Sterling College

Institutional Self-Study

REPORT

New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

February 2016

INTRODUCTION

Sterling College, founded in 1958, is undertaking a reaccreditation process at an auspicious moment in its history. As we anticipate our 60th year celebration in 2018, it is clear that the College's mission of environmental stewardship education has never been more relevant to the challenges facing humanity, the climate, and the natural world than it is today.

In the decade that has elapsed since Sterling completed its last comprehensive self-study, the College not only weathered the most significant global economic downturn since the Great Depression, it expanded enrollment and become more selective, added new areas of study and faculty, improved its physical plant, exponentially grew philanthropic support and, for the first time since in its history as a college, has welcomed a period of stability in presidential and board leadership.

With the arrival of President Derr, Sterling has embarked upon a strategic path to become the leading voice in higher education for environmental stewardship. In 2013, a comprehensive and inclusive strategic planning process was completed with the stated aim that Sterling College shall continue to fulfill its valuable mission and develop the financial strength necessary to meet the goals of an ambitious and thriving institution.

<u>Self-Study Process</u>

Sterling College designed and implemented a thorough three-year comprehensive process of self-study in preparation for the April 2016 site visit from the Commission of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). In keeping with the College's commitment to community governance, this self-study and its supporting documentation were created through a collaborative process and represents an accurate reflection of Sterling College today.

Maintaining high academic standards requires continuous self-evaluation as well as input from outside the institution. Sterling's preparation for the reaccreditation process included professional development through NEASC workshops for faculty who would fulfill leadership roles in preparing the self-study. The College began to formally prepare for the site visit and reaccreditation in the autumn of 2014 by appointing the NEASC Reaccreditation Steering Committee. Chaired by Dr. Pavel Cenkl, Associate Dean of Academics, the members of the steering committee included: Deborah Clark, Director of Finance; Dr. Carol Dickson, Dean of Academics; Favor Ellis, Dean of Community; Ezra Fradkin '16, student; Alice Haskins '17, student; Dr. Laura Spence, Faculty; and John Zaber '85, Faculty.

Members of the steering committee carefully studied the Standards for Reaccreditation and examined materials from the previous review in 2006 and the 2011 fifth-year interim report to ensure accuracy and thoroughness in assessing Sterling's progress in addressing

concerns raised by CIHE in previous reviews. The completion of the E-series, S-series and the Data First forms, providing much of the information from institutional survey data and collecting required information from other departments, was a collaborative effort coordinated by Christian Feuerstein, Director of Communication.

Seven committees organized around the eleven standards, with three to six members each, were responsible for writing the initial drafts of the self-study. Approximately 30 faculty, staff, and students contributed directly to the self-study. A single committee worked on Standards One through Three, another had responsibility for Standards Seven and Eight, and a third for Standards Ten and Eleven. The remaining committees focused on one standard each.

Given the small size of the community at Sterling, it was important that the chair familiarize the College's governance bodies and stakeholders with the significance of the reaccreditation process and to prepare them for participation. Throughout the winter and spring of 2015, Dr. Cenkl met with the Academic, Work, and Community Councils to discuss the self-study, as well as attending quarterly meetings of the Board of Trustees. Because of these efforts, and because overlap between steering committee membership and the governance structures of the college is substantial, the Sterling College community has been well and regularly informed about the reaccreditation process.

By spring 2015, all seven committees were meeting regularly and reviewing data and conducting interviews in preparation for the first draft of the self-study for each standard. The creation of a virtual workroom in Google Drive facilitated timely sharing of materials and collaboration on documents outside of physical meetings. Drafts were submitted and reviewed by the chair and steering committee members throughout the summer and early fall of 2015. Before completion, the self-study underwent several rounds of reading and revision, with the goal of creating a document that fully reflected the state of the college in 2016. This draft review included a subset of trustees who are familiar with reaccreditation reading the draft and making recommendations to the steering committee chair in early December.

After second drafts were reviewed by the steering committee, a revised draft was submitted to Dr. Carol Anderson, Vice President of the Commission, prior to her visit to Sterling's campus on October 23, 2015. During her visit she met with the steering committee and President Derr. Dr. Anderson's valuable comments were incorporated into the report and further revisions were made and the final draft was reviewed, in its entirety, by President Derr in December 2015.

Jonathan Lash, President of Hampshire College and chair of Sterling's Visiting Team, visited Sterling and met with President Derr and members of the steering committee on October 28, 2015. At his request, in early February 2016, for his convenience, President Lash was also provided with the final draft of the self-study narrative without the accompanying data forms. On February 18, 2016, Sterling College was informed by the

Commission that President Lash was unable to chair the visiting team and that a new chair would be identified forthwith.

Finally, Christian Feuerstein, Director of Communication, amassed materials for the visiting team and posted the self-study for public comment on February 25, 2016.

Our aspirations for Sterling College are a reflection of our commitment to its mission and the important civic role we feel the college must play at this moment in human history. This self-study and the eventual report of the visiting team will serve Sterling College well at we continually evaluate the effectiveness of our academic program and provide us with valuable insights as we chart our ambitious course forward.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

This decennial review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) comes at a moment of growing institutional confidence and promise at Sterling College. In the ten years that have elapsed since our last self-study, the College has remained steadfast in its commitment to its mission of environmental stewardship education and its focus on providing an exceptional education for its students. Sterling is a young institution, while it was founded in 1958; it is only seventeen years since the first class graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. This self-study is just the second self-study and ten-year review in its brief history as a four-year college.

Sterling has benefitted from stable leadership and strong board support over the course of the past decade since its last self-study. It weathered a difficult period for higher education with the economic recession that began in 2008, a time when institutions with much greater resources struggled mightily. Its existence on the landscape of American higher education is both remarkable, with its small enrollment and modest financial resources, and laudable, with an educational mission of critical importance to humanity and the natural world.

The pace of growth and change has quickened in the past three academic years. Data supporting this assertion will be found in abundance throughout the self-study, but it must also be noted that recent accomplishments have been achievable because of the hard work of many over a much longer period of time, of all those who made a commitment to seeking improved means of meeting Sterling's mission and purpose. We have made measurable—and in some areas, remarkable—progress on areas of concern identified by NEASC ten years ago, and yet we are aware that vigilance is necessary to ensure that our progress continues.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, Sterling College completed a strategic planning process entitled: *Nourish the Roots*, which later underpinned our comprehensive fundraising campaign of the same name. The implication of the name is plain: Sterling has taken on a strategic plan and fundraising effort to strengthen the long-term health of the College. All stakeholders participated in the development of this strategic plan and establishing the priorities of the fundraising efforts, including trustees, faculty, staff, and students. Inspired by this process, the College's recently adopted community governance structures have created more inclusive short and long term planning and evaluation efforts. Both the planning process and the plans themselves are evidence of an increasingly confident and mature institution.

The *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* guides the decisions and priorities of the Board of Trustees and President. The desire for the strategic plan, on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the community, was a key component in defining the presidential search that selected President Derr. The planning process was undertaken in his first year at Sterling and, because a long period of time had elapsed since prior planning efforts, *Nourish the*

Roots necessarily captures a broader set of goals, objectives, and accompanying implementation steps than might otherwise be the case, each with an assigned timeline.

The 2011 NEASC five-year report suggested that Sterling needed to improve its financial stability. While Sterling is still faced with the full range of challenges shared by higher education, and small colleges in particular, it has made significant strides toward increased financial stability. We note with pride that Sterling's net assets have grown by 91% since 2010, from $2 million to nearly $4 million; this recent growth is a result of the largest comprehensive fundraising campaign in its history. As of February 18, 2016, *The Nourish the Roots Comprehensive Campaign* has raised $5,422,000 for operations, capital improvements, and endowment. College leadership and the Board of Trustees are confident that Sterling will complete its $9 million goal, the largest in the College's history, by 2018 as planned.

Because of the success of its fundraising efforts, Sterling has reduced its dependence on tuition revenue, but recognizes that the key element to the institution's long-term financial health is growth in the student body and management of the institutional financial aid discount rate. In the autumn of 2012, Sterling's FTE enrollment had fallen below 100 for the second consecutive year. At that time the College undertook a restructuring of the admission and recruitment effort with greater emphasis on enrollment management and institutional marketing. Between fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2016, enrollment grew by a further 6.5%, and has been greater than 110 FTE for the last three fiscal years. Taken in context of the recruitment landscape among our cohort colleges, enrollment growth at Sterling is particularly notable, as is the improvement of the freshman acceptance rate from 91% to 80% in the same period. The College's strategic plan calls for enrollment growth to 120 FTE by 2018. Also contributing to enrollment growth is a recently adopted Orientation & Engagement plan and the effort of the Enrollment Council, both of which have contributed to a precipitous drop in attrition.

The comprehensive cost to attend Sterling is approximately 20% less than the mean average of New England private colleges and universities, based on data from the College Board. Accordingly, the College's institutional financial aid discount rate has been and remains lower than our peer cohort. In 2013, the Board of Trustees voted, at the recommendation of President Derr, to strategically increase the institutional discount rate by 10% in order to foster enrollment growth. Our current financial model projects that we can continue to sustain approximately a 48.5% discount rate. However, Sterling experiences greater vulnerability than its larger peers with regard to the small scale of its operations. In particular, the decisions of a small number of students can greatly impact our tuition revenue and discount rate projections. In this regard, Sterling has needed to rely more heavily on fundraising and has recently placed increased resources toward developing new revenue streams from its non-credit bearing continuing education programs, including the launch of the School of the New American Farmstead.

During the past three years, Sterling's operational revenue has grown faster than operational expenses and the College has also used its assets strategically, while managing debt service and improving its capital infrastructure. Contributing to our greater financial stability is a more thorough and inclusive budget development process. Sterling has engaged faculty and staff in decision-making about operational budget priorities and has, as a result, an increasingly sophisticated understanding of spending. Among our priorities, and an area of significant accomplishment, is the continued trend of increases in salaries in the past four fiscal years.

Sterling has made meaningful improvements to the academic program of study in recent years. The growth in the number of full-time faculty, and conversion of several "visiting" positions to appointments, has made it possible for the faculty and the Dean of Academics to expand offerings, such as adding the new Sustainable Food Systems major, and also to create instructional teams of sufficient number to inspire collaboration. In fiscal year 2013, Sterling had 10 full-time faculty members, two of whom were in visiting appointments. This autumn, for fiscal year 2016, the College had 13 full-time faculty. There are presently two full-time searches under way which is planned to bring the total full-time faculty to 15 by fiscal year 2017, a 50% increase in four years. This growth in the number of faculty is informed by the Commission's concern, expressed in 2011, regarding faculty workload. To that end, the President also initiated a yearlong review and evaluation of faculty workload to be completed in May 2016, which will include comparison with our institutional cohort.

Under the leadership of President Wootton, Sterling embarked upon a model of year round enrollment and created pathways for students to complete a degree in three years. Changes to the Pell Grant that eliminated its availability for summer enrollment largely made this plan untenable for Sterling College to implement. Sterling has addressed the Commission's concerns regarding the sustainability of our the summer program by adopting a new model of enrollment that emphasizes agriculture and food systems, internships, and global field studies, as well as a new non-credit based continuing education program that is planned to be a mission-related source of additional operational revenue named The School of the New American Farmstead.

The student body has become more diverse over the course of the past three years in which enrollment has been growing. Approximately 60% of Sterling's students are eligible for Pell Grants. As a federally recognized Work College, it is not surprising that Sterling is attractive to students and families with higher demonstrated need than some of our peer colleges. Providing access to a Sterling education is among our highest priorities given our abiding commitment to our mission of environmental stewardship and the valuable contributions and educational outcomes of our alumni. It is important to note, that despite a single year spike in our institutional default rate, the mean rate of ten years has been 4%. This is only one indication among many, including our own evaluation of outcomes through alumni surveys, of the value of a Sterling education to its graduates.

