

Macalester's 2022-2030 Strategic Plan:

A Review Two-Plus Years into the Work

Strategic Planning & Analysis Committee¹

Final Version, February 16, 2025

Background and Context:

In October 2022, the Macalester Board of Trustees approved a Strategic Plan, “Imagine, Macalester,” that emerged after months of extensive discussions across broad sectors of the Macalester community. The plan noted an eight-year timeframe of 2022-2030. Thus, we are now reviewing its progress about 30% through its expected span. The plan was comprehensive, outlining goals for nearly every College office, activity, priority and value. To choose just three of scores of examples, the commitments range from the specific and literally concrete (“build a new residence hall”), to the vast and programmatic (“create a compelling, future-focused curriculum”) to the diffuse and intangible (“cultivate a collaborative and engaging work environment”).

Since the plan was approved, enormous efforts have been expended by nearly every entity on our campus. Almost all of our 200+ faculty and 400+ staff have been involved in some way in its implementation. In some cases, the progress is tangible, and the work is either done, or the finish line is clear. But in most cases, the efforts are still very much in progress, with the finish line unknown. Quite frequently, progress on a given initiative is limited by resource constraints: what we can imagine is not the same as what we can presently afford. The current capital campaign will seek to address a number of these constraints, but it is unlikely to be able to fund them all. Reallocation of current spending to fund strategic priorities has proved hard.

In this broad context – that of an enormously complex and varied work in progress – we cannot comprehensively evaluate progress on the 2022-2030 Strategic Plan, for example with a single grade. And, at the same time, we recognize that Macalester's Strategic Plan implementation leaders – primarily a twelve-person Strategic Plan Implementation Committee led by Paul Overvoorde and Jeff Allen – have, especially via their website, provided a tremendous flow of information on [implementation progress](#). Likewise, the College has established five [Key Performance Indicators](#) (or KPIs) to track long-term progress toward stated goals. The present document aims, in this light, to provide an overview, fixed in time rather than ongoing, of the

¹ SPA membership for 2024-25: Elected faculty Alan Chapman (Geology), Gabriel Lade (Economics), Christie Manning (Environmental Studies), David Moore (Chair of SPA; International Studies and English), Kari Shepherdson-Scott (Art & Art History), and Lori Ziegelmeier (Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science). Elected staff Nathan Lief (Facilities), Minerva Muñoz (Institutional Equity), and Katie Reed (Admissions). MCSG-named students Matte Lopez '25 and Rola Cao '25. And ex officio members Lisa Anderson-Levy (Provost), Patricia Langer (Administration & Finance), and Adam Johnson (Institutional Research & Assessment).

Strategic Plan as it has unfolded to date. We should note here that the Strategic Planning & Analysis committee – the author of this report – predates and is separate from Macalester’s strategic planning implementation efforts; we serve those efforts with targeted studies and recommendations.

After this background section, we’ll offer a Main Narrative, note our Research Method, and then supply Executive Summaries of progress on each of the Plan’s three main focus areas: Curriculum, Culture, and Campus. This may be more than enough reading for many consumers of this report. We therefore will publish as Appendixes three fuller reports: one each on the Curriculum, Culture, and Campus sections of the overall Strategic Plan.

Main Narrative

In October 2022, after many months of public consultations and discussions across Macalester communities of faculty, students, staff, alumni, parents, and neighbors, a strategic plan, “Imagine, Macalester,” was approved by the Board of Trustees. The plan was seven single-spaced pages rich with ideas and commitments. Much activity has unfolded in the two-plus years since. The plan is designated “2022-2030.” Given this time frame, and the scale and complexity of the Plan’s commitments, it would be impossible now to evaluate it as a whole. To offer a sports comparison, now that we are 30% of the way through the plan’s timeframe, judging it now would be like judging the success of a marathon at mile eight. But we can offer a progress report.

The scale and complexity of the Plan also make it difficult to evaluate. The Plan opens with a preamble stating values and motivations. Next comes a short section describing the plan’s framework: four “Foundational Imperatives” of Academic Distinction, Financial Sustainability, Social Responsibility, and Community Well-being. We have elected *not* to extensively evaluate the Plan’s progress toward these Foundational Imperatives: they can be thought of more as lodestars or principles rather than as specific goals to be achieved. However, in reviewing progress on the plan’s next section – its nine more concrete Priority Initiatives, themselves divided into twenty-one separate Goals – we will note if the four Foundational Imperatives have been given appropriate attention.

