

REPORT TO THE HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE COMMUNITY

September 18, 2024

To the Hampden-Sydney College Community:

As I do around this time each year, I'm reporting to you on the state of our distinctive College. It's gratifying to be able to share that the state of the College is good, and quite possibly as strong as at any time in our long history. We have much to be thankful for and many to thank. We also have many to congratulate, especially our newest alumni, the members of the Class of 2024. And, I know you join me in welcoming the newest members of our community—the Class of 2028, which is our largest freshman class in five years, and they are joined by several young men who have transferred to Hampden-Sydney from other colleges.

We've received much positive feedback to the recent *Wall Street Journal* ranking of the nation's 500 Best Colleges, in which Hampden-Sydney came in ahead of most of Virginia's public and private colleges and universities. Ranked #115 overall, only 16 liberal arts colleges are ranked ahead of us on this list. Hampden-Sydney also received special mentions for best Career Preparation (#3) and Colleges Most Highly Recommended by Their Students (#7). We should all take pride in this recognition.

Of all of the variables that go into this ranking, I'm most pleased by our high score for Character Development, which the *Journal* defines as “the extent to which students feel the college has developed character strengths that will help them to make a meaningful contribution to society, including moral courage, hopefulness, resilience, wisdom and a sense of justice.” Of the 500 schools in the Best Colleges ranking, only two had a higher score on this variable. Our good showing on this variable is indicative of the College's dedication to its mission “to form good men and good citizens” and our commitments to character development, rhetoric and free expression, civility, and brotherhood.

I hope many of you also saw the news we shared a few weeks back of Hampden-Sydney's place in the latest edition of the Princeton Review ranking of the nation's Best Colleges. It is impressive for Hampden-Sydney to be included among this listing of the nation's 390 best colleges and universities, and we take great satisfaction from our placing among the top ten colleges in several categories, including Most Active Student Government (#1), Best College Library (#2), Best Alumni Networks (#3), Best Schools for Internships (#3), Friendliest Students (#5), and Best Career Services (#7). Also impressive are additional categories in which Hampden-Sydney places among the top 15 colleges: Their Students Love These Colleges (#13), Lots of Race/Class Interaction (#13), and Happiest Students (#15).

This external validation reinforces what we already know about Hampden-Sydney—that this is a very special college. It is, as one of our Trustees likes to say, “a national treasure,” or, as George Will has described it, “a beacon of light,” or, as our own Chris Peace '94 has eloquently stated, “Hampden-Sydney is what the world should be, but isn't.”

Our performance in national rankings and these positive accolades are not a coincidence, but rather the outcomes of plans and efforts that have been underway for many years. For Hampden-Sydney to thrive as a college for men, it must offer young men an extraordinary educational experience, and we have been working to provide our students with the finest coming-of-age experience a young man can have. Our faculty and staff members share our commitment to fulfilling the College's mission, and we want every program, activity, and new initiative to contribute to the formation of the good men and good citizens who will be tomorrow's leaders in the organizations where they work and in the communities they call home.

Central to the educational experience we offer is the work of our talented and dedicated faculty members who provide the outstanding teaching and mentoring that have long defined our academic program and that build a foundation for our students' success after college. Our faculty members are also scholars, scientists, and artists, and they are innovators who have introduced new majors and minors, new teaching pedagogies, and new curricular and co-curricular programs. This past year, the faculty adopted and the Board of Trustees approved a new general education program that makes more explicit the links between our mission and the courses we ask our students to take.

I often say that we want our campus life to model what it means "to form a more perfect union," so that when our students graduate and go out into the world, they will want, and work, to make their workplaces, families, communities, and our country that "more perfect union." Hampden-Sydney is—and should always be—one of the best hopes for a better nation and world. I commend our students, our student government leaders, and our student life staff for their efforts to strengthen our student culture, and I commend the impressive advances they have made in student and campus life.

By every measure, our students are living more closely into and up to our College's mission. The number of Code of Conduct violations this past year was less than half of what it was four years ago. Hospital trips due to alcohol or drug abuse, which once occurred most weekends, now occur about once a semester, largely because our guys are acting as "their brother's keeper." At the same time, student volunteer service hours are at an all-time high, and were 20 percent higher during the 2023-24 academic year than the year before.

Over the last few years, we've improved our retention and graduation rates by about five percentage points. This reflects an admission strategy of increasing selectivity and concerted efforts to ensure that our students thrive and graduate in four years. We continue to focus on improving our retention and graduation rates so that they are soon comparable to the most highly rated liberal arts colleges. And, building on the reputation we have established for career preparation that was highlighted in last week's *Wall Street Journal* ranking, we want to see all of our students move directly from graduation into the very best jobs and graduate programs.

Any review of this past year must also highlight our athletics program, teams, and coaches. Our coaches are as dedicated to the College's mission as they are to winning, and they are essential partners in our educational work. Last year's basketball team illustrates this commitment. Not only did the team win the Old Dominion Athletic Conference Championship and go on to be the NCAA Division III National Runner-Up, but its members also earned an average GPA of 3.37! Eleven members of the basketball team joined 92 of their fellow student-athletes in the ODAC's 2023-24 All-Academic Team, an honor that requires a minimum GPA of 3.25.

The aim of our ambitious building and renovation efforts is to ensure that the College's physical plant will match the quality of our educational program. I know our students, faculty, and staff members join me in thanking all involved in planning, working on, and helping fund the renovations of Venable Hall and Whitehouse, as well as the work we've begun on the Carpenter Houses (the last phase of our comprehensive residence hall renovation project), the ongoing renovation of the Kirby Field House, and the recently announced renovation of Gilmer Hall.

Thanks to the generous support from our alumni and other benefactors and the hard work of our talented advancement team, we've raised \$25 million or more in each of the last five years, a level of fundraising that compares favorably to the most prestigious liberal arts colleges. This new, much higher level of fundraising is what the College needs to fund our ambitions and our campus construction and renovation projects, and to strengthen our financial foundation and grow our endowment.

When we receive final figures from our investment managers, we expect that the value of the College's endowment will exceed \$250 million as of June 30, 2024, up from \$146 million in 2016. Doubling our endowment over the next few years is a worthy and achievable goal, and an endowment of \$500 million will allow us to fund our educational program at a level it deserves and provide the "financial impregnability" that will allow the College to thrive during its next 250 years.

I cannot begin to capture in this report the many ways that all members of our community contribute to the life and vitality of this remarkable College. We revel in the accomplishments of all of the students who study and live here. We are grateful for the talents and dedication of everyone who makes Hampden-Sydney such a vital place of learning. And, we could not sustain and improve Hampden-Sydney without the financial investments we receive from our alumni, parents, and friends.

At this year's Opening Convocation, I shared that we want Hampden-Sydney to represent all of the best that young men can be and do. I also noted that our important work of transforming youths into young men is not just important and noble work—it is transcendent work; it is a mission that separates, elevates, and makes distinctive a Hampden-Sydney education. It is a mission that is worthy of your devotion.

Sincerely,
Larry Stimpert