Advancing Merrimack in the 21st Century

THE AGENDA FOR DISTINCTION

Strategic Plan for Merrimack College
2011–2021
Dear Colleagues and Friends of Merrimack College,

Over the past decade, the demographics, economics and globalization of higher education have been changing rapidly. These profound changes have made it imperative that small residential colleges like Merrimack engage in a serious process for determining what the future holds 5, 10 and 20 years from now.

Beginning last October, the Board of Trustees, vice presidents, deans, leaders of the faculty, and members of the senior staff engaged in an important conversation about the future direction of Merrimack College. This strategic planning group then solicited feedback and input from stakeholders throughout the Merrimack community, including faculty, staff, and students.

This effort has resulted in a 10-year strategic plan that is rooted in our Augustinian tradition and embodies our mission to actively engage the passion and emotion of our hearts with the discipline provided by intellect and reason. This plan will enable us to confidently drive toward our vision of creating a highly ranked, internationally respected, selective masters comprehensive Catholic college, which is residential, student-centered, professionally focused and rigorous in the liberal arts, sciences, and business.

I am grateful to all who contributed their candid and constructive input and feedback throughout this process.

Our goals are ambitious, our opportunities are great, and our energy and passion for a better future for Merrimack College is strong and unanimous.

Sincerely,
Christopher Hopey
President
In the fall of 2010, Merrimack College embarked upon a collaborative process of bringing together campus influencers and key leaders of various institutional stakeholder groups to discuss the future of the College, its aspirations, and opportunities. Through more than nine months of discussions, dozens of campus-wide faculty and staff meetings, as well as a Board of Trustees’ retreat, the following strategy has been developed with the simple goal of shaping a vision for the future of Merrimack College and providing an overarching blueprint for achieving its success. The plan is called *Advancing Merrimack in the 21st Century: The Agenda for Distinction.*
VISION

Merrimack College’s vision is to be a highly ranked, internationally respected, selective master’s, comprehensive Catholic college, which is residential, student-centered, professionally focused, and rigorous in the liberal arts, sciences, and business.

We will advance this vision through excellence in classroom teaching and scholarship, diversity and globalization, development of professionally oriented graduate programs, investment in faculty, enhancement of student life and experiential learning, expansion of athletics, and refocusing our values on our Catholic roots and the teachings and principles of St. Augustine.

HISTORY

Merrimack College was founded in 1947 in North Andover, Massachusetts, by the Order of St. Augustine. The Augustinians, at the invitation of Richard Cardinal Cushing, then Archbishop of Boston, established the College as a direct response to the needs and aspirations of local G.I.’s returning home from World War II.

The college grew significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, along with the national population and number of high school graduates who sought higher education. With a student population of 2,000, the College continued primarily as a commuter school throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The academic excellence that had always been a priority of the Augustinian educational tradition inspired the first college-wide curriculum revision in the early 1980s, which included the introduction of institutional and distribution requirements and the growth of a student life division responsible for co-curricular programs and experience. A Master’s in Education degree program began in the 1990s.

In the mid 1990s, Merrimack focused strategically on becoming a residential college and, by the end of the decade, residential students accounted for more than 75 percent of the population. Three new residence halls and a new campus center provided the foundation for this gradual shift to a residential campus. Further revisions to the curriculum in the early 2000s reflected Merrimack’s strategic intention to emulate aspirant institutions, even as it began to compete locally and regionally for a shrinking population of high school graduates.

As Merrimack advances into the 21st century, the Agenda for Distinction details a ten-year commitment to make strategic investments in its people, its academic programs, its infrastructure, and the experiences and successes of its students in order to become a highly ranked, internationally respected college that draws students and faculty from around the world.

MISSION

Merrimack College embraces its mission to enlighten minds, engage hearts, and empower lives. Faithful to our Augustinian tradition, this mission calls us to actively engage the passion and emotion of our hearts with the discipline provided by intellect and reason.
CORE VALUES
Merrimack College seeks to nourish and sustain its five core values:

**Leadership:** To prepare students to adapt creatively to tomorrow’s realities through excellence in the liberal arts, sciences, and the professions.

**Community:** To build a community of scholars that welcomes and respects a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives.

