

Competition Working Group

Notable activity in the competition:

- Mass open online courses (MOOCs) currently offer free alternatives. Some of these are credit bearing.
- Some schools offer online courses in small scale (ie traditional model with roughly 20 students per faculty member) that use technology to break the barriers of geography.
- Competitors are more aggressive in preparing students for life after Carleton both in career service offices (internships, externships, alumni networking, etc.) and in the curriculum (creating pathways in the curriculum that connect to post-College vocations and avocations).
- Virtual Centers are used to raise profile without creating significant new programming and costs. Some are “physical” in the form of a one-term seminar (eg Wellesley’s Albright Center) while others appear to exist purely in the ether—web pages that connect faculty scholarship and courses around a narrow topic with little additional structure.
- Collaborations have developed to save money (eg Tri-Colleges—Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore—library system), to connect to professional schools (eg Wellesley’s collaborative environmental and sustainability degree that includes professional school coursework), to capitalize on faculty and student interests (eg international campus collaborations in regions studied by faculty), and to generate revenue (eg Middlebury’s franchise in summer language instruction or Penn’s Dubai campus).
- Large flagships increasingly offer Honors Colleges which promise an experience like that at a small liberal arts college at much lower cost (however, the promise doesn’t appear well-met).
- Some competitors are eyeing the same demographic shifts we are and responding with various targeted shifts in recruitment strategies.
- Several discipline-specific surges are noteworthy: Middle Eastern studies and interdisciplinary science. The latter may be an emphasis at Grinnell which has shown signs of increasing success in the sciences and recently hired a president out of the NIH and Chicago which has built large, new facilities.
- Several campuses have striven to sharpen their image. For example, Claremont McKenna emphasizes leadership as their unique strength throughout their website and campus. They live this out with a curriculum tied to the workplace, next steps, jobs and careers, and “Centers” which routinely point to leadership (eg “Center for Human Rights Leadership”). They have recently built a \$75M Center for Leadership which houses administrative offices and classrooms. In other words, they are very consistent in messaging.

Pay Attention to the Competition: The Working Group found our systematic examination of the competition to be very useful. By “competition” we mean a broad range of alternatives including any institution that might affect our ability to attract the students or faculty we seek. We strongly encourage administrators to revisit this process on a regular basis, drawing on publicly available information in addition to surveying faculty and staff who pick things up from peers. Carleton has always paid careful attention to its own performance and we have found it very useful to complement this information with a study of our peers.

Recommendations

(Note on Prioritization: The Working Group reached strong consensus that the first recommendation below was of the highest priority and the remaining three were more or less equally ranked. There was a feeling that “Profile” is incredibly important, but because it is hard and a bit nebulous it doesn’t rise to the top. If the administration had a clear sense on how to move that forward it might move into a clear second ranking.)

A. Enhance Connection between Career Planning and the Curriculum: From a competitive perspective, we support the recommendations of the Career Planning Working Group, and particularly

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those supporting the expansion of internships and improving accessibility of the alumni directory. These are areas of relative weakness compared to our peers. We propose to complement the recommendations of that group with one more: Carleton should create stronger connections between the quality liberal arts education we provide and productive post-Carleton career opportunities. We propose a collaborative effort involving the career center and faculty departments:

- Each department should designate a liaison to act as the point person between the career center and the department, developing and promoting department specific internship opportunities and alumni networking endeavors, and coordinating when alums are invited to give talks within departments.
- We propose that the Dean of the College office oversee the creation of “pathways” through our curriculum. These would not be degree programs. Rather they would be resources that help students and “Liberal Arts Advisers” (as envisioned by the Mentoring/Advising Working Group) organize the rich liberal arts experience into a coherent narrative that students can use to launch their post-Carleton lives. These resources might live on the web and a paragraph or two describing how a liberal arts education that integrates multiple perspectives provides a distinctively strong foundation for a particular vocation, and would name relevant staff and faculty who might help students in their vocational pursuit. “Alumni mentors” recommended by the Mentoring Advising Group may also be listed as potential resources on appropriate pathways. Relevant parents should also be included as resources. The webpages would also suggest relevant courses, co-curricular activities, and student work opportunities that prepare students for future endeavors in the area. In addition to helping students envision how Carleton’s education can be structured to empower them to achieve their goals, these resources could also be helpful to students as they articulate the power of their experience to potential employers.

