

THRIVE

The Future of Macalester

A Report from the Strategic Planning Committee

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Macalester College Strategic Planning Committee

Kendrick Brown, Associate Dean of the Faculty, Associate Professor of Psychology

Adrienne Christiansen, Director, Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching,
Associate Professor of Political Science

James Dawes, Professor of English

Laurie Hamre, Vice President for Student Affairs

Christy Hanson, Dean of the Institute for Global Citizenship, Distinguished Lecturer
in International Studies

Lynn Hertz, Assistant Provost, Academic Programs and Advising

Chad Higdon-Topaz, Associate Professor of Math, Statistics, and Computer Science

Barron Koralesky, Associate Director for Information and Technology Services

Brian Lindeman, Director of Financial Aid

Chris MacDonald-Dennis, Dean of Multicultural Life

Kelly MacGregor, Associate Professor of Geology

Karine Moe, F. R. Bigelow Professor of Economics

Kathleen Murray, Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Grace Putka '16

Brian Rosenberg, President

Patrick Schmidt, Professor of Political Science

Beth Severy-Hoven, Professor of Classics

David Warch, Director of Communications and Public Relations

David Wheaton, Vice President for Administration and Finance

Ruxi Zhang '14

Macalester Mission Statement

Macalester is committed to being a preeminent liberal arts college with an educational program known for its high standards for scholarship and its special emphasis on internationalism, multiculturalism, and service to society.

Statement of Purpose and Belief

At Macalester College we believe that education is a fundamentally transforming experience. As a community of learners, the possibilities for this personal, social, and intellectual transformation extend to us all. We affirm the importance of the intellectual growth of the students, staff and faculty through individual and collaborative endeavor. We believe that this can best be achieved through an environment that values the diverse cultures of our world and recognizes our responsibility to provide a supportive and respectful environment for students, staff and faculty of all cultures and backgrounds.

We expect students to develop a broad understanding of the liberal arts while they are at Macalester. Students should follow a primary course of study in order to acquire an understanding of disciplinary theory and methodology; they should be able to apply their understanding of theories to address problems in the larger community. Students should develop the ability to use information and communication resources effectively, be adept at critical, analytical and logical thinking, and express themselves well in both oral and written forms. Finally, students should be prepared to take responsibility for their personal, social and intellectual choices.

We believe that the benefit of the educational experience at Macalester is the development of individuals who make informed judgments and interpretations of the broader world around them and choose actions or beliefs for which they are willing to be held accountable. We expect them to develop the ability to seek and use knowledge and experience in contexts that challenge and inform their suppositions about the world. We are committed to helping students grow intellectually and personally within an environment that models and promotes academic excellence and ethical behavior. The education a student begins at Macalester provides the basis for continuous transformation through learning and service.

Prologue

To begin, a confession: this is a “strategic plan” for Macalester College born out of a strong sense of optimism about the future of Macalester but a healthy skepticism about the utility of most strategic plans. It should be read less as a map for navigating an unpredictable future than as a response to the challenges and opportunities that appear to lie ahead of us and as a record of our best thoughts at this moment about how to confront those challenges and seize those opportunities. We hope that readers will find it well informed, accurate in its particulars, and true to the character and mission of the college. We hope that at least some of its ideas will provoke important discussions on and off campus about the future of our work. We hope that it looks both inward, at those things that are valued by the college community, and outward, at those that are valued by important external constituencies. We hope that it will position Macalester on a sustainable path and as a leader in liberal arts education. *Most of all, we hope that it will better enable us to carry out our core work of providing a talented and diverse group of students with a liberal arts education that is outstanding in quality, distinctive in character, and demonstrably preparatory to vocational success.*

Of course we expect neither universal agreement with nor eventual adoption of every proposal or recommendation. This plan should be seen not as a fixed end-point, but as the start of an ongoing and iterative process of institutional improvement.

American higher education, and in particular high-cost, residential liberal arts education, faces headwinds now that are likely to intensify during the period considered within this document. We are reluctant to claim, as so many do, that this is the most difficult or most disruptive period *ever* for institutions like Macalester, since these colleges in general and Macalester in particular have more than once faced very real existential threats and have had to pivot sharply in order to survive. Every age has a fondness for historical exceptionalism—things have never been *this* bad or *this* good—and we do not believe that this bias is helpful. Nevertheless, the challenges we face now are real, substantial, and more likely to grow than to recede in the near future. Absent strategic thinking and institutional agility, they have the potential to leave us a lesser and more vulnerable college.

The fact that the challenges we face have become so well known makes them no less genuine. First among these, by a large margin, is attempting to operate a high-cost, highly discounted enterprise at a time when most people are unable or unwilling to pay even the discounted price. *Only half of all college presidents recently surveyed by **Inside Higher Education** believe that their institution’s financial model is sustainable for the next ten years.* This suggests either that college presidents are a deeply pessimistic bunch or that the threats to financial viability are pressing and immediate. Combine this with changing demographics that do not work in our favor, the potentially disruptive impact of new technologies, the threat of increased

and clumsily designed government regulation, and public skepticism about our value, and one can understand the feeling among many in higher education that the sky is about to fall.

It is not, at least for Macalester.

Still, even a cautiously optimistic view of these challenges leads to the conclusion that some change in the way we operate is necessary. What we must decide is the extent to which we will be proactive, shaping and directing change in a manner consistent with our values and aspirations, and the extent to which we will be purely reactive, responding as needed to pressures created by our market, regulators, and other external actors. Of course most change brings with it an element of risk, but we must avoid the common but erroneous perception that the absence of change is equivalent to the absence of such risk. “The status quo,” Robert Weisbuch has written, “disguises itself as safe” even when that is patently not the case and often as a form of self-preservation. There is a very small group of colleges and universities—lavishly resourced and with almost invulnerable reputational strength—for whom “more of the same” is probably sufficient for the foreseeable future. Macalester, for all its assets, is not among this group.

