

**COMMON GROUND/UNCOMMON GOALS:**  
**STRATEGIC INITIATIVES SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND**  
**INCLUSION AT SMITH COLLEGE**

October 2007

As part of the implementation process of the Smith Design for Learning, addressing the strategic planning goals determined upon by the college in the 2006-07 academic year, President Carol Christ asked Naomi Miller, Director of Institutional Diversity and Chair of the Smith Common Ground Project in 2005-07, to identify existing and potential intersections between the Common Ground Strategic Planning Proposals (October 2006) and the current initiatives underway at the college in October 2007.

**COMMON GROUND/UNCOMMON GOALS** lists the original Common Ground Strategic Planning Proposals, followed in each instance by the intersections (both actual and potential) with current initiatives being implemented at the college.

The complete Common Ground Strategic Planning Proposals, Vision, Principles and Goals, and original Strategic Planning Intersections are included in Addendums A, B, and C.

**Original COMMON GROUND STRATEGIC PLANNING PROPOSALS (10-06)**  
**and CURRENT INITIATIVES (10-07)**

**\* Strategic Direction I: *Strengthen Essential Student Capacities***

- **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN A DIVERSE WORLD COURSE REQUIREMENT (10-06)**

**Current initiatives (10-07): Possible intersections with the new Smith Centers for Societal Leadership and Engagement:**

- **Center for Community Collaboration**
- **Center for International Studies and Cross-Cultural Communication**
- **Center for the Environment, Ecological Design and Sustainability**

**\* Strategic Direction II: *Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry, and Discovery***

- **FACULTY HIRING AND RETENTION INITIATIVE (10-06)**

**Current initiatives (10-07):**

- **Five-College Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellows program**
- **Faculty Microclimate Change Colleague Circles**
- **New Faculty orientation programming**
- **OID Fall Faculty Dinners**
  
- **“CUTTING EDGE” FACULTY READING GROUPS AND LECTURE SERIES (10-06)**

**Current initiative (10-07):**

- **Individual faculty are encouraged to apply to the Provost’s Office for funding to support summer faculty reading groups or guest lecturer visits during the academic year.**

**\* Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society’s Challenges***

- **“WAYS OF LEARNING” PEDGAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS (10-06)**

**Current initiatives (10-07):**

- **Associate Provost working on bringing in outside speakers to address different pedagogical learning styles**
- **Possible creation of Learning Specialist position in the Jacobson Center, to work with faculty, administrative support staff, and students**

- Possible creation of Assistive Technology and Information Access Specialist, reporting to the Director of Disability Services and Educational Technology Services, to work with faculty, administrative support staff, and students

**\* Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues***

- **GLOBALIZATION, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND EQUITY PROFESSORSHIPS (10-06)**

**Current initiative (10-07): None.**

**\* Strategic Direction V: *Prepare Women for Rewarding Lives in a Rapidly Changing World***

- **DIFFICULT DIALOGUES INITIATIVE (10-06)**

**Current initiatives (10-07):**

- Intergroup Dialogues program sponsored by the Dean of the College
- Faculty Teas in the houses to discuss difficult issues, organized by Residential Life
- Pre-orientation programs including conversations about difference and diversity (Bridge, International Student Program, Cultural Connections)
- Campus Climate Open Forum (varied topics)
- Diversity Speaker and In-House Diversity Discussions at Orientation
- Multicultural Mediation Training for House Community Advisors (HCAs) and House Presidents (HPs), and Judicial Board members; Social Justice Training for Head Residents (HRs) and House Coordinators (HCs)
- Diversity Planning Group (staff, faculty, students meet with Dean of the College, Dean of Students, and Director of Institutional Diversity)

- **STAFF HIRING AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

**Current initiatives (10-07):**

- **OID Fall Gala for Five-College faculty and staff**
- **Staff Community Gatherings, sponsored by OI;**
- **Trans-Awareness Week for staff, sponsored by the Staff Council Diversity Committee**
- **Possible creation of Intergroup Dialogues program for staff, sponsored by HR, OID, and the Dean of Religious Life**
- **Reevaluation of renewal of Temporary Assistant Program (TAP)**

- HR /Five-College sponsorship of luncheon for community leaders of organizations serving underrepresented groups
- HR review of best practice organizations for enhancing hiring of diverse populations
- HR/5 College sponsorship of Diversity Training initiatives for Spring '08
- HR/OID office meetings with senior leadership to enhance ability to hire/retain diverse staff in their area

