

A Bridge to Washington College's Future



Erin Mayhew

WASHINGTON COLLEGE

2019 UPDATE OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE'S STRATEGIC PLAN

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CONTEXT FOR PLANNING

In the 2013-14 academic year, the Board of Visitors and Governors adopted a strategic plan for Washington College, “Advancing the Distinctive Character of a Washington College Education.” The vision set forth in that plan was of an institution that leveraged its rich history and its significant and enviable location to provide a distinctive education in the liberal arts and sciences. Washington College would be known as a place that built connections between classroom-based learning, the its social and natural environments, and the region’s rich history and culture. The 2014 plan was framed around eight distinct goals that have guided subsequent actions and decisions made by the College to develop innovative programs and offerings, particularly those involving experiential learning opportunities, to deepen the College’s commitment to the liberal arts and sciences and the positive outcomes associated with such an education, and to become a leader in the multidisciplinary study of the environment.

While significant portions of the 2014 plan have been implemented, the Board in the summer of 2018 directed the administration to update the plan to achieve the following goals:

- Reframe the portions of the 2014 strategic plan that had not been implemented, acknowledging the financial and market realities the College now faces.
- Provide a vision for the closeout of the “Forge a Legacy” capital campaign.
- Provide a vision for the College that will guide its operational and financial decisions as it navigates current financial realities towards a stable financial future.
- Position the College for a much larger vision for providing a distinctive liberal arts education for the 21st century to be fueled by a new capital campaign.

The need for this update was clear: The financial outlook for the next two years is not good for Washington College and will require that difficult choices be made. That said, the College has made significant investments in faculty, programs, and services for students that need to be protected. Furthermore, the College has also developed or been given very significant assets – including two new majors (in Biochemistry & Molecular Biology and Communications & Media Studies), a much-enhanced career development center, 17 new interdisciplinary minors, the River and Field Campus, and the Eastern Shore Food Lab – that need to be integrated fully into the College’s value proposition.

For the College to navigate its current difficulties and achieve a stable financial future, it must make the best use of the academic and physical assets it already has, and make focused investments in things with which students are becoming increasingly dissatisfied, such as residence halls, the sustainability profile of the College, athletics facilities, and the overall student experience. Faculty need to feel valued and supported in their efforts to ensure the best possible outcomes for Washington College students. Students and their parents need to know that their academic, social, emotional, and physical health needs will be met, and that they will be offered the same range of enriching experiences for which Washington College has become known.

The College also needs to develop a bold vision for a distinctive, relevant, and compelling liberal arts education that fully addresses the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. Absent discretionary financial resources, the best strategy the College can pursue to fund such investments now is to make these investments the focus of the closeout of the “Forge a Legacy” campaign.



VISION FOR THE COLLEGE

This updated plan presents a short-term vision for the College framed by the following positive and necessary outcomes:

- financial stability,
- strong morale among faculty, staff, and students that helps to engage disaffected or disinterested stakeholders such as alumni and potential donors,
- highly satisfied students, whose health and well-being are fully supported by College services,
- an increasingly competitive posture for potential students based on a better recognition of the College's value proposition and the ability to meet increasing amounts of financial need among students,
- a more environmentally sustainable campus, and
- full and integrated use of all of the assets of the College in enacting our value proposition.

While many elements of this vision are tactical in nature, this updated plan is really meant to position the College for a longer-term vision that sees it thriving for centuries to come based on a widespread recognition of its excellence and relevance in fully addressing the opportunities and challenges of our time. Absent the outcomes listed above, planning for such a bright future will be difficult, if not impossible.

WASHINGTON COLLEGE'S VALUE PROPOSITION

As part of the process to update the 2014 strategic plan, Washington College articulated the following value proposition based on input from faculty and staff, its signature centers, and the vision identified in the 2014 plan:

Founded in 1782, Washington College has educated citizen-leaders since the earliest days of our nation. Building on its rich history and its beautiful location on the Chester River, Washington College provides unparalleled opportunities for students to learn in a traditional liberal arts and sciences setting but also compels them beyond the classroom to understand complexity, solve real-world problems, and make a profound difference in an ever-changing world. Nearly 120 full-time faculty and more than 400 staff show their dedication every day to providing impactful learning experiences for students, creating safe and supportive living and learning environments, and making personal connections that last a lifetime.



PLANNING PROCESS

The updated plan was developed by the College's Planning Committee, a standing committee that includes representation from faculty, staff, students, and members of the Board of Visitors and Governors. This committee met monthly from September 2018 through late April 2019. Draft versions of the updated plan were written by the two co-chairs of the Planning Committee, Mark Hampton and, once she assumed the co-chair role in January 2019, Professor Christine Wade.

