



Inspired. Empowered. Engaged.
Luther College Strategic Plan
2018–2023*

Luther College was founded by immigrants with a vision for a more just society and named for a reformer compelled by conscience. For both, education was the key. This is more than a legacy for us; it's who we are.

Luther College excels in nurturing the potential of every student to tackle complex challenges and live a life of meaning and purpose. The Luther community is committed to helping each student develop the habits of mind and heart as well as the skills and perspective needed to thrive and serve in an ever-changing world.

Our history is based upon principled stands. Our namesake, Martin Luther, proclaimed the dignity of every human person and the inherent freedom promised by the Christian faith. Our immigrant founders staked their future on an opposition to a theological justification of slavery.

In our time, Luther College's model of education, based on these principles, remains powerful. But in a world of rapid and accelerating change, our model must be dynamic and open to innovation and renewal. Our new strategic plan builds upon principles that have been fundamental to Luther College since our founding in 1861. Our plan — “Inspired. Empowered. Engaged.”—propels us now to build on these principles to create, articulate, and deliver an educational experience for the 21st century.

With thanks to Pastor Mike Blair, Professor Eric Baack, and Dean Terry Sparkes for this concise formulation of Luther's founding history.

*Approved by the Luther College Board of Regents, February 2018
Revised, September 2021

Introduction

This past year the world marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. As we at Luther College commemorated that watershed moment in Western history, we were reminded of our mission and special calling: to prepare students to serve with distinction for the common good. And we saw the need for reformation in our own time as the world experiences continuous, transformative change and its effects on local and global communities. This is the context in which we discerned the strategic priorities for Luther College over the next five years. Rooted in a theological and educational tradition committed to excellence, community, human dignity, justice, freedom, and service, we are inspired by Martin Luther's call to be "always reforming" (*semper reformanda*), and we are confident in our ability to step boldly into the future.

Luther College Today

Luther College today is in a strong position, with much to celebrate. Ranked among the top 100 liberal arts colleges, we are nationally recognized for our foundational Paideia program, the number of our students awarded prestigious Fulbright scholarships, and the percentage of our students who study abroad. Our program in music enjoys international distinction, and we are leaders in environmental sustainability. Within months of graduation, nearly 100 percent of Luther graduates are employed, engaged in graduate or professional study, or involved in volunteer service. Our graduates push the frontiers of science; build thriving businesses; educate and nurture our children; address disease, poverty, and injustice; develop new technologies; protect the earth and promote sustainability; strengthen our faith; and create art and music that elevate our spirit and nourish our humanity.

Our identity as a college in the Lutheran tradition (ELCA) marks us as a community that is both rooted and open. Neither sectarian nor secular, Luther College shapes lives of meaning and purpose in service to the neighbor. We seek excellence informed by a tradition that couples freedom of inquiry with intellectual humility. We holistically educate mind, body, and spirit to promote the well-being of individuals so that communities may flourish. We identify oppression and seek justice to heal divisions. We practice radical hospitality, welcoming all so that we may learn from all.

Luther College is a laboratory for life. Our residential setting in a vibrant town surrounded by natural beauty invites immersion and exploration. Students take risks, test new roles, and develop their goals and values in a collaborative and supportive community. They develop lifelong skills and relationships, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a sense of wonder, purpose, and adventure.

An education at Luther College is a transformation more than a transaction. Our deeply invested faculty and staff are committed to ways of learning, teaching, and mentoring that encourage students to achieve their highest potential. Working together, our faculty and staff create the signature quality of Luther College: an education individually crafted with students to promote growth and discovery.

A Year of Reflection and Planning

During the 2016–2017 academic year, the Luther College community engaged in a comprehensive process to reflect on the current state of the college and to discern together the priorities and vision that will drive our next strategic plan. Hundreds of students, faculty, staff, administrators, regents, alumni, parents, and friends of the college participated in an iterative series of forums, interviews, and surveys. The process provided an assessment of the strengths of the college and an affirmation of the relevance and power of Luther’s high-quality, residential liberal arts education. It also revealed challenges to our business model, as well as the ways in which we have fallen short of our ideals.

These conversations and reflections occurred during a time of disruption. In society at large, the pace of change in the economy, demographics, technologies, politics, and careers and professions quickened, and the need to listen and work across differences for the common good grew stronger. In higher education, concerns about the value and affordability of a liberal arts education intensified, as did the challenges to enrollment and fiscal sustainability posed by the changing needs and expectations of students: the number of prospective college students of traditional age is declining in the Upper Midwest; they are becoming more diverse in a wide variety of ways, from their ethnicity and culture, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation and gender identity, religious beliefs, and political affiliation, to aspects of their academic preparation and health and well-being; they increasingly need financial aid in order to afford the costs associated with tuition, room and board, textbooks, travel, and experiential learning opportunities; and they expect greater accountability for their investment, seeking an education that differentiates them from a growing pool of credentialed job seekers.

