CAS Update for the BOV – November 2022

Prepared by Dean Keith Mellinger

The College of Arts and Sciences is in the midst of three full-time faculty searches this year, after rejecting 10 additional requests for faculty lines last spring. This poses some challenges, but also acknowledges our shifting needs and the interests among our students. While not all professional development money has been restored, we have seen a significant resurgence of interest in professional work. Requests for faculty travel and undergraduate research funding are all up significantly from last year, and it will be a challenge for us to fund as much activity as possible. Planning for our three popular and successful summer programs, the Summer Enrichment for high school students and the two summer research programs for UMW students, is all underway.

This November the College would like to share more with the BOV in the way of curriculum, personnel, and research within our academic programs. Arts and Sciences consists of 200+ faculty, organized into 20 academic departments each led by a department chair. Chairs are faculty who also engage in teaching, professional activity, and service, and who take on the management/leadership of their department through release time and a small stipend (averaging under $9000 per year). The departments deliver a curriculum for more than 45 academic majors and over 40 minors. In order to best understand the breadth of activity in Arts and Sciences, the 20 academic department chairs were asked to share some of what is happening within their programs.

The Department of **Art and Art History** creates impactful, applied experiences through, for example, the wood-fired kiln currently under construction on campus and various study abroad experiences in Europe. This year, the department is especially excited to be planning a major renovation of the outdated and inadequate facilities in Melchers Hall. Despite the limitations of the current spaces, departmental programs are thriving with over 75 majors in studio art and many events that reach out to the broader community, including a robust visiting speaker program and an exciting lineup of contemporary and historical art exhibitions each year at UMW Galleries. We continue to struggle with under-staffing in both the galleries and our studio program.

Although primarily a program that supports our intercollegiate athletics, the Department of **Athletics, Health and Physical Education** supports the most popular minor on campus: *Sports Management.* This fall, there are 60 declared students in the program. There, they are introduced to the basic principles of management, marketing, law, finance and ethics in sports. They also have the opportunity to complete an internship either on or off campus as a capstone course. Within the last year we have had students intern with: Fredericksburg Nationals, Normal Corn Belters, Sportable, True Lacrosse, CORE Volleyball, Fredericksburg Country Club and Hoop Group, to name a few.

The Jepson renovation has allowed the Department of **Biological Sciences** to have much more space dedicated to student laboratories and student research, and every member of our faculty is involved in student research. We have a great deal of modern equipment for a school our size which is used to train our undergraduate students for a wide variety of careers after graduation. We hired a new faculty member this year whose specialty is cancer biology, and we recently expanded to *three* majors with different foci, depending on the student’s goals: *Biology, Biomedical Science* (specifically designed for students headed for health care careers), and *Conservation Biology* (designed for students who are interested in careers based on conserving biodiversity and ecosystems). The latter program enjoys a healthy relationship with the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation where our students can study away for a semester.

In addition to the majors, **Classics, Philosophy, and Religion** (CPRD) is home to minor programs in African American Studies, Contemplative Studies, Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and Practical Ethics. It also houses the Leidecker Center for Asian Studies and maintains the Zen Garden. Our newest major in **Classics**, *Ancient Mediterranean Studies*, is among the first in the US that focuses on ancient diversity. New courses on *Ancient Slavery and its Legacy* and *Democracy and Revolution in Ancient Athens* address issues in antiquity central to contemporary concerns. Faculty take students abroad to Rome and Northern Italy, and our students are offered regular opportunities to work on archaeological digs, and win paid, prestigious internships. **Philosophy** and **Philosophy: Pre-Law** make up the core of the Philosophy program at UMW. Students work with faculty, a local attorney, and adjunct instructors in course work, guided research, and internships. These programs provide excellent preparation for graduate and law school, as well as careers in the business world, public service, and journalism. We host the student-run Pre-Law Club and are the primary coordinators and advisors for Mary Washington’s 3+3 program with George Mason’s law school. The curriculum in **Religious Studies** allows students to understand and research the historical and cultural impact of religion. A faculty member and recent recipient of the Grellet Simpson Award now leads the university’s first minor program in African American Studies. The flexible design of our curriculum allows students to double major and leads to careers in law, medicine, counseling, education, business consulting, and even video game design.

The Department of **Communication and Digital Studies** continues to grow and supports their majors as well as the minors in Digital Studies and Journalism. This is our third year as a department, created to support the fastest growing major on campus. We are graduating 60+ students per year, and we are rapidly expanding student opportunities. Our faculty have developed nine new special topics courses including health communication, sports communication, media studies, media law and ethics, virtual and augmented reality, and digital media production. Our curriculum prepares our graduates for success in some of the best graduate programs in the country, and our support for student internships (more than 30 per year) has helped ensure that our graduates are career ready. We are hosting the Virtual MLK exhibit in Spring 2023 from scholars at NC State that shares speeches of Dr. King through virtual and augmented reality.