What Macalester does have is an enviable set of opportunities. We enter these challenging years with resources and a reputation that surpass those of all but a handful of institutions. In our global focus, we have a widely recognized and deeply attractive distinctiveness. At our doorstep is one of the most vibrant urban areas in the United States. Maybe most telling, we have shown not only throughout our history but in recent years a willingness to innovate that is not shared by many of our peers. Change for Macalester will be nothing new. Complacency is not part of our culture.

Our goal in the decade ahead should not be to muddle through. It should be to become a better and more sustainable institution—to thrive—even in an environment that is less than ideally hospitable. While this outcome is not guaranteed, we believe that it is not only possible but likely *if* we take steps now to enhance both the actual and the perceived value of a Macalester College education.

Sustainability might be seen as a theme that runs through the priorities we have identified. To fulfill our potential and our social mission, we must create a campus that is sustainable in a variety of ways: socially, through the creation of a diverse and supportive community; environmentally, through both the adoption of responsible practices and the education of individuals who will help shape the cities and businesses of the future; and economically, through the creation of a financial model that is viable over the long term.

The strategic priorities that follow are grouped into two sections: the first focuses on the **quality and distinctiveness** of the experience we offer students today and in the future, and the second focuses on the institutional **culture and practices**

necessary to create and sustain excellence. Put another way, they focus on where we want to go and how we plan on getting there.

Finally, the fact that there is no precise time frame attached to this document reflects the evolving role of a strategic plan as one moves further from its point of creation. The period in the life of Macalester about which we write is roughly from 2015 to 2025. The truth is that we can expect the plan to speak with reasonable accuracy to our situation during the next three years and then, if we do our work well, to evolve as circumstances change in ways that are difficult to predict. Over time it will become less of a blueprint and more of a foundation for new thinking that reflects new realities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We believe that the priorities listed below will advance the college's commitment to its Mission Statement and Statement of Purpose and Belief.

Quality and Distinctiveness

- Reinforce Macalester's distinctive excellence in internationalism and, more broadly, encourage every department and program in the college to seize and develop opportunities to be distinctive in additional ways that serve our students well.
- Draw upon the energy of our students, the success of our alumni, and the vibrancy of our urban location to make entrepreneurship, including social, commercial, and artistic, an area of distinctive strength at Macalester.
- Become a leader in the offering of what might be called issue or problem focused academic programs, similar in nature to some of the concentrations that have been created during the past decade.
- Emphasize our urban location, and our historical commitments to sustainability, by focusing on the global city as a means to explore the intersections among such topics as the environment, science, technology, economics, and social justice.
- Strengthen the connections between a liberal arts education and vocation by making more obvious and accessible the paths from the student experience at Macalester to eventual careers.
- Increase the diversity within our student body, faculty, and staff, with a particular emphasis on increasing the presence and retention within our community of traditionally under-served populations.
- Become a leader among liberal arts colleges in the use of technology to improve and broaden the reach of teaching and learning.

Culture and Practices

- Recognizing the limitations of any strategic plan, create a culture at Macalester in which strategic thinking and careful, timely decision-making are the norm.
- Ensure the continuance of a sustainable financial model that will enhance the ability of the college to fulfill its mission.

- **In order to allow for the investment of time and resources implied by our strategic priorities, create both the institutional will and appropriate institutional ability to stop doing some things that we do at present, even while recognizing that everything we do has some value and some community support.**
- **Move from a model of divided governance to a model of truly shared governance, in order to facilitate institutional decision-making that is informed, timely, and strategic.**

QUALITY AND DISTINCTIVENESS

Reinforce Macalester's distinctive excellence in internationalism and, more broadly, encourage every department and program in the college to seize and develop opportunities to be distinctive in additional ways that serve our students well.

Rationale

We believe that it is essential for Macalester to strike the right balance between the broad strength expected from a highly selective liberal arts college and the distinctiveness necessary to distinguish the college from peer institutions.

"Balance" is the crucial goal, since there are risks associated with both too little and too much distinctiveness: too little and Macalester risks a loss of visibility and attractiveness in an increasingly competitive admissions market; too much and we risk being perceived as too narrowly specialized.

The one area of distinctiveness that seems unquestionably to merit continued support, investment, and promotion is internationalism. For decades this has been a strength associated with Macalester, and a very high percentage of our incoming students continue to identify internationalism as an area of academic interest. The importance of a more global and less insular education, moreover, has now been broadly embraced by both American colleges and the general public. This last point carries both benefits and risks: it is fortunate that our longstanding strength is in an area that is widely recognized as attractive, but it is also therefore the case that we face increasing competition as more and more colleges promote their commitment to "internationalism" or "global citizenship." Decades of experience combined with an urban location should provide us with powerful advantages as we approach this challenge.

If we expect to continue to make a credible argument that internationalism is more deeply ingrained in the life of Macalester than is the case at most other institutions, we must view our commitment to this area as continually evolving. We have seen this during the past decade in the creation of the Institute for Global Citizenship and in the creation of concentrations in areas such as Community and Global Health, Human Rights and Humanitarianism, and International Development. The next decade must bring continued evolution.

The Strategic Planning Committee discussed at length the question of whether we should identify a particular set of additional programs as current or potential areas of academic distinctiveness.* In the end, we decided that it would not be productive for us to do so: there are simply too many possibilities, too much likelihood for disagreement within the campus community, and too much uncertainty about the future. Rather, we believe that *every* department and program in the college should be encouraged to think about how it might take advantage of our location, our personnel, and our resources to create offerings that are both excellent and

distinctive. As the best ideas emerge from this broad conversation within and across departments, we expect that the answer to the question of where we should pursue distinctiveness will become more apparent. We want to encourage creative and original thinking and to support the best results.

