

**Hamilton College Strategic Plan  
Summary Draft – October 5, 2017**

Hamilton College is one of America’s finest liberal arts colleges. Just as we continue to expect more of the smart and talented students we are privileged to attract to College Hill, we seek to strengthen further the academic and extracurricular programs that draw them to our historic campus. This strategic plan outlines how we expect to fulfill our ambitions, maximize the resources entrusted to us, and make Hamilton even better.

Propelled by the successful execution of our previous strategic plan, *Foundations for Hamilton’s Next 200 Years*, we embark on this next phase of planning with optimism, confidence, and momentum. Since the adoption of that blueprint in January 2009, we have invested almost \$175 million to modernize our physical plant, including building spectacular new facilities for the arts; attracted an even more talented and diverse student body; become need-blind in our admission practices and secured \$61 million in new endowment to help sustain it; and raised more than \$230 million for current operations, new facilities, and new programs.

To fulfill other objectives identified in *Foundations*, we strengthened academic advising for students, improved governance, increased opportunities for experiential learning and student research, expanded the off-campus orientation program so that all students could participate, achieved full integration in the New England Small College Athletic Conference for all varsity sports, and opened the Days-Massolo Center to serve as the locus for activities that capitalize on our increasingly diverse community. In the area of student life, we completed planning and construction for the Sadove Student Center and opened Morris House, which enabled us to achieve the longtime goal of providing on-campus housing for all students. There have been other achievements as well, including, in June 2015, a new mission statement:

*Hamilton College prepares students for lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship. Guided by the motto “Know Thyself,” the College emphasizes intellectual growth, flexibility, and collaboration in a residential academic community. Hamilton students learn to think independently, embrace difference, write and speak persuasively, and engage issues ethically and creatively. One of America’s first liberal arts colleges, Hamilton enables its students to effect positive change in the world.*

We undertake this renewed focus on planning mindful of new challenges and guided by our mission, especially our objective to help students “Know Thyself.” Criticism of American higher education is widespread, interest in the liberal arts continues to decline, traditional sources of revenue are strained, and longtime employees are retiring in large numbers. But these forces present new opportunities for those ambitious colleges that can adapt with vision, creativity, and confidence.

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## STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS KNOW THYSELF

### I. “Know Thyself”: Academic Foundations

*Regardless of one’s concentration as a student, or profession as a graduate, several foundational skills are necessary for a liberally educated person to think critically, communicate clearly, and contribute meaningfully to one’s community. Hamilton currently emphasizes three such skills: writing, speaking, and quantitative literacy. This strategic plan calls us to add a fourth: digital fluency. This new emphasis would build on the College’s existing resources to expand digital instruction, develop new curricular initiatives to infuse digital thinking across the curriculum, and create new opportunities for faculty and students to work collaboratively and often interdisciplinarily on research that deploys digital thinking in critical, innovative, and creative ways. A new foundational skill focused on digital fluencies would incorporate information fluency, computational thinking, digital communication and collaboration, digital creativity, and digital ethics.*

#### 1. Existing Foundational Skills: Writing, Speaking, Quantitative Reasoning

A rapidly changing world needs flexible, critical, and creative thinkers who are collaborative problem solvers with the skills to communicate well. Enhancing our existing foundational skills (writing, speaking, and quantitative reasoning) aligns our academic goals with external needs and prepares our students for life when they leave College Hill. While most peer institutions are strong in at least one of these foundational areas, very few have robust support across all three. In particular, Hamilton’s emphasis on oral communication, a strong tradition at the College, distinguishes us from many of our peers, with a specific designation for “speaking-intensive courses” and an Oral Communication Center that supports faculty and students.

Possible initiatives to further enhance students’ attainment of foundational skills include:

- Creating an Integrated Center for Learning, Pedagogy, and Research. This center would serve students by bringing existing centers under one roof physically or organizationally, while also supporting faculty training in new methods of teaching.
- Considering a “speaking intensive” curricular requirement akin to our current requirements for writing and quantitative reasoning
- Integrating foundational skills into upper-level courses and senior projects in each discipline
- Enhancing foundational skills through experiential and applied learning opportunities (e.g., Three-Minute Thesis, Econ Fed Challenge, Mathletics, independent research, public speaking competitions, etc.)

