Strategic Directions Update:

Thoughts Shared with the Board of Trustees

Janet Morgan Riggs

February 2011

The Current Context

Much has changed since the Strategic Directions for Gettysburg were articulated in 2007. We have had transition in the leadership of the College in key positions including the president, the provost, and the vice president for development, alumni and parent relations. The economy has shifted seismically and in ways we certainly would not have predicted in 2007. Demographic projections related to the diversity of high school students and their geographic distributions have become a reality. The emergence of online learning opportunities and for-profit education, together with a high unemployment rate and significant increases in student financial need, have created a context that requires us to explain the value of a liberal arts residential education and justify its cost.

We are certain that a liberal arts education is the best possible preparation for our graduates who will live in a dynamic world and who will work in careers that are evolving rapidly and in some cases do not yet exist. Rather than focus on specific skills tied to a specific job, we teach students to think critically, to bring multiple disciplinary approaches to bear in the solution of complex problems, to communicate effectively, and to appreciate diverse cultural perspectives in a world that is increasingly interconnected. Although I would argue that the liberal arts approach provides the best possible preparation for tomorrow’s professionals and citizens, one could reasonably wonder whether or not we will be able to sustain a model of education that costs so much and that strives for accessibility to qualified students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, this may be the greatest challenge we now face. To meet this challenge successfully we must

• Maintain and enhance the demand for a Gettysburg College education by assuring that Gettysburg continues to be among the very best liberal arts colleges in the country;

• Become less tuition-dependent by increasing our endowment and level of annual giving;

• Consider and develop new revenue streams that are consistent with our goals and are a good fit for Gettysburg College;

• Consider strategic partnerships that have the potential to help reduce costs and/or expand the opportunities we are able to offer.

This combination of strategies will allow us to thrive in the challenging economic climate that we expect to live in over the next several years and move towards a model in which comprehensive fee increases more closely approximate the rate of inflation. We are poised to stand among the very best liberal arts
colleges in the country. We are in a position to provide our students with a truly exceptional educational experience. Our success, however, depends on our ability to acquire the resources necessary to support that experience. There is no question that we must engage in a major fundraising campaign for Gettysburg that will both increase our endowment and enhance the level of annual support that we can depend on from our alumni, parents, and friends.

Progress on the Strategic Directions

Informal conversations that I have had with faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni, and parents lead me to believe that the four Strategic Directions articulated in 2007 continue to be relevant and appropriate for Gettysburg College given the new challenges we face. We will continue to provide the best possible liberal arts educational experience, characterized by a high level of student engagement, and programs that are distinctive to Gettysburg College. We will continue to strive to make the Gettysburg experience accessible to a diverse student body, and to enhance the sense of connection among our community’s members.

Gettysburg College has not stagnated through the last few years of economic turmoil. Rather, we have made significant progress on a number of goals listed in the Strategic Directions. Specifically, we have

- completed the transition to a five-course teaching load to allow faculty additional time for individual work with students and for research and creative activity;
- enhanced our efforts to assist faculty in the acquisition of external grants through the re-formed Office of Foundation, Government, and Faculty Grants, resulting in an average increase in faculty grant submissions by 20% to an all-time high of 39 in FY ’10;
- established a coordinating office for student-faculty research and an annual symposium to showcase student work;
- established a new Global Leaders program to enhance opportunities for students to share their international experiences and to integrate those experiences into the educational program;
- sharpened our focus on leadership development through the establishment of the Garthwait Leadership Center;
- completed construction of the Center for Athletics, Recreation, and Fitness, securing $10.3 million in gifts towards this project and achieving Gold LEED certification;
- signed the President’s Climate Commitment and developed a long-term approach to carbon neutrality;
- established an interdisciplinary public policy major;
- developed a public policy speaker series and a co-curricular public policy experience (Inside Politics) through the Eisenhower Institute;
- hired a new Director of the Civil War Institute to lead the expansion and integration of our Civil War programs;
- continued expansion of the Sunderman Conservatory program, with the addition of 3 new full-time faculty and an increase in music majors from 34 in 2007 to 94 in 2010;
enhanced the financial aid available to support the recruitment of a more diverse student body, resulting in an increase in students of color over the last 5 years from 8% to 11% of total enrollment;
- increased the number of career-related learning opportunities from 394 in 2007 to 548 in 2009;
- kicked off the BOLD Council to engage our youngest alumni more fully with the College;
- expanded opportunities for parent engagement through the Parents’ Advisory Board, Get Acquainted Day, and Move-In Day;
- initiated underclass engagement in Founders Day to strengthen loyalty to the College.