The initial draft of the updated plan was based on an analysis of the 2014 plan in which Planning Committee members assessed what had been done to implement each of the goals in the plan, what remained to be done, and what, in their opinions, the College should have been doing relative to each goal. These individual analyses were collated, and the following nine tactical themes were derived from a content analysis:

- Articulate and Advance a Vision of the Liberal Arts for the 21st Century as the Core of our Value Proposition
- Support the High-Quality Work of Our Faculty and Staff
- Integrate and Enhance Student Learning Opportunities Both Within and Beyond the Classroom
- Grow Enrollment While Meeting Students' Financial Needs
- Recommit to a High-Quality Campus Experience That Meets Students' Health and Wellness Needs
- Develop a Spirit of Entrepreneurialism
- Transform Technology and Data Use to Enhance the Student Experience and Advance our Value Proposition
- Become a Leader in the Study and Practice of Sustainability
- Communicate Strategically to Strengthen and Grow our Base of Constituents

Once these themes had been identified, the Planning Committee articulated a set of tactics for each theme. Many of these tactics crossed themes or represented theme-specific aspects of a more comprehensive tactic. The full set of tactics, without associated themes, were then subjected to a second content analysis, and the following three strategies were extracted from that analysis:

- Articulate, Advance, and Celebrate a Vision of the Liberal Arts for the 21st Century Based on Our Unique Value Proposition
- Review and Redesign Institutional Practices and Mindsets to Become an Exemplar of Institutional Effectiveness and Operational Excellence and a Model of the Practice of Sustainability and Environmental Leadership
- Reenergize the Forge a Legacy Campaign to Fuel Institutional Transformation and Position Washington College for Its Best Possible Future

These three strategies formed the basis of the updated strategic plan, with each of the original tactics identified by the Planning Committee associated with one of the three strategies listed above.

Throughout the planning process, the Planning Committee sought feedback on drafts of the updated plan from faculty, staff, students, Board members, and alumni, and reflected that input in subsequent iterations of the updated plan. The meetings of the Board of Visitors and Governors were used to solicit feedback from the full Board and to give preliminary approval of the draft plan in May 2019. Final approval of the updated plan was given at the Board's Executive Committee at its June 26, 2019 retreat.

STRATEGY I: ARTICULATE, ADVANCE, AND CELEBRATE A VISION OF THE LIBERAL ARTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY BASED ON OUR UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

Washington College already offers high-quality learning opportunities grounded in the liberal arts and sciences tradition that prepare them to lead lives and build careers of profound impact in society. However, the College is not as widely known for this or for its unique value proposition as it should be, and therefore has challenges attracting students and raising support even from its own alumni. This strategy outlines how the College can strengthen its value proposition, provide more and clearer evidence for that value proposition, and celebrate it in ways that expand recognition of the College's excellence.

- Prepare each Washington College student to be a citizen-leader and an adept inquirer by fine-tuning the curriculum and making full use of existing academic development resources.
 - o Continue to develop courses that emphasize the College's values, including ethics, civil discourse, critical thinking, and inclusion, with appropriate assessments in place to ensure intended learning outcomes.
 - o Reaffirm the importance of the study of language and culture, as well as philosophical, scientific and social inquiry, and knowledge-based learning and problem-solving.
 - o Develop and offer more courses with an explicit global component.
 - o Provide resources and support to faculty to encourage and empower them to build diverse perspectives into their curricula, and to teach students how to recognize implicit bias.
 - o Promote high-impact teaching both in and outside the classroom through more effective and impactful use of the Center for Teaching and Learning.
 - o Reaffirm the importance of interdisciplinary learning in the liberal arts by reframing distribution requirements to be less about "checking boxes" and more about making connections between disciplines.
- Highlight the critical importance of mentoring as a key ingredient that makes a Washington College education much greater than the sum of its parts.
 - o Ensure that all students have access to mentors who can help them develop the skills necessary to embrace the prospects and challenges of the 21st century, including critical thinking, collaboration, cultural and scientific literacy, ethics, and entrepreneurship.
 - o Find ways to better acknowledge and celebrate mentorship experiences that change students' lives, both to model these experiences to other faculty and students, and to demonstrate to the public the true value of a Washington College education.
 - o Develop a mentoring program that focuses on students in their second and third years.
- Support the High-Quality Work of Our Faculty and Staff
 - o Achieve and maintain established benchmarks for faculty and staff salaries and develop a plan for setting benchmarks to be more in line with reach institutions.
 - o Increase adjunct faculty pay to a level consistent with a living wage (about \$4,500 per course).
 - o Provide additional support for faculty travel and professional development.
 - o Commit to a meaningful plan for professional staff development.
 - o Increase the retirement match for full-time College employees from 7.5% to 10%.
 - o Articulate specific diversity goals for the College's faculty and staff and create a plan and a timeline for achieving these goals.

