



Richard Bland College of William & Mary

SEIZE YOUR POTENTIAL

Strategic Plan 2020-2025







What is the role of a selective, two-year, residential, liberal arts transfer institution within the higher education landscape of the Commonwealth of Virginia? This is a key question that must be answered to ensure the success of Richard Bland College (RBC) and the constituency that the College serves. The 2020 RBC strategic plan's primary objective is to answer that very question so that the College, the community and the Commonwealth can engage successfully within this identity and purpose, to the benefit of all.

RBC has long been identified as the *hidden gem* of higher education in Virginia. The *hidden* adjective is based both on its relative obscurity—few are aware of RBC outside the Tri-Cities region—and its rural setting featuring 750+ acres of wetlands, bucolic forest, and the state's oldest and largest pecan grove. Additionally, on average, a student of Richard Bland College travels a mere 36 miles to campus. This keeps the knowledge of RBC in a tightly focused radius. The *gem* moniker refers both to the College's reputation for excellence and the undeniable sensation that the campus often elicits in its students, visitors, faculty and staff, the feeling of a warm and palpable embrace of care, compassion and support.

That sensation is where we start.

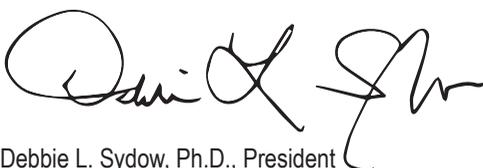
According to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), 99% of the 11.5 million new jobs created since the great recession require workers to have more than a high-school education. Students with a bachelor's degree have an earning potential almost double that of people with only a high school education. And yet only 17% of residents in the Petersburg area have a bachelor's degree, 15% below the national average. The obstacles in the way of education have been exhaustively researched and include financial challenges, academic under-preparedness, low self-esteem, slow college assimilation and immature levels of self-efficacy.

To combat this growing problem, Richard Bland College initiated a pilot program to determine the viability of a data-driven approach to improve retention and graduation rates. The program ultimately effected a cultural, organizational and operational shift at RBC, resulting in a personalized model of student support, the Exceptional Student Experience (ESE@RBC).

Originally many of the practices that RBC used as the basis of ESE@RBC were adapted from the four key principles found in the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project: 1) map pathways to student end goals; 2) help students choose and enter a program pathway; 3) keep students on path; and 4) ensure that students are learning. Unfortunately, limited resources made it necessary to skip some primary elements of guided pathways and instead to focus on specific high-priority projects that were immediately available for implementation, namely dedicated student support.

This strategic framework reimagines the way that RBC serves students, faculty and staff within the context of our existing culture, the principles of guided pathways and a hybrid work-college experience. Rather than thinking of a two-year college as a pipeline to a four-year university, this vision describes a more expansive menu of well-defined pathways to high-demand fields, all radiating from a curriculum constructed on the soft skills that define the liberal arts experience: critical thinking, written communication, analytical reasoning, civic engagement and oral communication. Furthermore, the impact of meaningful work is a resonating theme, providing avenues to participate in career-focused internships and jobs that develop important life & work skills, confidence, and character.

Richard Bland has tested its entrepreneurial mettle and its capacity for transformation in recent years. The College was among a select few Competency-Based Education sites established by the U.S. Department of Education. We were ahead of the curve in utilizing predictive analytics to improve student retention and success rates. And online enrollment now makes up nearly 20 percent of course offerings. It may be counter-intuitive, but these and other deep-level institutional changes still to come will ensure that Richard Bland College remains true to its original mission. We prepare our students for a lifetime of endless potential.



Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D., President
Richard Bland College of William & Mary



SEIZE YOUR POTENTIAL

THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY 2020-2025

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.”

– Abraham Lincoln







THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE VALUES

The following core values are the foundation of the culture and personality that are Richard Bland College. These values are what make our organization live and breathe. These values direct the actions and decisions that are made every day. They help to define our long-term vision.



