

**WORKING DRAFT**  
*April 2010*

**Strategic Plan III**

**Reaffirming Our Mission: A Student-Centered Plan**

*Dickinson College prepares aspiring students for engaged and fulfilling lives of accomplishment, leadership, and service to their professions, to their communities, to the nation, and to the world. Our founders intended the College to be a powerful agent of change - to advance the lot of humankind - and we expect no less today.*

**Dickinson College Strategic Plan, 2001**

**Introduction**

Dickinson's Strategic Plan I (2001) revitalized the College's charter mission - to prepare young people by means of a useful education in the liberal arts and sciences for engaged lives of citizenship and leadership in the service of society. That mission statement articulated our founder Benjamin Rush's vision of an institution, born of the American Revolution, carrying forward an engaged, dynamic program of liberal learning that resonated with the challenges of the day. Chief among these challenges was the need to match higher education with the current and future requirements of a new, ever evolving democracy. Strategic Plan I's focus on our charter mission has served the college well. We have in the past decade moved into a new peer group composed of the nation's leading liberal arts institutions.

Strategic Plan III reaffirms and advances the vision articulated in Strategic Plans I and II. At a time of financial crisis, questioning, and even self-doubt in higher education, Dickinson seeks to deepen its commitment to a useful education in the liberal arts and sciences, a distinctively American education that remains for our students and graduates as valid today as it did when asserted in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This essential notion of a useful liberal arts education that intentionally links liberal study with employment and public service in a democracy was never fully embraced by America's liberal arts colleges; thus what is in fact old appears revolutionary today. Other institutions may try to answer contemporary challenges through significant mission redefinition and/or the addition of new schools or branches. Dickinson remains convinced of the value of its historic, yet distinctive version of a residential, undergraduate education in the liberal arts.

We have inherited a centuries-old yet flexible, nimble sense of purpose, and we intend to exercise it fully for the benefit of our students now and into the future. In so doing, Dickinson also intends to embrace fully the distinctive mindset of its "frontier pragmatism" that borrows richly from a Quaker, German and Scot-Irish heritage, yet is at once open to new influences that

advance its educational purpose. By continuing on the path charted in Strategic Plans I and II, Dickinson aims to make its newfound place among America's finest colleges permanent.

In its structure, Strategic Plan III focuses particularly on our students. A "student-centered" plan allows us to ask and answer critically important questions, and then to devise and implement policies and practices accordingly. These are the fundamental questions that guide this planning effort:

- ❖ What do we hope our students will become?
- ❖ Who are our students?
- ❖ What are the means to achieve our vision for our students? What academic, student development, and residential programs and experiences produce this result?
- ❖ Where do and will our students go after graduation?
- ❖ How do we measure our success?

### **What do we hope our students will become?**

Strategic Plan III affirms Dickinson's mission to prepare young people by means of a useful education in the liberal arts and sciences for engaged lives of citizenship and leadership in the service of society. We interpret "useful" broadly, understanding that the individual members of the community will find many, differing definitions of an education that contributes to meaningful and fulfilling lives. Yet in the spirit of our origins in the Rush vision and the experience of the American Revolution, we emphasize how Dickinson prepares students to contribute as active participants in the communities in which they live and work. We aim to educate citizen-scholars whose liberal arts skill set, including especially the ability to be lifelong learners, will allow them to navigate and lead in a world characterized by increasing complexity and accelerating change.

This vision of what we wish our students to become is complex, combining individual habits of mind with a willingness to engage constructively with others. Key elements of this vision – put differently, characteristics of Dickinson graduates that will place them at a competitive edge in the 21st century – must include:

- Intellectual curiosity – a strong commitment to inquiry that makes students lifelong learners and equips them well to understand and address the challenges of rapid change.
- A "21st century skill set" of abilities commonly attributed to the liberal arts including critical thinking, analytical skills, capacity to synthesize insights and information from

multiple fields and perspectives (to “connect the dots”), strong communication skills, and capability to master emerging technology.

