



the clarion group
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WASHINGTON COLLEGE SUMMARY OF VISIONING SESSIONS

NOVEMBER 3-4, 2022

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Washington College

Summary of Visioning Sessions

November 3-4, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Washington College will celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2032, 10 years from now. As part of its strategic visioning process, Washington College conducted a series of “visioning sessions” to consider what the College can be in 10 years. Three sessions, two with a total of 49 faculty and staff and one with 16 of the 18 members of the College’s strategic planning Steering Committee, were held on campus on November 3rd and 4th. Laurie Schulte of The Clarion Group facilitated the sessions.

To help put the visioning exercise into context, Laurie provided an overview of the following topics:

- Strategic effectiveness – The Clarion Group’s philosophy on strategic planning
- The value of a strategic plan
- Phases of the College’s strategic visioning process

Overview of Strategic Effectiveness

Strategic effectiveness is an organization’s ability to set the right goals and consistently achieve them.



Organizations with a high level of strategic effectiveness:

- Quickly formulate a “good enough” strategic plan.
- Move immediately to implementation – letting implementation teach them the ways that the strategy is on target and the ways it needs to be improved.
- Review progress with implementation regularly with honesty and candor.
- Make needed adjustments based on what is working, what isn’t, and how the world has changed.
- Focus on results, not activities.

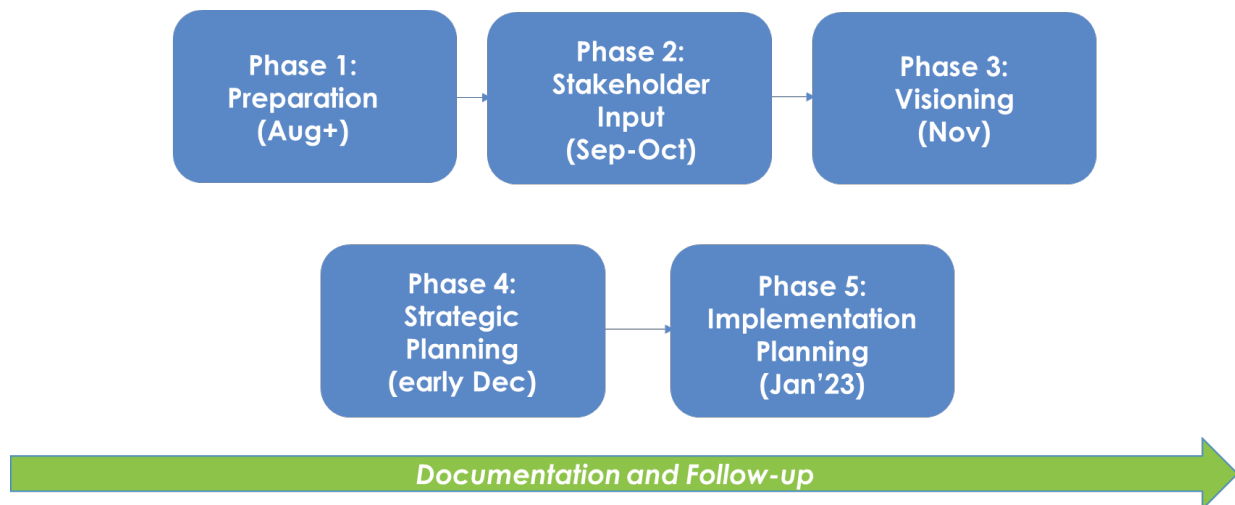
Value of a Strategic Plan

A successful strategy:

- Advances the organization's "North Star" – its mission and vision
- Provides clarity and focus on what's most important to do
 - Rational basis for making decisions
 - "Yes," "no," and "not yet"
- Aligns goals and behaviors – organizationally and individually
- Guides resource allocation
- Allows for flexibility, scenario planning, and adaptation – critical during and post-pandemic

Phases of the Strategic Visioning Process

There are five stages of Washington College's strategic visioning process, as outlined below.



With the completion of this document, the College has completed Phases 1, 2, and 3 of the process. The strategic planning session with the Steering Committee will be held on campus on December 13th – 14th. Laurie Schulte will facilitate this session. The written outputs from the visioning process will be made available to faculty and staff on a new strategic planning website.

VISION FOR THE COLLEGE IN 10 YEARS

At each of the three visioning sessions, participants met in small groups to discuss their vision for the College in 10 years. They considered the following questions:

- What are your aspirations for the College? What could Washington College be 10 years from now?
- What must be done so that your vision for the College can be realized?

