PROJECT
2024

Year 2 Report
From ideas to action plans

In Year 1, groups across the college community discussed two questions:

1. **How can we do what we do better?**
2. **Of the challenges experts say face higher education today, which ones will most likely affect CC?**

Steering Committee members co-chaired the meetings. **They heard one resounding theme— *Build Connections*—and three major areas demanding action.** Those areas are:

- **Learning inside and outside the classroom.**
  How do we enhance the possibilities and communicate the benefits of the education we offer?
- **Structures and interactions.**
  How do we organize ourselves to encourage collaboration and build community?
- **Policies, programs, and norms.**
  How do we better align our norms and practices with what we are and what we value?

In each of these categories, the Committee identified more specific targets for attention. [The Year 1 Report lists them, and is available at coloradocollege.edu/project2024]

Year 1 conversations expressed several shared values, and these guided the Steering Committee's work this past year.

- Supporting the **health and wellbeing** of the campus community
- Working on **anti-racism**
- Ensuring **equity and access**
- Protecting the **environment**
- Prioritizing clear, transparent, and **effective communication**

These common commitments coincide with President Richardson's vision for the college, with the pillars supporting the vision, and with the lenses through which we view the vision.

Question 1: How can we do what we do better?

To honor the promise to act on the issues discussed among campus community groups during Year 1, the Steering Committee undertook two initiatives in Year 2: **Turning Ideas into Proposals** and **Divisions Discuss Connection and Time**.

Turning ideas into proposals

Objectives:

> Generate more ideas (summer and early fall)
> Distill the ideas into sets of options (blocks 2-4)
> Consolidate the options and vet with established groups and committees (blocks 5-6)
> Prepare proposals (blocks 7-8) [**Read about the process here in Appendix B.**]

Proposals:

The Steering Committee's recommendations fall into two main categories:

1. **Reinforce Liberal Learning** and
2. **Value Our People** (staff, faculty, and students).

Category 1: Reinforce Liberal Learning

In Year 1, we heard the call to clarify what we mean by the liberal arts and to be more explicit about their value to students after they graduate.

Liberal learning, as we understand it,

- Features a distinctive interdisciplinary approach to understanding the world;
- Connects learning inside and outside the classroom;
- Makes learning everyone's responsibility (we are a "place of learning").

The Block Plan determines our academic calendar and shapes our curriculum. Many students and faculty members sought to improve the Block Plan by

- Adding multi-block options and by
- Building learning across classes into the curriculum.

They also called for maximizing the Block Plan's possibilities by

- Enhancing student-to-student and student and faculty connections to reduce the isolation that students report experiencing here;
- Emphasizing interdisciplinarity;
- Expanding access to experiential learning.

Over the last two years, the urgency of addressing mental health concerns caused the Steering Committee to pay particular attention to combatting isolation and to varying the pace of the Block Plan.

Specific proposals to reinforce liberal learning address three main goals. [Find details here in Appendix D.]

      A. Reinforce interdisciplinary inquiry

      B. Expand two-block options

      C. Facilitate experiential learning

Category 2: Value our People

Project 2024 conversations and the Modern Think Employee Engagement Survey results stressed the importance of reinforcing connection across campus constituencies, aligning our resources with our priorities, and ensuring that our practices and procedures reflect our common values.

Discussions this year helped explain the concerns expressed last year. **We're caught between diffused and top-down leadership models, between informal norms and exacting processes, and between relaxed and more rigidly enforced rules**. The Covid-19 pandemic and rapid staff turnover exacerbate these disconnects. The result is confusion and distrust, suspicion, and territorialism as we continue to operate in two contrasting modes.

The challenge is to define a middle way: to maintain collaboration and collective investment in the college's values and priorities and to have just enough processes and rules to ensure efficiency and equity. Clearly defining these procedures and enforcing accountability across the institution would benefit employees and students alike.

