



Strategic Planning — Preparing Solution Seekers

The aspiration and vision expressed in the Visioning Task Force document is one that captures how we can think about elements of strategic planning:

St. Olaf College will be known as one of the country's best liberal arts colleges, nationally and internationally recognized for excellence, academic rigor, and community inclusivity, while developing and preparing students of character to lead lives of substance as contributing citizens of the world.

In the coming year, we will bring clarity and meaning to the multiple efforts already undertaken and co-create a coherent strategy, built on our solid foundation, to achieve this vision. Our mission and values, which are enduring, will guide us. Our mission is our promise to our students. Our values are our North Star.

With the solid foundation our mission, values, and vision provide, we embark on planning for a bright and distinctive future for St. Olaf. My perspective on strategic planning is that it is dynamic, collaborative, and focused on differentiating St. Olaf from other fine liberal arts colleges. A strategic plan is not a document on the shelf; that would be a novel. Rather, it is a roadmap we develop, and we regularly check our GPS to see if the road is leading where we intended and to make course corrections as needed.

In planning to differentiate our cherished college, we will focus on the “WHY?” of the St. Olaf experience. Starting with “why?” leads us to the “whats” and “hows” that move us from vision to action. We know from prospective student and alumni surveys, the broader research on Gen Z, and our own experience with Oles that students are looking for a holistic education that prepares them to be **solution seekers**. We face pressing global issues — racial and economic inequities, health disparities, energy needs, food insecurity, a climate crisis, and threats to civil society. It will take all the wisdom and courage we can muster to create a better tomorrow, and our students want to be prepared. Empowering solution seekers can help reduce the pressing mental health issues many experience. We are just the place to provide that holistic education with our strong academic programs and depth of robust co-curriculars.

Everyone has a role to play in this planning — students, faculty, and staff. We will engage in this collective dynamic strategy work through three innovation teams and an integration team. Each innovation team will advance and integrate relevant work that is already underway. The goal is to create a bold path forward for our college built upon the solid foundation of our mission and values. The integration team will identify synergies within the work of the innovation teams.

We aim to create innovation teams composed of faculty and staff, students, Regents, and alumni.

We will focus on three areas aligned with the Visioning Task Force recommendations: 1) Everyone will **THRIVE**, 2) St. Olaf will be **AGILE**, and 3) St. Olaf will be **SUSTAINABLE** in the broad context of sustainability.

THRIVING

Foundational theme: The four-year development plan for every Ole should combine the requisite support with excellent academic resources and thoughtful, intentional mentoring. Connecting it all from day one, and supporting it with a robust data and reporting infrastructure, will bring together classroom learning, advising and mentoring, engaged learning experiences, and postgraduate planning, preparation, and exploration.	
Key question: How do we ensure every Ole succeeds and reaches their potential?	Key tasks and considerations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make visible the integrated approaches in place to support student success for all our students (work already underway by the <i>For Every Ole</i> team). 2. Support for staff, faculty, and students is part of this effort. 3. Consider the language for this effort and how we might best market this effort as integrated into our overall dynamic strategy. 4. Critical assessments — How will we know if we are successful? What are the milestones, benchmarks, and metrics that will inform our progress? 5. If we are all mentors, how do we follow a student's co-curricular path, and how does it integrate with academic pursuits? What is possible with technology that will allow for a visual, flexible, and easy-to-follow pathway? How do we support the professional development of our mentors?