At Luther College, we heard affirmation of our historical strengths, tempered by the acknowledgment that we can neither rest on them nor reject questions about how students may experience them today and in the future. We received fervent calls for our community to reflect more fully the growing diversity in society and to ensure that our policies and practices promote welcome, equity, and justice. We heard a variety of perspectives on both our location and the relevance and meaning of our identity as a college of the church. We saw many challenges, but we also saw exciting, inspiring opportunities to build on Luther’s strengths through initiatives that foster innovation and stimulate us to develop in new and compelling ways. Academic excellence across our programs, a vibrant sense of community, the depth and quality of faculty-student engagement and student support, and the ways academic, co-curricular, and residential life intersect to prepare students for rewarding lives and careers —these are essential qualities of the Luther community that we seek to enhance and strengthen in the challenging environment we are experiencing for liberal arts education.

Vision

Our vision of a comprehensive student experience that develops whole persons guides our goals, objectives, and activities, ensuring that all students are inspired, empowered, and engaged to thrive, serve, and lead in an ever-changing world.

Our renewed student experience will lead students through self-exploration, reflection, engagement, and service, a progression of inward to outward discoveries that will expand upon place and community each

of their four years at Luther College. Students will learn about themselves and others through an interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasizes intersections. New perspectives and awareness will be shaped and refined into direction and purpose through intentional reflection and advising pathways. Internships and study-away experiences will expand students' sense of community and engage them with the neighbor. Finally, leadership development through service will teach students how to use their strengths to work across differences in order to build community. Supporting each aspect of the experience is an emphasis on well-being that will teach students how to integrate their values and goals into lives and careers as servant leaders who are centered and resilient, empowered to serve the common good in an ever-changing world.

Presidential Transition

Dr. Jenifer K. Ward was unanimously appointed Luther College's 11th president and joined the campus community on July 1, 2019. Prior to becoming Luther's president, Dr. Ward served as Provost and Dean of the College for Centenary College of Louisiana, where she was tasked with integrating a liberal arts curriculum with co-curricular programming that would shape an educational experience designed to promote the intentional intellectual, as well as the creative, personal, and professional growth of the whole student.

During her "State of the College" address in August of 2020, President Ward introduced four vision themes for the future success of Luther College. The revised strategic plan identifies these themes and the "crosswalk" they provide as Luther approaches the end of the current plan and begins to shape a subsequent one to launch in 2023.

Vision Themes

STEWARDSHIP

Luther College's mission, history, values, and programmatic strengths all have a common denominator of stewardship or "caring for": the environment, our resources, our communities (both existing and desired), our heritage, the relationship to Decorah, and the power of a liberal arts education, among other objects of our care. While many colleges and universities might elevate one or the other of these, the umbrella concept of "stewardship" as a guiding principle is both distinctive and authentically Luther.

INTEGRATION, COHERENCE, AND FOCUS

Luther College has many bright and shining stars, some of which are already connected through interdisciplinary programs and collaborations. The next and needed step is to name and lift up the *constellation* that is Luther College, as opposed to assuming our audiences will connect with individual stars. This is of particular importance when it comes to our students, who should be able to understand and articulate what it is--aside from their major or their key co-curricular activities--that makes their holistic education a *Luther* education.

ADAPTABILITY

Luther College exists in a world in which the pace of change is rapid and accelerating. Through its approach to curriculum, student engagement, operational processes, and organizational structures, Luther must be able to alter course quickly and courageously, while ensuring that it remains tethered to its core values. Luther College is *always becoming*.

GROUNDING AND GLOBAL

Luther College's main campus is in the Driftless Region of northeast Iowa, in a town inhabited and influenced by, in turn, native communities, Norwegian immigrants, and an increasingly cosmopolitan and diverse population. While grounded in Decorah, Luther is faced to the world through its emphasis on internships and global learning, and through its wide alumni network. While both our grounding and our global reach are important, there are especially rich opportunities at the intersection of the two.

Goals and Objectives

Our goals and objectives intersect and interrelate, creating a synergy of efforts by programs and offices across the college. Collectively, they build on our strengths and equip us to achieve our strategic priorities:

We must ensure that our educational experiences continue to develop whole persons who are equipped with the skills for lifelong learning and leadership. We must inspire and empower students to solve the most difficult challenges facing our world.

