

PROJECT 2024

May 31, 2024

Year 3 Report

Implementing proposals

Why Project 2024?

In 1968, CC decided to celebrate its first 100 years by looking forward rather than back. Turn the college into a committee of the whole and ask the question: how can we do what we do better? Their answer? The Block Plan.

Why not do that again? As we approached the college's sesquicentennial in 2024, President Richardson asked why not convene everyone to consider two questions. **How can we do what we do better?** and **How can CC best meet the challenges higher education faces?** The first looked to the inside and focused on the present while the second turned outward and to the more distant future.

Year 1 (2021-22)

Whatever else it achieved, President Richardson believed that Project 2024 would **bring the community together after Covid** to talk about what they had in common: the college. Randomly selected groups of students, faculty, and staff met to discuss problems and possibilities. So did the trustees, the cabinet, the Alumni Council, the Parents Council as well as established college committees. A Steering Committee including staff, faculty, students, and an alumni representative listened and summarized what they heard. (A summary of the process can be found [here](#).)

Doing what we do better

These conversations expressed both **shared values** and **common concerns**. The collective commitments included the health and wellbeing of the community; antiracism, access, and equity; sustainability; and clear, effective communication. As participants considered ways to do better, one resounding theme emerged: the need to **Build Connections** across blocks, across constituencies and levels, to city, state, and nation, and to postgraduate life. Interest in taming **Time** demands also dominated conversations.

Calls for change targeted three main areas:

- Learning inside and outside the classroom
- Structures and interactions
- Policies, programs, and norms

In each of these categories, people identified more specific goals. (The [Year 1 Report](#) provides details.)

Confronting outside challenges

Groups also considered which of **six challenges** likely threatened CC the most. They were:

- Finances
- Demographics
- Access
- Digital knowledge
- Relevance of the liberal arts
- Capacity for change

Participants saw **dangers for CC in each of them**. Often, though, they singled out complacency, because it stood in the way of confronting any of the threats.

Year 2 (2022-23)

This year, **attention turned to developing plans for action** in the areas targeted for change.

Doing what we do better

The Steering Committee **sought specific suggestions** about building connections and managing time from staff, faculty, students and alums. A general call to faculty and staff, questions to 5-year alums, and two student surveys generated ideas. Special meetings for staff, Fall Conference, and Faculty Forum also identified ways of fostering **Connection** and managing **Time**. (Read the results from two student surveys [here](#).)

Using this input, eight working groups and the Steering Committee prepared **proposals and recommendations for next steps**.

Academic proposals sought to

- Reinforce interdisciplinary inquiry.
- Expand two-block options.
- Facilitate experiential learning.

Proposals for promoting a **thriving community** focused on

- Respecting experience and expertise

- Empowering people to do their jobs
- Promoting clear, streamlined, and collaborative systems and processes

The [Year 2 Report](#) details these proposals on pages 2-3 and in Appendices D & E.

In a parallel follow up to Year 1 conversations, **offices and divisions asked how they could save time and reinforce collaboration.** (The Year 2 report describes the process.)

These discussions have **led to immediate and to continuing small and larger changes.**

As important, they also **clarified some of the broader issues** evident in the 2021 ModernThink Climate Survey and in Year 1 meetings. Service-oriented divisions, for example, found that burdensome procedures, lack of accountability, and exceptionalism fostered feelings of disempowerment and distrust.

The Steering Committee made consideration of these and other related concerns a priority for Year 3.

Confronting outside challenges

Steering Committee members co-chaired groups which explored

- Finances and access ([See Report.](#))
- Demographics and access ([See Report.](#))
- Digital knowledge #1: online learning ([See Report.](#))
- Digital knowledge #2: the effects of screens and social media on cognitive function and on student learning and wellbeing ([See Report.](#))

These groups brought together students, faculty, and staff along with trustees, alums, and parents with relevant expertise. They analyzed the effects of these realities on CC now and suggested responses.

