I. Introduction

This report recommends a process for strategic direction setting and planning to begin in October 2010 and conclude in December 2011.

There are many reasons why it is imperative to undertake strategic direction setting and planning. During the 2007-2008 academic year, the College launched a long-range planning process (Swarthmore 2020). The initial 2020 working groups discussed incremental additions to faculty, staff, programs and facilities that would make the College even better, but the process was interrupted—by Al Bloom announcing his retirement and then the onset of the financial crisis—before the necessary stage of setting relative priorities. The Great Recession then made us all inescapably aware that any planning process must now consider the financial sustainability of our institution. Plans to educate in the 21st century must now be more strategic: we must examine fundamental financial assumptions as well as explore new opportunities; we must weigh difficult, and sometimes competing, choices.

The Ad Hoc Financial Planning Report, adopted by the Board of Managers in December 2009, included a recommendation to “establish a strategic direction-setting initiative.” In order to shape a process, Chair Barbara Mather named a pre-planning task force to consider relevant materials; identify issues, challenges and opportunities; and recommend a process to the Board that would fit our community’s culture: one that is thoughtful, rigorous, willing to take risks, and address and engage all our constituencies. The pre-planning task force was charged with considering Swarthmore’s needs, both present and future, as well as with identifying emerging trends in education. The task of the pre-planning committee was defined with clear limits: we were to craft a plausible process that identified major foci of work and that suggested an organizational structure and timeline to present to the Board in October 2010.

Thanks to the generosity of Gil and Barbara Kemp, the pre-planning task force met at Kemp’s home in Cerisay for several days of intensive work together. Our work there was very data driven, and began before arriving with an exercise designed to prepare us to think beyond incremental change and to stretch us to think about which trends might represent significant “game changers” for higher education. We each prepared (and asked several faculty to prepare) a “history of the future,” a brief vision of how we might imagine Swarthmore twenty years from now, including the key environmental factors that underlie that vision, and what actions Swarthmore would have to have undertaken to achieve that vision. We crafted visions that ranged in scope from narrow to broad and in outlook from pessimistic to realistic to utopian.
Once at the Kemp’s, we dug into all manner of data. We teased apart academic, development, facilities, admissions and financial reports, both those written during the 2007-2008 process and several subsequent reports as well; examined the sensitivity of our financial model to such factors as changes in endowment return rates, enrollment and financial aid; and read through a wide range of articles on the future of higher education. We considered peer data wherever possible, including data on admissions, endowments, financial aid, and development, and we reviewed strategic plans from Amherst, Hamilton and Wesleyan. We combined an emphasis on the distinctiveness of Swarthmore College with a close look at what we could learn from our peers and a broad consideration of trends in higher education. (Appendix A contains a list of materials considered at this preplanning session.)

At the President’s Staff Retreat in August, the proposal was discussed and a few revisions made to the proposal. In early September the proposal was discussed with the four faculty members appointed by COFP to be the faculty representatives in our planning process.

*Globalization, technology, changes in knowledge, teaching and learning,* and *sustainability (broadly imagined)* were themes that resounded across many of our conversations. They recurred time and time again when we considered the working group reports from 2008, when we read a number of “histories of the future,” when we discussed material on the future of higher education, and when Neil Grabois identified 16 potential game changers relating to higher education.

Across the three days of intensive work, five guiding principles emerged.

The first guiding principle recognizes the need for more *flexibility in our culture and in our structures,* e.g., how we organize curriculum (accommodating interdisciplinarity and problem-based research), financial aid and admissions (we asked whether there is a tendency towards recruiting a recognizable Swarthmore type) and the way alumni engage with the college. More flexibility will help us adapt to pressures of financial sustainability but also seems well suited to the needs generated by the changing nature of knowledge in both teaching and research in the 21st century.