- A commitment to engagement in local, national, and global communities, imbued with a strong sense of personal and social responsibility and ethics.
- Cross-cultural and global competence and sensitivity, informed by fluency in foreign languages; the ability to appreciate and thrive in a diverse, complex world.
- Appreciation of our core commitment to sustainability in the interests of a just, healthy and economically-viable world; respect that one should take no more from the planet than one needs and that leadership for the 21st century means operating in the context of less rather than more while simultaneously maintaining a competitive, entrepreneurial spirit—where others see incompatibility, seeing opportunity.
- The ability to live and work productively in ambiguity and uncertainty.
- A sense of Dickinson identity and affinity that strengthens alumni’s ongoing connections to the college in relationships of mutual support.

In sum, we strive for “an education without an expiration date” for our students – one that enables our graduates to find meaning and purpose in the private sphere, the workplace, and public arena across their entire lives.

### **Who are our students?**

Dickinson seeks to recruit students whose abilities, attitudes, and attributes match the college’s vision. Our students must be academically able, intellectually curious, and ready to join with others in making the most of the opportunities Dickinson offers for learning and engagement. Collectively, they must be diverse in background, perspectives, interests, and skills. Moreover, the college requires a student body that simultaneously includes those whose families have the resources to support the cost of a Dickinson education *and* those for whom financial aid is required to ensure access.

Strategic Plan III recognizes that there are currently formidable challenges to achieving these goals. In terms of geography, the proportion of high school age students in Dickinson’s traditional primary pool (the Northeast) is declining, while the proportion in newer areas to us (especially the South and West) is rapidly increasing. Moreover, the population of students of color – who have not historically been adequately represented in the college’s recruitment pool – is rising. Even greater diversity is critical to our stature as a national liberal arts college because highly talented students desire it as a minimum requirement in their college search.

In regard to finances, the current economic instability has diminished both the real and perceived ability of families to afford a private college education. In addition, financial aid eligibility for

the next two years will be calculated with the recession factored into the formula, translating into lower adjusted gross incomes and increased need. Requests for no-need aid are expected to increase as families look for a subsidy to offset the cost of attendance. Meeting such requests will contribute to Dickinson's competitiveness but also further press our aid budget. Moreover, this reduction in the capacity and willingness of our students and their families to bear the cost of a Dickinson experience comes at a time when the value of a liberal arts education is increasingly questioned in the media and among the public.

Lastly, in the past decade Dickinson has entered a new college peer group, where we are committed to remain permanently. The prestige of this group is matched by their considerable resources, which will challenge Dickinson to work creatively to stay competitive in this highly selective tier. Current overlap schools have more resources (especially larger endowments) and greater selectivity (lower admit rates) to support their recruitment efforts.

In order to meet these challenges, Dickinson requires a strategic approach to enrollment that:

- a. assures that the college's vision and program aligns with prospective students' abilities, attitudes, and ambitions,
  - b. reshapes our geographic and demographic reach according to national and international shifts in prospective student pools,
  - c. optimizes the relationships among students' actual and perceived financial needs, the college's financial resources, and macro-economic trends, and
  - d. sustains and strengthens our current selectivity by increasing the number, quality and diversity of applicants *and* by improving the college's yield rate.
- *Geography*: Since 2003, the ratio of admitted students from outside the Northeast has grown from 12 to 22%. Dickinson's rising stature positions us to increase our yield from these states. As the proportion of high school age students grows especially in the South and the West, we must enlarge the proportion of students coming from outside our traditional primary pool. Strategic Plan II established a target of 30% for areas outside the Northeast (VA-ME); that remains our goal. Continued growth should be achieved in emerging areas with a growing Dickinson footprint (Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Denver, Houston, Atlanta, Miami, Charlotte, Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill, Chicago, and Minneapolis). We also must optimize enrollment in relatively nearby urban areas such as Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, and also in western New York, western Massachusetts, and western Maryland (where we have not had an intentional presence in the last decade).
  - *Diversity*: The ratio of students of color in the national school-age cohort is rising rapidly. Dickinson has made notable strides in raising their representation; over the last five years, their proportion in the first-year class has ranged from 12.5-15.5%. Our goal

for the next five years is 18 percent. In addition, there are segments of the Jewish student population whom we have not reached. At present, Dickinson provides two of the three minimum requirements for many Jewish students—a robust Judaic Studies curriculum and a nationally-recognized Hillel (plus ties with Israeli universities and the South American Jewish community). As we meet the third requirement, a kosher option, we should be able to reach new segments of the Jewish population.