We must support students, faculty, and staff, equipping them to thrive, succeed, and serve. We must engage with one another across campus to develop programs and partnerships that enable us to flourish, ensure academic excellence, and invest in students.

We must become an inclusive community of welcome, equity, and justice that goes beyond hospitality and fairness. We must find inspiration in a diverse community and ensure that we are able to work across differences.

We must establish a fiscally sustainable business model. We must innovate and optimize our operations, investing in strategies that deliver on the distinctive character and value of a Luther education.

Goal 1: Learn and Lead

Luther College will be a national leader in reimagining a liberal arts education for a global society.

Objective 1.1: Reinvent the curriculum to inspire and prepare students to solve grand challenges.

Activities:

1.1.A Foster a common understanding about the characteristics of a liberal arts education and the mission and values of Luther College in the 21st century.

FORMER LABEL: 1.1.1

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

1.1.B Revise the all-college requirements to foster intersection and collaboration between disciplines, between cultures and identities, between curricular and co-curricular learning, and between intellectual exploration and preparation for life and career.

FORMER LABEL: 1.1.2

VISION THEME(S): Integration, Coherence, and Focus; Grounded and Global

Objective 1.2: Establish student mentoring and development systems that foster an ethic of service and the capacity for leadership.

Activities:

1.2.A Create a comprehensive advising program that involves academic advising by faculty, administrative advising by staff, and peer and alumni mentoring.

FORMER LABEL: 1.2.1

VISION THEME(S): Integration, Coherence, and Focus

Objective 1.3: Guarantee all students can participate in multiple study-away and internship experiences.

Activities:

1.3.A Create a new experiential learning hub in Minneapolis–St. Paul, Rochester, or Des Moines to establish a replicable model for other urban areas.

FORMER LABEL: 1.3.1

VISION THEME(S): Grounded and Global

Objective 1.4: Create structures and systems that foster experimentation, reflection, and responsiveness to changing needs.

Activities:

1.4.A Increase opportunities for reflection and planning by expanding the Next Steps for Sophomores initiative to all students in their sophomore year.

FORMER LABEL: 1.4.1

VISION THEME(S): Integration, Coherence, and Focus

1.4.B Create a Center for Teaching and Learning as a nexus for innovation and inclusive excellence in course and program design.

FORMER LABEL: 1.4.3

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability

1.4.C Revise the faculty-administration-governance system to promote nimbleness in the curriculum and operations.

FORMER LABEL: 1.4.4

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability

Goal 2: Thrive and Serve

Luther College will be a community of inspired, engaged, and resilient individuals empowered to thrive and serve in an ever-changing world.

Objective 2.1: Revitalize systems and facilities that support wellness.

Activities:

- 2.1.A Review campus policies and programming and implement changes that address the culture of overcommitment for all members of the campus community.**

FORMER LABEL: 2.1.1

VISION THEME(S): Integration, Coherence, and Focus

- 2.1.B Improve student well-being through an integrated approach to wellness, counseling, health, and academic support systems.**

FORMER LABEL: 2.1.2

VISION THEME(S): Integration, Coherence, and Focus

- 2.1.C Renovate and expand facilities for athletic and recreational programming.**

FORMER LABEL: 2.1.4

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

Objective 2.2: Equip students with the skills needed for vocational discernment and career readiness.

Activities:

- 2.2.A Grow capacity for students to explore careers, identify applied learning opportunities, and build professional networks by expanding partnerships between the Career Center and other academic and administrative units.**

FORMER LABEL: 2.2.1

VISION THEME(S): Grounded and Global; Integration, Coherence, and Focus

- 2.2.B Expand the student work program to coach and train students in soft skills and 21st-century career competencies.**

FORMER LABEL: 2.2.2

VISION THEME(S): Integration, Coherence, and Focus

Objective 2.3: Establish an institutional culture that values and supports professional development for faculty and staff.

Activities:

2.3.A Create an internal leadership development program that enhances growth of faculty and staff leaders.

FORMER LABEL: 2.3.1

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

Objective 2.4: Connect students, faculty, staff, and alumni to each other, as well as to local and regional communities, through service.

Activities:

2.4.A Establish a Day of Service for students, faculty, staff, and alumni to give back to their communities.

FORMER LABEL: 2.4.2

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

2.4.B Support service projects by groups of students, faculty, and staff through mini-grants.

FORMER LABEL: 2.4.3

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

Goal 3: Include and Infuse

Luther College will be a community that champions inclusive excellence as a core value.

Objective 3.1: Build inclusive excellence into the operations of all academic and administrative units.

Activities:

3.1.A Expand competencies and expertise in working across cultural differences.