A second principle entails understanding the need to make difficult choices among competing options, rather than assuming incremental growth when changes need to be made. While we all affirm the desirability of and commitment to raising new funds, we also agreed on the need for the institution to reemphasize the importance of financial discipline. Such discipline would begin by making sure that we need everything we have and lead us to imagine how we can enhance the experience we offer by our willingness, when necessary, to let go of something that already exists in favor of a new program or position that will be more strategic and more beneficial to the College.
A third guiding principle is to be bold, to understand that we are strong enough as an institution and in our reputation to continue in the 21st century our tradition of thinking creatively about education. Since Swarthmore’s inception, we have been an innovator in liberal arts education – in our inclusion of women as students, faculty and managers, and through the early stages of our formation, in the establishment of an engineering program and a half century later, our signature Honors Program. More recently, the Eugene M. Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility broke new ground by providing leadership in how to integrate social responsibility and the educational mission of a college. Given the new financial realities and a need to shift to more sustainable practices, combined with the changes in globalization, technology and knowledge, we need to continue this tradition of thinking boldly. New approaches will be required in order to build upon our unique features and will be necessary to ensure that our mission of providing the most challenging and supportive values-based education in the world continues.

A fourth guiding principle challenges us to ensure that our inquiry and decision making are values driven and data based. We should be particularly mindful of this when we seek to know what our alumni do and how they feel about Swarthmore, what various students need during their time at Swarthmore, and which students benefit the most from Swarthmore. Faculty load, compensation of faculty and staff, and the structure of the curriculum are also areas where we affirmed the need to gather, share and consider the data in decision making.

A fifth principle is to distinguish, as much as possible, between primary and derivative considerations. Primary considerations include our mission and goals and the skills we seek to impart; the structure of knowledge and diverse methods of teaching; admissions, access and affordability; and development and alumni engagement. Each area, of course, has its own internal drivers. Issues such as what size the school should be, what is the formal course load for faculty, and how we define need-blind aid are all important but derivative, in service to the primary goal.

Our task was to arrive at a process for strategic planning. We agreed that our work would include defining substantive areas of concern, leading multi-constituent conversations regarding the future of Swarthmore, and articulating a process that would result in a plan for Swarthmore’s future. The areas were to be fundamental to the nature of Swarthmore (we didn’t want to import areas just because they were good ideas or borrowed from our peers) and important for our future due to changes in the landscape of higher education as well as our own evolution.

As we considered a large number of substantive issues, four foci emerged as organizing areas for conversation and work: 1) The evolving mission, values and goals of Swarthmore College in the 21st century; 2) The organization of knowledge, teaching and learning; 3) admission, access and affordability: who
attends Swarthmore and how they are supported; 4) alumni engagement and development. Our recommendation is to focus the planning efforts in these four areas by assigning each to a working group, and then charging each group with the dual tasks of 1) providing a vision for the area, identifying challenges, financial needs and opportunities and 2) articulating a clear strategy for achieving that vision, identifying potential trade-offs, resources and possible courses of action.

II. Four Foci for our Work

1. The Evolving Mission, Values and Goals of the Swarthmore College Education

As the impact of globalization, technology, changes in knowledge, teaching and learning and sustainability further shape what is required of college students, we need to attend to the goals of a Swarthmore education, fully informed by our mission and values. We recommend that a central charge for the 2010-11 process be to discuss and clarify our mission and values, sharpen and highlight the goals of a Swarthmore liberal arts education, and identify and articulate the academic and extracurricular experiences and opportunities our students will require to meet these goals. The retreat sketched the following preliminary possibilities.

Swarthmore’s mission involves accepting exceptionally talented students and providing them with a rigorous and challenging academic experience. During a time when the strength of American educational institutions at all levels seems to have slipped, Swarthmore College has retained and expanded its focus on providing an education that stretches each student to his or her maximum effort and performance. For many this commitment is exemplified by the Honors program, but for many more, it is expressed in their course and seminar work; research activities; theses, dance, music, and theater performances; poetry readings and literary publications; and visual arts exhibitions, across each division-- humanities, sciences and social sciences--and in the interplay between disciplines.