Because time allowed for it, the Steering Committee responded to one additional question: What elements of the College's identity must be protected in the next strategic plan?

A summary of the small group reports follows.

Faculty/Staff

WHAT ARE YOUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE COLLEGE? WHAT COULD WASHINGTON COLLEGE BE 10 YEARS FROM NOW?

Group 1

- We have built a strong Brand and communicate who we are, e.g.:
 - Washington College is a national leader in environmental sustainability education. It is located on the Chester River in historic Chestertown, Maryland. Washington is a think tank on the Eastern shore offering multiple programs and platforms to undergraduates, graduates, and adult learners.
 - Washington College build connections with students through their experiences on campus and in community and with alumni as College ambassadors.
- We provide more student programming outside of athletics.
- We have an undergraduate enrollment of 1,500-2,000 students.
- We have consistent leadership ("be less bad").
- We have built a culture of frictionless collaboration.
- We have reconnected, rebuilt our sense of community.
 - Among faculty, staff, students
 - Goose Nation, Shoremen/Shorewomen
 - Alumni
 - Tell our story: which of our identities are we?

Group 2

- Recognized college outside of Maryland
- More students, more faculty
- Better satisfaction across campus among students, staff, faculty
- Retaining faculty and staff
 - Turnover causes many issues.
 - We need more joy.
- Alumni engagement and expanded network
- More energized community
- Stronger, unique identity; stronger brand
- Common hour for the whole community
- More global: study abroad and international students
- Celebration of community day
- Reaching Washington, D.C., students
- Students need to love this place again. Find students who want to be here (small, rural, shore, etc. are appealing); don't talk students into being here.
- Improved Cain gym to recruit more athletes
- Offering masters programs to help recruit assistant coaches
- Improved facilities across campus
- Greater interdisciplinary focus makes us more unique.
- More majors/programs that are specific (sports management, forensics, etc.); easily double major
- More informal systems

Group 3

- High morale/strong community
 - Happy
 - Thriving
 - Healthy
 - Diverse
- Common purpose
- Right-sized and proud of our identity
- Robust experiential learning opportunities and personal connections for everyone

Group 4

- Grow the student population.
- Create a workplace where it is attractive to stay. Improve:
 - Retention
 - Recruitment
 - Diversity
- Define what makes us unique.
- Have realistic expectations for our workforce (lost a ton of staff, people doing multiple jobs, ratio of staff to students).
- Leverage Chestertown and build a better relationship with the town.
- Bring technology up to par to meet needs – while still valuing unhurried conversations.
- Much better accessibility, ADA-compliant
- More mental health resources for all; a culture that supports mental health
- Defining College land/space
- Value interpersonal relationships; recognize their value to the institution.

Group 5

Summary: Compensation, Communication, Community

- Maintain and grow academic excellence.
- Develop strategies to attract high-performing students.
 - True assessment
 - GPAs are inflated.
- Marketing for the College
 - Beyond simply liberal arts
 - How do we differentiate ourselves?
 - Stronger faculty involvement in enrollment; communicating with prospective students
 - Promote Centers of Excellence!
- Bring ourselves up to baseline.
 - Compensation
 - Communication
 - Interdepartmental
 - Website
 - Systems/CRM
 - Wifi

- Residence halls
- Highly qualified team
- Wellness facilities and programs

Other Notes

- "To the moon" thinking
- Exemplar of liberal arts technology; cutting edge digital systems that are seamless and integrated
- Recognized and sought after nationally, globally
- Diversity
 - At minimum, representative of the U.S.
 - International influence
- Community – more influence and involvement
 - Civic engagement
 - Positive influence on the economy
 - Highlight our locale; experience, value, and celebrate the rural Eastern shore
- Hire and retain committed, high-level employees.
 - Qualified
 - Competitive wages and benefits
- Student leadership
 - Transformed and integrated
 - Visibly effective and empowered
- Majors
 - Science and technology
 - Graduate programs (good for staff growth and retention)
- Parent and family engagement and education; build confidence for students and parents
- Enrollment
 - Define "right size."
 - Build programs to meet that.
 - Increase prestige and selectivity.

