



College of Liberal Arts

Strategic Planning Preparation

2020-2021 Overview Report

Strategic Planning Process

July 1, 2021



COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



Preparing for an Exceptional Future

College of Liberal Arts Strategic Planning Preparation

2020-2021
Overview Report

July 1, 2021

Dear CLA Faculty and Staff,

As the 21st century develops, land-grant institutions face new challenges for which the liberal arts are essential partners, if not central players: the need for an educated citizenry, addressing social and cultural dimensions of technological change, developing and understanding key resources of the knowledge economy, and meeting a critical need to educate civically engaged and productive citizens.

To meet these challenges, we in the College of Liberal Arts are called to revisit and reimagine the ways in which we work, teach, learn, research, and create. To that end, the College has formed a strategic planning process that includes work from a guiding coalition, cross-department task forces, and the work of individual departments to create a plan that will guide us from 2022 to 2025 in our scholarship, teaching, and workplace habits.

Using skills inherent to the liberal arts – collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking – we can generate insightful and inspiring ideas that will center our work and our contributions in the future of this public, land-grant institution.

What can we do differently? What can we do better? Who and where do we want to be in 1 year, 5 years, 10 years? Answering these questions thoughtfully will allow us to be leaders facing the challenges of higher education in the 21st century – and to place ourselves firmly and positively within the strategic transformation that is happening on campus.

We can play a leading role on campus by reviewing our strengths and opportunities and sharing a vision of where we see ourselves—and the campus—moving in the future. To that end, the Dean, the Guiding Coalition, and the Task Force members ask each department to read and reflect on this report and identify the unique ways that your department or unit can determine and align your departmental goals and action items using these recommendations and guiding questions.





After you read and consider this report:

- Study the University's Courageous Strategic Transformation framework and consider how we can "read ourselves into" its goals and aspirations.
- Discuss the questions for consideration and the recommendations in this report at your department meetings.
- Identify your unit's strengths and areas where things can be better; develop your unit goals and action items.
- Create working groups or task forces of your own to discuss these topics in the context of your own department and identify your area's specific needs and goals in relation to the College and the University.

We ask the department chairs will bring the department/unit's ideas forward to the Dean's Office. At the College level, we will identify areas where departments see the potential for collaboration, synthesize themes and ideas, and incorporate them into the College's strategic plan.

The world needs the liberal arts, the skills and knowledge that derive from human beings and their societies and cultures, more than ever before. Now is the time to help others see and understand our potential.

Thank you,

Benjamin C. Withers

Dean, College of Liberal Arts



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Executive Summary

The Dean's overall strategic challenge to the three task forces and Guiding Coalition:

Can we imagine an "ecosystem" of scholarship and learning that allows us to develop complementary relationships between degrees/programs, progressive teaching and working modalities, team approaches to scholarship and administration, and a new vision of how the distinctive aspects of CLA and CSU fit into a changing higher education landscape?

This strategic challenge was undertaken by our College while members of the campus were formulating the Courageous Strategic Transformation (CST) framework for the University. Our work in the College of Liberal Arts aligns with, supports, and will integrate the CST framework.

[Members of each task force](#) were chosen carefully and deliberately to reflect the diversity of jobs, experiences, and backgrounds held by faculty and staff. Some members have been long-standing leaders in their departments and units; others are relative newcomers, yet already demonstrating thoughtful and caring leadership. In bringing them together, we sought their advice about the college and their thoughts about key issues facing higher education today. Their common purpose was to process this information for us and to suggest opportunities and challenges as we pick our path going forward. As you will read in the task force reports, our faith in their leadership has been well rewarded.

Conversations about and considerations of issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice were at the forefront of each task force.

Task Force 1: Discovery with Impact

The initial framing questions identified by Task Force #1, which focused the arc of the discussions that followed, were:

"What does it mean to be a student in a college of liberal arts in the 21st century at a land-grant university, and how should the values of both liberal arts and land-grant institutions inform what we do as instructors, scholars, and staff as we reimagine our programs and practices?"

The guiding practices of Task Force #1 place the student experience at the fore: How can we best prepare our students to better the world that awaits them? Thus, our task force is informed by the need to raise the visibility of the vital work being done in the College of Liberal Arts, on campus and beyond, and by our mission to serve the public good.

Topics discussed:

- Developing students' critical thinking as well as their cultural, visual, and informational literacy skills.
- Engaging a wide range of diverse perspectives and communities as we strive to be an inclusive community and multicultural organization.
- Promoting engaged scholarship and engaged teaching opportunities for faculty and students.





- Developing collaborative cultures throughout the college, in our classes and our scholarship, and building community partnerships.
- Enhancing the visibility of the College across the University and beyond.

