

Building on the Block 2.0: Using Innovation to Extend the Scope of Our Strategic Plan

Fall 2017

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The journey that began with implementing the *Building on the Block* strategic plan has met with overwhelming success (see sidebar). In that plan we counted on Colorado College's appeal to people who possess the curiosity, rigor, and passion of our faculty, staff, and students, and the pride and sense of adventure of our alumni, parents, and friends. As the only selective liberal arts college in the Rocky Mountain West, we occupy a unique niche in higher education that exemplifies the spirit of the West— independence, sustainability, creativity, and original thinking.

Building on our Momentum

The 2013 plan included five main recommendations, each with a distinct focus, yet complementing and reinforcing each other to create a more dynamic liberal arts experience that is authentically Colorado College. First, to realize the greater potential of the Block Plan, we upped our investment in innovation and support for faculty and students as they define the Block Plan for this new era of learning. Second, because our Block Plan fits in so well with the learning style of today's engaged and independent students, we recommended using it as building block for both a nationally recognized summer program and an inventive half-block program.

Third, we proposed an innovation program that supports students in becoming "changemakers." As a liberal arts institution, we use the term "changemaker" instead of "entrepreneur" to emphasize the reality that innovation occurs culturally, socially, and personally, rather than exclusively in the business and tech worlds. Changemakers are courageous doers who bias towards action. We have an opportunity to build a culture of innovation at CC that reflects our unique strengths and diversity, and that builds on our history of attracting students who are innovative risk-takers.

Key Strategic Investments So Far

Center for Immersive Learning and Engaged Teaching to support undergraduate research, Crown and Colket Centers, international programs, sustainability, community engagement

Tutt Library expanded to be intellectual hub on campus; net zero building

Increased diversity of faculty, staff and students, Butler Center founded to build inclusive campus

New opportunities in experiential learning field and study abroad

Half block courses on career development

New alumni and parent Block Break programs

Increased support for faculty scholarship

Expanded resources to students over block breaks and on blocks away

Enhanced communication and transparency through "In the Loop" and other practices

Professional development programs based on our new leadership philosophy

Sustainability concepts integrated into curriculum, renovated Spencer Center one of most energy efficient on campus, gold-level STARS report benchmarks across metrics

Campus Master Plan and Master Communications Plan to guide physical campus for the coming years

Building on the Block 2.0

A summer program that is as vibrant as the academic year

Innovation at CC, characterized by our adventurous spirit and love of learning

Integrating the Fine Arts Center into CC

Strategies that create connections across the student learning experience

New ways to help students connect the parts of their CC education and connect their education to next steps

Fresh ideas to break down silos and promote connections across the community

The final two recommendations focus on enhancing the experience of our distinctive place: investing more in our engaged, globally connected academic program and our regional and historical identity; and investing in workplace excellence to foster an organization that is as innovative and dynamic as the CC academic experience. We want our students, faculty and staff to realize the full benefits of being part of our dynamic intellectual community, a place that is unique in the world but also seamlessly connected to the world.

Against this backdrop, the trustees recognize that now is the time to take another leap forward. As we develop important new ideas to enhance one of the best liberal arts colleges in the world, we will continue to implement our original recommendations, including building stronger summer offerings, and creating a nationally recognized innovation program.

Our new summer programs are designed for a new generation of learners, offering increased flexibility for both faculty and students. These programs develop linked blocks around themes such as film, arts, pre-med, sports, foreign languages, environmental education, and geology. Students extend their academic experiences — they get hands-on learning with internships and mentorships. In addition, the summer programs make better use of facilities and other resources throughout the year as they offer new, exciting opportunities to both CC students and students from other colleges, both domestic and international, who are interested in spending an adventurous summer in the Colorado Rockies.

Innovation at CC is designed to provide spaces in which work merges with play, spaces where students, faculty and staff have the chance to say “I don’t know” and are resourced and encouraged to choose curiosity over fear. We seek to redefine success for our students and empower them to lead holistic, balanced lives driven by passion and creativity, lives that include work that has meaning. Our three main areas of emphasis, Design Thinking, Risk/Failure/Resilience and Mindfulness, are all practices and tools that will lead students into the change making space where ideas become actionable.