A FRIENDLY, FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

It is a consistent theme that emanates from faculty, staff and students. It is the comfort, the warmth, the family feeling that permeates the campus. An expansive atmosphere of support exists, allowing all members of the College to uncover and act on their inherent potential. That sensation is valued, and it is embedded at the very core of Richard Bland College.



ENTHUSIASTIC, STUDENT-FOCUSED SERVICE

Ask any faculty or staff member at Richard Bland College why they come to work on any given day, and a single answer will resound: STUDENTS. We value that our mission centers on the success of our student body, and we endeavor to provide service of the highest quality to support their journey to success. Processes and procedures are built, assessed and improved in the name of the student, and all agree that nurturing that potential is our sole purpose.



THE POWER OF DIFFERENCE

Difference comes in many forms: the diversity of our campus population; the myriad ways that problems can be solved and risks mitigated; the various methods by which students learn and can be supported; the entrepreneurial spirit and nimbleness of faculty and staff. RBC continually strives to build an inclusive and welcoming community of individuals with diverse talents and skills from a multitude of backgrounds who are committed to civility, mutual respect, and the free and open exchange of ideas. We value these differences because each new exchange expands our collective breadth of experience and knowledge, and it makes us stronger and better than we were.

“We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return as results.”

– Herman Melville



BUILDING CONFIDENCE

The dramatic transformation that occurs in students between Welcome Week and Commencement is incremental but astounding. Students move from the general idea of a college education to fully formulated plans that include academic majors, professional goals, and transfer programs that strategically align their skills and dreams. Faculty and staff grow personally and professionally, and they hit stride on their career goals as they interact and engage with the campus. We value that Richard Bland College is a place where every individual can assist another human being in reaching the next stage of his or her life and career with newly discovered confidence, or cultivate their own individual potential and fortitude.



QUALITY OUTCOMES

In the end, the result matters, and the faculty, staff and students of Richard Bland College value that we do our best to be the best. Through rigorous processes of assessment and adjustment, strategic change is continuously pursued to ensure that every outcome is of the highest quality, and that the effort and resources put into every initiative is used with the utmost responsibility and efficiency.

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

– Audre Lorde



THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE MISSION

The core mission of Richard Bland College makes the heart of the organization beat and focuses the enthusiasm that all faculty and staff have for the success of the College and its constituency. As defined by our core values and the culture they create, our core mission is...

**TO PREPARE OUR STUDENTS FOR A LIFETIME
OF ENDLESS POTENTIAL**



THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE STUDENT VALUE PROPOSITION

Guided Pathways for Success (GPS@RBC)

The Commonwealth of Virginia has defined a vision to be the best educated state by 2030. To achieve this, four goals were defined as part of the framework for identifying key areas of focus: provide affordable access for all, optimize student success for work and life, drive change and improvement through innovation and investment, and advance the economic and cultural prosperity of the Commonwealth and its regions. Richard Bland College is well positioned to support this effort because the innovative program (ESE@RBC) that is used to remove barriers to education is well established, but it can be even more.

Research and data collection done in support of our current strategic planning cycle strongly suggests that RBC should evolve ESE@RBC into a fully implemented guided pathways framework as it provides a well-defined **student value proposition** (*i.e.*, a measurable return on the student's investment in college). This framework is composed of

- easy to navigate onboarding;
- clearly defined pathways that outline workforce-friendly majors and credentials, and effective processes for entering a pathway;
- a work-integrated curriculum focusing on required soft skills;
- fast track programs that enable academically underprepared students to achieve, in a timely manner, expected learning outcomes in crucial English and math courses;
- high-touch, intensive, student-centric support across the college; and
- tools for faculty, staff and students that provide useful information about assessment and progress