How to Pay: The first is a matter of better communication rather than financial cost. We propose that the second be paid for by earmarking money already allocated to the Dean of the College discretionary fund as this is a modest investment in the continual rejuvenation of our curriculum which that fund supports. We imagine that the curricular “pathways” could be designed by faculty in consultation with staff and appropriate students. At a cost of \$200 per pathway to provide faculty “summer time,” \$20,000 total would pay for the creation of 100 curricular pathways.

Metrics:

- Fraction of students on exit interviews who indicate that their current post-Carleton plans are not part of a larger vision for their future. This probably requires new/additional questions on the senior survey.
- Fraction of faculty who say “prepare students for employment after college” is an “essential” or “very important” goal for undergraduates. (See HERI survey.)

B. Anticipate Demographic Shift in Admissions: To mitigate the risk associated with upcoming demographic change (loss of students or stagnation in the Northeast and slow growth in the Midwest) and our competitors’ potential efforts to attract students from growing areas, we propose to strategically shape the student body toward areas with growing numbers of prospective students. Specifically, we recommend the College continue to place greater recruitment emphasis in the west coast (Washington, Oregon, and California), which is an area of some strength, and the Southeast (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina), an area of current weakness. To accomplish this, we recommend devoting additional staff resources to support this effort, particularly using technology to “meet” students virtually such that operating expenses play a smaller role in expanded activity. In the Southeast we suspect better success in cities with universities/intellectual centers and in select schools with high-achieving students.

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How to Pay: We expect this will take 1 more admissions staff position (at around \$50K salary or \$75K with benefits). We propose that Admissions continue to shift resources from operations (particularly when electronic resources displace more expensive physical documents or travel) and admin support lines (as online applications reduce the need for those services). We further recommend that \$15,000 of the increases in operating budgets projected for the next fiscal year be targeted for alumni relations to foster the growth of alumni group activities in the Southeast to increase our profile in these states. The next recommendation will also support this goal.

Metrics: In the near term (1-3 years) successful expansion in these markets will be seen by increased application activity—10% and 3% in the west and southeast respectively. Looking out 10 years we propose those targets be raised to 10% more applications from the southeast and 25% more from the west (relative to 2012). In addition, we propose a base target that by 2022 the fraction of the class hailing from the west rise by 10%; an aspirational goal might be to increase students from the west by 20%. These increases should be accommodated by reductions in students from the Northeast and/or Midwest. Of course, all of this must be open to change should demographic patterns deviate from the predicted patterns.

C. Attend to our Profile: Carleton's ambition is to compete in national and international, rather than just regional, arenas. The Carleton community affirms that the College's profile and reputation for excellence among key constituencies--prospective students, faculty, donors, and employers--is a critical variable in whether we can compete in these wider arenas and is deserving of sustained focus and commitment of resources by the College administration and trustees. Carleton should in all instances promote its reputation in ways that are consistent with its historic values of academic quality and egalitarian spirit. The Working Group recommends that Carleton set itself on a long-term trajectory toward a culture that values a higher profile. Specifically:

