

SMITH  
2035





## SECTION 1

# Smith 2035 Vision

### WHAT IS VISIONING?

The mission of Smith College is to educate women of promise for lives of distinction and purpose. A college of and for the world, Smith links the power of the liberal arts to excellence in research and scholarship, thereby developing engaged global citizens and leaders to address society's challenges.

We have undertaken a visioning process, called Smith 2035, with our mission top of mind. This process has involved reflection and exploration of possible pathways forward by all members of the community—faculty, staff, students, and trustees. We asked ourselves questions such as: How will the education we offer our students evolve going forward? What kind of institution, place, and community do we want to be? What should most define and differentiate us? What difference will Smith make? How will Smith respond to the world's problems? How will Smith be a worthy steward of the public's trust? At the heart of these questions is Smith's place in the world as a preeminent women's college.

Vision blends imagination, aspirations, and hopes; it is less time-bound and more speculative than strategy. Vision seeks to establish overall institutional direction and map a path forward within a flexible framework of understanding and preparing for the probable future. So it is that Smith 2035 is not a strategic plan; it envisions the features of what may be the college's destination, but does not specify how to get there. Unlike the action steps, or tactics, that translate the goals of a strategic plan into agendas and assignments, vision does not tell us what to do differently tomorrow.

Instead, vision identifies what we should be thinking about, paying attention to, and opening our minds and hearts to consider as we look forward, toward the horizon. Smith 2035 forms a framework for pondering how the college's future will unfold—or, rather, how Smith will unfold its future—in relation to trends in society, culture, and higher education, and to the known and emerging challenges facing our unstable world.

None of that means that vision is not practical, or timely, or pertinent to today. On the contrary, renewing the college's identity, its highest-order purpose, and its deepest commitments is essential at every moment. It is in the service of that ongoing and indispensable spirit of renewal that Smith 2035 came to be.

## PROCESS FOR SMITH 2035

Smith's Committee on Mission and Priorities launched Smith 2035 as a purposeful strategic visioning process that has engaged governance groups responsible for ensuring Smith's long-term strength and competitiveness. The conceptual target of 2035 aligns conversations around a foreseeable—but not immediate—focal point, so as to foster creative, generative, cross-institutional thinking.

The college has articulated three primary intentions for this work that reflect both the value of imagining Smith's future state in relation to internal and external trends, forces, and factors, and the influence of certain more immediate contingencies.

- Educate ourselves collectively about the current social, cultural, demographic, and economic trends shaping higher education.
- Identify opportunity areas critical to strengthening Smith's future academic, financial, and reputational position.
- Articulate guiding principles and a shared framework for future planning and actions.

## UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

In the course of discussions of this document, three questions about Smith's future emerged that will require further community engagement and discussion, given that they speak to mission and strategy.

The mission of Smith College remains unfinished, given ongoing gender discrimination in schools and workplaces, violence against women, and threats to reproductive rights. Many women chose to study at Smith because of our commitment to addressing structural inequalities of all kinds. At the same time, gender is no longer considered a binary construct, and the college seeks to be inclusive within its mission as a women's college by embracing and supporting trans and non-binary students. Going forward, how do we productively engage with the issues inherent within this tension?

The college was an early presence in study abroad with its foundational programs in Paris, Geneva, Hamburg, and Florence. Currently, many students and faculty are more interested in short-term immersive international study rather than semester- or year-long experiences, and in locales outside western Europe. What is the role

of these legacy programs as well as other study abroad programs? How might the college explore and fund new and innovative research and study-away options across the globe? How might we partner with other higher education institutions here and abroad?

Technological innovations will drive the curriculum and co-curriculum in 2035. At Smith, courses and non-degree/executive education programs have adopted a robust set of technology-enabled pedagogical practices that have enhanced learning across in-person, hybrid, and non-credit programs. Going forward, to what degree does Smith see a role for online learning in the residential college experience we offer our students? How do we keep pace with technological innovations so that we remain relevant and competitive in the opportunities we provide students on campus and globally?

## SECTION 2

# Higher Education Context

Higher learning, which is the heart of the work of institutions of higher education, grows in value and criticality in direct proportion to the expanding array of needs and challenges that threaten the planet, reinforce inequities, and variously unite or divide peoples and societies. What Smith does inspires change for a better world: More knowledge, greater understanding, and advanced skills can elevate humanity and bring prosperity and wellbeing.



## THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Higher education, though, is fragile and expensive. Thought, scholarship, research, and teaching, at their best, demand time, flourish when customized, and resist mechanization. People—faculty and staff—are a college’s highest costs and its most valuable assets. The pressing need for equitable access to higher learning (and the people who provide it) has required that private colleges and universities operate with an increasingly unsustainable business model tied to financial aid and discounted tuition. The quickly arriving “demographic cliff” (declining numbers of high school graduates ready to come to college, particularly in the Northeast), aggravated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (especially, colleges enrolling fewer first generation, lower income, and racially minoritized students), decreasing public confidence in higher education, and hard economic realities for many families mean that there will not be as many traditional age students available in the years leading up to 2035. A smaller proportion of U.S. families will be able to pay the full costs of a private liberal arts education. Differentiation, distinction, diversity, and strong career outcomes will therefore rise in priority for every college. The value proposition of a private liberal arts education will be questioned and renegotiated in relation to costs, post-college and career outcomes, and the scope of benefits of long-term engagement.

## SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL FORCES

At the same time, social, cultural, and political forces are buffeting institutions of all types. Areas of nearly universal concern in higher education are equity, diversity, and inclusion; climate change; the future and sustainability of democracy; and the politics, economics, and potential of globalization. Internally, colleges and universities are working to respond realistically but equitably to rising expectations of faculty and staff for greater employment flexibility—remote work,

variations in work hours and conditions, and more support for family responsibilities. Competition in hiring and retaining faculty and staff has become increasingly challenging. Expectations for responsiveness to students—meeting, educating, and supporting them “where they are” (regarding the academic calendar, personal and academic support services, program availability, learning while working, and combinations of in-person and virtual program delivery) are driving innovations in policy and practice while stretching many operational functions. The priority of mental health and wellbeing—especially, but not only, for students—draws attention to both the patterns and boundaries of services and the place of health and wellness in campus culture.

Implicit and explicit bias based on individual differences continue to be sources of painful strain, tension, protest, and violence, including on college and university campuses. Political and social discourse may continue to be abrasive, negative, and divisive; as a result, students may not easily see good examples of respectful disagreement and constructive debate.

## FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Looking toward 2035 highlights another pressing reality for higher education: the challenge of preparing not only for the problems we can predict or imagine, but also for the completely unexpected. How do we future-proof Smith? Threats to enrollment, changes in the nature of work, pandemics, climate change, social injustice, and the sustainability of democracy itself constitute a formidable script for the near-term future, but a more fundamental question—“What have we not thought about or accounted for?”—will always, and necessarily, intrude on our planning.

## SECTION 3

# The Smith Community

Smith is a preeminent women’s college, an institution of higher learning, a center of research and scholarship, and an inspirational campus with distinctive structures and inviting spaces—but, more than any of those alone or taken together, Smith is a community whose people, in all their identities, bring its promise and potential to life—and where all community members’ voices matter in determining its future.

The Smith communities of today and tomorrow are the inheritors and stewards of all that the college is, means, and will be; everyone—students, staff, faculty, alums—contributes to and shares in the elevation of our work and the continuous reshaping of our culture.

## STUDENTS

Going forward, we expect that the student body will be more diverse, given our admission recruiting plans. Smith will work to equalize the experience of all students—with respect to their varying identities—by customizing the components, methods, sequences, and timelines of their learning. Students will value the freedom to speak and be heard across their differences, while being and sharing their most authentic selves. They will seek to thrive in a community built on trust and mutual respect that promotes the health, mental health, and wellbeing of all of its members. Smith’s students will understand their enrollment as only the first element of a lifelong relationship with the college community.



## FACULTY AND STAFF

Faculty and staff who teach and mentor students will come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. Smith will continue to renew the faculty with exceptional teacher-scholars whose work reflects foundational knowledge, emerging fields, and intersecting disciplines. Smith will continue to renew the staff with dedicated and creative people whose work reflects innovative programming across units. The intentional development of the talent and skills of faculty and staff will be a priority for the college.

## ALUMS

Smith's alums link the college's past, present, and future. Strengthening and expanding the networks among them will benefit the alums themselves, who count on one another and find great fulfillment in their continuing engagement with the college and its community; students, whose lives and learning on and off campus unfold more holistically through their involvement with the stories, influence, and assistance of alums; and the college at large, which benefits in innumerable ways from the ideas, encouragement, and support that flow from alums. The strong network of alums will serve as a powerful resource for students as early as their first year, and the close bond between Smith and its alums will be sustained, highly valued, and lifelong.