- *International*: The proportion of international students at Dickinson has grown from under 3% to over 6% since 2003, a change fitting our position of global education leadership. Dickinson's international applicant pool reached a record high in 2010, and we expect that it will continue to grow given the turnaround in the global economy. We also expect that the percentage of students able to pay the full or nearly full cost of attendance can and will increase. This will be needed to offset our aid commitment to those need-eligible. Regions of interest include Europe, Asia, and South America. Our goal is to reach 8% international in the next five years.
- *Academic quality*: Dickinson's strategy over the last five years has been to invest in no-need and need-based financial aid to influence enrollment of the top 10-15% of the admitted pool. These top-performing students have considerable choice among the most selective colleges. Without ignoring this segment, we need to identify other parts of the pool where we can have greater success. We will continue to attend to the top 25%, but investment must also be made in the upper end of the mid-50% of the pool to increase the overall quality of the class. Average SAT scores have ranged from 1275 to 1298 over the last five years; that quality should be sustained if not improved with this strategy. The percentage graduating in the top 10% of their high school classes has ranged from 37% to 53% percent over the last five years—a target of over 50% should be achieved.
- *Financial aid*: Financial aid continues to be important in providing access to our student body: 59% of the Class of 2013 received institutional aid with an average institutional grant of \$22,853. Our recruitment and retention strategy must optimize the relationship among families' perceived and actual financial need, our financial resources, and the macro-economic trends for private liberal arts colleges. Although the college made strides in reducing no-need awards over the last five years, this form of aid is expected to increase going forward. Tuition discounting reached record-high levels at private colleges and universities in 2008; the average discount rate for first-year students increased from 39% in fall 2007 to 42% in fall 2008 and an estimated 42.4% for fall 2009. Dickinson's projected increase (38.6% for FY10 to 39% for FY11) remains below the national average but is much higher than in the past (a first-year class low of 28% for FY07). We must define a discount rate target that is both competitive in

recruiting and realistic in regard to our resources, especially as we anticipate greater socioeconomic diversity within our current and prospective student population.

- In order to achieve our goals, we must position Dickinson as a *first-choice* college. Despite the high percentage of our students who enroll early decision (42-46% over the last five years), admitted student surveys indicate that Dickinson is not the first choice for many of our current students. We expected that yield rate would decrease given the more selective colleges with which we now compete, but our rate should be higher than the 24-27% achieved the last five years. We need to identify who are we not reaching or enrolling and why. Equally important is the development of strategies to retain students who choose Dickinson. A high retention rate is a quality indicator of the most selective liberal arts colleges. As we achieve a higher percentage of students choosing Dickinson as a first-choice college, we expect to see an increase in first-to-second year retention. For every point we improve student retention, we gain approximately seven students per class or approximately 25 students over four classes (some further attrition expected over subsequent years). We recommend continuous attention to the fit between our academic offerings and the interests of prospective students, the role of need-based and no-need aid in college choice, and the quality of the college's student life facilities including athletic/fitness/recreation space, the Holland Union Building (including dining), and residence halls. Many incoming students arrive from secondary schools that have invested significantly in student space. Dickinson's peers have also done so over the last decade, which further heightens our need to improve these facilities and spaces to be competitive.
- Enhanced *recruitment tools* can strengthen our enrollment efforts. In regard to geography, alumni and parent volunteers have been and will continue to be keys to success in expanding Dickinson's footprint. Appeal can also be broadened by geographically packaging Dickinson to ensure that students from outside our primary region recognize the portability of the Dickinson degree to return to their home region for careers or graduate and professional school. In regard to diversity and urban recruitment generally, opportunities include expanded relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs). These identify students in under-served high schools with the skills and desire for success in a highly selective college setting. Our work with CBOs can broaden diversity in terms of both students of color and socioeconomic background. For international students, a strong relationship and recruiting model comprised of targeted American and international schools abroad, as well as alumni volunteers and the availability of financial aid to highly talented students, will enable the college to continue to grow. Lastly, we must continue to develop relationships with independent schools across the board.

