

## **W&L Advocate Coalition Report Appendix: Other Oppressive Practices**

### **Targeted Goals and Strategies: Low-Income and First-Generation Students**

W&L expresses commitment to ensuring success for [first-generation college students](#) and students with [food insecurity](#) or [financial need](#). This commitment must also address W&L's institutional role in promoting elitism, classism, and exclusion of low-income, first-generation students from campus culture.

W&L Students are overwhelmingly from affluent backgrounds. According to a 2017 *New York Times* article<sup>1</sup>, 81% of W&L students are from the top 20% income bracket. Furthermore, 19.1 percent are from the top 1% (earning above \$630,000 per year). Of students born between 1980 and 1991, W&L had a disproportionate percentage of its students in the top 20, 10, and 1% income brackets compared with its peers, while at the same time it had a disproportionately low percentage (around 10%) of students from the bottom 60% of incomes. The W&L brand does little to help these students in the lower income brackets, too: according to the overall mobility index measured in this study, which looks at how likely a graduate of W&L is to move up two or more income quintiles, W&L ranked last of 64 other elite colleges. When compared to ODAC colleges, W&L ranked last of all 12. And this research shows that W&L has remained largely stagnant in terms of changing these statistics over time.

When the campus culture is dominated by wealthy students, those from other backgrounds automatically become marginalized. The income inequality on the W&L campus means that students bring to campus vastly different expectations and life experiences shaped by their socioeconomic backgrounds. These differences are not inherently bad, but the dominance of wealthy students means that the campus culture is not inclusive of those without the same financial means. The University must create an environment that is open and accepting of others' situations and fully supports students who may struggle financially.

As the University recruits a more diverse student population, such as first-generation and Questbridge<sup>2</sup> applicants, W&L must also pay attention to the barriers these students will face once they arrive on campus. Doing so will also encourage attention to the barriers and concerns that prevent students from lower income backgrounds from choosing W&L in the first place. While we commend W&L for aiming for need-blind admissions as part of the University's Strategic Plan, we are concerned that students who demonstrate great financial need will encounter difficulties after they enroll unless the University works to ensure a campus culture that includes them.

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<sup>1</sup> This article uses data from citing a study from "The Equality of Opportunity Project," now "Opportunity Insights," within Harvard University. The New York Times' project, with further income statistics, can be found here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/washington-and-lee-university>

<sup>2</sup> Questbridge is a non-profit program that matches outstanding low-income students with the nation's top colleges. Read more about the program here:

<https://www.questbridge.org/about/mission-and-vision>

Beyond money for books, food, computers, and other supplies needed for college, W&L's campus relies upon students having a great deal of disposable income in order to participate fully in its culture. For example, the cost of attending events such as Fancy Dress, Mock Con, or even simply joining a Greek organization, are prohibitive for many. When the wealthy students are in the majority, they may not realize the financial pressures these events and organizations create for their peers, and, consequently, lower-income students experience stress, exclusion, and diminished participation in college life.

Perhaps even more alarmingly, financial barriers arise in the educational aspects of campus life as well. Study abroad and internship programs, while supported by campus financial aid, incur additional costs that make them out of reach for many. Visa fees, financial transaction fees, and even wardrobe requirements (for example, the London Internship requires "dress to impress" clothing) make such opportunities financially prohibitive for many, even if their academic and professional credentials match those of their wealthier peers. Financial disparities act as a barrier to access for W&L students from lower-income backgrounds, even if opportunities are technically "available" to all.

W&L has made impressive financial aid packages available to its students, and we commend that generous assistance. At the same time, these packages do not automatically mean that students will be able to fully participate in campus life. On the surface, W&L's resources signal a rewarding and fulfilling experience, but in reality, campus culture requires a high income background for inclusion in social opportunities.

## **Calls to Action**

### **1. Increase recruitment from lower socioeconomic areas.**

Given the disproportionately high numbers of students from high-income backgrounds, University Admissions ought to reevaluate recruitment processes and ensure more students have the opportunity to experience W&L. Outside of programs such as DIVE Weekend,<sup>3</sup> the school ought to build long-term connections with high schools across the country.

