

# W&M NEWS

## RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP

# The Global Scholars Program: A bold model for applied learning, careers and global impact

In an era where global challenges demand bold, interdisciplinary solutions, William & Mary's Global Scholars Program is redefining what it means to learn beyond the classroom.

By [Gabe Cancio-Bello and Catherine Freemon](#) Published March 25, 2025



The Global Policy Cohort visits NATO HQ in Belgium. (Courtesy photo)

In an era where global challenges demand bold, interdisciplinary solutions, William & Mary's [Global Scholars Program](#) is redefining what it means to learn beyond the classroom.

The yearlong program is an immersive launchpad for future leaders, blending international fieldwork, hands-on policymaking and direct mentorship from global experts. While the program currently includes two cohorts, a new themed track — centered on the theme “American Statecraft and Great Power Competition” — will be launched for the 2025-2025 academic year.

Built to place students at the heart of international policymaking, GSP immerses students in applied learning through international fieldwork, professional experiences and direct mentorship from expert practitioners. A partnership between the [Global Research Institute](#) (GRI) and [W&M Washington Center](#) with the support of the [Reves Center for International Studies](#) and [Arts & Sciences](#), GSP prepares students for careers that make an impact around the world.

From Washington, D.C., to Brussels and Beijing, students don't just study global issues — they engage with them in real time, preparing for impactful careers on the world stage, according to the program's organizers. Best illustrated in the tenets of the [Vision 2026](#) strategic plan, the Alma Mater of the Nation continues to innovate and explore bold new ways to learn.

### **A bold model for applied learning**

For GRI Director Mike Tierney '88, GSP is the one best of W&M's programmatic offerings for students.

“The Global Scholars Program really is just a better way to get a liberal arts education. You're not in the bubble anymore, you're in Brussels, you're in Paris, you're in Washington, D.C.,” he said. “You're also applying the lessons that you learn in the classroom with practitioners in the real world. That's different.”

First pitched in spring 2022, the program introduced an opportunity to capitalize on the strengths of existing study away, study abroad and internship-bearing experiences at W&M and explore a new model for applied learning. In response to the early success of the pilot program, plans for expansion mirrored the progress of institution-wide initiatives under Vision 2026 and represent W&M's sustained leadership in applied learning and global scholarship.

The idea for GSP first emerged in early 2021 when faculty and administrators from GRI and the Washington Center began noticing a trend of students struggling to choose between applied learning experiences. Through focus groups blending student constituents from GRI and the Washington Center, students reported concerns over deciding whether to pursue a Study in D.C. experience, research at GRI or a study abroad program. The investigation recorded a common sentiment among focus group participants: Students didn't want to pick just one; they wanted to do it all. Each option offered distinct benefits, but no single program fully integrated the real-world experience, academic rigor and global perspectives for which they were looking.

Prior to the creation of GSP, GRI's Tierney and David Trichler taught various Study in D.C. courses — the Washington Center's credit-bearing programming in D.C. — where they connected students with foreign policy leaders through hands-on learning experiences in the nation's capital. Their experience in applied learning, the Washington Center's expertise in immersive, career-focused programming and the combined global networks of alumni, experts and mentors laid the foundation for the GSP model.

In symmetry with the university's Vision 2026 strategic plan, GSP would serve a broader purpose as a key initiative in advancing the university's broader goals — expanding its global footprint, fostering transformative education and driving innovation in applied learning.

Building on a years-long partnership, GRI and the Washington Center saw an opportunity to create something new. With the support of the Reves Center for International Studies and Arts & Sciences, the units could merge their strengths, creating a program that didn't force students to choose between an internship, research or study abroad but instead gave them all three in one cohesive experience.

Future scalability and plans for growth and replicability were presented as featured results of experimenting with the new program model. If successful, expanding the reach of GSP to benefit more students and diverse interests would be a natural next step. For other units at W&M, cutting-edge programs like GSP offer a proof-of-concept and a roadmap for future applied learning initiatives.

Reflecting back on first impressions of GSP's 2022 debut, Associate Director of the Washington Center Erin Battle '13, M.Ed. '15 described the program pilot as “an unmitigated success.”



This year's U.S.-China Strategic Competition cohort meets with Ambassador Nicholas Burns at the U.S. Embassy in

China. (Courtesy photo)

## Real, world experience: Preparing global leaders

Formally characterized as “a cohort-based experiential learning opportunity that cultivates creative thinkers, principled decision makers and compassionate global citizens,” GSP prepares students for careers in international diplomacy, governance and policy.

The program's immersive design provides multiple pathways for professional and academic growth. Every GSP student undertakes a guided internship, gaining hands-on professional experience in Washington, D.C., or through remote (e-internship) and international placements. Whether working on foreign policy initiatives, contributing to global development projects or assisting think tanks in tackling pressing international issues, GSP scholars apply their knowledge in real time.

In D.C., students take part in the Washington Center's hallmark [D.C. Winter Seminars](#) (DCWS) program — a site visit and speaker-driven course that places GSP scholars at the center of conversation with policymakers, industry experts and influential organizations. These applied learning experiences bring concepts from class to life as students engage in roundtable discussions, policy briefings and behind-the-scenes insights at institutions ranging from Capitol Hill to global NGOs.

