

TO: Williams Faculty

FROM: Ad Hoc Committee on Winter Study Teaching and Learning: Charlie Doret, Sara Dubow, Marion Min-Barron, Christopher Nugent, Annie Reinhardt (chair), Paula Consolini, Danielle Ramdath, Emily Gubin, Cara Sturdevant

DATE: May 2, 2022

SUBJECT: Update on the Work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Winter Study Teaching and Learning

Convened at the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester, the Ad Hoc Committee on Winter Study Teaching and Learning was formed to build on work done on the Winter Study Program in the Strategic Planning process and by the 2021 Winter Study Group and Winter Study Program Committee to investigate possible changes to the Winter Study Program. We are working towards the goal of bringing recommendations to the faculty by December 2022.

This spring, the Committee's work has focused on outreach and research in order to gain a better understanding of how the program has been defined and administered in the past as well as the impact of recent changes. The process of outreach to different communities on campus and research into specific questions about the program is ongoing, and will continue through the Fall 2022 semester. The Committee has conducted a survey of department and program chairs, requested data from Institutional Research, looked into similar programs in other institutions, and reached out to other offices on campus with stakes in the Winter Study Program, such as the '68 Center for Career Exploration, Alumni Relations, Spouse/Partner Resources, and the Center for Learning in Action. We are in the process of collecting survey responses from some groups of staff who may be interested in Winter Study teaching: Deans, Davis Center, Library, Museum, etc. We are working on outreach to students, which we hope will take place both around graduation and early next fall. As our work continues, our main goal will be to consider and clarify the aims and scope of the Winter Study curriculum.

The Committee affirms the curricular and co-curricular importance of Winter Study and recognizes the many roles and forms of teaching that faculty undertake during this period. The Committee is also considering the possibility of substantial changes to the Winter Study Program, listed and explained below. **This is a provisional, working list on which we are seeking feedback rather than a final summary of recommendations.** Several of these suggestions have complex implications for the mission and implementation of Winter Study, as well as for its multiple participants. We welcome your responses and suggestions at the May 11 Faculty Meeting, or at any time via [the Committee's website](#) (please scroll to the bottom for the feedback form):

1. Eliminate the obligation for faculty to teach Winter Study every other year; allow faculty to opt into Winter Study teaching with some form of compensation.

The distribution and enforcement of Winter Study teaching obligations is currently overseen by department and program chairs, while the Dean of Faculty can grant

releases in exchange for service, and in some cases exempt faculty from Winter Study teaching in their contracts. In 2021, pre-tenure faculty with starting dates in 2019 and 2020 were released from Winter Study teaching until the submission of their tenure materials, but the expectations that units contribute to the Winter Study curriculum were not officially reduced. As a result, Winter Study teaching obligations within units are not distributed evenly. Across the College, units have adopted a wide range of practices for staffing Winter Study that are not consistent. The Committee is considering the idea that rather than try to enforce the faculty obligation, faculty be allowed to opt into Winter Study teaching with some compensation. Such a system could preserve opportunities for faculty who are committed to Winter Study and to sustaining ongoing departmental programs, and provide a modest incentive for others to develop and teach Winter Study courses when their research, teaching, and service obligations permit.

2. Centralize and streamline the process of vetting, appointing, and supporting adjunct instructors. The number of Winter Study courses taught by adjuncts has grown in recent years and there is interest among alumni, spouses/partners, staff, and community members in additional teaching opportunities. Currently, potential adjunct instructors must approach and secure the approval of a department in order to propose a Winter Study course. We are considering a model in which adjunct instructors would instead propose courses directly to a Winter Study Coordinator, who would oversee the vetting of these instructors, and—along with the Winter Study Committee—approve courses for the program. The Coordinator would assist these instructors with the logistics of Winter Study teaching and oversee the evaluation of their courses. This centralization would relieve department/program chairs of the responsibility for managing this expanding part of the Winter Study curriculum while making adjunct instructors less dependent on forging connections with departments and programs to participate in Winter Study. The Winter Study Committee could provide some faculty oversight over this part of the curriculum, and the Committee’s composition and procedures could also be adjusted to strengthen that oversight. Adjunct instructors might propose courses under the current categories in the Winter Study Mission Statement: Experiential, Self-Expression, Exploration, and Wellness.

3. Undertake initiatives to promote various forms of Winter Study teaching. One type of initiative would encourage more departments and programs to develop Winter Study courses that complement the regular semester curriculum. This is already an important part of Winter Study for many academic units on campus (thesis work, language sustaining programs, travel courses, laboratory research, practica, etc.). Such an initiative could make the most of the idea of “year-round learning” articulated in the Strategic Plan. A second type would be sessions or discussions that introduce Winter Study teaching to faculty and adjunct instructors considering proposing a course, offering support on incorporating experiential elements, etc.

Please visit [the Committee’s website](#) to offer feedback and suggestions at any time (scroll down to the feedback form)