

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

Summary of Draft Plan
October 2011



DRAFT FOR COMMENT

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Nothing about Swarthmore College is closer to our hearts than engaging in self-study, planning, and imagining—and then taking action to make our vision a reality. The founders of the College conceived and executed their bold plan in the midst of one of our nation’s greatest crises, the Civil War. Thus we embarked on our strategic planning exercise more than one year ago mindful that we are stewards of a living heritage. We committed ourselves to applying the best of our critical and creative thinking to the times in which we live in order to ensure that the College and the liberal arts are sustained in America and may expand around the world.

In fall 2010, we began our strategic planning process by soliciting ideas from and enlisting participation by students and alumni, parents, faculty, and staff. After extensive study and discussion about Swarthmore, its mission, and its place in the world, we have formulated a draft of strategic directions for review and comment by the entire College community.

Strengths and Challenges

Swarthmore’s history has bequeathed to us a powerful set of core values and key strengths. At the outset of the planning process, we asked members of our community to identify what they believe those strengths and values are. A remarkably consistent list of values emerged, derived from our Quaker founders: respect for the individual, decision-making by consensus, simple living, social responsibility and justice, generous giving, and peaceful settlement of disputes.

Built on this foundation are Swarthmore’s key institutional commitments:

- our commitment to academic rigor and creativity
- our desire to support access and opportunity for all students, regardless of their financial circumstances
- our commitment to a diverse and vibrant community of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents
- our belief that we have a responsibility to improve the world.

We learned that our values and commitments not only define our culture, they have led to what we might call a “Swarthmore style of leadership” for our students, our graduates, and the institution itself. Swarthmoreans understand leadership as the principled practice of working collaboratively and ethically—and of using knowledge for the greater good.

These widely shared and deeply felt values have informed our strategic planning process. At the same time, however, we face several serious challenges to the Swarthmore model and the liberal arts, including:

- rapidly expanding knowledge and changes in teaching and learning, often driven by technological advances
- demographic trends that are changing the profile of the traditional college-age population
- changing attitudes about higher education, including concerns about the practical value and cost of a liberal arts education
- unstable financial conditions in the domestic and global economy, resulting in, among other things, increasing need for financial aid.

These challenges underscore the need for critical inquiry, creative thinking, and ethically and socially responsible leadership. As our founders did when they laid the cornerstone for Parrish Hall nearly 150 years ago, we must challenge ourselves today to be visionary, innovative, and courageous in order to secure Swarthmore's future in a changing world.

Principles and Opportunities

Strategic Directions for Swarthmore College provides a set of principles, challenges, and opportunities in five distinct but interdependent areas of College life. The following examples illuminate these principles.

Rigorous Inquiry and Imaginative Thinking

Ask Alfred H. and Peggi Bloom Professor of English Literature Craig Williamson—poet, medievalist, and lover of all things Old English—how he feels about the pace of change in a world in which knowledge is stored, transmitted, and transmuted in ever-changing ways. He'll tell you that today's changes in the way we acquire information, think, and learn are part of a continuum that began one-and-a-half millennia ago, when the oral culture in England was disrupted by the introduction of writing tools.

"We're going into a new age here, where things are being produced and stored electronically and stories are being translated into electronic media, but I believe that this just makes new ways of looking at old texts possible," he says.

*Real-world problems are the primary focus of *The Urban Underclass and Public Policy*, a political science course taught since 2003 by Associate Professor Keith Reeves '88. Urban issues are among the most challenging, contentious, and complex ones facing the nation today—and their roots lie in social policy, politics, economics, and human nature. Students study the formation and evolution of northern black ghettos, beginning with the idea of the North as a promised land and progressing to the current economic and social turmoil that often confronts inner-city communities.*

Students begin the course with a tour of Chester, led by Reeves and community leaders. They talk with those leaders about the city's challenges and various approaches to ameliorating them. At the end of the semester, the students combine knowledge gained in

readings and class discussion, their own research, and from facilitated connections with Chester residents to create what Reeves calls “policy analysis exercises”—independent research papers that describe a problem, analyze its complexities, evaluate previous solutions, and propose new approaches. This is both problem-based and community-based learning, and, since 2003, Reeves has seen some of his students’ solutions applied to real-world problems. Reeves’ course is just one among the growing trend of problem-based and community-based learning that Swarthmore faculty are increasingly teaching to offer students the chance to learn and develop thoughtful, practical solutions to complex problems.

