

Board of Trustees Focus Groups

Gaylord Hall, Worner Center -- Friday, September 21, 2012

A Distinctive Place of Learning

Discussion facilitated by Emily Chan, staffed by Ron Machoian

Participants: Susie Burghart, Dan Cooper, Doug Norberg, Phil Swan, and Nancy Woodrow

Charge: Through extensive outreach that is well documented, identify goals and initiatives to leverage our unique location, character and community to support the academic venture and promote a collective sense of place.

Guiding Questions:

- As our students represent more diversity and their lives revolve more around social media, how can the residential experience help them develop and maintain relationships, and live out the core values of the college?
- How can we benefit from our location in the Southwest as we offer one of the country's premier liberal arts experiences?
- As we become even more aware of the need to sustain the health of our physical environment, how can we use the undergraduate experience to instill lifelong habits of environmental conservation and stewardship? How can we do even more to protect the physical resources that will sustain the college in the future?
- How can we increase our presence as a critical strategic element of Colorado Springs?
- How can our alumni be more active and engaged?

Emily introduced the meeting with a brief review of the charges and guiding questions. The Board of Trustees participants were then asked to discuss their thoughts and ideas to meet the challenges posed by the guiding questions.

1) The group focused first on the notion of an improved framework for CC students to develop and maintain meaningful relationships during their time on campus. A summer block-series required for all students following their first or second year might reintegrate the class as a learning cohort and simultaneously strengthen social bonds and awareness. This concept is currently modeled at Dartmouth College, where a similar program has found success as a source of a college-wide sense of community. A CC experience of this sort also might integrate a second Priddy-styled service-learning program.

- It was noted that there is great potential for a required summer block to embody an expanded Southwest/Rocky Mountain experience. In this manner, a given summer block's course offerings might directly or indirectly relate to a regionally relevant theme.

It was suggested that many of the summer course offerings could be interdisciplinary in their content and methodology and in that way meet various curricular requirements while still prompting an association with “place” or region.

- Summer block(s) would be a required first-enrollment entry point for transfer students to build a social connection with CC prior to the regular academic year. Discussion noted that this advent could potentially negate the need for a winter-enrollment period.
- 2) The next thread of discussion identified the potential for bringing interested alumni into the summer experience as learning participants. This might take the form of three-day weekend “courses” led by CC faculty and might also bring together alumni and current students in a forum to develop mentor-styled relationships.
- These courses would similarly stress the unique sense of regional place and offer the alumni and students alike a feeling of continuity in the CC experience.
 - To reach similar outcomes, CC could offer three- or four-day courses or educational workshops to various alumni groups and others at accessible places around the country. This program would keep the alumni community engaged as life-long learners while offering them a continued vibrant relationship with their alma mater. The locations for such offerings might be chosen specifically to reflect the CC experience in its natural environment as a backdrop for learning.
- 3) It was noted that alumni feel an enthusiasm for helping students create and grasp professional opportunities following graduation, not only by offering them expanded information and insights on various professional pursuits, but also by providing access that might help graduates compete for opportunities that meet their interests and skills.
- 4) Discussion then shifted to the need for feelings of increased community on campus to support our notion of place--programs in this regard might seek to circumvent traditional social “stovepipes” that often remain even on diverse campuses. Thematic houses, much on the lines of CC’s current language houses, are a potential mechanism to reach this outcome as are intramural sports and other group-based recreational activities.

Engaged Teaching and Learning

Discussion facilitated by Mike Lampton, staffed by Daniel Marion

Participants: Neal Baer, Samantha Barlow, Lynne Cheney, Karen Pope, Van Skilling.

Charge: Through extensive outreach that is well documented, define the goals and supporting initiatives to leverage the block plan and establish Colorado College as the leading liberal arts institution for engaged teaching and learning.

