

## Future of the Graduate Student Association - Voting Guide

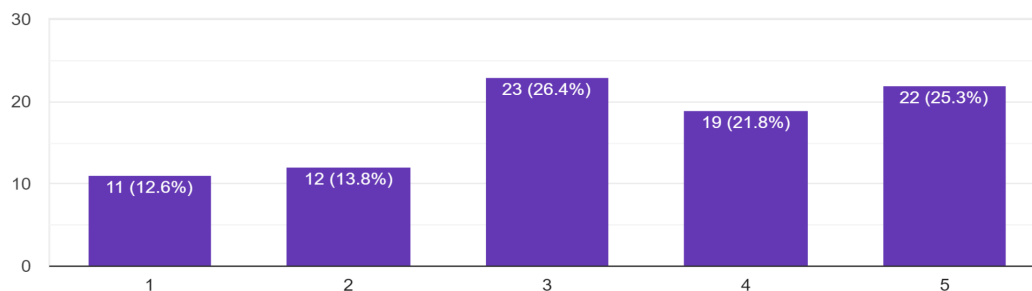
### Description of Task/Work:

William & Mary's decision to establish the School of Computing, Data Sciences, & Physics (CDSP) starting in the Fall of 2025 has been a subject of conversation for the Graduate Student Association (GSA) since the Board of Visitors made the push to create the new school in the Fall of 2023. While the move is an exciting one for William & Mary and the students enrolled in Computer Science, Data Science, Applied Science, and Physics, it has considerable implications for graduate student leadership and organization in both CDSP and Arts & Sciences. This move—shifting four existing academic departments within Arts & Sciences to CDSP, along with a little more than half of its graduate student population—is unprecedented and comes with challenges. Without any changes to the existing governance structure, these programs and their graduate student population would cease to have representation at the end of this year. Ongoing unknowns such as the future structure of the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS) and its support of existing graduate programs in both schools, representation in Student Assembly, and, until recently, an open Dean position for CDSP were a source of concern for students that led to calls for GSA to act on the future. After several discussions with graduate students and meetings with the Dean and Vice Dean of Arts & Sciences, as well as the Director of Student Leadership Development, it was agreed that GSA, as the student organization that currently represents all impacted students, was the most appropriate body to move these conversations forward. As such, beginning in the Fall of 2024, GSA began the process that has resulted in the committee work described here to develop various proposals for the future of student governance and representation.

From the outset, it was clear that graduate students in both schools valued the interdisciplinary nature of the graduate student community and GSA programming. GSA distributed a survey collecting feedback from students about their concerns while soliciting ideas regarding the future of student governance and hosted a Town Hall meeting to listen to these ideas and concerns. Below are some of the results, along with a more detailed breakdown, of this survey data.

### Future of GSA Survey Data:

How important is it to you that Arts & Sciences and the School of Computing, Data Sciences, & Physics remain closely associated?  
87 responses



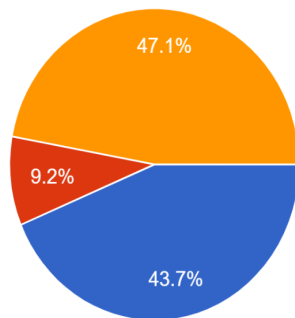
Importance of Close Associaton Between Schools (1 - Not Important - 5 - Very Important)						
Count of Graduate Program	Column Labe					
Row Labels		1	2	3	4	5
American Studies		2	1	3	1	2
Anthropology			1	5	2	
Applied Science		1	1	4		2
Biology			1		1	1
Chemistry			1		4	
Computer Science		5	1	2	3	5
History		2	4	4	3	2
Physics				1	5	9
Psychology		1		3		1
Public Policy			2	1		
Grand Total		11	12	23	19	22

Row Labels	Average of Importance of Close Associaton Between Schools
American Studies	3
Anthropology	3.125
Applied Science	3.125
Biology	3.666666667
Chemistry	3.6
Computer Science	3.125
History	2.933333333
Physics	4.533333333
Psychology	3
Public Policy	2.333333333
Grand Total	3.333333333

Which of the following general paths forward makes the most sense to you?

87 responses



- Status Quo - The Graduate Student Association would continue to operate "as is" with the same governance structure. The Graduate Student Asso...
- Separate Structures - The student leadership organizational structures for Arts & Sciences and the new School of Computing, Data Sciences, and Physi...
- Hybrid Model - Student Leadership structures will exist separately but with coordinated activities (Journal Club, et...

