



**For such
a time
as this**



Lutheran School of
Theology *at* Chicago

2021–2023 strategic plan

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago recognizes that our school stands on the lands of the Potawatomi, Miami, and Peoria peoples. For thousands of years before their forced removal, this was their traditional homeland, and it continues to hold their ancestral stories and wisdom. We honor and thank the elders of these and other nations, past and present. These lands are still home to many indigenous people, and we are grateful to learn in this place.

As a Reconciling in Christ seminary, LSTC seeks to offer hospitality and welcome to all who enter LSTC's academic programs. Following Jesus Christ, whose reconciling love bridged barriers and made strangers friends, we seek to welcome and learn from one another's particularity – including but not limited to one another's race, national or ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, physical ability, social status and theological diversity.





Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Office of the President

10 November 2020

Dear Friends:

At the start of a letter introducing our next strategic plan, we are acutely aware that the times in which we write are peculiar. Indeed, you may read this three years from now as our plan nears completion and find these words quaint and outdated. For today, though, recent developments are unsettling. A global pandemic again accelerates with no reliable resolution in sight. Social and political instability have become stark, surfacing latent tensions that will not be ignored. Even the fate of the earth is at risk due to how we have treated our home, with destruction and deprivation felt by many of our most vulnerable neighbors.

In light of such instability, some will decide that serious planning is impossible. Looking ahead is a fool's errand, speculative at best. We take a different approach. For us, there is no moment as important, as essential, as optimal for careful planning as these tumultuous times. Nearly everything once taken for granted in the wider church and how we prepare people for ministry is now thrown open. Things we never dreamt possible suddenly are available. To be sure, the basics of our faith – the relentless, unearned love of God toward sinners like us – remain solid and trustworthy. But how we convey such good news, or how we as a school of theology form leaders for emerging forms of church, these are now being explored afresh. It is for this very moment that our best thinking matters, that this plan matters.

The risk at a dramatic turning point is to regard everything beforehand as outdated. Nothing could be less true about the plan before you. We are grateful that our last strategic plan focused on leaders formed in community, for community. It is on that very basis we have the poise to attend to current concerns, **for such a time as this**. So as we engage serious changes in our wider world or more narrowly within theological education, we still hold to several core claims: that God's love is freely given, that Jesus' message is lasting life, that the Spirit's work still reconciles. We want to form leaders with character for the unforeseen moments, so they can declare hope and promise that sustains us whatever befalls.

This plan outlines the main steps toward that purpose. We invite you to review the **grounding** for this plan (pages 2-4), the **overview** of its themes (page 5), the **strategies** on which we are focused (pages 6-11), and the **monitoring** of our progress (page 12). Please also regard this as your invitation to join us as we discern our school's path during the next three years. We are blessed with an excellent faculty, committed staff, energetic students, wise boards, loyal alumni, and generous donors. We welcome your deeper engagement as well. May we receive holy vision that accords with God's ways in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

James Nieman, PhD
President

Kristi Ferguson, PhD
Chair, Board of Directors

Developing this strategic plan

This timeline shows the stages and steps for developing our strategic plan. The narrative beneath the chart details the major moments along this timeline, an intentional and extensive process that included substantial participation, research, and decision-making.

stage	prepare		discover		implement		monitor	
step	authorize	review	gather	propose	design	execute	assess	update
task	determining readiness and stages for process ahead	examining in depth core institutional commitments	collecting current data and new information	summarizing major insights that suggest priority areas	creating comprehensive, integrated, and credible plan	launching workable annual plan to be monitored	evaluating progress to share with stakeholders	reviewing outcomes in order to plot corrections
outcome	decision to proceed	value, mission, vision claims	data to make decisions	initial strategic choices	developed strategic plan	workplan for implementing	monitoring mechanisms	feedback for revisions
timing	Nov–Dec 2019	Jan–Apr 2020	May–Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov–Dec 2020	Jan 2021–Dec 2023	

PREPARE

The Board of Directors acted to **authorize** the development of a strategic plan for calendar years 2021–2023, assisted by Credo consulting. Seminary staff provided Credo with 18 documents about the range of the school’s operations, and Credo administered its “Thriving Framework Diagnostic Tool” to all Cabinet members. These materials were subject to **review** during a Cabinet retreat in January, followed by information gathering sessions with the Board Executive Committee and all staff and faculty in March. The Steering Committee (page 13) was appointed during this time and worked with Credo that spring to summarize materials and prepare for meetings.