## SECTION 4

# Themes

Three overarching themes emerged from our discussions of the future: teaching, learning and scholarship; an inclusive campus; and the campus and operations. Like all categories, these three have fuzzy boundaries; that is, they are connected. As we build the next strategic plan, it will be imperative to discuss the interconnections and bridges across these themes.

### THEME 1:

#### TEACHING, LEARNING, AND SCHOLARSHIP

Smith will retain a thriving residential liberal arts model, embracing emerging disciplines, methods, and modes of inquiry; inclusive pedagogy; and interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary teaching and scholarship conducted by a largely tenured and tenure-track faculty. Smith will support faculty scholarship and research to develop new knowledge in academic fields, which will renew and invigorate the classroom experience for students. The stability and continuity provided by tenure are critical to the student and alum experience, to faculty members' lives and careers, and to the principle of academic freedom.

The humanities, social sciences, and sciences will each remain foundational elements of Smith's liberal arts education regardless of shifting enrollment patterns. At the same time, it is likely that more students over time will want to design cross-disciplinary majors. Faculty will continue to engage deeply with students—in their courses, in honors and independent projects, and through programs such as Achieving Excellence in Mathematics, Engineering and Sciences (AEMES), Student Research in Departments (STRIDE), Zollman Scholarships, and Summer Research Fellowship (SURF). Smith's education will prepare students to solve complex problems that demand integrated, interdisciplinary knowledge.



Students will learn always and everywhere, in and out of the classroom, on and off campus, in and out of residences, and in-person or remotely. Learning will present opportunities for both rigor and joy. Smith will offer a dynamic curriculum that responds to shifting needs and priorities. Future students will blur the boundaries between their learning spaces and will seek to be educated in multiple arenas—classrooms, the co-curriculum, diverse domestic experiences in communities, and global learning experiences. Students will have the opportunity to integrate on- and off-campus learning in individualized ways; they may not routinely spend consecutive semesters in housing, and may choose study abroad, study away, internships, work experiences, or other opportunities at different points in their educational journey. Cultivating practices of respectful disagreement and peaceful strategies of contention (debate, coalition-building, diplomacy) will be a part of our mission.

Smith will design and continuously improve a comprehensive, holistic team model of student advising that unites the curriculum and the co-curriculum. To prepare our students for work and life, their team will include liberal arts advisers, the class deans, major advisers, career counselors, and

senior staff in our centers. The college will establish pathways that facilitate students' access to off-campus projects, internships, and global learning, including through a wide range of networks and partnerships with alums and others. Support for mental health and wellness will be integral, with a variety of delivery models, methods, and programs that connect with students as whole people.

Through a combination of academic, administrative, and financial creativity, Smith will develop ways to infuse greater flexibility, adaptability, and customization in students' educational experience, prioritizing academic integrity while valuing differing schedules, sequences, locations, and methods of learning. Students come to Smith from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences—some stressful, challenging, and even traumatic—and it is important for Smith to meet students “where they are” with a responsive openness to individualized academic sequences and timelines; more flexible patterns of on- and off-campus living and learning; and options for residential, non-residential, and virtual engagement with the college and its academic and co-curricular programs.

## THEME 2:

### AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

The Smith community—students, staff, and faculty—are diverse with respect to race, color, class, generation in college, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and ability. We aspire to be more diverse, because we believe diversity promotes learning and understanding. Toward this end, Smith will provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for learning, working, and living.

To advance our work on diversity, equity, and inclusion, Smith will enhance enrollment goals and plans, faculty and staff hiring and retention practices, curricular priorities, and college-wide institutional policies and procedures. Every student will learn about difference, prejudice, bias, and the multiple consequences and costs of inequities through both academic and co-curricular experiences. Smith will continue to make progress toward racial justice, guided by active,

specific, and accountable planning and goals at every level of work and throughout the college. Importantly, Smith will foster meaningful and sustained engagement with the complexities of Smith's own history and the legacies of those whose presence have shaped Smith, including Indigenous peoples who preceded the college.

Smith's campus and online environments will provide venues for lively discourse in which students will learn to participate in productive discussion, difficult dialogue, and constructive debate. Students will explore and share a broad spectrum of ideas, hear unfamiliar voices, and engage with new and divergent perspectives; Smith's learning community, informed by vigorous faculty scholarship, will prepare them to collaborate, challenge, dissent, and find common ground. Similarly, Smith will foster social and intellectual interaction and encounters among diverse groups of students, staff, faculty, and alumni.





