

Academic Strategic Plan Draft

Preamble

The stated goals of the Academic Strategic Plan are to:

- Intentionally highlight and make visible what we are already doing that is distinctive and valuable so we can protect and build on those foundations
- Encourage creativity and collaboration across programs to maximize effective use of expertise and resources and to build a stronger community
- Provide an exciting vision of what is possible in every area, for both internal planning and external requests for funding
- Ensure we are providing the best possible education for all our students and can share why that education is excellent

The Academic Strategic Plan is rooted in this understanding of the sustainable path forward for Guilford College:

“Sustainability in this model has several meanings. Certainly the long-term vision must be financially sustainable; the lack of financial equilibrium is, in large part, what necessitates change. But sustainability of mission and of educational quality is equally important. The purpose of the institution must be preserved in the midst of transformation because that inspired the creation of the campus and offers the justification for its continued existence. Identifying the essential elements of institutional mission allows transformation to be focused on preserving the campus, rather than changing it into something that is not recognizable to alumni, the community, faculty, staff, or students.”

Mary Marcy, “The Small College Imperative: From Survival to Transformation”

With this understanding, we present a coherent vision for teaching and learning at Guilford College: enhancing Guilford’s educational experience (understanding our current status, needs, goals, and milestones for growth), increasing the college’s visibility, growing our enrollment, drawing additional third-stream revenue, providing new opportunities for

faculty, and increasing engagement and impact for students, all as we “Let Guilford be Guilford”.

The Academic Strategic plan promotes the intentional alignment of our practices and resource allocations with our values. Each intention and action is designed to promote Guilford College’s Mission and Core Values in financially sustainable ways. This plan includes revitalization, coordination, and elevated visibility for the structures guiding our academic processes, such as the [Five Academic Principles](#) and the [General Education Learning Outcomes](#) (or GELOs) and the [Guilford College Curriculum](#).

The Five Academic Principles govern all courses and other educational experiences at the College. They are: 1) Innovative, Student-Centered Learning; 2) Challenge to Engage in Creative and Critical Thinking; 3) Cultural and Global Perspectives; 4) Values and the Ethical Dimension of Knowledge; 5) Focus on Practical Application: Vocation and Service to the Larger Community.

The College places the individual student at the core of its educational mission. In an environment committed to the value of interdependence, each student is encouraged to develop an individual viewpoint through the sharing of ideas with other members of Guilford’s intentionally diverse community. Students learn not only to develop and synthesize ideas but also to articulate them clearly via the spoken and written word and other forms of critical and creative expression. In particular, the College emphasizes writing as a mode of both learning and communicating, and thus students write intensively throughout their years here.

Guilford especially values courses that connect different ways of knowing, hence the College’s interdisciplinary emphasis. Guilford strives to prepare students to be citizens of the world. Thus the curriculum is designed to encourage students and faculty to respect and learn from people of other cultures and to foster an understanding of ecological relationships within the natural environment. By interacting with people from different cultures and gaining sensitivity to other ways of life, students deepen their academic investigation of Western and other traditions. In the process, students are challenged to envision better societies and to work collectively with others toward mutual benefit.

The Quaker ethos deeply influences the academic program as it does all other aspects of College life. Guilford’s courses explore the ethical dimension of knowledge with practical applications. This often requires close attention to such issues as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social justice and socioeconomics in historical and contemporary contexts. Guilford’s teachers help their students explore foundational liberal arts coursework (critical bases), choose majors that offer core knowledge in their chosen discipline. The Integrative Experience sequence encourages students to reflect on their own interests, plan future work and service possibilities that will bring personal fulfillment and challenge, and effectively communicate the story of their own learning and preparation.

The Academic Strategic Plan represents an opportunity to create mechanisms for ongoing information-gathering, sharing our story internally and externally, and assessing efforts by the faculty and staff who deliver, contribute to, and support our academic program. We must remain a learning institution at every level: we will keep learning from experience and feedback, so the actions below might shift.

