

STRATEGIC PLAN ESSENTIAL INITIATIVES

The following represent seven broad areas that will receive special focus and guide our growth over the next five years to improve the institution, our contributions, and the quality of education we provide for students and the region. Most bear directly or indirectly on our students and on improving their educational experience. Indeed, a clear focus on students and their success must be an overarching framework for this plan and its implementation. Some of the goals are clearly “primary” educational ones, relating directly and immediately to our core mission of educating students. Others may be regarded in part as “enabling” goals that enhance our long-term ability to fulfill our primary mission. The various areas are not independent of each other, but investment and improvement in some areas will enhance others. It is clearly recognized that advancing some of these goals will require investment of new or reallocated resources (financial and human at the same time that we will continue to work with constrained resources that will demand prioritizing activities and investments.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE I:

NURTURE INNOVATION AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To recruit top students and keep them actively engaged in their intellectual, personal, and social development, we must adapt to changes in higher education and look to best educational practices. These changes require that while we maintain our focus on liberal education, we understand educational markets, new modes of organizational structure and innovative teaching methodologies.

Traditional modes of teaching have given way to different approaches, driven in part by advancing information-technology inside and outside the classroom. Students are more comfortable using computers and multimedia resources and their tolerance is declining for in-class lectures. There are opportunities to expand online and hybrid programming without sacrificing educational quality nor our distinction as a residential college. The report on Open SUNY calls for active teaching and learning through online instruction that will “connect a global community of learners, through faculty partnerships and innovative online and mobile learning environments.” The AAC&U report on College Learning for a New Global Century (2007) recommends that teaching and learning must be “active, hands-on, collaborative, and inquiry-based” (p. 11).

New Paltz has had a longstanding commitment to active, hands-on, collaborative, and inquiry-based teaching and learning. Such goals correspond with George D. Kuh’s AAC&U report on “High-Impact Educational Practices” (2008). Kuh identified the following high-impact teaching and learning practices: first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service learning, community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects. High-impact practices improve rates of student

retention and levels of student engagement. These are also among the experiences that enhance the competitiveness of our graduates to succeed in and contribute to the complex societies and economies they will face.

Students on our campus are engaged in a number of these high-impact practices, but expanding such opportunities and ensuring that all students take advantage of them must be among our priorities. Such steps demand that we review and develop curriculum, pedagogy, instructional delivery modes and technologies, programs, and service to advance our distinctiveness, lift our innovative and creative value, and welcome and serve our students. Strengthening our educational and student-life programs in these ways – and ensuring that these successes are known beyond the campus – will help ensure our future competitiveness.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE II:

ESTABLISH AN ENGAGED LIVING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY

Our identity as a campus that welcomes people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, political views, and ambitions makes us ideally suited to meet educational challenges and prepare students to live and work in a global century. The AAC&U report on *College Learning for the New Global Century* stated, “Today it is clear that the United States - and individual Americans - will be challenged to engage in unprecedented ways within the global community, collaboratively and competitively. The seismic waves of dislocating change will only intensify” (p. 15). We need to be more focused on helping students make connections between their classroom work and applying what they learn outside the classroom in regional and global communities.

New Paltz is positioned to provide a distinctive living and learning community that demands a commitment to curricular and co- and inter-curricular learning opportunities that are fully embraced and supported by faculty, staff, alumni and community. Such an environment will meet the call for high-impact teaching and learning practices that provide students with an opportunity to engage in intellectual activities and programs that promote intellectual curiosity, inventive problem-solving skills, leadership and active engagement within an increasingly complex global society. The continued cultivation of this living and learning environment will require support for the right balance between, on the one hand, high-quality teaching and student focus, and, on the other, essential expectations for faculty research/scholarship/creative activity, in ways that differ from a research university. Supported by faculty, staff and external stakeholders in the College, students will be given opportunities to learn about themselves, to explore their interests, and become leaders in and beyond the classroom.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE III:

STRENGTHEN PHILANTHROPIC RELATIONSHIP AND SUCCESS

In the Planning Retreat, lack of funding was cited as a major obstacle in nearly every criterion identified for the College's future success. This included the student experience, faculty experience, the ideal 21st century undergraduate program, service to the community, and pride, boldness and identity. As described earlier, the absence of a strong philanthropic tradition and record of major fund-raising success at New Paltz is a current shortcoming that constrains our quest for excellence in many ways. In 2012, the College and Foundation Board undertook a feasibility study (results summarized in President Christian's 2012 State of the College address) that identified the most pressing steps that must be taken and barriers overcome for the College to undertake a credible, first-ever campaign to raise significant private support (tens of millions of dollars). Those steps are currently in progress, but much work remains and must be a significant focus during the 5-year life of this strategic plan.