#### 2. New Foundational Skill: Digital Fluency and Learning

Digital technologies are transforming higher education and the world. They make possible new pedagogy and scholarship, create opportunities for collaborative and interdisciplinary work, and provide expanded modes of learning to students coming from diverse backgrounds. A new emphasis on digital fluency and learning will better prepare students to succeed in an increasingly digital world. Hamilton aims to expand digital instruction, develop new initiatives to infuse digital thinking across the curriculum, and create more opportunities for student and faculty research.

Possible initiatives to further the goal of enhancing digital fluency and learning include:

- Adding a new foundational skill focused on digital fluency complementing what Hamilton already offers for writing, speaking, and quantitative reasoning. Highlighting existing courses that contain digital elements and encouraging the development of new or modified courses would increase digital learning opportunities for students.
- Creating new academic programs and interdisciplinary initiatives that incorporate digital thinking, including, for example, a program in Silicon Valley that would be akin to our domestic off-campus programs in Washington, New York and the Adirondacks.

## **II. “Know Thyself”: Learning Outside the Classroom**

*Hamilton will develop and support experiential and applied learning opportunities for students to more systematically and deliberately prepare for lives of meaning, purpose and active citizenship. As an alternative learning mode that complements and supplements traditional classroom instruction, experiential learning provides opportunities for students to test what they have learned in the classroom, reassess their ideas, improve their thinking, and then start the process again.*

### **1. Strengthen Current Experiential and Applied Learning Programs**

The College already offers more than 60 experimental and applied learning programs, but organizing these programs under one administrative umbrella will provide students with a greater awareness of such opportunities, more consistent implementation, better assessment, and new options for synergy and outreach. As part of a new emphasis on experiential and applied learning we will consider a new academic calendar (e.g., adding a January term, a “Maymester,” or a summer term).

Some of the existing experiential and applied learning opportunities at Hamilton include:

- On Campus: EMTs, peer tutors, lab employment, museum docents, orientation leaders, Schambach and Bristol scholars, etc.
- Local: Project SHINE, education practica, COOP-sponsored programs, Levitt Refugee Project, Spanish teaching project, course-related field trips, etc.
- National: NECC; DC, NY and ADK programs; DHi CLASS Fellows; Archaeology Field School, etc.
- Global: Programs in France, Spain and China; international internships; faculty-led, course-related experiences; spring break outdoor leadership programs, etc.

### **2. New Experiential and Applied Learning Programs that Complement Strategic Initiatives**

Several new experiential and applied learning programs have been suggested. They include creating a New York Center or expanding the existing New York program to meet student demand; establishing a program in Silicon Valley that complements our goal of developing digital fluency; adding more faculty-led educational experiences in the U.S. and abroad; and increasing opportunities for exchanges or research and teaching partnerships with international organizations and educational institutions.

## **III. “Know Thyself”: A Balanced Life**

*Members of our community operate in a high-achieving environment with many demands on their time and energy. We want to transform our campus into a community that is recognized as a leader in developing the health and wellness of its members. Integrating and strengthening our focus and support on the development of individual health and well-being will help community members manage stress and become more responsible and self-reliant.*

### **1. New Academic Options**

Introducing new academic options can de-stress learning and promote academic exploration and risk-taking. Changes to the academic calendar to offer shorter, less traditional classes and activities would give students the opportunities to explore academic areas or engage in activities that do not fit the traditional 14-week semester format. Changes to grade options for first-year students (e.g., making grades optional, credit-no-credit, or even no grades in the first semester) could help students transition to the expectations of a rigorous liberal arts education.