Smith's distinctive assets and resources will provide the energy, processes, and structure needed for every student to prepare for a meaningful life.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Climate change, climate justice, and environmental sustainability will be core principles guiding the college's overall direction, strategy, and priorities. By 2035, Smith will have achieved net-zero carbon emissions via our geothermal heating and cooling project. Going forward, we will embrace regenerative approaches to the use of goods and services. Smith will provide sustainably-sourced and efficient dining options that foster a strong sense of community and meet the needs of a diverse student body.

## EXPANSION OF THE EDUCATIONAL MODEL

Smith's living campus will be an interactive and dynamic teaching and learning space. The year-round use of campus will at once enable greater flexibility in academic

programs and offer revenue-building opportunities by expanding the educational model to include more adult learners in lifelong learning, executive education programs, and in-person, on-campus opportunities in the summer—all of them built on the foundation of the liberal arts.

## FINANCIAL MODEL

Smith will continuously renew its financial model to balance (1) costs of attending Smith for students and families, (2) expenditures to support the success of all students, (3) the need for pedagogical and academic innovation, and (4) competitive compensation for faculty and staff. Financial plans will account for a student population that moves among learning experiences more frequently, blending on- and off-campus learning experiences. In service of these goals, it will be important to articu-

late the value of a Smith education and the unique capacities students will develop at Smith.

The college will achieve exceptional results in strengthening the endowment and will advance fundraising to increase financial aid and funding to launch and support innovative academic programs, to equalize the student experience, to develop new and renovate older facilities, and to support cutting-edge faculty research.

## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Commitments to operational excellence will enable Smith to make the highest and best use of resources through improving finance and administrative functions, implementing comprehensive workforce plans, controlling costs, and taking steps to increase efficiency and reduce redundancy. Smith will continue to align faculty and teaching resources with curricular needs, students' interests, and enrollment demands, and will adjust staffing levels in response to operational needs

throughout the college. The college will work with faculty and staff to develop a portfolio of attractive and rewarding professional development goals and experiences.

## TECHNOLOGY

Students, faculty, and staff will have access to ubiquitous, user-friendly technology with the goals of supporting innovative teaching, creative scholarship across the disciplines, research, data-informed decision making, and simplified work processes.

## SPACES

Smith will create a variety of types, sizes, and features of spaces that will support intended elements of the college's culture and student experience—gathering, convening, collaborating, experimenting, teaching, creating, and making. Smith will continue to develop and regularly update welcoming, accessible, contemporary, technology-enhanced teaching spaces, including laboratories and practice and performance spaces.

# Final Thoughts

We are grateful to the students, staff, faculty, and trustees who contributed to the ideas described in Smith 2035.

By necessity, this is a consensus document, which reflects ideas that were embraced by many. At the same time, we outline tensions that exist in three important areas going forward: the future of women's colleges, opportunities for global study, and ways to incorporate online learning in a liberal arts college environment. It is our hope that ongoing discussions of these topics as well as consideration of this vision document will provide a foundation for thinking about the next strategic plan for the college. Further, we hope that the ideas presented here will generate a sense of optimism and excitement for what Smith College could be in 2035 and beyond. As the college moves forward with strategic planning, it will be critical for us to consider our risk appetite—that is, the amount of risk we are willing to take to achieve our future aspirations.



# Engagement Timeline

## 2021

### SEPTEMBER 7

Launch of Smith 2035 initiative with Committee on Mission and Priorities (CMP)

### SEPTEMBER 14

The President's Cabinet conducted a half-day discussion of Smith 2035 during a retreat

### SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER

Introductions and discussions of Smith 2035 with faculty, senior staff, and trustees

### NOVEMBER

Updates on Smith 2035 for CMP, CAP (Committee on Academic Priorities) and faculty

## 2022

### FEBRUARY

Review of drafts with CMP; trustees engaged in a plenary conversation about the initiative

### MARCH

Discussion of Smith 2035 in all-staff meeting

### APRIL – MAY

Students, staff and faculty had the opportunity to offer feedback on Smith 2035 during several working group meetings, playback poster board sessions, and faculty lunches

### SEPTEMBER

Discussions with CMP and with faculty over two lunch meetings

### DECEMBER

Received feedback from trustee focus group

## 2023

### FEBRUARY

Discussions with CMP, CAP and Board of Trustees



This document reflects the ideas, comments, and recommendations gleaned from all the discussions completed to date.

# Participant List

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