

Chapter 6

STRATEGIC PLAN AND THE FUTURE

Mission-related Activities and Improving upon Excellence

Earlham is committed to improving itself. The Strategic Plan (29) was specifically developed to help guide us in sustaining and, more importantly, improving upon the overall quality of what we do. The Strategic Plan began as a candid investigation of our current operations and a consideration of what activities might be in most need of improvement. Our conclusions, formally presented in the Strategic Plan document, were based on two intertwining kinds of ‘logic of improvement. The first arises from our own internal discourse about how we can improve what we are doing. The second logic listens carefully to those (especially students) who are *not* members of the community because they did not apply, chose to go elsewhere, or left after only a semester or two. It attends to how we fare in competition with other colleges in attracting and retaining students. With enrollment our most important strategic problem, this second logic of improvement is very important.

In the Strategic Plan, we attended to both logics of improvement and approached the question of Earlham’s strengths and weaknesses from both internal and external perspectives. With regard to strengths, the two angles of vision gave us remarkably convergent results. Earlham’s strengths are numerous, robust, and long-standing. Most of these were identified by the visiting NCA team in 1993 and received commendation. With regard to weaknesses, while there was some convergence between the internal and external perspectives, each angle of vision also informed us about issues the other did not identify. The Performance/Importance Matrix clusters our strengths and weakness according to their importance in attracting students to the college. In this way, it allows us to see more clearly where efforts at improvement might have the greatest effect in addressing our enrollment problem.

Earlham’s longstanding strengths – excellent faculty, community, off-campus programs, graduate school preparation, emphasis on values – are appreciated by prospective and current students. Also of importance to students are areas in which we either do not perform as well as we might or are not *perceived* by prospective students to be strengths of the college. Thus, on the one hand, we *do* need to do a better job of helping students to prepare for entering the world of work, for example; while on the other, we need to do a better job of communicating the strength of our curriculum in terms of both breadth and depth. We also need to promote to prospective students the value of student/faculty collaborative research. With regard to diversity within the faculty and the student populations, we need to be more effective in publicizing our accomplishments while continuing our efforts at the same time.

Performance/Importance Matrix

| | | EARLHAM PERFORMANCE | | |
|--|------|--|--|--|
| | | High | Medium | Low |
| I M P O R T A N C E T O S T U D E N T S | High | Quality of faculty Close student/faculty interaction Participatory class environment | Curriculum and availability of academic programs Academic reputation Career preparation/job placement success/internships Diversity of faculty Student diversity | |
| | Med | Community service/activism Graduate school and pre-professional preparation Values International and off-campus study Collaborative learning | Academically challenging Intramural or intercollegiate athletics for males Community Entertainment/social life | Financial aid Student housing Technology Academic facilities Value for price Non-urban location |
| | Low | Collaborative research | Advising Intramural or intercollegiate athletics for females | |

We also identified weaknesses in areas important to students that deserve attention as we endeavor to increase our enrollment and improve retention. From this point of view, the facilities that are in particular need of improvement are Fine Arts spaces and residential housing. We should also provide increased access to technology and improve our sensitivity to environmental issues on campus. Programming and staffing should be strengthened in Fine Arts, a number of our interdisciplinary programs, and for training in the use of technology. We should attend to aspects of community life at the college including clarifying governance, reducing busyness, and better appreciating the diversity among us. Increasing the amount of financial aid funding should be a key goal.

Ten Commitments to Strengthen Earlham College

Drawing on this picture of our strengths and weaknesses and keeping in mind our strategic goal of increasing enrollment, the Strategic Plan identifies ten *commitments for action* we believe the college should undertake over the next six to eight years:

Commitment 1: Increase awareness of Earlham; increase the size of the applicant pool. More people should know about a college this good. It may not be fair to say we hide our light under a bushel, but we have not taken all the energetic steps we must to bring the college to the world's attention. Earlham needs to: (a) make a more focused and strategic effort to enhance Earlham's national visibility through print and electronic media and through coordinated networking; and (b) communicate more accurately about Earlham, especially with regard to our academic excellence. The most critical manifestation of our 'awareness' problem is the size of our applicant pool. We need to increase this pool in order to consistently enroll entering classes that will bring us to our overall target enrollment of 1,200.