Task Force 2: The Future of Learning and Working

During a most challenging year, faculty, students, and staff were required to pivot into blended modes of teaching, learning, and working. While there are many pre-pandemic practices to which we are eager to return, this taskforce explored and reflected on the innovative practices born out of this moment, viewing them as a catalyst for the future vision of the college. We have grounded our discussions through these guiding questions: “What have we learned?” and “How does this learning inform who we want to be as a college?”

We have learned of the exacerbated inequities in our community and the imperative that our shared sense of equity and access needs to be at the core of all our work and goals. We have approached our questions with an understanding that while technology is integral and informative, it should not be directive. It is our hope that the work of the task force will help provide a framework for the department/unit strategic planning process.

Topics discussed:

- The future of working in CLA, with an emphasis on staff and re-envisioning work environments in a way that centers trust, productivity, and autonomy.
- The future of engaging internally, with a focus on what meetings and department/college events might look like in the future and a discussion of best practices and lessons learned.
- The future of engaging external audiences, including prospective employees and students, alumni and donors, and larger-scale events, speakers, exhibits, and performances.
- The future of teaching, with a focus on defining technologically sophisticated, excellent, supported teaching that is attuned to inclusive pedagogical practices and CSU students of the future. By exploring the role of blended learning, we also attended to curriculum design and collaborative practices in multi-section courses and across the college.

Task Force 3: Structuring Change

Task Force 3 focused on ensuring that CLA has the right structures in place to achieve the goals of the whole college. Recognizing that culture and values are embedded in the structures we have built in the college, structures (in the form of staff organization, policies, procedures, practices, and resource allocation) also help us make the most of finite resources to prioritize and realize those values.

To begin, we focused on identifying known structural issues that would benefit from ongoing and/or immediate visioning and re-visioning. We explored employee growth and impact, including professional development, evaluation, hiring, promotion, and various administrative structures and supports that would allow the College to adapt to changing circumstances, reflect our digital-first world, and ensure equity and inclusion in all our efforts. Task Force 3 recognizes that this work will be ongoing, implementing recommended changes, further





exploring complex topics, and identifying the structural changes needed to implement recommendations from this process.

Topics discussed:

- Structures for
 - organizing work for CLA around HR, finance, communications, and recruiting activities.
 - enabling equitable and streamlined faculty evaluation and assessment.
 - supporting rich and varied professional pathway development.
 - supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and access.





Themes and Recommendations

Based on the reading of the task force reports, the Dean has identified five themes that could inform College and department strategic planning.

Interweave Equity and Access With All We Do

We must **make visible, acknowledge, and continue to support the extraordinary quantity and quality of scholarly work, teaching and service** related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) produced in CLA. We should **intentionally weave this work into each area** of our strategic plan in order **to improve the climate for all our community, especially under-represented faculty, staff, and students**. The College should focus energy on further communicating, coordinating, and translating the work of individual faculty and staff, and of departments to share with broader audiences for a more profound impact.

Innovate for Impact and Leadership

The present national conversation and the campus strategic planning process present unparalleled opportunities for CLA. We can **lead the University by supporting excellence of individuals and their research within disciplines and by advancing collaborative, interdisciplinary/engaged scholarship** on novel and complex problems, designing innovative graduate and undergraduate academic programs and curricula that complement traditional disciplines, and providing enhanced opportunities for in-demand credentials and professional advancement of our students. Our traditional strengths as scholars and teachers allow us to **advance student success and lead in the development and use of blended models of teaching**, linking learning to data-informed methods of improving access, equity, and student success. CLA can develop programs to **support CSU in being the university of choice for Colorado students**, with an emphasis on becoming a designated Hispanic-serving institution.

Align Aspirations and Practices

We must make sure our practices—evaluations and codes—reflect our values, goals, and aspirations. This includes creating or revising governing documents to **acknowledge collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and work that fosters inclusivity**. We should **change how we evaluate faculty and staff achievements**, moving away from traditional descriptive, backward-looking summaries in favor of focusing on future-oriented and goal-directed evaluations that align individual and institutional initiatives. We must **streamline processes for evaluation and promotion** so that we can reduce the burden on faculty and staff.

Structure Administrative Support to Match Mission

How we organize and administrate should reflect and foster the kinds of impactful research, teaching, and engagement we value. We will **examine traditional administrative structures** supporting HR, communications, and finance, refining hub structures to understand strengths and weaknesses, outlining possible models/structures that support job equity, quality, and





return-on-investment, **to better support all academic units and the entire college**. We will ask the question of whether current structures assist or impede this kind of collaboration and interdisciplinary teaching and research. Doing so will allow us to support the campus strategic plan while **enabling the kinds of teaching and research that best serve our students and our communities**.

Expand Pathways for Professional Growth

As we create better, more forward-looking evaluations, we can **build a culture of professional development and peer-mentoring practices that promote growth and change**. We will need to create flexibility for faculty and staff to take full advantage of professional development opportunities toward longer and more satisfying career paths in CLA and at CSU. We should invest in leadership development processes that support the cultivation, identification, and transition of department chairs and other academic leaders.