Similarly, our values have evolved in expression, but at their core have remained constant and central to the Swarthmore experience. These values are drawn from our Hicksite Quaker heritage and include, in the current context, individual responsibility, respecting difference, and a sense of world citizenship that consists of generous giving, sustainable living and consensus decision making.

The questions we now face are:

a) How are our mission and these values affected by an increasingly global, technologically advanced, rapidly changing 21st century? What are the goals
of a liberal arts education and what skills do our graduates need? How do we measure success in achieving our mission and our goals?

b) How do our Quaker values express themselves in the 21st century? If the Hicksites assumed the amelioration of social ills for those in this country, can we now also imagine new forms of setting the world anew and aright?

c) Critical thinking, creativity, writing and other forms of communicating ideas, and the ability to work collaboratively, are fundamental elements of our development of Swarthmore students. What else should we identify as essential and how do we help our students learn these through the curricular and extracurricular programs? Should the ways that we currently develop these skills be fashioned differently in the 21st century?

d) What are the social, life and leadership skills needed in the 21st century? How do we support student growth in these areas inside and outside the classroom, and how do we further support the development of the skills identified above?

e) How do we ensure that all students have the best chance to engage each of the learning, growth and development opportunities we offer? How do we support students academically, socially and culturally and shape community as that community becomes more globally diverse? What is the right balance of support from academic departments, student affairs, and technology?

f) How do we support the continuing evolution of our athletics, fitness and other key extracurricular programs that contribute to both the wellness of our students and the development of skills such as leadership and teamwork, and values such as commitment and discipline?

2. The Future of Knowledge and the Ways in Which Knowledge is Taught and Learned

If the 20th century witnessed the end of the industrial age, the 21st may well be called “the knowledge age” as we now live in a postindustrial, knowledge-based global economy. Knowledge is expanding at an accelerating pace compared to the expansion of knowledge in the 20th century. Academic disciplines identify new areas and new conversation partners while interdisciplinary knowledge and problem-based research and teaching expand the frontiers of knowledge. Teaching and learning are framed now as sometimes collaborative and participatory and sometimes individual and abstract.

Technology has forever changed cognition, learning, and knowledge itself. Computational science allows us theoretical reflection and inquiry, problem solving, and modeling in unforeseen ways. Many students in the digital generation may well prefer a “plug and play” learning style in which experimentation and participation become the entry point for sequential learning. Multiculturalism and globalization expand our ways of knowing, our
patterns of learning, and the scope of what there is to know. The life-long pursuit of knowledge may in effect make the 21st century the age of a new, global culture of “perpetual learning.”

The following questions may be relevant:

a) Knowledge though driven through its internal developments/discoveries, is changing in response to globalization and technology. We are a small college: how do we remain competitive? How do we determine what must be taught: what subjects must be added, what fields must be given up or covered in new ways?

b) Science, mathematics and statistics will be important for everyone in the 21st century. Do we need more investment in the sciences both for our majors and for all our students? Should we require even more scientific and quantitative literacy than we do now?

c) How do we demonstrate the vital relevance of the humanities and the creative arts both to what it means to be human and to effective citizenship as responsible, critical decision-makers?

d) How do we make clear the importance of inquiry in the social sciences to understand the dynamics of global stability and change?

e) Swarthmore’s mission is to provide the best undergraduate education in the world. Do we have the right academic programs to offer this? Are there changes we must consider that will require us to make tradeoffs among competing options?

f) How do we recruit and support the excellent faculty needed for the dynamic student-faculty interactions that are the core of the Swarthmore experience? How do we sustain the research potential of faculty, so that they can share their experience of challenging received wisdom and creating new knowledge with their students?

g) Should we incorporate more problem-based research and teaching, and if so, how? What other methods of teaching and research should we explore?

h) Are we supporting and challenging every student in our diverse student body in the most effective ways?

i) How does the Honors program continue to inform our models of collaborative learning, intellectual rigor, and creativity?