Commitment 2: Improve the first two years of a student's experience, focusing especially on general education and residence life. Efforts to improve retention should focus on improving the quality of student experience during the first two years. We need to: (a) proceed with our new General Education Program and evaluate it thoughtfully; and (b) improve life in the residence halls through enhancing our student development programming and upgrading residence facilities.

Commitment 3: Strengthen pathways to vocation. We know that our alumni prove successful and effective in a broad array of fields, achieve outstanding accomplishments in their work and personal lives and becoming active, concerned citizens for service and change in the wider world. The success of our graduates in their life beyond Earlham depends on two related yet different issues: vocational discernment and career success. We should continue to (a) develop programs and strategies for involving students in the process of vocational discernment throughout their time at Earlham; and (b) focus more on outcomes when marketing and in talking about an Earlham education. Life

stories of Earlham alumni will be compelling to young people and contribute to strengthening the reputation of the college.

Commitment 4: Make Earlham a more diverse community. For at least the past four decades, we have aspired to make Earlham a more diverse community, promoting the presence and voice of groups that have been historically oppressed because of such factors as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, or physical ability. We have made clear progress over these past few decades; nevertheless, we see a need for continued progress. Our Diversity Aspirations Working Group has developed an action plan and the Diversity Progress Committee is monitoring our progress in the following areas: (a) expanding a diverse curriculum; (b) enriching co-curricular programs and supportive networks; (c) attracting, enrolling and retaining a larger percentage of students with divergent backgrounds from the U.S. and abroad; and (d) recruiting, hiring and retaining an increased number of faculty and staff who reflect a diverse world.

Commitment 5: Extend the uses of technology. Significant advances in electronic technology have been rapidly reshaping the ways we learn, teach, work and play at Earlham. We want to increase our effectiveness in using technology to *supplement* and *enrich* education in a residential setting where learning in community is valued. We have already taken some important first steps by joining together the Library, Computing Services, and Media and making more adequate provision for technology in the regular operating budget. Continued progress will depend on a threefold effort to: (a) extend a common technology platform throughout the campus; (b) provide adequate staffing to maintain this infrastructure; and (c) establish training opportunities for students, faculty and staff. Included in these efforts will be initiatives to help teaching faculty better utilize technology in their teaching and research, to assist faculty and staff who rely on Banner in the “business of the college,” and to make our college Web site into a comprehensive resource for Earlham’s on-campus community and for wider exposure to the world.

Commitment 6: Strengthen the curriculum. The pace of innovation in the Earlham curriculum over the past few decades has been constant and relatively rapid. Discussions with faculty, students and staff identified three areas where we should work to consolidate important changes of the recent past: (a) develop strategies for sustaining interdisciplinary study programs; (b) strengthen the fine and performing arts with stronger facilities and increased staffing; and (c) endow funds for student-faculty collaborative research and creative efforts, for summer projects, and for special individual student projects.

Commitment 7: Invest in community life. While most colleges and universities speak of themselves as communities, we believe the character and depth of community is one of Earlham’s greatest strengths and most distinctive aspects. Nevertheless, we need to continually renew the fabric of our community. We believe the most important areas we should work on with regard to community life are: (a) improve our ability to listen respectfully to differing views; (b) develop a governance manual that will clarify consensus building and decision-making processes; (c) create new community spaces and events that intentionally bring together students, faculty and staff; (d) reach an

understanding of why many members of our community feel too busy and hurried, and find ways to devote our time and attention to activities that are most valued and rewarding; and (e) pay greater attention to environmental issues on our campus and develop a stronger curricular program in environmental studies.