\* **Strategic Direction VI: *Support and Promote Environmental Sustainability***

- **DISABILITY ACCESS REVIEW: FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS (10-06)**

**Current initiatives (10-07):**

- **Campus-wide Accessibility Review, including buildings and programs**
- **Possible creation of Learning Specialist position in the Jacobson Center, to work with faculty, administrative support staff, and students**
- **Possible creation of Assistive Technology and Information Access Specialist, reporting to the Director of Disability Services and Educational Technology Services, to work with faculty, administrative support staff, and students**

\* **Strategic Direction VII: *Open Doors to Women of Promise***

- **STUDENT SCHOLARS COMMUNITY (10-06)**

**Current initiatives (10-07):**

- **Pilot AEMES Scholars program (Achieving Excellence in Mathematics, Engineering, and Science): team-based approach (with faculty and peer mentors) to supporting students with a commitment to promoting greater participation in the sciences by students from traditionally underrepresented groups.**
- **Culture of Research initiative to support the access and success of all undergraduates in having research experiences within learning communities, both within and beyond the classroom (including service learning groups), across the college**

\* **Strategic Direction VIII: *Extend Smith's Impact on the World***

- **ALUMNAE CONFERENCE ON RACE AND COMMUNITY (10-06)**

**Current initiative (10-07):**

- **Building Community: A Reunion for Smith Students and Alumnae of Color (March 7-9, 2008) [co-sponsored by the Alumnae Association of Smith College, the Office of Institutional Diversity, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs]:** aiming to foster connections between Smith students and alumnae of color through a bi-yearly weekend program that explores issues of diversity at Smith and beyond and provides opportunities for small group discussion, networking, and mentoring.

**Addendum A:**  
**Original COMMON GROUND STRATEGIC PLANNING PROPOSALS (10-06)**

**Strategic Direction I: *Strengthen Essential Student Capacities***

- **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN A DIVERSE WORLD COURSE REQUIREMENT**

The Smith College Mission Statement quotes Sophia Smith’s exhortation to provide “studies as coming times may develop or demand for the education of women.” In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our increasingly global society demands that a well-educated woman has the capacity to engage effectively across a range of human differences. This requires her to have a robust understanding of such diversity principles as those articulated by the Common Ground project:

- Power and privilege influence access to opportunities and resources, according to distinctions among people based on race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion and disability.
- Within any given community, people will have multiple and complex social identities that both connect them to and differentiate them from others.
- Valuing diversity requires not simply an acknowledgment of differences, but a commitment to overcoming inequities and fostering a hospitable and respectful community.

It also demands that she develop skills of inquiry, communication, mediation, and leadership that allow her to explore and negotiate across complexities of culture, class, religion and other differences. Such knowledge and skills are fundamental to effective civic engagement, and no undergraduate education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be considered complete without them. *Like the refinement of writing skills, their development is a core value in the College’s culture and should be a component of the first year experience.*

Just as first year students can satisfy the existing Writing Intensive Course requirement through any number of courses across the curriculum, so they could satisfy a **Civic Engagement and Leadership in a Diverse World (CivDiv) Course requirement** in a variety of ways. Many such courses already exist across all three divisions in the college, but funds should be made available for the development of more of them.

Courses designated as CivDiv build the fundamental skills necessary for engagement across difference from a number of directions:

- by exploring different ways of knowing and being in the world;
- by offering multiple means of trying to engage the world from the perspective of others;
- by inquiring into the nature of societal and cultural structures out of which one’s own perspective develops and beyond which it can grow; and

- by identifying and developing skills for communication and leadership in a world in which disagreement and conflict are inevitable, and in which an understanding of diversity is inseparable from an examination of inequity.

Such courses also allow students to develop a sense of what social responsibility involves, the capacity to work in groups, and the ability to engage in and lead civil discourse.

The knowledge and skills at the heart of CivDiv courses link such courses to a variety of co-curricular activities, including but not limited to:

- opportunities for service learning and community outreach;
- Praxis internships;
- residential life programs; and
- Orientation and pre-Orientation.

**Also pertinent –**

Strategic Direction II: *Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry, and Discovery*

Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society's Challenges*

Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*

## Strategic Direction II: *Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry, and Discovery*

- **FACULTY HIRING AND RETENTION INITIATIVE**

Smith College has an increasingly diverse student body, with regard both to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status: in 2006, 32% of the incoming class of first-year students were students of color who were also U.S. citizens, and 22% were first-generation college students. Student learning for such a diverse student body can be most effectively supported by the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty.