FORMER LABEL: 3.1.1

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability; Stewardship

Objective 3.2: Recreate institutional structures that support an inclusive campus community.

Activities:

3.2.A Restructure the Diversity Council to provide expertise on inclusive excellence, campus climate, and structural diversity.

FORMER LABEL: 3.2.1

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability; Stewardship

3.2.B Create an additional institutional resource on student persistence and retention by restructuring the Diversity Center.

FORMER LABEL: 3.2.2

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability; Stewardship

Objective 3.3: Recruit, support, and retain a diverse faculty, staff, and student body.

Activities:

3.3.A Design a cohesive, structural marketing and outreach model to diversify the faculty and staff.

FORMER LABEL: 3.3.1

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability; Stewardship

3.3.B Advance campus-community relationships to ensure a mutually welcoming experience on campus and in the larger Decorah community.

FORMER LABEL: 3.3.4

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability; Stewardship

Goal 4: Innovate and Steward

Luther College will be a leader in financial sustainability and stewardship to maximize the reach and impact of its mission.

Objective 4.1: Maximize enrollment, persistence, and net tuition revenue.

Activities:

- 4.1.A Develop and launch a research-based brand positioning strategy and a strategic marketing campaign that emphasize value and support the vision and goals of the college.**

FORMER LABEL: 4.2.1

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

- 4.1.B Design and implement a four-year, high-impact student retention model.**

FORMER LABEL: 4.2.3

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

- 4.1.C Create new Iowa and Minnesota community college transfer pathways and improve institutional capacity for transfer student success.**

FORMER LABEL: 4.2.4

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability

- 4.1.D Conduct a tuition pricing study to inform research on alternative pricing and financial aid models.**

FORMER LABEL: 4.2.5

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

Objective 4.2: Accelerate mission-driven entrepreneurial changes to diversify revenue streams.

Activities:

- 4.2.A Stimulate creativity and collaboration among faculty and staff to launch new ventures and to support development and refinement of Luther's business model.**

FORMER LABEL: 4.3.1

VISION THEME(S): Adaptability

4.2.B Expand summer programs (camps, conferences) and academic year programming (youth programming, retreats) to meet revenue, pre-enrollment, and/or community development goals.

FORMER LABEL: 4.3.3

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

Objective 4.3: Increase responsible stewardship of assets and resources and expand institutional collaborations in order to maximize operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Activities:

4.3.A Renew commitment to Climate Action Plan and the goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.

FORMER LABEL: 4.4.1

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

4.3.B Expand and strengthen regional and educational partnerships to enhance programs, and achieve economies of scale.

FORMER LABEL: 4.4.3

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

4.3.C Review programs and services to identify opportunities for improved effectiveness, strategic investment, or abandonment.

FORMER LABEL: 4.4.4

VISION THEME(S): Stewardship

Former Activities: Merged with Another Activity

Increase participation in study away and internships by reducing financial barriers through endowed scholarships.

FORMER LABEL: 1.3.2

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 2.2.A

RATIONALE: The Career Center was relocated to the Development and Alumni division in June 2021. The merger and rebranded division will maximize partnerships and engagement with alumni and donors, which should ultimately lead to both increased financial support for internships and enhanced capacity for career exploration, as represented in Activity 2.2.A.

Expand initiatives and prevention education to foster a safe campus experience.

FORMER LABEL: 2.1.3

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 2.1.B

RATIONALE: Identifying programming and equipment to improve safety on campus, as well as identifying initiatives with partners in the local community (e.g., Decorah Police Department) to improve safety for students in both Decorah and Winneshiek County, are key aspects of supporting student well-being on campus, as represented in Activity 2.1.B.

Articulate career paths and succession plans for staff.

FORMER LABEL: 2.3.2

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 2.3.A

RATIONALE: Identifying career paths and succession plans for staff are key aspects of enhancing the internal development and growth of staff leaders, as represented in Activity 2.3.A.

Ensure that all academic and administrative units have resources that support ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual minorities.

FORMER LABEL: 3.1.2

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 3.1.A

RATIONALE: Ensuring that academic and administrative possess the resources to support diversity across a multitude of dimensions is a key aspect of expanding intercultural competencies, as represented in Activity 3.1.A.

Foster interreligious understanding to explore the meaning of faith and values in a globalized, pluralistic society.

FORMER LABEL: 3.1.3

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 3.1.A

RATIONALE: Fostering interreligious understanding is a key aspect of expanding intercultural competencies, as represented in Activity 3.1.A.

Position Luther College as a regional resource and site of expertise in inclusive excellence.