- As the traditional 4-year secondary school model of transition to college is changing, Dickinson must reach students taking *non-traditional* paths. This includes both at the front end (accelerated high school degree) and back end (gap year[s] before entry) of transition from secondary school. We need to develop creative contemporary initiatives - e.g. Yellow Ribbon Program, community college partnerships, and Public Service Fellowships – to respond to new enrollment patterns, and we must identify how we integrate students entering through such programs into our own four-year model.
- Dickinson’s connections with the U.S. military, including strong Army ROTC and cooperative relationship with the Army War College, may create an enrollment niche for us. Strategies should be developed to reach students drawn to a college that combines interest in the military with the liberal arts tradition. These include *veterans and children of families with a service tradition*. The development of the security studies certificate is an example of a program differentiator with projected recruiting appeal.
- From the admissions process to classroom interaction and social networking, today’s students expect and demand a high level of up-to-the-minute *technology and new media*. It will be critical, for example, that we optimize and leverage internet and interactive capabilities in recruitment. And that we offer an educational program that includes a vibrant and visible technology dimension.

### **What are the means to achieve our vision for our students?**

Strategic Plan III affirms Dickinson’s mission to prepare young people by means of a useful education in the liberal arts and sciences for engaged lives of citizenship and leadership. The plan also commits us to establish permanently our position among the nation’s leading liberal arts colleges. Our academic and student development programs, working in tandem, must be tailored to accomplish this end. While respecting the need for balance in our programs, Strategic Plan III also confirms the college’s strategy of placing special emphasis on areas where Dickinson can offer distinctive, exceptional opportunities – thus enriching our students’ experience and increasing our ability to recruit outstanding students and attract resources. Our on-campus program must also be mindful of current and future pressures on budget, seeking in many cases ways to “do more with less.”

- Dickinson offers a rich liberal arts curriculum structured around general education requirements and forty-two majors. The academic program emphasizes *independence and choice* – as reflected in the broad range of options both for fulfilling requirements and completing academic majors. Breadth of choice and curricular flexibility are substantial advantages, both in tailoring academic experiences to the individual needs of every student and in recruitment. Strategic Plan III affirms the current structure and philosophy of the curriculum noting:

- Dickinson has an unusually large number of offerings for a college of its size, both in terms of individual courses and programs (majors, minors, certificates). We believe the college should maintain and even enhance this *rich repertoire*, continuing our practice of developing new programs that address emerging contemporary issues and reflects special areas of faculty and student expertise and interest (e.g. health studies, security studies). One potential vehicle for achieving curricular innovation and “movement” at a time of resource limitation is broader application of the concept of “certificates.”
- Freedom of choice in the academic program helps students develop independence of mind, enhances capacity for lifelong learning, and inculcates a sense of accountability for their decisions. It also places responsibility on the college to provide appropriate support, especially in the form of *effective advising*. We need to continue to enhance our advising system, linking it more closely to student planning for advanced study and career beyond graduation. One element of advising might be creation of occasion(s) for students to reflect on what they have accomplished thus far and how their experience might contribute to long-term plans as they move forward.
- Dickinson’s vision of a useful education focuses on the development of what might be called a “*21st century skill set*.” The college, for example, endorses all of the intellectual and practical skills identified by the American Association of Colleges & Universities in its VALUE project: inquiry and analysis, critical thinking, creative thinking, written communication, oral communication, reading, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork, problem solving, and integrative and applied learning. Underlying these individual skills is the foundational ability to “learn how to learn,” to apply the multifaceted capacities engendered by a liberal arts education innovatively in a rapidly changing, complex world. While thus envisioning the skill set we desire for our students broadly, Strategic Plan III identifies the following skills as distinctive to Dickinson and/or requiring special attention:
  - Reflecting and anticipating the growing complexity and interdependence of the world in which we live, Dickinson emphasizes the ability of our students to synthesize knowledge, methodologies, and perspectives – to “connect the dots.” We want students to make connections among courses, between curriculum and co-curriculum, between the academic and residential experience, and between the campus and the wider world. This *commitment to connectivity* is at work in all our programs including the traditional disciplines. But it is especially reflected in the strength of our interdisciplinary offerings, including strong interdisciplinary majors (many with dedicated staff and facilities). The college needs to continue to enhance interdisciplinary endeavors, taking full advantage of the flexibility of our curriculum and openness of our faculty. Measures include enhanced advising



for students and continued support (e.g. time, funding, workload flexibility, and rewards) to faculty.