Although the composition of the faculty has improved overall in terms of underrepresented groups over the past twenty years, due to strong recruitment efforts – from 5% in 1985 to almost 13% in 2006 – when the fluctuations over time are scrutinized, the numbers may indicate a “revolving door” pattern. This was apparently the case a couple of decades ago: the report entitled “The Recruitment and Retention of Minority Faculty at Smith College” in 1985 found that 25% of “regular” appointees among the minority faculty “chose to resign rather than remain for reappointment and/or tenure” (p. 20). While the numbers seem to have improved noticeably in recent years, the available data (qualitative as well as quantitative) still suggest localized problems of retention for some groups of underrepresented faculty.

Reliance upon traditional hiring processes and budgets has not proved sufficient to meet the urgent need for building and retaining excellence that includes diversity among the faculty at this time. The top priority recommendation from the Common Ground project for supporting student learning is to **develop and fund specific initiatives to increase the hiring and retention of faculty of color across departments and programs, with a commitment of additional resources.**

Possible avenues for increased *recruitment* of faculty of color include:

- Designing an **Emerging Scholars Hiring Program**, where a department that is able successfully to recruit an excellent faculty member from a traditionally underrepresented group would be eligible to receive funding for the position from a central pool of resources for the first two years – specifically designated for launching this program – after which point the department would need to receive approval and funding from the college to make the appointment permanent [*see related Faculty Council proposal for Emerging Scholars Lectureship*];
- Funding the **Globalization, Social Identity, and Equity Professorships** recommended later in this Common Ground group of proposals; and
- Plan deliberately to create and support a more cohesive cohort of Mendenhall and Mellon fellows, and provide practical job readiness development opportunities [*see Faculty Microclimate Change proposal*].

Possible avenues for more successful *retention* of faculty of color include:

- Build and sustain cross-department faculty cohorts for new hires by creating **Colleague Circles** [*see Faculty Microclimate Change proposal*];
- Establish a new category of **Picker Fellowships** for curricular development earmarked for course development or revision that focuses on adding content about underrepresented groups [*see Faculty Microclimate Change proposal*]; and
- Provide increased and permanent funding for the pilot **Faculty Career Development Research Grant** program, that supports the scholarly research or creative work of faculty who have engaged in extraordinary outreach activities to underrepresented groups in the Smith community, particularly in the case of exceptional mentoring and support for students from underrepresented groups.

**Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society's Challenges*

Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*

## **Strategic Direction II: *Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry, and Discovery***

- **“CUTTING EDGE” FACULTY READING GROUPS AND LECTURE SERIES**

Recognizing that some of the newest and most exciting scholarly research in every division at the college is both interdisciplinary in nature, and pioneered by faculty from traditionally underrepresented groups, the Common Ground project recommends that the college provide a pool of funding for the establishment of interdisciplinary faculty reading groups and a speaker series on “The Cutting Edge,” to support faculty from different departments in identifying intellectual common ground and finding academic community through the process of engaging with cutting-edge scholarship.

“Cutting Edge” faculty reading groups could provide a summer stipend for faculty members to venture into a new area of research that explores the cutting edge of their discipline, or for new interdisciplinary research that enables faculty members to expand some of the parameters of their scholarship, with pedagogical implications. Academic year support could include funding for administrative support as well as for weekly meetings organized around central topics or questions shared in common by the faculty receiving the funding, where faculty could discuss and share the results of their readings.

- The “Cutting Edge” faculty reading groups could have related beneficial consequences, such as serving to support the retention of faculty from underrepresented groups by fostering a sense of academic community across different departments, along similar lines as the Kahn Institute, but with a more focused strategic purpose.

The “Cutting Edge” lecture series could be combined with the Common Ground proposal for an Emerging Scholars Hiring Program, as well as with the Faculty Council proposal for an “Emerging Scholars Lectureship,” with the aim of bringing promising rising scholars to the Smith campus across all three divisions who might be recruited as potential candidates for tenure-track hiring consideration in the future [*see Common Ground proposal for Emerging Scholars Hiring Program and Faculty Council Proposal for Emerging Scholars Lectureship*].