**Awareness:** To cultivate the intellectual, moral, spiritual, physical, and personal awareness needed to make wise choices for life, career, and service.

**Scholarship:** To encourage and support scholarly work that contributes to the wisdom on which society bases its decisions.

**Service:** To engage other educational institutions, industry, and agencies of social change in collaborative efforts to foster a just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR THE “AGENDA FOR DISTINCTION”
Through the Agenda for Distinction, its planning process, major goals, and planned outcomes, we seek to:

- Re-invigorate our identity as a Catholic College in contemporary culture.
- Involve all members of the community in the careful and humble self-reflection essential to wisdom.
- Develop a seamlessly integrated academic culture of excellence in which vibrant intellectual activity intersects with the physical, social, and spiritual development of our students.
- Lay the foundation for the College to grow in size, diversity, and stature as well as to take our rightful place as a leading institution of higher education.
- Become a laboratory for leadership and teamwork producing graduates ready to compete and collaborate in the process of shaping the culture of tomorrow.
- Challenge our community to enlighten minds with truth, engage hearts with love, and empower lives for the work of justice.
Create a Modern, Academic Enterprise Grounded In Innovative Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

We will provide our students with a unique and comprehensive educational experience that is rooted in the liberal arts and sciences, enhanced by the professions, and linked to the Augustinian intellectual tradition of seeking wisdom through knowledge, action, and reflection. We will be recognized for our excellence in teaching, scholarship, and creative practice. We will develop new and/or expanded student-centered signature academic programs that provide Merrimack with a competitive market advantage and allow us to meet emerging needs while addressing urgent global issues. We will encourage and sustain new ways to evaluate and understand ourselves, our community, and our impact on society.
OBJECTIVES

- Develop distinctive models of undergraduate and graduate education through strategic investments in unique programs to expand enrollment.

- Encourage interdisciplinary studies across the Schools that are consistent with Merrimack’s academic mission, represent a strategic advancement, and meet the needs of students and society.

- Develop and expand distinguishing out-of-classroom co-curricular, service learning, and experiential learning opportunities that qualify the College for listing in the Carnegie community engagement classification.

- Invest in and encourage the creation, alternative delivery and continuation of selected non-core master’s and undergraduate part-time programs for working professionals whose financial contributions provide support for other strategic investments.

- Build on the existing foundation of scholarship and activism in the area of environmental sustainability, consistent with the Catholic understanding of respect and responsible stewardship of God’s creation. Support a broad spectrum of sustainability education by expanding course offerings, promoting and facilitating campus-based research using the campus as a laboratory, and engaging and partnering with community sustainability organizations to address needs in the region.

- Support and enhance the Honors Program so that it stands out as a challenging, valuable experience for our students and serves as a symbol of intellectual vigor at Merrimack College.

- Harness our curriculum and the talents of our faculty, students, alumni, and friends to provide opportunities to create, experience, and appreciate a wide variety of performing and visual arts, cultural experiences, and the rich complexity of the natural world.

- Increase the percentage of courses taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty while also improving the percentage of courses with smaller class sizes.

- Enhance our academic enrichment and advising programs in order to provide students of diverse backgrounds and levels of preparation an opportunity to develop the skills, abilities, and confidence necessary to achieve academic success and graduate from Merrimack.

- Increase the number of students who are engaged in senior research or field projects, taking research preparation courses or senior seminars, and participating as subjects in sponsored research projects. Increase the number of faculty mentors who are working with student researchers and increase opportunities for student/faculty research and scholarship throughout the academic year.
Develop a Contemporary Catholic Mission

We seek to be known as a leading Contemporary Catholic College in the Augustinian tradition that engages national and global questions by integrating scholarship, worship, and action. We will be an institution that embraces the intellectual traditions, spiritual wisdom, and social values of Catholicism and provides an environment where all voices can be heard without loss of our Catholic identity. We will actively engage in the Augustinian process of knowing God by knowing ourselves through disciplined and critical self-awareness; prayer, ritual, and worship; and by seeking to bring about peace, justice, and sustainability to our world through generous service to others.
• Empower the faculty to participate in this mission without compromising the principles of academic freedom through investments in strategically effective programs of professional development.

