



## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION STRATEGIC PLAN

### CREATING A CULTURE OF CONNECTION AND SUPPORT FOR GETTYSBURG COLLEGE: FOR AND FROM ALUMNI

#### ***PART 1: THE PLANNING ENVIRONMENT***

##### **THE GETTYSBURG COLLEGE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

The Gettysburg College Alumni Association was founded on September 16, 1835, just three years after the founding of what was then Pennsylvania College, making it one of the oldest alumni associations in the country. Formed by eleven members of the classes of 1834 and 1835, its purpose was “the cultivation of friendly and social feeling among its members, the advancement of the cause of education and literature, and the promotion of the best interests of the *Alma Mater*.”

Today the Alumni Association serves 22,000 alumnae and alumni across the country and around the world. We are vital stakeholders of the institution. Additionally, the 2,600 currently enrolled students are considered “alumni in residence.”

The purpose of the association, as currently stated, is “to stimulate and vitalize interest in the welfare of Gettysburg College and to foster a lifetime of learning and community among its alumni and friends.”

All graduates of the College are members of the Alumni Association. Former students who did not graduate but wish to belong when or after their original class graduates have the opportunity to be considered alumni. Recipients of Gettysburg College honorary degrees may also be considered members of the Alumni Association.

The association is governed by a 24-member board of directors and operates in accordance with a constitution and by-laws. Directors are elected at the annual open meeting of the Association during Alumni College & Reunion Weekend, each for four-year terms. The director of Alumni Relations and the assistant vice president for Alumni and Parent Relations serve as *ex officio* members of the board. The president of the Alumni Association chairs the board of directors and is also a member of the board of trustees.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

Gettysburg College celebrated its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary during the 2006-2007 academic year. The confluence of this milestone, cyclical Alumni Association planning, and the approval of “Strategic Directions for Gettysburg College” by the board of trustees created a timely opportunity for the association’s board of directors to undertake new strategic planning initiatives for the alumni program. The directors held a strategic planning retreat on February 3, 2007 to begin conversations as the basis for this plan. Six strategic foci emerged:

- Current students as future alumni
- Engagement strategies
- Technology and communication
- Affinities
- Career matters
- Measurements and metrics

Small study groups met throughout the spring to make recommendations on the six areas noted above. The board of directors studied a preliminary draft of its strategic plan, *Creating a Culture of Connection and Support for Gettysburg College: For and From Alumni* on April 21, 2007.

Alumni constituents will have many opportunities to review and comment upon this plan during the 2007-2008 academic year. Once there has been sufficient time for thorough conversation, discussion, and alumni input, the plan will be presented to the Development and Alumni Relations Committee of the board of trustees for endorsement. It is anticipated that all goals will be successfully realized by the academic year 2014-2015, to coincide with the Alumni Association’s 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## **PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS**

- This is intended as a dynamic, flexible document, and implementation strategies may change and grow as new ideas and opportunities emerge. It is anticipated that the six strategic priorities will remain constant. It is intended as a “road map,” and not a “to do list.”
- Many alumni want to support their alma mater as advocates, volunteers and donors.
- Alumni want to be engaged and many are looking for “bite-sized opportunities” for volunteer involvement. Others may be seeking longer-range engagement opportunities.

## **“STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR GETTYSBURG COLLEGE”**

Gettysburg College has achieved national distinction as a liberal arts college but is always inspired to reach higher. A College-wide planning process to determine the actions needed to take the College towards a new level of excellence led to a new strategic vision for Gettysburg College. Approved by the board of trustees in May 2007, “Strategic Directions for Gettysburg College” identifies four broad strategic themes: Engagement, Distinction, Access, and Connection. Theme four, Connection, notes that “Gettysburg will promote a culture of connection among all of its constituencies, on campus and around the world.” It is this theme in which alumni can have the greatest influence and involvement. Developing an Alumni Association strategic plan in concert with the College’s strategic directions initiatives is opportune and appropriate.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

At their planning retreat, the board of directors identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and potential threats to the current alumni program. These were developed within the context of national trends, changes and demographics.