Among the significant challenges Sterling College faces is the condition of its physical plant. The College was unable, until recently, to keep up with deferred maintenance and has only recently adopted a campus master plan with support from a qualified architect and planner. In a short period of time, over the past five years and with the launch of the *Nourish the Roots Campaign*, the College has completed several major renovations and constructed its first new facilities in over a generation. The College was able to make a major investment in the sustainable agriculture facilities in the newly named Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems with donor support, including the addition of the Alfond Draft Horse Barn. Buildings near campus have also been both purchased and rented to improve the residential and academic experience of our students. Improvements have been made to existing residence halls and academic spaces, but further progress is necessary as part of the current and future campaigns.

In 2014, Sterling made significant progress with its information technology infrastructure with the addition of a new fiber optic network for the campus and at the same time upgraded all faculty and staff with new desktops and laptops. The College also invested in a new campus wide student information system, the first such system at Sterling to assist in staff and faculty workload and record accuracy. In 2015, Sterling also received a gift that will allow it to purchase new servers.

The process of preparing this self-study has had a transformational impact on its authors and the many stakeholders who have participated in its drafting impression of the "state of college." In its brief history as a four-year college, over the past ten years, and most pointedly over the last three, Sterling College has made substantial progress as an institution in fulfilling its educational mission. Its relative youth as an institution and its scale give it both the will and the capacity to be nimble and ready to adapt to a changing educational landscape, but at its core it is an educational community with absolute clarity in its purposes and its belief in the importance of its mission in the 21st century.

STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES

Motto

Working Hands. Working Minds.

Mission Statement

Sterling College combines structured academic study with experiential challenges and plain hard work to build responsible problem solvers who become stewards of the environment as they pursue productive lives (as reaffirmed by the Faculty and the Board of Trustees, May 2013).

Vision Statement

Sterling is a small college that speaks with a big voice. Consistent with its historic values, the College has embarked upon a strategic path to become a global leader in the promotion of a unique educational model that prepares students to become environmental stewards.

Sterling embraces its rural location as one of its defining characteristics and strives to foster a community in which people of all backgrounds and identities feel at home, where differences are embraced and individuals take responsibility for furthering the dignity of all (as adopted by the Faculty and the Board of Trustees, May 2013).

Description

Founded in 1958 in Craftsbury Common, Vermont, Sterling College is a baccalaureate degree-granting, non-sectarian, co-educational, residential institution of higher learning. Sterling is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, the Association of Experiential Education, and is one of only seven federally recognized Work Colleges.

While Sterling has substantially evolved from its inception as a boys' boarding school to become an undergraduate college, it continues a six decade tradition of experiential education and focus on the natural world inspired by the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound. In the 1970s, Sterling College was among the earliest U.S. colleges to offer an interdisciplinary emphasis on sustainability, and carried this focus through its development from semester program to two-year A.A. program to the current four-year B.A. program. Building on this foundation, the College's program has both expanded and added depth through majors in Ecology, Environmental Humanities, Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Food Systems, Outdoor Education, as well as individually designed majors.

The mission of Sterling College is linked to the critical environmental challenges, such as climate change and food security, facing humanity in the 21st century. Our vision of the College's future is detailed in the goals, objectives, and implementation of the five-year

Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan (NTR), adopted by Faculty Meeting and the Board of Trustees in May 2013. This plan strengthens the capacity of Sterling College to prepare its graduates to commit themselves to become environmental stewards. [Workroom Docs: Nourish The Roots Strategic Plan]

Though articulated anew, our vision of the future is consistent with our legacy. For decades Sterling has looked at undergraduate education through the lens of environmental stewardship:

> *At the core of all Sterling programs is the concern for the relationship between man [sic] and his [sic] environment. No more critical issue faces society today and it has become very clear that neither the narrow technician nor the uninformed idealist can reach a solution alone. Sterling provides a comprehensive bridge between thought and deed as its students confront questions that affect the future of us all.*
>
> *Sterling College Viewbook, 1978*

Sterling remains as committed to this purpose today as it was at its inception; we charge our graduates to contribute to a just and sustainable approach to supporting the resilience of the natural world around us.

Appraisal

The motto, mission, and vision of Sterling College are central to Sterling's identity and the College's culture as they are embraced and understood by the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees. They are read aloud by the President at the start of All-College Meetings, are found prominently both in printed publications and online, and are referenced in planning and strategic efforts across the institution. Given the critical challenges facing humanity and the planet, we see no higher civic purpose for Sterling than environmental stewardship education.

While society's focus on environmental concerns has become more commonplace today than it was at Sterling's founding, our specific mission of environmental stewardship is timelier than ever. The integrative and experiential character of a Sterling education effectively prepares our graduates to understand relationships within the natural world (Ecology), help them interpret the human experience with the natural world (Environmental Humanities), aid them in understanding human adaptation of the natural world (Sustainable Agriculture & Sustainable Food Systems), and prepare themselves for experience in the natural world (Outdoor Education).

Sterling is becoming increasingly adept at articulating the characteristics of its academic program and the educational outcomes that distinguish it from a growing number of environmental and sustainability programs, not just at similarly scaled institutions, but also at much larger colleges and universities. For example, after a gap of several years between strategic plans, the Sterling College community participated in a comprehensive planning process during the 2012-13 academic year to establish goals, objectives, and implementation steps to meet its aspirations over the next five years. In addition, our

College-Wide Competencies, recently revised and reaffirmed by the faculty, articulate more clearly the distinctive nature of Sterling's undergraduate curriculum. Finally, between 2012 and 2015, the attention Sterling has received in national media has grown significantly and has recently appeared in articles in *The New Yorker, The Wall Street Journal, Sierra Magazine*, and others. [Workroom Documents: College-Wide Competencies, Nourish The Roots Strategic Plan]

Projection
In 2017, the Sterling community will begin the College's next strategic planning process. As part of that process, we will review the entire program, including mission, college-wide outcomes, and curriculum.

With the support of dramatically increased fundraising success, the College will continue setting financial goals to support the institution's mission and strategic planning initiatives. Sterling is also poised to conduct a brand review with faculty, staff, and students, and will launch a new and highly sophisticated website in February 2016.

Building on our initiative as the third college in the U.S. to divest from fossil fuel investment in 2013, the Sterling community and Board of Trustees will continue to lead by demonstrating values based on our mission.

Institutional Effectiveness
In the face of global environmental urgency and a rapidly changing culture, Sterling must continually re-assess the effectiveness of our mission in the world of higher education and as global citizens. The mechanisms of institutional assessment mentioned above (including the community-wide strategic planning process, the institutional assessment fundamental to the NEASC self-study process, and regular self-assessment by the Board of Trustees) ensure that we remain resilient and responsive in serving students and meeting our civic obligations.

STANDARD TWO: PLANNING AND EVALUATION

<u>Planning</u>

Description
Sterling College has been engaged in a variety of planning initiatives over the past decade. Consistent with its commitment to experiential education and a community governance model, the College engages students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees in both short- and long-term planning and evaluation processes. All planning initiatives include specific goals, objectives, and implementation steps.

The College links responsibility and authority through its planning efforts, affording the opportunity for broad participation, but also ensures that those with expertise can shape the planning process. Curricular planning and evaluation, for example, are led by the faculty, but with the expectation of broad participation in planning exercises by students and staff. The President, at the behest of and in collaboration with the Board of Trustees, initiates long-term strategic planning efforts. To facilitate participation in planning work and evaluation, the College maintains an intranet of web pages for faculty, staff, and students that host information to be used in planning and the individual plans from all areas of the College.

Long- and short-term planning exercises are supported by institutional research. At Sterling, the Dean of Academics, Director of Communication, Registrar, and individual faculty members share responsibility for institutional research. A recent example of the institutional culture of planning and evaluation can be found in the 2015-16 Task Force on Faculty Compensation & Instructional Load, comprising of faculty and members of the Program Committee of the Board of Trustees.

Examples of recent planning efforts include the Campus Master Plan, the Global Field Studies Plan, the New Student Orientation & Engagement Plan, the Strategic Recruitment & Marketing Plan, and, most significantly, the *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* and its corollary *Nourish the Roots: Comprehensive Campaign for Sterling College*, which exemplify our ongoing rigorous processes of planning and evaluation. [Workroom Docs: Sterling Master Plan, Global Field Studies Plan, Orientation & Engagement Plan, Recruitment & Marketing Plan, Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan, Nourish the Roots: Comprehensive Campaign for Sterling College.]

Following the completion of Sterling's Strategic Long Range Plan (SLRP) in 2008 and the Sustainable Sterling Plan in 2012, Sterling completed a comprehensive strategic plan that reflects the aspirations of its community and focuses significantly on the issue of long-term financial health identified in response to the College's Fifth Year Report to NEASC in 2006.

The five-year *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* (NTR), launched in 2013, was a year-long mission-driven planning process that engaged the full Sterling College community and was ultimately adopted by vote by both the faculty and the Board of Trustees. The NTR

Strategic Plan also formed the case statement for the $9 million comprehensive campaign, the largest fundraising effort in the history of the College. By means of this collaboratively developed plan the College sought to:

1. Affirm its mission and clearly articulate its vision for the future;
2. Clarify and reinforce the relationship between mission and curriculum;
3. Strengthen long-term financial health;
4. Further the Sterling community's ecological sustainability; and
5. Improve the campus and facilities to better serve the community of faculty, staff, and students.

Sterling College's President, Matthew Derr, and the Board of Trustees initiated the planning process with the understanding that the community was eager to embark upon such a process, a point made evident through the presidential search process in the spring of 2012. The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was co-chaired by trustees Catherine Donnelly and Jonathan Larsen. Its membership included trustees, faculty, alumni, administrators, and students. In addition to this overarching committee, throughout the process various subcommittees, working teams, and individuals consulted many other members of the community.

Several sources of information were utilized in developing the plan, including a series of interviews of alumni conducted by an evaluation team from the University of Michigan regarding educational outcomes and the most recent NEASC fifth-year report completed in 2011.

In November 2012, the strategic planning co-chairs, board chair, and vice chair were interviewed by a strategic planning consultant who was retained to aid with gathering further information. Similar interview sessions in large and small settings were held with the entire community of faculty, staff, students, and alumni from October 2012 through January 2013. Information from these interviews and conversations was compiled by the President and the Dean of the College & Faculty, and later informed the questions that were posed to the subcommittees and working teams.

The President appointed three subcommittees, each to cover an aspect of College operations: People & Program, Resources, and Facilities & Infrastructure. A member of the SPC chaired each subcommittee, and each subcommittee convened smaller working teams to report back on areas of specific research.

The first phase of planning focused on the work of the People & Program subcommittee. The second phase includes the efforts of the Resources and Campus & Infrastructure subcommittees. These latter two efforts led to the plans identified in the programmatic and mission-driven goals established in the first phase by the People & Program subcommittee. These initiatives will be supported by a five-year business plan, including fundraising and enrollment goals.

The People & Program portion of the plan was compiled and written in mid-January 2013, reviewed by the faculty and staff and the SPC in late January, and was presented to the community and the Board of Trustees for review and comment in early February.

The second phase of the plan, Resources and Facilities & Infrastructure, was compiled and written in mid-April 2013, reviewed by the faculty in late April and the SPC in early May, and was presented to the community and to the Board of Trustees on May 3, 2013.

For evaluation purposes, each goal is supported by specific objectives and implementation steps are linked to a date for completion. The goals represent our core vision for Sterling and are not always directly measurable. Objectives are the directions in which we wish to move to meet the goals and are typically measurable. Implementation steps are the incremental choices we make to reach the goals in a specified period of time.