Year 3 (2023-24)

This year the Steering Committee worked on **implementing projects and proposals aimed at doing what we do better.** For some of the proposals, that means moving to action; others require further refining and vetting.

To tackle the Big Challenges, the working groups developed **integrated plans for securing CC for the long-term future.** The college community will need to recognize the gravity of the challenges and make acting now a priority.

At this implementation stage, **Project 2024 depends on college decision makers** to enact proposals and to continue to respond to the concerns and the hopes expressed by the college community over the last three years. It also falls to the Board of Trustees and to senior leaders to ensure that we act now to sustain CC in the decades ahead.

Responsibility belongs to the Interim President and to Cabinet, and given the nature of the changes proposed, especially to the VP for People and Workplace Culture, the COO and Dean of the College, and to the Dean of the Faculty. Key academic initiatives require the approval of the Curriculum Executive Committee and the faculty.

It is also true that **President Richardson created Project 2024 as a ground up, collective effort** to assess what we do. She asked the college community to voice concerns and identify possibilities, understanding that **everyone has a stake in the process and in the results**. By broadening decision-making, Project 2024 intended to activate people around a shared set of commitments and specific goals.

And, in fact, **we see the effects in the multiple actions** taken over the last three years to cultivate connection and streamline what we do. Project 2024 outlined a series of specific initiatives to pursue. But cabinet members and senior leaders, groups such as the Faculty Executive Committee and Staff Council, and individuals in all areas of the college have also acted on what they heard from the college community. They have responded to calls to reinforce liberal learning, maximize the promise of the Block Plan, promote collaboration, and save time. (See Appendix A for Cabinet responses to Year 2 proposals.)

Doing what we do better

Early in the fall 2023, the Steering Committee laid out **the next steps, identified groups and individuals responsible for carrying them out**, and suggested a **timeline**.

Groups of students, faculty, and staff refined and vetted Year 2 proposals in these areas:

- Liberal learning
- Experiential learning
- ePortfolios
- Salary philosophy
- Decision making
- Doing less

Cabinet and the senior leadership collaborative developed **guidelines for deadlines, reports, and lines of approval**.

(See Appendices B-G for details.)

Liberal learning

This group concentrated on Year 2 proposals to increase

- Interdisciplinary learning
- Multi-block courses
- Student and faculty agency

It worked on

- Synergy courses and semesters
- A liberal learning capstone
- A four-year liberal learning option
- Structures promoting variants of two-block courses

Status of the proposals (May 31, 2024)

1. Promote interdisciplinary learning as central to the liberal arts

- **Interdisciplinary Studies minor**
- **4-year interdisciplinary liberal learning pilot** (option to fulfill Gen Ed requirements)
- **Streamline general education requirements.** Allow courses classified in more than one critical learning category to fulfill a maximum of two CL requirements.

Submitted to the Curriculum Executive Committee. They are considering the first two and recommend that the CEC 2024-25 present the third for faculty approval.

- Problem-focused **liberal learning senior capstone**

Dean of the Faculty is offering course development grants.

2. Integrating learning across blocks

- Multiply **multi-block configurations** in blocks 5-6 and create more **interdisciplinary “synergy” courses.**

The Dean of the Faculty is offering faculty grants to develop synergy courses, and the Crown Center is helping identify potential partners for interdisciplinary collaboration. (Appendix B provides details.)

Experiential learning

This group **assessed the feasibility of the Year 2 proposal to give all students access** to one or more experiential learning opportunities (understood as learning outside the traditional classroom setting, specifically blocks abroad, summer internships, and summer faculty-student research collaboratives.)

Analysis of participation data redefined the problem from one of enabling all students to engage in experiential learning to encouraging them to do so.

Why don't students take advantage of those opportunities? The student engagement survey gave partial answers, and the group explored other ways of obtaining more complete data.