Responding to what we heard, the **Steering Committee outlines concrete ways of increasing cross-campus collaboration and promoting shared leadership**. Some of these actions involve "culture" changes. These demand more collective discussion. Others require the college to reallocate resources. Still other initiatives can be done now.

Cultivating a thriving community at CC involves

- respecting experience and expertise;
- empowering people to do their jobs and to contribute to advancing the college's values and priorities;
- promoting clear, streamlined, and collaborative systems and processes.

To achieve these goals we propose changes in five general areas. [Find details in Appendix E.]

      A. Salaries and the salary system

      B. Advancement and professional growth

      C. Empowering people

      D. Streamlining procedures, establishing processes

      E. Doing less

NOTE: Regarding other significant ideas. Distilling ideas into options and options into proposals sidelined salient issues and many very good ideas. Some can be readily executed while others require more thought and preparation. Year 3 allows us to pursue these areas for action.

Divisions Discuss Connection and Time

Objectives:

Engage offices and divisions in identifying ways to save Time and to increase Collaboration in their work. [Find a description of the process in Appendix F.]

Results:

Offices and divisions made some specific changes to increase efficiency and reduce redundancies within and across offices and divisions. Other initiatives are in the works.

Service-oriented divisions discussed ways to manage demands that distract from their principal responsibilities and/or benefit some at the expense of others. Focusing on this issue should be a priority in Year 3.

In several divisions staff identified more streamlined processes and greater accountability as keys to saving Time. The Steering Committee incorporated these concerns into its proposals for Year 3.

Question 2: Which challenges facing higher education will affect CC the most?

In Year 2, the Steering Committee deepened the inquiry into the challenges facing higher education that campus community groups discussed in Year 1. Studies of higher education emphasize these threats: **Finances**, **Demographics**, **Access**, **Digital Knowledge**, **Relevance**, and **Capacity for Change**.

Objectives:

Draw broader attention to these challenges
Add to what we know already about them
Solicit more ideas about ways of addressing them

The Steering Committee narrowed the focus to four challenges:

1. The financial model/access
2. Demographics/access
3. Digital knowledge #1—Online learning
4. Digital knowledge #2—Effects of screens/social media on cognitive function and on student learning and wellbeing

Exploratory groups co-chaired by members of the Steering Committee and including staff, faculty, students, alums, parents, and trustees examined the issues' effects on CC and considered possible responses.

Results:

Reports will be posted at the end of June 2023 to the Project 2024 website: https://www.coloradocollege.edu/project2024

Appendix A: Project 2024 Year 1 Report

Find the Project 2024 Year One Report at: https://www.coloradocollege.edu/p2024-year1

Appendix B: Details on Process

Phase 1: Asked the campus for ideas. Organized meetings of staff and sessions at the Faculty Forum and Fall Conference to hear ideas in particular categories. Added questions to the young alumni survey; polled incoming students on priorities and expectations; polled returning students on what they did and did not want to see changed.

Phase 2: Working groups gathered related information and metrics, synthesized ideas, and developed sets of options. [**See working group reports in Appendix C.**]

Phase 3: The Steering Committee consolidated working groups' options; examined their feasibility; and vetted them with relevant senior leaders, AVPs, and directors. It sought feedback from Cabinet, FEC, Staff Council, CCSGA, CEC, and the Compensation and Budget Committees. It also shared the working options at Spring Conference, In-the-Loop, and with Alumni Reunion Volunteers.

Phase 4: Using this input, Committee members prepared proposals and drafted recommendations for implementation in Year 3.