The story of this college can be told as repeated crises (even large crises, such as the Civil War and Great Depression). It can also be described as repeated community collaborations to overcome both small and major obstacles. The college is going to continue changing because it must change to thrive in changing circumstances. And it can do so while maintaining its communal core.

Strengths:

- As a small institution, we build strong interpersonal relationships across the college, allowing us the opportunity to be nimble and human in the face of bureaucracy.
- Our faculty, staff, and students are dedicated to the community and educational experience built on our core values.
- We regularly hear positive feedback, external and internal, about what is happening on our campus and the positive impact of the learning experience at Guilford.
- We have a consistent cross-disciplinary emphasis on effective communication. Senior surveys indicate that our students have higher than average experience in writing and presentation.
- We have the seeds of Ethical Leadership focus, which we can grow to strengthen our curricular and co-curricular experiences.
- We have the distinctive experience of successfully drawing on local and broader community to respond to serious challenges in a creative and collaborative way.

Challenges:

- Not enough people know about the great things happening on our campus (including internally).
- Lack of financial resources and poor communication about finances harm the health of the community.
 - While the academic program is the core of Guilford College, the unavailability and allocation of resources present ongoing challenges to maintaining an excellent and sustainable environment for teaching and learning.

- Perceived and actual financial instability have harmed the retention of faculty and staff, leading to a loss of institutional knowledge and continuity.
- Non-competitive compensation makes hiring difficult. Low wages harm faculty and staff retention and morale.
- Many students leave Guilford for financial reasons.
- Ongoing issues with clear communication about finances and institutional decision-making compromise the confidence that encourages members of the Guilford community to engage in innovative work to serve the needs of our students.
- Faculty report that the experience of teaching in college classrooms and learning spaces is shaped by unreliable and outdated technology and spaces in need of physical maintenance.
 - These issues contribute to the perception that other priorities are being elevated at the expense of the academic program, contributing to low morale among already over-tasked and under-compensated faculty and staff.

Intention #1: Cultivating and retaining a healthy community

Community is one of Guilford's seven Core Values. Many people (students and employees alike) say they joined and stayed at this college because of its community. However, Guilford has sometimes struggled with retention of students, faculty, and staff, transparent communication with community members, and morale. Strengthening the college community would encourage growth of the student body, help to maintain consistent enrollment levels over time, and reduce the costs associated with replacing and retraining employees. A healthy community would also support lasting relationships with alumni and other potential donors, with a positive impact on the long-term financial stability of the college.

Intention #1: Actions

1. Increase student retention and satisfaction with the College.

Example: Enhancing capacity for timely & helpful responsiveness from faculty and staff in interactions with students and other community members.

- Increasing collaborations with Admissions to connect prospective and incoming students with faculty by building on the Faculty-in-Residence in Admissions, working with the Guilford Alumni Admissions Network, contributing to faculty fairs, etc.
- Increasing faculty and staff development that focuses on student retention.
- Hiring and retaining faculty and high-level staff of color; this can improve retention of students of color.

Example: Improving student ability to be successful both at Guilford and after.

- Increasing alignment of team-based advising to promote students' academic planning, goal setting, and preparation by supporting the implementation of Stellic, building on Faculty-in-Residence for CAPE, etc.
- Increasing the number of students who engage in experiential learning, including internships, field work, job shadowing, internal and external community-partnered projects.

2. Increase faculty and staff retention and satisfaction

Example: Addressing staffing issues for core functions of the academic program

- Equitably increasing wages to meet employee and student retention goals
- Strategically hiring staff and faculty, including tenure-stream faculty

Example: Improving quality of workplace for faculty and staff

- Enhancing capacity for timely & helpful responsiveness across offices
- Providing professional development opportunities, including opportunities to grow in one's areas of expertise

3. Implement practices to increase effective governance, management, and communication

Examples:

- Collaborating with the Budget Committee to host a community forum at least once per semester.
- Creating and maintaining a Provost Office website that consolidates and shares important information; increases the visibility of available resources; and serves as an accessible repository for institutional knowledge
- Improving systems for tracking student journeys in college and after

