



NORTHLAND COLLEGE  
ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE:  
A STRATEGIC PLAN

2013-2020

Approved by the Northland College Faculty Council, May 25, 2013.  
Adopted by the Northland College Board of Trustees, July 12, 2013

# AN INSPIRED FUTURE



Northland College finds itself in a time of recent success and considerable optimism, particularly when you consider the competitive, if not harsh, times in which all colleges and universities find themselves. We understand at our core however, that our existence relies on vigilant attention to our health, our relevance, and our performance. As a result, our year of strategic discussions have focused on the needs of our students and of the world, and have then focused on becoming a continuously evolving organization with the capacity to partner and lead toward a sustainable existence.

This plan is not a document identifying the next few strategic steps of an organization. It is a plan that enhances our identity as a strategic organization, with guiding documents and frameworks that empower us to make responsive, nimble and strategic steps over many years. This plan will make us increasingly strong across time – focusing on essential immediate and continuous lift, increased distinctiveness in both experience and outcome of our educational offerings, and increased value to students and the world. It is a sign of our strength, our relevance and of the nature of our values-driven existence that we have created this plan for ourselves.

This document outlines that all constituencies of the college understand the value of the remarkable and unique place in which we live. They have reaffirmed our liberal arts approach, the prioritized experiential and relational facets of learning, hopefulness in empowerment of people to do good work in the world, and our identifying emphasis on issues of the environment.

Through clear and collective processes, we will:

- Support the personal growth and development of each individual
- Integrate our curriculum, student experience and outreach efforts to address the complexities of environmental problems
- Actively seek and invigorate partnerships with organizations and individuals who share and support our dedication and passion for a more sustainable future
- Immerse our students in defining and solving problems with our partners
- Be disciplined in our use of resources to strengthen the institution
- Recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff committed to our vision, and
- Continuously assess, innovate and reinvent ourselves and our programs.

This plan, the outcome of our intense efforts, commits us to live this life boldly, with a vision to be preeminent. To teach and to impact the world in powerful and affordable ways. The college has for decades inhabited the front edge of the environmental education evolution. Our world demands that we continue to show the way, not just through finding the problems and finding the answers, but to leading people to make changes in behavior for long term good.

  
Michael A. Miller  
President, Northland College

In July, 2012, Northland College embarked on a yearlong journey to develop this strategic plan and associated process for review and approval of the actions that will advance the College for the remainder of this decade. This plan was designed to be directional, important, understandable, and actionable. It charts the course for the future of the College in realistic and achievable ways that are fully consistent with the mission and values of the College.

The process used to develop this plan was designed by the Northland College Planning Council. It included four campus-wide events where members of the faculty, staff, and students spent half and full-day community meetings together in large and small groups. There, they discussed Northland's assets, challenges, and ideas to secure a successful future for the College. The College's Board of Trustees participated in the planning process at each of its meetings during the year, including one full-day where Board members participated in one of the campus-wide events. Regional community members provided comments and suggestions through two community listening sessions. College alumni were encouraged to participate through a web-based survey.

This plan represents the College's collective thinking about the critical pathways to Northland's success. The core elements of this document -- the strategic commitments and initiatives -- are the result of a prioritization process across all parts of the campus including members of the faculty, staff, and students. This plan forms the framework through which decisions will be made about the future of Northland College.

## HISTORY OF NORTHLAND COLLEGE

Northland College was born of a dream and a vision near the end of the Gilded Age. On July 14, 1892, a parade of citizens and religious leaders marched south on Ellis Avenue to a clear-cut above Bay City Creek, where they laid the cornerstone for Wheeler Hall. Speaking on the occasion of this dedication ceremony, Dr. James Blaisdell of Beloit College challenged those who were present with a question that continues to resonate: "An academy," Dr. Blaisdell observed, "is not built of rock, or of granite, or of sandstone that hardens with exposure. You may launch it with fine appointments and striking architecture, but it is not an institution until you have endowed it with a deeper life. Citizens, what kind of life are you putting into it?" He went on to say, "In laying this cornerstone you are putting

into this institution a determination. The destiny of this school is now trembling in the balance."

Founded as the North Wisconsin Academy, the school stood at the northern edge of the Great Cutover, described as "a God-forsaken waste extending south 300 miles from Lake Superior." The region had grown rapidly following the Civil War, with immigrant settlements providing the labor for clear-cut logging, mining and shipping industries. But schools were scarce and the children of immigrant and native families lacked the opportunities provided by education beyond the eighth grade. The Congregational leaders that came together to found Northland stated, in their Declaration of Principles, a requirement to provide education for youth "from foreign countries," and with an open door "to all students of both sexes and of all races." This was their vision and their dream.