Status of the proposal (May 31, 2024)

The Student Success Operational Group will consider recommendations to prepare guides for experiential learning for students and advisors and to adopt a transcript notation for experiential learning or a co-curricular transcript. (See Appendix C for details.)

ePortfolios

The Year 2 committee on learning inside and outside the classroom recommended that students be required or have the option to develop “ePortfolios” to archive, record, and reflect on their learning.

A group of students, staff, and faculty investigated current platforms and practices at CC and at comparable institutions. It evaluated available outside platforms and recommended a 5-year phased-in trial of CN CourseNetworking.

Status of the proposal (May 31, 2024)

The Student Success Operational Group will consider the proposal to adopt and implement CN. (See Appendix D for details.)

Salary philosophy

Representatives from the Compensation and the Steering Committees worked with the VP for People and Workplace Culture to revise the college’s compensation philosophy.

Status of the proposal (May 31, 2024)

The compensation philosophy now **commits CC to providing benefits-eligible employees a living wage** and to getting other categories as close as possible to it. (See Appendix E for the revised compensation philosophy.)

Decision-making

Another group pursued Year 2 recommendations to

- Establish plans for clear, consistent, and formal ways of communicating decisions.
- Define the responsibilities of key groups including Staff Council, the FEC, the Budget Committee, and the Compensation Committee.

This group developed a **tool kit to align decision making processes** across offices. (Link to the tool kit [here](#). See Appendix F for more details.)

Status of the proposal (May 31, 2024)

Chief Operating Officer and Dean of the College, Pedro de Araujo, is considering action.

Doing less

We heard the call to **reduce Time pressures** from all constituencies at the college. One (very active) student referred to CC’s “culture of toxic productivity.” To manage time better would, people emphasized, **require a collective effort**.

The commitment to continuity expressed by Board of Trustee Chair Jeff Keller and Interim President-Elect, Manya Whitaker, responds to this concern. Sticking to what we’ve planned rather than launching new college-wide projects will help contain time demands.

Of the specific Year 2 proposals to do less, **limiting the number of events** got the most traction. The Events Operational Team organized by the Chief Operating Officer categorized and prioritized events this year.

A parallel Project 2024 action group planned to focus on how to use events to reinforce Connection. Deferring to the Events Operational group, it disbanded.

Status of the proposal (May 31, 2024)

The Standing Operational Group on Events will reimagine events designed to promote community.

Exceptionalism and accountability

The meetings of offices and divisions in Year 2 identified cumbersome **forms and reports**, complicated **approval lines**, and the burden of **enforcing deadlines** as unnecessary time sinks.

Some offices also pointed to **the practice of making exceptions** to rules and deadlines as both time-consuming and disempowering. Why make the effort to enforce a policy or decision when someone up the line may overturn it? Cabinet and the senior leaders collaborative reviewed recommendations for change.

Status of proposals (May 31, 2024)

Cabinet committed to review and to enforce deadlines; simplify reporting; and streamline approval lines. (See Appendix G for details.)

What else?

As the Steering Committee summarized discussions and turned ideas into proposals, **what got left out? What more can we do to reinforce Connection and to manage Time?**

This fall the Steering Committee reviewed a compendium of all the suggestions offered in Years 1 and 2 and singled out a set for further consideration. (See the [lists of other ideas](#).)

A subgroup of the Committee identified **a set of “extras” for staff** and worked with the VP for People and Workplace Culture on refining it. (See [their report](#).)

The Steering Committee also pursued the idea of **“a dynamic org chart.”** Partnering with IT and the VP for People and Workplace Culture, it is investigating platforms that allow people to identify who does what. The goal is to facilitate work and to cultivate connections, both professional and social.

Status of the proposals (May 31, 2024)

The VP for People and Workplace Culture will consider implementing the “extras” and partner with IT to identify and propose an appropriate dynamic org chart platform.