Appraisal
The *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* is broad and ambitious in its scope, in some degree as a result of the transition in plans between 2008 and the launch of the most recent planning effort in 2012. The most recent plan is as inclusive as possible in its nature to ensure that it captured an important transitional moment in the College's history prior to significant enrollment growth.

One advantage of a small community is that it is relatively easy to engage all constituencies in planning efforts; however, among the challenges of participatory governance at a small college is that a handful of voices across the institution have a more significant hand in crafting any plan, and this includes *Nourish the Roots*. Our experience will help to make future planning processes as fully inclusive and transparent as possible.

Sterling has struggled to provide professional development to its faculty and staff in institutional planning. As a result, like many small colleges, we can be vulnerable to the assumption that the challenges we face are unique to Sterling. To strengthen the capacity of faculty to participate in a transparent budgeting process at the College it engaged the Great Lakes Colleges Association in a workshop named "Invent-a-College" in October 2015. [Workroom Docs: Invent-a-College].

Evaluation

Description
Institutional evaluation takes place on many levels. The Administrative Council and the Board of Trustees regularly review and evaluate the College's progress in meeting the 21 goals of the strategic plan, most recently in April 2015. [Workroom Docs: Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan, Board self-assessment]

Institutional evaluation is aided by our regular participation in comprehensive surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, and Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) as well as our compulsory submissions to the National Center for Institutional

Statistics (IPEDS) and, as a federally recognized work college, through our annual reporting to the Work Colleges Consortium and the U.S. Department of Education. [Workroom Docs: NSSE; IPEDS; Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey]

As part of the *Nourish the Roots* strategic plan and for general institutional research purposes, the College identified a ten member cohort of colleges for benchmarking purposes that share characteristics such as enrollment size, location, mission, and overlap in applications from prospective students. These institutions include: College of the Atlantic, Green Mountain College, Marlboro College, Northland College, Paul Smith's College, Prescott College, Southern Vermont College, Unity College, and Warren Wilson College.

Appraisal
Planning and evaluation at the College is challenged by the absence of a single administrative position devoted to institutional research. As a result, planning efforts are often slower to unfold because members of committees and taskforces must collect data that would be more readily available at other institutions with greater resources.

Although the College participates in regular program assessment in some areas of the curriculum, including: Outdoor Education (through the Association for Experiential Education) [See Standard 4]; annual financial audits [See Standard 9]; participation in annual College-wide surveys and self-assessments; and other areas through more informal processes, Sterling does not currently employ a systemic approach that involves outside parties in curriculum and program assessment.

Projection
Planning and evaluation are increasingly becoming part of the governance culture of Sterling College; as the College's enrollment grows and fundraising efforts continue to be successful, the students, faculty, staff, and alumni will become increasingly engaged in planning efforts that prioritize the use of new improved financial resources. The College will continue to assess its progress toward meeting the goals of the *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* on a quarterly basis.

The College has undertaken and will complete a redesign of its alumni survey in November 2015 that qualitatively and quantitatively measures alumni satisfaction with the educational experience as well as expands our understanding of effectiveness of the program in leading to gainful employment in Environmental Stewardship fields.

In 2016 Sterling faculty, staff, and members of the Board of Trustees will build on an existing collaborative project in the launch of a market research effort to prepare for a review of the College's mission and vision to build the foundation for the next long range planning effort in 2017.

As part of the 2017 strategic planning process, Sterling will reassess and affirm its commitment to institutional and curricular assessment and evaluation. We will develop processes for the evaluation of individual instructional areas [See Standard 4].

In its continuing commitment to evaluating faculty workload and compensation, the College will continue its assessment of faculty and staff compensation and workload. We will expand our perspective to include a broader institutional cohort. By May 2016, the faculty workload taskforce will submit a report and proposal to the Board of Trustees.

Institutional Effectiveness
As part of its *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan*, Sterling integrates systematic review of its planning process. This is apparent from the Board of Trustees' review and approval of the plan in 2013 to the faculty's review of the College-Wide Learning Outcomes in 2014-2015 to the College's work with outside consultants to build the framework for the planning process in 2017. The *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* is the College's guiding document, planning, and self-assessment tool.

STANDARD THREE: ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

Description
There have been substantial changes to the organization and governance of Sterling College since the submission of the Fifth Year Report in 2011. In conjunction with the writing of the *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan,* beginning in 2012, President Derr undertook a review of the governance practices and structures of the College in an effort to strengthen community participation in decision-making.

Simultaneously, as the College launched *Nourish the Roots: The Campaign for Sterling,* there was a change in leadership in the Board of Trustees and evolution of membership that helped the College prepare for a successful fundraising campaign. The Board of Trustees has also recently developed a broader regional and national representation, and the proportion of the membership composed of alumni of Sterling has decreased.

These areas of change in organization and governance have increased the capacity of Sterling College to meet its mission of environmental stewardship education and support institutional effectiveness and integrity. In the last three years, Sterling has developed community governance organizational structures that increase representation of students, faculty, and staff, which in turn link important responsibilities with the appropriate authority to make decisions. Some examples of the College's revised governance structures include a new Council structure (Administrative Council, Community and Work Council, Academic Council); standing committees (including Enrollment, Lands and Energy, and Faculty Meeting); instructional teams; task forces and other special short term working groups (for detailed descriptions see below and in Workroom Documents). Sterling's organizational structures have evolved to support a robust system of community governance. [Workroom Documents: Organizational Chart]

Like most private colleges and universities, Sterling College is governed and served by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. The College is fortunate to have a highly qualified Board membership that possesses a wide range of professional backgrounds and accomplishments. In addition to fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities, including hiring and evaluating the College's President, members of the Board have been instrumental in the launch of the largest fundraising campaign in the history of the institution and the success of that effort thus far. [Workroom Docs: Board of Trustees Membership]

Currently there are 22 members of the Board of Trustees, excluding the President, who is a non-voting, *ex officio* trustee. (This change was made since the Fifth Year Report upon President Derr's request.) The role and work of the Board of Trustees is governed by its annually reviewed bylaws. Much of the work of the Board is conducted by six working committees: Executive, Finance & Investments, Program, Advancement, Enrollment, and Trusteeship. Each of these committees has staff and faculty liaisons. [Workroom Docs: Board of Trustees Bylaws]

The Board of Trustees meets three times a year as a full Board, two weeks after the close of each fiscal quarter in spring, summer, and autumn, with a fourth meeting of the Executive and Finance Committees in the winter. The Executive and Finance Committees meet by telephone as needed between Board meetings, as well. The Board has an annual retreat and conducts regular Board education sessions. After the conclusion of each meeting, Board members are surveyed on the effectiveness of the meeting and any areas of concern or focus they wish to see in future meetings. In addition to quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees from the President and committee liaisons, the College maintains a website for the use of members with important documents and data related to governance of the College. The Board of Trustees reviews the performance of the President annually and will engage the community in this process in spring 2016. [Workroom Docs: Board Intranet.]

Administrative Council meets weekly to discuss and advise the President on issues related to the current and future needs of the College. In particular, this council focuses on issues related to institutional vision and planning, operational budget, risk management, and general college initiatives. While the membership of this committee includes the senior leadership of the College, the Administrative Council is a deliberative body that advises the President; it does not make institutional decisions. This council may also establish task forces to research and make recommendations on specific topics, particularly those identified in the Strategic Plan goals. Administrative Council is chaired by the President, and its membership includes: the Dean of Academics (who acts as chair in the President's absence), Dean of Community, Director of Finance, Director of Advancement & Alumni Relations, Director of Admission & Financial Aid, Director of Communication, Director of Technology, Director of Marketing, and the Assistant to the President.

Faculty Meeting creates a venue for the work of the faculty. As such, it is the primary forum for the faculty to arrive at decisions regarding the curriculum of Sterling College. The full-time faculty has responsibility for developing and sustaining cogent academic, community, and work curricula that support our mission by furthering the College-Wide Outcomes. Faculty Meeting convenes weekly to review and comment on curricular recommendations brought forward by the Academic Council, instructional teams, and individual faculty members; to discuss student progress; and to address other topics important to the welfare of Sterling College. The faculty also uses their weekly meeting as an opportunity to engage in regular professional development activities. The Dean of Academics establishes the agenda and is the chair of Faculty Meeting. Membership of Faculty Meeting includes all full-time employee faculty and adjunct faculty by invitation of the Dean of Academics.

Working in collaboration with the Dean of Academics, the Academic Council has responsibility for making recommendations on the development, review, assessment, and modification of the credit-bearing academic components of the Sterling College curriculum. The Academic Council reports on its work at each Faculty Meeting and presents recommendations for decisions related to the academic curriculum. The Academic Council reviews and is given authority to approve individual courses proposed by faculty and to review student self-designed major proposals. The Academic Council may also make recommendations to Faculty Meeting, other councils, committees, and the

President concerning other needs of the academic curriculum. This council may also establish task forces to research and make recommendations on specific topics, particularly those identified in the Strategic Plan goals. Academic Council is chaired by a full-time member of the academic faculty invited by the Dean of Academics, and its membership comprises faculty from each instructional area, academic staff, and student representatives.

Community Council is responsible for furthering the health and wellbeing of the Sterling College community and supports the development of a rich community-based learning experience for students, as well as components of the College-Wide Competencies. Community Council makes recommendations on the development, review, and modification of the community components of the Sterling College program. The Community Council reports on its work at each Faculty Meeting and presents recommendations for decisions related to the curriculum. The Community Council reviews and is given authority to approve student life initiatives and to address Community Standards and judiciary issues at the request of the Dean of Community. The Community Council may also make recommendations to Faculty Meeting, other councils, committees, and the President concerning other needs of the community life program and curriculum. This council may also establish task forces to research and make recommendations on specific topics, particularly those identified in the Strategic Plan goals. Community Council is chaired by Favor Ellis, Dean of Community and membership includes Nicole Civita, faculty member; Lucy Hankinson, staff; Jesse Keck '16, Community Advisor; and Jes Scribner '17, Community Advisor and Student Activities Coordinator.

Work Council is responsible for expanding the opportunity for faculty, staff, and students to participate in the development of and commitment to the work curriculum and the College's membership in the federally funded Work Colleges Consortium. This committee makes recommendations on the development, review, assessment, and modification of the required components of the work curriculum, which supports the College-Wide Competencies. The Work Council also reports on its efforts at Faculty Meeting and presents recommendations for decisions related to the College's curriculum. The Work Council reviews and is given authority to approve new jobs proposed by members of the community and to consider new initiatives in the on-campus Work Program. The Work Council may also make recommendations to Faculty Meeting, other councils, committees, and the President concerning other needs of the Work Program and curriculum. This council may also establish task forces to research and make recommendations on specific topics, particularly those identified in the Strategic Plan goals. The Work Council is chaired by Seth Barr, the Director of Work & Community and includes Adam Reck '17 and Alice Haskins '17, Work Advisors and student representatives. [Workroom Docs: Standing Committees]

Community Meeting, at which the entire College community is welcome, takes place weekly and is an important venue for communication and community discussion. While not a decision-making body, Community Meeting plays an essential role in raising issues that are then deliberated in the Councils and in reporting decisions made in the Councils.

Appraisal
Sterling has entered a new phase in its institutional development with organization and governance structures that are more inclusive of a larger number of voices from across the community and moving away from the "ad hoc" ways of community participation reported in its last self-study. However, many of the structures described in this current self-study are new to the College. They came about at the urging of President Derr and will continue to evolve as the charge to each is adapted to the challenges each committee and task force faces. Aware that it is critical to do so, the College has not yet created a plan for assessment of the effectiveness of the new governance structures it has in place.