The College was seen as a moral cause from its very beginning. That moral (continued on next page)



(continued from previous page) cause was extended to consideration of the environment by the second academy president, M. J. Fenenga. A tireless champion of the academy and the region, Fenenga linked education for all persons to education for the sake of healing the cutover land. He saw the school as having redemptive purpose. So, when the academy extended its mission by chartering a college in 1906, Fenenga chose the 35th chapter of Isaiah with its prophetic vision for restoring the land. Further, the new College was named not after a religious denomination, nor a wealthy patron, but after a place – the north land. Fenenga called this, “the impelling power of a great idea.”



The College has followed the larger ebbs and flows of the nation’s history, with declining enrollments in times of war and financial challenges during economic crises. The year after breaking ground, and with less than half the pledges returned, the United States plunged into the Panic of 1893. One observes an almost stubborn grit as the College endures by turning to its deep commitments for renewal.



We see this renewal when the College established a pioneering environmental curriculum in 1971 as the embodiment of a “great idea” for this generation. President Malcolm McLean led the efforts to transform the College through the environmental studies programs, the founding of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, and the Native American Studies program, while at the same time the College faced financial challenges. Again, we witness the crucible of vision and struggle at work in the history of the College.



So, Northland College now begins a new effort to endow itself with a deeper life for a new generation and a new century. The challenges of our times are many and our commitments remain the same – to people regardless of privilege, to healing the land, to serving the region, and to providing the best liberal arts and practical education possible.

## MISSION

Our mission reflects our core purpose and confirms our faithfulness to the College’s direction established in the early 1970s.

*Northland College integrates liberal arts studies with an environmental emphasis, enabling those it serves to address the challenges of the future.*

## VISION

Our history and our mission inform our future and lead us to our vision for Northland College in this decade.

*Northland College will be the nation’s preeminent liberal arts college focused on the environment, preparing students and other stakeholders to lead us toward a more sustainable, just, and prosperous future.*

We will model and lead in everything we do to create sustainable and thriving communities and regions, while using Lake Superior and the world as our classroom and laboratory. We will continuously assess, innovate and reinvent ourselves and our programs.

# Strategic Commitments

At the core of our strategic plan are six commitments that we make to one another and to our collective future. These commitments address important opportunities and challenges in the future and establish priorities and a direction for the College throughout this decade.

Northland College commits to:

- Creating distinctive and transformative educational experiences for our students, preparing them for service, leadership roles, global citizenship, and fulfilling lives and careers.
- Being a healthy, thriving organization built on a sound financial base.
- Providing leadership and scholarship that address regional and global challenges.
- Cultivating collaborations that support the resiliency of our communities, preserve our natural resources, and strengthen our region's intellectual, cultural, and economic assets.
- Modeling sustainable practices that recognize and respect ecological systems and societal needs.
- Upholding the principles of trust, respect, and accountability in the creation of an innovative, nurturing, and just campus community.

# Strategic Initiatives

The following initiatives are the means by which we intend to accomplish our strategic commitments. We have clustered these initiatives into three broad categories that provide pathways to new levels of innovation, achievement, and distinction.

## Maximize our Short Term Success

- Grow enrollment and tuition revenue while continuing to ensure access, campus vibrancy and educational quality.
- Support current and implement additional distinctive undergraduate majors that are mission consistent, of high quality, and aligned with demand and need.
- Attract, develop, and retain the highest quality and diverse faculty, staff, and student body.
- Create opportunities for faculty and staff to do outstanding work through competitive compensation packages and optimized workloads.
- Strengthen connections with alumni in support of the College.
- Strengthen capacity for and development of additional innovative and distinctive revenue streams.

## Capitalize on Our Distinctiveness

- Develop new outreach and research centers in collaboration with community partners.
- Strengthen Northland's role in the stewardship of Lake Superior and its watershed.
- Ensure new and renovated facilities and learning spaces are sustainably designed, developed, constructed, and maintained.
- Expand Northland's role in the local food system.
- Become a climate neutral campus.
- Recruit and retain traditionally underserved populations such as students of color, students from low income backgrounds, and first generation students.

## Enhance Our Value and Reinforce Our Quality

- Ensure academic rigor across current and future initiatives for liberal, experiential, place-based, and interdisciplinary learning.
- Enhance, update, and maintain facilities and equipment that facilitate student learning and faculty research priorities.
- Strengthen efforts to prepare students for a global, multi-cultural world as they transition from college to careers.

# IMPLEMENTATION

Our strategic commitments and initiatives come to life as we begin the most critical part of the planning process –implementation. As a community, we are committed to seeing the strategic priorities playing out in decisions of the College in ways that are both disciplined and transparent. All aspects of implementation are guided by a set of principles that define how this plan is put into action. Further, we identify the roles and responsibilities of the key groups who serve in important ways in implementing our strategic plan.