### **Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction V: *Prepare Women for Rewarding Lives in a Rapidly Changing World*

### **Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society's Challenges***

- **“WAYS OF LEARNING” PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS**

Both students and faculty (during the Fall'06 planning roundtables as well as during the first Campus Climate Open Forum in October 2006) have embraced the importance of expanding the discourse in the classroom to enable more intersections with “the real world.” Recognizing the relevance of service learning and community service to the classroom, as well as the challenges to classroom learning posed by an increasingly diverse student body with different academic backgrounds, the Common Ground project proposes that the college offer **a series of pedagogical workshops on “Ways of Learning,”** with some of the following aims:

- to provide pedagogical development for integrating internships and service learning more fully into the curriculum;
- to expand opportunities for faculty to develop the “civil discourse,” “moral/ethical reasoning,” and “social justice” components in their courses; and
- to support faculty in encouraging the effective engagement of students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom.

Borrowing from the framework used by the "American Cultures Seminars," there might be a several one-week seminars or a three-week seminar offered to faculty during the summer break or over J-term, with a stipend to encourage participation (depending on the length of the seminar).

It seems important to offer incentives for faculty who are interested to acquire some new skills and pedagogical strategies for use in their increasingly diverse classrooms (ranging from students with different degrees of academic experience and students from different cultural backgrounds to students with differing degrees of disability).

Participation in the Ways of Learning Pedagogical Workshops should be valued in the annual and promotion review process as evidence of faculty commitment to student learning.

#### **Also pertinent:**

*Strategic Direction IV: Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*

*Strategic Direction VII: Open Doors to Women of Promise*

**Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues***

- **GLOBALIZATION, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND EQUITY PROFESSORSHIPS**

In concert with the Common Ground proposal for an “Emerging Scholars Hiring Program,” and in recognition of the likelihood of being able to recruit from a diverse faculty candidate in areas pertaining to global culture, social identity, and social justice, the Common Ground project supports the establishment of **either an endowed professorship or three new junior faculty positions under the heading of Globalization, Social Identity, and Equity.**

The current identification of “globalization, social identity, and equity” as an embracing concept for these new faculty positions is a result of the ongoing campus conversations about what it means to be a “global” college, to encourage civil discourse among a variety of different individuals and groups, and to support the need for greater equity within cultures around the world.

More deliberate curricular planning for details of these faculty positions could be launched by the appointment of a working group including faculty representation from all three divisions, charged with the responsibility of identifying “gaps” in the present curriculum with regard to diversity, as defined by the Common Ground vision and principles of diversity.

A department in any division could be eligible to apply for a new FTE for a junior faculty position under this heading by identifying the applicability of this umbrella of concerns to present as well as future curricular development.

Were an endowed professorship to be created, departments could similarly be encouraged to apply for consideration, based on their strategic planning for the future.

**Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction II: *Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry, and Discovery*

Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society's Challenges*

## **Strategic Direction V: *Prepare Women for Rewarding Lives in a Rapidly Changing World***

- **DIFFICULT DIALOGUES INITIATIVE**

Based on the results of the focus group interviews, the Common Ground Report included the working recommendation to “develop and fund specific initiatives to support ‘difficult dialogues’ with civil discourse for all students.” Just as the first Common Ground Strategic Planning proposal – for a CivDiv Course Requirement – affirms that diversity must be treated as a basic requirement for education, the notion of enabling Smith students to engage in civil discourse on difficult topics must be considered an essential element of “preparing women for rewarding lives in a rapidly changing world.”

The **Difficult Dialogues Initiative** offers a two-tier plan for how to achieve this recommendation.

### **PART I: NEW STUDENT OUTREACH**

The new student outreach program targets both first year and incoming transfer students. During the orientation week (in which both constituencies should be on campus) new students would take part in **social justice house dialogues**, co-facilitated by student Residential Life staff and a faculty or staff person. “Social justice dialogues” in the context of the Common Ground vision and principles for diversity would include an awareness of the importance of discussing power and privilege as well as differences.

The aims of the New Student Outreach phase of the initiative include the following:

- First, we hope to begin the important conversations that need to occur in order to build stable house communities. We hope that by enabling the “difficult dialogues” about diversity recommended by the Common Ground report (addressing what that means to each student, what it looks like in the particular house, and how the community can function while incorporating and respecting difference into the collective), every incoming student will have an opportunity to engage with the issues around diversity and be encouraged and prepared for continuing engagement with “civil discourse” on campus.
- Second, we hope to give students, faculty, and staff the possibility of using facilitation skills in a proactive manner on campus. By incorporating people from all areas of campus, we will show new students (and the campus at large) that the college at all levels respects and values difference and diversity.
- Third, the initiative aims to bring faculty and staff in closer connection with the student body. This project will help create a broader concept of who the Smith community includes and will make students more comfortable with engaging in dialogue around difficult issues with the faculty and staff.