Group 6

- Best liberal arts; own our greatness
 - Positive experiences
 - More student/faculty interaction
 - Small class sizes
 - High-quality faculty in the right numbers
 - Everyone participates.
 - Post-graduate success
 - Jobs
 - Graduate school
- Student care/support
- Embedded experiential learning experiences for every student
- SCEs are a highlight where the light could be brighter.

- What makes us great?
 - Location/town
 - Unique program opportunities
- What should make us great?
 - Student-faculty relationships
 - Illuminating the student experience
- Stability
 - What does this mean for this generation of staff?
 - Allows for career advancement vs. escape (retention)
 - Creates better opportunities for transitions
- All faculty and staff are ambassadors (which makes it easy to share available opportunities).
- Senior staff are engaged with students, and tell the stories of that engagement.
- Alumni engagement
 - Visible
 - Sharing the things that are happening
 - This shows that the Washington College degree has value in the world.

Group 7

- Sustainable
 - Strong enrollment
 - Fiscal responsibility
 - Investing in academic excellence where it counts
 - Consistent COLA and retirement match
 - Right numbers of faculty and staff
 - Career growth
 - Improved morale
 - A strong foundation from which to build and launch all efforts
- “Civic impact,” “social impact lab”
 - Activist and solution focused
 - Interdisciplinary: how to use existing passion/interest to change the world
- Grown endowment to offset enrollment challenges
- Competitive compensation and employment quality to support retention of talented staff/faculty
- Organizational clarity, quality of life and experience for all
- Innovative, contemporary liberal arts; framework/thinking/visioning
- What's the niche? Required minor/major tied to purpose
- Increased alumni engagement, giving
- Alternative revenue streams
- Recognized/known/seen/understood as the finest small college in Maryland
- “Passion and purpose” – calling, career, vocation, meaningful contributors to community, empowered to act
 - Students who know and love liberal arts and see the connections to their future career and civic life
 - Students engaged in “purpose” since Day 1
 - Training students to be citizens

- Embracing the history of the College (“not just good old George”)
- Empowering students to pursue passion, change student thinking to see multiple paths to service and work
- We’re better at robust conversations about and engaged in current issues.

WHAT MUST BE DONE SO THAT YOUR VISION FOR THE COLLEGE CAN BE REALIZED?

Group 1

- Additional revenue streams
 - Online learning
 - Adult learning
 - Undergraduate
 - Graduate
 - Certification programs
 - Masters programs
 - Pipeline for the underserved?
- Strong branding
 - St. Mary's comparison
 - Waterfront college, only college on the shore – leverage our location as a positive
 - Historic town
 - First college in the country
 - Message it!
- Spirit of philanthropy
 - Set the tone for giving as alumni when students arrive on campus.
 - Bring back the Magazine.
 - Build giving levels.
 - Overcome the disconnect when graduates leave.
 - Support them forever being connected to the College.
 - Meet alumni where they are – the College joins their thing, vs. holding manufactured events.
- Attract students who are comfortable here. Follow through on student onboarding over time.
- Ideas to focus messaging on:
 - Sophie Kerr
 - Strong writing college
 - One of the best environmental colleges in the country
 - Sustainability certification

Group 2

- More funding
- Campus improvements
- Identity/recognized brand

Group 3

- Internal communication/collaboration
- Consistent leadership
- Defining our identity; new branding/marketing
- Better/fair compensation for faculty and staff
- Fostering a community of inclusion
- Strong wellness resources and programs

Group 4

- Move past the survival mindset.
- Create space and workflows to build capacity for collaboration, creativity, risk taking.
- Lessen/eliminate barriers to interdisciplinary efforts.
 - Scarcity
 - Fear of the new
 - Bandwidth
 - Lack of stability
 - Competition (sole or shared authorship)
- Balance the value of institutional knowledge (long-time employees) and advancing new initiatives.
- Provide workforce, leadership development.
- Standing meetings/committee with the College and the town
- Local version of day trippers, presence at farmers' market, First Friday
- Encourage students in the town with an eye on safety.
- Use mechanisms to connect across departments (internal newsletter, intranet, RAFC).

