Institution-Wide Barrier Review

Summary Document

January 13. 2026

This document provides a high-level summary of institutional findings following completion of the respective institutional-wide barrier reviews (IwBR) in mid-December, 2025. Participation in the Pell Initiative (PIV) for Virginia requires that the institution (all public institutions) conduct an intensive study of any potential or confirmed barriers to the enrollment and retention of low-income students, defined as federal Pell grant recipients. A more detailed analysis of the institutions' submissions will be compiled following completion of staff review. The findings in these reports will inform future use of PIV funds.

Major themes emerging from the institutions' findings…

- Internal fragmentation of systems, policies, and communication
- Affordability concerns: insufficient aid for known indirect costs and unexpected incidental and micro-costs.
- Faculty development in working with low-income students

Institutions will repeat the institution-wide reviews periodically. Future reviews will be enhanced as the institutions continue to learn from themselves and each other.

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1. Christopher Newport University

- Upfront and recurring indirect costs impede Pell enrollment and persistence.
- Targeted recruitment has improved Pell access; retention gaps are narrowing.
- Housing, curriculum rigidity (sequencing of classes), and coordination (recent staff turnover) remain.

2. George Mason University

- Strong Pell enrollment and minimal outcome gaps are institutional strengths.
- Unmet financial need—driven by cost of living—is the primary barrier.
- Supports are robust but fragmented; data tracking and post-graduate transitions lag.

3. James Madison University

- Pell access lags despite strong retention and graduation outcomes possibly due, in part, to communication issues.
- Process, policy, and communication barriers disproportionately affect Pell students.
- Financial micro-costs and fragmented mentoring weaken persistence.

4. Longwood University

- Pell participation and completion lag institutional capacity.
- First-year attrition and non-academic barriers (e.g. transportation) drive student success gaps
- Advising and pathway reforms show promise but require scale.

5. Norfolk State University

- Fragmented policies and inconsistent communication create navigational barriers.
- Indirect costs, infrastructure and communication issues significantly impede persistence.
- Effective programs exist but require institution-wide coordination and scaling.

6. Old Dominion University

- Data and advising systems are insufficiently coordinated for early intervention.
- Student pathways are fragmented (not all majors have solid advising and progression plans), delaying momentum.
- Cross-divisional working groups are translating diagnosis into action.

7. Radford University

- Pell enrollment and retention are improving; completion gaps persist.
- The recent addition of professional Student Success Advocates along with other policy and hold reforms significantly reduced structural friction.
- Technology and systems integration remain the primary risk.

8. University of Mary Washington

- Pell access and yield are constrained by early recruitment and affordability barriers.
- Persistent first-year retention and completion gaps compound over time.
- Institutional response is structured but not necessarily coordinated and requires sustained investment.

9. University of Virginia

- Pell enrollment lags despite nationally strong completion outcomes.
- Targeted high-school outreach and transfer partnerships significantly reduce access barriers.
- Administrative complexity is being addressed with the creation of a one-stop student services center and increased staff professional development.

10. University of Virginia's College at Wise

- Pell students report strong belonging but persist and graduate at much lower rates than peers indicating a possible neglect in studying academic and pedagogical structures.
- Early academic difficulty and gateway course performance drive attrition despite interventions.
- Financial shocks and rural logistics remain unresolved barriers.

11. Virginia Commonwealth University

- Persistent Pell retention and graduation gaps confirm need for targeted supports.
- Pre-major pathways, course access, and advising capacity were key structural barriers.
- Institution-wide engagement and multi-year implementation are strengths.

12. Virginia Military Institute

- Indirect and episodic costs are the dominant Pell persistence barriers.
- Academic-military workload intensity disproportionately affects Pell cadets.
- Data coordination and early-risk identification remain critical gaps.

13. Virginia State University

- High-Pell institution with strong early-engagement and retention infrastructure.
- Academic and gateway interventions show measurable GPA and persistence gains.
- Financial strain remains the dominant cross-cutting risk despite supports.

14. Virginia Tech

- Primary equity gap for Pell students occurs at access/enrollment, not completion,
- Policy complexity, basic-needs insecurity, and polywork create academic strain.
- Continuous, student-success-centered policy review is now embedded as an institutional practice.

15. William & Mary

- Access gains have increased Pell enrollment but a gap remains in persistence or completion for first-generation low-income (FGLI) students.
- Financial strain and navigational capital gaps undermine engagement and academic momentum.
- Post-graduation pathways and disciplinary representation gaps remain underdeveloped for FGLI students.

16. Richard Bland College

- Pell enrollment and completion trail state benchmarks.
- Early momentum and gateway course success are primary pressure points.
- Fragmented interventions and limited data capacity threaten sustainability.

17. Virginia Community College System (VCCS)

- Pell students face systemic non-academic barriers that depress completion statewide.
- Federal Satisfactory Academic Progress rules, course availability, and communication gaps disrupt momentum.
- Wraparound supports are strong but require scaling and tighter integration.