- Fourth, we can begin using (in more training-specific ways) the vast network of student leaders that is the Residence Life staff. The students on Res. Life staff go through a rigorous training procedure after they have accepted their position. This project will give them the opportunity to see that training implemented in very concrete ways and give them one of their first opportunities to connect with their new student residents. The training will also make them more comfortable with doing complex programming around diversity, difference, and multiculturalism.

Requirements for New Student Outreach Initiative:

- Training of student Res. Life staff in dialogue facilitation techniques (along with mediation): extended training might be required (perhaps two weeks worth versus one).
- Training in dialogue facilitation techniques made widely available to faculty and staff.
- Communication with Staff Council, the Office of the Provost/Dean of the Faculty around the new student orientation process.
- Shifting of funds from the lecture style diversity talk done in John M. Greene Hall during New Student Orientation, to pay instead for facilitation workshops and possible incentives to support faculty/staff participation in training.

**Ada Comstock Scholars:** It will be necessary to ensure that Ada Comstock Scholars also have access to this orientation style. A similar process can be enacted in housing designated for Adas. Although many of our Adas do not live on campus, they are still a vital part of our Smith Community. Recognizing this, we suggest that the Dean of Adas organize within their orientation a similar event, reserving intimate lounge spaces around campus (to approximate a ‘house-like’ environment) to host similar intimate discussions. Residence Life could request interested student staff members to facilitate the discussion with faculty and staff.

**Transfer Students:** It will be necessary to implement this program during the spring semester so that spring transfer students can have access to the program. Because of the smaller percentages of transfer students at this time an in-house dialogue would be less effective (only one or two people would be at each house), therefore (similar to the Ada program) intimate lounge space could be reserved to have the conversations and student staff help could be solicited from the Residential Life office.

PART II: CONTINUING DIALOGUES

It is important to ensure that there is a continued engagement around “difficult dialogues” for all students, with an emphasis on having civil discourse on campus. We propose then, that **a revitalization of the diversity chair position on House Council** needs to occur, including an emphasis on collaboration with Res. Life staff.

The aims of the Ongoing Dialogues phase of this initiative include the following:

- First, we hope to continue the dialogue beyond the beginning of the school year through deliberate collaborative programming between House Council and Res. Life. A great deal of strong programming is offered during the start of the year for house communities. This initiative aims to help Res. Life and House Council members to maintain their enthusiasm.
- Second, we want to reinvigorate the position of Diversity Rep. (to be renamed), within the House Council structure. Several of the positions have been removed from house constitutions over the past couple of years and we hope that the students today (with the aid of Res. Life and general institutional support) will be able to restore the vitality and relevance of the position.
- Third, we want to give the Diversity Chair of the SGA a greater support network on campus. The Diversity Chair currently has a cabinet which is made up of a select group of students. In revitalizing the Diversity Rep. program we will give the SGA Diversity Chair a greater pool of talent with which to accomplish programming and begin to shape a campus-wide engagement with various issues around difference, diversity, and dialogue.

Requirements for Ongoing Dialogue Initiative:

- *Training for diversity reps:* training might include how to plan events, how to incorporate student interest into programming, collaborating with other leaders on campus, how to publicize events, how to compose a diversity board.
- *Incentives:* given the low participation and enthusiasm regarding the position currently, it would seem that some type of incentive should be established at least initially to draw students into the program.
- *Name change:* many students are put off by the term ‘diversity,’ assuming that it means solely ‘race relations,’ that it’s too big an issue and they don’t have the expertise to address it, or it’s not the issue they want to focus on. Suggested name change: Community Liaison.
- *Structured time to build in collaborations with Res. Life Staff:* invite the liaisons back to campus early (along with HONS and HPs) to do some training and preparation work, or create scheduled meeting times for liaisons to discuss programming with their Res. Life Staff.
- *Contact information:* provide contact information or at least names of House Council and Res. Life Staff in each house to both groups at the end of the year, so that programming and planning can be attempted (if they choose to do so), during the summer.

**Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society’s Challenges*

## **Strategic Direction V: *Prepare Women for Rewarding Lives in a Rapidly Changing World***

### **• STAFF HIRING AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

The Common Ground focus groups affirmed the central role of the staff at the college to the success of the students, particularly in examples of students from underrepresented groups. Recognizing this central role of staff in contributing to student learning, the Common Ground project recommends **the development of specific initiatives to increase the hiring and retention of staff from underrepresented groups across the college, with a commitment of additional resources.**

The Office of Institutional Diversity and Human Resources have been collaborating on a number of plans, indicated below, that will support the Common Ground recommendations, some of which will require the commitment of additional resources and some of which are currently being implemented at no additional cost. Because not all the planning for the possibilities noted below has been finalized, the Common Ground committees would like to affirm our support for a number of initiatives that connect to the spirit of the larger strategic planning process.