### **2. Research and remove barriers and pressures facing students from lower-income backgrounds on campus.**

Before starting any initiatives, the school must understand from its own students what challenges they face based on their socioeconomic status. This research could be conducted through the Diversity/First-Gen Working Group in Student Affairs to ensure diversity initiatives are effective and achieving desired results for students on campus.

### **3. Address the problem of food insecurity among W&L students.**

W&L does have a Food Pantry, but this resource is intended (and described on the University website) as an emergency option and not a regular solution for food insecurity. If W&L cannot provide food to students in need, it should provide transportation to RARA's food pantry, which is not easily accessible for students without cars.

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<sup>3</sup> DIVE Weekend is the "Diversity & Inclusion Visit Experience" event hosted for underrepresented students at W&L. An introduction (for those who meet the "criteria") to the liberal arts and residential campus life: <https://www.wlu.edu/admissions/visit/dive/>

**4. Provide detailed costs for curricular programs and adjust financial aid accordingly.**

As mentioned above, many curricular programs such as study and work abroad require attendant costs beyond the program fees. Costs for transportation, visas, work attire, and the like should be transparent for students, and financial aid packages should provide coverage for those who need support.

**5. Increase recruitment from lower socioeconomic areas.** Given the disproportionately high numbers of students from high-income backgrounds, University Admissions ought to reevaluate recruitment processes and ensure more students have the opportunity to experience W&L. Outside of programs such as DIVE Weekend, the school ought to build long-term connections with high schools across the country.

**6. Address cultural differences between students that arise from socioeconomic status.**

The university must create opportunities for students to engage with those different from themselves in a meaningful way. Students should be provided with sensitivity training that also addresses racial discrimination. We suggest that it be required through Greek life programs or as part of the general curriculum.

**7. Decrease or eliminate consideration of legacy preference when reviewing student applications.**

The current system seemingly grants preference to children or other “legacies” to the Washington and Lee community, which could perpetuate the wealth disparities we mentioned throughout. . Reducing or eliminating legacy preference would open the door to a far more diverse, high-performing, and interesting set of students.

## Targeted Goals and Strategies: LGBTQ+ Students

W&L aims to support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, and Questioning (LGBTQ) students' development and success and to create a strong and welcoming community for LGBTQ+ students and allies. The Office of Inclusion and Diversity (OIE) offers [resources and information](#) through the [LGBTQ Resource Center](#).

Further educational and administrative efforts should aim to challenge heteronormativity, homophobia, transphobia, and cisgenderism, which are currently commonplace in W&L's culture and environment. While the LGBTQ Resource Center offers an open and safe environment, we encourage the W&L community to strongly commit to mirroring the LGBTQ Resource Center's values and goals in the broader academic and social environments.

### Calls to Action

1. Reform the LGBTQ Resource Center to include all queer identities and communities (two-spirit, queer, intersex, asexual, etc).
2. Renovate all bathrooms to be gender-neutral. If gendered bathrooms remain, signs that indicate nearby gender-neutral bathrooms should be placed near gendered bathrooms.
3. Assign first-year roommates based on preferences for gender(s) of roommate(s) rather than automatically assigning students to same-sex roommates.
4. Establish secure Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender Nonconforming, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, etc. (2SLGBTQIA+) Housing for self-identified 2SLGBTQIA+ students.
5. Address rigid, oppressive gender roles and stereotypes perpetuated by historically white Greek life.
6. Confront discrimination and misgendering against transgender students during informal and formal rush.
7. Address gender and sexual orientation discrimination and bigotry in academic settings.
  - a. Require annual mandatory 2SLGBTQ+ Ally and Inclusion educational programs or events for all faculty and staff. Programs should be approved through the 2SLGBTQIA+ Resource Center Coordinator(s).
  - b. Faculty and students should be encouraged to include pronouns in their introductions and email signatures.
8. Assess faculty makeup and aim to hire faculty who identify as LGBTQ+.
9. Encourage the introduction of pronouns in first-year orientation, classrooms, events, and training.