Commitment 8: Strengthen partnerships with alumni, our neighbors and Quakers. We need to appreciate the key relationships that connect us to the wider world, especially our connections with Earlham alumni, with Quakers, and with our neighbors in Richmond and Wayne County. We should strengthen these connections in ways that will better serve the college's mission: (a) involve alumni in helping students with career development and offer to alumni more opportunities for life-long learning; (b) improve the relationship between Earlham and Richmond by increasing our mutual understanding of each other and developing partnerships for mutual benefit between Earlham and organizations in the environs; (c) nurture our grounding in Quakerism and also improve understanding of Quakerism by looking for ways to engage students in activities embodying Quaker practices and testimonies such as conflict resolution, consensus seeking, and community service activities.

Commitment 9: Make compensation the first priority in the operating budget; make financial aid the first priority in fund raising. Earlham's excellence depends on its committed faculty and it is critical that we support them by achieving the compensation goals previously set: to reach the median of compensation within the GLCA. While reaching an enrollment of 1,200 will enable us to afford much of what we strive to do at the college, we will need to increase our financial aid budget to enroll that number of students. This is particularly true because we want Earlham to be financially accessible to many students, including international students, who would not otherwise be able to attend the college. Thus we must: (a) make compensation the first priority in developing the operating budget each year and fund this in part by increasing the Earlham Fund's contributions to the operating budget; and (b) make financial aid the first priority in fund raising by adding to the endowment funds that go toward supporting students. We should also develop a more effective strategy for using these funds to attract and retain the student body we want.

Commitment 10: Plan for continuous improvement in facilities. We have seen significant improvements in our facilities over the past few years, yet the quality of our facilities in a number of areas does not adequately support the quality of the people and programs housed within these facilities. We cannot address all of our issues at once, but we can and should plan for continuous improvement in these facilities. At the present time, we need to look at facilities improvements through the lens of improving our competitive posture to attract and retain students, while simultaneously making longer range plans for improvements in other facilities. To these ends, Earlham should: (a) begin as soon as possible to improve our residence life facilities and our fine and performing arts facilities; (b) begin a master planning process that will take into consideration a wide range of additional facilities needs identified in the Strategic Plan; (c) use the Strategic Plan priorities as a basis for planning the college's next capital campaign; and (d) remain committed to conducting short and long-range planning for staffing and programming at the college.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

Progress on each of the commitments will be most effective if efforts are fully incorporated into the on-going operations of the college. Rather than seeing these commitments as "separate from" or "in addition to" our daily and yearly efforts, we aim to fully integrate them as part of a campus-wide strategic agenda. We believe this is possible because at Earlham, a collaborative spirit and an ethos of helping one another pervade classroom environments, admissions and alumni activities, preparations for major events, and dozens of other efforts. What we aim for now is for each of us to recognize the heightened importance of these ten commitments in making daily decisions, longer range plans and decisions about the use of our financial resources. As we develop fuller plans for each of the ten commitments, we need to be sure the plans include an assessment strategy. This includes developing a set of "dashboard indicators" as quantitative measures to help us see whether we are making progress toward the goals of the Strategic Plan. In particular, such dashboard indicators will be developed for admissions, retention, diversity, the budget and development.

The following chart shows each of the ten commitments and their component parts, and identifies who we believe should take the administrative lead and which college committee(s) should make the effort a major focus of its agenda over the next several years. Furthermore, through the efforts of these individuals and units, we have made significant progress in addressing these commitments. In a broad range of areas, the Strategic Plan has already been used to guide our decision making, set priorities in our use of financial resources, and direct our planning efforts. Briefly noted, examples for achievements made toward each of our ten commitments, listed in order, include:

1. Achieved a ten percent increase in 2003 applications over 2002. We have hired a fully dedicated director of media relations to lead efforts toward improved national visibility.
2. Renovated residence facilities in the summer of 2003, began planning on a new residence hall, initiated a new General Education Program in the fall of 2003.
3. Awarded a Faith and Vocation grant from the Lilly Endowment that will strengthen avenues for students to consider moral and ethical issues in choosing their career.
4. Converted a temporary position held by an international faculty to a tenure track position.
5. Opened the Landrum Bolling Center with classrooms fully equipped with technology and new computers for faculty in the building.
6. Provided release time for faculty to develop a new core course for environmental sciences at Earlham.
7. Drew together an informal description of governance and began drafting an official governance manual.
8. Initiated a Monthly Earlham Forum that brings together Earlham and the surrounding community.
9. Continued compensation as a top priority in the 2003/2004 budget.
10. Constituted a Campus Master Plan Committee and began data collection.