### **Strengths**

- Gettysburg is a "hot" school; unprecedented momentum in admissions
  - Many legacies – illustrates alumni satisfaction
- Many faculty, administrators, and staff are alumni
- The Gettysburg connection is welcoming and nurturing
- Continuity
- Many alumni are engaged and want to stay involved
- New “right-sized” board size
- Board rotation leads to diversity and opportunity to engage more alumni
- The Norris-Wachob Alumni House offers a hub for returning alumni
  - “Come Home”; sense of place
- Alumni clubs and affinity groups offer traditional ways to stay connected
- Approximately 1,600 alumni couples

### **Weaknesses:**

- The “culture of connection” and the Gettysburg network could be stronger
  - Many alumni are passive rather than actively engaged
  - Volunteer pipeline needs to be strengthened and supported
  - Links between students and alumni present challenges and opportunities for students to consider themselves as “alumni for life”
- Relatively small percentage of alumni routinely attend events
- No easily-accessible online presence for alumni at the present time; alumni need more ways to connect
- The College’s brand needs more explanation, understanding, marketing, and promotion
- Alumni don’t sufficiently promote being Gettysburg graduates
- Strong, consistent links between each class and the College are needed
  - Class correspondents should assume a stronger role

- There are too few affinity groups (e.g. professions, avocation interests) at the present time; a stronger case must be made for “how do I fit in?”
- Alumni don’t have a clear understanding about the need for support
  - Why are gifts needed? What difference does my gift make?
  - Various funds (e.g. the Gettysburg Fund, special endowed funds, capital funds, etc.) lack clear definition
  - Benefits and impact of all gifts are not communicated
- Alumni Board of Directors
  - Clearer definition of role for students and other alumni is needed
  - Enhance student representation on the board

### **Opportunities:**

- The College has extensive technology tools, which can be used to enhance alumni connections
  - internet-based community, news, events, social and networking opportunities
- Younger alumni seek ways to be involved, beginning as current students
  - alumni/student mentorship in junior year
  - sweat-equity giving, e.g. ways to be engaged other than financially
- Diverse College and alumni community offers new opportunities for engagement; i.e:
  - identify and launch new affinity groups, e.g. by professions
  - capitalize on strengths of existing groups
  - expand connections with professors and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities: majors, diversity, community service, recreational interests
- Women can be engaged and involved at greater levels
- Bite-sized engagement activities can be created
  - would provide structure
  - tapping talent for operational needs
  - ladder of engagement, one rung at a time
- The alumni body is becoming more geographically diverse
- The College’s brand initiative can connect the community of Gettysburg College to external audiences
- Current students can be engaged in new ways

### **Threats:**

- There is competition for alumni resources of time, talent, and treasure
- The cost of attending Gettysburg is comparable to other highly selective institutions
- The College could lose competitiveness, especially if talented staff leaves or is not attracted to the College
  - staff turnover interrupts relationship-building
- Apathy
- Lack of knowledge about the College today
- A perception that other institutions have higher media profiles
- All students aren't engaged in the traditions of Gettysburg College
- The College doesn't integrate the Alumni Association to the fullest extent possible, and the Alumni Association's work isn't widely known
- There is discontinuity of Alumni Association at the club level
  - need to have more and revitalized alumni clubs
  - a perception that the Alumni Association and the College limit their activities geographically
- Retention and on-campus safety matters
- Value of a liberal arts education can be questioned
- Economic disruptions, including job losses and changes, can cause interruption of attention to and engagement with alma mater.

### **PLAN MANAGEMENT**

This is intended as a living document, one that all alumni will have opportunities to review through presentations, surveys, and focus groups. The Administration and Awards Committee of the board of directors will facilitate these conversations and gauge measures of success. The board of directors will have ultimate responsibility for the plan and will continue to meet in small study groups (in addition to traditional, standing committees) that parallel the six strategic priorities to ensure the plan's success.