## Guiding Principles

A set of principles represents our community's renewed commitment to open, analytical, and disciplined decision-making processes. These principles (stated as adjectives to describe our implementation approach) are: *Inclusive and accessible*—ideas and proposals designed to achieve our strategic commitments can come from any individual or group and the mechanisms for proposing ideas are clear, uncomplicated, and readily available. *Transparent*—

decision-making processes and criteria are clearly identified and shared with all campus constituencies. *Timely*—decision processes are streamlined and reviews are rapid and thorough. *Imperative* —implementation starts immediately with emphasis on initiatives that provide positive results and immediate lift for the College. *Assessed and revised*—outcomes and processes are continuously monitored, revisited, and improved.

## Roles & Responsibilities

Three key structures within the College are important in the implementation of the strategic plan. These structures include: the major divisions of the College; the Planning, Budget, and Assessment councils; and the President/cabinet.

Each major division of the College (academic affairs, student affairs and sustainability, Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, finance and administration, enrollment and marketing, advancement, and the president's office) has

responsibility for planning and prioritizing ideas that advance this strategic plan. Typically, this is done through the development of a divisional action (or operational) plan. Consultation with appropriate committees of the Board of Trustees during the creation of these divisional plans provides additional input and support for proposals coming out of the division.

Within each division, ideas that advance the strategic plan are gathered from individuals and groups. Divisions define the data needed to analyze various proposals and determine their resource needs and benefits. Each division establishes priorities for actions to be pursued. In some divisions, establishing priorities is accomplished through established governance processes; in other divisions, alternative mechanisms are used to prioritize actions.

Primary responsibility for reviewing high priority proposals coming out of divisional action planning falls to the Planning, Budget, and Assessment Councils (PBAC), with faculty representatives from all campus and staff from all college divisions. These councils are responsible for converting institutional priorities into evaluative criteria and then translating those criteria into rubrics used to evaluate the merits of any proposal. PBAC provides recommendations to the President and cabinet on each proposal brought forward by a division. (continued next page)



(continued from previous page) These councils are also charged with ensuring that proposals are integrated across divisions and collaboration and cooperation is secured during the proposal phase. If a proposal is approved, PBAC would assist in implementation through the development of workplans and inter-divisional cooperation. A final and critically important responsibility of PBAC is to develop appropriate assessment and feedback mechanisms designed to monitor success and provide opportunities for revision and refinement of action plans.

The third group actively engaged in the implementation of

the strategic plan is the president/cabinet. Primary responsibilities of this group are to consult, as needed with the Board of Trustees, community partners, donors, and other constituencies vital to effective implementation of the plan. Based on the priorities of divisional plans, recommendations of PBAC, and current institutional priorities, the president/cabinet make decisions on which actions to undertake that are in alignment with the strategic plan. Further, the president/cabinet is responsible for communicating decisions and providing regular reports to the campus on proposals approved, progress on specific proposals, and the outcomes achieved.

## Ongoing Review of This Plan

The Planning Council will consistently and systematically review the strategic plan in consultation with the campus and regional community, to ensure it captures our progress, characterizes our current strategic priorities, and remains responsive to changes in our external environments. As needed, the Planning Council will modify this document to reflect the success of our efforts and changing external realities. Through this process, our strategic plan will continue to guide us toward greater levels of success, distinction, excellence, and financial sustainability.

This document was prepared by the Northland College Planning Council:

- Jason Terry, Associate Professor of Art
- Mark Peterson, Executive Director of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute
- Kristy Liphart, Executive Director of Development
- Randy Lehr, Bro Professor of Sustainable Regional Development, and Associate Professor of Natural Resources
- Brandon Hofstedt, Assistant Professor of Sustainable Community Development
- Bob Gross, Interim Director of Institutional Marketing
- Wendy Gorman, Chair, Department of Environmental Sciences, and Professor of Biology
- Nathan Engstrom, Regional Sustainability Coordinator
- Cheryl Contant, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty (Co-Chair)
- Michele Meyer, Vice President of Student Affairs and Institutional Sustainability (Co-Chair)

For more information about Northland College, please visit us on the web at [www.northland.edu](http://www.northland.edu). For specific questions about this Strategic Plan, please contact us at [stratplan@northland.edu](mailto:stratplan@northland.edu) or call (715) 682-1236.

## LAUNCHING

Our institutional vision resonates as powerfully today as it has over our long history as a college of and for the "North Land." Our commitments to education, people, the land, and the region remain the cornerstones of our work.

This plan is a reminder of and recommitment to the values that have shaped the College and strengthened the region over the last 100 years. As we plan for 2020, we envision a college that serves as an incubator for innovation, a hub for cultural life, a model for the future, and an inspiring place to live and learn.

We need the energy and commitment of all who care about the College, her mission, and the region. Our journey through the remainder of the decade will lead us to a place of greater prominence, a thriving college and region, and a community of scholars and leaders making a difference in the world. Paraphrasing the words of Dr. Blaisdell, speaking at Northland College's dedication, we are *putting into this institution a determination*. Let us turn this vision into reality.



NORTHLAND COLLEGE