Although, as indicated above, Sterling's governance structure accommodates broad participation in College decision-making, among the chief limitations at the College is the repeated reliance on a small number of faculty and staff to participate in community governance. The small size of enrollment and number of employees has many advantages with regard to the academic, work, and community programs of Sterling, but it also creates challenges with regard to active collaboration and workload. Specifically, faculty are occasionally charged to participate in committees, councils, or task forces, which can increase the pressure on teaching and advising schedules.

We have been working to improve communication, in part through more reporting, by Community Council and Academic Council to Community Meeting and Faculty Meeting, for example. This has been effective in supporting the goal of greater participation in decision-making, as indicated by an increased number of voices engaged in discussion of community and curricular questions, but such reporting needs to become more regular. Sterling is in the process of reinstating a standing personnel committee to share responsibility and authority among staff from across the College.

Projection
The College continues to improve its outreach to the full range of Sterling alumni. Sterling is in the process of defining, with support from alumni leaders, the role a new alumni board could play in supporting the mission of the College and as a launching pad for the selection of candidates for the Board of Trustees. The Alumni Board will be in place for the College's 60th year in spring 2017.

The College continues to develop and enhance its long-standing annual evaluation of all employees. In 2014, the President organized an informal, faculty-led, review of his performance. The Board of Trustees evaluates the President annually and will conduct a community evaluation in the Spring of 2016.

In 2016, the Board of Trustees adopted a set of Board responsibilities in advance of reviewing and accepting a board member evaluation process to be implemented in the fall of 2017.

More than many larger institutions, Sterling has to be mindful and strategic about prioritizing faculty responsibilities, and about protecting this core group at this ambitious

moment in the life of the College. In 2015, the President and Program Committee of the Board appointed a working group on faculty workload and compensation; this group will present a formal recommendation to the Board of Trustees in May 2016.

Institutional Effectiveness

It is essential that the College continue to develop clear and transparent processes for evaluating its current governance structures. The next strategic planning process will include provisions for developing both internal and external reviews of the College's participatory governance model. In particular, the process will assess the balance of authority, responsibility, and opportunity across faculty, staff, and community governance structures. This evaluation of the governance bodies of the College will be critical in the coming academic year after completion of the Ten Year Self-Study. In the meantime, the collaborative NEASC self-study process itself has provided invaluable opportunity for institutional assessment.

STANDARD FOUR: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Overview

The Sterling College mission is to combine "structured academic study with experiential challenges and plain hard work to build responsible problem solvers who become stewards of the environment as they pursue productive lives." Consistent with this mission, Sterling's academic program has continued to evolve over the past ten years. Our efforts over the period spanning 2006-2015 concentrated on defining the goals of our program more clearly, broadening our curriculum in targeted ways (including adding one major and instituting minors), and strengthening our student-centered approach to higher education—in alignment with the mission, the *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan* (completed in 2013), and our College-Wide Competencies (revised 2015):

> A Sterling College education builds the skills, knowledge, and experience of its students to:
> 1. Live satisfying and productive lives as environmental stewards.
> 2. Understand the ecology of the natural world.
> 3. Understand historical and global cultural contexts of social dynamics.
> 4. Practice both critical and systems thinking.
> 5. Collect, evaluate, and use information.
> 6. Apply theories and concepts to practical situations.
> 7. Communicate accurately and effectively in writing and in speech.
> 8. Work effectively independently and in collaboration with others.
> 9. Demonstrate resilience when facing challenges.
> 10. Practice leadership and participate intentionally in communities.
> 11. Develop and appreciate creativity in expression, work, and problem-solving.
> 12. Cultivate curiosity and actively pursue lifelong learning.

Major, core, and general education requirements ensure that students are able to gain the skills, knowledge, and experiences to graduate having met these competencies.

Now in our sixteenth year of offering a B.A. degree, our curriculum continues to solidify in ways that have both made our academic program more responsive to student needs and given it a stronger sense of identity and coherence. This evolution of the academic program is overseen by the faculty, particularly through the Academic Council and instructional teams, and the Dean of Academics. It is intentional, developed through mechanisms including the collaboratively-generated *Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan,* and it evolves from assessment of the current program through mechanisms like student course evaluations, faculty annual reviews, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2007 & 2014), the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (2013), feedback from internship supervisors, surveys of graduating seniors and recent alumni, the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) accreditation self- study process, as well as the NEASC Self-Study itself. [Workroom docs: Sterling College Strategic Plan, 2013-2018; NSSE Report

2014; Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory report; AEE self-study and report; course evaluations; senior surveys; alumni surveys.]

Academic Advising, Learning Support, and the Student Academic Experience
Academic advising is at the heart of a student's educational experience at the College; advisors help students navigate the curriculum, and this relationship helps ensure coherence of the program for students. A close, caring, and concerned advisor/advisee relationship is consistent with and supportive of the mission, culture, and strategic plan of Sterling College. Advising is integral to the faculty role and is not tangential to the teaching and learning process. Advising at Sterling is focused on supporting students as they explore and address their academic, social, and developmental goals, and must be responsive, compassionate, consistent, and reliable. Consistent and individualized advising is essential as we build relationships and authentic community, two indicators of strong retention.

All faculty and some staff serve as academic advisors for students, typically serving 6-10 students each. Frequency of individualized advising meetings varies from weekly meetings to two or three meetings per semester, depending on student needs. Due to the individualized nature of the program, advisors must be familiar with all of the program areas of the College and fluent in the requirements of each major and minor. The role of advising also involves considerable goal-setting coaching skills. The College continues to provide trainings and workshops for academic advisors towards these ends.

Special attention has been given to reinvigorating the advising program over the past five years. With the help of an advising committee and the faculty, the Dean of Academics' office has worked with the faculty to recognize the need for and to implement more effective advising, including the following initiatives:

- Increased contact between advisees and faculty prior to students' arrival on campus
- An enhanced new student Orientation and Engagement Plan
- A minimum of two full-length meetings with each advisee during each semester
- Appropriate use of online tools for academic advising purposes (including the newly adopted student information system)
- Increased information about advisees shared with faculty advisors (including through our new student information system)
- Development of 3-year curriculum plans for all major areas of study
- Advising forms available on the Sterling website
- Formalizing the major declaration process
- Dedicating multiple meetings during August & January pre-semester faculty meetings and during the regular faculty meeting schedule for advising-related issues

Additionally, students entering their final year at Sterling also work with other advisors specific to their Senior Project (SP) or Senior Applied Research Project (SARP). These advisors typically work in the student's field of interest and are able to effectively support research interests and assist with outreach to potential sponsors.

A small segment of our student population requires additional learning support. To address this need, as well as to integrate our support of student learning more broadly, we have recently made a staffing change in this area, from a half-time Director of Learning Support to an Associate Dean for Learning Support and Academic Advising (a full-time faculty member). The Associate Dean coordinates learning support at all levels, including meeting individually with students, overseeing College Learning Skills, documenting students' need for classroom accommodations, supervising Writing & Learning Center mentors, and training faculty in supporting students with diverse learning needs. We anticipate this new position will advance our goal of cultivating more robust and personalized academic advising, as well as integrating systems of learning support for all students throughout the program.

Writing support for students comes through a variety of channels. Faculty receive writing-across-the-curriculum trainings, in order to gain strategies for teaching writing in any class. The adoption of required writing-intensive courses five years ago ensures that students will be exposed to writing instruction at various points in their career. Faculty-trained student Writing Center mentors provide writing assistance outside of the classroom.

Incoming students receive introductory training in information technology at the Library. The Director of Technology provides students with an orientation to institutional technology at the College. Faculty introduce students to an array of information resources appropriate to specific course content. For example, in "Geographic Information Systems," students learn to use sophisticated software to obtain conservation-related information on specific regions and create map images that illustrate this information; in our oral history course, students learn ethnographic field methods and interviewing techniques; in natural history courses, students learn appropriate field observation and interpretive techniques. In summary, specific components of orientation include formal information trainings and subsequent core coursework trains all students in general information gathering skills. Major-specific coursework builds on this foundation and students learn more advanced techniques specific to their area of study.

We conduct all of our programs in English. Lectures and experiential activities are all delivered/facilitated in English and all assignments are in English. Students whose English language skills are not at the collegiate level are identified during first-year core required courses, most notably "Writing and Speaking to the Issues." Students are also required to successfully complete two writing intensive courses that require proficiency in English. Students have access to ESL tutoring if needed. Completing senior level work also requires proficiency in English. [Workroom docs: Advising section of Sterling website; writing-intensive course guidelines; Orientation and Engagement Plan.]

Appraisal
Recent initiatives mentioned above have strengthened our advising program. Additional training and support is needed for advisors, to ensure consistency and an overall sense of capacity and competency around expectations, developmental advising, boundaries, learning styles, motivational interviewing, and resources and referrals. In addition, further

training and resources in working with students for whom English is a second language is needed for advisors and faculty. A new student information system (Blackbaud) has significantly increased our capacity to track student progress and communicate among instructors, advisors, the Registrar, and the Deans. More training is needed to use this to its full potential.

Undergraduate Degree Programs

Sterling offers a single B.A. degree program. To graduate, students must complete 120 credits (including at least 30 from Sterling), follow a major course of study (typically 40-45 credits), and complete general education and core curriculum requirements (36-45 credits). Students may complete the balance of their coursework through electives in any area (provided that they have met the prerequisites); students may also pursue independent studies with a faculty advisor, contingent upon an approved proposal. Courses are offered progressively within each major (100-level through 400-level).

General Education (including the Core Curriculum)

Central to Sterling's general education requirements is the core curriculum, which consists of a suite of courses designed to scaffold student learning in the first and through the second year of study and build a foundation for success throughout their tenure. Core requirements were reduced from 60 to 30 credits (excluding senior capstone work) in 2007 to increase student flexibility and more effectively accommodate individualized study.

The core curriculum for all incoming students begins with the College's flagship course, "A Sense of Place," a three credit, two-week intensive course that immerses students in interdisciplinary study of the culture, community, literature, ecology, and traditional skills of northern Vermont. Other required first year courses underlie the essential role of ecological, quantitative, linguistic, community, and technical literacy in the curriculum, including "Tools and their Application," "Experiential Education I: Bounder," "Writing & Speaking to the Issues," and "Ecology."

Mid-level core courses emphasize the importance of gaining skills relevant to the world of work and applying academic learning to an employment setting. These are a series of courses that support students' internships: "Work Search," "Practicum in Environmental Stewardship," and "Writing and Communications."

Upper-level core requirements engage students in focused, applied research. Sterling offers three paths towards completion of capstone work in the senior year. The most commonly chosen option is a six credit Senior Project. The project occurs in two separate three credit installments (Senior Project 1 and 2), each of which occurs in a different semester, such that the project spans two semesters. Students must have an approved Senior Project proposal on file to enroll in this course. A second option for students who wish to pursue a more involved original research experience is the 15 credit Senior Applied Research Project (SARP). The SARP option spans three semesters, beginning with a cohort course (SARP 1), which trains students in research methods and proposal writing, followed by SARP 2, which includes nine credits of original research, and concluding with SARP 3, also a

cohort course, which focuses on data analysis, paper writing, and presentation. For the third option, students may petition the Dean of Academics and propose a coursework-only option to fulfill their capstone requirement, if they can demonstrate that they have successfully completed a series of upper-level courses that create a capstone experience.

Finally, seniors take "Senior Seminar," an interdisciplinary seminar that enables cross-disciplinary conversation toward becoming environmental stewards after graduation.

In addition to these core required courses, students must fulfill the requirements of a major course of study (See Majors & Minors, below), which typically represents between 40 and 45 credits of coursework, and they are required to complete the following minimum general education requirements: one credit of Applied Sciences, six credits of Humanities, six credits of Natural Sciences, six credits of Social Sciences.

