To clarify and convey the nature and value of a liberal education

Liberal learning (a term we favor to liberal arts) is difficult to accurately and succinctly define, yet many within the CC community feel that it is at the center of what we do. Throughout the first year of Project 2024 we heard from faculty, students, and staff that it is time to reevaluate what liberal learning means and to assess the value it has in the present day (and for the future). We posed existential questions, raised concerns, reflected on our past, projected into the future, and gathered lots of ideas. What if we...?

The Liberal Learning Working Group cataloged, refined, and vetted ideas related to liberal learning. As part of the process we kept in mind the Project 2024 themes of "connection" and "time" as well as the CC antiracism commitment and mental health awareness. We discussed the nuances and vagueness of defining liberal learning. We reflected on the traditional view of the *artes liberales*, the history of liberal learning at CC from Glenn Brooks and Glenn Gray, Bro Adams' thoughts on the future of liberal learning, and various other sources with diverse views. Discussions of what liberal learning means influenced our thoughts about what we would change, and our proposed changes influenced our view of liberal learning.

We identified two areas for action:

- **Messaging:** Develop some common language that describes what liberal learning means to us now and for the future to enable us to use common messaging on campus as well as to others (prospective students, parents, alumni, etc.).

- **Curriculum:** Refocus liberal learning at CC through a new general education program that embraces connection, leverages the block plan for time (within courses and across years), and asks students to use interdisciplinary approaches to address big questions.

**Messaging - options to pursue**

Our discussions led us to a generate a list of ideas and values that are essential to liberal learning at CC in 2022 and beyond. We have not developed a succinct refined definition, but we have guiding principles and some phrases to test out and refine. The synthesis here blends traditional views, which are still very relevant with some refinement for the present day and projecting into the future.

- The role of liberal learning can be expressed as the cultivation of "practical knowledge/wisdom" or "useful knowledge/wisdom" - applying knowledge to daily life to lead a satisfying life and one of consequence beyond one’s self.

- Who am I? What am I good at and what should I be thinking about doing with my life? What are my obligations to others and my communities?

- An important aspect of liberal learning is to practice broad interdisciplinary approaches to solving "big questions".
Liberal learning should foster a sense of responsibility and obligation within communities to solve problems and create change.

Liberal learning would be more effective through intentional discussions of "why we do what we do" and through more opportunities for reflection on self-growth.

Liberal learning will prepare our students for the "next now". There is uncertainty over the future and our students, prospective students (and parents) feel anxiety about career readiness. Liberal learning prepares students to be nimble, which is an advantage considering that our graduates may change their careers several times. Students often develop skills that they do not know how to express to others (cv/resume, job interviews, grad apps, etc.). Part of our messaging to current students might involve more explicit discussion of the skills that they are honing and owning.

Curriculum - options to pursue

Develop a new general education curriculum to focus on liberal learning with a college-wide set of learning outcomes to help connect curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities. We have discussed many ideas related to a new liberal learning program that we highlight below.

Liberal learning courses are interdisciplinary and co-taught to emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to life.

Liberal learning courses are focused on a "big question" that benefits from/requires interdisciplinary solutions.

Liberal learning courses are based on a two-block format in their first, second, and third year plus a liberal learning capstone in B8 of their senior year. This format emphasizes connection across blocks, across disciplines, within a cohort, and across years. Annual engagement with liberal learning allows for and promotes growth and reflection.

Two-block liberal learning courses would be offered in B1/2 and B5/6 to allow flexibility for study abroad, winter starts, etc. This also creates space for other two-block courses (not associated with liberal learning), which also emphasizes connection and time.

Liberal learning courses will be more explicit about "why we do what we do" rather than a checklist of courses that may have the purpose less explicit since courses are not connected.

Two-block liberal learning courses may create room in the block plan for co-curricular activities that support liberal learning for a large number of students in those courses at that time.

Instruction of liberal learning courses should be primarily faculty but may also be supported by staff interested in teaching their discipline, retired faculty, and alumni. We should be careful not to rely overly on visiting faculty.

Let's do less! Keep the number of general education requirements to a fairly small number. A two-block course each of the first three years plus a liberal learning capstone is 7 blocks. If we maintain a language requirement of two blocks, we are at 9. If we are concerned about distribution (Ex. a student graduating with no science courses, etc.) we can also overlay a requirement of one course per division.