



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.

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.

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. Foster a common understanding about the characteristics of a liberal arts education and the mission and values of Luther College in the 21st century.
2. 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.
3. Create an employer and professional advisory board to inform curriculum development.

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

Activities:

1. Create a comprehensive advising program that involves academic advising by faculty, administrative advising by staff, and peer and alumni mentoring.
2. Launch a student leadership institute that builds leadership skills and intercultural competencies.

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

Activities:

1. Create a new experiential learning hub in Minneapolis–St. Paul, Rochester, or Des Moines to establish a replicable model for other urban areas.
2. Increase participation in study away and internships by reducing financial barriers through endowed scholarships.

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

Activities:

1. Increase opportunities for reflection and planning by expanding the Next Steps for Sophomores initiative to all students in their sophomore year.
2. Create an Innovation Incubator as a student laboratory for entrepreneurship and socially responsible businesses.
3. Create a Center for Teaching and Learning as a nexus for innovation and inclusive excellence in course and program design.
4. Revise the faculty-administration-governance system to promote nimbleness in the curriculum and operations.

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:

1. Review campus policies and programming and implement changes that address the culture of overcommitment for all members of the campus community.
2. Improve student well-being through an integrated approach to wellness, counseling, health, and academic support systems.
3. Expand initiatives and prevention education to foster a safe campus experience.
4. Renovate and expand facilities for athletic and recreational programming.

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

Activities:

1. 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.
2. Expand the student work program to coach and train students in soft skills and 21st-century career competencies.

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

Activities:

1. Create an internal leadership development program that enhances growth of faculty and staff leaders.
2. Articulate career paths and succession plans for staff.
3. Increase endowed support for faculty scholarship.

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

Activities:

1. Appoint a community liaison officer to identify and coordinate service opportunities between Luther and local and regional communities.
2. Establish a Day of Service for students, faculty, staff, and alumni to give back to their communities.
3. Support service projects by groups of students, faculty, and staff through mini-grants.

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:

1. Expand competencies and expertise in working across cultural differences.
2. Ensure that all academic and administrative units have resources that support ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual minorities.
3. Foster interreligious understanding to explore the meaning of faith and values in a globalized, pluralistic society.
4. Position Luther College as a regional resource and site of expertise in inclusive excellence.

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

Activities:

1. Restructure the Diversity Council to provide expertise on inclusive excellence, campus climate, and structural diversity.
2. Create an additional institutional resource on student persistence and retention by restructuring the Diversity Center.
3. Improve the accessibility of campus facilities.

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

Activities:

1. Design a cohesive, structural marketing and outreach model to diversify the faculty and staff.
2. Develop formal mentoring initiatives for underrepresented faculty, staff, and students.
3. Implement a comprehensive first-year experience for all students that uses the framework of inclusive excellence to support student engagement and success.
4. Advance campus-community relationships to ensure a mutually welcoming experience on campus and in the larger Decorah community.

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: Launch and complete a comprehensive fundraising campaign that prioritizes funding for scholarships, academic and co-curricular programs, and renovations to Main and athletics facilities.

Activities:

1. Develop a comprehensive campaign case statement that aligns with the goals, objectives, and action items within the strategic plan.
2. Conduct campaign-readiness work to position the college to successfully launch the comprehensive campaign.
3. Carry out the phases of the comprehensive campaign.

Objective 4.2: Maximize enrollment, persistence, and net tuition revenue.

Activities:

1. 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.
2. Increase the affordability of a Luther education by providing endowed scholarships that address demonstrated financial need gaps.
3. Design and implement a four-year, high-impact student retention model.
4. Create new Iowa and Minnesota community college transfer pathways and improve institutional capacity for transfer student success.
5. Conduct a tuition pricing study to inform research on alternative pricing and financial aid models.

Objective 4.3: Accelerate mission-driven entrepreneurial changes to diversify revenue streams.

Activities:

1. Stimulate creativity and collaboration among faculty and staff to launch new ventures and to support development and refinement of Luther's business model.
2. Create new certificate and degree programs aligned with market demand.
3. Expand summer programs (camps, conferences) and academic year programming (youth programming, retreats) to meet revenue, pre-enrollment, and/or community development goals.

Objective 4.4: Increase responsible stewardship of assets and resources and expand institutional collaborations in order to maximize operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Activities:

1. Renew commitment to Climate Action Plan and the goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.
2. Secure additional grant funding to advance strategic priorities, programs, and mission.
3. Expand and strengthen regional and educational partnerships to enhance programs, and achieve economies of scale.
4. Review programs and services to identify opportunities for improved effectiveness, strategic investment, or abandonment.