Emerging avenues for more successful *recruitment* of staff of color include:

- Close collaboration between the OID and HR in implementing the updates of the selection and hiring process for staff, giving both HR and the OID a more directly engaged role in assisting the process for every search, with the intention of fostering a deeper appreciation of the range of candidates for every search.
- Continuing support for collaboration with Five Colleges in the recruitment process, which currently includes attendance at minority job fairs and interaction with a Five Colleges Coordinator of Recruitment Outreach who is charged with responsibility for recruiting a diverse group of applicants for administrative and staff position openings at each of the five institutions.

Emerging avenues for more successful *retention* of staff of color include:

- Managerial encouragement for participation in a range of professional development opportunities, particularly for staff engaged in outreach to underrepresented groups on campus or in the larger community, in recognition of the fact that supporting access to excellence sometimes extends beyond traditional job descriptions.
- Participation in the Five Colleges “Diversity Day” being planned to enhance staff development with a range of opportunities, including “bystander training” and “multicultural mediation” supporting staff development and recognition around daily matters of diversity.

- Support for new HR initiatives to advance staff career development, including: a website on “job families” and career mobility opportunities at the college, with internal and external options for training to qualify for these opportunities; a Career Day for staff in the spring with workshops on resume preparation and other career development skills; and possible career counseling made available to staff on a regular basis.
- Reaffirmation for managers of the central importance of “diversity” in the staff performance evaluation process, so that staff who routinely engage in diversity outreach that supports student learning can be credited for that work, even if it is not a traditional part of their job descriptions.
- Developing opportunities for staff from all areas and departments at the college to come together for training and conversations that explore critical intersections between excellence and diversity.

**Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society’s Challenges*

Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students’ Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*

## Strategic Direction VI: *Support and Promote Environmental Sustainability*

### • **DISABILITY ACCESS REVIEW OF FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS**

In order to recruit and retain the most diverse and talented pool of students, staff and faculty, among whom are individuals with disabilities, the college must be a welcoming and accessible learning, working, and teaching environment. Strategic planning provides a timely and historic opportunity to evaluate the college's capacity to assure equal access to its facilities and programs. Disability non-discrimination laws fundamentally require the college to assure equal access to its programs, which may or may not require facility modifications. Based on the findings and recommendations of the Common Ground project and the work of the Disability Access Advisory Committee, we offer a joint proposal approved by both committees that the college **develop a specific plan for assuring current compliance with program accessibility requirements under Section 504 and the ADA as well as priorities for facility improvements over time.**

In order to develop a plan for equal access the college should:

- Conduct a disability access review involving an updated accessibility audit of facilities and a program access review process to be completed within a two to three year period, with priority given to those programs and facilities that are essential to support new programs and opportunities created to address the college's eight new strategic directions.
- Develop a plan for disability access and compliance based on the facility and program review under the leadership of the Office of Institutional Diversity and the Office of Disability services with appropriate direction and support from senior staff and involvement of senior management throughout the college.

Specific collaboration with the Director of Operations and Facilities is essential to a successful facilities audit. The Office of Human Resources is another important collaborator with regard to conducting the program review, which may be modeled after previous organizational effectiveness assessments. Program directors and others must be involved in order to understand the relationships between facilities and programs in order to fully assess the level of existing accessibility and to develop a plan with short and long range goals for reasonable changes to facilities over time based on program needs. Outside expertise and consultation should be secured as needed to assure a comprehensive approach that is technically sound as well as organizationally and financially feasible within a reasonable time frame that will allow the results to inform development of initiatives related to all areas of strategic planning.

An anticipatory approach that examines the current level of accessibility will allow the college to identify, prioritize, and plan for needed changes in policies, programs, and facilities and identify and plan for funding necessary to assure equal access. A facility and program review will provide a foundation for understanding the human and financial resources necessary to make Smith capable of supporting the diverse populations it hopes to serve well into the future.