## ***PART 2: STRATEGIC PLANNING PRIORITIES***

### **Strategic Priority #1: Recognize students as future alumni, and nurture excitement about a lifetime of engagement with Gettysburg College.**

#### **Rationale**

Today's students for four years are tomorrow's alumni forever. Students are active and engaged citizens and leaders. The Alumni Association must find new ways to promote the benefits of alumni engagement so that the momentum is not lost when students graduate. If students are encouraged to feel pride in being "Gettysburgians for Life," they are more likely to stay connected with their alma mater and with each other, and to support the College in a variety of ways.

#### **Implementation Strategies**

- Foster sense of pride and a philanthropic interest in unrestricted giving.
- Revisit date of Alumni Weekend / reunions from student connection perspective.
- Implement an online web networking community for connecting students, alumni, parents, faculty, staff, and College.
- Connect to student body in general and especially student leaders (influencers) as future leaders.
- Ensure career connections for young alumni, as a seamless transition from student services.
- Create seat(s) for student representative(s) on the board of directors.
- Build upon Gettysburg College traditions and identify new ones.

### **Strategic Priority #2: Create and enhance opportunities for alumni engagement in support of Gettysburg College, and promote the benefits of the reciprocal relationship between alumni and Gettysburg College.**

#### **Rationale**

If alumni are "Gettysburgians for Life," the College and the Alumni Association must offer programs to interest and engage them in all stages of life as students and beyond. A culture of connection that begins even before a student matriculates at the College encourages involvement, which in turn can lead to increased philanthropic support. Benefits to alumni and to the institution are mutually rewarding.

#### **Implementation Strategies**

- Restructure and invigorate alumni club structure and programs to include alumni and student interaction; centralize operations (from student as future alumni).
- Create new vertical associations (with affinities).
- Engage and educate young alumni about mutually rewarding opportunities to connect with their alma mater.

- Broaden the appeal of alumni activities through purposeful diversification of governance, planning, and implementation of the alumni relations program.
- Ensure that board of directors and alumni club leadership reflects/leads the diversity of our current and prospective alumni.
- Promote and encourage use of Norris-Wachob Alumni House.
- Re-engage “lost” alumni and those who are no longer active.
- Recognize parents and faculty as valuable partners, especially those who are alumni.
- Create a ladder of engagement and bite-sized opportunities for alumni to be involved.
- Enhance and expand current lifelong learning opportunities (e.g. Alumni College, GRAB, etc.).
  - Create travel programs, book groups, academic symposia, etc.
- Implement an online web community as an important tool for providing information about, and mechanism for, alumni engagement.
- Seek alumni input to more closely align programming with alumni interests.

**Strategic Priority #3: Develop a robust electronically-connected community for alumni to communicate with each other and with the Gettysburg College community.**

**Rationale**

An expanded and robust technology base facilitates effective and efficient communication among alumni, students, parents, faculty, and staff. Alumni and others clamor for the opportunity to communicate with each other and with the College individually and through groups based on interest and affinity using electronic means.

**Implementation Strategies**

- Interface an online community with all strategic priorities, which is critical to the success of each priority.
- Create convenient and attractive ways to stay connected with the College and with each other (from engagement).
- Engage students and recent graduates by staying abreast of technology capabilities.
- Transition alumni to interface with the online environment by providing instruction about how to connect electronically.

**Strategic Priority #4: Support and expand career networking programs for and with alumni, students, and all members of the Gettysburg College community.**

**Rationale**

A significant way that alumni can foster a sense of connection with students and with each other is through career networking. Internships, externships, shadowing, mentoring and other career programs offer alumni many opportunities to share their experience and expertise with each other, with students, and with members of the College community.