Guiding Questions:

- How can we make the most of all the time our students spend with us?
 - What are the next steps as our faculty continue to move from oracle to mentor?
 - How can we do more to support faculty and students as they pursue scholarship and research?
 - Considering our aspirations for engaged teaching, participatory learning, and more collaborative scholarship, what forms of technology should we acquire and support?
 - How can we help students and faculty do more to expand the lesson of the liberal arts to life questions and career development?
 - What do these changes mean for the physical campus?
- 1) There are old questions that have been around since the inception of the block plan (e.g., how do faculty best pursue research while extracting expectations and simultaneously manage their duties as a professor and colleague?) and there are new questions (e.g., how do we incorporate the inevitable technology to maximize our resources?).
 - One suggestion was to consider partnering with other schools to do online language courses. How do we maximize our resources while staying true to what we do best – the block plan.
 - Are we getting the best talent this country has to offer by treating all departments as equal?
 - 2) The promise of the block plan is that students and faculty are free from the constraint of semester plans, so how do we deliver the potential that such a curriculum offers, and how do we financially support the students and faculty that wish to have experiences that are unique to the block plan?
 - One suggestion was to consider a year-long block plan for uninterrupted engagement. Students could have the option of graduating in 3 years, more resources and choices might be available to faculty and students on when they wish to learn, and flexible opportunities for studying abroad and internships may improve. Such an idea may utilize our place more effectively, and we may be able to simultaneously import and

export the brightest minds in the country.

- 3) How do we best take advantage of our alumni and the benefits of a liberal arts education to offer more internships and jobs for our students and elucidate what they may do with their CC education? More programming should be offered that brings in successful alumni to promote post-graduate ideas.

Extending our Reach

Discussion facilitated by Bob Manning and staffed by Andrew Streight

Participants: Alan Harris, Chad Milton, Eben Moulton, Jane Rawlings, Mike Slade, Sue Woolsey

Charge: Through extensive outreach that is well documented, investigate best practices nationally in higher education to define the goals to extend CC's reach in terms of what we do and how we are perceived. Goals should leverage the Block Plan and location.

Guiding Questions:

- How can we be better known for what we do?
 - How can our entrepreneurial spirit extend our reach?
 - Should we consider establishing a physical location in another part of the U.S. or the world?
- 1) The first item that was discussed during this meeting was that, as far as we know, we (at Colorado College) have never measured the academic effectiveness of the Block Plan. It's important, before we try to market the Block Plan, that we figure out how we can measure the utility of the Block Plan. This measurement should involve student-based outcomes. Specifically, it might be worthwhile to see information on data retention at CC vs. that achieved at "regular" universities and colleges.
 - 2) The group also discussed the idea that CC needs to reach out to the broader CS community and extend our national/international reputation. One way of doing this is by establishing CC as some sort of "Center for Research Intensive Learning." The idea is that more institutes or forums sponsored by CC might encourage greater community accessibility and interest.
 - 3) When others talk about the Block Plan, the question that always seems to come up is "why?" Also, people tend to ask, "If the Block Plan is so great, then why doesn't everyone do it?" These questions need to be addressed substantively by the college before attempting to export the plan or claim its ascendance.

- 4) A participant asked, “What has CC spent on marketing in the last few years?” This question prompted conversation about what we are trying to be at CC and who we are trying to reach as our audience. What could we be known for in terms of a US News Ranking audience? Since scarcity is such an important aspect of being known, perhaps we should focus on continuing to drive down our admit rate at CC. The way this is accomplished is by driving up the # of applicants.

- 5) In order to attract students as well as extend our reach, the group started to focus on ideas for more programs like the State of the Rockies. This topic dominated the rest of the conversation and several ideas were brought up about what a new program like this might actually look like.
 - Someone thought that it is important that we do not try to just do one thing with respect to this program—we need to focus on several areas. Some sort of water/environmental study program was mentioned as well as the notion of reestablishing our dance program as a nationally recognized program. The issue of immigration was also discussed—what are the costs/benefits of having an immigrant population in the Southwest?

- 6) The idea of marketing or exporting the Block Plan in some way gained traction among participants. The program would focus on education and market the Block Plan as an innovative educational strategy. Ideas offered included:
 - We would teach it to everyone interested (the idea is that we could market it to people who aren’t necessarily college-age students or people who fit into the mold of CC culture)
 - Institutionalizing the Block Plan
 - Measure, evangelize, and market the Block Plan
 - We would need to have the whole school participate in a measurement of the Block Plan’s effectiveness
 - Virtual entities could add new money and a new focus to the Block Plan’s program
 - We could accomplish by identifying a few staff/faculty members who might be available to be extra resources for the new CC center
 - Is the Block Plan good for you if you aren’t good at the subject?—we need a tracking study

Institutional Effectiveness

Discussion facilitated by Bill Campbell and staffed by Lyrae Williams

Participants: Amy Louis, Brian Thomson, Cole Wilbur, Jack Wold, and committee chairs Stacy Davidson and John Lauer

Charge: Through extensive outreach to both faculty and staff that is well documented, identify the improvements, changes, and new initiatives that will ease the implementation of the strategic plan, improve operational efficiencies and the positioning of the college for future change.