Here, we ask that our reader [briefly review](#) the [seven-page October 2022 Strategic Plan](#), or at minimum the [one-page summary](#) approved on the same date, so they can follow the narrative presented here.

The meat of the 2022 Strategic Plan comes in its three primary goal-setting sections: Curriculum, Culture, and Campus. Those three sections offer a total of nine “priority initiatives.” Each priority initiative is broken down into one to three specific “goals.” Thus in its original bullet-pointed form, 21 separate goals are listed, and each of those 21 typically embeds many sub-goals. For example, one goal in the Culture section states that we will “amplify programs, policies, and resources that support the effective recruitment, retention, and success of marginalized students, faculty, and staff.” Note that this 3x3x3 grid of goals alone implies 27 different objectives: programs for the success of faculty, policies for the recruitment of staff, and so forth.

As another example of the Plan's range, a bullet-pointed goal in the Curriculum section states that the College will "ensure all students have access to internships, community engagement, study away, and entrepreneurship experiences that prepare them for life after Macalester." Evaluation of this goal involves multi-year initiatives undertaken by four different Macalester offices. And achievement of these goals is not fully controlled by those offices. In many cases, a given office cannot achieve its goal without additional staff or financial resources. Some other goals, such as "extend Macalester's reach beyond the campus," are the responsibility of dozens of entities. Both achieving and evaluating the Plan's broadest goals are hard to do.

As another measure of the scale of our Strategic Plan, we note that in 2023-24, seven different implementation committees or working groups totaling 84 faculty, staff, and students labored throughout the year. Finally, we must also note that the laudatory ambition of the 2022 Strategic Plan makes it unreasonable to assume that Macalester will achieve all of its objectives. Thus we will take it as normal or sometimes wise if some of our 2022 goals are set aside. A strategic plan should not be a set of handcuffs. Indeed, ongoing critical reflection on the goals of the Strategic Plan and the effectiveness of (and barriers to) implemented actions should at some points prompt revisions to our initial aspirations, or the generation of successor goals.

As an overall matter, the Strategic Planning and Analysis committee is impressed with the astonishing breadth and depth of efforts made across the scope of our campus toward the 2022 Strategic Plan. And we are heartened by early evidence of progress on many fronts. Were we to sound notes of caution, they would be on the twin fronts of resources and time. Nearly every goal of the Strategic Plan asks us to do more: amplify, build, connect, create, deepen, develop, emphasize, ensure, establish, expand, extend, immerse, increase, integrate, modernize, prioritize, promote, remedy, and strengthen. All of these goals require fresh efforts, and fully realizing many of them would require incremental funds or staff. The plan does not say what we should do less of, or stop doing altogether. There is therefore some tension between the "additive" nature of the plan and its Foundational Imperative of financial sustainability. There is likewise some tension between, on the one hand, pursuit of *all* of its goals, and, on the other hand, the Foundational Imperative of employee well-being paired with the goal of "creation of time for reflection, integration of ideas, community connection, and rest." These twin cautionary notes are meant to be understood in the context of SPA's overall high admiration for progress on the Strategic Plan to date.

Research Method

In September 2024, the fourteen members of SPA re-read the Strategic Plan, discussed it generally, and then put it into a working spreadsheet which gave each specific commitment a separate line. We then broke ourselves into three groups, for the Culture, Curriculum, and Campus components of the Plan. Of our 14 members, we spread faculty, staff, students, and our ex officio members across all three groups.

Each group worked independently, discussing and reviewing their segment, and interviewing campus actors closely connected with each of the plan's many goals. Each group drafted a section of this overall report, and then we sought to integrate it into a whole.

Executive Summaries of the three main components of the Strategic Plan:

Curriculum

Separately, please see the Appendix with the full Curriculum section report.

Executive Summary of Curriculum Section:

At present, Macalester is in the early stages of a comprehensive effort to renovate its overall curriculum for the first time since the 1980s. Led by a [Curriculum Implementation Committee](#) (CIC) chaired by Duchess Harris (American Studies) and Dan Trudeau (Geography), a deeply researched community process has been launched, with extensive focus groups, surveys, work sessions, digital feedback, consultation with authority Paul Handstedt, and much more, to consider various models and establish a distinctive fresh approach. At present we do not (and cannot) know how successful the CIC's ambitious and complex process will be, nor if the community-generated result will be, as the Strategic Plan entails, "irresistible to future students." Their work began in 2023, with significant acceleration throughout 2024, capped most recently by a heavily attended January 21, 2025 faculty and staff retreat to develop alternative curricular models. Given the scale and complexity of the process, it is not clear when a new curriculum will be in place for students.