- Dickinson is a recognized leader in developing *global perspective*. We must continue to build our program in this arena with particular attention to: introducing active learning (field study, research, internships) into the study abroad experience, providing more effective re-entry experiences for students returning from off-campus study, expanding our presence outside of Europe – this in conjunction particularly with our efforts in regard to domestic diversity (e.g. new majors in Africana and Latin American, Latino & Caribbean Studies), and exploring ways to apply technology to enhance our concept of a “global campus.”
- The college has identified *sustainability* as a subject for special emphasis, and we already have established a leadership position in this arena. We need to push this initiative, pursuing these agenda items: defining the place of sustainability in the curriculum, identifying Dickinson’s distinctive approach to sustainability, and taking full advantage of sustainability’s potential for connecting curriculum with operations, service, and the wider world generally. We need to devote particular attention to melding our international and sustainability initiatives, thus creating a *global sustainability* dimension unique among American colleges and universities.
- During the input gathering for Strategic Plan III, *technological and information fluency* clearly emerged as an area in which we need to do more. Our students come to us as “digital natives” accustomed to using technology but lacking mastery, and especially a full understanding of its full potential *and* limits. We are currently engaged in a writing program initiative that includes definition of learning goals for various elements of the curriculum (first-year seminars, “writing intensive” courses), better faculty training, a new student “writing associates” program, launch of a multilingual writing center, and development of assessment tools. We need a comparable initiative on technology and new media coordinated with an expansion and re-imagining of existing information literacy programs to include development of clear goals for information technology and expansion of digital media and geospatial fluency. This requires, among other steps, the creation of an Academic Commons to draw together our currently dispersed LIS resources and serve as a center for outreach to faculty and students.
- Dickinson’s commitment to a useful education – and especially the goal of making our students lifelong learners - places a premium on *active learning*. Across the curriculum, students are already asked to search out, question, re-conceive, and create knowledge. We must enhance our already strong efforts in this arena. Key elements include: student research and creative performance – both independently (e.g. “Students as Scholars”) and

collaboratively with faculty; internships; field study; service learning; and laboratory work of all kinds. For example, the concept of the campus as a “living laboratory” for sustainability must be actively pursued. Finding ongoing funding for student-faculty research and the Community Studies Center and Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education are top priorities.

- Our guiding concept of citizenship places a premium on learning connected to *community engagement*. We already have vigorous programs of service learning, internships, community-based research, and volunteerism. These programs need to be enhanced and the already substantial coordination among them deepened. The extensive nature of our efforts in this arena also needs to be more visible, actively celebrated, and better communicated to the campus and the public.
- Strategic Plans I and II identified *diversity* as a critically important goal, and we have made great strides toward transforming our campus in this regard. Both demographic data and surveys of student experience suggest that diversity may – in addition to its obvious significance as a requirement for any 21<sup>st</sup> century educational program – distinguish Dickinson from regional peers. The college should intensify its efforts to enhance the diversity of the Dickinson experience. We must continue to develop strategies to promote a pluralistic, integrative and accepting campus culture and directly address what counteracts such a culture. We must create meaningful opportunities for students of different backgrounds and experiences to learn from each other. Our agenda – pursued in parallel with student recruitment efforts – should include continued curricular enhancement, intensive efforts to recruit faculty and staff of color who can serve as models and mentors, reduced reliance on one-time programs as a framework for diversity education beyond the classroom, and development of a residentially based peer education program with clearly articulated outcomes.
- The college considers building a supportive and inclusive community a priority in student development. Fundamental characteristics of the college’s *campus culture* are respect, accountability, inclusion, and community concern. The college extends full participation in campus life to individuals and organizations who uphold community standards and refuses it to those who do not. To promote support for community standards, we will continue recent initiatives and try new ones: support for students to exercise leadership within the peer culture; peer-based and restorative systems of conduct resolution; a residentially-based system of peer review of disruptive community behaviors; residentially based peer-educator programs on issues of diversity, gender climate, and wellness (alcohol and drugs); and implementation of revised procedures for adjudication of sexual violence offenses.
- *Greek life* has a long history at the college. Presently, students who affiliate with Greek life comprise approximately 22% of the student body. A moratorium on the addition of

new fraternities and sororities is in place pending a period of review. Initiatives we put forward with this strategic plan stem from the commitment to advancing the desired characteristics of the campus culture, and include the implementation of a comprehensive and annual chapter evaluation and review process, implementation of a comprehensive hazing education program, and implementation of a comprehensive risk management education program. Over the next five years, as the college develops new approaches to residential life to engage students socially and intellectually, community conversation about the role and contributions of Greek life within the residential experience will naturally occur.