It is important to note that Sterling's Work Program effectively serves as a part of the core curriculum as well. While students do not receive credit for their Work Program jobs, through this experience, they learn other skills related to our college-wide competencies, including creating and assessing learning objectives, applying academic learning to real-world experiences, and working with others.

Appraisal
The full faculty reviews general Education and core requirements regularly. This happens informally on an annual basis based on student course evaluations and faculty observation. Last year, for example, after extensive discussion, the faculty decided to offer two levels of the core Ecology course (at the 100-level and 200-level) in order to best serve the needs of students, who come to the class with a broad range of science backgrounds. In addition, inconsistent student outcomes and mixed student feedback have led to faculty to consider dropping the Senior Seminar requirement; this conversation is still in process as faculty discuss how to ensure students could meet the intended outcomes by alternate means. On the other hand, because students have been inconsistently prepared for senior capstone work, faculty are considering adding "Research Methods and Project Design" as a core requirement (to be run as a pilot in spring 2016).

Curricular assessment happens formally through vehicles like the strategic planning process (every five years) and external instruments like the National Survey of Student Satisfaction, last administered in the spring of 2014, and the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, administered in the spring of 2013. Three areas where Sterling scored lower than we would like have been targeted as areas for improvement: "There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus;" "Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course;" and "Tutoring services are readily available." Discussions have taken place in Community Council about how to address these concerns, and are in process in Academic Council and Faculty Meeting.

The effectiveness of the core curriculum in particular is assessed in light of how well this sequence serves students, particularly in preparing them for upper-level and major-specific

coursework. Student success in senior capstone work attests to the effectiveness of general education and core requirements. All changes to core requirements are vetted first by the Academic Council for review, revision, and approval, and then vetted by the full faculty for review, revision and approval. [See Workroom documents: NSSE, Noel-Levitz, Faculty Meeting minutes, Academic Council minutes, Community Council minutes.]

Majors & Minors

Sterling offers majors in five areas: Ecology, Environmental Humanities, Outdoor Education, Sustainable Agriculture, and Sustainable Food Systems. Over the past ten years, these have been consolidated, refined, and expanded. Northern Studies was eliminated in 2012. Natural History and Conservation Ecology have been combined as Ecology. Sustainable Food Systems was added as a major under the aegis of the Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems. The name of the Outdoor Education and Leadership major was changed to Outdoor Education to streamline prospective student access to program information via web searches.

Major requirement checklists are assessed yearly by instructional teams, and refined when needed, with an eye towards course progression, student options within the requirement structures, and capstone learning experiences. Instructional teams have, or are in the process of, developing major specific competencies as well. [Workroom docs: major descriptions and checklists, Environmental Humanities major outcomes.]

Students also have the option of designing an individualized major, the process for which has been strengthened in the last five years. Support for the Self-Designed Major option occurs through a combination of personalized academic advising and a recently developed credit-bearing course through which students design and formally propose their self-designed major. Self-Designed majors must be approved by the Academic Council no later than the second semester of a student's third year. [Workroom docs: Self-Designed Major proposal form; Self-Designed Major Guidebook.]

Additionally, the faculty, Academic Council, and instructional teams created several minors that emphasize specific skills and knowledge within an established program area and are relevant to students in other major areas of study. Each minor is housed in an existing program area but accessible to students majoring in other areas. Minors include the following: Climate Justice, Draft Horse Management, Education Studies, Natural History, Natural Resources Conservation, and Sustainable Food Systems. Currently under discussion is the possible addition of a minor that combines forestry and woodworking, a growing area of student interest that complements our current majors. [Workroom docs: minor descriptions and checklists.]

Each of the four instructional teams (Ecology, Sustainable Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems, Outdoor Education, and Environmental Humanities) is supported by full-time faculty members with appropriate academic credentials and diverse expertise relevant to the area of study sufficient to maintain a student faculty ratio of no more than 12 to 1.

Instructional teams for each of the above stated majors review major requirements annually and update their descriptions and checklists accordingly. All changes to major requirements, as well as new courses and changes in academic policy are vetted by the Academic Council for review, revision, and approval.

Instructional teams also create and maintain an ongoing three-year plan of course offerings. These three-year plans are distributed among the faculty and used for advising and other related planning purposes. They are also used to identify areas for intended curricular growth as well as staffing priorities. Each team submits its three-year plan to the Dean of Academics on an annual basis. Review and evaluation of instructional areas is ongoing and approximately every third year each instructional team revises its description, checklist, and three-year plan in consultation with the Dean of Academics.

Appraisal
A high degree of effectiveness of major courses of study is demonstrated in part by student success in internship experiences and in finding employment in their field of study. Alumni surveys indicate that 95% of alumni are employed within a year of graduation, and 80% are employed in a field related to their major area of study. 90% of Sterling alumni report that they are meeting their career goals.

Regular assessment happens informally in instructional teams as well, based on student course evaluations and external instruments like the Noel-Levitz student satisfaction inventory that are used to assess effectiveness of the majors. The Noel-Levitz report indicated, for example, that Sterling scored higher that the national average of private four-year institutions in the areas "The content of courses within major is valuable" (5.69 on a 1-7 scale) and "The instruction in my major field is excellent" (5.67 on a 1-7 scale). Yet Sterling scored lower than the national average on "There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus" (5.27 on a 1-7 scale). Instructional teams are also in the process of developing expanded 400-level major specific course offerings as part of our institutional response to the area of growth. In addition, instructional teams are in the process of developing of major-specific outcomes/competencies to help with future assessment. [Workroom docs: alumni survey, Instructional Team minutes, Academic Council minutes, Noel-Levitz report.]

While curricular planning has improved, instructional teams have not always been able to plan course offerings three years ahead (in particular with special topics courses), due to challenges like staffing and evolving major curricula. We need to get to a place where three-year plans are always in place, to enable students to plan their degree paths with a greater degree of certainty.

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit
The integrity of majors and courses within the major (including prerequisites and progression) falls under the purview of the instructional teams, as well as the Registrar and Dean of Academics. Instructional teams oversee degree checklists. Degree audits

(verification of degree specific requirements and graduation requirements) take place in the student's senior year by the student's advisor and the Registrar.

Course offerings are described in the Sterling College Course Catalog, which can be found on the College website. Some courses are offered in every semester, some are offered in either the spring or fall semesters; a few courses are offered every other year. In the event that a course is required but not offered, the Dean of Academics creates a plan with the student and advisor to address the requirement. The fact that we offer a full range of course offerings during the summer semester, as well as the internship option, makes it relatively easy for students to graduate in fewer than four years if they so desire. Although sometimes courses change times by necessity, we are good at creating alternatives for students, so that they can graduate on time. Part of being a small institution that offers many courses of study means that we are constantly assessing our curriculum and making changes that reflect needs. [Workroom docs: Sterling College Course Catalog.]

The Academic Council oversees the approval of new courses and of self-designed majors. Changes to the Core Curriculum are first considered by the Academic Council and then presented to the entire faculty for approval. Newly approved courses are given "topics" or "special topics" status until they have successfully run at least three times. Faculty members submit updated course syllabi every semester. Courses offered off-site go through the same rigorous approval process as courses offered on site. (Academic Council approves courses at other institutions for which we grant credit, including Yestermorrow Design/Build School, dual enrollment at Lamoille Union High School, and select courses at the ROOTS School.) The Dean of Academics approves independent study proposals, Senior Project and Senior Applied Research Project proposals, and College Teaching Experience (Teaching Assistant) proposals.

Generally, new full-time faculty members are hired via a national search, overseen by a search committee through a rigorous hiring process overseen by a hiring committee comprising students, faculty, and administrators. The hiring of adjunct instructors follows a parallel but modified process, whereby the expectations are the same, but searches may be regional (rather than national) and hires may be made by the Dean of Academics without a search committee, albeit in consultation with the appropriate instructional team. All prospective faculty members must have appropriate credentials, and preference is given to candidates with a terminal degree in their field. The search committee makes a final recommendation to the Dean of Academics and President regarding new hires. Faculty members and courses are evaluated at the end of every term by their students. Yearly evaluations are completed at the end of the spring term by the Dean of Academics. Professional development funds are set aside annually for faculty to access courses, conferences, research opportunities, etc. [Workroom docs: hiring process, course evaluation form.]

The Office of Admission and Financial Aid oversees student applications. Students are accepted or denied based on our admission policies, which value demonstrated potential

for academic success, as well as success in the community and the Work Program. [Workroom docs: Admission policies.]

Student retention is addressed on many levels, beginning with Admission, continuing with faculty contact with incoming students prior to their arrival and the new student Orientation & Engagement Plan, and then with our intensive advising system, and community program initiatives. Our low student-to-faculty ratio ensures significant opportunity for individualized support. (See advising section above.)

Criteria for the evaluation of student learning are presented in each course syllabus (and are an expectation of independent study proposals). This is also a requirement for new course proposals submitted to Academic Council. Assessment and awarding of credit for coursework is based on our Transcript Information document. Grading information is also available in the Community Guidebook, which is available on our website. Academic Council and instructional teams discuss and review how we establish and evaluate student outcomes on a regular basis, with the goal of ensuring consistency. Faculty are provided with trainings that address the use of rubrics, student outcomes, and assessment in general. The Dean of Academics works with adjunct faculty to ensure that there are clear expectations about assessment and grading. [Workroom docs: syllabus template, selected course syllabi, transcript information document, Community Guidebook, Academic Policies page on website.]

Credit hours are awarded based on the number of hours courses meet, based on a modified Carnegie unit formula. One credit is awarded per 15 hours of contact time (in addition to 30 hours of out-of-class work). All courses use this formula, though it is modified slightly in some non-standard courses. Global Field Studies course credits, for example, are awarded using a similar credit-hour model, but with emphasis on engaged time rather than class time. The academic components of Global Field Studies courses are overseen by the Academic Council; the Global Field Studies committee is responsible for scheduling and planning of field programs. The internship program is a credit-bearing course, and credits are awarded based on non-paid contact hours plus supplemental assignment time. The internship program coordinator oversees internships and grades students on weekly reflections, site visit reports, and supervisor evaluations. Independent studies are designed so that one credit = 30 hours of work or engaged time.

All courses—including Global Field Studies courses, independent studies (which may or may not take place on campus), and courses in two week intensive blocks—follow the same credit rules as courses offered during the long block, with some slight flexibility. (Two week intensive courses, for example, require 15 hours per credit, slightly fewer hour expectations, which acknowledges the intensive nature of academic engagement in these courses.) All courses are subject to review by the Academic Council and approval by the Dean of Academics.

At this juncture, students may receive credit for non-accredited "lifelong learning" by special petition only, through an independent study reflective of academic scaffolding.

Students submit portfolios in combination with reflective writing in order to petition for credit towards their undergraduate degree. Credits are awarded based on student work completing the portfolio and reflection, and upon approval from the Dean of Academics. We are in the process of assessing the need to formalize this process and make it more widely available. Research and in-depth discussion need to take place in Academic Council in order to develop an effective and workable policy that has integrity with our program.

Expectations for satisfactory academic progress are made clear in the Community Guidebook. Satisfactory academic progress is defined as a C average over the course of a semester, or a cumulative Quality Point Average (QPA) of 2.0 or higher; students not making adequate academic progress are placed on Academic Review, and a series of support mechanisms go into effect. If a student is on Academic Review for two consecutive semesters, s/he is subject to dismissal. A student in this situation is typically asked to complete a successful semester at another accredited college before re-applying to Sterling, if s/he chooses to do so. In addition, students may be on "Work Review" in response to unsatisfactory progress on the Work Program; two consecutive semesters of unsatisfactory progress in the Work Program jeopardizes a student's standing at the College. Academic standing decisions are made on an individualized basis, in consultation with the academic advisor, Dean of Community, and Dean of Academics (within the context of, for example, a student's medical situation). [See workroom documents: Academic Policies page of website, sample Academic Review letter.]