*To provide some context for future deliberations, we should note that among the areas discussed by the Committee were global health, which seems to be developing great momentum among students and faculty, and creative writing, which would take advantage of our proximity to one of the most active literary communities in the country.

Tactics

- Support the continued evolution of the Institute for Global Citizenship and our globally focused departments and concentrations.
- Form additional partnerships with organizations, academic institutions, and businesses both in the Twin Cities and around the world that will enhance international programming at Macalester.
- Maintain both a large and diverse population of international students and a robust study-away program. Consider in particular adding distinctive elements to our study-away opportunities, such as a strong internship or civic engagement component.
- Create a program of presidential discretionary awards for departments or programs interested in creating or deepening distinctive elements of their curriculum or co-curricular activities. The most compelling of these would combine strong educational outcomes with the potential to attract interest among current and prospective students.

Draw upon the energy of our students, the success of our alumni, and the vibrancy of our location to make entrepreneurship, including social, commercial, and artistic, an area of distinctive strength at Macalester.

Rationale

Entrepreneurship broadly understood means the bringing of creative thinking and a willingness to take risks to the formation of new businesses, the revitalization of existing businesses, and the mitigation of social problems. More fundamentally, in the words of a successful Macalester alumnus, it means having the courage, confidence, and necessary skills to follow the path to your dream. Macalester has a long and well-known history of various forms of civic engagement, including social entrepreneurship, among its students and alumni; it also has a less well-known but clear and growing tradition of commercial entrepreneurship in such areas as technology, health care, and finance and of arts entrepreneurship in areas including theater, literary publishing, and photography. We believe that strengthening and foregrounding this broad range of entrepreneurial activities would serve the college and its students well.

Why entrepreneurship? First, the public is increasingly and with some justification asking whether a liberal arts education is a reliable pathway to a successful career. Demonstrating that a Macalester education imparts the skills necessary to start or revitalize businesses and to address social problems would be in part to demonstrate that we are preparing students for vocational success in a wide variety of fields. Second, entrepreneurship is in no sense discipline-specific and can be of benefit to students in virtually every department and every program at the college: its appeal is broad and its potential manifestations are varied. Third, it speaks very powerfully to the kind of institution we want to be: one that embraces rather than shuns change, that brings creative thinking to the solution of complex problems, that rejects complacency, and that is constantly re-inventing itself.

Why entrepreneurship at Macalester? Maybe most important, there are signs everywhere that the concept of entrepreneurship is energizing our students. The “Live It” Fund, run through the Institute for Global Citizenship, has been an enormously popular and successful student-led program in social entrepreneurship. The “Macathon” has become, in only two years, a popular and successful student- and alumni-led program in business entrepreneurship. A new student entrepreneurship club has quickly gained membership and momentum. This past summer a student-led and alumni-funded entrepreneurship “camp” was held on the Macalester campus. Our sense is that this is only the beginning.

Entrepreneurship also seems to be a compelling vehicle through which to engage our alumni with the college. It appeals to graduates in a wide range of fields, seems to them consistent with the college’s values and culture, and provides a path for them to engage with students, faculty, and staff beyond simply donating money. Among our alumni are enormously successful people in virtually every field, and we

believe that entrepreneurship may be the single best way to draw upon their success to the benefit of our students.

Finally, our location in the Twin Cities—a hub for both social and business entrepreneurship of virtually every kind—provides us with resources and educational opportunities that are simply not available to most of our peers. It is one thing to talk about entrepreneurial opportunities when one is located in a small town, far from a robust community of for-profit and non-profit businesses; it is quite another—and much more interesting—to do so in the urban environment within which Macalester sits.

We envision the evolution of entrepreneurship at Macalester as a ground-up rather than a top-down effort. That is, we believe that the best way to embed entrepreneurship within the college community is not to create a center, a program, or an administrative structure; rather, we would like to empower students, alumni, faculty, and staff to pursue promising entrepreneurial initiatives, recognizing that eventually the best of these may turn into ongoing programs. In short, we want to be entrepreneurial in our approach to entrepreneurship.

Tactics

- Expand and eventually endow the “Live It” Fund, which has begun to establish an enviable record of support for student-led social entrepreneurship.
- Create a “Dream It” Fund to support student-led and alumni-guided entrepreneurial projects. Essentially, the “Live It” Fund would be focused on living out social entrepreneurship today and the “Dream It” Fund on building the for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations of tomorrow.
- Continue and expand the “Macathon,” our entrepreneurial competition for current students.
- Create a Macalester “business incubator” to support projects designed and carried out by groups of new graduates. The college would provide start-up funding, space, and technical support. While the question of whether we should take any ownership interest in businesses created through this incubator merits discussion, two possibilities seem most attractive: either we take no ownership interest at all, or we take a very small ownership interest and reinvest any funds returned to the college in the support of the entrepreneurship. The largest return on the college’s investment would be in the form of campus energy, institutional branding, and, eventually, deeper alumni connections.
- Expand and develop new links to the social and business entrepreneurship communities in the Twin Cities.
- Create a Presidential discretionary fund to support promising entrepreneurial efforts emerging from departments, programs, student groups, or groups of alumni.

- Drawing upon alumni and parents from a wide range of professions and disciplines, create a network of Macalester entrepreneurs who can mentor students, visit classes, and help shape our entrepreneurial programs. We might begin by bringing potential leaders together for an “entrepreneurship summit.”
- Eventually, develop through the regular committee channels courses and programs that expand the curricular presence of entrepreneurship, which is now limited to the Economics Department and a small group of additional departments that teach social entrepreneurship. History has taught us that this process cannot be forced but must proceed at a pace consistent with faculty interest and resources.