- A sense of belonging and community can be a powerful anchor to a student's experience; it can improve retention and create a *life-long connection* to Dickinson. Anecdotal and survey information reveals that this is an area where we can improve. We will put several strategies into place, among them: change the current physical layout of the dining hall; establish, fund and advise localized social programming boards for each first year residential area; implement a more engaging and sustained program of weekend all-student social events. In addition to these concrete efforts, we should develop a research plan to thoughtfully study this issue and what it means for students.
- This under-developed sense of community diminishes the prospect for *life-long connection* to Dickinson, and it is evident among alumni. Understanding that this is an elusive issue, the study proposed above will be of great value in this regard. In the short term, we need to heighten our ability to translate students' general satisfaction with their educational experience here into ongoing affinity with Dickinson. We will implement a year-long senior class program that cultivates meaningful experiences for fellowship, reflection, and engagement with alumni and that educates about philanthropy to the college. We will also develop and implement collaboratively planned retreats for each class year to forge opportunities for connection to the college.
- To extend our mission of developing students for the complexities of citizenship through a useful education, we must implement a plan for residential life that provides a framework which supports academic and personal success by underscoring the ways students inhabit a *community of learning* both inside and outside the classroom. Our agenda includes: implementing governance and leadership councils within each first year residential area, implementing programming boards within each residential area with a budget and advisor to help students plan social and academic programs, implementing a community forum program for peer-based review of community disruptions, establishing a community enhancement fund in each first-year residential area to encourage students to invest in their living arrangements through unique projects, and establishing an advisory board (faculty and staff) for each first-year residential area to provide support for self-governance. Beyond the residential arena, we will implement student advisory

boards for each department within the Division of Student Development that will provide more students with the opportunity to participate with us in complex problem-solving of campus issues. We anticipate that this broadened base of student leadership roles will increase the opportunities for students to participate in governance of the college. Finally, the college re-affirms its commitment to promote student involvement in institutional governance through student representation on all-college committees.

- Very appropriately for a student-centered Strategic Plan, we have identified our *students themselves as a valuable resource* for enhancing the Dickinson educational experience. We need to take full advantage of our students' abilities to contribute to the learning process for their peers and themselves by creating an intentional and cohesive leadership development strategy that advances desired institutional objectives and outcomes. Important initiatives in this direction should include: continued experimentation with upper-class teaching assistants and writing associates in first-year seminars, heightened activity by academic majors' committees and advisory groups, expansion of our networks of peer advisors in offices such as Advising and the Career Center, enhanced involvement of students returning from off-campus as mentors on study abroad, continued development of leadership abilities among upper-class students for clubs and other activities, and enhanced mentoring within our residential life model. We must expand meaningful work study experiences on the model of, for example, of Clarke Forum staffers or Trout Gallery interns.
- In addition to expanding opportunities for students to act as peer advisors, we should encourage students to develop a clearer sense of their own education and growth and provide a framework for *student ownership of their individual learning goals*. Doing so means creating systemic ways for students to make meaning out of the entirety of their Dickinson educational experience, creating an educational plan over different points in time. We will appoint and charge an appropriate working group to develop such an educational planning framework to help all students realize the maximum benefit of their Dickinson education. Encouraging students to find an intellectual passion, explore interests, connect classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, set and evaluate goals, and reflect on their learning, all will be integral to this effort.
- In the right setting, a properly designed *architecture for learning*, the residential experience can provide an unparalleled influence on students' development and learning. To succeed as a residential community of learning we must ensure that the design, facilities and programs for student housing facilitate a campus culture that is mature, diverse, and conducive to a sense of community. We will begin implementing the recommendations of a quality of student life facilities study that addresses these goals and that includes discussion of mixed-year housing, special interest housing and learning

communities as well as priorities for renovation and modernization of residence halls, athletics and recreation facilities, and the Holland Union Building.