j) Information is exploding in ways that might require fundamental shifts in the ways we might need or want to process and analyze that information. Changes in technologies make new kinds of exploration and new forms of communication, presentation and sharing possible. How do we position ourselves to ensure that faculty have the resources to continue to be leaders in teaching students the kinds of skills and literacies necessary in this landscape?
3. Admissions, Access and Affordability

The most important decisions that Swarthmore makes, together with the hiring and tenuring of faculty, are in admissions, financial aid and tuition policies. Swarthmore’s uniqueness – the special nature of the Swarthmore experience – depends on both the quality of the faculty and the quality of the students who work with their professors and with each other. The pre-planning group repeatedly expressed belief in the power and the value of a Swarthmore education not only for the individual student but also for its impact on the world. Two questions that were asked many times were: what types of students benefit the most from our approach to education and what does the world need from Swarthmore in terms of whom we are producing?

The following questions should be considered:

a) Swarthmore is fortunate to be an extremely selective school. We admit individuals both for their own “success and potential” but also for what they bring to the whole student body. Do we have a well-rounded student body? What characteristics make a good Swarthmore class as a whole? Are there populations of students, such as international students, whose representation in the class we may want to examine, particularly as we move into an ever more global 21st century?

b) What do we communicate to prospective students, parents, and admissions counselors? What stories do we elevate in our admissions literature, in the Bulletin, on the web, in social media and in other print and online publications?

c) Given our mission and values, we should aspire to lead in all sectors of the nonprofit and for-profit worlds. We have historically educated many individuals who go into higher education and non-profit service, but we also have, perhaps without sufficient recognition, educated leaders in business, government, engineering, medicine and law, among others. Are we recruiting students who will become leaders in government, finance, and global companies as well as leaders in education, medicine, and law?

d) Affordability and access encompass the topics of tuition growth and endowment support, and the concern shared by many managers, faculty and staff that we are vulnerable in terms of financial sustainability. Is our financial aid program having the desired effect, measured by outcomes? Only 57% of our current financial aid is endowed. Will aid grow in the next twenty years as it has in the last twenty? How do we think most strategically about the relationships of the growth of tuition, the rise of financial aid, and the distribution of the various socio-economic backgrounds of our students?
4. Alumni Engagement and Development

Swarthmore alumni express deep appreciation for the education they received and pride in the rigor, depth and richness of their educational experience. Many are eager to be engaged with the school in order to support future generations of students and to continue some type of “perpetual” or life-long learning themselves in relation to Swarthmore. Our alumni work in a variety of professions and participate in multiple activities, all of which can be seen as resources for our students and other alumni.

Swarthmore alumni could expand experiences for our students, from mentoring to externships, and other forms of engagement. Using social networking tools such as Facebook and Linked-In, we have unlimited opportunities to connect our students with alumni around areas of common interests. The possibility of expanding the arenas in which alumni partner with students and faculty is exciting and has great potential, particularly in areas of experience and knowledge in which our alumni supplement or complement the expertise of the faculty.

New ways of bringing our alumni and parents together in the 21st century should also be explored. Could convening in the summer around a topic such as climate change or migration and pandemic disease bring together interested alumni, parents and friends? Might we provide workshops around specific affinity groups? Is there a way to be more responsive to the ongoing educational aspirations of our alumni so that we offer them life-long liberal arts education? We should find new ways to craft a life-long Swarthmore attachment from the acceptance letter to the 50th reunion and beyond.

It has been four years since the completion of The Meaning of Swarthmore Campaign in which the College raised $245 million to support new curricular initiatives, financial aid, and new facilities. As we strategize over the next year, we will begin to ask and answer the important questions necessary to prepare us to embark on an even more ambitious fundraising campaign. While formulating a formal plan for a fundraising campaign will require waiting until our strategic planning process is nearly complete, we should begin to explore the ways in which we can expand our fundraising efforts among our alumni, parents, foundations and friends.