### **Accessibility and Sustainability:**

While sustainability is often framed in environmental terms, it is more accurately about both environmental and social sustainability. To support and promote sustainability we must give consideration and attention to those factors and conditions that support optimal human functioning within a given environment. Accessibility is integral to assuring participation and functioning of people with a wide range of abilities that change over time as people grow and age. Creating an accessible and inclusive community at Smith will require intentional design choices and focused efforts to assure both environmental and social sustainability

Planning for access at the design stage offers the opportunity to build structures and programs from the outset that incorporate and address the needs of a wide range of users. Cost savings are often possible and the need and expense of ongoing accommodations to overcome barriers is avoided. When access is integral to the way people learn, work, and live at Smith everyone can participate and benefit from all that the college has to offer in a more seamless and equitable way.

### **Background**

Discrimination on the basis of disability has historically excluded individuals with disabilities from social, educational, and economic opportunities throughout our society and around the globe. Today laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, are increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to live and work as equal members of society. While it is important to provide needed accommodations and services to known individuals who identify themselves and request assistance, we have a growing population of people with disabling conditions who utilize Smith facilities and programs who are alumnae, visitors and guests. An access review is essential to planning for facility and programmatic changes as well as priorities for resource allocation to assure access to Smith academic and other programs. Equal access is required by disability non-discrimination laws, is in keeping with Smith's values and commitment to diversity, and is essential to achieving the mission of the college.

### **Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*

## Strategic Direction VII: *Open Doors to Women of Promise*

- **STUDENT SCHOLARS COMMUNITY**

Campus feedback to the Common Ground working recommendations emphasized the strong and vital connections between students and faculty, and urged greater support for offering research opportunities with faculty to a range of different students. Both students and faculty shared that lack of strong connections to faculty results in diminished access to research opportunities for students from underrepresented groups. Consequently, students from underrepresented groups, who don't necessarily develop strong connections with faculty within their majors (due to seeming lack of common research interests, backgrounds, difficulty relating, etc), resort to picking up secondary majors where they can find faculty support, although these secondary majors do not necessarily have strong connections to the students' actual academic interests. This problem becomes even more of an issue when students are unable to complete the research that they aspire to (such as an Honors Thesis) because of a lack of support from faculty within their major.

Indeed, institutional evidence suggests that African-American and Latina students at Smith are not writing Honors Theses at the levels we might expect, given the percentage of these students who graduate from Smith. For example, consider the proportions of White, African American, Asian American, and Latina students who wrote an Honors Thesis in 2006. Given this group of students, 88% percent of Honor Theses were written by White students, 10% by Asian American students, 2% by African American students, and 0% by Latina students. By contrast, 76% of graduating seniors were white, 11% were Asian American, 6% were African American, and 8% were Latina. If Honors Theses are any kind of indicator, African American and Latina students do not seem to be taking full advantage of opportunities to conduct independent research at Smith. Consequently, the college needs to address the challenge of equalizing access to research opportunities for our students.

The Common Ground project recommends establishing a student research program that might be titled the **Student Scholars Community**, that would be more accessible to a wide range of students than fellowships already on campus (like the Mellon Mays or Khan Institute which are intentionally selective), and that will offer students greater opportunities to accomplish the research they desire.

The research program could be realized in a number of ways:

- First, it would allow students to pair with both faculty and staff in the five colleges with similar research interest and expertise. We would like to define expertise more broadly to allow students to work with staff members who might or might not have a doctorate in their area of focus. [This recommendation connects to the roundtable discussion regarding the possible establishment of "Scholars of the Practice," who are practitioners with expertise in fields that students would like to explore further.]

- Second, it would provide small stipends to students in order to pursue their research interests. Many students have financial obligations which keep them from being able to do independent research (due to time and/or lack of resources). By providing small stipends (like those in the STRIDE Scholars program or Praxis) students who have an inclination towards research will be more encouraged to pursue those interests.

Requirements for Student Scholars Community Initiative:

- Fundraising to provide small stipends to students.
- Hire or assign a staff member to coordinate the program.
- Provide training/workshop for qualified staff on how to mentor student research .
- Provide informational packets/workshops for students (and first-year advisors) on how to develop special studies, independent research projects, and/or honors theses.

**Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction I: *Strengthen Essential Student Capacities*

Strategic Direction II: *Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry, and Discovery*

## **Strategic Direction VIII: *Extend Smith's Impact on the World***

- **ALUMNAE CONFERENCE ON RACE AND COMMUNITY**

Although the first stage of the Common Ground project focused on the current campus community, with focus groups for students, faculty, and staff at the college, the Common Ground Alumnae Committee affirmed from the start their commitment to encouraging the college to successfully engage in continuing communication with alumnae from underrepresented groups, both to foster connections with current students and to more effectively benefit from as well as contribute to alumnae experiences out in the world.