Group 5

- Academics
 - Environmental education integrated throughout majors; outdoor education?
 - Strategic in offerings to meet student needs
 - Experiential opportunities
 - Science of agriculture
 - Environment
 - Business
 - Community
 - Student Affairs and academics – interdepartmental communication
- Facilities
 - Residence halls
 - Improve
 - Show off
 - Apartments
 - Keep historic appeal and modernize amenities
 - Housing for staff, visitors, commuters, short-term housing
 - On-campus bar
 - Brewery

- Social/community
 - Student-led conflict resolution
 - Restorative practice
 - Mediation

Group 6

- What are the gaps to grow enrollment?
 - Second-generation students
 - Certificates/credentials
 - Academics
 - Do we go back to graduate programs? Why did they go away?
 - More in-house 3:2
- Less siloed/competitive in Centers
- Faculty advisors as career advisors for student support
- Life coach/career advisor/class advisor
- Accessibility to campus buildings from off-campus (shuttles)
- Message board using technology for alumni
- Support to new alumni in their first jobs

Group 7

- Regular reviews of issues related to sustainability
- Realistic and ongoing appraisals of real student needs
- Define right-sized enrollment.
- How to grow endowment for everyday things?
 - Not just the “bright and shiny”
 - Fully fund the new things before you build them.
- Know who our student body is and what they need to succeed.
- Student service on community Boards
- Fundraising is keyed to scholarship, Chairs; sustainable funding, not initiative funding.
- Common space, common time, common hour/two hours
- Four-day work week (Wednesday!)
- Eliminate reduplicating of efforts.
- Start in our own backyard.
 - Local students
 - Pied Piper faculty
- SWOT analysis re: dual enrollment

The following are highlights of the discussion at the two faculty and staff visioning sessions.

- There is not a call for radical change at the College.
 - We need to do what we do, well. This means fixing what's broken.
 - We need to figure out what we do (or can do) better than others and distinguish ourselves with those things.
 - Consistent, capable leadership is a critical element in any plans for a resurgence.

- Obviously, our declining enrollment is a major issue.
 - Do we know what “right sized” means?
 - We must have adequate numbers of faculty and staff to deliver on our value and to improve morale. Turnover is so disruptive.
- The idea of a shared vision based on commonalities across our different groups could be exciting.
 - What do we want to be? Is our shared vision the environment, civic engagement/impact, writing? We need to build a common identity we can be ambassadors for.
 - “Branding” ourselves and better telling our story to the right audiences are so important.
- A number of years ago, our joy, our sense of community and identity, our support for one another energized us; student happiness and faculty/staff job satisfaction were high. We have lost these things.
 - Some express a sense of hope that things can improve.
 - Others remain angry and hurt.
 - We must be a place of opportunity for all students.
 - It's also essential that faculty and staff feel valued and that they are treated fairly. Low compensation in general and the “scarcity mindset” of the past several years have left scars.
 - Our relationships were the roots that held us together. We must invest in these non-quantifiable success factors.
- When we are at our best, students can have a transformative experience at Washington College.
 - Each student can be all that they can and want to be.
 - Our small size is essential to this experience; we can't compromise on who we are in order to grow.
 - We need our community – students, faculty, and staff – to be strong and for all to have fulfilled lives. This will mean breaking down siloes and building back trust and harmony within and across departments and disciplines.
- Many vision session participants didn't know some of their participant colleagues.
 - New hires and COVID are a part of this – but the need to “hunker down” and protect our own turfs in these challenging economic and social times has further divided us.
 - We should consider dedicating time (common hour, special days) for all of us to come together and think about how to apply our teaching and learning to make a difference in the world.
 - We would also benefit from less “structured” engagement; we don't run into each other organically much anymore.
- We don't treat recent graduates who come to work for the College well. Their starting compensation is too low. This can give the impression that we are not valuing our own degree.
 - We must do better in investing in our human capital, across the board.
 - We also need to better engage our alumni in the work of the College (beyond financial giving).
 - If we don't have our family, who are we?

- Many feel we should talk about our location as an asset.
 - We are in a place where you really can make a difference.
 - We shouldn't try to talk potential students who prefer urban areas into coming here; they'll just be dissatisfied. We should find those more likely to thrive in our environment and recruit them.
- There's a need for investment in health and wellness supports for students, faculty, and staff. This piece of the overall Washington College experience has grown in importance due to COVID, but was an issue before the pandemic.
- While an assumption could be made that the relatively low participation of faculty relative to staff and Centers at these sessions is due to a lack of interest, many faculty who would have liked to participate had classes to teach.
- Ultimately, we want to prepare our students for lives of purpose and passion. Our curriculum/requirements (e.g., how we think about majors and minors), experiential learning, and Centers can tie together around this powerful notion.

Steering Committee

WHAT ARE YOUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE COLLEGE? WHAT COULD WASHINGTON COLLEGE BE 10 YEARS FROM NOW?

