A strategic plan is a story – one told by many authors, and for many audiences. Taken as a whole, the Clark College 2015-2020 Strategic Plan tells the story of who the college is, whom we serve, and how we plan to improve and expand that service in the future.

The plan is also a bridge. It spans the distance between employees’ duties and departments, uniting us in a common conversation about how we all contribute to student learning. As well, the plan connects us to the students and to the communities we serve. It allows the college to allocate resources surrounding the plan's development. Because the strategic plan ultimately touches so many, it’s vital that those voices were heard in the discussions that guide Clark’s development have real, lasting impacts on Clark’s “stakeholders”? This term is rarely defined in detail. In truth, however, the decisions that guide Clark’s development have real, lasting impacts on individuals’ lives. Because the strategic plan ultimately touches so many, it’s vital that those voices were heard in the discussions surrounding the plan’s development.

Specifically, the development process reached out to students, faculty, administrators, board of trustees, employees, local school districts, local business, transfer universities, as well as economic and workforce organizations. Over the period of the plan’s development, these groups worked collectively and individually. They brainstormed. They envisioned. They critiqued. They questioned. Quite simply: they dreamt. They dreamt of an institution that can overcome its challenges, change students’ lives, and serve as a leader for the future good of its community. And while those dreams were wide-ranging and diverse, a common thread ran through them all: a commitment to inspiring, supporting, and enhancing student learning. This focus informed much of the developmental conversations as the plan took shape, and it continues to inform the direction of the college’s future.

Because the development of the Clark College 2015-2020 Strategic Plan was driven by stakeholder feedback, a comprehensive approach to collecting and reporting this input was necessary. The first step in the process began in February of 2013. Under the theme of “Vision 2020,” the college was asked to consider what Clark College would look like in the year 2020. Its role in the community, its values, its instructional programs, its student services, and its budget priorities.

This feedback was collected by the Office of Planning and Effectiveness and relayed to the Planning and Accreditation Committee. In March of 2013, the members of that committee identified commonalities in the collected responses. These themes would help structure future discussions and, eventually, give more concrete shape to the many visions being shared.

From this exercise, in fact, one broad theme emerged, cutting across responses of all types: a focus on student learning. It became clear that the work done by all the college’s employees was directed – directly or indirectly – toward the achievement of student learning. Similarly, members of the greater college community – regardless of their particular industry’s priorities – shared an investment in that same student learning.

With this in mind, the strategic plan developed with student learning at the center of its future discussions. This thematic focus was introduced at the Opening Day Activities in September 2013. Student learning was formally defined as “the knowledge, skills, and connections gained at Clark College.” Small, interdepartmental groups were convened and tasked with providing their input on four key aspects of student learning: access, environment, engagement, and commitment.

Method

The 2015-2020 Strategic Plan has been more than two years in the making. The considerable scope of Clark’s services and its impact on the community account in some ways for the extended timeline of this undertaking. A more accurate explanation for the lengthy process, however, can be summarized in a single word: inclusivity.

In this case, inclusivity more precisely means that all of the college’s stakeholders contribute their input in the development of the strategic plan. So, who are Clark’s “stakeholders”? This term is rarely defined in detail. In truth, however, the decisions that guide Clark’s development have real, lasting impacts on individuals’ lives. Because the strategic plan ultimately touches so many, it’s vital that those voices were heard in the discussions surrounding the plan’s development.

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Throughout fall 2013 term and into the winter 2014 term, these groups met to discuss readings about each of the four key aspects of student learning. They were asked for their feedback on how Clark College currently provides for each element of student learning, and how the college might better do so in the future. These responses were recorded and – much like the Vision2020 exercise – this feedback was collected and themes were identified.

By February 2014, the feedback from these conversations had been collected, and the strategic plan entered a more empirical phase of development. A dedicated group – Taskforce 1 – had been appointed in July 2013 to provide continuous updates on the plan’s progress to the wider college community. Now, Taskforce 2 joined the effort. An interdepartmental team of more than 40 college representatives collectively considered the themes that had emerged from the college-wide discussions on student learning and then researched related internal and external data.

Together with input from Clark’s College Council, this research was organized within a framework of sustainability. More specifically, Taskforce 2 conducted research in three broad areas of sustainability: social equity, economic vitality, and environmental integrity. Research was conducted pertaining to students as well as local and national data, drawing on recognized best practices to promote student learning and increase educational attainment. The results of this research were published in the 115-page Clark College Environmental Scan.
The environmental scan, published in June 2014, details both the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead for the college. Taken as a whole, these challenges paint a comprehensive picture of the state of the college and the broader educational landscape.

Following the three-pronged framework of the scan’s sustainability framework, the research first delves into social equity. As an open-access institution, Clark College plays a vital role in sustaining and advancing social equity for its students. Related specifically to those students’ learning, Taskforce 2 found that student success and completion rates have been low for students who entered the college below college-level in at least one area of study, and at varying levels of technological proficiency. In addition, Clark College’s students are largely low-income and more diverse than the college’s faculty, staff, and the greater community. Only about 25% of students actually attain educational completion. Finally, students of less privileged backgrounds express more dissatisfaction with the college climate.