Now our opportunity is to realize the vision of *Building on the Block* by doing even more to implement the ideas contained in those recommendations; adding two timely initiatives to increase our scope; and adopting one new recommendation to connect students’ learning experience across coursework, across curricular and co-curricular experiences, and between CC and our students’ post-CC lives. The new recommendation recognizes important changes in both the expectations of our students and in the higher education learning environment. When our students join CC, we want them to know that they are entering a dynamic intellectual community that reflects a global outlook, a strong liberal arts tradition, and our unique place in the West. We also want them to know that every environment requires a constant infusion of new ideas to remain vibrant and fresh. For these reasons,

In 2015, Forbes named CC as the third most entrepreneurial college in America. A great example of this spirit is David Amster-Olszewski '09, who was featured in Forbes' "30 Under 30" list as one of the nation's leading developers of community solar energy. Two years after graduating, he formed his company in Tutt Library because he did not have an office. CC went on to become one of SunShare's first customers.

innovation is a theme that connects and amplifies the expanded scope of our plan.

The two initiatives and the new recommendation also affirm that at CC, innovation is in our DNA. In 2017, *U.S. News* asked top college officials to identify institutions that are making the most innovative improvements in terms of curriculum, faculty, students, campus life, technology, or facilities. CC ranked first on that list. As we embed concepts like innovation deeper into our fabric, we are ever mindful that a liberal education is the best way to develop one's mind and character. Instead of only learning facts or pre-professional skills, a liberal education teaches students how to live a life of continuous learning with a deep appreciation of the world around them.

As before, President Tiefenthaler began this new strategic work with a series of listening/brainstorming sessions with the community in the 2016-2017 academic year (a total of eight sessions with 532 participants). At the same time, the college and Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center took up an intense collaborative effort to integrate the center and the college.

Two Initiatives to Increase our Scope

In 2016, Colorado College announced a new alliance with the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center (referred to as the *FAC* in this document), beginning an effort to redefine the contributions of both organizations to the arts in the region. Supporting both missions while expanding new kinds of learning opportunities, arts programming and cultural resources for the greater Colorado Springs community, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity fits in seamlessly with CC's strategic focus on the experiential learning made possible by the Block Plan, our innovative people, and our special place. Integrating the center and the college—our first new initiative—also demonstrates our ability to respond to changes in the environment—natural, cultural or economic—in ways that benefit our students and the community.

The second initiative extends our current work to connect our faculty and staff to the mission of the college and to each other, underscoring our commitment to diversity of all kinds and encouraging the energy and creativity that characterize all our investments in people, place, and program. *Building on the Block* affirms this commitment by calling for an inclusive community that helps each person develop and thrive.

Initiative One: Integrating the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and the College

The many benefits of the extraordinary alliance between the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and the college include expanded community offerings and enriched student experiences—creating a synergy between the two that invigorates the other. As designated by the legal agreement that guides the alliance, a strategic process was taken up by groups that included representatives from each institution. These groups gathered extensive feedback from the center, the college and the community, learning much more about the community's deep engagement with art and its commitment to enriching

understanding, inspiring those who engage, and expanding their worlds.

The resulting plan contributes significantly to CC's overall strategic aims. For example, we will see more opportunities for the Block Plan to include more object-based teaching, short field trips, visiting artists, and experiential education such as internships for students. And with one of the strongest collections of Southwest art in the country, the museum clearly supports our sense of place. Up to now, most of the strategic work to emphasize our unique location has focused on campus sustainability, environmental education and extending outdoor education to all students—now we can very intentionally include arts and humanities by doing more to integrate the distinctive arts and culture of the Southwest into the curriculum.

Each aspect of the FAC will increase our emphasis on innovation and adventure. In the words of a March 2017 art review about a FAC show of drawings and paintings, “The exhibit shows the upside of letting an academic institution take the reins. Colleges are shielded from the ups and downs that cultural nonprofits face and can push boundaries.... They have a history of sheltering provocative ideas.” Now we are using this spirit to design a national model of distinction for an arts center that joins with a college to serve the campus, the community, the region and the world. The FAC plan affirms and underscores the themes that guide this extension of CC's strategic plan, we look forward to executing the FAC plan as a significant part of our innovation efforts.

Initiative Two: Integrating the Community to Increase Workplace Excellence

Because people are our greatest asset and our Rocky Mountain location makes us distinctive among liberal arts colleges, we have a deep appreciation for holistic well-being and a sense of belonging to the special place we inhabit for all members of our community. This commitment inspires us to connect to our mission and model the lifelong learning and sense of shared humanity that we work to instill in our students.

Excellence, Access and Collaboration:

Summary of a Strategic Plan for the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College

In August 2016, the CSFAC and CC announced an alliance that supports the missions of both organizations while expanding innovative learning opportunities, arts programming and cultural resources for the greater Colorado Springs community and the college. Our vision is to develop a national model of distinction for an arts center that joins with a college to serve the campus, the community, the region and the world. Three themes—excellence, access and collaboration and connectivity—affirm this spirit of engagement and support six recommendations that will contribute to our distinction for years to come.

One: Nurturing a Community of Artists

Nurture an artists' community that offers innovative arts learning and expertise; creates leaders for local, regional, national and global arts worlds; offers development opportunities to professionals.