### **2. A Model Program for Advising and Mentorship**

A broader and more holistic system of advising and mentorship that recognizes and supports both formal academic advising and the advising and mentoring that occurs in other areas would provide a more

integrated and connected experience of academic and co-curricular activities for students. Options might include an advising center; a board of advisors comprised of an academic, a career, and a student life advisor assigned to each student; professional advisors who would assume that responsibility from faculty members; or new academic deans assigned to coordinate advising for each class. At the same time, as Hamilton welcomes a significant number of new faculty and staff colleagues, we seek to improve orientation programs and introduce more robust mentoring relationships for new employees.

### 3. Wellness Initiative

A comprehensive initiative focused on well-being would centralize and coordinate existing wellness services for all members of our community and support the development of new proposals around wellness. Such proposals might include the “Community of Care” program launched in fall 2017 to address issues of anxiety and mental health, and the establishment of a Wellness Center on campus. The center would provide programming and support in a wide variety of areas, including emotional well-being, physical health and nutrition, and spiritual life. Although the focus for the center would be students, we anticipate programs that will benefit all members of the community.

### 4. Developmentally Appropriate Student Housing

Research shows that developmentally appropriate housing can support student growth and build community, especially when housing is paired with a sequential residential programmatic model. For example, first-year students benefit from traditional residence halls that promote interaction and a sense of community, while seniors benefit from living experiences that promote independence and prepare them for life after graduation. First-year programming can focus on social opportunities, inclusion, wellness, academic resources, and community engagement; programming for juniors and seniors tends to emphasize careers, independent living, and community building. Among the long-term proposals for consideration is an integrated housing village with living and social space for seniors, faculty and staff, and retirees that would promote engagement and the sharing of knowledge across generations. Should the size of the College increase, new housing would eventually be necessary to accommodate a larger student body.

### 5. Capitalizing on our Growing Diversity

In *Foundation’s for Hamilton’s Next 200 Years*, the strategic plan adopted in January 2009, we identified four priorities, including: An inclusive community whose demographics reflect those of the coming generation of faculty and college-bound students. We have made significant progress toward that objective: domestic students of color and international students comprised 16.5 percent and 5.3 percent of the student body, respectively, in 2008-09; they represent 24.2 percent and 6.4 percent today. For all full-time faculty, the percentages are 19.0 percent in 2008-09 and 24.1 percent today. Despite the progress, increasing diversity, in all its forms, remains a College priority. But our success must be measured not just in attracting a more diverse community; we must also do more to ensure that each student has the opportunity to take full advantage of what Hamilton offers. Furthermore, learning from individuals who have different backgrounds and life experiences (e.g., racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, gender, political, etc.) should be embraced as an integral component of our academic program and residential community. Moving forward, we will review and strengthen our inclusion programming, add a new associate dean of students for diversity and inclusion in the Division of Student Life, fully implement the recently adopted across-the-curriculum requirement for social and structural institutional hierarchies; and increase scholarship resources for talented students from the U.S. and abroad. The recently announced partnership with QuestBridge to connect more high-achieving, low-income students with Hamilton is another example of our commitment to attract and support the best and most deserving students.

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## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

### A. Faculty and Staff

The core of the educational experience at Hamilton takes place in the classroom, laboratory, and studio where skilled, hard-working and conscientious teachers interact intensively with smart, motivated, and enthusiastic students. But Hamilton is also a residential college, so learning takes place in all corners of the campus, and at all times of the day and night. As such, all interactions matter for students – those that take place with faculty, of course, but also those that take place with each other and with other members of the Hamilton community.

- **Staff Contributions**

Whether one meets a student in the classroom, the playing field, the dining hall, a residence hall, or on the job, all employees at Hamilton contribute meaningfully to that student's education. Such is the premise of a residential liberal arts college. Many of the initiatives identified in this plan cannot be fulfilled without the support of talented and committed staff members, many of whom may be asked to realign their existing responsibilities with new priorities.

- **Faculty Contributions**

Hamilton faculty members commit to teaching, scholarship, and service to support the College's educational mission. It is sometimes difficult to achieve balance in all three areas, and the initiatives outlined in this plan may add to that pressure.