- Recommit to a high-quality campus experience that meets students' health and wellness needs
 - o Enhance the quality of the student experience across all four years, with a particular focus on the second and third years.
 - o Recommit to the implementation of the Athletics strategic plan
 - » Prioritize additions and improvements that can be made given the current budgetary outlook.
 - » Identify strategies for additions and improvements that require funding or other resources beyond those currently available, and reflect such strategies into the development of a new capital campaign.
 - o Identify a list of campus improvements that will enhance the student experience and improve recruitment and retention efforts, and identify funding strategies.
 - » Improve the comfort and attractiveness of all residence halls.
 - » Improve the appearance and pedagogical potential of all classrooms and labs.
 - » Improve the safety and attractiveness of campus exteriors and gathering places.
 - » Modernize and expand athletics and recreational spaces.
 - » Improve the efficiency and attractiveness of the dining hall, and provide more dining options to meet students' needs.
- Celebrate Washington College's excellence and unique value proposition in regular strategic communications to the College community, our local community, our stakeholders, and to those we would like to welcome into our community.
 - o Ensure that the College's value proposition is communicated at every opportunity through an outcomes-oriented strategic communication plan and a redesigned website that clearly demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary problem-solving in addressing the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.
 - o Ensure that all of the College's communications strategies provide stakeholders easy ways to act upon their desire to support the College.
 - o Improve the quality of the data we have about key constituents such as alumni and donors so that we can better target communications to them in a way that leads to greater engagement and support of the College.
 - o Engage key constituent groups, particularly faculty, staff, and alumni, to understand and communicate the College's value proposition to achieve wider recognition as an outstanding private liberal arts college.
 - o Strengthen communications between Washington College and Chestertown and nearby counties to increase awareness of College activities and opportunities for engagement.
 - o Increase the availability of sustainably sourced Washington College-themed merchandise in retail settings in Chestertown and nearby counties, and seek out other opportunities to increase awareness of the College to visitors and residents.
- Establish a distinctive and compelling new vision for Washington College's liberal arts education—based on the College's historical and contextual strengths—that fully addresses the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. This vision should include the following elements:
 - o Balancing the College's commitment to liberal arts education with student and market demand for academic programs and other learning experiences,
 - o Leveraging new technologies, consistent with the College's mission, to make liberal arts education more accessible to current and future students,
 - o Removing or mitigating obstacles to innovation in teaching and learning that we face, and
 - o Articulating and actualizing for students the connection between a liberal arts education and career preparation.

STRATEGY 2: REVIEW AND REDESIGN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND MINDSETS TO BECOME AN EXEMPLAR OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND A MODEL OF THE PRACTICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

Like most institutions of higher education, Washington College relies on systems, processes, organizational structures, roles, and responsibilities that are not fully in step with the tools available, the operational demands, or the stakeholder expectations of the time. However, whereas many institutions have made significant investments in institutional effectiveness, Washington College has not, either because it does not have the resources to do so, because of a high degree of administrative turnover, or because there has been significant resistance to change. The current fiscal challenges provide the College with an opportunity to address the latter. This strategy provides a roadmap for the College to address the inefficiencies and operational obstacles that prevent faculty, staff, and students from doing their best work.

Furthermore, Washington College has, by virtue of its faculty, programs, and signature centers, assets that can make it a world leader in the interdisciplinary study of sustainability and environmental leadership. However, the College does not always practice these virtues in its day-to-day activities and decision-making. Some of the disconnect between the College's values and its practices with regard to sustainability and environmental leadership is due to the inability to invest in sustainable facilities, but much of the disconnect is rooted in a reluctance to adopt what is taught in the classroom and in the field into institutional practice. This strategy also lays out ways that the College can affirm its status as a leader in the study and practice of sustainability by living the principles that it teaches regarding the proper stewardship of the earth's environment and natural resources.

- Build connections between existing parts of the College that take advantage of existing strengths and bring greater coherence to the College's programs and offerings
 - o Improve collaboration between the College's signature centers, newer assets, and its academic departments and programs, leveraging center assets to provide more experiential learning and internships.
 - o Explore the "hub-and-spoke" model of offering specialized programming and outreach to strategically placed sites where the Washington College value proposition is well-received and where operating at such sites provides clear and measurable benefit to the College.
 - o Build greater coordination between similar activities taking place in different parts of the College or at different times, for example
 - » Reframe the George Washington Leadership Lecture Series as a way to package and bring more coherence and continuity to the schedule of speakers and lectureships.
 - » Facilitate coordination between budget managers of endowed funds to find opportunities to collaborate and leverage individual resources and efforts.
 - » Seek greater coordination of experiential learning opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies, to leverage strengths, and to target student learning goals.
- Become a data-driven organization that routinely uses data to support planning, program improvement, and innovation
 - o Improve technologies throughout campus to support cutting-edge teaching and learning, efficient business processes, and data-driven decision-making.
 - o Gather and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data on student outcomes associated with various aspects of the College's value proposition to demonstrate in clear terms the value added through a Washington College education, and that can be used to communicate the value proposition to prospective students and their parents and other key constituencies.