DISCOVER

The most extensive labor during the planning process occurred as the Steering Committee began to **gather** existing information and discern further research. This material was distributed into three themes, with the Committee divided into “theme teams” to explore it more closely. Meeting weekly during the summer, teams sought further insights and conducted over sixty stakeholder interviews. This culminated in a three-day Committee meeting in September to **propose** dozens of initiatives for each theme and prioritize those with greatest potential. Though still in rough form, this was the first overall draft of the comprehensive plan you are reading.

IMPLEMENT

During a quite compressed period, the President, theme team leaders, and Director of Marketing met to **design** a fully developed form of the plan. This included editing the initiatives, reordering some of the structure, and sketching an internal workplan for later use. This was presented to the Board of Directors for initial review and subsequent revision. By the time of its fall meeting, the Board acted to **execute** the plan so it could be launched in 2021. Cabinet members and other staff then completed the workplan details for the first full year of implementation.

MONITOR

The steps to **assess** plan progress and **update** plan direction happen after initial implementation. This includes regular communication of outcomes and an iterative process of revising initiatives as needed. This stage is detailed near the end of this document (page 12).

Mission, values, marks, vision

This strategic plan builds directly on several long-standing formal commitments of our school. Each has been articulated by the Board of Directors in four approved statements regarding our mission, values, marks, and vision. These statements guide how we will address new challenges while ensuring that the plan is aligned with the history and gifts of this seminary.

MISSION

What we do best, our central purpose

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, forms visionary leaders to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ

VALUES

What we deeply believe, our guiding principles

Christ-centered – Striving by God's grace to follow Christ's call into loving service, directed and impelled by the Spirit's transformative power

Responsive to context – Embracing our diverse setting and academic environment in order to learn from and minister to the community

Attentive to diversity – Knowing and honoring cultural, ethnic, and religious perspectives to build communities of hospitality and reconciliation

Committed to excellence – Preparing leaders who are academically, practically, and spiritually ready to serve in a variety of vocational settings

MARKS

Who we are distinctly, our special character

Urban – LSTC is an urban seminary that believes the best way to prepare leaders to witness to the gospel in any setting is to provide them with a diversity of experiences found in a large city. This context is also crucial for those intending to specialize in urban ministry.

Global – LSTC equips leaders for the church in the United States and the world, engaging gifts that international faculty, students, and their families bring to the community, and structuring a curriculum that integrates care of creation and worldwide peace and justice into its degree programs and daily life.

Ecumenical – LSTC is a member of one of the largest theological consortia in the world, the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS). This resource and the contributions of its own ecumenical staff, faculty, and student community members give students access to a broad array of opportunities for education that is thoroughly Lutheran yet respectful of other Christian traditions.

Multicultural – LSTC's theological commitment to diversity is a high priority and makes the seminary a rich environment in which to equip leaders of all cultures.

Interfaith – LSTC's specializations in Christian-Muslim and Jewish-Christian relations and its wide-ranging studies in world religions and interfaith dialogue prepare students to exercise pastoral and public leadership in an increasingly multifaith world.

University-related – LSTC is located by intention near the University of Chicago. Through interaction with the university faculty and students and other educational resources, including the university's libraries, LSTC relates theological education and ministerial preparation to the wider search for wisdom in our society.

VISION

Where we are going, our emerging direction

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago seeks to build up the body of Christ and work for a world of peace and justice that cares for the whole creation

For such a time as this...

James Nieman, President

Strategic plans are maligned for demanding great effort but producing little change, an ocean of words with a teacup of results. This is not our experience, though. At our school, good plans align our work and guide our action in ways that make a real difference. For example, a report to an accreditor about our recently completed strategic plan ran a dozen pages of single-spaced text supported by twenty-six appendices, marking major gains in nearly every one of that plan's twenty-seven tactics arrayed across twelve strategies. Our plans neither "sit on the shelf" as some lament, nor is our active engagement accidental. An effective strategic plan focuses on something meaningful that matters, has genuine urgency. Such a plan is literally "timely" if not "momentous," eventful for our mission right now and in the impending years. A truly strategic plan convinces you that to do anything else would just be a waste of time.

