Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan
Office of Residential Life and Housing

Introduction

      In Residential Life and Housing (RLH), diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are the guiding principles that shape our work. DEI and anti-racism work is essential to support our marginalized populations and seek a unified, humanized and safe path forward due to the prevalence of discrimination and racism nationwide. Williams is not immune to these societal ills and this national epidemic and we dedicate ourselves and our work to proactively fight against them. Our plan is designed to provide a clear direction for RLH, ensuring that these values permeate every aspect of our department. With three fundamental values at the core of our work - awareness, integrity, and service - we strive to create an environment that supports the growth and well-being of our students, fosters strong partnerships with campus stakeholders, and cultivates a cohesive and inclusive team.

      In RLH, we believe that awareness is key. By cultivating self-awareness, emotional intelligence, interpersonal awareness, and societal awareness, we develop a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. This allows us to foster empathy, compassion, and inclusivity in our relationships and interactions. Upholding integrity is a core value for us. We prioritize transparency, trust, and fairness in student housing and the student experience outside the classroom, ensuring that every student's needs are met and their well-being is valued and protected. Lastly, service is at the heart of what we do. We are dedicated to making a positive difference in the student experience, providing convenience, safety, community, and access to resources. We tailor our services to meet the unique needs of our students and continuously seek their feedback. We strive to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where every student feels valued and supported. By establishing and implementing policies that align with our core values, we aim to contribute to a positive and enriching campus life that supports each student's personal and academic growth.

Purpose and Values

      This plan aims to provide RLH with the direction to ensure that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging permeate our work. We are guided by these values, as they serve as the foundation of our work with students, campus partners, and our team. We have identified three fundamental values that form the foundation of our work: awareness, integrity, and service.

<u>Awareness</u>

      Awareness is the ability to perceive, understand, and be mindful of oneself, others, and the world around us. This involves being mindful of thoughts, emotions, sensations, and the broader context of a situation. Being aware allows us to understand how our emotions and thoughts may influence our actions and interactions with others. It also helps us recognize the needs and perspectives of those around us, fostering empathy and compassion. This can be practiced in a variety of ways whether it's internal reflection, journaling, or discussion with peers. By actively maintaining

awareness, we can enhance our care for ourselves, others, and our work. We plan to cultivate awareness in the following ways:

- Self-awareness: Understanding our strengths, limitations, feelings and biases enables us to assess their impact on our behavior and make conscious choices that align with our values and goals. Through self-reflection we can identify areas for personal development and take steps towards self-improvement, leading to greater personal effectiveness and fulfillment.
- Interpersonal awareness: By developing a keen sense of others' emotions, perspectives, and needs, we will build stronger connections and forge collaborative relationships. In combination with being aware of our own feelings and their impact on our behavior helps us manage our reactions effectively. This awareness helps us adapt our communication style, be more receptive to feedback, and constructively resolve conflicts. This practice allows us to respond to challenges and conflicts with empathy and understanding, fostering healthier relationships and more constructive communication.
- Societal awareness: Understanding the broader societal issues and challenges that impact our work and the people around us is essential. Doing so enables us to recognize systemic inequities, biases, and barriers and take informed actions to promote fairness, justice, and inclusion within our sphere of influence. Maintaining awareness involves a commitment to continuous learning, problem-solving, and staying informed about current events, trends, and research relevant to our work. This enables us to adapt to changes, identify opportunities for improvement, and contribute meaningfully to our professional and personal communities.

By cultivating awareness, we can develop a deeper understanding of ourselves and others, leading to more authentic care and empathy in our relationships, improved well-being, and more meaningful contributions to our work and society. We plan to grow in this area by reading and discussing literature which will help us better understand identity, history, and community. Each summer we will choose two to three books and analyze them through the lens of our work aiming to more deeply understand the issues at play and our role in combating historical inequities and systems of power and privilege.

Integrity

By fostering integrity in student housing, we create a community where honesty, trust, and fairness thrive. Students can feel confident that their housing needs are being met with transparency and consistency; they can trust that their well-being is valued and protected. Ultimately, an environment built on integrity in student housing not only enhances the residential experience but also nurtures each student's personal and academic growth, contributing to a positive and enriching campus life.

Our team is responsible for establishing and implementing various policies and procedures that direct multiple aspects of our work. By holding ourselves and the students accountable to these established processes, we reinforce principles of integrity. Transparency is essential in ensuring that all students are well-informed about these policies. By providing clear and accessible information we

aim to serve every student to the best of our abilities. It is crucial to address potential gaps in understanding and support students to ensure they have the necessary knowledge to navigate the housing processes.