- o Gather and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data on market trends and prospective student needs and interests to ensure that communications about Washington College are appropriately targeted and that plans to meet student needs and interests reflect such trends.
- Ensure that operational practices reflect the values of sustainability and environmental leadership that we advocate in our academic programs, signature centers, and experiential offerings
 - o Review our business practices in areas such as Dining Services, student housing, procurement, investment, etc., to assess whether they model our commitment to sustainability, and develop a plan to address any inconsistencies.
 - o Set and meet environmental standards for all new construction and major renovations, using these capital projects as learning opportunities for faculty and staff.
 - o Establish a schedule of renovations to ensure that all residence halls, classroom buildings, dining facilities, and other facilities operate as efficiently as possible.
 - o Set and achieve goals for full carbon neutrality as well as other sustainability standards.
- Review and revise administrative operations as well as business processes, policies, and procedures to be more efficient and mission-focused, and to better support institutional goals of advancing excellence in our programs and scholarship and providing the best possible student experience.
 - o Provide more administrative support for faculty research and provide greater incentives for faculty to participate in research and scholarly activities, including larger salary increases associated with promotions.
 - o Identify and eliminate obstacles preventing greater levels of collaboration between faculty and students, such as poor transportation options and other difficulties associated with travel.
 - o Gather and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data about faculty workload, effort, and student demand to ensure that programs have a sufficient number of faculty and that faculty resources are appropriately allocated among programs and activities to achieve the College's goals for academic program quality, enrollment, and ongoing enhancement of its value proposition.
 - o Provide support for logistical planning related to faculty-led experiential and global education.
 - o Identify and remove unnecessary administrative barriers to innovation and income generation and create administrative support for developing and commercializing intellectual property created by faculty, students, and staff.
- Build toward a sustainable student enrollment that meets students' financial need.
 - o Develop a strategic enrollment plan that realistically assesses the College's optimal enrollment size and demographic makeup, keeping a clear focus on financial need and changing demographics, and mapping out a clear strategy for achieving that optimal enrollment.
 - o Research the feasibility of a concurrent reduction in gross tuition and fees ("sticker price") and unfunded discount that would result in the same net tuition revenues while sending the message that a Washington College education can be affordable to families from a wide range of financial abilities.
 - o Develop new financial aid strategies for merit- and need-based aid that increase yield and retention.
- Become more financially sustainable by better diversifying the College's sources of revenues
 - o Develop more summer programming, both for Washington College students and others, including both pre-college and post-college as well as other uses of Washington College's intellectual capital, campus facilities, and other assets.
 - o Expand existing non-student sources of revenue such as grants, contracts, and fees for professional services and create new sources of revenue such as licensing intellectual property and commercializing novel technologies.



STRATEGY 3: REENERGIZE THE FORGE A LEGACY CAMPAIGN TO FUEL INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION AND POSITION WASHINGTON COLLEGE FOR ITS BEST POSSIBLE FUTURE

As the Forge a Legacy campaign closes in on its \$150M goal, the College is presented with a unique opportunity to revitalize and reenergize the campaign by focusing on a handful of major initiatives that can truly transform the College. The strategies outlined above provide real opportunities for donors to make gifts that help address our immediate needs while repositioning the College for its best possible future. This strategy lays out three areas of focus for the closeout of the Forge a Legacy campaign that can fuel the implementation of this updated strategic plan, and help the College make the specific investments that need to be made at a time when the College needs those investments most. Furthermore, these areas of focus have the potential to engage new donors and to reengage donors who have supported the College in the past, but who remain committed to seeing it positioned for its best possible future.

- Make serving as a model of environmental leadership a key goal for the closeout of the Forge a Legacy campaign:
 - o Secure resources to improve the physical condition of our academic facilities.
 - o Secure resources to improve the physical condition of our residential facilities.
 - o Secure resources to improve external spaces to address stormwater management and other environmental concerns.
- Make meeting students' financial needs a key goal for the closeout of the Forge a Legacy campaign:
 - o Secure resources to support additional need- and merit-based aid.
 - o Secure resources to support participation in experiential learning opportunities for students with demonstrated financial need.
 - o Secure support to send more students to regional and national conferences to present their research and to network.
- Make supporting student health and wellness a key goal for the closeout of the Forge a Legacy campaign:
 - o Secure resources to provide additional support, including space, to advance student wellness, mental health, and safety, anticipating the needs of future students.