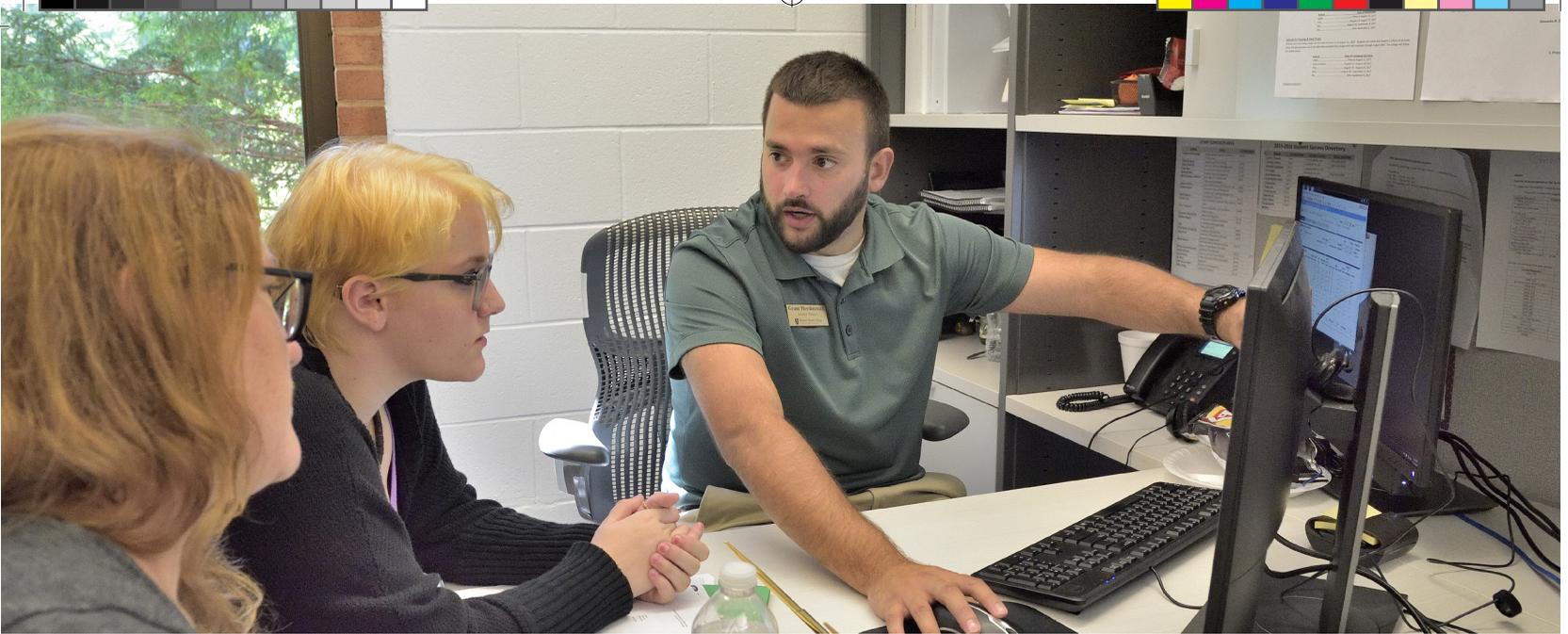
The design and implementation of this comprehensive program, **Guided Pathways for Success at Richard Bland College (GPS@RBC)**, is the primary focal point of the future-sighted strategic plan of the College.

This is an initiative that redesigns the entire college to improve the educational experience for every student, from entry through graduation, and deliberately aligns faculty and staff around a clear, laser-focused purpose. The primary directives involve reforms in advising and registration processes to help all students identify realistic and relevant goals as early as possible in their academic career. Well-defined and easy to follow program maps are developed to meticulously guide students in each program through the academic journey with the primary objective of avoiding as much wasted time as possible.

There is also a strong focus on how students are supported, monitored and tracked throughout their courses of study. A full redesign of academic programs, student services, administrative services, recreational services and any other service that touches the student in order to meet their needs is the focus, for the goal is to end the confusion that is created through acronym-filled lingo and ambiguous, bureaucratic processes.