In the pursuit of integrity, it is also crucial to review policies and procedures regularly. We will create a binder to keep a log of policies, each application of them, and their outcomes. This will be a tool in our regular review process. If we encounter a policy that does not align with our core values, we will actively seek solutions consistent with our principles. This proactive approach reinforces our dedication to creating an environment that genuinely supports and nurtures students. By upholding integrity in student housing, we contribute to the overall well-being and success of the student community. Through these efforts, we establish a foundation of trust and fairness, creating an environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and personally.

Service

We are committed to making a positive difference in the student experience and are dedicated to fostering a friendly and inclusive atmosphere for students and staff. We aim to deliver timely, ethical, and top-notch service to our students and colleagues. This includes:

- Integration and Transition: For students new to the institution or living away from home for the first time, student housing services can aid in their integration and transition. Residential Directors, House Coordinators, Community Coordinators, Junior Advisors, and RLH staff can provide valuable information, guidance, and support, helping students adjust to their new environment, navigate campus resources, and address any challenges they may face.
- Facilities and Processes: Service amenities provided in student housing enhance the overall living experience by offering convenience and comfort. Services provided in student housing support the campus living experience. Providing furnished accommodations, maintenance services, utilities, move-out, and storage services addresses the need for students to handle these tasks with the support of the Residential Life & Housing team.
- Safety and Security: Providing on-call support, student leader oversight, and security services can provide students and their families peace of mind. Feeling safe in their living environment allows students to concentrate on their studies and personal growth.
- Community and Social Interaction: Student housing aims to foster community among residents through common areas, social activities, and student leader support. These services encourage social interaction, facilitate friendships, and create a support network within the residential experience. Building relationships with fellow students can enhance the college experience and contribute to personal development.
- Access to Resources: Student housing services may also provide access to additional resources and support. This can include referrals to on-campus counseling or health services, career guidance, or assistance with administrative processes. Having resources readily available within the residential experience can benefit students in need of guidance or support during their college journey.

We acknowledge the unique requirements of our students and tailor our resources to meet their needs, making them our priority. Serving the diverse community at Williams College is a multifaceted responsibility, requiring us to balance efficiency, consistency, and individual care. Furthermore, we proactively gather student feedback and stay updated on industry trends to anticipate and plan for future community needs. To do this, we have created the Residential Life Advisory Committee (RLAC) which brings together invested students, staff and faculty to have an open dialogue about the programs, services, and policies of the RLH office. We take thoughts and feedback from these meetings and use them to inform and shape our work. In addition, we regularly attend professional conferences to immerse ourselves in best practices, learn from others, and share our experiences.

Programs, Training, and Housing Processes

As our department grows and changes, we are dedicated to developing robust residential life programs that prioritize serving students from all backgrounds, with additional attention to historically marginalized and underserved communities. In line with this commitment, we will implement programs and review processes centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. We intend to create an inclusive and welcoming environment that ensures every student feels valued and supported.

Residential Life Programs

We will implement and expand upon residential programs that prioritize collaboration between staff and students, to support and build a vibrant community for students with marginalized and underserved identities. These programs encompass a wide range of initiatives designed to meet our student population's diverse needs and interests. We organize activities such as snacks and Williams After Dark to foster social connections and engagement. These events provide opportunities for students to come together, build friendships, and create lasting memories within a supportive and inclusive environment.

In addition to social activities, we recognize the importance of educational programs that empower and inform our students. One such program, "Life After Williams," aims to equip students with valuable life skills and knowledge to thrive beyond college. Through workshops, panels, and networking opportunities, students gain insights into career development, financial literacy, personal well-being and citizenship.

Theme, Affinity, Programmatic and Special Interest (TAPSI) Housing gives students the opportunity to create communities based on shared themes, affinities, programming initiatives or a shared special interest. These communities expand the programmatic reach of the residential experience.. TAPSI programs aim to engage the larger Williams community with focused programming that enhances a sense of belonging, educational opportunities outside the classroom and social connection. Past examples of these programs include, campus speakers, lectures on topical media, campus composting initiatives, and collaborations with student organizations.

We are excited to introduce Entry Engagement Communities, residential communities specifically tailored to our students' unique experiences and identities. These communities will offer all first-year students the chance to select a living environment centered around specific themes, including substance-free living, the LGBTIA+ experience, the Asian Pacific Islander Diasporic experience, the Black/African Diasporic experience, and the Latine Experience. These intentional communities create spaces where students can find support, connection, and understanding among peers who share similar backgrounds or interests.