The Alumni Engagement and Development working group will focus on issues such as the following:
a) Demographics: Who are our alumni and what do they do? In what ways are they engaged with the college and how would we like them to be engaged?

b) Alumni engagement: What are the best practices in alumni engagement and how could we craft some new forms of engagement for our particular alumni body? Are our students receiving the benefits of a dedicated and engaged alumni body? Are we doing all that we can to educate students (early) about the necessity and obligation of giving to the strength and health of the College? Can we develop and utilize the concept of “Swarthmore for life?”

c) How can our communications and messaging most effectively enhance our engagement efforts? What role will social media play? How will we most effectively deploy our more traditional forms of communication such as the Bulletin, web and other print and electronic formats to encourage a deeper connection to and engagement with the College? (As well as between alumni, parents and friends.)

d) What are the challenges of raising money from a more diverse and international alumni constituency? How do we improve our capacity in this context? In order to determine whether we have the alumni to support a large campaign, we must examine our alumni body and look beyond occupations and income levels. True capacity and inclination will be the important touchstones in determining the size of a campaign.

e) Development strategies: Recognizing the key role parents will play in the next campaign, we have already increased our fundraising staff in this area. In addition, we have added two new major gift travelers and a professional in donor relations. What other best practices in development can we adopt? How can we best organize to serve the needs of our alumni body? How can we achieve more systematic collaboration among the staff in Annual Fund, Alumni Relations, Capital Giving, Donor Relations, Gift Planning, Parents and Research in order to engender and harness synergies?

f) How can technology improve our fundraising capabilities? Should we engage faculty more to help with fundraising? How can we take advantage of the connections between admissions policies and development? Can Career Services be an avenue for help in finding a community of wealthy donors?

III. Organizational Structure and Timeline

Primary Organizational Structure for the Planning Process:

We want a process that is flexible, efficient and consultative. We believe our community—faculty, students, staff, alumni, parents and friends in higher education—should be consulted. We want our managers and our faculty to be well briefed on game changers and trends in higher education.
We propose a *Strategic Planning Council* whose responsibility it is to solicit feedback from various constituents, to oversee communications efforts, and to develop and recommend a plan to the managers. The Council’s membership is listed in detail on the website.

The Council will maintain the public website for the planning process as well as an internal, working website.

From this Council, a *Steering Committee* will be responsible for overseeing the progress of the four working groups and will develop the financial plan that emerges from their work. We expect working groups to link to the steering committee both by sharing membership but also through a process of regularly reporting strategic recommendations and their financial implications. The Steering Committee’s membership is also listed on the website.

With the guidance of the Strategic Planning Council, the Steering Committee will charge the following four working groups. The first three groups will be co-chaired by a manager and a faculty member and staffed by a Vice President. The development working group will be co-chaired by a manager and an alumni representative and also staffed by a Vice President. The Associate Vice President for Planning will provide additional staff to the working groups as well as to the Council and the Steering Committee:

- Working Group on Evolving Mission, Values and Goals of Liberal Arts
- Working Group on Future of Knowledge, Teaching and Learning
- Working Group on Admissions, Access and Affordability
- Working Group on Alumni Engagement and Development

**Additional Organizational Ideas**

Critical to the process is the ideal mentioned earlier, that we be inclusive of the entire community. At times, particular constituents will be called upon to think about specific policy recommendations and to do some of the in-depth, background research required. We will develop mechanisms for sharing relevant information with managers, faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents and appropriate friends of the College.

We recommend that at each board meeting we engage managers, faculty, staff and students as appropriate in conversations on one of the four organizing foci, using outside readings and experts as needed. We also recommend that special Board briefings on globalization, technology and student services be featured during the 2010-2011 year.
Since we want our process to be broad and inclusive, we recommend that several alumni–parent web surveys be used to solicit ideas and feedback. Alumni events over the course of the year can be used for conversations as well. Student focus groups, surveys and other avenues of input must be used. Staff will be engaged through staff and campus-wide meetings, among other ways. The Steering Committee can work with the Strategic Planning Council and the four working groups to coordinate our efforts.