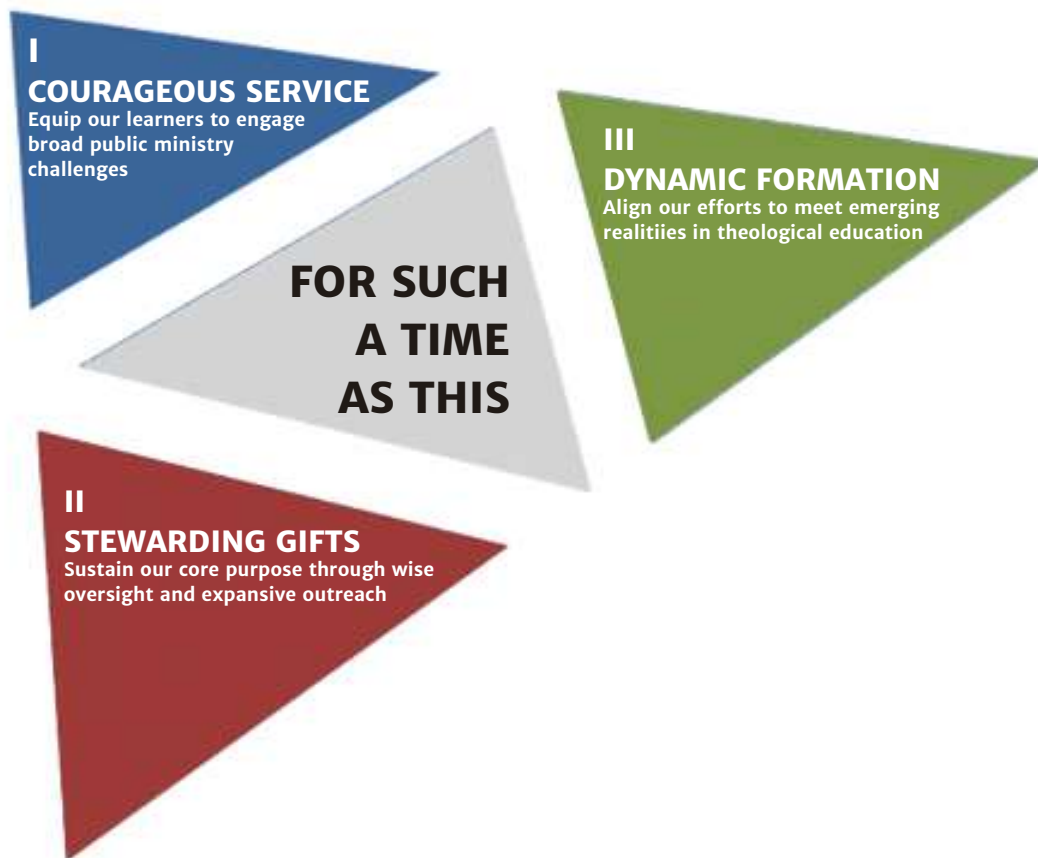
That is why this strategic plan has the title it does. What we say here, how we enact it, and where it can lead are precisely **for such a time as this**. Maybe you've heard that phrase before, a vague recollection that you cannot quite place. It sounds like something from scripture – and so it is, but from one of the less visited portions. It comes from a dramatic turning point in the book of Esther, a story rarely read in Christian churches that was almost left out of the canon because, like the Song of Songs, it never directly mentions God. In fact, though, the story is saturated with concerns about faithful living in difficult days. Originating twenty-four centuries ago, it recounts a period during the Persian empire when Jews were scattered far from their homeland – a minority within the dominant culture, outcasts on the fringe of respectability, a vulnerable and curious clan far from the seat of imperial might. That is, until Esther.

At first, she faced the plight of her Jewish compatriots, maybe worse. Orphaned and alone, Esther was finally adopted as daughter by Mordecai, an elder cousin. But in a complex twist, the Persian king comes to notice and favor her, naming Esther as queen. So far, then, the story is just a fairy tale, a reversal of fortunes. It's what happens next that matters. Mordecai hears of a plot to kill all the Jews in the empire, and begs Esther, now queen, for help. Though also a Jew, her identity had remained hidden, so speaking out now puts her at grave risk. And in Mordecai's only direct words in this entire story, he replies to Esther by laying out two irreconcilable options: the shame of her silence *at such a time as this*, or the promise of her role *for such a time as this* (4:14). Nothing matters so much as which action Esther takes with the power she has on which so many lives now depend. I hope you'll read your Bible to see what she does.