In the process of discussing the strategic planning proposals emerging from the Common Ground project, the Alumnae Committee recommended that the college consider **developing an Alumnae Conference on Race and Community**, along the lines of such relevant conferences at other institutions as Princeton University's Kaleidoscope Conference.

The plan for the conference might include:

- Articulating an opportunity for all Smith alumnae to explore issues related to diversity and community and to examine the ways in which an expanded commitment to diversity allows Smith to achieve more fully its highest aspirations for teaching, research, and service to others.
- Bringing together alumnae, faculty, students, senior administrators, and trustees to reflect on some of the changes that have occurred at Smith over recent decades; to identify today's challenges and opportunities; and to look ahead.

Topics that might be covered by the conference:

- The Importance of Diversity to the Strategic Planning Process at Smith
- Diversity in Student Learning: Rethinking the Curriculum
- Diversity in Admissions: Who Do We Want to Be?
- Diversity in Recruitment and Retention of Faculty and Staff: New Initiatives
- Understanding Campus Climate Themes from Common Ground: Community in Diversity
- Challenges for Higher Education: Extending Smith's Impact on the World

### **Also pertinent:**

Strategic Direction III: *Encourage Purposeful Engagement with Society's Challenges*

Strategic Direction IV: *Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*

Strategic Direction V: *Prepare Women for Lives in a Rapidly Changing World*

## **Addendum B: *Common Ground Vision, Principles and Goals (10-06)***

### **Vision**

*As a central element of its commitment to excellence, Smith College seeks to provide an environment that fosters the recruitment and success of a diverse student, faculty, and staff community.*

### **Diversity Principles**

- **Power and privilege influence access to opportunities and resources, according to distinctions among people based on race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and disability.**
- **Within any given community, people will have multiple and complex social identities that both connect them to and differentiate them from others.**
- **Valuing diversity requires not simply an acknowledgement of differences, but a commitment to overcoming inequities and fostering a hospitable and respectful community.**

### **Diversity Goals**

**Diversity initiatives at the college have three goals:**

- 1) to enable all to recognize and learn about the varied traditions, backgrounds, and capacities that members of the community bring to the college, and to recognize that each member has something to teach and something to learn;**
- 2) to foster critical thought about equality, inequality, power and privilege in society;**
- 3) and, finally, to reduce (as much as is possible) inequalities in the college community that are based on such differences.**

**Achievement of these goals must be a key priority in any academic environment that aspires to support intellectual exploration, innovative research, and effective problem-solving. Creating a community that is accepting and respectful of all its members is not, then, simply one of our goals; rather, the vision of such a community must be recognized as central to every aspect of each of the strategic priorities for the college, from curriculum to co-curriculum, associated with providing an excellent education.**

**The Common Ground Strategic Planning Proposals that follow seek to realize these goals.**

## **Addendum C: Strategic Planning Intersections (10-06)**

**The original Common Ground Strategic Planning Proposals specified existing intersections with the following Strategic Initiatives submitted by other groups and individuals, as well as the support of other groups for the Common Ground initiatives.**

### **JOINT INITIATIVE**

- **Disability Access Review of Facilities and Programs [*with Disability Access Advisory Committee*]**

### **COMMON GROUND SUPPORT FOR OTHER INITIATIVES:**

- **Colleague Circles Initiative [*Faculty Microclimate Change Project*]**
- **Picker Fellowships for Curricular Development [*Faculty Microclimate Change Project*]**
- **Cohort Support for Mendenhall and Mellon Fellows [*Faculty Microclimate Change Project*]**
- **Regional Symposia for Women of Promise [*Faculty Microclimate Change Project*]**
- **Emerging Scholars Initiative [*Faculty Council*]**
- **Global Visual Culture Initiative [*Dept of Art and Museum of Art*]**

### **OTHER SUPPORT FOR COMMON GROUND INITIATIVES:**

- ***Faculty Council* and *SGA* support for Common Ground Faculty Hiring and Retention Initiative**
- ***Faculty Council* and *SGA* support for Common Ground “Cutting Edge” Faculty Reading Groups and Lecture Series**
- ***CAP* and *SGA* support for Common Ground “Ways of Learning” Workshop proposal**
- ***SGA* support for Common Ground Student Scholars Community proposal**
- ***Residence Life* and *SGA* support for Common Ground Difficult Dialogues Initiative**