**Timeline**

*October, 2010 Board Meeting*
- Board Approves Planning Recommendation
- Faculty-Board preliminary focus on Changing Patterns of Knowledge
- Working groups chartered

*December, 2010 Board Meeting*
- Strategic Planning Council Update
- Faculty-Board focus on Mission, Values, Goals and Skills
- First Alumni Survey Completed

*February, 2011 Board Meeting*
- Strategic Planning Council Update
- Faculty-Board focus on Admissions, Affordability and Access

*May 1, 2011*
- Working Groups Reports and Recommendations due to the Steering Committee

*May, 2011 Board Meeting*
- Strategic Planning Council Update/ Preliminary Recommendations
- Faculty-Board focus on Alumni-Engagement/Development
- Second Alumni Survey Completed

*May 18, 2011*
- Steering Committee retreat on reports and financial implications

*Summer, 2011*
- Plan Drafted by Steering Committee
- Strategic Planning Council Retreat to revise and approve Plan to present to the Board

*September, 2011*
- Draft Report presented to Board of Managers
- Draft Report Summary shared with Faculty, Students, Staff and Alumni Council
Draft Campaign Plan presented to the Board

*December, 2011*
Board approves Strategic Plan
   Campaign Plan to Board

*January, 2012*
Implementation plan developed

*Spring, 2012*
Implementation plan completed

**Appendix: Emerging Issues**

The Emerging Issues as identified by Neil Grabois:

1. There are about 100 semi-pure liberal arts colleges.
2. There seems to be a changing attitude in America toward elites. We are entering a “know nothing” time.
3. Changing demography: state universities are struggling. They are losing students; high tuition, low aid. Many who expected to go to state universities are not.
4. There are more students of color in the population. More lower income students are applying to college as well.
5. We have not had price resistance as much as expected. The discount rate is going up, which is a potential game changer.
6. Technology – we are not yet experiencing cost savings.
7. Library – more impact on the library is coming. We can’t see it yet; but we do know the pedagogy is going to change.
8. IP – more for research universities. Lots of schools focus on technology transfers.
9. Energy costs – bigger part of budget
10. Travel – it’s more expensive to travel; distance education will happen.
11. Career services – a big push is coming for good jobs for alumni. Need to make a better case for the liberal arts. We are likely to become an even more boutique institution (a luxury good), which is not a good thing!
12. Education for life – we will be more involved in this; i.e. not just focused on four years.
13. Medical costs continue to increase, and retirement benefits decrease. 82% of our professors are now tenured.

14. Increased emphasis on accountability; i.e. are we doing a good job? This puts further pressure on budgets.

15. Continuing decline in government support for research.

16. Globalization: India is focused on services; China is focused on manufacturing. India will be more successful because Vietnam and Korea will take manufacturing from China.

**Appendix: Readings**

General:
- *The Future of Liberal Arts Colleges*, by Eugene Tobin (Smith College, 4/30/2010)

Globalization:
- *Higher Education in the Global Age*, by Richard Haas (Forum Futures 2007)
- *Cultivating Humanity and World Citizenship*, by Martha Nussbaum (Forum Futures 2007)
- *Climate Change, Foreign Policy and Higher Education*, by Michael Levi and Joseph Mullinix (Forum Futures 2009)

Technology:
- *Sophie and the Future of Reading and Writing*, by Robert Stein and Daniel Visel (Forum Futures 2007)
• *Digital Media and Learning*, by Connie Yowell and Diana Rhoten (Forum Futures 2009)
• *An Open Mind*, by Katie Hafner (NYTimes, 4/16/2010)

Changes in Knowledge, Learning and Teaching
• *Cognitive Dilemmas in Higher Education*, by Jamshed Bharucha (Future Forums 2008)
• *Science Education in the 21st Century*, by Carl Wieman (Future Forums 2008)
• *Learning about Learning*, by Diana Chapman Walsh (Future Forums 2009)
• *College Learning for New Global Century*, from AAC& U