The Department of **Computer Science** is a thriving community of over 250 declared majors, 10 full time faculty, and several long-time adjunct faculty members. We offer majors in the highly marketable fields of Computer Science and Cybersecurity, a minor in Data Science which will soon be expanded to a certificate program, and are collaborating with the Department of Mathematics to create a new major in Data Science which will prepare students for this in-demand career field through mathematical expertise and experience in machine learning, data mining, and simulation. Our department’s space is undergoing renovation to include more student collaboration spaces and additional lab space to support student research. Students intern for organizations such as the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Central Intelligence Agency, Booz Allen Hamilton, and MITRE.

Faculty in the Department of **Earth and Environmental Sciences** developed a climate-change FSEM, courses focused on ecotoxicology and sustainable aquaculture, courses with a study abroad component (to Bonaire and South Africa), and a new *After Mary Washington* course to develop e-Portfolios. Junior faculty Drs. Grothe and Frankel secured several external grants (NSF for $112K; Morris Animal Foundation for $92K; FMC Corp. for $50K; local donor for $20K) that will enable them to supervise many undergraduate research students in EESC.

Experiential learning is a special emphasis in the **Economics** department.  In 2019, Experiential Learning was added as a requirement, providing students with an opportunity to apply economics outside the classroom. For example, students can present at the Economics Scholars Program undergraduate research conference in Dallas. Our majors are also active in the economics honor society with activities that include invited speakers, group discussions, dinners, and tutoring for students in economics. With support from a Waple Professorship, one faculty member worked on an economic history project where he collected information on over 2,000 legal cases from the 1820s in Fredericksburg. The recent faculty-published *Inequality in America: Causes and Consequences for ABC-CLIO* won two awards last summer.

The Department of **English and Linguistics** has seen growing interest in writing instruction. This includes student interest in the ENGL 202 series of writing courses on topics such as medicine, technology, sports, the self, and multiethnic literature, as well as writing food, book, and film reviews and writing in the workplace. In addition, we offer advanced courses such as *Writing with Digital Media* and *Writing and Literacy in the Digital Age.* Our creative writing faculty continue to garner national attention with a new collection of poems, *Living Room*, winner of the highly competitive Backwaters Prize in Poetry, and *School*, recently accepted for publication with FC2, an imprint of the University of Alabama Press with a strong reputation for publishing experimental writing.

The **Geography** Department launched a new major this fall in Geospatial Analysis raising the visibility of this subject for students across campus. Completing our GIS Certificate remains an option for any major, and is especially popular in historic preservation, conservation biology, and environmental science. A GIS-based webpage completed by two geography majors is due to be published at the end of October by the National Park Service. Other current projects include a GIS storymap on a new civil rights trail in the City of Fredericksburg, exploring the paradox of local isolation despite international connectivity through globalization, the use of GIS to assess impacts of urban heat islands and impervious surfaces on water temperatures and quality in the Chesapeake Bay, and a brand-new class on the *Geographies of Beer, Wine, and Spirits*. A dozen students are signed up to go to Guatemala during spring break.

The hallmark of the Department of **Historic Preservation** is the hands-on, community-engagement nature of courses and co-curricular activities. This fall, students enrolled in *Building Forensics* confirmed that the current chimney at the Mary Washington House (the 1759 portion of the building) was added in 1791, with the original fireplace located centrally on the rear eave wall, which sets the Mary Washington House apart from other structures in Virginia as a unique surviving example of this design. In the *Experimental Archaeology & Reconstructing Ancient Technologies FSEM*, students research past archaeological cultures with tattooing traditions and then recreate the tattooing needles from those cultures. In August, the **Center for Historic Preservation** partnered with the Fredericksburg City Cemetery in organizing a cemetery conservation workshop that introduced seven Historic Preservation majors and seven community members to this topic; together they documented, stabilized, and cleaned twelve gravestones in the City Cemetery.

**History** is designing two new minors for students to continue their interest in studying the past. The *global history* minor will encourage students to continue their study of foreign language. We continued the *Talking History* series with such scheduled guest speakers as alum Rebecca Erbelding (historian, curator, and archivist at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Faculty advanced such projects as *Flying Aeroflot: A History of the Soviet Union in the Jet Age* and anti-vaxxers at the turn of the nineteenth century. Community service includes work with the City of Alexandria on housing discrimination and with the local Rappahannock Tribe to document its history. Recent courses include *History of Mental Illness*, a re-imagined course on *The Civil War*, and *Problems in Genocide Studies*. The director of **American Studies** reached the final stages of a multi-year collaboration with the National Park Service and added a new course, *Introduction to Public History*.  Significantly, affiliate faculty developed a new 100-level gateway course to elevate the profile of American Studies on campus and to introduce students to the interdisciplinary study of American life and culture.

The last four hires in **Mathematics** have enabled the program to strengthen its offerings to include minors in actuarial science, applied mathematics, and applied statistics, all of which are geared towards boosting their chances in the competitive post-baccalaureate environment. This has resulted in an increased engagement of students in undergraduate research targeting real-world problems. A quarter of math faculty have won Waple professorships to deepen their research, and their publications in leading journals have resulted in increased visibility for UMW. A recently launched colloquium series on the *Life of a Mathematician* has brought inspiration to many students as they observe the trajectories of the faculty.