• Seek to enhance the quality and reputation of the Religious and Theological Studies Department within and beyond the College community through the recruitment and hiring of the finest theological educators possible.

• Ensure that an atmosphere of inclusion and respect for all religious traditions, beliefs, and perspectives, including non-belief, exists in the intellectual climate of Merrimack by building on the foundation of interfaith reverence and respect through the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations.

• Create a model of theological scholarship that includes the voices of women, the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities, and persons of diverse sexual orientations so as to enrich and deepen the understanding of God’s action in the human community.

• Transform worship at Merrimack into one of the most vibrant, energized and inclusive community-centered experiences of liturgical worship in New England.

• Develop and engage students in a comprehensive co-curricular program of spiritual growth based on the Augustinian tradition that allows students to experience first-hand the clear links between scholarship, worship, and the practice of just living and service to others.
Create an Intellectually Vibrant, Socially Engaged, Entrepreneurial Student Experience

Merrimack will provide distinctive out-of-classroom learning opportunities that give students an added perspective about themselves, their interests, and the global community. We will foster the intellectual curiosity of our students by increasing the number and variety of opportunities for them to engage in intellectual pursuits and learn outside the classroom. Our peers, students, and external stakeholders will identify us as a living and learning institution that embraces and supports curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities that emphasize intellectual curiosity, entrepreneurial spirit, professional growth, campus involvement, community service, global citizenship, and personal responsibility.
OBJECTIVES

• Achieve national recognition as an institution where student involvement in leadership development and team building in and out of the classroom will be central to the Merrimack experience.

• Provide our students with entrepreneurial learning opportunities, which build upon the foundation of their classroom learning and result in increased creativity, solutions to real world problems, and the ability to turn ideas into innovative organizations and businesses.

• Encourage and support opportunities to create, contribute, and highlight the scholarly work of our students, faculty, and distinguished alumni through both traditional and new creative modes of delivery.

• Expand living-learning communities, strengthen Greek life, and cultivate social engagement for students in order to foster teamwork, friendship, community, mutual respect, and entertainment opportunities, which are integral to the student residential experience.

• Support a culture of teamwork, respect, and collaboration through athletics, student clubs, and campus organizations, which encourages active participation on campus, in the community, and in life.

• Accentuate the Merrimack Experience through the development of traditions and rituals in conjunction with current Merrimack activities. The Merrimack Experience branding will be emphasized from the first time students, parents, and alumni step onto campus through a renewed emphasis on celebrating successes on and off campus.

• Empower our students with a sense of campus ownership to further develop their values through student-run organizations and governance processes.

• Commit resources to develop suitable performing and creative arts programs and student arts organizations. Celebrate dance, music, theatre, painting, drawing, sculpture, writing, and poetry as an integral aspect of various student, faculty, alumni, and community life.

• Clarify and strengthen the links between our academic programs and the public service performed by our faculty, students, administrators, and staff.
Inspire and Engage our People, Culture, and Community

Merrimack will encourage, sustain, and reward our faculty; empower, inspire, and challenge our students; support and value our staff; and celebrate the successes of our alumni and friends. We will be a faculty of scholars focused on helping young people develop their powers, abilities, and talents. We will offer opportunities for all members of the Merrimack community to participate in the processes of intellectual inquiry and discovery.
- Actively shape the culture of our community on the basis of the ideals of community life articulated by St. Augustine, namely:
  - Placing the common good ahead of individual good.
  - Accountability and responsibility for one another at every level of relationship.
  - Asking and granting of forgiveness when appropriate.
  - Mutual respect and honor among all members of the community.
- Advance, strengthen, and support a student-centered philosophy where individualized attention from faculty, advisors, student life professionals, and administrative staff is central to the Merrimack experience.
- Strive to build and support a community rich with a diversity of backgrounds, races, ethnicities, faiths, and cultures.
- Support and encourage free expression, reasoned discourse, and diversity of ideas.
- Build a series of programs that will enable students of all backgrounds to cross the gap between high school and college, achieve their potential, and become successful college students. These pathway programs will provide the support and individualized attention that is signature to the Merrimack experience.
- Recruit a diverse faculty with exceptional knowledge and experience in order to enrich the teaching, learning, and student experience and prepare our students for 21st century challenges.
- Create a more efficient, integrated, and responsive budgeting process that focuses on strategic investments for the institution. Institutional research will be used to make better academic, administrative, and financial decisions based on past and potential performance.
- Empower the faculty, administration, and staff to make autonomous decisions to achieve institutional goals, but to also be accountable for outcomes.
- Develop and support new connections to alumni and friends.
- Plan, direct, and integrate our government and community relations to enhance our missions of teaching, research, and service.
- Pursue positive connections both locally and globally and exhibit the value of service to our neighbors.
- Promote energy efficiency and renewable energy, to mitigate our impact on the climate. Create more efficient, environmentally friendly, and socially equitable campus operations; reduce our carbon footprint; and bridge the dichotomy between campus operations and the curriculum. Promote sustainable campus grounds and green campus planning.
We will achieve academic excellence as a selective, residential, highly ranked, private, comprehensive Catholic college. We will pursue areas of distinction where we can compete, excel, and respond to market demand. We will clearly articulate and reinforce our value proposition and the specific characteristics we offer that set us apart from our competitors and make us attractive to our target student market.
OBJECTIVES