Intention #1: Indicators¹

- Increased fall-to-fall and fall-to-spring student retention.
- Improvement in measures of employee satisfaction.
- Improved communication reported by students, faculty, staff, and alumni
- Moderate to strong satisfaction with life among recent graduates

Intention #2: Creating and maintaining desirable and sustainable infrastructure

Stewardship is an important Core Value that guides this Intention. The campus is beautiful and welcoming. However, Guilford has sometimes struggled to provide structural support for learning technologies and spaces; collaboration and communication; and efficient, equitable, and sustainable organization of academic labor. Improving the organization and support systems for academic work will increase the efficacy of the academic program with attention to responsible allocation of resources. Attention to sustainability in the use and maintenance of indoor and outdoor spaces reinforces the college's commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

Intention #2: Actions

1. Ensure an ongoing and strategic institutional commitment to maintaining and enhancing learning technologies, classrooms, and learning spaces.

Example: Academic Affairs can collaborate with the Space Planning and Management Committee to conduct regular assessments of learning environments.

- Developing an aligned learning and technology strategic plan would support and strengthen the academic program
- Understanding needs and potential improvements would allow for strategic alignment of resources, including capital projects.

Example: The Guilford College Farm can be optimized as a living laboratory that enhances and extends the academic program to complement classroom learning,

¹ Specific metrics for these indicators to be included.

experimentation, and community outreach projects, demonstrating possibilities for a more ecologically grounded and socially just agriculture.

- Mentored work experiences and internship opportunities focusing on daily operations, land-based business management, and the development of profitable farm enterprises can provide opportunities for student enrichment and skills development.
- Ensuring the farm operates within regularly reported and transparent budgetary parameters can support working toward increasing revenue generation through appropriate enterprise development.

2. Expand and cultivate external and internal partnerships.

Example: Faculty and staff may collaborate on scholarship and creative endeavors and bring in funding.

- Expanding collaboration between our community-facing programs, including ethical leadership programs, athletics, academic departments, and others.
 - Establishing a dashboard of community-facing projects and engagement
- Cultivating current partnerships with community organizations and institutions such as government and public sector organizations, non-profits, and private / for-profit businesses.
 - Creating pipelines for students to pursue additional education after Guilford
 - Create pipelines for students to gain employment and meaningful career paths after Guilford
- Providing infrastructure and support for grant applications and implementation.
 - Establishing a grant support office
 - Developing clear and accessible processes for identifying opportunities, submitting proposals, and post-award grant management
 - Implementing processes for improved communication about grant activities and opportunities
 - Creating a repository of faculty and staff scholarly and pedagogical interests that could be enabled or enhanced by grant efforts

3. Reorganize academic labor to enhance efficiency, equity, and sustainability through disciplinary and interdisciplinary distributions of workload.

Example: develop and implement a Faculty Workload Plan.

- Developing a workload plan using qualitative and quantitative data collection would provide an accurate understanding of faculty workload with attention to the types of work, expectations, and time allocation.
- Analyzing patterns in faculty work can support the development of processes for allocation of workload that address issues of equity and burnout.
- Implementing standardized and streamlined processes would support the alignment of faculty work with institutional goals by providing stability and predictability as a foundation for innovation and expansion.

Intention #2: Indicators

- Increased satisfaction with learning spaces and technologies on regular assessments
- Increased student participation in community partnerships
- Increased grant revenue that enhances academic programs and faculty projects
- Reduced self-reported symptoms of burnout among faculty
- Greater integration of academic and co-curricular organization showing a positive impact on student experience

Intention #3: Strategic development of ethical, engaged, and excellent academic pedagogy and programs

Excellence is a guiding Core Value for Intention #3. A Guilford education provides personal and intellectual transformation through the liberal arts and sets high standards for all students, helping them to become the best possible versions of themselves. However, Guilford has sometimes struggled to obtain recognition and visibility for our excellent pedagogy and academic programs and consistently attract students in sustainable numbers. With this intention, we seek to develop ethical, engaged, and excellent academic pedagogy and programs with an eye towards fiscal responsibility. In this way, we will

improve the quality of the education we offer while addressing problems with silos, courses with low enrollment, and enrollment more broadly.