With its research into the regional economics of student learning, the environmental scan details that local counties (Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat) have lower rates of educational completion. In terms of the college’s environment, in addition to redesigning places to gather, and dedicated tutoring spaces would further be associated with fewer loan delinquencies for students. Finally, the $ALT financial literacy program has been found to highlight the ongoing support of the college’s Foundation.

In addition, business partnerships and internships have proven vital in the creation of relevant programs and providing valuable opportunities for experiential learning. Local employers have expressed a desire for hard skills in the areas of health care, technology, transportation, and manufacturing, among others. As well, they seek soft skills in such areas as critical thinking, communication, and diversity of thought and experience. Economic research additionally revealed the direct relationship of state funding to both enrollment and attainment and highlighted the ongoing support of the college’s Foundation. Finally, the SALT financial literacy program has been found to be associated with fewer loan delinquencies for students.

The environmental scan’s third area of concern focused on Clark College’s environment. It found that efforts to promote environmental sustainability at the college lacked coherent organization. It also found that the college’s infrastructure is aging significantly, with one of the smallest allotments in the state of square footage for its students. Resources, facilities, technology, and shared governance earned the lowest marks among Clark College employees’ perception of climate.

Among these findings, however, the environmental scan also records vital information on researched best practices that have helped to address similar challenges faced by other colleges nationwide. Local research also reveals promising data. In short, the difficulties that face the college are not without remedy. A variety of findings are put forth that can help to alleviate these pressing problems.

For example, hybrid and competency-based offerings, as well as credit for prior learning, have been shown to improve student success and completion rates, as has student enrollment in both math and English classes during their first quarter. A student’s first quarter, in fact, was found to be a crucial period that often determines that student’s future success. More generally, structured pathways with clear learning outcomes produce greater student completion rates and lead more directly to employment. Students who participate in mandatory wrap-around support services were found to be more successful in educational attainment than their counterparts. Research also shows that students of historically disadvantaged communities should be particularly supported to overcome the risk of academic under-preparedness.

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The plan asserts six values - ideals that will guide Clark’s pursuit of its mission, vision, and core theme objectives. These values are: social justice, partnerships, innovation, sustainability, continuous improvement, and shared governance.
VALUES

• Social Justice – Institutional commitment to produce equitable outcomes and challenge systems of power, privilege, and inequality.
• Partnerships – Collaboration with individuals, organizations, and businesses to increase student success and improve the community.
• Innovation – Development and implementation of creative and agile strategies to enhance student learning and respond to market needs.
• Sustainability – Effective and efficient stewardship of all college resources.
• Continuous Improvement – Evaluation and enhancement of all college operations based on data-informed planning and resource allocation.
• Shared Governance – Clear communication, inclusive consultation, and respectful consideration of multiple perspectives guide decision-making throughout the college.

CORE THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

Academic Excellence
Facilitate student learning by providing the conditions for intellectual growth through scholarship, discovery, application, creativity, and critical thinking.
• Implement and institutionalize practices that increase academic performance, retention, and completion.
• Create and sustain an inclusive and dynamic curriculum and environment that reflect our diverse college community.
• Integrate active learning strategies within and across courses, disciplines, and programs with a global perspective.
• Create and advance accessible, integrated, and technology-enriched learning environments.
• Engage faculty, administrators, and staff in professional development experiences that enhance student learning.
• Align curriculum with learning outcomes and apply outcomes assessment evidence to continually advance student learning.

Social Equity
Facilitate student learning by providing the conditions that improve educational outcomes and eliminate systemic disparities among groups.
• Create and sustain an accessible and inclusive environment by utilizing principles of universal design and social justice so that all students can achieve equitable outcomes.
• Demonstrate improved intercultural competency among employees and students through comprehensive professional development and curricular transformation.
• Institutionalize hiring and retention practices that challenge systems of power, privilege, and inequity.

Environmental Integrity
Facilitate student learning by providing the conditions that continually improve the college’s physical, virtual, and social environment.
• Incorporate environmental sustainability priorities into all college systems.
• Improve the college’s physical and virtual environment to maximize access and appropriate use of space and technology.
• Integrate principles of mutual respect, collaboration, clear communication, and inclusivity in all interactions.

Economic Vitality
Facilitate student learning by providing programs, services, and conditions that improve the economic well-being of the students, college, and community.
• Improve college affordability for students by expanding access to and information about financial resources, clarifying career and educational goals, providing pathways to success, improving college readiness, increasing financial literacy, and managing costs.
• Align program offerings with regional workforce needs to include technical and work-readiness skills.
• Align, expand, and enrich the relationships with regional industry leaders to increase internships, advisory committee participation, financial support for students’ education and programs, hiring pipelines, grant partnerships, mentorships, and apprenticeships.
• Maximize the college’s return on investment by responsibly allocating available resources.
• Leverage resources to create and sustain future innovations.

VISION 2020

~ VISION ~
Clark College inspires learners to excel, transforms lives, and strengthens our increasingly diverse community.

~ MISSION ~
Clark College, in service to the community, guides individuals to achieve their educational and professional goals.