Beyond the nation's capital, GSP expands students' global perspectives, bursting the W&M bubble through international study. Scholars have visited Beijing, Brussels, Paris and beyond, gaining first-hand experience navigating global hubs and diverse diplomatic, economic and cultural landscapes.

By combining study abroad with professional direction, GSP scholars develop a distinctly functional understanding of international affairs while building the skills and relationships needed to lead impactful careers.

“As students prepare for careers in a globalized world, study abroad is an integral and complementary part of their learning trajectory and the GSP,” said Director of the Global Education Office and Global Partnerships Sylvia Mitterndorfer.

“Together with studying global topics in Williamsburg and D.C., the study abroad component allows students to take their knowledge into the world, ask questions, engage with experts abroad, participate in site visits and deepen their understanding of issues and cultural contexts from an international perspective,” she said. “GSP is an example of many William & Mary units coming together to craft an integrated experience with multiple applied learning experiences designed to prepare students for their future endeavors.”

## The power of mentorship and support

At the heart of GSP is a multi-layered mentorship model, connecting students with a network of experts at different stages of their careers. Each scholar is supported by alumni mentors, faculty advisors and seasoned professionals — diplomats, policy analysts, and global leaders — who provide guidance, career insights and real-world wisdom. This structured model for mentorship ensures that students receive both broad exposure and individualized support as they navigate the intersection of the liberal arts education and the professional world.

These program elements all contribute towards GSP's ultimate goal: to transform curious students into contributing leaders during their time at W&M, not after. According to Battle, "GSP is, in many ways, an optimistic vision for the future of higher education and how W&M prepares its graduates." For the partnership itself, the success of the program model offers a path toward expansion and an example of feasibility in integrating career readiness into academics.

The momentum produced in its first year brought a second cohort and an additional themed track to the program. For its recent program alumni, program outcomes and benefits would come into focus. In addition to providing students with opportunities to practice skills and gain experience, it also facilitated the creation of a peer-to-peer support system of similarly minded individuals to rely on throughout their time at W&M and beyond. Much like the future global careers of GSP scholars, the practice of continuous learning, collaboration and mutual success is one of the most significant program outcomes to date.

## The future of GSP

Within the past year, GSP has expanded to a two-cohort model, reflecting its increasing breadth and ambition. This year's U.S.-China Strategic Competition cohort, for instance, has focused on the geopolitical and economic tensions between the U.S. and China, offering students a unique winter field study experience in China. Meanwhile, the American Statecraft cohort, launching in the fall of 2025, will delve into the tools of American diplomacy and how the U.S. coordinates its various instruments of power, drawing insights from the personal papers of Chancellor Robert M. Gates' '65, L.H.D. '98 and other archival resources.

A central component of the Global Scholars Program is its emphasis on making global learning opportunities accessible to all students, regardless of financial background. Scholarships and financial aid are provided to support students' participation in the program. This commitment to accessibility ensures that talented students from all backgrounds can take part in GSP, cultivating a richer, more inclusive experience for all involved. Accessibility aligns with the university's mission to expand its reach and educate for impact, making global learning opportunities available to students who might otherwise face barriers. Adding a second cohort is just one example of how the program is broadening its geographic and thematic focus. As global issues become increasingly complex, the need for globally engaged leaders is more pressing than ever. GSP is committed to ensuring that William & Mary students are at the forefront of these challenges.

Whether in government agencies, nonprofit organizations, international institutions or private-sector companies, GSP alumni are making meaningful contributions to the fields of global development, international security, public health and beyond.

Alumni continue to contribute to GSP's evolving mission by serving as mentors for current students, providing career guidance and sharing their experiences in the field. These alumni networks help sustain GSP's growing impact, offering future cohorts access to a wide array of career opportunities and professional connections that will help them thrive in global careers.

GSP alumnus and recent W&M graduate Sailor Miao '24 served as the teaching assistant for the China cohort led by Kyuri Park. When reflecting on GSP, Sailor commented, "I am honored to give back to my alma mater and this amazing program. At this crucial time for US-China Relations, the best way to reduce tension is to engage with real people on the ground. With the support of our generous alumni, we were able to meet with so many incredible people on our trip to China."

The Global Scholars Program will continue to strengthen W&M's global reach, fostering civic engagement and preparing students for careers that make a lasting impact on the world. Through immersive global learning, GSP scholars graduate with more than just a degree; they leave with practical experience, a robust professional network, and the confidence to navigate and influence the global stage.

"Joining the Global Scholars Program was one of the most impactful decisions I made at William & Mary," said current scholar Landen Broocke '27. "From Williamsburg to D.C. and Europe, I worked alongside passionate peers and mentors who inspired me to dive deeper into global policy and helped me connect my passions to real-world change."

Now more than ever, programs like GSP showcase the best of a liberal arts education, where critical thinking, open perspectives, and applied knowledge organically intersect. By bridging the gap between academia and real-world application, GSP prepares students for the future and empowers them to shape it.

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