General degree requirements, as well as checklists specific to each major (including all graduation requirements) are available on the Advising section of the Sterling website. A parallel checklist for self-designed majors is also on the website and in the Self-Designed Major Guidebook. Academic advisors discuss these every semester with students. If major or general degree requirements change, students have the choice to meet the new requirements or the requirements for the year in which they enrolled. (The Registrar keeps archived catalogs and major degree checklists on file.) The Registrar and the student's academic advisor complete a degree audit in the student's last semester, to ensure degree and graduation requirements have been met. [Workroom docs: major checklists, Self-Designed Major Guidebook, archived course catalogs and major checklists.]

The Sterling College Academic Honesty Policy is clearly outlined in the Community Guidebook. Faculty refer to this policy on their syllabi and discuss it in class. Emphasis is placed on avoiding plagiarism and other examples of academic dishonesty by giving students tools and knowledge to discern academic dishonesty from academic integrity. For example, proper research, assessment, and citation methods are covered in the introductory writing course and writing intensive courses. There is a clear process for follow-up and consequences when a violation of academic honesty is suspected. It is interesting to note that we have very few cases of plagiarism. [Workroom docs: Community Guidebook, Academic Honesty section.]

Consistent with our mission and curriculum, we offer an array of courses for continuing education students, primarily in the Sustainable Food Systems curricular area. Upon

successful completion of these courses, students may receive Continuing Education Units. If non-matriculated students want to receive academic credit for these courses, they must petition to do so and pay additionally for these credits. All courses that are offered for CEUs are available to our matriculated students for college credit; as such, these courses go through our proposal and review process, including approval by the Academic Council and Dean of Academics, or they are structured as independent studies and must be approved as such. Continuing Education courses are taught both by full-time Sterling faculty members and adjunct instructors and vetted as with regular faculty hires. Continuing Education courses are a relatively new addition to our program, and we need further conversation to discuss how we assess them, as well as their role and future as part of our curriculum.

For example, in Sterling's continuing education program, the School for the New American Farmstead (SNAF) courses are designed primarily for a continuing education audience, but enrollment is open to Sterling's matriculated students. When a matriculated student takes a SNAF course for credit, a member of the full-time faculty supervises the student's work and assesses his or her mastery of the subject, and assigns a final grade. The final grade is informed, in part, by the attendance records and participation observations made by the continuing education instructor. The remainder of the grade is based on the student's guided independent reflective work, self-designed final project, and meetings with the faculty supervisor. Thus, matriculated students are supported by both the continuing education instructor and a member of the full-time faculty in deeply engaging with the subject matter and pursuing personal interests within the discipline.

The Academic Council and faculty (through instructional teams and in Faculty Meeting) are the primary drivers of all curriculum development. Although we have very few off-campus course offerings, the recent development of a dual-enrollment course at Lamoille Union High School ("The Ecology of Consumption") is a case in point. In such cases, the Academic Council reviews and advises instructors on course content and scope, as with any new course proposal; faculty qualifications are scrutinized as with any adjunct faculty member. As an extra level of vetting, Academic Council members have performed visits to dual enrollment program sites. Dual enrollment continues to be a growing opportunity in Vermont, and we are already having conversations about new partnerships (including Northfield High School, Lake Region High School, and North Country High School) in order to be proactive in planning how these courses can best serve students and maintain the integrity of Sterling's curriculum.

We offer a limited number of certificates. These include certification in Wilderness First Responder and Wilderness First Aid. The content of these courses and the training of the course instructor are overseen by Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities (SOLO) and by the Academic Council. A Permaculture Design certificate is also available through our Permaculture course. Students may enroll in coursework at the Yestermorrow Design/Build School. Yestermorrow offers certificates in Natural Building, Woodworking, and Sustainable Building and Design. All courses offering a certificate are reviewed and approved by the Academic Council. These partnerships are valuable to our students and

enrich our program offerings. As we go forward we will continue to be careful to ensure that program offerings are consistent with our program requirements.

Transfer Credits

Sterling accepts transfer credits from all accredited institutions of higher education. Transfer credit is awarded for grades of C or better. We also accept credit for AP and CLEP courses, contingent on a student's score on the exam. Evaluation of prior learning including CLEP, AP, other college coursework, military training and lifelong learning is completed by the Registrar and Dean of Academics. The College has articulation agreements with Greenfield Community College, Community College of Vermont, National Outdoor Leadership School, Yestermorrow Design/Build School, and Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities (SOLO). Descriptions of articulation agreements are listed on the website. [Workroom docs: articulation agreements on Sterling website, Memoranda of Understanding.]

There is no upper limit to the number of credits a student may transfer to Sterling; however, transfer students must complete at least 30 credits of coursework at Sterling College to earn a degree. Transfer students are expected to fulfill Sterling's core and major requirements, except in the case of a waiver for equivalent coursework. Students who transfer with more than 60 credits are waived from "Experiential Education I (Bounder)" and "Community Building through Winter Recreation," as well as the Internship experience ("Work Search," "Practicum in Environmental Stewardship," and "Writing & Communications"). Required upper-level course work includes SARP/SP, Senior Seminar, writing intensive courses, and expected number of 300- or 400-level courses. Transfer policies are clearly outlined on our website.

Appraisal

While we are proud of our flexibility in meeting student curricular needs, improvements need to be made so that we can become better able to anticipate need for courses and the overall number of courses we can offer based on student numbers. We need to move toward having more standardized, predictable course offerings so that there are not so many switches from spring to fall, or courses that do not fill and cannot run, or that are offered every other year.

The Registrar and Dean of Academics are currently in the process of assessing our current graduation auditing system toward identifying and addressing deficiencies earlier (including researching procedures at other institutions). We plan to create a more formalized structure for ensuring that degree audits are completed by the advisor and the Registrar on a regular basis.

With the help of the new website (to be launched in March 2016), we are working to improve the consistency of policy information availability (currently found on separate website pages and the Community Guidebook, as well as in our oral culture), so that this information is always up-to-date and easily found. For example, we need to make sure our transfer policies are published both on the transfer page and the military transfer page.

We plan to develop a clearer shared sense of "engaged time" in order to assess whether our current credit model is appropriate for the kinds of learning students are engaged in and to ensure consistency. With the prospect of moving toward more competency-based assessment (see Projections), we will need to ensure a standard for "engaged time" that allows for flexibility.

With a significant population of "non-traditionally" aged students, we have seen more requests for prior learning credit. In response, we are in the process of formalizing an Assessment of Prior Learning process. Research and in-depth discussion need to take place in Academic Council in order to develop an effective and workable policy that has integrity with our program.

Continuing education courses and dual-enrollment partnerships are a relatively new addition to our program, and we need further conversation to discuss how we assess them, as well as their role and future as part of our curriculum.

Assessment of Student Learning

Goals for student learning are articulated in our major and general education requirements, and are informed by the set of twelve College-Wide Competencies, published on the website and in the Community Guidebook (see above). Assessment of student learning is done with the ultimate outcome of ensuring students are meeting these competencies by graduation. These competencies are built in each student through the academic, work, and community programs. Evaluation and assessment is done in each of the program in many forms. Both broad-based assessment of the students competencies as well as specific assessment of individual student learning is done by each of the academic, work, and community programs.

Individual assessment of student learning happens primarily in the classroom (or in the field in the case of field-based courses). Assessment criteria are published on course syllabi and reviewed with students by the instructor at the start of classes. Assessment of student assignments is done on an A-F scale. Assignments (including essays, exams, and projects) are planned with the intent of student learning in the course or curricular area; thus assignment grading reflects individual student learning and application of the course material. The same scale (A-F) is used for assessing overall student performance in the course (though a few courses, including "Experiential Education I," are graded on a Pass/Fail basis, consistent with the course objectives). Letter grades are used as a standardized means of assessment; however, most faculty provide ongoing feedback on individual assignments as well as student course performance. Many faculty use grading rubrics to convey and assess learning goals. In addition, most classes include an effort or participation grade. Skills courses (such as "Wilderness First Responder," "Experiential Education I," and "Tools and their Application") often include a practical examination that reflects students' ability to perform the acquired skills. Our low student-to-faculty ratio also enables assessment of student learning to happen through frequent one-on-one check-

ins with faculty, meetings with the student's advisor, and narrative feedback provided by faculty on individual assignments and at the end of the semester.

Our problem-focused, real-world-oriented curriculum is well designed to provide students with systematic, substantial, and sequential learning opportunities. Instructors provide students with regular feedback designed to help them improve their achievement, on specific exams and assignments, as well as through a written narrative evaluation of specific assignments and of their work in the class as a whole. Students are regularly asked to reflect on their own learning as well, in conjunction with faculty assessment. When students propose independent studies, for example, they must develop (in conjunction with their faculty sponsor) a list of assessment criteria; they typically engage in self-reflection about their learning at the conclusion of every course. The internship ("Practicum in Environmental Stewardship") gives students an early opportunity to apply skills and knowledge to a supervised working/learning situation. Part of the internship is a "problem-solving project," through which the student identifies, with the site supervisor, a real problem and develops a solution to the problem. Senior capstone work is specifically designed to provide students with an opportunity to apply their learning to complex real-world situations.

Student participation in the Work Program is assessed based on a collaboratively developed set of learning objectives and expectations (with the student and work supervisor). Community Council is currently developing learning objectives and assessment systems for the student community learning.

Student learning is structured on a progression model. Students progress from introductory (including many of the core courses) courses to upper-level and major-specific courses to capstone coursework. Coherence of this design is overseen by the faculty, instructional teams, Academic Council, and the Dean of Academics. This progression is clearly spelled out in the major checklists, the core curriculum, and the graduation requirements. Students are supported in their progression through regular one-on-one meetings with their Academic Advisor. Students must make satisfactory academic progress to remain at Sterling. (See above regarding satisfactory academic progress.)

Student learning expectations grow directly from the Sterling College mission; all courses of study have the end goal of building "responsible problem solvers who become stewards of the environment as they pursue productive lives." Specific to our program, student learning is frequently applied, for example, and learning assessment participatory and collaborative. At the same time, in alignment with general expectations of the academic community, we have rigorous expectations for general literacy and competencies across the disciplines (including quantitative, writing, and research literacy expectations). These are found in our core curriculum and in our major requirements.

Individual courses have clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment measures, published on course syllabi. Course evaluations, which include both qualitative and quantitative components, are administered online at the end of each semester and

reviewed by the Dean of Academics. Whether students have achieved major-specific competencies is measured by their progression through the major checklists. Whether students have achieved the college-wide competencies is observed in the completion of capstone work. We also regularly survey alumni; these instruments show success in alumni finding employment in their area of study. Reports from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Noel-Levitz survey also inform our understanding of the effectiveness of student assessment. [Workroom docs: alumni surveys, NSSE report, Noel-Levitz survey.]

The faculty and the Deans are intimately involved in the development of student assessment goals and mechanisms. Faculty instructional teams regularly discuss and assess their major requirements and the extent to which students are successfully meeting major-specific learning goals. Policies around assessment, including Academic Review and course evaluation processes, are developed and refined in Academic Council and Faculty Meeting. The Dean of Academics regularly analyzes data from course evaluations and patterns in student records, as well as external instruments like the NSSE and Noel-Levitz survey. For example, our first-year student Orientation and Engagement Plan was developed in response to both retention numbers, which were lower than desired, and student learning assessment data; the NSSE report, for example, indicated that student-faculty interaction received a far lower engagement score from first-year students than from seniors. [See workroom docs: NSSE report.]