We should be proud of these accomplishments, which are attributable to our excellent faculty and staff who have guided and been guided by the Strategic Directions for Gettysburg as they have considered new programs and activities and made decisions about the allocation of available resources.

However, we have not yet achieved all of the goals laid out in the Strategic Directions. We are at a moment when we must consider which of the remaining goals are most critical for us to pursue and whether there are goals that we should put forward now that we did not in 2007. Simply put, what will allow us to enhance the educational experience for our students even as we manage the issues related to cost?

Looking to the Future

I strongly believe that there are strategies in the Strategic Directions document that, if integrated, would produce more than the sum of their individual parts. Specifically, the Strategic Directions document cites the importance of

- expanding opportunities for student engagement with public policy issues and challenges;
- enhancing the global focus of the educational experience;
- promoting leadership and community service within the co-curricular program.

These are worthy goals, each of which supports our mission of preparing students for active leadership and participation in a changing world—to be effective citizens and professionals in an increasingly interconnected global community. The intersection of these three areas provides an opportunity to strengthen this preparation, and I believe that that opportunity is one that is distinctive to Gettysburg.

Our highly regarded Center for Public Service has produced a strong focus on service learning and community engagement over the last two decades. Our evolving curricular and co-curricular programs in public policy are distinctive among liberal arts colleges. Our community’s enthusiasm about language and culture extends well beyond the faculty who teach foreign languages. Our new approach to student leadership development builds in our students the skills they need to take effective action in service of the greater good. Critical to our students’ preparation for global citizenship is the way we facilitate the connections between public service, public policy, leadership, and language and culture.
In fact, I believe that our approach to these components of our program is so distinctive that their integration will truly differentiate the Gettysburg experience from that provided by any other college or university in the nation. As we reconsider the Strategic Directions for Gettysburg College, I challenge our community to capitalize on the potential for synergy in these areas, particularly as our public policy and leadership programs develop.

The high quality liberal arts experience to which we aspire requires a campus culture that supports the student body of today. As we have become increasingly selective, it is clear that we must provide a campus culture that meets the expectations and needs of excellent students and challenges them appropriately. That culture will not only foster their intellectual development, but it will also increase the likelihood that excellent students will complete their undergraduate degree at Gettysburg. I often hear our faculty and students express concerns about the social environment at Gettysburg College. There is no question that academic culture and social culture are related, that the student social culture can either support or detract from the academic culture. We are acutely aware of the problems arising on college and university campuses across the country associated with the abuse of alcohol and other substances, and we have initiated efforts on our own campus to address this issue. We owe our students a culture that promotes responsibility and the development of healthy habits. We also owe our students a program that challenges them academically and supports them as they strive to meet that challenge. The Strategic Directions document does not bring a clear focus to the issue of campus culture, one that is complex and requires our careful attention. Therefore, I challenge our community to build a culture that values academic rigor, that supports students as they cultivate their intellectual and civic passions, and that promotes the development of healthy social relationships and behaviors. These efforts must focus especially on students who are new to our community.