## Targeted Goals and Strategies: Religious Tolerance and Inclusivity

W&L condemns antisemitism and Islamophobia in policy and culture and aims to be religiously inclusive of nonsecular and secular students. Additionally, the Office of Inclusion and Diversity (OIE) offers resources on [religious life](#). Students seeking resources about different world religions may visit the Interfaith Resource Center located in the Hillel House or utilize the Sacred Space in Elrod Commons. Unfortunately, W&L and the broader Lexington area, lack opportunities for Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and other non-Christian religions to practice their religions in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Since the establishment of W&L, Christianity has dominated the campus environment and culture. According to the [Commission on Institutional History and Community Report](#), Henry Ruffner, president of Washington College from 1836 to 1848, stated: Washington College “was designed for the education of youth of all Christian denominations” (18). Furthermore, 36 Christian churches are located in Lexington, while no other places of worship for other religions, except for W&L’s Hillel House, are available within or near Lexington. Christian organizations are overwhelmingly overrepresented through campus culture; these include Reformed University Fellowship, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Baptist Campus Ministries, Canterbury Club, Catholic Campus Ministry, Good Shepherd Lutheran College Group, and Young Life.

In response to the lack of a local synagogue and community center to celebrate Jewish faith and culture, [Hillel](#) was founded in 2001, and the Hillel House opened in 2010. Hillel welcomes and supports Jewish people at W&L, VMI, and the larger Rockbridge community by hosting weekly Shabbats and events and offering outreach services. Although Hillel successfully improved the admissions and inclusion of Jewish students in the last two decades, antisemitic attitudes and behaviors still regularly occur. For instance, students have reported experiencing religious discrimination during Greek rush. Additionally, Hillel House remains the only place that offers kosher food, and there is no rabbi or Jewish educator on campus.

### Calls to Action

1. Identify and implement recruitment strategies for non-Christian students, which include phoning and visiting Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious schools and communities. W&L should actively recruit students from other religious backgrounds.
2. Establish a scholarship for other religious students similar to the Max and Sylvia Weinstein Scholarship for Jewish undergraduates.
3. Collaborate with surrounding universities and their non-Christian religious organizations to provide religious communities and social opportunities for Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious students.
4. Put out educational information (social media, website, events, etc) on non-Christian religious holidays.

## Targeted Goals and Strategies: Accessibility for Disabled People

Through its [Undergraduate Disability Accommodation Policy](#), W&L expresses commitment to providing equal access to students and employees with physical and mental disabilities. Further policies and resources relating to [disability accommodations and accessibility](#) are available on W&L's website.

Ableism is deeply embedded in W&L's history, environment, policies, infrastructure, curriculum, and culture. As a result, disabled people face bias, harm, marginalization, segregation, and injustice. Ableism has been defined in multiple ways:

- As a system of oppression that favors the able-bodied and able-minded, usually at the expense of disabled people. ([University of Arizona Disability Resource Center](#));
- As the systematic, institutional devaluing of bodies and minds deemed deviant, abnormal, defective, subhuman, less than ([Lydia X. Z. Brown](#));
- And as the historic and systemic exclusion and oppression of people with disabilities (Kimberlé Crenshaw). These systems have roots in eugenics, anti-Blackness and racism generally, classism, and xenophobia, among others.

Examples of Ableism (from [Access Living](#)):

- Lack of compliance with disability rights laws
- Failing to incorporate accessibility (such as making or sharing videos without closed captioning, holding campus events without interpreters)
- Building inaccessible websites
- The assumption that disabled people want or need to be “fixed”
- Using disability as a punchline, or mocking disabled people
- Refusing to provide reasonable accommodations
- Assuming people have to have a visible disability in order to be disabled
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Students, faculty, and guests of W&L with disabilities should feel welcomed, included, valued, independent, and equal. Disabled people are entitled to fair and equal access and treatment and full integration into the W&L community.

Historically, W&L has operated under the medical model of disability. The [People with Disability Australia \(PWDA\)](#) explains that the medical model characterizes disability as a problem, an abnormality, a tragedy, and/or something that should be fixed. In contrast, the [social model of disability](#) views impairments and disabilities as an expected aspect of human diversity. PWDA provides the following detailed definition:

The social model sees “disability” as the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It therefore carries the implication that the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment must change to enable people living with

impairments to participate in society on an equal basis with others. [...] The social model seeks to change society in order to accommodate people living with impairment; it does not seek to change persons with impairment to accommodate society. It supports the view that people with disability have a right to be fully participating citizens on an equal basis with others.

The social model is internationally accepted and shapes how the world views and approaches disability and accessibility. W&L must embrace the social model of disability and apply it to its physical, technological, and cultural environments. In short, the University must be accessible to all.

According to the Center for Disability Rights (CDR), the protections in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) establish the minimum requirement towards accessibility, fair treatment, and equal rights for people with disabilities. At W&L, classrooms, building entrances, sidewalks, and residential spaces (such as themed houses, Woods Creek Apartments, and Third-Year/Junior Village) are not accessible to people who use wheelchairs or other types of mobility aids. Information (such as signs, maps, etc.) on the accessibility of spaces, entrances, or pathways is difficult to locate. Those with mobility issues experience difficulty, frustration, despair, anger, and confusion trying to navigate campus.

In addition, W&L offers little to no physical accommodation options that are accessible, affordable, and integrated into the community. For example, students with mobility disabilities (chronic or temporary) are encouraged by the [Director of Disability Resources](#) to rent or buy a personal scooter, motorized wheelchair, or a golf cart to successfully navigate the campus. Because W&L does not provide personal mobility devices to students, a student who can't afford a mobility aid has a single option: seeking transportation from Public Safety. This option exposes disabled people (especially those with invisible disabilities) to biases and places them in a position of dependency.

### *Housing Accommodations*

W&L requires students to live on-campus (including Greek and themed housing) for their first three years. The First-Year Housing and Upper Division Housing webpages both state that “rooms with facilities for physically disabled students are available in both singles and doubles,” but no further information is presented. It is only when a student seeks housing accommodations that they learn of the need for planning and extensive documentation, including reports from professional healthcare providers.

In “[Documentation Guidelines](#),” the Director of Disability Resources describes what is generally required when requesting accommodations for neurodevelopmental disorders, psychological disabilities, and physical disabilities:

In general, documentation should include a description of the disability, including the diagnosis, assessment and evaluation used to make the diagnosis, history, any treatment, and expected duration. Documentation should also include the current functional limitations of the disability in an educational setting and recommendations for accommodations that are logically related to the specific functional limitations of the



disability. **Please note that Washington and Lee University does not grant accommodations solely based on the recommendations of evaluators or care providers.** The determination is made based on all information relevant to the documented functional limitations caused by the disability in relation to our program. *(Emphasis added)*

At this time, Lauren Kozak, who is both the Title IX and Director of Disability Resources, reviews documentation for accommodations. If other parties are involved in the review, it is not stated on W&L's [Disability Accommodations](#) webpages. Information on how disorders, disabilities, and recommended accommodations are evaluated and determined is also unknown.

According to [Undergraduate Disability Accommodation Policy](#), the deadline to submit a request for housing accommodations for matriculated students is March 1st. In comparison, the deadline for matriculated students not seeking accommodations was March 24th in 2020 (the original registration date before COVID-19 pandemic). For incoming first-year or transfer students, the deadline is May 31st. **Even if documentation is submitted before the deadline and approved, housing accommodations are not guaranteed.**

#### *Academic Accommodations*

Fundamentally, W&L places the responsibility of having access to instructional content on students rather than on professors. While professors are obligated to provide approved accommodations, standard policy and principles favor students without disabilities. Those who seek equal access and opportunity are subjected to additional deadlines and responsibilities, making an unnecessarily difficult situation even more difficult. Instructors should be required to make instructional content reasonably accessible and inclusive, so the need for individual accommodations is minimized.