Two: Inviting Visitors to Enliven Our Community

Engage top-quality visiting artists, performers, scholars and exhibits; make their work, objects and events accessible to all; draw on their presence to inspire learning experiences and creative opportunities for the community.

Three: Building an Innovative Program of Arts Education

Develop an arts education program that becomes highly regarded nationally; create excellent arts education offerings with special emphasis on youth; include professional development for teachers.

Four: Inspiring Creativity through Collaboration

Encourage and sustain vibrant connections across all programs. Developing shared physical space and encouraging risk-taking to try new things will contribute to this aim.

Five: Developing an Arts Corridor

Develop an Arts Corridor for our community; encourage local galleries, studios and other arts and creative entities to locate nearby and become integral members of the community the corridor promotes.

Six: Underscoring our Sense of Place

Encourage sense of place through physical location, Southwest and Spanish Colonial collections and regional theater, classes and exhibits; use these efforts to link the FAC to its traditions and future.

Already many are collaborating to make CC one of the best places in the nation to learn, work, and grow, and many more are embracing change with enthusiasm. Such progressive moves encourage new forms of collaboration, enriching the community even more. Now our opportunity is to develop new ways to relate collaboration and professional development to our mission and to make time to reflect, explore, and innovate as a matter of course. These opportunities build on our aim to provide the finest liberal arts education in the country by emphasizing the role of faculty and staff in shaping the future of the college. We believe that this initiative will have a direct, positive effect on our culture—and will call for our most creative work to date.

When CC began a strategic planning process in 2013, a study of strengths and weaknesses revealed the scarcity of collaborative work. A team formed to address this condition underscored the need for a climate of inclusion and support for meaningful collaboration. This recommendation extends and deepens that team's important contribution.

To encourage mission-related collaboration and professional development, we could:

- Support intensive block-like projects that require imaginative framing and input from faculty and staff to be executed successfully. Examples include faculty and staff collaborating to design and test the new forms of mentoring that are recommended in this document, or faculty across disciplines working together to promote team teaching.
- Continue to design professional development programs around substantive, institution-specific content that are aligned with the mission of the college and optimize everyone's attention and time. This effort should build on the success of Excel@CC. Prompt leaders to embrace and communicate the value of professional development to the future of CC, and make time for it.
- Encourage and prepare more faculty and staff to step into leadership roles, including opportunities to build skills in supporting and developing people, managing change and conflict, and strategically leveraging budgets.
- Review policies, practices and procedures to distinguish between actions that increase willingness to take appropriate risks and try new things from those that discourage this approach and use this information to bring about positive change.

Excel@CC resulted from talks about how to support faculty and staff while connecting them more deeply to CC's mission—a framework that moved us from professional development classes that were fun but not purposeful, to development experiences that benefit the person and the college as a whole. That one change was the key to success.

To make time to reflect, explore, and innovate, we could:

- Recognize the role of a healthy community in individual wellness. Supporting staff and faculty wellness from a holistic perspective—as we do for students—could increase productivity and model healthy behaviors for students.

- Promote learning across departments and offices to share good ideas for time management, networking, and team teaching, for example; identify tasks that can be streamlined or discontinued; and help the community work smarter, not harder. We should use technology to boost efficiency and support continuous improvement as a matter of course.
- Develop new ways to connect efforts that support the curricular and co-curricular. More intentionally connecting academic departments to student life and other offices could increase collaboration and reduce duplicate programs. Because few institutions engage in cross-division collaboration, CC could be a leader in this important area.

It should require less effort to recommend a student for an internal venture grant than a Goldwater Scholarship. Expectations for routine tasks like responding to emails after hours or being on-call while maintaining day-to-day work should be clear. Could we clarify and scale such realities more appropriately?

Especially because these two initiatives—integrating the FAC and the college and integrating the community to extend workplace excellence—extend the themes that guide our 2013 strategic plan, they are significant parts of our innovation efforts.

Recommendation: Connecting the Parts of the CC Experience

Our students affirm the value of a liberal arts experience that broadens their horizons, deepens their insights, and develops their capacity to identify and pursue their passions. In fact, they want us to go further and find new ways to enrich and connect the various parts of their CC experience and connect their college experience to their next steps.

Our students also know that diversity increases the value of a liberal arts experience, and we are pleased that recent initiatives to extend our recruitment have improved diversity and the academic profile of incoming classes. Now we need to double our efforts to make CC accessible to more students from low- and middle-income families. We also recognize that the number of Coloradans who enroll has decreased as CC has become more selective. We are more committed than ever to doing all we can to increase and support educational excellence in our local community.