Count of Graduate Program	Column Labels			
Row Labels	Hybrid Model	Separate Structures	Status Quo	Grand Total
American Studies	7		2	9
Anthropology	6		2	8
Applied Science	3	1	4	8
Biology			3	3
Chemistry	1		4	5
Computer Science	7	5	4	16
History	7	2	6	15
Physics	5		10	15
Psychology	3		2	5
Public Policy	2		1	3
Grand Total	41	8	38	87

While it was clear from this data and the resulting discussions that graduate students favored some level of continued association between the schools, what this association should look like and how student governance organization(s) should be structured was less clear and more evenly divided. As a result, this committee was established at the October GSA meeting to take the feedback collected and to craft proposals that address and account for graduate student ideas and concerns. The committee initially reviewed a number of different proposals for graduate student leadership while thoroughly considering the concerns and questions raised by students. It became clear during these conversations that descriptors like “status quo” and “hybrid” were inadequate and unclear for differentiating proposals, and the committee ultimately narrowed the options to two proposals that reflect student feedback. The models outlined here for your review both depart from the “status quo.” Both models offer structure (either through separate governance organizations or internal councils) for independent representation and decision-making by student leaders in A&S and CDSP. Both models value continued collaboration on initiatives like Journal Club and social organizing (either integrated or ad-hoc). The primary difference between them is continued student leadership under one student organization or as part of separate organizations for both schools. We urge all to read the descriptions below and to consider the advantages and concerns/challenges of each model.

### **One Organization Model**

#### **Description/Overview/Details:**

This model prioritizes advocacy on behalf of all graduate students in Arts & Sciences (A&S) and the School of Computing, Data Sciences & Physics (CDSP) by maintaining a single Graduate Student Association (GSA) for both schools, which will be the primary deliberative and decision-making forum for graduate student affairs. The majority of the membership of the GSA, as presently constituted, values a close relationship between graduate students enrolled in A&S and CDSP, and this model seeks to foster interdisciplinary dialogue not only through social functions (including Journal Club) and ad-hoc cooperation between the two schools’ graduate student leadership, but rather through the governance structure itself. At the same time, this model provides a mechanism for graduate students enrolled in each school to address issues

particular to their schools through A&S and CDSP Councils within the GSA. These councils would meet separately and have some autonomy on matters of school-specific advocacy.

*Outline:*

- There shall be one Graduate Student Association (GSA) for graduate students enrolled in BOTH Arts & Sciences (A&S) and the School of Computing, Data Sciences & Physics (CDSP).
- Officers of the Executive Council shall be chosen through elections in which graduate students enrolled in both schools shall vote. The organization shall have two Co-Presidents, with one to be selected from each school; the position of Vice-President shall be eliminated. Other Executive Council positions and membership of standing committees shall also be balanced between the schools.
- Each of the Co-Presidents shall serve as their respective school's first representative to the Graduate Council. Each school's second representative shall be another officer of the Executive Council from that school.
- A&S and CDSP shall have separate representation within the Student Assembly Senate (pending approval by the Student Assembly Senate).
- One Graduate Studies Advisory Board (GSAB) Student Representative shall be drawn from A&S, and one shall be drawn from CDSP.
- One Journal Club Executive shall be drawn from A&S, and one shall be drawn from CDSP.
- The Social Chair, along with members of the Social Committee, shall plan, publicize, and supervise GSA social functions, to which all graduate students enrolled in A&S and CDSP shall be invited.
- The GSA shall meet at least once per month, with additional meetings called as necessary. All graduate students enrolled in programs in both A&S and CDSP will normally be invited to attend these meetings. The GSA shall set and enforce its own rules for attendance at meetings.
- The GSA shall create two new school-specific councils—an A&S Council and a CDSP Council—to address issues particular to their respective schools.
  - The membership of each council shall consist of all General Council members drawn from the corresponding school (i.e., officers of the Executive Council, the Journal Club Executive, and department representatives drawn from that school). The Co-President from the corresponding school shall serve as each council's chair.
  - Each council shall meet at least twice per semester, with additional meetings called as necessary. Only graduate students enrolled in programs in the corresponding school will normally be invited to attend these meetings. Each council shall set and enforce its own rules for attendance at meetings.
  - Each council shall be empowered to adopt binding resolutions without input from the remainder of the GSA, PROVIDED that those resolutions (1) pertain specifically to affairs in the council's respective school, (2) do not violate the provisions of the GSA Constitution, and (3) do not systematically disadvantage graduate students enrolled in programs in the other school represented by the

GSA. Officers on the other school-specific council shall affirm that these conditions are satisfied.

- The GSA shall be empowered to allocate funds from its budget for each council to spend at its discretion.
- Departmental funding shall, as at present, be apportioned proportionally to the various programs represented on the GSA, based on the number of graduate students enrolled in each program. Neither apportionment nor use of GSA funds shall otherwise systematically favor one school over the other.