Guiding Questions:

Year 1

- How can Colorado College be positioned to be more nimble and at ease with change?
- Where are the opportunities for improved efficiencies in operations?

Year 2

- What resources can we leverage to implement the strategic plan?
- What initiatives and efficiency opportunities will require additional resources? Which initiatives are fundraising opportunities?

- 1) Discussion began with the question “what obstacles does the college have to overcome to be more efficient and effective?” Response identified cultural issues in the campus fabric that reside in the otherwise positive characteristics of independent thinking [academic innovation].
 - It was noted that independence can lead to a disposition for silo-focused versus college-centered operations.
 - Another obstacle is the cumbersome way things get done (or not done) by committees. In the current college governance structure it is believed or perceived that everyone necessarily has a voice. While shared-governance is valuable, it creates a cumbersome environment to modify, progress or even change processes.
 - The questions remain . . . where do we need to be (in the future) to be positioned for change? How do we become more nimble?

Suggestions include:

- Set “big” goals that inspire the whole college
 - Use the language/words “institutional effectiveness” cautiously, as it sounds tactical
 - Catch up and remain with the higher education industry in progressive innovation, especially with regards to technology
 - Suggest sharing with the entire CC community what is happening in higher education; share what other institutions are doing and what current short-term and long-term issues are facing higher education [idea: follow the example of Tech-Tuesday with Higher Education-Thursdays 2-3 times a semester]
 - Encourage the campus to share internally what new (cool) things a department/area is doing that might be beneficial to and/or inspire other areas to rethink how they do things [idea: follow the example of the faculty luncheons each block with “department luncheons” where various depts share something they are doing with the audience]
 - Find out what other institutions are doing in higher education in addition to how CC is a leader in various areas
 - On the academic side, how do we inspire the college to think innovatively to bring on a collective CC mindset more so than an independent mindset?
 - Identify and focus on what we do well
 - Suggest putting into annual evaluations (including those written on faculty) some measure of whether the individual is perceived as an “enabler of change” or a “roadblock” to progress
 - Redirect people to be inspirational
 - Emphasize our shared common value across the staff/faculty of “being here for the students”
- 2) Discussion noted that organizational culture is driven by the stories we tell. Are we (CC) telling negative stories? If so, negative gossip needs to somehow be mitigated-- shift the balance from negative to positive. Create and encourage a culture of gratitude.
- 3) The Year of Listening document and the Strategic Planning charges reaffirm the mission and values of the college. The results of the planning process will set the priorities for the future. All faculty and employees of the college should have clarity about their roles and how they are tied to the mission and how they contribute to supporting the values.

- 4) The physical structure and layout of campus buildings can promote feelings of isolation across the college community [idea: short of new construction, use the campus open space more strategically to effect feelings of shared community].

Further suggestions:

- Provide clarity around the organization. Who and when to ask for information? Where are the employees of influence? Who are these people? What are their roles? [idea: have these conversations “bubble up” from the ground during the planning process.]
 - Keep the message clear, that effectiveness is not a money/cost-cut thing, but that resources may actually be needed to improve the organizations effectiveness. Apply Charitable Navigator concepts to the college.
 - Resources (human, space and budget) are segmented, which encourages silo thinking [idea: can the college think about finding opportunities to share resources (human, space and budget) across departments and divisions?]
 - Apply Lean Management concepts throughout the college. Follow Student Life’s example on how to learn to be more efficient and effective and learning how/where you have value. Focus on the positive (“value”) first then identify where things (activities and processes) are providing less value [idea: with regard to the scheduling of meetings . . . the physical footprint of the campus makes it difficult to attend back-to-back meetings. Suggest starting all campus meetings 10 minutes past the hour and end 5 minutes before the hour. This way there is always 15 minutes between scheduled meetings.]
- 5) From a current student’s perspective, CC “totally works” and seems efficient. Prompt celebrations through a communication channel that is actually consumed by the intended audience [idea: Identify the best thing that happened organizationally in a block. Discuss positive things – celebrate “best practices” on the CC campus while seeking “best practices” at other institutions].
 - 6) Create a social space for faculty and staff in the form of a “college club”
- Year 2 suggestion: Establish relationships with Google, Apple and Microsoft--these organizations exemplify nimbleness. Ask them for help/ideas on effectiveness and positioning an organization for change.