Become a leader in the offering of what might be called issue- or problem-focused academic programs, similar in nature to some of the concentrations that have been created during the past decade.

Rationale

While college and university faculties and curricula are typically organized into discipline-based units, the rest of the world is not. Most of the challenges confronting society require interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary solutions, and certainly most of the careers our graduates will pursue—with the exception of academia—will require them to think and work outside the boundaries of a particular major or department. To the extent that a liberal arts education can reflect this reality, it will be providing an important service both to students and to the broader society.

The Macalester faculty has been on the leading edge of what might be called issue-focused or problem-focused program development. Concentrations including Community and Global Health, Urban Studies, Human Rights and Humanitarianism, and International Development have generated high levels of student interest and, taken together, comprise a more extensive and innovative set of interdisciplinary programs than can be found at most of our peers. Environmental Studies, while more longstanding and more commonly found at other colleges, has of course been a leader in this area. No concentration can make students expert in multiple disciplines, but concentrations of this kind can teach them the importance of taking a multi-disciplinary approach to complex challenges and of working collaboratively with colleagues from other professional backgrounds. They also help highlight the pathways from their Macalester education to potential careers.

Tactics

- Use the Institute for Global Citizenship as a “hub” or gathering point for faculty and staff working in issue-focused concentrations. This does not mean that the IGC would manage or direct the various concentrations, but that it would act as a convener of gatherings and as a place where the best ideas can be shared and areas of common interest can be discussed. Some organizational efficiencies might be realized through these discussions and eventually more managerial responsibility might be shifted to the IGC to lessen the administrative workload for faculty.
- Provide support for the strengthening of existing issue-focused concentrations and for the development of new ones, with the understanding that we will have to make decisions at various times about which concentrations to continue and strengthen and which to discontinue, perhaps by attaching a sunset clause to the creation of new programs.
- Attend to the needs of successful concentrations as we craft departmental position descriptions for new faculty hires, bearing in mind that

departmental priorities and the priorities of concentrations need to be kept in proper balance.

- Create additional and attractive housing options for students that would include new living/learning communities. These would allow the focus on important issues to move beyond the classroom and into students' daily lives in a variety of ways. Once such options are in place, consider moving to a three-year residency requirement. We estimate that moving to such a requirement would entail the addition of 125 to 150 new beds.

Emphasize our urban location, and our historical commitments to sustainability, by focusing on the global city as a means to explore the intersections among such topics as the environment, science, technology, economics, and social justice.

Rationale

Our approach to sustainability at Macalester is distinguished by our urban location. Compared with our peer institutions, we have a distinctive opportunity to use our facilities and classrooms to model what it means to live sustainably in the midst of a thriving metropolitan region, as well as to consider the role of sustainability in the development of megacities around the world. This is a topic around which there is already a high level of interest among students, alumni and faculty.

Global cities emerged as a priority in the last Curricular Development Plan. As the authors of that report noted, “global cities implicate questions of culture, community, ethics, and religion that are a central concern of the humanities, including the languages and arts”. We add to this that global cities produce new kinds of ecosystems that scientists are just beginning to understand how to model and manage. This involves core problems around migration, population, and resource extraction.

A focus on urban sustainability would allow us to develop relationships with institutions, like UN agencies and the National League of Cities (of which Saint Paul Mayor Coleman is the Chair), to create new research opportunities for faculty and students. We can also develop a new student ambassadorship program, representing the best of Macalester traditions like the Ambassadors for Friendship Network, to engage with local and global cities as close as Hibbing, Minnesota and as far away as Tianjin, China to interrogate how sustainability values are being integrated into new urban forms.

Tactics

- Build on our current Embracing Sustainability Ambassadors grant to integrate our urban studies and international programs more fully by developing a focus on the networked global city. Consider the creation of an Urban Sustainability Fellows program that would place our students or recent graduates in internships with NGOs, municipal government, or UN agencies around the world.
- Develop a robust teaching and research focus on the urban environment. The combination of our urban location and our location in the watershed of three important rivers offers us powerful and unusual opportunities. The Katharine Ordway Field Station can be, in this respect, an increasingly important asset.

- Consider the creation of an interdisciplinary sustainability concentration or certificate. Either of these might include some combination of existing courses, newly developed courses, and co-curricular work with local organizations, governments, or businesses.
- As we develop new student housing options, consider the creation of a living and learning laboratory with a focus on sustainability. The EcoHouse is a small experiment in this sort of housing option that has been having considerable success.

Strengthen the connections between a liberal arts education and vocation by making more obvious and accessible the paths from what students study at Macalester to eventual careers.

Rationale

Since the inception of liberal arts education in the United States, there has been an ongoing debate about the extent to which that education should be focused on preparing students for employment. The most thoughtful participants in that debate—from Jefferson and Franklin forward—have recognized that the answer is complicated. Vocational preparation is *among* the important goals of a liberal arts education, along with preparation for informed engagement in civic life and for simply becoming a more thoughtful and empathetic person. Moreover, vocational preparation cannot be reduced to the imparting of certain knowledge or the passing of particular examinations, but has a great deal to do with the strengthening of the skills and habits of mind that will allow graduates to thrive as the world around them changes.

Without acceding to reductive assertions about either job preparation or the aims of education, we must acknowledge that the expectation that we prepare students for both short-term job placement and long-term, rewarding careers is stronger than ever before and that this expectation, given our cost, is not unreasonable. It is not enough for us simply to assume that students will figure out on their own the connections between education and vocation or for us to expect the Career Development Center to do this work on its own. The work of preparing our graduates for careers must be embraced by the entire Macalester community. Nor should the burden of this work be shouldered disproportionately by certain departments or individuals. Every Macalester student, regardless of major or area of interest, should be afforded ample opportunity to explore and prepare for potential career paths.