The Department of **Modern Languages and Literatures** sees great success with its recently introduced FSEM on International Fairytales. Representatives from six languages the department offers teach one of the fairytales from their cultures as guest lecturers. The seminar also has a community engaged learning component: students work with the Fredericksburg Bookmobile and read fairy tales to younger students in middle schools and after-school programs. As some of the students expressed an interest in becoming teachers, the final project can be either a traditional research paper or a lesson plan with all handouts and materials for a middle school class. Our colleagues in the College of Education were of great help in providing lesson plan templates and successful plans from the past.

**Music** continues to broaden the opportunities for student experiences, working with members of the downtown homeless community to coordinate the Fredericksburg Street Choir, mastering non-Western theoretical and technical skills in the Indian Music Ensemble, and exploring “Sinatra’s America” in a first-year seminar. Students are featured as soloists with our ensembles, including the UMW Philharmonic.  The gift of a new Steinway concert grand piano for the Weatherly Auditorium in Seacobeck Hall has made an entirely new venue available for the public to enjoy UMW performances and guest artists.

The **Physics** program is enjoying their first year as a fully staffed unit. A new program coordinator is leading the program through a two-year program supported by the American Physics Society. One of our faculty received the 2022 Outstanding Young Faculty Award, and senior Kevin Leong received the Perkins Research Award for “Best Poster” in his research last summer. The **Chemistry** Program is enjoying strong interest and enrollment. Fall classes are quite full, and there are waiting lists for many spring classes. We have 10 students participating in undergraduate research, including three students who are preparing their Honors Theses. This fall we have been active in promoting science in the community, with students participating in outreach activities at the Science Museum of Virginia, Moncure Elementary School, and the Spotsylvania Rising Scholars Program.

Faculty in the Department of **Political Science and International Affairs** supervised over 90 credit hours of Individual Studies, Internships, and Undergraduate Research projects in 2021-22. This year we welcomed our newest hire who will teach courses on American political behavior, including American public opinion. In 2022 Political Science and International Affairs professors had books published on topics ranging from disinformation in the news, conservative women in comparative political systems, U.S. engagement with NATO, and teaching religious literacy. Our students further pursue their interests outside of the classroom through club activities, such as the International Relations Organization, UMW Voting Ambassadors, and UMW Student Government Association.

In the department of **Psychological Science** students engage with the community both on a volunteer basis or in one of our 58 approved internships. Collaborative faculty/student publications include a study on minority stress and post-traumatic growth in the transgender community, and one on how mindfulness can protect against the negative effects of Adverse Child Experiences. Faculty also lead student research teams looking into helicopter parenting, using the EEG to look at brain activity associated with relationship threat, using our eye tracker to look at how mindfulness impacts memory. The second edition of *Psychology of Women and Gender* authored by UMW faculty is poised to be the top selling textbook in the field, and we have one of the top recognized national experts in the field of trauma with eight peer reviewed papers published in 2022 alone.

In the second year of a two-year Waple professorship, a faculty member in the Department of **Sociology and Anthropology** is studying “Models for Living in the Anthropocene'' a project that explores a shift toward solution-orientated teaching, with potential for collaborative partnerships across the University. With a grant awarded by the City of Fredericksburg, another project is creating and coordinating the Bragg Hill Community Garden. Student researchers are comparing public information on state prison systems, and many of our courses represent partnerships with local community organizations. Our work in this area has connected UMW to the community in truly meaningful ways.

In August, the Department of **Theatre and Dance** welcomed its largest-than-ever first year class interested in majoring in theatre, generating tremendous energy as we continue to bring our production program back to life. We just closed a sold out run of *The Play That Goes Wrong* with sales equally as strong for our upcoming production of the cult classic, *The Rocky Horror Show*. Our UMW Theatre in London study abroad program quickly reached maximum enrollment and the inaugural cohort of students will travel in May of 2023 to experience 12 performances and the rich theatrical heritage of this world class theatre city. Giving to UMW Theatre in 2021-22 exceeded all previous records and we will build on that success as we begin to develop strategies for our new building.

With affiliated faculty from thirteen departments and expertise in over twenty disciplinary areas, the **Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies** program remains popular, filling their introductory courses every time they are offered. Most majors write a traditional research paper while some produce artwork, write chapters of a novella, or put together a journalist’s portfolio of news items. The program hosts an forum where students from across campus present papers and posters based on their research on WGST-related topics. The program also organizes public lectures, brown bag lunch discussions and panels enriching the scholarly conversation on campus on important and contemporary issues such as the current feminist protests in Iran, the status of women’s reproductive health issues in the United States, and the challenges around refugee resettlement in Fredericksburg.

Finally, the college continues to raise the profile of our student work through the [Beyond the Classroom Endowment](https://cas.umw.edu/btcendowment/) campaign which supports student work outside the classroom, including low-paid internships, study abroad, and research. The fund is generating its first grants this year. Due to a generous gift from Beth Craig and Phyllis Quinn ‘77, we have a November challenge this year, and a complementary challenge by the CAS Alumni Advisory Board on Giving Tuesday will cap off the year’s activity. We hope to end 2022 with our endowment reaching the milestone of $500,000.