• Demonstrate a defined and favorable international reputation, as evidenced by increasing numbers of international student applicants, students participating in study abroad programs, and international colleges having partnerships with us. Attain an increased presence in international ratings of colleges and higher numbers of faculty participating in international activities.

• Target financial resources, hire new faculty positions, and provide ways to reallocate current resources to build on the strengths and reputations of our professional schools, and ensure that our signature programs are able to function as areas of distinction within their professional fields.

• Grow the student community while still providing each student the opportunity to receive personal attention from our faculty and staff.

• Encourage our alumni to regularly participate in the life of the Merrimack community by attending annual college events, serving on college alumni committees and advisory boards, volunteering as student mentors, and making annual financial investments in Merrimack.

• Execute a fundraising campaign to provide the campus with the academics, student life, and athletics required to improve our reputational ranking and compete on a national and global scale.

• Ensure that our faculty will be recognized in their areas of expertise, as evidenced by the number of faculty with peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, awards, and invitations to speak or participate.

• Become an NCAA Division I institution. Expand intercollegiate sports, enhance and grow club sports, and feature a distinct intramural program that integrates team building and leadership skills characteristic of intercollegiate and club sport disciplines.

• Establish programs that foster teamwork and leadership skills and build camaraderie amongst the first year students and that will continue throughout their years at Merrimack.

• Be recognized for being a sustainable campus through our environmental curriculum, campus operations, and community engagement.

• Implement an integrated, highly effective student retention program with the aim to retain and graduate a high percentage of our students. Our retention program will distinguish us from our competitors.
Merrimack College’s *Agenda for Distinction* sets a bold agenda for realizing our potential and aspirations. Merrimack has the vision, energy, resources, and drive to bring transformational change to the institution and our students hereby creating a nationally recognized institution that produces ethical, creative, and experienced leaders.
The task of realizing this strategic vision will be driven through the following units on campus:

- Office of the President
- Office of the Provost
- Office of Institutional Advancement
- Division of Enrollment Management and Academic Services
- School of Education
- School of Science and Engineering
- Girard School of Business and International Commerce
- School of Liberal Arts
- Division of Mission and Student Affairs
- Division of Athletics
- Office of Administration and Facilities
- Office of Fiscal Affairs

Each of the units will be responsible for the implementation of the strategic plan through the development of their own operational plans. Each major responsibility management unit will create a three-year operational plan, which details how their own aspirations, goals, and objectives meet or exceed the goals and objectives of the Agenda for Distinction. Each operational plan will be approved by the Office of the President, with specific outcomes and funding directly tied to meeting the goals and objectives for the Agenda for Distinction.

The operational plans will annually measure progress with a series of metrics presented through an Annual Campus-Wide Action & Assessment Report, which will be developed, updated, and annually reviewed in collaboration with the Trustee Committee on Planning and the Central Campus Planning Committee. As part of this Agenda for Distinction, the campus will embark on a Master Campus Planning process and cumulate all of this work with the launch of a Capital Campaign in a few short years.