



Adding Value to a Changing World

2015-2020



Austin College: Adding Value to a Changing World Strategic Plan 2015-2020

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We enter this season of strategic planning for the future from a position of many strengths. In the midst of a recessionary economy, we have used the past five years to enhance the value and quality of an Austin College education and expand opportunities for students.

Applications have reached record highs, as has donor support for sponsored scholarships. Our academic reputation and our media presence have grown. Our graduates are getting good jobs and attaining scholarships to graduate school, acceptances to top medical and law schools, and prestigious post-graduate awards. Our new housing is allowing seniors to stay closer to campus and play a larger role in student life.

With the help of many alumni, friends, and foundations, we have created the new IDEA Center, our most ambitious and transformative facility, which doubled the number of classrooms on campus. Generous gifts have helped us build new student housing, expand support for academic excellence, bring our communications strategy to a new level of sophistication, and implement our comprehensive environmental sustainability strategy, Thinking Green. Third-party reviewers consistently identify Austin College as a life-changing college, a great value for students, and an institution that outperforms its similarly resourced peers.

And unlike many of our peers, we have maintained the strength and size of our faculty, ensuring that small classes, mentoring, and hands-on learning remain hallmarks of an Austin College education. We have continued to invest in support for faculty scholarship and staff development. And we have sustained our commitment to an increasingly diverse and talented student body by cultivating inclusiveness and increasing need-based financial aid.

Disciplined financial planning has allowed us to rebuild economic strength amidst the slow global recovery from a recessionary economy. Our endowment has grown to \$133 million from a recessionary low of \$102 million, and our new investment strategy maintains a focus on growth while sharply reducing our risk. National

measures demonstrate that our overall financial health is strong and that the decisions we made during the recession allowed us to recover faster and with greater effect than most of our peers.

But these are challenging times for small liberal arts colleges nationally, and we remain extremely vulnerable to larger economic and social forces. The continued slow pace of global economic recovery as well as structural changes in the ways families are able to access capital, savings, and debt, mean that families are increasingly struggling to afford private higher education. Nationally, net tuition per student remains relatively flat. And while our endowment has grown 30 percent, market volatility will continue to require disciplined endowment spending.

Our ability to innovate and to support rising costs associated with providing a high quality liberal arts education will depend on identifying new resources and not simply relying on aggressive tuition increases or endowment draw.

Moreover, the College is increasingly under pressure to affirm and communicate effectively the importance and value of the residential college model as lower-cost, on-line learning expands. The liberal arts themselves are incorrectly seen by much of the American public as incompatible with the demands of contemporary work. The national mood and the expectations our graduates face in a rapidly changing technological environment mean that an Austin College education must directly and successfully demonstrate its enduring value to multiple stakeholders.



The Austin College mission calls on us to provide an ever-deepening and enriching liberal arts education. Student learning—especially the kind of sophisticated, complex, hands-on, higher-order learning that is the hallmark of a liberating education—is at the core of our strategic plan. Our plan acknowledges our traditional methods of teaching and learning, as well as the ways that new technologies are changing both the dissemination and the actual creation of knowledge.

Our graduates must be prepared to emerge as leaders among their own generation.

That means they must not only come to know themselves and their complex world but also must understand how knowledge is constructed and challenged. They must know how to communicate with audiences, actual and virtual, using a wide range of compelling strategies and techniques. They must be able to adapt the skills they develop at Austin College and translate them into meaningful work and service in a diverse and rapidly changing world.

Our strategic plan is responsive to what Austin College students bring to the table. We recognize that curricular and co-curricular opportunities should build on student skills—increasing sophistication in hands-on learning, extensive multilingual and multicultural competencies, and unprecedented access to information. And at the same time, these programs must compensate for what popular culture and the test-based high school have not emphasized: opportunities for critical reflection, creative expression, and appreciation for complexity.

We know this kind of active learning is best realized face to face, within a community of co-learners, and in an atmosphere of personalized challenge and support.

And so our strategic plan for the future emphasizes the importance of our residential mission, our four-year curriculum, co-curricular opportunities, and our sense of place—even as we explore the ways mediated communication can enhance off-campus study, connect our campus to new ideas, and provide new models for the creating and sharing of intellectual work.

Just as new technologies and changes to the high school curriculum are part of our planning, so are we responsive to larger economic and cultural forces.

We must ensure that the high-quality education we envision is supported by a sustainable business model.