Follow-through Responsibilities for Strategic Plan Commitments 1 to 5

| Commitment | Administrative Lead | College Committee |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Increase awareness of Earlham; increase the size of the applicant pool | | |
| National visibility campaign | VP Institutional Advancement Associate VP for Public Affairs | Marketing Team |
| Size of the applicant pool | Dean Admissions and Financial Aid | Admissions and Financial Aid Committee |
| 2. Improve the first two years of an Earlham education, focusing especially on general education and residence life | | |
| General Education | Associate Academic Dean | Curricular Policy Committee |
| Residence Life | Dean of Student Development | Ad Hoc Residence Life Committee |
| 3. Strengthen pathways to vocation | | |
| Lilly Vocations Grant | Director of Lilly Vocations project | Lilly Vocations Advisory Committee |
| Strategy on pathways to vocation | Director of Career Services | Ad Hoc Committee on Vocations Curricular Policy Committee |
| 4. Make Earlham a more diverse community | | |
| Diversity Action Plan | Provost, Dir. Multicultural Affairs | Diversity Progress Committee |
| 5. Extend the uses of technology | | |
| Technology in learning and teaching | Coordinator of Information Services | Technology Policy Committee |
| Technology in operations and community life | Coordinator of Information Services | Technology Policy Committee |

Follow-through Responsibilities for Strategic Plan Commitments 6 to 10

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| 6. Strengthen the curriculum | | |
| Interdisciplinary Programs | Provost, Associate Academic Dean | Curricular Policy Committee Faculty Affairs Committee |
| Arts | Provost, Associate Academic Dean | Curricular Policy Committee Faculty Affairs Committee |
| Engagement | Provost, Associate Academic Dean | Curricular Policy Committee Faculty Affairs Committee |
| 7. Invest in community life | | |
| Listening respectfully | AAD/Program Development | Faculty and Student Governments |
| Governance processes | Faculty Clerk, President | Ad Hoc Committee of Clerks |
| Community spaces and events | Dean of Student Development, President | Master Plan Committee, Events Committee |
| Busyness | Provost | Nominating Committee Faculty Welfare Committee |
| Environmental concerns | V.P. Finance | Ad Hoc Environmental Planning Committee |
| 8. Strengthen partnerships with alumni, our neighbors and Quakers | | |
| Alumni | V.P. Institutional Advancement | Senior Staff |
| Richmond and Wayne County | V.P. Community Relations | Senior Staff |
| Quakers | President | Senior Staff |
| 9. Make compensation the first priority in the operating budget; make financial aid the first priority in fund raising | | |

Strategic Plan

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|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Compensation | V.P. Financial Affairs | Budget Committee |
| Financial Aid (fundraising for) | V.P. Institutional Advancement | Capital Campaign Planning Committee (to be appointed) |
| 10. Plan for continuous improvement in facilities | | |
| Residence life facilities | Dean of Student Development | Ad Hoc Residential Life Committee |
| Arts facilities | Provost | Division of the Arts |
| Campus master plan | V.P. Financial Affairs | Campus Master Plan Committee |
| Capital campaign | V.P. Institutional Advancement | Capital Campaign Planning Committee (to be appointed) |

In summary, developing our Strategic Plan led the Earlham community to take a critical look at the college and identify ways to improve areas of our operation that need attention. We have made progress in realizing aspects of our commitments and have generated a momentum that will carry us forward in fulfilling them. We are proud that we have created a Strategic Plan that is not collecting dust on a shelf, but rather is being used as dynamic tool, moving the college into the future.