#### **Advantages to this Model:**

- A high level of integration and collective advocacy between the two schools
- A stable venue for maintaining interdisciplinary dialogue and community, reflecting current graduate student priorities
- Built-in opportunities for school-specific advocacy and decision-making
- Little need for the formation of ad-hoc committees for either collective or school-specific matters
- A large pool of resources for all graduate students, such as funds for joint events, joint initiatives, and conference funding, as well as a large pool of human resources to coordinate on advocacy and joint projects
- Built-in collaboration and a large number of participants for joint projects such as the Graduate Research Symposium
- Mentoring opportunities across schools
- Minimal disruption to funding mechanisms from the GSAB and to initiatives such as Journal Club
- Minimal rebranding of graduate student leadership
- A large pool of candidates to fill leadership positions (which have been enough of a challenge to fill as it is), with each school filling approximately half of the General and Executive Councils

#### **Concerns/Issues Raised:**

- Additional meetings required for the school-specific councils, meaning a greater demand of time and labor for GSA leadership
- A lack of full autonomy for the two schools, creating a potential source of conflict
- The need to coordinate with two administrations and institutional funding streams in the event that the Office of Graduate Studies splits after the creation of CDSP
- A potential challenge in securing full, separate, and balanced representation for the two schools' graduate students in student government bodies beyond the GSA (in the Student Assembly Senate, for example, this would demand either an amendment to the Student Assembly Constitution or reduced representation for the Raymond A. Mason School of Business or William & Mary Law School)

## **Separate Organizations Model**

### **Description/Overview/Details:**

This model prioritizes the autonomy of graduate students in Arts & Sciences and the School of Computing, Data Sciences & Physics (CDSP) by establishing two distinct Graduate Student Associations (GSAs), enabling each school to advocate independently for the specific needs and priorities of its graduate students. While both GSAs operate independently, a structured mechanism for collaboration remains in place to support interdisciplinary dialogue, joint programming and unified representation on shared issues. Each GSA would elect its own officers, with the overall number of leadership positions reduced compared to the current GSA structure, with designated representatives from each GSA to serve on the Graduate Student Advisory Board (GSAB), Student Assembly and Graduate Council, as well as one representative to a unified Journal Club, which both GSAs would support. Collaboration between the schools would also be encouraged, particularly through each GSA's social chair, who would coordinate on joint events to foster community. Additionally, possible collaborations on initiatives such as the DEI program and graduate mentoring could be pursued depending on mutual interest. This model thus allows each GSA to focus on its priorities while maintaining a sense of community among all graduate students across A&S and CDSP.

### *Outline:*

- There shall be two Graduate Student Associations—one for graduate students in Arts & Sciences (A&S) and one for graduate students in the School of Computing, Data Sciences & Physics (CDSP)—with separate Constitutions to be drafted and adopted by graduate student leadership of each school.
- The officer roles in each school shall be determined by each school, with it likely that some roles will be combined (such as a secretary-treasurer for instance) or eliminated (such as parliamentarian).
- A&S and CDSP shall have separate representation within the Student Assembly Senate, as provided by the Student Assembly Constitution.
- One Journal Club Executive shall be drawn from A&S, and one shall be drawn from CDSP.
- Each school's GSA shall guarantee some amount of money for Journal Club with the minimum amount guaranteed proportional to the number of students in A&S and CDSP
- The Social Chairs of each GSA shall be encouraged, either formally or informally, to coordinate with one another to plan joint events to which all graduate students in A&S and CDSP are invited.
- A&S and CDSP shall have separate representation on GSAB.
- A&S and CDSP shall have separate representation on Graduate Council.
- A&S and CDSP shall have separate Dean's Advisory Committees.
- The two GSAs shall be encouraged, either formally or informally, on joint initiatives as they deem fit such as the DEI and Mentoring programs as well as the Graduate Research Symposium and Faculty Awards Committee, depending on how those programs operate once the CDSP begins.

**Advantages to this Model:**

- Allows both A&S and CDSP to advocate independently for the specific needs, goals, and interests of their respective graduate students, reducing the potential for conflicting priorities
- Avoids the complexity and administrative burden of managing semi-autonomous councils within a joint structure, allowing each GSA to operate with clear, direct lines of authority
- Enables focused representation in student government bodies and school-level initiatives, ensuring that the unique priorities of each school's students are clearly communicated and acted upon
- Allows each GSA to collaborate selectively on programs like Journal Club, DEI initiatives, and social events, without requiring joint decision-making on all issues
- Reduces the need for additional meetings dedicated solely to each school's unique concerns, making time management more efficient for GSA leaders
- Each GSA can develop distinct budgets and resources, giving both schools greater flexibility to allocate funding based on their specific priorities and external funding opportunities

**Concerns/Issues Raised:**

- Having two separate GSAs may lead to less frequent interaction and a reduced sense of community between A&S and CDSP graduate students
- Separate governance structures may result in redundant initiatives or duplicated administrative processes
- Having two separate GSAs may reduce the overall pool of candidates for leadership positions, which could make filling all positions challenging as interest in GSA roles is already low (For example, this might require greater labor burden on each consolidated position and greater reliance on Master's students to fill leadership roles)
- Each GSA may face different challenges in securing funds from their respective schools or the university, potentially leading to imbalanced resources between the two organizations