- Dickinson has in recent years increased its *retention rates* for enrolled students; current recruitment pressures mandate that we redouble our efforts in this arena. We need to expand our capacity for early identification of students at risk of departure and develop mechanisms for retaining them at Dickinson. These latter should range from assistance for students at academic or social risk to wider opportunities for rewarding engagement for outstanding students. The national average for first to second year retention is 65.7% and for private liberal arts college 69.6%, but our peer institutions range from 91% to a national high of 98.5% (Pomona). Strategic Plans I and II set retention goals for Dickinson of 94%. We have established a three-tiered committee with representation from all areas of the college to address our efforts in this area. While we have improved, our current performance remains some 2% short of that figure. Although the current instability in the economy and higher education works against heightened retention, Strategic Plan III reaffirms our goal for first to second year retention of 94%.

### **Where do and will our students go?**

Our student's educational experience on campus must be seamlessly connected with where they go and what they do after graduation. While we recognize the intrinsic value of the four years spent enrolled at the college, our mission is to prepare young people for citizenship, civic engagement, and careers after their departure. The key dimensions of our educational program, such as our emphasis on lifelong learning, are designed with this in mind. Our graduates' achievements and activities throughout their lives not only fulfill the original purpose for which the college was created; they also powerfully validate our distinctive approach to the liberal arts and the worth of a Dickinson degree. Moreover, the continued connection of our alumni with the college and their multifaceted contributions are critically important in sustaining the institution. This is particularly true in challenging times.

- *Graduate school* is a next step for many Dickinsonians. Although not all students go on for further education immediately after graduation (some fields strongly encourage a year or two of experience before applying), a majority (55-60%) of alumni enroll in graduate school within five years of completing studies at Dickinson. There is a rising tendency for alumni to enroll in arts and sciences graduate school programs, a falling trend to enroll in law school (this in line with national trends), and considerable annual variation in the proportion heading to education, medicine, and business schools. Given the importance of advanced study to our students, we need to enhance our already substantial efforts to provide the experiences and support that guarantee both acceptance and success in high-quality graduate programs.

- Opportunities for active and applied learning are valuable for our students both as important credentials for admission to graduate work and as preparation for graduate study. The college needs to deepen its current emphasis on hands-on work with demonstrable outcomes such as research projects (laboratory, fieldwork, archives, etc.), performance and studio opportunities, internships, and various forms of experiential learning including volunteerism and service learning. Many of these opportunities will be rooted in academic departments/programs, but they must be a key characteristic of student life as well.
- Student success in preparing for graduate admission and study can be powerfully affected by the quality of the advice they receive as they craft their undergraduate experience and plan for the future. Effective guidance by faculty advisers, academic departments, the Office of Academic Advising, and the Career Center are all important in supporting students' post-graduate plans and aspirations. We need to integrate the faculty (individually and on the department level), the Advising Office, and the Career Center into a seamless network able to inform and guide students on how to plan for the future and build educational programs that support their aspirations. Key steps include taking more advantage of collaboration between the Advising Office and Career Center. We must determine whether our current division of responsibilities is the best approach and discuss how these offices integrate their activities. Both programs must work with departments to insure the availability of information to students. A unified effort should address the following questions: What programs do departments currently conduct? Should there be a designated "placement officer" in departments? What possibilities are there for peer advising? Do department web pages address graduate study? Coordinated workshops and information sessions with faculty must be scheduled. Peer advising in the major may play a role and should be explored to define its full potential.
- We have considerable information about graduate placement for students, but much of it remains anecdotal and unsystematic. The college must further analyze the patterns of enrollment in graduate and professional programs – including, as far as information allows, success rates in application – to help students recognize and aspire to their best possible options. An initial review of available data suggests an approximately 40% correlation rate between undergraduate majors and career paths during students' early careers. It appears that over time the correlation gets weaker as students gain experience and practice their liberal arts skills in new settings. A more complete data collection strategy and further analyses of these patterns will help us be more specific about successful outcomes.