Tactics

- *Every department* should establish strong connections with alumni who can, through visiting classes, offering internships, providing formal or informal counsel, and perhaps even offering jobs, help students navigate the path from classroom to career.
- *Every department* should provide to its majors opportunities, embedded within the curriculum, to reflect on professional goals and explore possible careers.
- We should seek funding to add to the faculty a group of practitioner-educators who can both do some teaching and help students connect to potential careers. While one model for this is the Egge Professor in the Economics Department, one might imagine a variety of models: for instance,

- someone from the world of museums in the art department, someone from the world of publishing in the English Department, or someone from the world of technology in the Department of Math, Statistics, and Computer Science. Such practitioners would not substitute for more traditional faculty members, would ideally be paid for through fund raising, would typically be part-time, and might often be alumni whose time would be donated to the college.
- Consider creating a system of portfolios for students through which they might document and enhance their preparation for careers. The process of designing and then evaluating these portfolios might involve not only various constituencies within the campus community, but the broader community of alumni and parents. The portfolio (or *MacVita*?) might track the development of general skills in such areas as writing, speaking, and quantitative reasoning, the development of more specialized skills in areas such as statistical analysis or computer programming, and relevant experience through internships, volunteer activities, and appropriate course work. It might also provide students with additional opportunities to reflect on their personal and professional goals and to practice articulating how they have been prepared for life after Macalester. Maybe most important, it would remind students at the start of and throughout their career at the college that the development of certain skills and habits of mind is the best way to prepare for vocational success.

Increase the diversity within our student body, faculty, and staff, with a particular emphasis on increasing the presence and retention within our community of traditionally under-served populations.

Rationale

Few would argue with the assertion that increasing the diversity of the Macalester community is the *right* thing to do. Our contention is that it is also the *strategic* thing to do, for the following reasons. First, as the demographics of the United States change through the current century, it is critical for Macalester's health that it be able to recruit and retain students from parts of the country and from demographics where we will see the most growth. Second, institutions thrive when they are acting in ways consistent with their mission, and Macalester's mission identifies multiculturalism as a core component of the education we provide. Third, we believe that the campus community will be both more vibrant and more positive if it is diverse, and a thriving community translates into better recruitment and retention of both students and employees. And fourth, as colleges are increasingly being challenged on the extent to which they are serving the public good, it will be beneficial for Macalester to be able concretely to demonstrate a deep commitment to educating and employing populations that reflect the population of our local and national communities.

Albert Einstein famously defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. We would not go so far as to say that Macalester's efforts to diversify the campus have been insane, but we do believe that simply continuing our current efforts will produce the same results and that those results, while not without some positives, are insufficient. We would argue, therefore, that the college needs to take some new and concrete steps in order to reach our diversity goals.

Tactics

- Explore seriously the possibility of associating with programs such as Posse and Questbridge, which have a track record of success in helping enroll and graduate students from under-served populations.
- Given the direct correlation between standardized test scores and family income, as well as the relative lack of predictive power of those tests, join an increasing number of our peers in becoming "test optional" for applicants.
- Set aside 3 to 5 tenure-track faculty lines for "targeted searches" for qualified faculty members who will meet the curricular needs of the college *and* increase the diversity of the faculty.
- Convert the two positions currently occupied by Fellows from the Consortium for Faculty Diversity to tenure-track positions that enhance diversity within our faculty and curriculum. This change would add both courses and stability with a very modest increase in cost. At the same time,

use the endowed Berg and Wallin Fellow positions to focus on appointments that will enhance diversity so that we can ensure that this shift will result in a net gain in diversity hires.

- Review our staff hiring policies and practices, particularly those affecting our hiring within the local market, with the goal of developing strategies for increasing diversity within our applicant pools and ultimately our staff.
- We are aware this is not sufficient only to bring a more diverse population to Macalester; we must do more to support and foster the success of traditionally under-served populations in particular. This will mean improving our efforts at training faculty and staff and at creating a safe and inclusive campus.

Become a leader among liberal arts colleges in the use of technology to improve and broaden the reach of teaching and learning.

Rationale

As in so many other areas, the truth about technology and higher education, we believe, lies somewhere between hyperbolic extremes. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will not do away with campuses, and students will not soon be getting their college education on iPhones. Neither, however, will either the business or the educational models of traditional higher education remain untouched by the evolution of new forms of information technology. Technology, like other forms of change, should be neither feared nor embraced without qualification; rather, it should be examined with care and with an eye toward improving the quality of what we do. This process is ongoing at the college right now, but it must be carried out with more focus and intensity.

To continue offering innovative curricular and co-curricular opportunities at Macalester, we must make strategic use of technology in two ways. First, we must use technology judiciously to continue providing the most effective learning environment possible for our students. Second, we must use technology's ability to transcend time and space to provide students with maximal flexibility.

Tactics

- Create online courses to maximize curricular availability. For a selected portfolio of courses that might otherwise have enrollment bottlenecks, we should create online offerings during the summer, winter break, and/or the academic year. These selected courses might enroll current students (both on campus and those studying away) as well as admitted students planning to matriculate and even alumni and AP/PSEO students. An added benefit would be interactions among these communities.
- Increase the use of blended learning to enhance the interactivity of on-campus courses. By applying blended teaching and learning models, we can free up more time for faculty-student and student-student interaction.
- When possible, redesign high-enrollment classes. Relying on blended learning techniques, we could transform some large lecture classes into smaller, more highly interactive tutorials. For faculty, this would transfer some time away from lecture preparation and delivery to be used for providing applied learning opportunities. For students, this would at least partially replace a large-group experience with a small-group one.
- Explore partnerships with peer institutions around the subject of on-line or blended courses.
- Develop a process and methodology for the evaluation of courses from third-party providers, with the goal of determining whether any might enhance student learning and curricular opportunities at Macalester.