FORMER LABEL: 3.1.4

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 3.3.B

RATIONALE: Positioning Luther College as resource for building inclusive excellence is a key aspect of advancing campus-community relationships and ensuring a mutually welcoming experience on campus and in the larger Decorah community, as represented in Activity 3.3.B.

Develop formal mentoring initiatives for underrepresented faculty, staff, and students.

FORMER LABEL: 3.3.2

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 3.3.A

RATIONALE: Developing mentoring initiatives is a key aspect of building a strategic model to increase the diversity of faculty and staff, as represented in Activity 3.3.A.

Implement a comprehensive first-year experience for all students that uses the framework of inclusive excellence to support student engagement and success.

FORMER LABEL: 3.3.3

MERGED WITH ACTIVITY 4.1.B

RATIONALE: Implementing a comprehensive first-year experience is a key aspect of designing a four-year, high-impact student retention model, as represented in Activity 4.1.B.

Former Activities: Removed from Strategic Plan

Create an employer and professional advisory board to inform curriculum development.

FORMER LABEL: 1.1.3

RATIONALE: Use the Alumni Council as a consulting body during the curriculum revision process and leverage the new home of Career Services within the Development and Alumni division to further that work.

Launch a student leadership institute that builds leadership skills and intercultural competencies.

FORMER LABEL: 1.2.2

RATIONALE: Given other priorities, leadership development is best accomplished through the work of the new Dean for Student Engagement and existing student organizations. Leadership development may also serve as a component of the invigorated work-study program.

Create an Innovation Incubator as a student laboratory for entrepreneurship and socially responsible businesses.

FORMER LABEL: 1.4.2

RATIONALE: The lack of a faculty or staff champion, as well as staffing changes in the Management program, makes tangible progress unlikely in the next two years. There has been negligible student interest in such a program.

Increase endowed support for faculty scholarship.

FORMER LABEL: 2.3.3

RATIONALE: Securing support for endowed faculty chairs/professorships/fellowship and student-faculty research projects are a routine priority for development officers, as such support creates direct budget relief and/or increased access to high impact learning opportunities for students.

Appoint a community liaison officer to identify and coordinate service opportunities between Luther and local and regional communities.

FORMER LABEL: 2.4.1

RECOMMENDATION: Stewardship of campus-community relationships and the identification of opportunities for partnership and service projects are routine expectation of the work of the President and members of the President's Cabinet.

Improve the accessibility of campus facilities.

FORMER LABEL: 3.2.3

RATIONALE: While improving the accessibility of campus facilities remains an important goal, the college is not in a financial situation where it can pursue significant opportunities in the next two years. As Luther College works to develop a campus master plan, the accessibility of facilities and needed improvements should be identified.

Develop a comprehensive campaign case statement that aligns with the goals, objectives, and action items within the strategic plan.

FORMER LABEL: 4.1.1

RATIONALE: A comprehensive campaign is best considered as supporting the fundable initiatives within the strategic plan rather than as an activity within the strategic plan.

Conduct campaign-readiness work to position the college to successfully launch the comprehensive campaign.

FORMER LABEL: 4.1.2

RATIONALE: A comprehensive campaign is best considered as supporting the fundable initiatives within the strategic plan rather than as an activity within the strategic plan.

Carry out the phases of the comprehensive campaign.

FORMER LABEL: 4.1.3

RATIONALE: A comprehensive campaign is best considered as supporting the fundable initiatives within the strategic plan rather than as an activity within the strategic plan.

Increase the affordability of a Luther education by providing endowed scholarships that address demonstrated financial need gaps.

FORMER LABEL: 4.2.2

RATIONALE: Securing support for student scholarships is a routine priority for development officers. While the need to address unmet financial need will grow, the college is not well-positioned in the next two years to make progress that will substantially impact enrollment numbers or net tuition revenue. Consider including this activity as a pillar in the forthcoming comprehensive campaign and/or the next strategic plan.

Create new certificate and degree programs aligned with market demand.

FORMER LABEL: 4.3.2

RATIONALE: Neither the Academic Prioritization Task Force nor the Curriculum Committee acted upon the data and recommendations regarding new programs that emerged from the workshop with Gray Associates in May 2020. Given the ongoing work connected to academic program elimination/reduction and the revision of the all-college requirements, it is unlikely that the faculty will take up this work in the next two years. Include this activity in the next strategic plan.

Secure additional grant funding to advance strategic priorities, programs, and mission.

FORMER LABEL: 4.4.2

RATIONALE: Seeking grant funding from foundations and government agencies is routine work for the staff in the Development Office and the Dean's Office. Upon the arrival of the Provost in July 2021 and subsequent restructuring of the office, identify additional resources that may be needed to support the submission of grant proposals from faculty and staff.