In order to enhance the educational program for students, we will consider redefining the teaching workload to allow more emphasis on new and creative ways for faculty to engage with students outside the classroom. Options include increasing the size of the faculty, especially to maintain our nine-to-one student-to-faculty ratio if we increase the size of the student body (see B below); re configuring the current teaching load to account for work advising and mentoring students, supervising student research, or developing new courses or experiences that fall outside the traditional curriculum (such as incorporating off-campus activities, experiential learning, practica, etc); instituting a variable course load in which faculty teach four courses annually plus a periodic Jan/May term course; or some combination of the above. Adjusting the teaching workload creates more time for faculty to engage with students in the new and exciting ways envisioned by our strategic plan. We believe this change would lead to an improved academic reputation, more educational opportunities for students, and more time for faculty to develop a curriculum that prepares an increasingly diverse new generation of students for lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship.

### B. Increasing the Size of the College

Hamilton's character is defined, in part, by the size of the community. That character and the interaction that takes place between faculty and students are distinguishing features of a Hamilton education; they should be preserved at all costs. Nevertheless, a small increase in the size of the student body to slightly more than 2,000, and a corresponding increase in the size of the faculty, may foster a more dynamic curriculum and a more diverse community.

The growth in Hamilton's applicant pool in recent years makes this a good time to consider inviting more students to join our community. Data show that expanding the size of Hamilton's student body to 2,000 or more would make the College even more attractive to a greater number of talented and diverse candidates. More students from different backgrounds would create greater campus vitality and support for our academic programs and the new initiatives being considered in this plan. A larger student body would also lead to more graduates, which may grow Hamilton's presence and reputation in the world, and provide additional revenue for new programs.

Increasing the size of the College would need to take into account:

- Hamilton’s mission should not be altered and any growth would be considered only with the goal of maintaining or enhancing the quality of the student body and educational program
- While additional faculty and student housing would likely be needed, other initiatives in the strategic plan (e.g., experiential and applied learning opportunities) may expand our enrollment footprint to include students both on and off campus
- If the growth in enrollment were to be absorbed on our Clinton campus, we would need to consider the impact on additional areas such as dining, parking, classrooms, and faculty offices
- Enrollment growth likely would be incremental and carefully modeled, and the College’s target size would need to be determined based on economies of scale and sustainable and reasonable efficiencies
- During any period of growth, admission statistics (e.g., selectivity) may be compromised until a larger applicant pool is realized
- A larger enrollment will add revenue, but decrease endowment per student

### **C. New Resources**

Several of the ideas identified in the prior pages will require significant new resources if we are to capitalize on their potential and position Hamilton and its students for the future. Growing the size of the College will provide some additional revenue, but we hope the new ideas contained in this plan will excite our loyal alumni, parents and friends to join us in making Hamilton even better still.

Hamilton will link the priorities in its next capital campaign to many of the initiatives identified in this plan. Some of the funding priorities might include:

- Endowing new scholarships to support an increasingly diverse student body (A Balanced Life, Capitalizing on our Growing Diversity, pg. 4, and Increasing the Size of the College, pg. 6)
- Endowing new professorships to support faculty development and innovation (Faculty Contributions, pg. 5)
- Creating an Institute for Learning, Pedagogy, and Research (Academic Foundations, pg. 2)
- Establishing wellness programs, including a Wellness Center (A Balanced Life, Wellness Initiative, pg. 4)
- Constructing an integrated housing village (A Balanced Life, Developmentally Appropriate Student Housing, pg. 4)
- Adding experiential and applied learning programs (Learning Outside the Classroom, pg. 3)

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We did not enter into this planning process needing to correct shortcomings or deficiencies. Our goal has been to continue propelling Hamilton forward by responding thoughtfully and strategically to new challenges at a time of deep skepticism of American higher education. We believe the ideas outlined in this plan introduce new pedagogical directions, increase opportunities for student learning, improve students’ co-curricular options, and ultimately help students achieve a healthy balance in their academic, residential, and social life at Hamilton so that they can lead lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship.