



OXFORD
COLLEGE

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STRATEGIC PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EMORY

Oxford College is the place where Emory began as an institution built upon a Methodist foundation and dedicated to high standards for academic excellence. This history and sense of place continue to provide strength and energy to the community's pursuit of its mission. Oxford is a diverse community in which people actively care for one another, nurture openness of thought, experience, and culture, and dedicate themselves to excellence in undergraduate liberal arts education. As a college committed to the education and development of students during the crucial first two years of undergraduate education, Oxford embodies a philosophy of education grounded in liberal learning that integrates instrumental education—in which learners acquire knowledge or skills that enable them to do particular tasks—and transformational education—in which learners develop in important ways as human beings. Oxford also promotes students' academic progress from dependent learners—who rely upon teachers as authoritative dispensers of information—to engaged learners—who are self-directed participants in the learning process.

Building on this heritage, Oxford's Strategic Plan consists of thirteen strategic initiatives designed to achieve the following six goals:

1. To establish Oxford as the exemplar of a Liberal Arts Intensive college.
2. To support the continuing growth of Oxford's transformative learning environment grounded in innovative pedagogies of engagement.
3. To establish Oxford as a model for leadership in responsible action and healthful living - by individuals and institutions, across social, political, and environmental realms.
4. To build and continuously improve the personnel and physical infrastructures necessary to create a welcoming, attractive campus community that effectively supports Oxford's academic mission and vision.
5. To make the contributions of Oxford's students, faculty and staff a definitive, enriching element of the Emory University identity.
6. To catalyze the emergence of Emory University as the paradigm for undergraduate education within a national research university.

These goals form the pillars for developing Oxford over the next three to ten years into the exemplar of a liberal arts college, elevating us from the ranks of the very good to the great.¹ This process will create a peerless program of student engagement and experiential learning through innovation in teaching, leadership development, coordinated curricular and co-curricular programs, community engagement and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

To achieve and document this level of excellence, it is essential that Oxford develop resources for systematic research and assessment so we can monitor the impact of our work in the broader community, and undertake sustained study of how best to develop our students to become responsible

¹ Note, for example, that Oxford ranks in the 90th percentile among 900 colleges in all five benchmarks of academic excellence on the National Survey of Student Engagement: rigor of the academic program, faculty-student interaction, enriching educational experiences, active and collaborative learning, and supportive campus environment.

citizens and independent, life-long learners who are successful during their subsequent undergraduate study, whether at Emory University or elsewhere, in various graduate and post-graduate schools, and in their later personal life. Only by creating an organizational structure and culture that is a student of its own practices—and thereby promoting continuous improvement—can the excellence to which Oxford aspires be realized; for as Aristotle first observed, excellence in human endeavors is not an end-state but a continual “seeking of the best.”

One of the engines driving our pursuit of these goals will be the new Center for Academic Excellence (CAE). The CAE will provide direct leadership for some initiatives, serve as the catalyst for others, and create an administrative infrastructure to effectively support these efforts. The CAE will be supervised by a Director with expertise in the scholarship of teaching and learning, educational research and research design, learning theory, faculty development, and assessment of student academic success. The CAE will help us to raise even higher our level of innovation as a laboratory of teaching and learning. (This is an area in which Oxford’s accomplishments to date have already led to our recognition by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a national leader in this form of scholarship.)

The CAE will be one important part of a newly reorganized and expanded Office of Academic Affairs. We will add an Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and additional support staff so that we can better support our academic mission. This will also allow the Dean of the College to concentrate more on strategic issues. During the 2005-2006 academic year, the Dean of the College and the Academic Affairs staff will join the faculty in a dialogue through which we will work out in more precise terms exactly how we define Liberal Arts Intensive and what steps we will take to better achieve that ideal.

An expanded Office of Academic Affairs will have the staff and expertise to more effectively support growth and improvement. In particular, they will be able to:

- ◆ support course and curriculum development,
- ◆ seek opportunities for collaborative partnerships with faculty and programs in other divisions of the University (e.g., inter-campus enrollment, faculty exchange, joint faculty appointments),
- ◆ assist in assessment of courses, programs and curricula,
- ◆ coordinate the initiatives and programs of Oxford’s Advisory Council on Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development (commended by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as a distinctive and effective method of promoting professional and program development),
- ◆ provide additional professional development to assist faculty in identifying and implementing “best practices” in student learning and development,
- ◆ develop an undergraduate research and internship program (including a Summer Institute),
- ◆ support expansion of interdisciplinary programming,
- ◆ establish and oversee a program of post-doctoral teaching internships, and
- ◆ promote open-ended faculty discussions of the curriculum to ensure that our academic programs effectively express the learning and development goals outlined in our Mission and Vision Statements.