Group 1

- 400 entering freshmen, selectively admitted
- Financial sustainability

Group 2

- Washington College is Maryland's best liberal arts college and widely recognized as such.
 - Top 25 liberal arts colleges
 - Student selectivity increased
- Washington College is a brand recognized across the nation, as:
 - Best writing college
 - Best environmental science college
- Centers are fully integrated into the academic experience.
- RAFC is accessible for students and the community.
- Washington College is a respected generator of research.
- 100% experiential learning opportunities for students
- Faculty and staff are compensated at industry standards.
- Learning that extends beyond four years
 - Graduation/certification programs
 - Dual enrollment
 - Fully activated campus in the summer
- Reached Green Campus status
 - Carbon neutral
 - Storm water
- Valued partner for Maryland businesses
 - Deliberate relationship
 - Shared vision with the town

- STEM vs. liberal arts: engineering, physics
- State-of-the-art fitness/athletic facility
- Shared language across campus

Group 3

- Recognized as a top 50 liberal arts college
- Stabilized enrollment (1200-1500) and retention (90%+)
- Affordable for any ambitious student
- College of choice with robust endowed scholarships
- A reflection of the diversity of the country in all its forms
- A model of sustainability
- A peer cohort that is made of top liberal arts colleges
- Nationally recognized for an innovative approach to liberal arts
- Alternative revenue streams in line with our mission and values that benefit the College
- Healthy, vibrant alumni network to benefit students and alumni
- Purposefully contributing in tangible ways to preserve democracy
- A more collaborative and supportive community
- Integrated with the Chestertown community civically, programmatically, and physically
- A physical campus that reflects the other aspirations

Group 4

- More student diversity
- Financial stability – excellence
- Additional programs/majors
- Protect the liberal arts.
- “Unhide” ourselves (“hidden gem”).
- Better integrate the College and the town.
- High school dual enrollment growth
- Alumni engagement
- Better integrated student body
- Academic and social events with good attendance
- Break down silos.
- Better/more appealing campus housing
- More/better support staff

WHAT MUST BE DONE SO THAT YOUR VISION FOR THE COLLEGE CAN BE REALIZED?

Group 1

- We tell our story better to more targeted audiences.
 - The rate of success of our graduates is the key message.
 - Others are support.

Group 2

- Raise the academic profile.
- Strengthen our brand.
- Know and articulate our value proposition.
- Increase the value proposition.
- Improve the student experience; curate a rich intellectual life.
- Break down silos so all are working towards a common vision.
- Commit and do not deviate from small student/faculty ratio.

Group 3

- Fundraising
- Engaging alumni
- Growth of athletics and academics
- Be more intentional and less siloed as an institution.
- Articulate a brand story.
- Cultivate and burnish our academic reputation.
- Improve institutional support for student clubs and organizations (e.g., active advisors).

Group 4

- Fundraising – more money
- Marketing – reach out more locally (Delmarva)
- Reach out around agriculture.
- Student recruitment
- Improved web presence
- Make the case for liberal arts.
- Promote town/gown relations.
 - Scooters
 - Transportation

WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE COLLEGE'S IDENTITY MUST BE PROTECTED IN THE NEXT STRATEGIC PLAN?

Group 1

- The environment, defined broadly
 - Our program is one of the best.
 - We have relationships with other institutions.

Group 2

- Student/faculty ratio
- Writing college
- Environmental programming
- Teaching first
- Embrace history.
- Nurture leadership.
- Amplify alumni success.

Group 3

- Student engagement in campus activities
- The look and feel of the campus environment
- The way the community values relationships with students and each other
- The way we embody the teacher/scholar ideal
- Never settle, don't accept mediocrity.
- Continue to recognize and grapple with the history of the College.

Group 4

- Liberal arts
- Intimacy
- Opportunity to combine a lot of majors and minors
- Value proposition
- History
- Water/environment
- Sports: student-athletes

Highlights of the Steering Committee discussion were similar to that of faculty and staff, albeit with more hopefulness.

- We're not looking for revolutionary change; we want to strengthen the College to be (appropriately) bigger and better.
- We need to brag about ourselves more, e.g., we have the best teachers/professors.
- Small class sizes are crucial, although not differentiating.
 - What opportunities exist to do more innovative things?
 - We should be open to taking calculated risks, to act and not just talk.
 - We want everyone in our community to lead fulfilled lives.