- As one special dimension of its work to prepare students for further study, the college has developed a network of special articulation agreements with excellent graduate schools, both nationally and internationally, in a range of fields. The college's connections through articulation agreements with graduate and professional schools helps students identify possibilities, can facilitate entrance to competitive programs, and can allow for a program that closely integrates undergraduate and graduate study, sometimes saving the student a year or more of formal study. We need to continue to develop articulation agreements, aiming toward a comprehensive network that covers all fields and ties us to strong graduate programs.
- Dickinson has an active program for securing fellowships that support graduate study such as Fulbright, Goldwater, Truman, and Udall Scholarships. We have improved our advising system in this area and moved toward critically important practices such as identifying candidates early. The result has been considerable success, especially with Fulbrights, but we can do much better. The Advising Office staffing must be rearranged and augmented to allow for more time dedicated to the goal of enhancing our current faculty-based and decentralized system.
- *Career* placement data shows interesting trends for Dickinson graduates. The distribution of graduates is about one-fourth in business, one-fourth in education, and much of the remainder in government, other non-profit, and health sectors. Education, non-profit and government are rising destinations for Dickinson graduates, in line with national trends. Areas of growth in the national job market include the federal government, the sustainability sector (“green jobs”), and health care (nursing and allied-health professions.) The current trend, again in line with national statistics, is for more students to postpone the job search until well after graduation. For Dickinson graduates, service and personal development frequently figure as the primary considerations rather than salary. These trends all speak to a strong alignment between our academic programs on one side and graduate choice and emerging opportunities on the other.
- Our ability to support graduates in their initial *career placement* and thereafter is of utmost importance to the college. We suggest the following steps to enhance our current efforts:
  - Virtually all of the recommendations made in relation to advising and preparation for graduate study apply as well to career. In particular, we need to deepen the efforts of the Career Center, Advising Office, and academic departments to guide our students and assist them in the placement process. Collaboration between the Career Center and Advising Office, our leaders in this arena, is essential.

- Alumni have a particularly important role to play in regard to career placement. We must expand programs such as Dickinson Works that take best advantage of their capability to mentor and place graduates in internships and careers thereafter.
  - Geographical distribution of alumni following graduation has remained very stable. Self-reported alumni data shows little change since 1985, with large concentration in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast. Given shifts in the national economy and recruitment patterns (high school age demographics), the college should consider cultivating connections to employers in regions projected for economic growth. International students tend to return to their home countries. The college should explore this population as a possible resource for graduates with a global career focus.
  - As our student body becomes more diverse and as we emphasize diversity as a distinguishing characteristic of the college, we need to assess how well we serve both students of color and international students with graduate school and career advising.
  - As with graduate placement, we need the best available information on our graduates' careers. We must fully utilize and integrate all sources of information on alumni career activity, ranging from comprehensive surveys to individual contacts with faculty and social networking reports.
- Dickinson's future will in significant part be determined by the quality of *connections to our alumni*—they are a key asset to our value as a college. This is an area in which the college has made important strides but continues to lag behind peer institutions. In order to meet this concern we need to do a full-scale review of the ways in which we interact with our alumni. Key elements of such a review include:
    - We must evaluate how the college contacts alumni. Areas for consideration include alumni visitation programs; services to alumni, including career counseling; the present model of alumni clubs. New affinity groups may provide another important opportunity for alumni engagement.
    - While financial support will remain critically important to the college, we must expand the model of “giving” beyond donations to include mentoring, networking, providing internships, admissions outreach, and other volunteer roles.
    - We need to plan ways to mobilize our rapidly expanding pool of international alumni, recognizing that many of them are recent graduates.



- We need new efforts, reflecting the rapid evolution of technology-driven social networking, to foster the alumni online community and make alumni events more visible on the college website.
- The college must continue its efforts to make alumni activities and achievements more visible. Such efforts should, for example, include exploration of opportunities for departments and majors to profile accomplishments of alumni on their web pages as a way for current students to envision the usefulness of their classes and undergraduate education, so that alumni might serve as models, and perhaps as mentors, to current students.
- We need to continue efforts to collect comprehensive information about our alumni. For example, we should consider creation of a regular channel from faculty familiar with alums to alumni relations, including a determination of whether the college should devise a uniform method for departments and programs to track former majors. Any program designed must be efficient and easy to encourage broad participation. Clearly, the information gathering effort must include periodic surveys. The recent work by the Development Office in surveying and meeting with some 2,500 alumni potential donors is a good example not only of the magnitude of this undertaking but also of the way in which surveying can be connected to key elements of our program (in this case especially citizenship and community engagement) and to assessment.
- Connection between the college and its alumni is not something that can be easily created after they graduate. A sense of affinity with Dickinson needs to be cultivated during the undergraduate experience, and even before. We must develop a clearly articulated plan to cultivate Dickinson identity and affiliation from admission to orientation to graduation. This project crosses all divisions of the college and should be undertaken by a task force representing all constituencies including of course alumni.