Appendix C: Working Group Reports

Working group reports (all reports are available at www.coloradocollege.edu/project2024)

- Aligning Systems and Power Structures and Bridging Distances
- Flexibility of Formats
- Interdisciplinarity and Learning Across Blocks
- Learning Outside the Classroom
- Managing Resources: Money
- Observing Limits and Managing Resources: Time
- Sustaining our People
- Value of Liberal Education

Appendix D: Proposals to Reinforce Liberal Learning

A. Reinforce interdisciplinary inquiry

1) Develop two-block synergy courses and theme-centered synergy semesters.
2) Create a liberal learning senior capstone that mobilizes interdisciplinary knowledge to address a perennial or current problem.
3) Increase space for students to experiment with different disciplines by reducing the number of required courses.
4) Provide a four-year question-driven interdisciplinary program (FYP, synergy blocks/semester, liberal learning capstone) as an option for students.

B. Expand two-block options

1) FYP returns to two contiguous blocks with continuity of content. Built around a question, these courses could include gateway courses to majors. All would incorporate writing.
2) Adjust the calendar to schedule a longer break between blocks 2 and 3. Depending on the year, Thanksgiving break would, then, be an extended block break or a multi-day break after the first week of block 4.
3) Reserve blocks 1 and 2 and/or 3 and 4 for two-block options in a wide range of formats—faculty choice.

C. Facilitate experiential learning

1) Give every student access to an off-campus class, summer internship, or summer research collaborative.
2) Encourage students to reflect on how their learning inside and outside the classroom shapes them as individuals and citizens. Could be through "knowledge portfolios", the liberal learning capstone, or general education courses.

Appendix E: Proposals to Value Our People

A. Salaries and the salary system

1) Pay at least a living wage to employees and contract workers. Commit to an adaptive rather than reactive approach to fair compensation. Develop a multi-year plan to achieve this goal.
2) Review salaries for students and for contingent faculty. For the latter, consider equity, housing pressures, and the market.
3) Consider accelerating pay raises in the lower bands early in an employee's career. Think about more consequential awards at experience milestones (5 years, 10 years, etc.) to recognize the value of institutional knowledge and commitment to the college.
4) Further reinforce our strong benefits program. Think about ways of promoting health and wellbeing. Investigate subsidies for housing and childcare beginning with lower paid employees.

B. Advancement and professional growth

1) Create clearer paths to advancement by, for example, reviewing the minimum requirements for jobs. Allow equivalent experience to substitute for degrees.
2) Develop more cross training and leadership development to facilitate career advancement.
3) Rewrite personnel reviews to recognize contributions to college priorities and to gauge job satisfaction. For faculty, emphasize the quality and the impact of service over its quantity and strive to encourage and reward service that is organic to a faculty member's life.

C. Empowering people

1) Develop protocols for engaging outside experts. Before investing in outside consultants, seek advice from experts among faculty and staff.
2) Establish plans for clear, consistent, and formal ways of communicating decisions: who makes them and the rationale behind them.
3) To diffuse decision making, define the responsibilities of key groups such as Staff Council, the FEC, the Budget Committee, and the Compensation Committee. Create a plan for sharing the information they need to be effective.

D. Streamlining procedures, establishing processes

1) Develop a plan to reassess technology needs to achieve small and larger scale efficiencies.
2) Simplify existing procedures. Invite suggestions for eliminating unnecessary forms and for simplifying the necessary ones.
3) Identify areas where clear procedures could replace current ad hoc relation-based operations. Create and vet those procedures.
4) Reduce exceptionalism by finding ways to empower staff and faculty to hold people accountable for following procedures and observing deadlines.

E. Doing less

1) Create a system and a set of metrics to determine which programs no longer support student interests. Use the information to sunset old programs as we bring on new ones.
2) Clarify expectations about when to schedule class activities.
3) Develop strategies to reduce requests to work on tasks (some critical, others not) that take staff and faculty away from what they were hired to do.
4) Develop plans for managing emails and reducing meetings.
5) Discuss ways of limiting and consolidating events.

Appendix F: Process to Engage Offices and Divisions to Save Time and Increase Collaboration

Cabinet members decided how best to organize their divisions to address these two questions: "How could you save time, and what would you do with the time saved?" "How could your office/division support other offices/divisions, and how could they support yours?"

Every office/division participated during blocks 3-5.