Appraisal
Assessment of academic programs is largely based on student learning outcomes. Instructional teams periodically review their respective major programs (see minutes of meetings) and in doing so, consider what competencies seniors demonstrate through senior capstone work and evaluate programs accordingly. The Dean of Academics regularly reviews grades and semester course evaluations to assess consistency of student learning and to identify gaps. As a faculty, and in accordance with the *Nourish the Roots* strategic plan, we are moving toward a system of competency-based assessment. The revision of the College-Wide Competencies in the spring of 2015 was a major step in this direction; instructional teams are currently discussing major-specific competencies as well. Next steps will include collaborative design of an outcome-based assessment model with support from the Academic Council, Dean of Academics, and students.

Instructional teams are currently developing major-specific competencies to use as a way to assess student learning in their major. Until a system for doing so is formalized, major-specific student learning is assessed informally, in Faculty Meeting and instructional teams' discussion of their graduating seniors and in Senior Applied Research Project (SARP) committee discussions. The new student information system should make it easier to track students and gather data on student success. We hope this will be a mechanism to enhance our assessment systems and ensure greater consistency (particularly in regards to the use of narrative evaluations and effort grades).

An area where we seek to improve is in the consistency of feedback students receive among instructors, with an eye toward even greater consistency in outcomes; we want to ensure that all students meet all competencies well. In particular, we are continuing to work on providing students with the tools and support they need to become proficient writers and critical thinkers. In part, this emerges from a targeted growth area identified in the Noel-Levitz survey report, in which we scored below the national average in "Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course." Toward this end, faculty need additional and ongoing trainings that address student outcomes, and assessment in general.

We are in the process of developing a more robust course evaluation system, as well as a more systematic way to measure attainment of college-wide competencies.

Projection
We expect the Sterling curriculum to continue to evolve, in response to assessments discussed above, changing student interests, and our ongoing strategic planning processes. For example, the Academic Council and the faculty are currently considering refinements to the internship requirement, the Senior Seminar requirement, and the structure of the Senior Project and Senior Applied Research Project capstone experience, among other aspects of the curriculum. Decisions on the future of these courses will be finalized in the spring semester 2016. Assessment of new programs, like continuing education courses, dual enrollment courses, and a pilot semester program in the American Southwest (spring 2016) will also reveal whether these are effective and valuable growth areas for the College program. Additional minors (like Integrated Forestry and Woodworking, Environmental Humanities, and self-designed minors) are also being considered. In addition, a task force is considering significant changes to our academic calendar in order to better serve our students and curriculum; this process will be concluded by the end of January 2016. The dynamic nature of our program will continue to make it exciting and responsive to student interests and needs.

We expect to incorporate more competency-based assessment, including developing a more formal structure for assessing the College-Wide Competencies. We have started to undertake a process of curriculum mapping (to be completed by summer 2016), which will help identify where these competencies are addressed and where there are gaps in our curriculum. The use of portfolios in competency-based assessment in other programs (including the program at Warren Wilson College, one of our Work College cohort schools) will be researched by a task force as part of this process, over the academic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

We expect to continue developing robust, effective, and regular systems for program assessment, internally and drawing on outside bodies like the Work Colleges Consortium and the Association for Experiential Education (ongoing). For example, the creation of redesigned student course evaluations (to be completed in the fall semester 2016) will enable more granular and useful feedback for faculty in assessing the content and delivery effectiveness of their courses. Beginning in spring 2016, Academic Council will discuss the

development of additional structures for internal program assessment, enabling us to gain a better sense of the optimum number of course offerings, the balance of upper- and lower-level courses, and the overall scope and breadth of curriculum.

Our new website (online in spring 2016) will give us the opportunity to improve clarity and consistency of academic policy information available online.

More training on our new student information system (ongoing) will facilitate enhanced communication among faculty, between instructors and advisors, and between instructors and students. We expect that this, along with the ongoing implementation (and assessment) of our New Student Orientation and Engagement Plan and the hiring of a dedicated learning and advising support faculty member (spring 2016), will result in higher retention of first-year students and higher scores on students satisfaction measurements.

Finally, the development of a new strategic plan, beginning in 2017, will help identify priorities for program development over the following five years.

Institutional Effectiveness

To complement our internal assessment, it is important for Sterling to look to external structures to measure institutional effectiveness. Toward this end, the aforementioned NSSE and Noel-Levitz survey have provided invaluable data, with which we can measure our effectiveness in relation to our internal goals and in relation to cohort schools (national private four-year colleges and other Work Colleges). These show that Sterling is typically above the national average in most categories measured. Self-studies for accreditation by the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) and NEASC also play a critical role in assessing our institutional effectiveness as far as our program is concerned. [Workroom Doc: Alumni Survey]

STANDARD FIVE: FACULTY

Description
A focused and dedicated faculty is central to Sterling College's mission, vision, and experiential, ecologically-focused liberal arts education. Our faculty demonstrates unique expertise in the combination of practical skills and experiential challenges with rigorous intellectual exploration, as encapsulated by the motto "Working Hands, Working Minds." This duality of approach is reflected in the combination of advanced degrees held by faculty along with a broad array of other training and competencies. The qualifications of our faculty typically consist of a combination of academic degrees and long-term experience in specific fields or professions. The hiring of superior practitioners in these fields reflects Sterling's commitment to promoting environmental stewardship and facilitates the College's mission to integrate working hands and working minds.

In the academic year 2015-16, four of Sterling's 14 full-time faculty hold terminal degrees, and the others all hold advanced degrees and/or certifications. In addition, faculty support the Sterling College program with their practical skills and experiences reflected, for example, in certifications relating to outdoor technical activities such as rock climbing, wilderness first aid, skills in farrier work, use of tools and machinery such as chainsaws, and management practices of farm and forest.

Sterling College maintains a balance between full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty. Full-time faculty are considered those employees for whom teaching is at least 75% of their workload (Employee Handbook Sec. 1.4). Occasionally, faculty members are full-time employees of the College for whom teaching constitutes less than 75% of their workload. (Currently, this is the case with one faculty member.) Furthermore, many faculty also have significant administrative responsibilities and carry a lower teaching load. The College's adjunct faculty also plays an important role in supporting the breadth of the Sterling curriculum by bringing in expertise in a particular skill or professional area. Adjunct faculty are defined in the Employee Handbook as those faculty hired to teach specific courses at the College and not eligible for participation in the College's benefit program. As much as possible, adjunct faculty are not employed to teach core courses. Finally, the President and a number of administrators teach courses as well. [Workroom Doc: Employee Handbook]

Sterling College's faculty and courses of study are not departmentalized. This is partly reflective of the size of the institution, but also reflects philosophically the focus on integrative studies and collaborative approaches as a means to support the development of environmental stewards and problem solvers in the 21st century. However, the faculty is subdivided into four instructional teams that meet regularly and work closely to plan and deliver curriculum in each of the major subject areas: Ecology, Environmental Humanities, Outdoor Education, Sustainable Agriculture, and Sustainable Food Systems.

New full-time faculty members are selected by a Search Committee. We are in the process of formally adopting guidelines developed by the President and Dean of Academics, with input from faculty in order to keep this an open and orderly process. For example, the

position must be advertised at a national level, at least three candidates must be invited to interview on campus, and there is a preference for candidates with a Ph.D. or equivalent. The College is an equal opportunity employer. All prospective faculty members are provided with a written contract prior to starting their job.

The faculty workload primarily consists of teaching and teaching-related activities, but also involves, to varying degrees, student academic advising, curricular planning, policy-making, research, community outreach, plant management, and institutional governance. [Workroom Docs: Faculty Workload Analysis]

Sterling College maintains a commitment to faculty in the long term, although in the College's current employment framework, Sterling is an "at-will" employment institution, and annual commitments are made to all full-time faculty members with an annual appointment letter supplied in May for the next academic year. Faculty reappointment is based on performance as evaluated by a self-assessment and review by the Dean of Academics.

In direct response to the Affordable Care Act of 2010, a recent change was implemented in the supply of health insurance benefits to faculty members such that College-provided health insurance was withdrawn and employees were given the opportunity to seek their preferred health insurance package on the marketplace. This transition was accompanied by an increase in salaries and was a decision made by the College designed to optimize the situation for all staff, giving them more options based on individualized family needs.

There is no rank, promotion, or tenure at Sterling, so all faculty are on similar academic footing, although as noted, many of the 14 full-time faculty serve in capacities of "Director" or "Coordinator" or otherwise support the administration of academic and co-curricular programs at the College.

The instructors in the School of the New American Farmstead (SNAF), Sterling College's continuing sustainable agriculture and food education program, are expert practitioners who teach hands-on, skills-based intensive courses under close supervision of full-time faculty. These instructors engage students fully and transmit knowledge that they've developed over many years of study and practice at the top of their fields. Although the SNAF classes have a strong practical component, the continuing education instructors deliver a complete curriculum, and include reading assignments, references to resources for further study, written materials, facilitated discussion, and opportunity for synthesis and reflection. The continuing education instructors also facilitate field trips to connect students with other experts in their field and expose them to diverse perspectives and techniques.

Continuing education instructors are invited to teach at Sterling because they are renowned in their fields; many have published popular and authoritative texts. They are hired for the limited purposes of teaching one or more continuing education courses or

workshops. During their brief time in residence they may also enrich the College and its surrounding community by consulting with the College and delivering public lectures.

Nevertheless, because the continuing education instructors may not have the depth of academic study and teaching experience we expect of our full-time and adjunct faculty, they develop and deliver their courses under the guidance of and in close cooperation with the Director & Assistant Director of the Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems and other members of the full-time faculty with relevant subject matter expertise.

Appraisal
While the roles of full-time and adjunct faculty are clear, there is no single definition of part-time faculty members. Given that a substantial proportion of faculty members at Sterling perform roles other than teaching for more than 25% of their workload, this is an issue that the College plans to address. Despite this, the balance of full-time, part-time and adjunct faculty appears to work very well at Sterling. For example, our judicious use of adjunct instructors grants students the ability to benefit from a broad range of professional experiences that complement those of the full-time faculty.

The potential for perceived inequity is an issue currently being addressed by a Workload Task Force. This task force, called for by the President and comprised of three faculty and the Dean of Academics, has met regularly since Fall 2014 and has recently proposed a change in Independent Study policy that was adopted by the faculty in Fall 2015. The task force's work is ongoing.

Additionally, the process of hiring part-time or adjunct faculty is often less formalized, and may not be consistent.

Sterling College prides itself in its ability to give students individual attention and this is effectively facilitated through the high faculty-to-student ratio. In the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted in 2014, 86% of students ranked the quality of interactions with their academic advisors as 5 or above (on a scale of 1-7), and 92% of students ranked the quality of their interactions with faculty members as 5 or above.

Faculty often report that they choose to come and remain at Sterling for a wide range of benefits which include, amongst others, quality of life, the chance to work closely with a unique population of students, a community-based and environmentally focused work environment, and on-campus meals. Additionally, we have already made a commitment to raising salaries and total compensation in relation to a benchmarked cohort of colleges that share our environmental mission. Salaries of Sterling College full-time faculty are consistent with our benchmarked cohort, but this cohort as a whole has much lower salaries than regional and national averages for small colleges. However, raises in full-time faculty salary have occurred in the past four successive years from a median of $39,818 to $48,099.

Teaching and Advising

Description
The mission and purpose of Sterling College is to promote undergraduate education in environmental stewardship through an integrated curriculum of work, service, and learning. The current student-to-faculty ratio of 7:1 is among the lowest of all U.S. liberal arts colleges (and second only to Burlington College in Vermont). Such a ratio allows the College to effectively fulfill its primary role by providing students with highly individualized undergraduate education, and offering students unparalleled curricular and co-curricular experiences—from Global Field Studies courses of eight to ten students and two faculty to semester-length independent studies in a broad range of fields to individually tailored advising.