Recommended Action Items at the College Level

These recommendations from the task forces identify areas and items to fix, to build on, or to extend at the College level. We ask that our departments review and consider these recommendations for their own areas as well.

Interweave Equity and Access

- Update and share a list of all college activities, workshops, and training related to DEIJ (last compiled before the pandemic).
- Devise steps to significantly improve DEIJ capacity and/or outcomes in conjunction with the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, in part through careful analysis of the current Diversity Coordinator position and the resources and structural mechanisms in the College to support that role.
- Support organic, grassroots equity efforts in the College, supporting DEIJ efforts that derive from our faculty and staff expertise. Recognize this work through evaluation and promotion processes.

Innovate for Impact and Leadership

- Form a standing committee composed of CLA center directors, engaged scholars, and other faculty engaged in interdisciplinary research to advise the College on initiatives related to the promotion of interdisciplinary and engaged scholarship; or consider developing a center for interdisciplinarity (see the whitepapers by CLAIR and the Center for Engaged Humanities linked in References and Resources)
- Host College-wide symposia and spin-off social/networking opportunities that align and amplify college strategic priority areas and that promote and enhance collaboration.
- Hold more College-wide colloquia to promote engaged research and develop a shared language surrounding engagement practices.
- Create a task force/working group for best practices teaching online/hybrid/hyflex using existing research/data on these teaching modalities.
- Invest at the College level in a curriculum designer with specific expertise in blended and online learning in the liberal arts to set consistent expectations across courses, provide ongoing training as technology evolves, and offer professional development opportunities.
- Collect, consolidate, and share best practices from departments, particularly on topics concerning engaging external audiences like student and employee recruiting, donor and alumni relations, and community and client connections.

Align Aspirations and Practices

- Continue to align job descriptions, offer letters, and onboarding materials with institutional goals, principles, and practices.
- Examine and assess the frequently hidden and disproportionately burdened work of fostering inclusive climates for underrepresented, minoritized faculty, staff, and students by faculty and staff who hold similar identities.
- Develop assessments and benchmarks to hold units accountable for their progress in meeting priorities and to offer meaningful intervention when momentum has stalled.





Structure Administrative Support to Match Mission

- Develop plans to refine hub structures where they have already been implemented and determine timelines and organizational models for full implementation across the College.
- Create structures and practices that reward aspirations and values (e.g., Indiana University-Purdue University recently approved new promotion and tenure options based on diversity, equity and inclusion work).
- Strive for equity in course loads across units.
- Identify administrative obstacles for interdisciplinary research and teaching.
- Evaluate the CLA IT support structure and capacity given the new technology environment (especially with changing technology in conference rooms and classrooms). Evaluate the need for a core technology trainer to support staff and faculty; need more expertise for a Canvas support team; and need for standardized technology and support for blended classroom learning.
- After Spring 2022, conduct a college-wide assessment of blended working to identify any challenges or concerns and invite creative suggestions for improvement.
- Form a taskforce to audit our lessons-learned for engaging internally and externally to create best-practices guidelines around multi-modal events, meetings, donor relations, clients, and employee and student (undergraduate & graduate) recruitment.

Expand Pathways for Professional Growth

- Continue to build College-wide mechanisms for professional development (Strengths-Finder, etc.) and peer-mentoring practices.
- Create flexibility for staff to take full advantage of professional development opportunities toward longer and more satisfying career paths in CLA and at CSU.
- Invest in leadership development processes that support the cultivation, identification, and transition of department chairs and other academic leaders.

See **References and Resources** for link to department-level questions to consider and recommendations.





What's Next

To move our strategic planning process forward, we plan for the following:

- **August – November 2021**
Departments and academic units to discuss the questions, recommendations, and other reports in department meetings from August to November.
- **September 2021**
The College will host a college-wide town hall in September to discuss this report and answer questions.
- **Mid November 2021**
Departments and academic units will submit their action items. At that time, a dean's office committee will review, synthesize, and connect themes and actions for inclusion in the College strategic plan.
- **December 2021**
Items to be added to the College strategic plan will be selected. Simultaneously, the committee will identify the ways in which our College efforts integrate into and with the campus Courageous Strategic Transformation framework.
- **January – March 2022**
College strategic plan developed and shared.
- **May 2022**
College strategic plan finalized.





References and Resources

To read more about the process and see a timeline of work and outputs, visit

<https://www.libarts.colostate.edu/strategic-plan-2021/>

Recommendations and Reports

Department Level Recommendations

Full Report of the three task forces

White Papers

Revisiting Service in Departments

Envisioning Interdisciplinarity in Liberal Arts

The Center for Engaged Humanities at CSU

Additional Information

[Task Force and Guiding Coalition membership](#)

[Interim report from the task forces](#)