- Integrating external relations and the campus: Greater connection should be made between faculty, student, and staff scholarship/artistic production/work and external relations. We should aggressively push stories based on the work of our faculty, students, and staff through our webpage and through media outlets in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago, and beyond.
- Making news: Carleton's administration should more creatively use the College's convening power--our ability to draw prominent speakers and illuminate vital issues of the day--as a way of increasing our public profile, nourishing relationships with high-achieving alumni, and instilling an ethos of leadership in its student body. Examples might include efforts to improve weekly convocations (perhaps not planning all dates far in advance so that timely speakers can be added), host debates, or sponsor symposiums on subjects that would engage students and faculty and draw upon the College's collective expertise. This may involve coordination between departments so that resources are less diffusely spent when arranging speakers. (One such example is the Chesley lecture.)
- Awareness building: Some of our successes are not even known among students, staff, faculty, and alums. Campus leaders should design annual plans to share stories of our success at new student week, reunion, faculty and chairs meetings, quarterly meetings and other venues.
- Reaching out: Faculty routinely travel to conferences and other academic institutions. With help from external relations, such travel could sometimes be coordinated with talks to local business and community organizations on topics related to faculty research and/or the liberal arts. This might be a useful way to create informal relationships with potential employers and to reach out to new prospective student markets.
- To ensure sustained attention, a brief annual report should be submitted to the trustees highlighting key profile-raising activities of the past year and notable evidences of success.

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How to Pay: Many of these recommendations are about how to use existing resources rather than spending new ones. However, we expect that “doing this right” will take new resources, probably situated in External Relations (estimate = \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year). This investment would be worth cutting operating budget growth by 1 percentage point for one year.

Metrics:

- Number of positive stories in national media outlets recorded in Lexis/Nexis
- Number of applications/matriculants in key markets (see admissions recommendation above).
- Alums’ perception of the value of Carleton’s reputation in landing their first job on senior or alumni survey
- Google analytics (or equivalent) measures in SE and NW markets

D. Experiment with Teaching Technology: While Carleton is not immediately threatened by the recent rise of online courses, the technology is changing quickly and its use is becoming more widespread. The best way to ensure that Carleton remains nimble in responding to these changes to our competitive environment is to experiment continually with the technology and know it well. In addition to placing the College in a strong position to respond to changes in the future, such experimentation can identify ways to adapt new technologies and techniques to enhance the residential liberal arts teaching model. We recommend the College support experimentation in at least two directions over the next five years:

- The Faculty Grants Committee should organize a competitive internal grant program offering summer support to faculty revising their courses to experiment with hybrid, blended, “flipped,” or other technology-infused course models.
- The College should create a series of distance learning courses for alums. In addition to giving faculty and staff experience with the technology, such “alumni college” courses would serve the College’s mission of creating life-long learners and increase alumni connection with Carleton. The length of courses could vary from as short as a lecture to as long as a term.

To reiterate, the point of these experiments is not the specifics of the experiments themselves, but the learning process that flows from playing with the technology so that we are prepared for whatever the future holds. For example, the Blue Sky Group’s recommendation for the Carleton Institute for Teaching Excellence may also be a wonderful way these experiments could unfold.

How to Pay: We (crudely) estimate the five-year cost of these experiments to be \$600K: \$250K for faculty course creation/revision grants (equally divided between experiments in the traditional curriculum and in the alumni college), \$300K for support staff (including student assistants working with faculty to create and administer online content), \$50K to identify and purchase distance learning technology. We believe this cost modest enough and the need pressing enough that the College should consider reducing operating budget increases in FY14 sufficiently (ie by about 1/3) to fund these experiments. However, it may be possible to raise outside funding to support this effort, including modest tuition payments from alumni users, or perhaps a dedicated development effort from interested alumni to support understanding these new technologies.

Metrics: In the 3rd and 5th year, the College should report success—both on campus through the LTC and to the trustees— on progress as measured by the number of courses created/revise, the number of students/alums in those courses, assessments of student/alumni learning and satisfaction, and interviews with teaching faculty. Both reports should include a summary of “lessons learned” in the experimentation with the final report providing direction for another round of 5-year experimentation. (Note: the direction of the second round of experiments may differ from what we recommend here depending on how technology evolves and what we learn.) To provide context for this report, the Dean’s Office should present a report to the board the various ways we already experiment with new technology in the classroom.