Proposed Priorities

A refinement of the listed priorities in the Strategic Directions document should emphasize continued strengthening of our academic program and academic culture, a continuing focus on our distinctive programs, the building of a more diverse community, and an increased focus on supporting the health and well-being of our students. Given the thoughts articulated above, together with multiple informal conversations I have had with faculty, staff, and students over the last several months, I propose the following areas of emphasis as we strive to advance the quality of our undergraduate experience and enhance our reputation under some challenging financial constraints:

In the areas of engagement and distinction we must

- Expand and enhance our academic facilities to support contemporary pedagogy and research and to accommodate a faculty that has grown over the last several years. Specifically, we will plan to give priority to acute academic facilities needs as we direct allocations from the annual capital budget (and surpluses where appropriate). We will also include as a Campaign priority the renovation of a building to include space to support our academic program.
• Create five additional faculty positions to support the development of new and distinctive academic programs. Specifically, we will include as a Campaign priority support for faculty, with a particular focus on our distinctive programs in public policy, music, and Civil War era studies.

• Provide support for student-faculty research and creative activity, so that all students and faculty who seek this experience can have it and so that students can engage in this activity earlier in their academic careers. Specifically, we will include as a Campaign priority support for student-faculty research and creative activity.

• Provide support for service-learning immersion experiences and career-related experiences (internships, externships, job shadowing) so that all students who want these experiences can have them and so that students can engage in these activities earlier in their academic careers. Specifically, we will include as a Campaign priority support for these experiences. We will also continue to work with alumni and parents to build the number of career-related experiences available to Gettysburg students.

• Develop strategies for better integrating our commitment to global and multicultural perspectives with our programs in public policy, public service, and leadership. Specifically, we will form a cross-divisional task force to develop integrative strategies and recommendations for how best to proceed. We will also plan for physical adjacencies of these programs where possible to encourage synergies and to reinforce our institutional focus in this area.

• Provide an intellectual center for the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in 2013, thereby enhancing Gettysburg College’s academic reputation and visibility. Specifically, we will look to the 2013 planning committee for recommendations, and we will explore the initiation of programs in conjunction with this commemorative year that could live on beyond it.

• Plan for the enhancement of the campus climate in ways that promote a strong academic culture and support the healthy personal and intellectual development of our students.

• Capitalize on advancements in technology and the digital skills of today’s students in ways that will enhance their academic and college life experiences.

In the area of access, we must continue to work to increase the diversity of the student body and to build a community that embraces and celebrates diversity in the fullest sense—diversity of ideas, interests, abilities, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious beliefs, geographic background, and socio-economic level. Specifically, we must

• Build both our endowment and annual giving to provide scholarship support to qualified students who cannot afford a Gettysburg education. Specifically we will include as a Campaign priority support for financial aid.
• Increase our efforts to attract and sustain a more diverse faculty and staff. Specifically, we will look for recommendations from the Diversity Commission with regard to increasing the diversity of our community, as well as promoting a campus environment that welcomes and celebrates diversity.

In the area of connection, we must focus on building a sense of pride among all of our constituencies in their association with Gettysburg College. Without the help of our alumni, parents, and friends, we simply will not be able to sustain or enhance our reputation as one of the best liberal arts colleges in the country. Although there are many advantages to building a strong sense of identity with Gettysburg among our alumni, parents, and friends, the most important outcome will be to

• Develop a more robust annual giving program, both with regard to percentage of alumni giving and the dollars raised. Specifically, during the Campaign we will increase annual giving and sustain that level of giving post-Campaign.

**Conclusion**

Our commitment to developing intellectual vitality in our students, a sense of responsibility for themselves and for others, and a propensity to take effective action in service of the greater good, is unwavering. We take seriously our responsibility to prepare students for meaningful professional and civic lives.

According to former Gettysburg College Dean, David Potts, “Yale’s Reports of 1828...emphasiz[ed] that even a citizenry well schooled in the three Rs would need wise, effective leaders who had been rigorously trained at liberal arts colleges.” (p. 5). One hundred seventy-nine years after our founding, that mission has never been more important. It continues to guide the way we prepare our students and the way we plan for the future. We will continue to offer the rigorous liberal arts education called for by our founders and so relevant for today’s world. In addition, our unique combination of language and culture, public service and policy, and leadership development will create an extraordinary educational context for the development of “wise, effective leaders”—global citizens well-prepared for lives of action and responsibility.