University of Arizona's Disability Resource Center provides [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) strategies, an [Inclusive & Accessible Design Checklist](#), and [Best Practices](#) page. Professor Alison Bell in the Anthropology Department has successfully adopted UDL strategies in her courses, and her work can be a resource for other faculty seeking to implement these accommodations.

#### *Transportation Accessibility*

W&L offers two public transportation options that are free for current students. Both are fixed route services.

First, Washington and Lee runs a local shuttle system between on-campus housing and Greek housing called Traveller Transit. (Note that Traveller Dispatch is the safe ride system and is a different service than Transit.) Transit operates on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 10:00pm-2:00am and is designed to provide safe transportation for students going to Greek parties. Additionally, Transits offers transportation to/from the Roanoke Airport and the East Falls Church Transit Center in Arlington, VA during move-in and move-out periods.

Second, RADAR Transit runs the [Maury Express](#) of Rockbridge County, which requires an ADA eligibility application and approval to receive its service. It operates six days a week:



Monday to Friday from 8:00am-6:00pm and Saturdays from 10:00am-4:00pm. Stops include grocery stores, clinics, donation shops, and general locations in Lexington and Buena Vista. Although W&L has an arrangement in place with RADAR allowing students to ride free by showing an ID, the Maury Express is not publicized during first-year orientation or in campus culture. Information about the Maury Express is only listed online under W&L [Transportation Services](#).

## **Calls to Action**

- 1. Commit to full campus accessibility.**
- 2. This commitment includes necessary renovation and retrofitting of buildings, clear signage on campus, and availability of accessibility information. Ensure that information on housing accessibility is available to all students. Encourage incorporation of the Seven Principles of [Universal Design](#) in any new spatial planning or renovation. **Require that faculty implement [Universal Design of Learning](#) strategies to create inclusive learning environments.****
- 3. Professors should strive to make their content accessible and inclusive, and they should publish accommodation information on their course syllabi. Establish an Access and Accommodations Center (AAC) or Disability Resource Center (DRC) on campus.**

Such a center would provide services, resources, and programs to facilitate equal learning and working opportunities for disabled faculty, staff, students, and guests.

- The office will determine eligibility and nature of reasonable accommodation and work towards creating physical, technological, and curricular environments that are inclusive and welcoming for all of the W&L community (Example: [Disability Resource Center at University of Arizona](#)).
  - Hire full-time administrators and consultants.
  - Offer communication accommodation options, so disabled people may access public announcements, events, and meetings.
  - Promote web accessibility.
  - Offer disability sensitivity training.
- 4.
  - 5. Expand campus transit options, including the existing Maury Express and Traveller Transit systems.**
    - a) Publicize the Maury Express during First-Year Orientation and work with the operator to develop resources to increase awareness and accessibility.
    - b) Transform the Traveller Transit system (the student shuttle system) by increasing accessibility and expanding purpose, hours, and stops.
      - Purpose: provide public transportation for students seeking social opportunities, entertainment, and access to resources (groceries/food pantry/health care)
      - Hours: 5pm to 10am on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights
      - [Stops](#): may include Kroger (near CookOut and CVS), FUDG, RARAs Food Pantry, Salerno's, R/C State Theater, Lime Kiln Theater, Clark's Ole Time Music Center, Lexington Public Pool and other entertainment/social locations
      - Consider providing service to VMI students and Lexington residents.
      - At least one bus should be accessible for people who use wheelchairs.

6. Establish an inclusive, accessible reporting system for incidents affecting disabled people.

Such a system would anonymously and immediately send reports to the Public Safety, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Board (HSMB), the Student Judicial Council (SJC), and the Executive Committee (EC). All reports would be seriously considered and investigated.