

**Contemporizing the Coordinate Tradition:
Joint Position Statement and Recommendations from the Hobart Alumni Association and
William Smith Alumnae Association**

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In response to President Gearan's October 2015 request, the Alumni and Alumnae Associations have engaged in an extended conversation to examine the meaning and value of "contemporizing" the College's coordinate tradition. Over the past year we have considered an expanse of information including the Culture of Respect report; excerpts from the Middle States response; discussions with current students, faculty, and staff; joint and individual deliberations of both Associations, including Association Trustees, and intensive dialogues within the Executive Committees of both Associations.

Throughout the rich history of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, the coordinate tradition has been the centerpiece of a deep institutional commitment to understanding self and others. Indeed, this distinctive feature of self-discovery through appreciation of the "other" has always been a guiding tenet for enabling the development of Hobart and William Smith students. Vital to this tenant are values of inclusion, equity, empathy, respect, leadership, and community. The Associations firmly believe that upholding this tenant and enhancing these values are essential as the Colleges look to contemporize the coordinate tradition.

When the coordinate system began in 1908 with the founding of William Smith, gender was the primary modality through which HWS students explored self and other. We appreciate that the notion of gender has been wholly upended since then. As noted in the 2015 Culture of Respect report, "contemporary definitions of gender reinforce the idea that gender identity is a social construct and that it is a continuum, not a bipolarity; a continuum with a long and complex middle, to be sure." It is also clear that the locus of diversity and inclusion at the Colleges has necessarily extended far beyond matters of gender. Race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation are also defining identities that students embody and must understand if they are to successfully navigate an increasingly complex world.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to "coordinate" is to "bring the different elements of a complex activity or organization into a relationship that will ensure efficiency or harmony." Because of their rich tradition of self-discovery, the Colleges are uniquely positioned to explore the rapidly evolving and complex issues of inclusion. Expanding the definition of "coordinate" beyond the traditional gender binary to include the full range of identities that students embody could better reflect the reality of the current--and future--HWS experience. An expanded definition would appropriately modernize the coordinate tradition will living up to the promise of its original intent.

Importantly, diversity in this regard also applies to upholding diversity of ideas and opinions. By expanding how the coordinate system is defined, we hope students would be better equipped to engage in discourse about their lived experiences and outlooks in a way that spans the full

range of political and ideological beliefs. Such an approach would more intentionally integrate our central tenant of self-discovery and the values that give it power into the ongoing work of the Colleges. And it would ensure the Colleges maintain relevancy in a rapidly modernizing world.

By contemporizing the coordinate tradition in this manner we will equip students, faculty, and staff with greater resiliency in a time of significant national and global change. We will instill a deeper sense of community and connectivity on campus. We will engage our rich family of alumni and alumnae. And we will bolster the distinctive nature of the Colleges in an increasingly competitive field. As a result, student experience could improve, retention rates could increase, and the applicant pool could become more competitive, among many other potential benefits.

Together the Associations represent nearly forty decades of Hobart and William Smith graduates. Our student experiences, personal interests, and professional lives are significantly diverse. The uniting factor that binds us together is the deep value we experienced as students—and experience increasingly as adults—of the coordinate tradition. We also recognize that there are decades more of alumnae and alumni to come who will breathe new perspectives into the traditions of the Colleges. Most important, then, is to ensure that the most essential and distinctive ideals of our dear alma mater are retained, so that new customs can reflect current context and needs while still upholding our timeless core values.

A redefined and reinvigorated coordinate system that is instituted as the guiding framework of the student academic and cultural experience at HWS will ensure that these deeply shared values inform the ways in which the faculty, staff, student, and alum support the important work of the Colleges. While more exploration is needed to understand exactly how this approach could manifest, we are confident it can build on the rich heritage that is a rudder of the institution, and enable an even better connection between students, alum, and our rapidly globalizing world. Certainly, such an approach would better equip students to appreciate the full range of the human condition, an essential competency for living a “life of consequence.”

The Associations play a critical role in supporting this conversation, and look forward to working closely with the Board of Trustees, Deans, faculty, staff, and students to understand and determine how an expanded coordinate tradition can be carried forward to support the bright future of Hobart and William Smith.

Recommendations: *Note--the below recommendations mirror, with a few additions--those made by McGuire/O'Laughlin from the 2015 Culture of Respect report. We independently arrived at these recommendations through our conversations.*

1. **To quantify and understand the full value of the coordinate tradition and determine possibilities for its redefinition and reinvigoration**, the Colleges should engage a Working Group of key faculty, staff, students, Trustees, and Association members to support an ongoing dialogue about practical and enduring solutions to “contemporize coordinate”. Additionally, we recommend that:

- a. The Colleges should engage the deep bench of HWS faculty and staff with expertise that touch on areas of inclusion, diversity, and equity to inform conversations with the Working Group. This includes faculty who focus on issues related to gender, power, race, class, sexual orientation, and beyond.
 - b. The Colleges conduct a survey of current students, faculty and alumni/ae with an intent to better understand the value, benefits and challenges of the coordinate tradition, and what might be done to support a more inclusive and redefined approach that will endure in the future. Findings would inform the recommendations of the Working Group.
2. **All new members of the HWS community should learn about the coordinate tradition and its importance to the Colleges**, including students, faculty, and staff—both through interviews, orientation, and as an ongoing part of their experience engaging with the Colleges. Students should have an experience throughout their orientation that reinforces the coordinate tradition. This should intentionally continue throughout their time at the colleges throughout the curriculum, athletics, and student life.
3. It is important that the Colleges model the values of inclusion and leadership in a modernized coordinate system. Therefore, it is especially important for **HWS to increase the diversity in the administration and key leadership roles on campus**. Instilling practices to continuously evaluate how matters of equity, diversity, and inclusion do and should manifest among all faculty and staff roles on campus would be important to carrying this work forward.
4. As part of this work, **the mission of the colleges should reflect any changes in how the Colleges define the coordinate tradition**.
5. **The artifacts and activities that comprise many of the traditions should be reevaluated to be sure they align with the modern idea of a coordinate system**, that they are equitable and inclusive, and uphold the values essential to authentic self-discovery and exploration.
6. **The Dean’s offices should remain the keeper of the modernized coordinate program** and work to communicate and share this with every generation of students. The tailored 1:1 support provided to students by the Dean’s offices should remain an integral part of supporting the process of student self-discovery. They should be charged with educating and enforcing the values of the coordinate system and tradition as they evolve and are modernized.
7. There is a robust opportunity for **the Colleges to position themselves as leaders in the higher education field in this space**. We recommend that insights and best practices be shared intentionally with the field throughout this process to extend and enhance the Colleges’ influence, and continue to enhance our distinctive nature.