CULTURE AND PRACTICES

Recognizing the limitations of any strategic plan, create a culture at Macalester in which strategic thinking and careful, timely decision-making are the norm.

Rationale

The mistake made by most organizations when engaging in strategic planning lies in defining the goal chiefly as the production of a "plan" that will capture the best ideas of the moment and act as a touchstone during the ensuing five or ten years. If one accepts this definition, success in this exercise would presumably mean the creation of a document that is both thoughtful and bold and that pushes Macalester to new levels of excellence. Such an outcome is powerfully attractive and remains, in some sense, the desired endpoint of our efforts, but like many powerfully attractive things, it can lead to some less than clear thinking.

Here is the problem. When setting institutional goals, it is important to define success in terms that one can largely control, which is why, for instance, it makes little sense to define success in terms of any system of rankings (one cannot control either the methodology or what other colleges are doing). At the end of the day, there is much about a final "strategic plan" over which we have relatively little control, regardless of how hard we work or even how brilliantly we think. We cannot control the evolution of public policy regarding higher education. We cannot control the use of "merit aid" by our peers and competitors. We cannot control the rate of growth in the global economy or the distribution of wealth. Maybe most important, we cannot control the future and cannot therefore reliably judge the level of accuracy or risk in many elements of any fixed plan. This last point is of course true for virtually all organizations, but it seems especially germane to colleges and universities at a moment when so much about the road ahead for American higher education seems wreathed in fog and when those who most confidently claim prescience are so often uninformed.

This absence of control, even more than timidity or overly conventional thinking, is why most strategic plans are unimpressive when produced and more or less useless two or three years after their creation. It is not because people at other colleges or other organizations are less smart than we are, but because they assume a level of foreknowledge and a command of events that are unrealistic.

Compounding our difficulty is the fact it is nearly impossible to be clear about the precise problems we are trying to solve. Planning processes are easiest when their goals are most evident: a business faced with a loss of market share or a college confronted by an ongoing structural deficit may not be able to solve its problem, but at least it has an unambiguous awareness of what it must try to do. It must deal with an existential threat.

Macalester (happily) faces no such threat within the time frame being considered in this particular planning exercise. We know that there is serious pressure on our operating budget and that economic forecasters predict that this pressure will intensify. We know that technology is doing *something* to higher education, though whether it is good or bad, disruptive or evolutionary, is far from clear. We suspect that being distinctive would be a good thing, though we are aware that too much distinctiveness at the expense of general appeal is risky. We want to improve the way we are perceived even as application and retention levels suggest that we are perceived more positively than ever before. In short, we are trying to come up with answers without being able precisely to articulate the questions.

All of this leads to the following conclusion: we should think about the outcome of our work more in terms of the *process* than in terms of a final *product*, or, put another way, more in terms of *planning* than in terms of a *plan*.

We have far more control (though not absolute control) over the nature of strategic planning at Macalester than we do over the utility or feasibility of any plan we actually create. We can ensure that we openly challenge everyone in the community to think seriously about the strengths and weakness of what we do; we can ensure that we reject complacency and bring a healthily skeptical attitude to every assumption we examine; we can ensure that we are open about the presence of risk and uncertainty; we can ensure that we acknowledge regularly that plans can and almost always do change in response to unforeseen circumstances and that any Macalester plan will surely do so.

In short, we can do a great deal to establish a thoughtful, adaptive, and self-aware **planning culture** at Macalester. The persistence and pervasiveness of that culture will be more important to the future of the college than any document. To cite President Dwight D. Eisenhower, “the reason it is so important to plan [is] to keep yourselves steeped in the character of the problem that you may one day be called upon to solve—or to help to solve.”

A true planning culture would exist on a number of levels. It would be informed by a clear set of strategic objectives, but also would enable us to react with both appropriate care and appropriate speed to unanticipated changes and challenges. It would be reflected in **governance**, which would be designed to ensure meaningful input from important constituencies and the ability to make smart and timely decisions; in **channels of communication**, which would be broadly understood and would enable anyone with a good idea to find a way of conveying that idea to others; and in **campus climate**, which would be receptive to creative and challenging thinking about the way we do our work.

Tactics

- As a first step toward more truly shared governance, we recommend replacing the current Resources and Planning Committee with a standing Strategic Directions Committee whose members would include (but not necessarily be limited to) the President, the Provost, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, and elected members of the faculty. This would be a forum within which chief administrators and faculty representatives could discuss in confidence *any and all* matters of institutional importance. (See section on governance.)
- Alter the committee structure of the Board of Trustees to allow for the creation of a Strategic Directions Committee of the Board. This might be done through the addition of a committee or through a more thorough revision of the current slate of committees. The Strategic Directions Committee of the Board and the campus Strategic Directions Committee would meet together during each board meeting. (See section on governance.)
- Alter the format of President’s Council—a monthly gathering of administrative directors—to include regular discussions throughout the year about all areas of the college. The goal of these would be to share information, to seek feedback, and to ensure that natural areas of either overlap or inconsistency are identified.

Ensure the continuance of a sustainable financial model that will enhance the ability of the college to fulfill its mission.

Rationale

The challenge facing the financial model at Macalester is at its heart relatively simple to identify, if not to address: for the foreseeable future, revenues are likely to grow at a rate that is slower than the rate at which expenses have historically grown. This is virtually the definition of unsustainability. A related question, but one that cannot be ignored, is whether we are approaching a point of resistance at which, due to either the inability or the unwillingness of the consumer to absorb more increases in cost, even slow growth in revenue comes to a stop. Clearly this would create an even more pressing set of difficulties.