**Implementation Strategies**

- Build programs for alumni to network with one another.
- Support and encourage participation in current programs to serve students such as the Gettysburg College Connection, HUB Cities program, internships, externships, and Bright Lights! Big Cities!; encourage 100 percent participation from board of directors in setting an example.
- Recognize parents and other College leadership boards as valuable partners.
- Ensure career connections for young alumni, as a seamless transition from student services.
- Implement an online web community to support all of the above.
- Consult with and support the efforts of the Center for Career Development.

**Strategic Priority #5: Develop a vibrant, diverse, and far-reaching network of affinity groups that enable Gettysburg College alumni of all ages to connect with one another and with the College on commonalities of interests and experiences.**

**Rationale**

Alumni will have an even greater sense of connection to the College if there are opportunities for them to experience their relationship to one another through affinity interests in addition to their class years.

**Implementation Strategies**

- Review current areas of affinity (e.g. diversity, athletics, Greek, public service, the arts, geographic location) and establish additional affinity groupings (e.g. professions, recreation, young alumni).
- Advocate for and communicate about the above to alumni, parents, students, faculty, and staff.
- Implement an online web community as an essential tool for enabling and communicating with/among affinity groups.

**Strategic Priority #6: Develop metrics to measure all strategic priorities, annually and long-term.**

**Rationale**

Increasing participation rates across the spectrum of College and association programs and services, as well as increasing alumni support for the institution, is essential if more alumni are to be engaged. Strategic planning involves strategic assessment measurement. Benchmarks will be established in the first year in order to measure meaningful metrics over time.

**Implementation Strategies**

Quantifiable metrics include but are not limited to increases over the next eight years (2007-2015) in the following areas:

- Engagement
  - Young alumni (up to 10 years since graduation)
  - Bite-sized to sustained roles (progression)
  - Establishment of new affinity groups and alumni participation in them
  - Online community participation
  - Career mentors
  - Intercultural, global, and diverse participation
- Attendance (on and off campus events)
  - First time attendees
  - Alumni who attend single to multiple events (progression)
  - Students (pre-alumni) who attend events
  - Donors and donor prospects who attend events
- Giving (with the Gettysburg Fund and the Annual Giving staff)
  - Increased participation in the Gettysburg Fund
  - Increased number of new Cupola Society level donors

**We invite you to take part in this process and invite your comments. Please contact Jean LeGros '73, assistant vice president for Alumni and Parent Relations, Box 417, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA 17325 or [jlegros@gettysburg.edu](mailto:jlegros@gettysburg.edu).**

## Appendix A

### PLANNING PROCESS TIME LINE

February 3, 2007	Alumni Association's board of directors Strategic Planning Retreat
February – April, 2007	Board of directors study groups meet to determine strategic priorities and implementation strategies
April 21, 2007	Board of directors endorses first draft of the strategic plan, <i>Creating a Culture of Connection and Support for Gettysburg College: For and From Alumni</i>
Summer 2007	Board of directors Executive Committee reviews and refines the plan
September 29, 2007	Board of directors endorses final draft of the plan
October 1, 2007- April 15, 2008	Alumni and on-campus constituents have opportunities to comment on the draft in venues including <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Homecoming and other campus events</li><li>• Alumni club meetings</li><li>• Special focus groups</li><li>• The website</li></ul>
April 19, 2008	Board of directors approves <i>Creating a Culture of Connection and Support for Gettysburg College: For and From Alumni</i>
May 2, 2008	Final approval of <i>Creating a Culture of Connection and Support for Gettysburg College: For and From Alumni</i> by the Development and Alumni Relations Committee of the Board of Trustees
Academic year 2011- 2012	Refresh and revise <i>Creating a Culture of Connection and Support for Gettysburg College: For and From Alumni</i>
Academic year 2014 - 2015	Conclusion of planning cycle and successful attainment of all strategic goals; 180 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alumni Association (2015)

Draft to be approved by the Gettysburg College Alumni Association Board of Directors  
4.19.08