AGILE

Foundational theme: The successful liberal arts colleges of the future will be those that are agile, taking strong, decisive, and urgent action over the next five years — before it is too late. Being able to adapt and proactively respond to change requires a better understanding of who we are: a culture that rewards and supports risk-taking and change with a laser-sharp focus on the vision of who we want to be.	
Key question: How do we align the major, new Ole Core, STOGGoals, NACE goals, and the work of the Piper Center to uplift the central role of vocation — life on purpose for the common good — in the Ole experience?	Key tasks and considerations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What would it look like to have Ole Core courses align with key NACE goals and offer the opportunity to move to a credential from the Piper Center after completing a course successfully? Could the Core lead to engagement with a series of stackable credentials that make the value of a liberal arts education clear and visible to students and employers? 2. Could we parallel this with content alignment and business/industry sectors? For example, what if a student were able to take a course in the bioeconomy (interdisciplinary – economics, biology, chemistry, public policy, and other fields) or ESGs (environmental studies, economics/finance, sociology, political science, and other fields) followed by a credentialing opportunity through the Piper Center that has been developed in collaboration with the sector partner and leads to a LinkedIn credential and opportunity to interview for an internship within the sector?

SUSTAINABLE

Foundational theme: Much of St. Olaf's distinctive identity is found in the work of the Piper Center, the Taylor Center, the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community, and the Institute for Freedom and Community. We are at a critical moment in society where the values championed by our centers and the institute are a critically needed lens for understanding, compassion, and personal well-being. These vessels provide a unique means to expand conversations on values and to manifest those commitments through programmatic integration and thoughtful community engagement. Our centers and the institute have an opportunity to play a stronger role as interdisciplinary hubs, focusing and highlighting institutional values through an academic and co-curricular lens, thereby elevating the institution's commitment to whole-person education.

Key question: What can set us apart is the "Why" that is rooted in our Lutheran tradition. What competencies are needed to be a solution seeker? How do our centers and the institute map onto core identified components? How do we explicitly integrate the centers and other programming in this important work?

Key tasks and considerations:

1. Our students want a relevant, academically excellent liberal arts education that prepares them to contribute to the most pressing issues of our times. We need to mentor students to intentionally create their personalized pathway through their experiences in and out of the classroom and on and off the Hill.
2. Build on opportunities outside our classrooms:
 - Coursework within a major and beyond aligned with an issue that compels the student.
 - Leadership development (e.g., Athletics leadership pathway)
 - Research or work study or internship
 - Intercultural competence (DEIB)
 - Community/civic engagement
 - Global understanding
 - Collaboration/team building

INTEGRATION TEAM

The integration team is charged with synthesizing and integrating the work of the three innovation teams to provide a clear, easily understood overall pathway to a holistic education for our students that prepares them to contribute to solutions to one or more pressing global issues — Oles Can! Oles Will! The integration team will work to ensure that the following elements are fully considered and present:

1. Clear, compelling visuals
2. Crisp, easily understood language
3. Steps to achieving the strategic goal — include shorter- and longer-term steps and the role of faculty governance. Focus on best bets
4. Infrastructure needs (tied to strategic priorities)
5. Metrics and milestones as part of a roadmap. This should include a plan for regularly assessing progress and being agile in shifting course

We aim to create an integration team composed of some PLT members, leadership from our co-curricular areas, representation from the Dean's Council and other faculty members, staff leaders, students, alumni, and Regents.

All teams will attend to three cross-cutting and connecting themes:

DEIB	SUSTAINABILITY	MISSION
The recommendations will advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts so all members of our St. Olaf community thrive and experience a genuine sense of belonging.	The recommendation will address a key question: How do we sustain St. Olaf's bright future in light of multiple national and global headwinds? The proposed action steps will reflect strategies to address inequities locally and globally, issues of environmental sustainability for this one precious Earth we inhabit, creating a financially sustainable approach that reaffirms our commitment to meeting the financial needs of our students and providing fair and equitable compensation and benefits for our employees, ensuring the viability of our academic offerings and our built, digital, and energy production infrastructure that undergird all that we do on the Hill.	<p>Our mission statement is our promise to our students. Throughout our planning, our work will be mission-aligned.</p> <p><i>St. Olaf College challenges students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition.</i></p>

INTERESTED IN CO-CREATING A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR ST. OLAF COLLEGE?

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