And, finally, alignment with local and other high-need labor markets is a major principle, ensuring that value exists as students leave with a defined credential and the skills to succeed in a rapidly changing workforce.





THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE STUDENT VALUE PROPOSITION CONSISTS OF TWO PRIMARY ELEMENTS. THESE ARE DEFINED AS OUR STRATEGIC GOALS:

STRATEGIC GOAL: **AN EDUCATIONAL PRODUCT OF HIGH-VALUE WITH STREAMLINED PATHWAYS**

Richard Bland College will provide access to educational programs that are streamlined and well-defined, thereby allowing learners to proceed deliberately and efficiently. These programs will be carefully vetted for transferability, academic rigor and relevance to the current market. They will provide unique experiences, including opportunities for research, internships and work experiences that cultivate in-demand technical and soft skills.

STRATEGIC GOAL: **AN UNMATCHED STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Richard Bland College will provide a student-centric experience unlike any other in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Support and guidance at every stage of the student lifecycle will be provided enthusiastically with processes and procedures that are user-friendly. We will remove barriers. Through this focused service, RBC will ensure that learners have a clear path to graduation, transfer and beyond. When students reflect back on their time at RBC, the only acceptable memory will be how amazing the experience was and how it helped them to reach their potential.



THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE PROMISE

In order to execute our core mission and provide a unique **student value proposition**, resources are required to fund and support the operations and infrastructure of the college. The Richard Bland Core Promise states that:

ALL EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS WILL SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF OUR LEARNING COMMUNITY BY AGGRESSIVELY PURSUING FISCAL STABILITY, OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION.

STRATEGIC GOAL: SUSTAINABILITY IN OPERATION

Higher education costs are increasing, and unfunded mandates are multiplying while state funds and the number of high school graduates continue to decline. This results in a dependency on tuition and auxiliary revenue to cover expenses. To prevent unduly shifting the financial burden to students, RBC is committed to identifying alternative funding streams, improving internal financial management tools, and using all available resources in a sustainable and responsible manner.

To ensure a more robust endowment, philanthropic giving and alumni engagement will be invigorated with a focus on student success. Current trends in fundraising highlight interest in one-to-one giving, making appeals for more and varied scholarships a smart strategy. Leveraging the gift of alumni time and talent for program development, internship support, and job placement builds relationships and creates support systems beyond financial gifts. To ensure clarity of goals, targeted giving and legacy campaigns will be established.

RBC has ample opportunity to innovate internally. Automating systems will free up staff to manage more strategically important challenges. Expansion of data dashboards that are transparent and adaptable will clarify expectations and push accountability to drive continuous improvement.

Making the most of every available resource is paramount. We will pursue initiatives in environmental sustainability and recycling. Lower operating costs result in more funds that can be applied to the student value proposition.

These are the tenets that will drive the resource engine at Richard Bland College.



THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following strategic objectives have been crafted to ensure that the **student value proposition** is well developed and the Core Promise is kept.

- Construct and/or update programs that prepare learners for entry into employment or further education in fields of economic importance to the RBC service area. It is crucially important that these programs are clearly documented and presented in a user-friendly manner, with well-defined course sequences, critical milestone points, and available targeted opportunities.
- Refine recruitment and admissions processes so that they are clearly presented, easy to follow, and keep prospective students accurately informed of requirements and next steps. Onboarding should be effortless and will: a) expose the student to career/transfer opportunities that inform and inspire pathway decisions; b) develop individualized, comprehensive program plans based on the chosen pathway; c) remove all barriers to starting the education process.
- Tell the story of Richard Bland College and our **student value proposition** through: a) a targeted, future-sighted strategic enrollment management plan; b) well prepared and executed marketing strategies that spread awareness and effectively develop the RBC brand; c) communication strategies announcing the success of faculty, staff and students; d) focused engagement with partners and the community that demonstrates our contribution to the local municipalities and the Commonwealth.
- Initiate partnerships with high schools that provide college-level credit and/or motivate and prepare students for college-level coursework. Create programs that provide support for underprepared students in college-level math, English and key gateway courses that are intrinsic to a majority of program pathways.
- Develop/improve the processes and tools that support the students during their educational journey at RBC. Progress and risk alerts should be accurate and provide information that can be used for just-in-time interventions by students, faculty and staff.
- Continue to develop and fine-tune college-wide assessment systems and reporting mechanisms to stimulate a culture of continuous improvement in all academic and administrative areas.
- Using institutional assessment results, create targeted professional development opportunities for faculty and staff that improve the quality of the RBC student value proposition and the job satisfaction of all employees. Develop processes and programs that ensure equity, reward excellent performance and encourage engagement.
- Administrative processes, particularly those that have a direct impact on the student, will be evaluated and redesigned to provide the smoothest, most user-friendly experience possible. Barriers to every facet of the educational system will be removed. Course registration, engagement in events and activities, housing and dining plan enrollment, and bill processing and payment, for example, will be easy and seamless.