As President Wagner stated in his inaugural address, “The true purpose of higher education is to lead us out of our self-centered universe to a place where we can perceive the world from others’ perspectives and have a positive effect on the community.” This more comprehensive view of education as a “decentering” of self and as engagement/service in the world is one of Oxford’s current strengths, and is further emphasized as a principal component of our vision for the future. In FY2006, with income from the approximately 12 million dollar Pierce endowment, Oxford will create the

Pierce Institute for Leadership and Community Engagement. The Institute will support and implement programs that prepare students to assume roles of leadership and service at Oxford College and in the community by integrating academic study, leadership development, and community engagement. We will also continue to increase our offerings of Theory/Practice/Service/Learning courses and enhance our currently modest program of Intercultural Studies by increasing support for courses that involve travel abroad and pursuing other curricular initiatives that promote internationalization.

Oxford has a history of promoting environmental leadership and healthful living. The nationally recognized Oxford Institute for Environmental Education engages our strong science faculty, students, and program with K–12 teachers from Georgia and surrounding states to improve science education. Our physical education program emphasizes the connections between a healthy body, mind, and spirit, to promote practices of healthful living. These commitments to individual, community, and environmental health will be integrated into a “Green Campus and Healthful Living Initiative.” We plan to become a model of an environmentally committed and healthful campus by enhancing existing efforts to conserve energy, manage natural resources, use LEED principles in campus development, and engage the Oxford community in practices that promote individual and community well being. Oxford’s efforts might well provide a laboratory for appropriate research projects in the Rollins School of Public Health and/or an opportunity to work with the Georgia Institute of Technology’s program to develop alternative sources of energy.

We have created thirteen strategic initiatives to accomplish our goals and create a culture that will be alert to unforeseen opportunities. These initiatives are designed to overcome the barriers to the success of our *Strategic Plan* identified in our *Environmental Assessment*. To achieve these programmatic, physical, and organizational enhancements and innovations for excellence will require increased endowment and financial aid, upgraded and expanded facilities, and additional staffing.

If the outcome of research currently being conducted deems growth desirable, our student applicant pool must be enlarged, and independent of a commitment to growth, financial aid needs to be increased to enable us to “design” the entering class to provide the diversity (including varying levels of academic preparedness, as well as the standard categories of difference) which research indicates optimizes achievement of our educational goals. Restructuring University undergraduate admissions to increase the student applicant pool and increasing financial aid to enable enrollment of the “mix” of students that creates the most potent learning environment are key to our success.

Oxford has an urgent need to improve its facilities. The recruitment of students is hindered by the contrast of our physical plant with those of other colleges and universities and even many high schools. Our living, learning, and recreational spaces are insufficient. Indeed, in a 2004 survey of admitted students who declined enrollment at Oxford, 71% of Georgia students and 68% of all respondents cited the quality of Oxford’s academic facilities as a “very important factor.” Moreover, Oxford does not have adequate library, science, teaching, or office space to allow for growth in faculty, staff or the student body, let alone the rich teaching space required to accommodate innovative teaching and learning programs or the extensive institutional research we plan to continue to grow as a national leader in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Since inadequate planning and investment in facilities will prevent the development and final success of our Strategic Plan, we will update our Master Plan to incorporate the facilities required to bring Oxford to the level of academic excellence that we envision. We also are understaffed. Our current faculty/student ratio is an unacceptably low 1:13; as Frank Rhodes states, the best universities “have an overall faculty-to-student ratio of 1:10 or better”² (and our research shows this also is true of the best free-standing liberal arts colleges). Our

² Frank H. T. Rhodes, *The Creation of the Future: The Role of the American University* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 100.

support staff also lags behind those of our peer institutions (our current staff-to-faculty ratio ranks ninth among our 10 benchmark institutions).

As it becomes better known, Oxford's distinctive Liberal Arts Intensive program for the first two years of an Emory baccalaureate degree will be instrumental in making Emory University a national model for undergraduate education. This strategic planning process has begun to clarify what Oxford students, faculty, staff, administration, and alumni have long recognized about our transformative learning environment but have not expressed as cogently and forcefully as necessary: Oxford College is distinctive, in part because of its role within Emory University. On the other hand, Oxford also makes Emory University distinctive, in part because of Oxford's character as a Liberal Arts Intensive division within it. Oxford's place in the heart of Emory stems from its unique contribution not only to Emory's heritage but also to Emory's vision for the future as a destination university that is an inquiry-driven, ethically engaged, and diverse community.