What courses will Swarthmore’s catalog contain in 2021? How will curricular innovation be married with tried-and-true pedagogies? Will medieval texts still be discussed around tables of 12 students? Will there be more community-based courses like The Urban Underclass and Public Policy?

Even more fundamentally, how will knowledge, teaching, and learning evolve in a rapidly changing—and shrinking—world? Swarthmore graduates will always need good writing, research, and analytical skills, but as lifelong learners in the 21st century, they will employ these competencies in a much different knowledge environment. How, then, will the intellectual attributes of a liberally educated individual be instilled in future Swarthmoreans?

Strategic Directions provides some answers. Beginning with a broad statement of principle, it describes some emerging approaches to teaching and learning and some of the challenges facing the College in the new knowledge environment.

Swarthmore acts to advance uncompromising excellence in the study of the liberal arts, embracing both rigorous inquiry and imaginative thinking.

For Swarthmore to advance academic rigor and innovations in the 21st century requires that we attend to changes in the ways that today’s students learn without compromising the academic standards on which its reputation is founded—including the Honors Program.

Knowledge, teaching, and learning are expanding and being reinvented. We will continue to teach within traditional disciplines, but we must also support new forms of interdisciplinary, community-based, and problem-based learning. Although technology will play a greater role in the educational process, a liberal arts education will continue to rely on face-to-face discussions between individuals or among small groups, requiring close student-faculty interaction and maintaining a low student-faculty ratio.

Strategic Directions recommends that Swarthmore continue to foster a curriculum that requires intellectual rigor within traditional disciplines. At the same time, it should provide structures and incentives to encourage innovations in both curriculum and pedagogy. Consequently, the College should:

- Create a teaching, learning, and research initiative to cultivate traditional and new competencies for students.

- Address facilities needs for academic programs, with an initial focus on the Departments of Engineering, Biology, and Psychology, which will enable the College to refurbish existing spaces to address significant needs in other departments.
- Provide high-impact summer learning experiences for students, including academic research and professional internships.
- Strengthen the infrastructure and mechanisms for helping students navigate the curriculum, discover opportunities, and manage their choices.

The Residential College Experience

David Opoku '12 credits the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility with helping bring his dream of starting a library in Ghana to fruition.

Sable Mensah '11 is proudest of the literary magazine she produced with students she tutored in Chester, Pa.

Charles Tse '13 says the opportunities he's had to meet with alumni in the finance industry will help him prepare for his future career.

No matter their class year, major, or background, Swarthmore students are driven by their shared passion for fully developing and exploring their academic interests. How do they do it? How do they achieve—and maintain—balance while developing their intellectual and personal potential? How do they establish and build on their shared experiences in a community that is diverse in so many ways? And, in an environment that so highly prizes intellectual rigor, how are they getting the skills they need to prepare them for fulfilling lives and to take leadership roles in the world?

“It's very clear to us that the power of a liberal arts education lies in students being fully immersed in an incredible learning laboratory,” says Dean of Students Elizabeth Braun. “At Swarthmore, students learn a style of leadership that is grounded in community, Swarthmore's expression of Quaker values, and civic engagement. It's a core part of our identity and, in many ways, our work is to lift up those positive aspects of life here and build on them.”

Students, faculty, alumni, and staff—and visitors to campus—frequently remark on the distinctive nature of the Swarthmore community. Alumni describe the friendships developed, ideas explored, hard work shared (and often enjoyed), skills developed in activities as varied as debate, athletics, the arts, and more—as well as the parties, pranks, and performances etched in their memories. As *Strategic Directions* envisions the future of Swarthmore, another key principle has emerged: the importance of community. The following statement puts that principle into action:

Swarthmore cultivates a substantive community in order to shape engaged and thoughtful leaders who will contribute to a more just, civil, and inclusive world.

The grand ambition of the liberal arts college—America’s unique contribution to higher education—is that the residential experience should inspire students to pursue their own passions even as they learn to create and tend to the multifaceted dimensions of democratic community. Through engagement with their peers in extracurricular activities as well as the academic program, students develop the capacity to appreciate culture in all its many and diverse forms. As Isaac H. Clothier Professor Emeritus of History and International Relations Professor Robert DuPlessis said in his Baccalaureate remarks this year, “knowledge must be sought across and beyond confining borders of race, class, gender, religion, and nationality ... only by encountering and attempting to comprehend the origins, assumptions, and logics of perspectives that are different from—even repellent to—our own, can we adequately understand our own convictions. True learning, in short, requires broad exposure along as many parameters as possible. This type of ‘deep’ diversity is not politically correct but educationally mandatory.”

In this social learning environment, students are educated to be leaders who contribute to society in a wide variety of ways. As a liberal arts college, Swarthmore should be the exemplar of how a residential experience supports the work of developing individuals; manifesting diverse, inclusive, and engaged community; and building democratic communities in the world.

Strategic Directions identifies the following goals as we imagine the next chapter of our life as a substantive community:

- Build upon our longstanding commitment to diversity by developing a comprehensive, coordinated plan for diversity, inclusivity and engagement among students, faculty, and staff.
- Reaffirm that civil discourse is the foundation of intellectual engagement and community life by fostering a community that develops models of civil discourse in our increasingly diverse and inclusive global community.
- Preserve and enhance Parrish Hall as the symbolic and actual centerpiece of campus and community life while re-envisioning spaces where larger groups of students, faculty, staff, and alumni may come together for deliberative discussions and social interactions.
- Use our resources and environment in a sustainable manner, understanding the complex interactions between natural- and human-made systems.
- Build upon the program for socially responsible leadership and the Lax Conference to create a comprehensive approach to Swarthmore-style leadership development through a Center for Innovation and Leadership for students.

- Make fitness and wellness a focal point of community life by encouraging participation in intercollegiate, club, and recreational athletics, addressing facilities needs, and developing programs that promote healthy lifestyles for all.
- Encourage students to engage in and with the arts outside the classroom.
- Continue to recruit and develop a staff whose devotion to the community makes such a profound impact on our students and others.
- Build bridges to bring students and alumni together in ways that are rewarding for all.

A Fully Engaged Faculty

K. Ann Renninger, professor and chair of educational studies, works hard and loves it, but her son once asked her about it. What made her work so much—days and nights and weekends too? “It’s like fishing is for you,” she told him. “You love fishing, and if you could do it all the time, you would.” It’s become family shorthand for work: going fishing.

In October—after a week of midterms before students have a nine-day fall break—Renninger wrote down her professional activities, which, like the typical Swarthmore faculty member, include teaching, student advising, research, and—well—let her list speak. This is just a glimpse of the 40 activities she remembered doing during that week:

- *Friday/Saturday/Sunday: Work on Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant proposal, due Tuesday. This takes most of the weekend—with back-and-forth right through Tuesday noon, when it is submitted.*
- *Monday and Friday afternoons: Work with a student who is helping to upload information from meetings with the Swarthmore departments with which we certify student teachers. (Our secondary teacher certification programs are being reviewed this year by the State Department of Education.)*
- *Monday night: Work on introduction for a paper reporting data from a study of productive disposition in mathematics that a student and I are writing for publication.*
- *Tuesday, 7–10 p.m.: Teach Educational Psychology class; work after class with a few students on paper outlines.*
- *Wednesday: Correspond with former student working on Fulbright application—encouragement and strategy.*
- *Thursday: Read first draft of introduction to senior honors thesis in psychology and educational studies; work with the student to develop it.*

- *Friday: Meet with the media services staff about possible virtual conferencing during an American Educational Research Association conference to be held at Swarthmore in the spring. The conference will bring about 35 researchers to campus—and through video conferencing we'll connect with researchers in Korea, Australia, and New Zealand one evening, and with researchers in Europe and Israel the next morning.*
- *Friday: Figure out transportation for next week. I need to be at a meeting of educational studies faculty at Barnard on Thursday and then travel to Baltimore for the Association of Science Technology Center meeting, where I am giving an invited paper.*

Renninger is deeply engaged with her students, her field, the College, and the community. This engagement, which, in the electronic age, requires near constant attention, is a hallmark of Swarthmore faculty members. For generations, Swarthmore has recruited intellectually gifted and highly dedicated professors who are committed to teaching and learning. They inspire in their students that same passion for exploration and discovery. And, as changes in student needs and pedagogy have altered and added to the work they do, faculty members are increasingly experimenting with new modes of teaching, integrating problem-based learning in their classes and encouraging (and supervising) independent research. Like Renninger, they are staying in touch almost 24–7 with the ideas and people who are leading their fields. In fact, in many cases, they *are* leading their fields.

Relationships begun in the classroom blossom into friendships and research partnerships—often during summers, when scores of students populate faculty members' labs and the College's libraries. Such supplemental educational experiences—now the norm for both students and those who will consider their applications for graduate admission, fellowships, and jobs—extend the teaching and research responsibilities of many faculty members into the summer months.

Scholar-teachers come to Swarthmore for a full life of intellectual engagement with both undergraduates and colleagues. Excellence in teaching and scholarship is critical to ensure that our students become agents of their own intellectual growth and are empowered to use knowledge for positive change. Thus, *Strategic Directions* articulates the crucial role that the faculty plays:

Swarthmore recognizes that the faculty is critical to ensuring the excellence of the academic program. Our professors should be dedicated to teaching undergraduates while pursuing research, scholarly writing, and creative production in the arts.

Because the faculty members form the foundation of a Swarthmore education, the College must encourage and support faculty excellence, embracing exceptional teaching and active scholarship and artistic production throughout an individual's career. *Strategic Directions* recommends three important ways of supporting the faculty in their multiple ways of engaging with students, colleagues, and community:

- Support new teaching formats and engagement with students beyond the classroom with policies and practices that allow greater flexibility in the allocation of faculty time.
- Recognize the value of faculty research and artistic production and support it vigorously since it is the lifeblood of innovation and renewal in the curriculum that serves our students.
- Renew efforts to increase the diversity of the faculty, especially in tenure-track appointments.

Equal Access for Exceptional Students

As a seventh-grader in Newark, N.J., John Boucard '10 was identified as gifted and placed in the New Jersey Seeds Program, which helps students gain acceptance into private high schools around the country. After graduating from the Church Farm School in Exton, Pa., he was admitted to Swarthmore.

Boucard was born in Brooklyn, N.Y.—along with a twin sister, he is the youngest of five children of Haitian parents. He lived in Haiti until he was nine, when his widowed mother returned to the United States for cancer treatment. Graduating in 2010, Boucard is currently a medical student; he wants to become a pediatric surgeon. Thanks to significant financial aid—both at Church Farm School and Swarthmore—he has been able to use his gifts, learn to be a leader, and go on to help others.

At Swarthmore, Boucard was a national McCabe scholar, chosen on the basis of need. He says that financial aid from Swarthmore has benefited him far more than just academically: “It’s really allowed me to broaden my horizons and take advantage of the resources available here.”

Nothing defines Swarthmore College more fundamentally than its commitment to attracting, admitting, and supporting talented students like Boucard. Thus, a guiding principle in *Strategic Directions* is to continue to offer access to all qualified students—students who will thrive at Swarthmore—regardless of their financial circumstances:

Swarthmore strives to enroll students who will thrive intellectually, socially, and personally while helping enrich our community. We value access as an individual opportunity for students and as an institutional responsibility to educate students who—collectively—represent the world.

This core value has been carefully re-examined and re-affirmed in the strategic planning process. Despite the escalating scholarship needs of today’s students, Swarthmore is committed to maintaining its need-blind admissions policies and to meeting families’ demonstrated need. But what does this require today and what might it mean as we plan for the future? *Strategic Directions* articulates the following objectives:

- Raise funds specifically for financial aid to increase endowment support and expand to meet anticipated future needs.
- Promote the liberal arts locally, nationally, and internationally with renewed vigor, affirming that Swarthmore’s commitment to access is essential for the best liberal arts experience.

Leadership in the Liberal Arts

In “How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students,” noted scholar of higher education Alexander Astin argues that residential liberal arts colleges produce student outcomes that are unlike any other type of college or university in the United States. Even more pronounced in highly selective liberal arts colleges, these gains include long-lasting changes in what a student actually knows.

Satisfaction with college is higher as well. Compared to students at other types of schools, students in liberal arts colleges are more satisfied with the faculty, the quality of teaching, and the general experience as well.

Astin attributes these positive effects to three characteristics: small size, the residential experience, and the faculty’s strong orientation to students. Selective colleges encourage even more frequent interaction between students and faculty and between students and their peers, spend generously on student services, emphasize diversity, favor narrative evaluations over multiple-choice exams, and involve students in research. Although other types of institutions engage in these practices, selective liberal arts colleges invest in them to a much greater degree.

The final principle in *Strategic Directions* recognizes the importance of the liberal arts model, not just for Swarthmore itself, but increasingly for a world that is hungry for this proven way of educating society’s leaders.

Swarthmore maintains its tradition of bold leadership in undergraduate education in order to create practical, visionary solutions to the most complex issues confronting our world.

In 1864, Swarthmore’s founders made a bold statement when they petitioned the Pennsylvania legislature to charter a college with both female and male students—and with a governing board equally comprised of men and women. Nearly 60 years later, President Frank Aydelotte’s introduction of the Honors Program served as another bold act of hope for future generations by further reinforcing that academic rigor was the cornerstone of the College. Swarthmore’s most enduring tradition, it could be said, is to imagine, inspire, and innovate in order to continually provide students with an exceptional liberal arts education.

We live in challenging and exciting times for higher education and especially for small, residential liberal arts colleges. The accelerating rate of the production of information, a

more pervasive awareness of global connections, vast technological changes, and daunting financial pressures combine to produce a particular set of contemporary opportunities and challenges.

Many questions lie ahead: What will student demographics be like in 2030? Is our business model sustainable? Can financial aid keep pace with need? Can residential colleges serve their alumni better over their lifetimes? How might alumni themselves serve as educational resources and engaged members of the College community? In making the case for the liberal arts, Swarthmore should convene others to analyze future trends and best practices.

Strategic Directions recommends that the College create the Swarthmore Institute for the Liberal Arts in the 21st century to study and expand liberal arts education at Swarthmore, in the United States, and around the world. This institute would:

- Foster curricular innovation, explore new pedagogical practices, and study new technological innovations.
- Support scholarly activity on the future of the liberal arts within the global higher education system.
- Promote the visibility and viability of the residential liberal arts college in general and of Swarthmore in particular. The Institute could become a destination for scholars outside Swarthmore who are interested in the future of the liberal arts by stimulating generative conversation about liberal arts education and providing a physical space to convene such activity. The Institute might work particularly well in tandem with the Town Center West project, which includes the development of a 40-room Inn, restaurant, retail, and conference spaces to be built on the edge of the south end of campus.
- Provide opportunities for alumni and others who live “liberal arts lives” to engage in conversations, conduct research, or teach. This provides an opportunity for students to learn from alumni who have used their liberal arts background in myriad professions, through volunteer activities as well as in academic settings.

Enduring Relationships with Alumni

Deb Felix '83 says that her classmates are the nicest group of people she's ever known. “The class has a really nice culture about it,” says Felix. “We get along well, care about each other, and have a lot of memorable shared experiences.” This year, as many members of the class turn 50, members of the Class of 1983 have organized birthday parties in several cities, adding another shared experience to their cache of Swarthmore memories.

In Atlanta, alumni get together at least twice a year to work on a community service project—calling their group Swarthmore Cares. In San Francisco, there's Bay Area Alumni in Business, a group that now has more than 200 alumni on its mailing list. Book

groups are thriving from East to West, and one group is taking the first steps toward a virtual Swarthmore book group that's open to alumni worldwide. Swarthmore bonds are so strong that they seem to be almost a force of nature—something that may have more to do with a distinct way of engaging the world, asking questions, and rejecting easy answers.

Strategic Directions recognizes that our community is strengthened considerably by enduring engagement with our alumni. Swarthmore alumni put the liberal arts into practice. In their work, their service, and their solid sense of community lie nearly 20,000 examples of why Swarthmore matters in American society—and, increasingly, around the world.

For Swarthmore to realize its full potential requires active participation of alumni in the life of the College. Our alumni instruct, inspire, and improve the College, supporting it with their time, energy, passion, and financial contributions. For alumni to deepen and enhance their connections to the College requires engagement opportunities that can best suit alumni interests and also recognizes where they are along life's continuum.

Swarthmore seeks to cultivate a full range of lifelong relationships with its alumni, making the campus the heart of a worldwide network of people who are connected to each other and to the College. These relationships must be both meaningful and useful to alumni—and beneficial to each new generation of students. Students understand the value of gaining access to professional networks and receiving career advice from those who have gone before them.

As we think about the distinct nature of our community, we recognize how vital our alumni are in their enduring connections with students, faculty, staff, and one another. In the 21st century, Swarthmore, as a global liberal arts college, will enact the greatest and most positive change towards the common good through those whose lives have been transformed by the power of a great liberal arts education.

In addition to finding greater opportunities for alumni to connect meaningfully to students, and through a proposed “Lives in the Liberal Arts” Fellows program, *Strategic Directions* recommends that Swarthmore:

- Create more opportunities to engage alumni as volunteers, providing expertise and leadership in areas such as admissions, career services, development, and other areas that benefit greatly from alumni support.
- Create a “virtual hub” where alumni can engage with Swarthmore online.
- Implement a social media strategy to promote more effective communications and build community.

Next Steps

These strategic directions are designed to give Swarthmore a broad vision, guiding principles, and recommendations for our future together. The plan itself is meant to be an organic document that can adjust both to additional community input and new challenges or opportunities as they arise, such as the turbulent economic times we are presently

living in. After we have completed our consultative period this fall, how do we then translate these ideas into action?

First, the Board of Managers will evaluate the plan this winter. If the plan is approved, we will then develop an overall prioritization and implementation plan. A *campus facilities master plan* will be developed to evaluate existing facilities and the need and shape of new facilities. A *financial plan* will quantify the costs of specific initiatives and integrate them into several comprehensive scenarios for the future. A *diversity and inclusivity plan* will be developed to further advance the College's enduring mission to create a wholly diverse, engaged, and inclusive community. Finally, a *capital campaign* will be designed to support these recommendations and to excite the imagination and interest of all members of our community.

We encourage you to share your thoughts about these directions on the Strategic Planning website, www.swarthmore.edu/strategicplanning/summary.