Confronting Outside Challenges

Three groups examined these three challenges:

- Finances/Demographics/Access
- Online learning/Digital wellness/AI
- How to prepare students now for 2055

President Richardson charged these groups to

- Ask “**How big can we go?**” What would “**big**” be? And “**What can we (CC) do** while staying true to our mission and our shared values?”
- Convince the CC community of the gravity and urgency of these challenges. Convey that the status quo is more dangerous than change.

(See the [Big Challenges/Big Ideas summary report](#).)

This work built on the Year 2 analysis of the likely effects of four major challenges on the college and the identification of constructive responses.

This year’s groups produced an integrated set of recommendations:

- **Reduce our reliance on tuition.** How close to 50% or less can we get in six years?¹
- Stand firm on **the liberal arts**.
- Extend the boundaries of **learning beyond graduation and to the community**. Develop programs centered on long life learning for alums and community members.
- **Prepare students now for 2055.**

(See Appendix H for details.)

Status of the proposals (May 31, 2024)

The Steering Committee recommends using the new operational governance structure to pursue these goals. It urges the creation of one overarching group dedicated to reducing reliance on tuition, with subgroups to explore ideas for enhancing revenue and curtailing costs.

¹ Six years or the end of the next capital campaign. See these two documents: a preliminary analysis of Long Life Learning and Additional Revenue options and the Finances/Demographics/Access report for specific ideas in each category.

Appendix A: Cabinet responses to Year 2 recommendations

Value our people

A. Salaries and the salary system

- Updated our Compensation Philosophy to better document priorities.
- Engaged in comprehensive staff position benchmarking.
- Accelerated pay raises in the lower bands early in an employee's career.
- Further reinforced our strong benefits program.
 - Completed comprehensive leave reform and enhancement

B. Advancement and professional growth

- Rolled out online quarterly performance conversations.
- CC Leadership Development Program pilot.
- Will be launching internal learning and development survey.

C. Empowering people

- Created the People Practices Advisory Group and Senior Leader Collaborative,
- Building more awareness of procedures and policies, and supporting decision-making in alignment with such guidance.

D. Streamlining procedures, establishing processes

- Added role of Chief Operating Officer to Dean of the College position.
- Implementing Operational Groups under an Institutional Shared Governance structure.
- Developed a plan to reassess technology needs to achieve small and larger scale efficiencies.
- Identified areas where clear procedures could replace current ad hoc relation-based operations. Creating and vetting those procedures.
- Developed an ongoing administrative process review whose findings will inform how to streamline and implement existing and modified processes. Once complete, simplify approval processes and automate, when possible, to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.
- Increased outreach efforts/engagements to build stronger understanding of academic, administrative, and operational requirements of IT.
- Implemented a platform to catalog software applications, processes, and technology resources to help align campus IT needs with college priorities.

Reinforce liberal learning

- Added tenure-track faculty in interdisciplinary programs.

Appendix B: Reinforce liberal learning

- Pilot a four-year integrated interdisciplinary studies program. ([Link](#))
- Create an Interdisciplinary Studies minor. ([Link](#))
- Streamline general education. ([Link](#))
- Revise the academic calendar.
- Increase the number of multi-block classes, especially in blocks 5 and 6.

Appendix C: Experiential learning

A group consisting of the Directors of the Career Center, Global Studies, Summer Session and Student-Faculty Collaborative Research asked **who in the entering classes of 2019 and 2020 engaged in one or more of these experiences.**

Against expectations, the data showed that BIPOC, international, female, and highest need students participated more than their incidence in the CC population while whites, males, and students who do not qualify for financial aid engaged less. The group hypothesized that the latter group may have non-CC sponsored summer internships and that they may already have international experience. (See the [data and analysis here.](#))

The data indicated that **we could require every student to engage in one experiential learning opportunity** at far less cost than originally calculated. However, it would likely mean limiting college support to one such experience. No matter how beneficial experts argue this high-impact practice is, **adding another requirement inspired limited enthusiasm.**

This group, expanded to include students and faculty, also focused on how to gather more information on who participates in non-CC summer internships and research opportunities. It investigated adding questions to forms required by Residential Life and the Registrar. In the first case, the effort outweighs the benefits, and in the second it still awaits an answer.