The 2022 Strategic Plan notes that our future curriculum will "identify specific learning foci for each year." It is not certain that the CIC process will generate such yearly foci. If it does not, we trust that the decision not to will have been well considered. Separately, a robust set of initiatives, already well advanced, has been launched seeking to establish a stronger first-year experience.

The Strategic Plan's Curricular section also commits to "Amplify Opportunities for Experiential Learning." Under this heading, substantial initiatives have been undertaken in internships, community engagement, study away, and entrepreneurship. More limited work has been done in the domain of summer and January break programming. Here, as everywhere, resource constraints, including the already-full plates of almost all faculty and staff involved in the efforts, limit the potential for expanded opportunities and activity.

The Priority Initiative to "redesign the academic calendar to reimagine our use of time" has thus far been among the less successful of the 2022 Strategic Plan components. Extensive reports by SPA in Spring and Fall 2023 on the annual calendar and weekly schedule did not identify dramatic proposals, since time shifts have costs. The recommendations that were offered have unevenly been taken up, with the exception of an extension in the August first-year orientation, some expansion of weekly course- scheduling options, and availability of a custom option for off-campus-engaged courses. Further substantial changes do not seem to be on the front burner. On a related note, impediments to increasing course-based off-campus learning, which SPA

explored under the rubric of the weekly schedule, have proved difficult to overcome. SPA did, however, fully explore (as the Strategic Plan mandated) and then reject a three-year BA and accelerated pathway to graduate or professional school. Separately, and most specifically, little progress has been made on the goal of “creating time for reflection, integration of ideas, community connection, and rest.” Creating time requires doing less, and the Strategic Plan does not offer proposals for doing less. Indeed, the great majority of goals outlined in the Strategic Plan require that we do more.

Culture

Separately, please see the Appendix with the full Culture section report.

Executive Summary of Culture Section:

The strategic plan includes commitments to foster a culture of collaboration, creativity, respect, and support. This vision is structured around three key initiatives: (1) prioritizing student and employee well-being and fostering a sense of belonging, (2) diversifying the student, staff, and faculty populations, and (3) nurturing lifelong connections between the College and its broader community.

The College has already made substantive progress towards achieving these goals. For students, notable advancements include expanded educational opportunities for international students, new winter housing options, and programs designed to support high-need and traditionally marginalized students including the new Flemming Scholars initiative, which provides extra resources and programming for the highest need first-year students to support their flourishing and to increase retention and completion. Faculty-related actions include launching the Inclusive Pedagogy Institute and creating and endowing funds for exceptional performance awards – the latter is also open to staff. Staff benefits and onboarding have been improved with changes to parental leave, vacation accrual for hourly staff, the decision to make permanent winter break, the revamping of new employee orientation, and the standardization of holidays for hourly and exempt staff, facilitated by restructuring in Human Resources. Alumni engagement efforts include the consolidation of three fall programs into one annual MacFest, gathering students, parents, alumni, and trustees in a single celebration. Additionally, the college hired a new Vice President for Advancement to drive strategic fundraising initiatives.

While significant progress has been made, this document highlights ongoing challenges and areas needing further attention. While the limited pool of candidates from historically underrepresented groups creates challenges for recruitment in some areas, Macalester has done an excellent job of diversifying its faculty over the last three hiring cycles. For 2024-25, 64% of Macalester’s Assistant Professors identify as faculty of color. That said, there is anecdotal evidence that students may be more likely to disrespect faculty members from diverse backgrounds, stemming from a larger problem of a non-inclusive campus environment, pointing to a need for increased educational programming on faculty diversity. Human Resources has made strides in improving workplace equity and transparency, but further investments in tracking and retention initiatives are necessary. Many of these efforts are underway. Alumni engagement efforts have focused on fuller tracking of alumni contact and participation, to measure success more accurately. While Macalester has expanded mental health and wellness

programs, there is still work to do including implementing campus-wide education on best practices and adopting more academic and engagement policies, standards, and resources that promote holistic well-being.