Intention #3: Actions

1. Develop, strengthen, and support interdisciplinary and innovative collaboration for faculty and students through the creation of theme or problem-based area "clusters".

Example: Build on the problem-based ethical leadership programs and resources of the Center for Principled Problem Solving and Excellence in Teaching to create an intellectual hub that supports interdisciplinary units, or "clusters," focused on identified areas of academic and practical interest that emerge from our existing interdisciplinary programs and allow students to incorporate ethical leadership and engagement in their courses and co-curricular experiences.

- Clusters would contribute to our efforts to streamline administrative processes and improve campuswide communication
- Clusters would draw on existing resources and possibly serve to attract additional external grant or philanthropic resources.
 - Clusters would not replace academic programs or departments but add meaningful teaching, learning, and engagement opportunities shaped by faculty and student curiosity and "wicked problems" in the world.
- Clusters can provide meaningful guidance and creative pathways for students as they proceed through the Integrative Experience (IE), including Contribution projects and certificates.
- Faculty could connect and contribute to one or more clusters through existing courses, by contributing to the development of new learning opportunities, or through the Integrative Experience sequence.
 - For example, faculty may collaborate in developing projects that students can contribute to at various stages of the IE and result in Contribution projects that last beyond individual students' time at the college.
- Area clusters can also serve as incubators for interdisciplinary courses that could serve existing academic programs in order to increase minimum class size.
- Faculty Fellows for each cluster could host events, speakers, and programs supported by CPPSET.

2. Strengthen and develop high-impact practices

Example: Enhance the Integrative Experience (IE) component of the general education curriculum by emphasizing reflective practice and capstone Contribution projects.

- The Integrative Experience prepares students to set and achieve goals as well as to effectively reflect on and communicate their experience, abilities, and aspirations.
- Students report benefits from reflecting on their educational and co-curricular experience, including improved awareness of skills and confidence to identify and pursue opportunities.
- The capstone Contribution Project requires students nearing the end of their degree program to complete a project addressing a question or problem that applies what they've learned and reflected on throughout their educational experience.

3. Revitalize engagement with a wider range of learners

Example: Increase the presence of the Continuing Education population of learners over 23 years of age through high-quality, interactive, and flexible offerings

- Providing training and support for faculty to expand course offerings in different modalities, such as hybrid and online, can support pedagogical innovation with a focus on expanded access and inclusion.
- Developing an academic and social support structure to support CE students would foster retention and encourage a sense of belonging and connection to peers, faculty, and the overall community.
- Providing options to engage and integrate a wide range of non-residential students with Guilford College courses and collaborative learning opportunities could expand the recruitment base.
- Cultivating community and corporate connections to identify and more effectively recruit pools of potential participants for existing degree programs, as well as providing non-degree-seeking learning opportunities that would serve community needs.

4. Cultivate holistic credentialing opportunities

Example: Develop a transcript package that incorporates micro-credentials, portfolios, and external certifications.

- Acknowledging the development of a variety of skills and competencies related to Guilford values and learning outcomes with an integrated badging system
 - For example: interpersonal, relational, and leadership skills; technical skills like digital and information literacy.
- Accumulating existing academic and co-curricular offerings and opportunities into Guilford-developed certificates (for example, Ethical Leadership or Difficult Dialogues)
- Preparing students for externally administered credentials
 - For example: the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) exam

Intention #3: Indicators

- Creation of Integrative Experience student Contribution projects led by interdisciplinary faculty teams that extend over time and address significant "wicked" problems
- Increased class sizes for upper-level courses
- Increased student reporting of awareness of abilities and confidence for future opportunities
- Increased (or high levels of) reports of / evidence of student resilience and growth mindset
- Increased enrollment of non-traditional students
- Increased number of regularly offered hybrid, HyFlex, online, and evening classes with ongoing assessment of student interest and success by format
- Expanded use of e-Portfolio for presentation of learning experience/skills, microcredentials, badges, and pre-credential preparation.