- *Evaluation and improvement of operational processes to ensure the effective use of fiscal, physical, and human resources in support of the student value proposition. Available monitoring, notification and reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability are crucial. Processes that ensure adherence to local, state and federal compliance requirements institution-wide will mitigate unnecessary risk.*

- *Ensure that students have various opportunities to participate in experiential learning activities, including internships, service learning, job placements and other similar programs that are deeply embedded in the curriculum. The chance for a student to receive financial relief from tuition and other educational costs must always be top of mind. Assessment of effectiveness is paramount.*

- *Develop high-quality, practical learning spaces, both physical and virtual, that support innovative, effective learning through cutting-edge instructional technologies and pedagogies.*

- *Increase non-tuition revenue streams through: a) efficient practices and projects that sustain campus resources and promote environmental stewardship; b) the aggressive pursuit of grant-based funding; c) identification of new or improved auxiliary revenue streams; d) a deeply engaged partnership with the RBC Foundation for guidance and support in fundraising campaigns, community initiatives and alumni relationships.*

- *Institute or expand processes, policies and activities that cultivate a campus environment where physical, psychological and cultural safety and health are of the highest priority.*

- *Produce initiatives and curriculum that promote global thinking and perspectives to expand problem solving capacity; develop communication skills; and encourage cultural awareness, understanding and mutual tolerance.*

- *Engage in efficient practices and projects that sustain campus resources and promote environmental stewardship.*

THE RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE KEPT PROMISE INDICATORS

The Kept Promise Indicators (KPI) are those metrics used to ensure that Richard Bland College actively moves forward to the success outlined within this plan. Baselines will be calculated and appropriate objectives set annually.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: AN EDUCATIONAL PRODUCT OF HIGH-VALUE WITH STREAMLINED PATHWAYS

The following student success metrics capture the direct effectiveness of Richard Bland College and provide an indication of preparedness for transfer.

- A. Number of two-year credentials (degree and certificates) achieved at RBC within three (3) years of start
- B. Number of credentials achieved from any postsecondary institution (including a Bachelor's degree) within six (6) years of starting at RBC

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: AN UNMATCHED STUDENT EXPERIENCE

When they are provided an effortless pathway and are enjoying their college experience, students will persist at RBC, thereby reducing "swirl" (transfer between and among postsecondary institutions) and time to degree.

- A. Fall to spring persistence in the first year, from semester one (1) to semester two (2)
- B. Net Promoter Score for overall student satisfaction, measured on exit

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: SUSTAINABILITY IN OPERATION

- A. The Composite Financial Index (CFI) is a benchmarking tool developed specifically for higher education and is a combination of several ratios involving primary reserve, net operating revenues, viability and return on net assets. Using the accepted baseline, Richard Bland College will gauge performance and implement strategies to maintain fiscal health.
- B. 100% of all Richard Bland College administrative units will define, execute and evaluate an effectiveness assessment annually. Continuous improvement of all operational units is crucial for sustained growth, innovation and student satisfaction.





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