Pressures to keep tuition from rising mean we will need to grow the size of our current student body. We will do so in measured and well-planned ways and with focused attention on maintaining both the nature of our community and the caring, individualized support we provide for each of our students. Student persistence and completion will remain as important as student recruitment. New revenue streams will develop from our core competencies and will not be motivated by hype or unthinking imitation.

Philanthropic giving will continue to play a key role in the College's business model. Our plan will require that we launch a comprehensive fundraising campaign focused on endowment growth and support for key programs and scholarship support. In addition, annual giving—the kind of gifts that can be put to work immediately in support of the College's operating budget—will have to expand to new levels as we maintain our focus on providing access to talented students.

Moreover, since we believe excellence in undergraduate education is relationship-intensive and driven by a commitment to place, our business model will sustain an outstanding faculty and staff, a physical plant that nurtures learning, and opportunities for growth and renewal as technologies and pedagogies change.



VISION

By 2020, every graduating Austin College student will be ready to offer perspectives, skills, and knowledge that add authentic value to a changing world. The College and its graduates will be well prepared to flourish amidst rapid technological advances and economic disruption.

STRATEGY

To realize our vision we will invest in the key drivers that will most effectively prepare the College and its students for the new economy and new opportunities for leadership and service. Our plan identifies four overlapping areas of core focus:

■ **Career and Life Planning**

Our curriculum, co-curricular programs, and facilities will be fully aligned to maximize opportunities for students to develop transformative life and career skills. As a community, we will collaborate to cultivate and institutionally “own” the achievement of each and every student. We will create numerous partnerships that expand next-step opportunities for our graduates and will embrace the development of leadership skills and hands-on learning across the curriculum.

■ **Liberal Arts in a Digital Era**

Our curriculum and our classrooms will be reimagined to enhance student learning through expanded access to both traditional and new communication technologies. We will improve student outcomes in written, oral, and visual communication. We will emphasize both intercultural and intergenerational communication.

■ **Sustainability in the New Economy**

We will work to make an Austin College education even more affordable and its opportunities more accessible to all talented students, including first-generation college students, international students, transfer students, early-access college students, and others who could benefit from expanded opportunities. We will aim for a student body of at least 1,450—larger than our current size but still well within our capacity—in order to stabilize our financial health. We will create new revenue-producing programs that build on our strength in liberal arts education. And we will launch a comprehensive fundraising campaign that will move Austin College to the next level of competitiveness and excellence.

■ **Global Vision, Local Engagement**

We will serve as an accelerator for the cultural and economic growth of our surrounding region. We will make better use of the unique opportunities our location provides for learning, service, and scholarship. Concurrently, we will build international partnerships that have a local impact and further build on our long-standing reputation as a leader in international education.



We have identified specific goals and preliminary initiatives in each of these four core areas. As the plan unfolds, this list will expand.

Career and Life Planning

AC Gateways

We will launch Austin College Gateways to provide our students with preferred and expanded access to graduate schools, professional schools, internships, summer research, and prestigious post-graduate opportunities. By 2020, Gateways will grow to include partnerships with at least 15 universities and with at least 45 different degree programs.

Leadership, Service, and Scholarship Complex

We will transform the Moody Building Complex into the Leadership, Service, and Scholarship Complex—the physical, and henceforth symbolic, center of the Austin College campus. This center will foster collaborations among our flagship co-curricular programs and will expand our ability to support high-impact, hands-on learning. By 2020, funding for this project will have been secured and renovation will be underway.

Transferable Skills

We will create a first-year experience that integrates learning goals across academic and student life. Focusing on building a portfolio of transferable skills and exploring applications for a liberal arts education, this first-year experience will grow to include experiences and outcomes for each of the four years a student spends at Austin College. By 2020, a new designation system and an e-portfolio will allow every student to easily articulate the way the liberal arts education has prepared them to add value to an employer or a graduate degree program.

Hands-on Learning

We will expand opportunities for students to engage in hands-on, high-impact learning such as student research, performance, internships, and leadership opportunities across the curriculum and co-curriculum. By 2020, every student will have access to at least two hands-on learning experiences prior to graduation.

Career Development Support

We will engage our extensive network of alumni and friends to serve as career mentors to students and recent graduates, building a career support community that extends well beyond our campus borders. By 2020, this support will be available to every student, and utilized by at least 25 percent of them.

Liberal Arts in a Digital Era

Digital Pedagogies

We will provide faculty with the training and tools they need to more fully integrate technology into the liberal arts classroom. This initiative will build on student experiences as digital natives and will respond to the increasingly complex technological demands in a variety of disciplines and professions. By 2020, at least 25 faculty members will participate in this initiative and a minimum of 40 courses will be transformed in this way.