Appendix D: ePortfolios

The group discussed requiring students to maintain an ePortfolio and decided to **begin by providing a platform** and encouraging entering students and FYP faculty to use it. The Career Center promotes this practice, and some majors and individual faculty members already use ePortfolios. A widely available platform would facilitate their work and benefit students generally.

(See [the proposal here.](#))

Appendix E: Living wage

As inflation spiked in 2021, the call for the college to provide a living wage intensified. The Year 2 group working on supporting staff and faculty urged the college to ensure a living wage for all employees.

The College has made significant progress recently.

- Increased the baseline for Sodexo workers to \$15. (2022)
- Adopted the MIT Glassmeier living wage for a single adult as the standard. (2022-23)
- Increased contingent faculty salaries. (2022-23)
- Increased pay for occasional and temporary workers. (Minimum \$15.50) (2023-24)
- Accelerated progress to the midpoint of the salary band. (2023-24)

The revised compensation philosophy clarifies the principles governing compensation, including paying a living wage to benefits-eligible employees. A linked document identifies related policies and practices. (See the [revised compensation philosophy](#).)

Appendix F: Decision-making

This group considered Year 2 proposals designed to empower people. It focused on decision-making and recommended that CC develop “a decision toolkit to support effective, efficient, and well-communicated decisions across campus.” The proposed contents of the toolkit would include:

- A "norms document" outlining decision-making best practices and expectations
- A decision model to clarify roles and responsibilities
- A simple 3-part communication checklist (pre-communication, midway update, final announcement) to ensure transparency

(See a [more detailed description of the toolkit](#).)

Appendix G: Exceptionalism and accountability

Year 1 discussions, the ModernThink campus climate survey, and the office and divisional meetings about Time and Connection indicated noticeable discontent with the complexity and enforcement of current policies and procedures. The Year 2 Report offered an explanation. “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, distrust, suspicion, and territorialism as we continue to operate in two contrasting modes.”

The Report sought 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.”

Deadlines, reports, and approval lines provide a reasonable and concrete starting place. (See [the Empowering People report](#) for further details.)

Appendix H: Big Challenges, Big Ideas

Recommendations

1. **Reduce our reliance on tuition.** How close to 50% or less can we get in six years?

- Explore **additional and innovative sources of revenue** (See number 3 below.)
- Increase the **annual fund and the endowment**.
- Curtail the growth of **costs** through careful planning and prioritization.

(See a [preliminary study of Long Life Learning options](#).)

2. Stand firm on **the liberal arts**

- Feature interdisciplinary learning, a way of knowing unique to the liberal arts.
- Emphasize the ways liberal learning helps students achieve personally satisfying lives and lives of consequence beyond themselves.

3. Extend the boundaries of **learning beyond graduation and to the community**.

- Leverage online delivery and our location to increase long life learning opportunities for alums and members of the community. Consider mini-blocks, workshops, and virtual access to CC events.
- Explore post-baccalaureate certificates and degrees, certificate programs, and short-course skill-building classes targeting alums and others as they change careers.
- Consider partnerships with other colleges to expand virtual offerings in different formats for alums and the community.

4. **Prepare students now for 2055**

- Stress interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking.
- Ensure digital competence and a knowledge of AI sufficient to use it wisely, responsibly, and with a critical eye to its limits.
- Encourage healthy relationships with technology by integrating more “low-tech” classes into the curriculum and considering no-tech periods (NSO, for example).

(Find [the combined summary report here](#). See also the reports for [Finances/Demographics/Access](#); [Online Learning/Digital Wellness/AI](#); [Preparing Students for 2055](#).)