We should also acknowledge that a degree from Macalester will remain expensive by almost any measure no matter what steps we take to rein in the growth of our expenses. There is no straightforward way for us to reduce our cost structure by, say, 20% and continue to bear even a faint resemblance to our current selves. This means that we must invest intelligently in quality to draw the student body that we want, one that meets a complex and sometimes competing set of academic, social, and economic objectives.

The cause of what has come to be known as the “slope problem”—the rate of growth in expenses exceeding the rate of growth in revenues—is also pretty obvious. The combination of stagnant family income for most of the population, hesitancy to take on debt in the wake of a financial crisis that might be described as traumatic, aggressive use of “merit aid” by competing institutions, and questions in the public sphere about the value of a high-cost college education has sharply slowed the rate of growth in tuition revenue, which provides roughly two-thirds of the revenue for the college. This is highly unlikely to change, and even the most optimistic assumptions about endowment returns and fund raising success cannot be expected to alter the fundamentals of the equation.

An effective response to this challenge must be comprehensive and creative. No single action will by itself be sufficient. We must slow the rate of growth in expenses *and* we must look for ways to increase the rate of growth in revenues. We cannot cut our way to higher levels of quality or public recognition, nor can we *avoid* cutting some things in order to invest in others during a time of stagnant or shrinking resources. We cannot abandon either our commitment to academic excellence or our commitment to access, yet we cannot assume that the appropriate point of balance between these two is stable.

The keys to financial sustainability might be summarized as follows: maximize existing *capacity*—and perhaps expand capacity—without sacrificing quality; maximize *revenue* without abandoning our commitment to access; and minimize *expenses* without adversely impacting the student experience.

Tactics

- Maintain a student body size at the high end of what campus infrastructure, staffing levels, and other resources can handle without a reduction in quality. This would appear to be more or less our current size of approximately 1975 annualized FTE students. We should, however, continue to build budget models around a somewhat smaller number—perhaps 1925—to cushion ourselves against potential shortfalls in enrollment. This is a prudent reaction to the likelihood of continued volatility and decreased predictability in admissions.
- Target an average increase in net tuition revenue of 3.5% per year over the next five years. This is based upon assumptions of an average annual tuition increase of 4% and an average discount rate of 51%, which seem to us the limits of what can realistically be expected absent a dramatic change in the economy, our market, or college operations. Meeting this goal will require careful monitoring of and, when appropriate, necessary recalibrating of our aid and admissions strategies.
- Given the difficulty of increasing revenue at a rapid rate, devote a larger portion of our fund raising efforts to growing the endowment. The next campaign should include a very aggressive goal—\$80 million, or twice the goal of the *Step Forward* campaign—for endowment support, most of which would go toward scholarships.
- Maintain a reserve fund sufficient in size both to protect the college against unexpected challenges (for example, capital expenditures or enrollment shortfalls) and to support targeted strategic investments.
- The study away budget has grown at a rapid rate and now consumes roughly 5% of the overall operating budget. Without reducing student access to study away opportunities, reduce the size of this annual expenditure by reducing the average cost per program in which students participate. We should target a maximum expenditure on study away of 4.75% of the operating budget. Meeting this goal will require a thorough review of approved programs with an eye toward providing the highest quality at the most reasonable cost.
- It is important to complete the renovation of the Janet Wallace Fine Arts complex and to support our programs in theater and dance. It is not feasible in the near term, however, to commit anything on the order of \$50 or \$60 million toward that renovation. We should devise a renovation plan that meets the needs of the affected programs but that is more modest in scope and cost than the renovations envisioned prior to the recession. This would free up operating dollars and fund raising capacity for investment in other areas as well. It would also reduce the college's future debt burden.
- Explore options including a shared services model with other colleges and universities in the Twin Cities or beyond and new technological tools, with the goal of reducing administrative expenditures without sacrificing—or

perhaps even improving—the quality of services we provide to students, faculty, and staff. Within the next two years, all administrative and support activities should be evaluated and alternative operating models should be considered to determine if our current structures are cost effective and value enhancing.

In order to allow for the investment of time and resources implied by our strategic priorities, create both the institutional will and the institutional ability to stop doing some things we do at present, even while recognizing that everything we do has some value and some community support.

Rationale

Though the notion of *stopping*—of making the very difficult decision to discontinue some program or activity—is typically either implied by or buried deep within many strategic plans, we believe that this priority is important enough to lift into the foreground. The self-evident truth is that many of the goals identified in this plan will remain only desires if we do not make difficult choices among competing and sometimes compelling priorities. Sometimes this means not beginning something; sometimes it means discontinuing something. Colleges are not especially good at deciding to do the former and are just plain awful at deciding to do the latter.

Few people would dispute this point in the abstract, but abstract decisions to discontinue an activity or program free up no money or time. Clearly any decision to stop something of value carries with it some risk and some pain, but we would contend that in the long term both the greater risk and the greater pain would result from having such decisions forced upon us by circumstances outside our control. Better to decide in the absence of a crisis how best to allocate finite resources than to be forced by a crisis into making decisions that lack the appropriate level of thoughtfulness.

Tactics

- More fully empower elected faculty bodies to implement decisions.
- Create mechanisms and structures for closer faculty interaction with administrators around important institutional questions of all kinds.
- Develop a clearer sense of institutional strategic priorities.
- Educate the community as fully as possible about the trade-offs implied by consequential policy and budgetary decisions.

Move from a model of divided governance to a model of truly shared governance, in order to facilitate institutional decision-making that is informed, timely, and strategic.