By intentionally creating these residential spaces with programmatic support, we aim to foster a sense of belonging, empower students with resources and knowledge, and promote a vibrant and inclusive community that celebrates the rich diversity of our student body. We will assess the effectiveness of these programs and continually update them in response to student needs.

Student Leader Training and Supervision

We recognize the importance of updating student leader training and supervision to achieve our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. We will focus on enhancing their understanding of identity development, cultural competence, and resident support. Emphasizing the importance of identity development recognizes that each student brings unique identities and experiences to their residential life. Through workshops, discussions, and experiential learning, we support our student leaders in deepening their understanding of different cultural backgrounds, social identities, and intersectionality. This enhanced awareness will enable them to navigate conversations and situations with sensitivity and inclusivity, fostering an environment where all residents can thrive.

Cultural competence will also be a focal point in our training. We will provide tools and resources for student leaders to develop their understanding of various cultural practices, beliefs, and perspectives. Cultivating cultural competence will enable them to engage in meaningful dialogues, bridge cultural gaps, and facilitate connections among residents from different backgrounds. Our student leaders will receive guidance on creating inclusive programming that addresses residents' diverse needs and interests. They will learn strategies for fostering a sense of belonging and well-being among all residents, particularly those facing additional challenges due to their marginalized identities.

By equipping our student leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills, we empower them to create inclusive communities within the residential spaces they oversee. This includes promoting an atmosphere that celebrates and respects all residents' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Housing Processes

We design efficient, accessible housing selection processes using technology like StarRez to ensure equity and transparency. Students are made aware of how pick time is calculated and we have rooms available listed before selection time. To ensure fairness and also benefit students who have been here for a longer period of time, we use class year to determine pick-numbers

while randomizing within the class. Our housing accommodation (HART) process creates room for flexibility and reasonable efforts to try and meet the needs of all students.

RLH has implemented a Housing Points System which can affect students in two ways.

Our initial rollout included applying Housing Points for students who were living in certain flex rooms as a double. After student outreach, which was followed up with staff investigation and assessment of the living situation in some rooms, if a flex room has a certain square footage, the students living in that space receive housing points to raise their place in the housing selection process for the following year.

We also recently began implementing Housing Points as a way to hold students accountable when they do not adhere to housing policy, including move-in/move-out dates and expectations. As Housing Points can affect a student's pick time in the housing selection process, implementing Housing Points is a move away from fines which can impact students differently depending on their socio-economic background and access to financial support. We plan to approach campus partners with this initiative which has been vastly successful within the Residential Life and Housing office thus far. Some of these campus partners include Campus Safety Services, Student Financial Services and Environmental Health & Safety.

Overall, we aim to improve feedback loops, remaining open to cultivating new relationships that will inform policy and integrating information that enhances the timeliness, accessibility, and transparency.

Program and Policy Review & Assessment

We recognize the critical importance of regularly reviewing and assessing our policies and programs to ensure their effectiveness and alignment with our goals. To prioritize this essential work, we will implement a comprehensive policy and program evaluation schedule at multiple points each year. By dedicating specific time slots for review and assessment, we ensure these crucial activities receive the attention and resources they deserve. This approach allows us to thoroughly evaluate the impact and outcomes of our policies and programs, identifying areas for improvement and making informed decisions based on data and feedback.

During these scheduled assessments, we comprehensively analyze our policies and programs, examining their objectives, implementation strategies, and outcomes. We evaluate their alignment with our values and mission, seeking input from stakeholders, staff, and students. This collaborative approach enables us to gather diverse perspectives, fostering inclusivity and ensuring that the voices of all members of our community are heard.

We utilize various assessment methods, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews, to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the experiences and perceptions of those involved. This

data provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of our policies and programs, guiding our decision-making process for improvements and updates.

In addition to gathering feedback and data, we also conduct reviews of best practices in student housing and community development. This external benchmarking allows us to gain insights from other institutions, identify innovative approaches, and integrate evidence-based strategies into our policies and programs.

By scheduling these review and assessment sessions, we demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to our students' ever-evolving needs and expectations. We prioritize creating an environment that fosters growth, inclusivity, and well-being for all. Ultimately, the scheduled review and assessment of our policies and programs serve as a mechanism for accountability, ensuring that we remain committed to providing a supportive and enriching residential experience for every student. Through this ongoing process, we build a culture of learning, adaptation, and continuous improvement, enabling us to deliver our students the best possible services and opportunities.