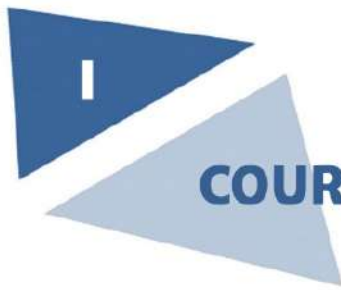
Maybe you think this drifts far from strategic planning, but I see it otherwise. In the end, this plan is not wishful thinking about what we aspire might happen someday, somehow. Instead, it clearly reckons with what these times place before us, ask of us, call from us. In her day and role, Esther had power to make a difference. So do we – not just individually but institutionally. Our school has power to act faithfully in forming visionary leaders. This is not some recent trend we glibly adopt but the lasting call we gladly accept – called into the world for this time, engaging our situation out of love of God and of neighbor. This strategic plan describes our responsibility and role for the sake of our students who will serve, our church in its witness, and our school as we adapt to change. Put another way, this plan directs our best efforts in hope for God's time, not anxiety for our own – that is, *for such a time as this*.

Overview of plan themes

To ensure that our work would result in a truly comprehensive and integrated strategic plan, we used a “balanced scorecard” approach. This well tested, highly respected method does not reduce an institution to one measure for success but adopts four perspectives, each of which contributes to sustainability. These four are: (a) capacities, (b) processes, (c) resources, and (d) stakeholders. The steering committee examined our school from each of these perspectives to identify successes, name problems, raise questions, and make proposals. The resulting initiatives were then drawn together into the three coherent themes that provide the structure for this plan.



For such a time as this, the three themes above address different challenges facing our school now and in the years to come: “Who do we hope our students will become?” “How do we hope our school will continue?” and “What do we hope our changes will enable?” The answers to these questions are summarized in the subheading for each theme and further elaborated in the detail for each theme that follows (pages 6–11). On those pages, you will also see that specific initiatives are organized into the four perspectives built upon the balanced scorecard approach. All told, this plan offers direction and improvement across every aspect of our school.



COURAGEOUS SERVICE

Equip our learners to engage broad public ministry challenges

Who do we hope our students will become?

Called to faithful service through the church, they surely need the foundations of biblical grounding, historical perspective, theological clarity, and practical wisdom. Building on that base, though, they will also need insights and skills undreamt when theological curricula were designed long ago. Church leaders now must grasp and confront twin forces that endanger us all – harm to neighbor due to race, gender, or sexuality, and waste of creation due to climate change. These are not faddish topics but deeply theological questions of sin and evil to which the gospel replies with truth, remedy, and promise. Our church needs diverse leaders who bring skill and capacity to this calling, able to learn from and work with others toward a holy vision for mercy, justice, and healing. *For such a time as this*, we will prepare graduates who serve our church with compassion and engage our world with courage.

WORKING PROCESSES

Optimize curricular forms and essential supports

Curriculum review – Conduct review of the school's Public Church curriculum to focus on course planning, new program creation, innovative delivery, faculty hiring, and paracurricular activities

Advising redesign – Increase clarity and standardization of advising within MDiv / MA / MAM programs (e.g., what courses to take when, timing of contextual education); separate the tasks of advisee mentoring and program guidance

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES

Involve outside partners to enrich learning

Nonprofit engagement – Explore and initiate pilot contextual education placements in non-profit organizations of various kinds so that students can have both parish and non-parish opportunities for learning and ministry

Neighborhood focus – Develop and sustain a strong commitment to particular neighborhoods as places for learning, service, and formation by developing projects, programs, scholarships, courses, and institutional partnerships

SEMINARY STAKEHOLDER

Focus on contemporary theological concerns

Seeking equity: race, gender, sexuality –

Conduct curriculum review, course offerings, and faculty hires that enhance the seminary's capacity to equip students to frame these issues as theological concerns and gain experience addressing them faithfully in practical contexts

Climate health – Focus on the development of programs and partnerships offering formational experiences of the church as a change agent for rethinking the relationships of economies to ecology to care for creation

