 6:** GW will commit itself to attracting a broadly diverse undergraduate student body and to 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