To better evaluate progress on student and employee well-being initiatives, the College's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), described earlier in this document, should be supplemented with additional survey data to assess the impact of these initiatives. While existing data on some survey measures already indicate improvement, benchmarking against peer institutions and expanding indicators, particularly around employee, faculty, and student well-being, would provide a clearer perspective on progress. Future efforts should focus on refining retention strategies, increasing collaboration across departments, and securing long-term funding for diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Campus

Separately, please see the Appendix with the full Campus section report.

Executive Summary of Campus Section:

Macalester's 2022 Strategic Plan, in its "Campus" section, charged the College to "create a campus that fosters innovation, access, and connection." It also committed us to "include the broader Twin Cities metro area as an extension of our living and learning environment." The primary gateway to achieve these ambitious objectives has been the creation of a Comprehensive Campus Plan (CCP).

Macalester's CCP outlines both short-term and long-term strategies for campus development, aiming to address critical needs in housing, academic infrastructure, sustainability, and equity. Launched in 2022, the CCP includes feedback from a wide range of stakeholders and was endorsed by the Board of Trustees in 2023. The plan features 15 core projects, including a new residence hall and welcome center, with a goal to modernize existing facilities and enhance student life.

To date, the following projects have been completed to begin the implementation of the CCP.

- The 2nd and 3rd floors of the Lampert building were renovated to provide a modern environment that is ADA compliant and supports the Advancement Department's work. This remodeling allowed the entire Advancement Department to be located in Lampert.
- Phase I of the Weyerhaeuser remodeling plan was completed. This project moved a number of Student Affairs staff into the building and initiated the work to make Weyerhaeuser more student-facing.
- The 1st and 2nd floors of the Campus Center were completely remodeled to make the building a more compelling place for students to gather, and to create a more efficient and enjoyable dining experience for students on and off the meal plan.

A number of additional projects are in various states of planning and design, including:

- Demolition of the three cottages on the southwest corner of Grand and Macalester Streets. Summer 2025
- Construction of a parking lot on the site once the cottages are removed. Summer 2025

- Removal of the Cultural House and parking lot on the north side of Grand Ave. Summer 2025
- Remediation of the polluted soils on the vacant lot at 1661 Grand Ave. Summer 2025
- Drilling four wells to support heating and cooling of the new residence hall and welcome center. Fall 2025
- Remodeling the 1st and 3rd floors of the library to support the move of the MAX Center from Kagin Commons. Summer 2025
- Remodeling the first floor of Kagin Commons to replace and expand key programming spaces being lost due to the C House being demolished, including a teaching kitchen, event space, and living room space. Summer 2025
- Design of the new residence hall and welcome center. Construction to begin in Spring 2026. Move-in Fall 2027

A key focus of the CCP is addressing deficiencies in student housing. The plan envisions the construction of a new residence hall by 2027, adding 224 beds (more than 10% of the Mac student population) and helping guarantee three years of on-campus housing. Additionally, the modernization of existing residence halls will improve amenities like air conditioning, privacy, and accessibility. A long-term goal is to replace the Vernon Street houses with new residential buildings, bringing the college closer to offering four years of on-campus housing.

Sustainability is a central theme, with plans to incorporate geothermal heating, rooftop solar, and improved energy efficiency across future campus projects. Accessibility remains a priority with 59% of the deficiencies identified in a 2021 ADA compliance report having been addressed. The plan also calls for upgrades on key educational buildings: replacing the Humanities building, modernizing Olin Rice, and creating facilities that support the evolving academic needs.

The CCP also aims to leverage Macalester's facilities to generate revenue through rentals and strengthen ties with the local Twin Cities community. The college is exploring ways to expand the use of its assets, such as by hosting public events and partnerships with local organizations. Technology integration is also a key priority, with recent enhancements designed to improve the student experience and campus efficiency.

In addition, the CCP emphasizes Macalester's relationship with the Twin Cities and its location on Indigenous land. As described in the fuller version of this report, this includes deepening community engagement, enhancing partnerships with local entities, and expanding the use of off-campus locations like the Ordway Field Station for research, coursework, and civic engagement. Several logistical and financial gaps, detailed in the full report, currently prevent the Ordway Field Station from reaching its potential.

The CCP is an ambitious, long-term vision that will require substantial funding and phased implementation over the coming years to fully realize.