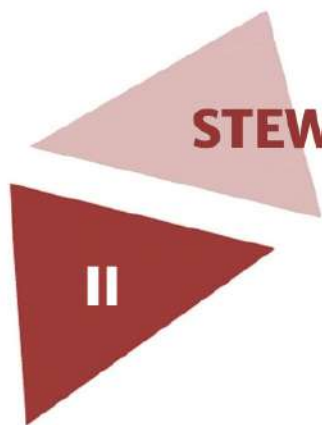
RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY

Improve financial and geographical accessibility

Scholarship support – Review student financial challenges in all degree programs (debt, income, expense, food insecurity) and respond with new scholarships attuned to distinctive needs, pre-enrollment financial counseling, and finding a balance between employment and granting

Remote learning – Enhance shift of degree programs online and address remaining challenges; determine which programs/courses will remain remotely available, how hybrid options can combine remote and local learning, and whether collaborations can improve range and diversity of offerings





STEWARDING GIFTS

Sustain our core purpose through wise oversight and expansive outreach

How do we hope our school will continue?

Not so long ago, seminaries were “wholly owned” by the church. In order to prepare ministers, they received secure finances, sound facilities, and guaranteed students. Such assurances, however, have eroded. Our school gladly remains in close partnership with the church, but the burden for resources and recruitment is now decidedly on us. For the sake of our church, then, we must take the lead to expand our student base beyond conventional sources to discover new leaders for tomorrow. We must also develop new resources to support those students and the programs they will need, not just with creative forms of revenue but also through greater efficiencies that expand our capacity. Amidst it all, we need to reach out and tell our story effectively, so the wider church learns of our distinctive value. *For such a time as this*, we will identify more kinds of gifts and steward them wisely into the future.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES

Build internal effectiveness and efficiency

Coordinated evaluation – Implement a comprehensive, coordinated institutional data management plan for streamlining information collection and use, in order to become effective at developing, modifying, and supporting initiatives as well as providing oversight to the seminary’s ongoing work

Administrative alignment – Conclude and review all remaining elements of the Common Discernment Project, with particular attention to aligning personnel within functional areas in order to clarify and improve organizational structure, communication, and staff retention

WORKING PROCESSES

Share the school’s story widely and effectively

Software integration – Fully integrate the institution’s software systems and programs to ensure seamless efficiency in generating reports, evaluating progress toward sustainability, and making effective internal decisions

Seminary marketing – Connect our foundational theological education to specific aspects of the seminary’s commitment to and progress toward equity, ecological health, justice, antiracism, and community-building, as well as its public church identity

SEMINARY STAKEHOLDER

Build stronger and more diverse learning cohorts

Enrollment pipelines – Continue and expand commitment to developing and enhancing strategic and diverse enrollment pipelines, including fostering deep relationships with ELCA colleges, universities, and campus ministries in order to enhance the student experience

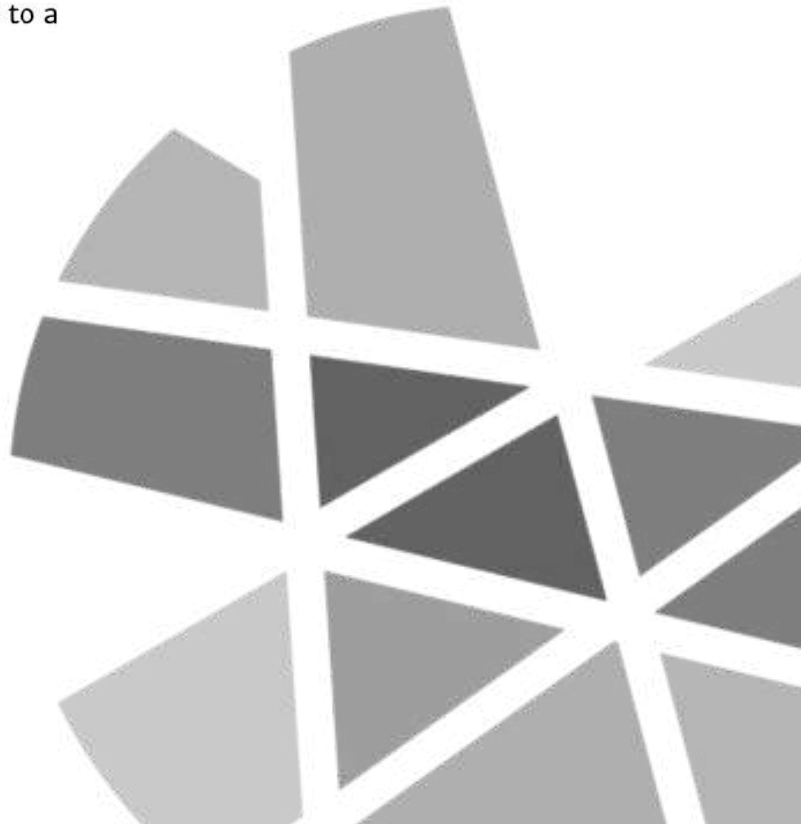
TEEM program – Pilot with the Metropolitan Chicago Synod (and later with other synods) to develop, enroll, and support clusters of students through the TEEM program, and support enrollment and retention of these candidates through intentional and structured mentoring initiatives with our alumni

RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY

Generate new sources for financial support

Catalytic grants – Establish an Advancement-led coordinating committee that includes other departments and meets regularly to identify, research, and pursue grant opportunities that will support innovative initiatives, focused on but not limited to building capacity for equity

Alumni involvement – Design and implement multiyear strategy to enlist alumni board to increase unrestricted donations from alumni; recruit alumni as volunteers for communicating our story to potential donors; connect alumni with students in mentorship that leads to a continuous learning community





DYNAMIC FORMATION

Align our efforts to meet emerging realities in theological education

What do we hope our changes will enable?

The enterprise of theological education faces vast and rapid upheaval that mirrors our social and religious milieu. Some churches now see lower commitment and participation, with challenges for how to prepare those best able to lead such groups. For both churches and seminaries, assumptions about basic facilities or core programs are being rethought. We must now explore what is truly required in order to carry out our educational mission, while not inadvertently discarding forms of community that support discipleship. This is the moment to invest in our commitment to becoming an equitable school, so that our institution teaches the lessons of leadership, sustainability, and justice that our students can then embrace and share in ministry. *For such a time as this*, we will persist along paths of faithful formation that can make us a more dynamic learning community.

WORKING PROCESSES

Realize institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion

Antiracism team – Receive, affirm, and endorse the upcoming recommendations from the seminary’s Antiracism Transformation Team pertaining to representation, voice, structure, hiring, and related items, as actions committed to dismantling institutionalized white supremacy

Authentic diversity – Examine, prioritize, and implement the “Recommendations for theological education and leadership” from the ELCA Task Force for Strategic Authentic Diversity final report, including periodic public reports that demonstrate accountability and progress

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES

Assess viability of programmatic commitments

Program viability – Accurately identify and assess the actual opportunity costs for various seminary programs (academic and otherwise) in their current form and implement strategic decisions to achieve sustainability, adaptation, or discontinuation of these programs

Educational partners – Cooperate and coordinate with ACTS schools, ELCA seminaries, and other appropriate consortia or institutional partners to enhance course offerings, workshops, certificates, and conferences, including the prioritizing of antiracist and intercultural commitments

SEMINARY STAKEHOLDER

Prepare adaptive and effective leaders

Leadership emphasis – Articulate and develop a formational emphasis focused on skills, character, and critical thinking needed for ministerial leadership, including commitment to areas such as antiracism training, community organizing, equipping lay leadership, conflict and crisis transformation

Bivocational support – Develop a comprehensive model that prepares graduates for part-time and bivocational career paths, including an adapted curriculum and professional certification partnerships

RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY

Provide appropriate learning space and equipment

Redeveloped facilities – Pursuant to board directive, secure a firm to explore redevelopment of main property/facilities, including careful reconsideration of our educational space needs as well as resolution of emerging challenges in ways that mutually benefit the school and the community

Accessible technology – In support of remote and enhanced learning, audit the information technology needs for all matriculated students in order to ensure their access to such resources (personal or institutional), and budget these over a multiyear period as a regular institutional expense



Oversight, progress, and metrics

IMPROVEMENT

The most recent strategic plan improved collaboration across the school, leaving a strong basis for this next three-year plan. The Executive Cabinet and larger Leadership Council provided regular opportunities for supervisory staff to communicate, troubleshoot, and plan. The smaller size of the Board of Directors and increased frequency of Board and Executive Committee meetings led to better interaction and responsiveness. Communication with staff and faculty who support the Board committees also improved. Finally, the Board identified shared institutional metrics so that progress achieving the goals of this strategic plan can be reviewed and assessed.