Currently the college supports many pipeline initiatives designed to support our community and our diversity and access goals, but we know little about their impact. We will now create one specific program that can be assessed, considered and improved.

The action steps that make up this important recommendation emphasize four opportunities for integration—among students from various backgrounds; across the parts of the academic experience, including Blocks, disciplines, the classroom and experiential learning, field study, study abroad, and faculty-led research; across academic and co-curricular learning; and across the CC experience and students’ aspirations for their future. Our strategies should deepen and expand our students’ education, help them explore their passions and yet recognize the value of limiting busyness by choosing among co-curricular opportunities carefully, and increase the meaningfulness and potential of a CC education.

Action steps to broaden the academic experience and integrate its parts could include:

- Enhance the pipeline of college-ready students from marginalized backgrounds in the Pikes Peak region. This program should reach out early to K-12 students to ensure that they have the academic credentials, skills, attributes and information they need to attend CC and other elite colleges. Steps could include studying our current efforts including the commitments that support them, scanning other institutions for best practices, and developing options for next steps.
- Add new forms of innovation and creativity to the Block. We could do more to support team-teaching and faculty teams who collaborate to create connections across the disciplines that make up the liberal arts; deepen collaboration across departments by coordinating new courses across disciplines to facilitate—rather than impede—cross disciplinary enrollment, and thinking outside the Block’s current nine-to-twelve daily timeframe.
- Develop new ways to help students reflect on and integrate what they are learning as they manage the intensity of the Block. For example, we could support convergence days where classes on similar issues come together to discuss topics that are related.
- Design adjunct courses that bridge disciplines or focus on contemporary issues, connect college and world experience, and help students—especially as they work their way through their four years—create a narrative of their CC experiences.
- Help students connect to intellectual communities in the various disciplines before they declare a major. Rather than reserving these connections for declared majors, we could help students by giving them more insight before choosing a major.
- Create and support innovative forms of academic advising for students at all levels. Our program should encourage students as they explore interests; offer transparent help as they investigate, select, and change their major; promote active co-programming between entities, and engage faculty in the developing the program as it evolves.

Action steps to integrate academic and co-curricular experiences might include:

- Engage students more with advisors and mentors, including staff mentors, to integrate their academic and co-curricular experiences and increase the meaning of their experiences outside class.
- Create small groups for faculty and staff to collaborate to explore the connections between academic and co-curricular experiences. For example, 90 percent of our students participate in an athletic program. Designing venues for coaches and faculty to explore connections between athletics participation and excellence in the classroom might enrich the CC experience for many students, faculty, and staff members alike.
- Extend the advantages of all these connections through networks we create and support. Develop the technology we need to support robust interaction across groups and individuals.

- Use space more powerfully to encourage faculty, students, staff, and alumni to gather and create ideas.

Action steps to integrate the CC experience and students’ aspirations for their future could include:

- Draw on the expertise of alumni, parents, and special friends to offer new forms of mentoring. Find new ways to bring alumni and parents to campus, send students out into the world, and use technology with consistency and sophistication is critical to this aim.
- Build on the success of the Public Interest Fellowship Program by developing other similar intern experiences for students. These experiences could offer meaningful work to students in a variety of sectors.
- Help students develop a narrative through which they view, interpret, and explain their CC experience. Our aims are to help students integrate the parts of their academic experience and link that experience with co-curricular engagement.
- Encourage faculty to engage majors in their professional communities of practice, including them in issues, professional gatherings, and other events.
- Expand support for students who pursue national scholarships for post-graduate study, helping students understand more about their deepest ambitions and how CC can help them achieve those goals.

Formed in 2013, CC’s Mock Trial teams are coached by alumna and 4th Judicial District Court Judge Regina Walter ‘80, who led a CC team to the national championship that first year. Team members learn to think critically on their feet and remain unflappable in any circumstance. These skills are taking graduates to top law schools and careers.

More than strengthening connections, this recommendation is designed to enrich the entire learning experience and extend our strong commitment to educate students who are looking for a one-of-a-kind academic experience. As the great American naturalist E.O. Wilson noted, in the future *synthesizers* will run the world. Our new recommendation aims to help CC students become these synthesizers—active lifelong learners, imaginative individuals, and inspired members of diverse communities in a changing world.

The world henceforth will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely.

--E.O. Wilson

Next Steps

Our next steps include sharing this draft document with the community, inviting comments and suggestions, using them to improve our ideas, and presenting this extension of our plan to the Trustees. With their approval and support, we will implement the two initiatives and the recommendation along with our ongoing work to execute *Building on the Block*. We are pleased that these new ideas build on the success of strategic progress that is already in place. Helped and supported by the entire community, CC will go from strength to strength as we develop the very best future we can imagine.