GIS Lab

We will develop an expanded interdisciplinary Geographic Information System (GIS) laboratory to complement current research tools used in social, cultural, and environmental research. The lab will support individual research projects as well as community collaborations. By 2020, the lab will be a leading data provider for information about our region.

Abell Learning Commons

We will transform key spaces within Abell Library to support collaborative learning, the use of information technologies, and the development of an increasingly lively, intellectual learning environment.

Communication Skills

We will develop signature opportunities to enhance writing and other communication skills through curricular and co-curricular programming. By 2020, every graduating student will be able to create a portable e-portfolio demonstrating achievement in these areas.

Sustainability in the New Economy

Scholarship Expansion

By 2020, we will significantly increase the number of endowed and sponsored scholarships that we can make available to students with a primary focus on making Austin College more affordable for a wider range of students.

Comprehensive Campaign

We will launch an ambitious comprehensive fund-raising campaign for the future of Austin College. By 2020, our Board of Trustees will have demonstrated leadership for the campaign through 100 percent participation and the securing of at least 30 percent of our goal.

Persistence Plan

Collaboration between faculty, student affairs professionals, academic affairs professionals, coaches, and the admission staff will allow us to better identify at-risk students, encourage student resilience, and intervene in a timely and effective way. By 2020, first-year fall-to-spring retention will be 94 percent; first-year-fall-to-second-year-fall retention will exceed 85 percent; and 90 percent of our graduates will achieve graduation in four years or less.

Integrated Learning Environment

We will create a partnership with Grayson College to help at-risk Austin College applicants prepare for the transition to Austin College. This program will offer additional academic preparation and opportunities to develop leadership skills. By 2020, we will enroll at least 20 students each year in this program.

Recruitment Communication

We will invest in a state-of-the-art communications center to support admission and fund-raising efforts. By 2020, at least 45 additional students will enroll each year as a result of the recruitment strategies made possible by this investment.

Athletic Recruitment

We will identify ways to increase roster sizes and expand athletic opportunities for students. By 2020, we will have expanded the number of sports we sponsor to better match the average of schools of our type and location.

International Student Recruitment

New partnerships with high schools abroad, as well as foreign government agencies and educational exchanges, will expand opportunities for targeted international recruitment. By 2020, we will enroll at least 20 students each year through these partnerships.

Austin Teacher Program

We will make the ATP program more affordable by creating opportunities for students to enroll in Austin College graduate-level courses that meet undergraduate requirements. Students will be able to complete both the BA and the MAT in four and a half years and will be eligible for a paid internship during their final semester. By 2020, annual enrollment in the MAT program will exceed 30 students.

Faculty and Staff Support

We will remain committed to small class sizes, individualized support for students, the principles of tenure and academic freedom, and a compensation structure that attracts and retains talented and committed employees. The creation of new positions and the filling of vacated positions will be done with careful attention to economic sustainability and will ensure that our average student-faculty ratio does not exceed 13:1. By 2020 we will have a student body of approximately 1,450 and a (proportional) full-time faculty of at least 111.

Preparing the Next Generation

We will partner with select independent high schools and consider how we can provide opportunities for their high-achieving students. By 2020, we will have formalized these relationships in ways that introduce talented students to Austin College and create additional revenue.

National Consortium

We will create a national consortium of like-minded colleges to support January Term collaboration and reduce costs. By 2020, our consortium will include at least seven other institutions.

Global Vision, Local Engagement

Center for Community and Regional Development

We will create an endowed center to support economic and cultural development in our region. The center will provide robust data and bring multiple stakeholders together in order to respond to our region's largest challenges. By 2020, the center will be fully endowed.

Service Learning

We will build on our successful culture of service to include service-learning opportunities and linkages between global and local service. By 2020, service learning as high-impact pedagogy will be available to students in a wide range of academic programs.

Faith and Engagement

Our covenant with the Presbyterian Church (USA) will continue to develop and strengthen relationships with Presbyterian individuals and congregations, as well as with individuals and communities of other faith traditions. We will continue to create opportunities for spiritual development and will foster student engagement in interfaith and intercultural dialogue and service. By 2020, Austin College will have enhanced visibility among Presbyterians while remaining a place of welcome and spiritual support for each student and all members of the Austin College community.

Access to International Study

We will create additional scholarships for international January Term courses, develop new exchange programs with foreign universities, and look for other ways to make study abroad and other international experiences more affordable for our students. By 2020, at least 75 percent of our graduating students will have participated in an international experience and 65 percent of those who spend a full semester abroad will do so at a partner university.





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