WORKPLAN

The workplan spreadsheet is a dynamic document meant for internal monitoring. It presents every initiative across the strategic plan within its appropriate theme and objective (left side), so that relationships can be recognized. In turn, each initiative is elaborated into its priority, duration, owner, sponsor, budget, source, metric, indicator, and tactics (right side). Simply for illustration, the top few lines of the complete twenty-four line workplan appear below.

THEME	PROGRESSION	OBJECTIVE	NO. TACTICS	DESCRIPTION	DEADLINE	INDICATOR	IMPACT	CHARTERED	OWNER	SOURCE	METHOD	INDICATOR	TACTICS
Secondary improvements	Team coordination and strategic development	Plan, guide, monitor	1	Conduct an annual review of the plan, and faculty/staff/committee members will identify specific areas for improvement. In turn, these issues will be addressed and goals reported addressing them in progress reports for annual evaluation.	12/31/2020	1.2020	None	None	Dr.	Current budget	Survey, catalog, and focus	Survey results, all issues, and focus	Conduct an annual review of the plan, and faculty/staff/committee members will identify specific areas for improvement. In turn, these issues will be addressed and goals reported addressing them in progress reports for annual evaluation.
		Classroom	1	Focus on the development of programs and personnel providing formalized experience of the school and management including the management of resources and learning.	12/31/2020	1.2020	Target	None	Dr.	Current budget and focus	Survey, catalog, and focus	Survey results, all issues, and focus	Conduct an annual review of the plan, and faculty/staff/committee members will identify specific areas for improvement. In turn, these issues will be addressed and goals reported addressing them in progress reports for annual evaluation.

MONITORING

For each initiative, its owner (the responsible and authorized party who directly implements and monitors progress) and sponsor (the supervisor to whom the owner directly reports) will identify its **year one metrics**. They will also report progress on initiatives to their respective constituents. Year one metrics will be identified before the plan launches at the start of 2021. Progress toward achieving these metrics will assist in identifying year two metrics and beyond.

Annual targets for **intermediate metrics** will be identified by members of the Executive Cabinet consulting with the chairs of the Board committees they support. Intermediate metrics include broader demand (stronger enrollment, expanded target audiences, etc.); enhanced educational product quality; improved diversity, equity, and inclusion; better efficiency and effectiveness; increased giving and revenue; and decreased expenses. A progress report on initiatives will be presented semiannually to the Board of Directors.

An oversight team drawn from the Board of Directors, faculty, and staff will be responsible to monitor plan progress through initiatives identified as contributing to the **shared institutional metrics** identified by the Board: (a) revenue exceeds expenses, (b) financial asset growth, (c) physical asset management, (d) staff retention, (e) student retention, and (f) antiracism accountability goals. A dashboard identifying progress toward achieving these metrics will be regularly updated and made available to stakeholders.

COMMUNICATION

Results from the internal communications audit will guide selecting the best channels to share the plan and provide progress updates. Engaging those who oversee all three levels of metrics will improve plan effectiveness by recognizing problems sooner and addressing them in a timely way. Enhanced transparency and sharing among staff, faculty, and the Board of Directors will ensure the aims of the plan are met, and so contribute to the school's sustainability.

Steering committee members

COURAGEOUS SERVICE

Theme team 1

Esther Menn [chair]
Dean of Academic Affairs

Tim Brown
Major Gift Officer

Lena Washington
Director of Dining Services

Marvin Wickware
Assistant Professor of Church and Society and Ethics

plus invited student participants

STEWARDED GIFTS

Theme team 2

Kristi Ferguson [chair]
Vice Chairperson of Board of Directors

Andrea Finnegan
Vice President for Finance

Langston Roberson
Gift Processing and Data Services Manager

DYNAMIC FORMATION

Theme team 3

Erik Christensen [chair]
Pastor to the Community and Director of Worship

Aaron Copley-Spivey
Director of Human Resources and Title IX Coordinator

Vima Couvertier-Cruz
Recruiter and Acting Coordinator of ISO

James Nieman
President



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