

CAS Update for the UFC – September 2025

Submitted by Dean Keith Mellinger

With the launch of our new academic organization this fall, the leadership team in the Dean's office has changed and new efforts toward recruitment, retention, curricular development, and advancement are being developed and aggressively pursued by our team.

School of the Arts: The School of the Arts will work this year to cultivate a conversation around shared affinities to realize the potential of the arts' alignment within the new school. Much of the year will be spent articulating aspirations for the future and connecting those goals to the Six Year Plan. Student recruitment will be a priority as will be developing the resources required to enhance the programs of these highly active public facing programs. To that end, the school director, Gregg Stull, will begin the formation of an advisory board of alumni, patrons, and donors who will be charged with supporting the School of the Arts and its reach through the cultivation of external associations and relationships.

School of Science: The new School of Science, led by Lynn Lewis, includes the programs housed in the Jepson Science Center. The new director intends to encourage collaboration, both between departments and individuals in the Jepson Science Center, and between the sciences and other disciplines across campus, while also building relationships with individuals within Jepson and with other university units, such as Admissions, Advancement and Career and Professional Development. Much time will be spent working with the new Director of Undergraduate Research on planning for the distribution of the Piscopo Rodgers endowment, and to work with Advancement to raise funds for areas not covered by this endowment. Finally, targeted recruitment initiatives for the sciences will be pursued in order to attract the best and brightest students to the UMW sciences.

Humanities and Social Sciences: Starting this fall, the humanities and social science programs within the College are supported by a new Associate Dean, Laura Mentore, who previously served as the chair of the Department of Cultural and Philosophical Inquiry and as a professor of anthropology. Her principal goal for the year is to develop a compelling vision and strategic plan for the Humanities and Social Sciences at UMW. This vision will align with and advance institutional priorities, entail partnerships with the two new schools, demonstrate our adaptiveness to changes in Higher Education, and ensure the delivery of career skills that our students need for success in the workforce. We plan to encourage team-taught courses that will address the needs of multiple programs in a cost-effective manner, develop a minor in medical humanities, and explore more certificate and micro-credentialing opportunities. Importantly, a faculty working group is developing a proposal for a Humanities Center, with a tentative launch date of Fall 2026. The Center will foster interdisciplinary teaching and research, public engagement, and career preparedness, with an emphasis on the practical utility of humanistic modes of inquiry, ethical reasoning, and creative problem-solving in service to the university and society at-large.

External Grant Activity: Within the past academic year, 11 CAS faculty members submitted a total of 18 external grant proposals for funding to develop or enhance new curricula, research projects and the creation of free open-resource material for several of our classes. The total of the requests came to \$571,000 and the applicants represented seven different disciplinary programs, including communications & digital studies, biology, chemistry, earth & environmental sciences, history, physics and political science.

Dr. Anand Rao, Professor of Communications, submitted three proposals (one of which was to the National Science Foundation and another to the National Endowment for the Humanities) to provide resources to further develop and expand our curriculum in the vital area of Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Tyler Frankel, in the Department of Earth & Environmental Sciences, applied for a research project to the Green and Healthy Homes Initiative of the Environmental Protection Agency. A unique feature of the proposal is the inclusion of members of the local Mattaponi tribe to provide field support and to create related educational material for tribe members. On February 21, 2025, Tyler was notified that his proposal was successful, and he received an award of \$140,000. Regrettably, as has happened in other federal agencies such as NSF and NIH, the EPA later canceled the award in late March which was a great disappointment as the project would have involved a number of our UMW students as active participants.

Summer Enrichment Program: Summer 2025 marked the 4th consecutive year for delivery of the UMW Summer Enrichment Program, taking place July 13-19. A total of 78 high school students participated (19 rising 10th graders, 33 rising 11th graders, and 26 rising 12th graders). Of those students, nine came from out of state, with one each from Georgia, New Hampshire, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Maryland; 69 more from Virginia; and one additional student from Austria. Twenty-three different week-long courses were offered which were taught by 24 UMW faculty members. Students participated in three classes each day during the week as well as 5 different enrichment activities. There were 30 different enrichment sessions in which students participated which included off-campus field trips, and sessions focusing on: learning sport/athletic skills, developing social/communication skills, college preparation, and community service activities. During the week, students were supervised by nine camp counselors who are UMW students and who also work as RAs and Orientation Leaders. We have ambitions of growing the program over the next two years.