Rationale

The governance structures at liberal arts colleges are typically variations on a common model that has, despite its weaknesses, worked well more often than not. At Macalester, this model has enabled the creation of compelling new academic programs, the revision and assessment of the general education requirements, and financial planning that has steered the college well through a challenging economic environment

At the same time, faculty, administrators, and trustees at Macalester and peer institutions repeatedly express serious worries about their college governance. These concerns include the following: 1) Governance structures discourage change and preserve the status quo; 2) Insofar as governance structures permit change, they strongly favor adding programming and increasing expenses over reallocating resources, cutting expenses, and facing necessary trade-offs; 3) All-faculty deliberations and votes are uneven in their inclusiveness, quality, and depth of information and preparation; 4) Faculty are increasingly reluctant to serve on committees that cannot implement well-researched decisions, and the most important leadership positions are actively avoided by many of those who should seek them.

To be fair, at least some of the criticisms above might be re-described as strengths: for instance, an institution that resists rapid change also resists the destabilizing swerves of fad-chasing and the perils of short-term thinking that have doomed so many businesses. We believe, however, that the coming decades will test liberal arts colleges in profound ways and that ineffective governance based chiefly on allegiance to the status quo will become an increasingly grave concern. This plan calls for Macalester to be a more interconnected, dynamic, and bold institution; it would be a mistake not to ask whether our current structure for decision-making will help or hinder this evolution.

While institutional governance structures have complex histories and evolutionary paths, we have concluded that a single structural condition is more responsible than any other for the most significant deficits in liberal arts college governance: namely, that authority on campus is almost completely *divided* rather than *shared*. Faculty control the curriculum, but have, at best, only an indirect role to play in financial matters and no role in a wide range of matters from setting admissions and financial aid policies to establishing priorities for capital expenditures. Administrative personnel control financial matters and most non-academic decisions but have, at best, only an indirect role to play in the curriculum. Because all of these areas overlap and interweave, we believe that their management should as well.

As it stands, our governance structure is defined in part by the blunt instrument of mutual veto power: the faculty can exert its authority by declining to approve curricular changes recommended by committees or favored by administrators; administrators can limit the funding of faculty-approved programs or limit the access of faculty to important information. So long as this is the case, long-term alignment of financial capacity and curricular ambitions will be at best disjointed and ad hoc, and at worst maladaptive.

Divided governance not only promotes organizational stasis instead of renewal, but also generates a sense of mutual powerlessness within both the faculty and the administration. On both sides, the primary power is the power to say “No.” Noting that the one part of our governance structure that is truly shared—the tenure and promotion process—is also generally the most respected and effective, we recommend redesigning our governance structure with three aims: 1) To increase collaboration between administration and faculty in all aspects of college governance, 2) To empower elected faculty bodies to implement decisions, and 3) To establish a standing body of administration and elected faculty representatives tasked with information-sharing and ongoing rather than episodic strategic planning.

Though some of the tactics below were listed earlier in the section on creating a culture of planning, we felt it important to restate them here as they bear directly on the question of governance.

Tactics

- The Faculty Personnel Committee, including the President and the Provost, should establish a Task Force to design and recommend a revised faculty governance structure, guided by the aims described above. This Task Force should move expeditiously to bring its recommendations to the faculty for consideration.
- As a first step toward more truly shared governance, and even prior to the recommendations of the Task Force, we recommend replacing the current Resources and Planning Committee with a standing Strategic Directions Committee whose members would include (but not necessarily be limited to) the President, the Provost, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, and elected members of the faculty. This would be a forum within which chief administrators and faculty representatives could discuss in confidence *any and all* matters of institutional importance, with a particular emphasis on issues of strategy and planning.
- Add an elected faculty representative to the President’s Senior Staff.
- Alter the committee structure of the Board of Trustees to allow for the creation of a Strategic Directions Committee of the Board. This might be done through the addition of a committee or through a more thorough revision of the current slate of committees. The chief responsibility of this

committee would be to consider the impact of important developments in higher education, economics, and public policy on strategic decisions at Macalester. The Strategic Directions Committee of the Board and the campus Strategic Directions Committee would meet together during each board meeting.

- Charge both the President's Council and the Staff Advisory Committee with examining current staff input into college governance and with making recommendations for improvement.

Epilogue

“Plans,” Eisenhower wrote, “are worthless, but planning is everything.” This is a salutary reminder that what is contained herein is neither a foolproof prescription for nor a prescient description of Macalester’s future. Rather, it is a set of goals whose pursuit would, we believe, better enable us to carry out our mission, better prepare us to respond to the challenges and opportunities we cannot now foresee, and, perhaps, lead us in surprising and fruitful new directions. Above all else, it is a declaration that we should ask of ourselves what we ask of every Macalester student in our *Statement of Purpose and Belief*: to embrace the idea that “education is a fundamentally transforming experience.” What better way to model this assertion than to be open to the idea of our own fundamental transformation?

No future is ever guaranteed. While we have attempted to avoid hyperbolic predictions of easy success, we also reject the notion, popular in some circles, of inevitable decline. Great as Macalester is—and it is truly a special place—it can be greater tomorrow. Indeed, if we make progress on this set of goals, we believe that it is not hyperbolic to expect that Macalester in 2020 will be even better at fulfilling the aim, articulated at the start of this report, of providing a talented and diverse group of students with a liberal arts education that is outstanding in quality, distinctive in character, and demonstrably preparatory to vocational success. We can become and remain as successful and respected as any college in the country. This is not destiny, but it is an outcome within our reach.

Since there is much about the present and even more about the future that we cannot control, we should focus our efforts on those things that we can. These include establishing the right priorities, reacting with thoughtfulness and resilience to setbacks, and having the courage to take appropriate risks. Above all else, this means establishing a deep-rooted culture of trust and not suspicion. Organizations with cultures of suspicion design themselves to avoid the worst; organizations with cultures of trust design themselves to accomplish the best. The former often survive; the latter, we believe, are the ones that thrive.