The major areas of needed improvement include: convincing college members and constituents about the importance of philanthropy for a public college; connecting more effectively with friends, alumni, and prospective individual and corporate donors and foundations; improving the capacity and efficiency of our development operations and Foundation; increasing the effectiveness and reach of our communication and marketing about New Paltz and our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and programs; investing in and realigning financial and human resources to achieve these goals.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE IV:

ENGAGE ALUMNI IN THE LIFE OF THE COLLEGE

Alumni are among the most important assets of any college or university. They are the living embodiment of the values within the institution's DNA – values that can inform decisions and directions well into the future. Their own stories about their successes and challenges they have faced in their lives and careers since graduation provide important assessment information to inform curricular and program revision. Alumni can be key ambassadors, for example by supporting recruitment goals by connecting prospective students and their parents with their alma mater; speaking on behalf of an institution's financial or other needs with state legislative or executive leaders; or introducing potential major donors to the development office. Alumni may mentor students, and serve as inspiring and informative speakers. Working alumni are often key to identifying internship, research, or cooperative educational opportunities that are critical in the learning and career preparation of current students. Certainly, alumni are often the primary philanthropic supporters of their alma mater.

As noted earlier, New Paltz has not had a strong record of engaging its alumni, despite having nearly 60,000 alumni and despite every indication that large numbers of our alumni have deep

affection for the College and the impact of their education on their lives and successes. In December 2012, the College filled a long-standing vacancy for a dedicated leader of its alumni relations efforts, and President Christian subsequently announced the formation of a task force that will identify ways to engage our alumni for all of the above reasons.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE V:

MARKET NEW PALTZ INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Marketing activities have become more critical to the college's success. It is an inescapable reality that higher education functions in an intensely market-driven era. New Paltz is in a competitive market environment, vying with both public and private institutions, within New York and beyond, for students, recognition and prestige, financial resources, and political and social support. New Paltz is now a top-tier institution, and remaining at that level requires further investment in marketing and outreach. Historically, New Paltz has invested limited – and clearly insufficient – resources in highly decentralized marketing and outreach activities.

Although New Paltz has enjoyed measured success with identity branding, a more substantial focus on “telling the New Paltz story” to various stakeholders is required, for purposes that include student recruitment, philanthropy, alumni relations, and political and public awareness of the College's strengths and accomplishments.

Value, a combination of cost and quality, is increasingly important in how we position ourselves and how we are perceived. The cost advantage of New Paltz, with relatively low SUNY tuition, is largely a given. But the perception of our quality is not, and the success of any of the following goals depends on continued improvement in academic and student-life programming noted above.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE VI:

IMPROVE INTERNAL PROCESSES AND ADDRESS INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Faculty, staff, and administrators need to have clarity in roles, expectations and consistent support to achieve institutional goals. A climate of cooperation should be enhanced. Much work has begun in these important support areas in recent years. Initiatives for the years to come will include generating clear and helpful descriptions of roles and responsibilities for all positions; reviewing, tightening, and streamlining policies and procedures (academic, human resources, business, and other); laying out full plans for professional development throughout the college; allocating staff resources among departments for greatest efficiency and effectiveness; and creating campus unity and community.

ESSENTIAL INITIATIVE VII:

STRENGTHEN REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

New Paltz enjoys assets of “place” that are unparalleled within SUNY: proximity to New York City and Albany; the beauty, outdoor and recreational amenities, and cultural and historic resources of the Hudson Valley; strategic placement relative to other SUNY comprehensive campuses and community colleges. We have a unique opportunity to hone our identity and strengthen potential assets by taking better advantage of these resources, and to strengthen our contributions to the region and the State.

New Paltz is a cultural and intellectual hub in the region with arts, cultural, and educational events open to the entire community. The living and learning environment for students is enriched through these events that benefit the entire community. The *Power of SUNY* alignment document maps the strength of the connection of programs at New Paltz to the region at large, an engagement far more extensive and successful than generally recognized.