Most instructors integrate experiential methods in their courses and co-curricular interactions with students (including supervising Work Program positions, advising student clubs, and working with athletic teams). Under the aegis of Sterling motto's "Working Hands, Working Minds," student learning is understood across the curriculum as participating in a continuing cycle of experience, reflection, and revised action. An experiential model thus scaffolds the structure of much of the curriculum—from individual courses to the breadth of a student's experience. Faculty are extended a large measure of professional discretion in designing and delivering courses, and this freedom is balanced by discussion with the Dean of Academics and instructional teams to maximize the connections among courses and between course curricula and Sterling's college-wide outcomes. Within a classroom, a faculty member is entitled to freedom in discussing the subject matter, but is encouraged to create a space in which students can engage in issues in a thoughtful and respectful manner.

Academic advising at Sterling is plays a central role in the support and academic development of every student. The opportunity for frequent one-on-one conversations with faculty members in a student's field of interest contributes significantly to student engagement and success. Sterling's advising system is modeled in part on the guidelines provided by NACADA (the National Academic Advising Association) and aims to provide a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes.

Most faculty members also work with students as supervisors in the Work Program. The Work Program is a noncredit-bearing but required component of the Sterling curriculum, essential to the program in its integration of work, service, and academic learning—the central goal of the Work Colleges Consortium, of which Sterling is a member, and a clear echo of Sterling's mission. Faculty serve as mentors and teachers in this role; they train and oversee such student jobs as Writing Center Mentors, Lab Assistants, and Food System Analysts. In so doing, they help support student learning toward the college-wide competencies, in particular, applying theories and concepts to practical situations, working effectively independently and in collaboration with others, demonstrating resilience when facing challenges, and practicing leadership and participate intentionally in communities.

The Registrar and Dean of Academics assigns incoming students to an advisor based on their interests expressed at time of application. In 2015-16, 98% of students have a full-time faculty member as their academic advisor. The number of advisees for full-time faculty members ranges from six to ten. After initial weeks at Sterling, students have flexibility in their choice of academic advisor, and can opt to change advisors at any point through their time at Sterling, for example, to reflect a shifting academic focus.

All faculty members post regular office hours and are available for their advisees during those times. In addition, given the small community size, there are regular opportunities for informal advising such as during meals in the dining hall, during co-curricular or extracurricular activities, or simply during walks around campus.

A small segment of our student population requires additional learning support. To address this need, as well as to integrate our support of student learning more broadly, we have recently made a staffing change in this area, from a half-time Director of Learning Support to an Associate Dean for Learning Support and Academic Advising (a full-time faculty member). The Associate Dean coordinates learning support at all levels, including meeting individually with students, overseeing College Learning Skills, documenting students' need for classroom accommodations, supervising Writing & Learning Center mentors, and training faculty in supporting students with diverse learning needs. We anticipate this new position will advance our goal of cultivating more robust and personalized academic advising, as well as integrating systems of learning support for all students throughout the program.

While all students must discuss course selection with their advisor each semester, the nature of interactions between students and academic advisors is broad. It may include, for example, discussion about course content, major and minor selection, development of independent work and senior research projects, student interests and direction, future plans, strategies for academic success, student issues and the planning of internships or other work experiences. Many students meet with their advisors weekly, especially in the situation of a student being on academic review, or developing their self-design major.

The advising role of faculty members is supported through the regular dissemination of information relevant to student advising electronically from the Registrar, via the College's student information system, and at weekly Faculty Meetings. These faculty meetings also provide a forum for the discussion and sharing of advising strategies in the presence of the Registrar, Dean of Community, Dean of Academics, and Associate Dean for Learning Support and Academic Advising.

Appraisal
Sterling has an exceptionally low faculty-to-student ration of 1:7, which provides great opportunity for individualized learning and reflection, one-on-one support for student learning, rich co-curricular activities, and developing strong mentoring relationships between students and individual faculty.

The College's dedicated faculty typically stay at Sterling long-term. By the end of spring 2016, half of Sterling's full-time faculty will have been employed at Sterling for more than ten years. To complement our long-standing faculty, Sterling continues to hire new faculty as dictated by curricular needs, student interest, and budgetary priority. In the past three years, we have hired three full-time faculty in areas as diverse as Sustainable Food Systems, Outdoor Education, and Sustainable Agriculture.

The College has hired an Associate Dean for Learning Support and Academic Advising to further build and support the student advising and learning support program. The Associate Dean will work alongside the Dean of Community and Dean of Academics to develop a more robust first-year advising and academic support system.

Because of the small size of the faculty at Sterling (with only between three to five full-time faculty members within each instructional team) students have the opportunity to take multiple courses and work closely with a given faculty member during their time at Sterling. However, both for the core curriculum, and for the foundational curriculum within each major, effort is made to ensure that students are exposed to a diversity of instructors and teaching styles. Exceptions to this exist in the College curriculum, such as in the Draft Horse Management Minor. In order to achieve this minor, a student must take 14-17 credits with a one instructor, and only zero to three with a different instructor. Similar narrowing of expertise can occur in the study of natural history, social justice, and a variety of other subspecialties at the College.

Faculty members are very accessible and are frequently engaged in meaningful interactions with students. Results from the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement show that students are frequently engaged in higher order thinking skills through their coursework at Sterling. For example, students report courses "quite a bit" or "very much" emphasizing the application of facts, theories, or methods to practical problems (66%), analyzing ideas in depth by examining the parts (70%), evaluating points of view (73%), and forming new ideas from various pieces of information (79%). 67% of final year students often or very often discuss career plans with a faculty member, 70% of final year students often or very often discuss topics, ideas, and concepts with faculty members outside of the classroom. [Workroom Docs: NSSE]

Scholarship, Research, and Creative Activity

Description
The faculty are encouraged to pursue professional development avenues. Faculty currently engage, in differing degrees, in a range of professional development activities; for example, the attendance of conferences, workshops, field trips, and faculty seminars. There is a professional development fund managed by the Dean of Academics to which faculty members can apply for money to support their professional development endeavors, though the budget for doing so is limited. In 2015-16, available annual funding for individual faculty is $275.

In accordance with Sterling's experiential educational model, research is encouraged, though not formally required as part of a full-time faculty member's employment. Much of our research involves the systems in place at the College, such as farm production models, changes in management strategies, and ongoing monitoring of natural resources. Often, these projects are focused more on providing instruction than on pure research. Faculty will work with students on research projects, and there are often students working on grant-supported faculty research projects. Faculty are encouraged to become engaged in projects involving local organizations, including businesses, non-profits, and other institutions. However, time and physical resources often limit individual faculty members' ability to pursue primary research. Faculty members are given full freedom in research and publication of results as long as such research or publication does not interfere with adequate performance of assigned duties.

Appraisal
Faculty generally feel that they have full freedom to develop and deliver courses as they see best based on their academic and professional outlook. In addition, they feel freedom in terms of intellectual content of research and academic outputs. However, there is limited opportunity for faculty to engage in many of these activities due to a lack of time. Much of this faculty feedback and reflection on process is offered verbally and ad hoc; the College is currently engaged in a survey of faculty regarding workload. It is also not entirely clear what funds are available for professional development for any one faculty member and the process by which a faculty member applies for funds is not detailed in the Employee Handbook. [Workroom Docs: Faculty Workload Survey]

Projection
As part of the College's longer-term goals, we aim to steadily increase the number of advanced and terminal degree-holding full-time faculty. Additionally, Sterling's mission remains constant and thus the importance of community connections and field practitioners will continue to be valued and thus Sterling remains committed to fulfilling its unique curricular goals with a broad diversity of full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty.

The College will make every effort to maintain transparency and openness by publishing criteria and processes for the hiring of new full-time faculty. (While there are specific guidelines in place, these are not currently published in the Community Guidebook or Employee Handbook.)

It has long been a priority, initiated by the Board of Trustees and the President, to bring salaries in line with comparable institutions. In addition, as the College's financial health continues to grow, the Workload Task Force and Board of Trustees Program Committee will explore the possibility of eliminating annual agreement letters for faculty, substituting them with longer terms of appointment, associated with a review process led by faculty. The College is also aware of issues surrounding benefits, including health insurance, and aims to move to a more comprehensive suite of benefits offered, which can be selected by each employee.

Professional development is important in terms of the integration of appropriate academic and professional standards and expectations back into the classroom, although faculty often do not have adequate time for engaging in professional development activities as much as they would like. For example, it used to be that faculty would have time during a typical semester to occasionally sit in on a colleague's course meetings at Sterling, thus providing the opportunity to observe a different teaching style and approach, as well as expanding horizons of knowledge and skills. Now it is rarely the case that faculty have time within their semester's workload to attend a colleague's class. In general, it is clear that faculty would appreciate more time and opportunity for professional development activities, both integrated into semesters and occurring on discrete occasions such as attending a conference or engaging in summer field research.

The College plans to create a process of regularly surveying faculty attitudes to academic freedom and ability to pursue avenues of inquiry within the context of employment at the college. The College should support faculty in structuring workload to allow for research and scholarship, including sabbatical, leave of absence, a targeted internal expense budget, and other avenues for funding such as grant application and administrative support.

Institutional Effectiveness
There are several avenues of feedback supplied to faculty linked to their involvement in different aspects of the Sterling curriculum. For example, faculty receive written feedback from students at the end of each course. Every student is offered the opportunity to provide feedback on every course in which they participated. Recently, the gathering of this written feedback shifted from paper to online format. Those faculty members participating in the Work Program receive a formal end-of-semester evaluation from each student they supervise. This evaluation meets the requirements of work-college standards as specified by the Federal Government. Finally, all full-time faculty are evaluated annually using a self-evaluation form that informs a meeting with the Dean of Academics. Any issues identified in student evaluations or other communications about a specific class are reviewed at this time. This self-review process happens between the end of the Spring semester and start of Fall semester.

The recent shift to online forms of student feedback regarding each course has results in very low return rates meaning faculty members are not receiving a full reflective picture of the effectiveness of their teaching and course. The role of this student feedback in subsequent faculty evaluation also needs to be formalized.

Regarding the self-review process, the Community Guidebook states that this must be completed prior to a faculty member's agreement being renewed for the following year. However, this timeline is not necessarily compatible with the annual appointment letter timing of May for the renewal of a faculty contract (as stated by the President). This indicates that the timing and relevance of this self-review process needs to be reflected on. In response to this need, the faculty are currently experimenting with a peer-review observation process. Depending on the outcome of this, it may be implemented in coming semesters.

Throughout the process of the next strategic planning process in 2017, the College will continue to work to make this process of self-review more timely and consistent.

STANDARD SIX: STUDENTS

Overview

The guiding philosophy of student services at Sterling College is one that encourages compassion, care, and reflection, and focuses on student development and success through individual growth and accountability. Our goal is to support students as they become the people they want to be in the world. We are committed to providing the tools, resources, and support for students to make informed decisions about their lives and their interactions within the community. Our community values relationship, equity, and transparency in policy and communication.

As of January 2016, there are 118 students enrolled at Sterling College, including six students on a leave of absence who are expected to return.

The Office of the Dean of Community advocates for and supports community and individual wellbeing, and is responsible for promoting and cultivating a safe, productive, and supportive environment on the Sterling College campus. Sterling's small size offers the opportunity for intensely individualized services and supports that generate a collective sense of belonging and engagement in community. The Dean of Community oversees Residential Life, Wellness, Safety and Security, and the Work Program, and supervises all attendant staff, including a newly hired Director of Work in Community and the Student Leadership teams.

The Director of Admission and Financial Aid supervises three Admission Counselors and the Director of Financial Aid.

All staff that provide student services have extensive training and experience in their area of responsibility as well as membership in appropriate professional organizations. [Workroom Docs: CVs]

Admissions

Description
Consistent with our mission, Sterling College attracts and recruits students who are committed to an approach to higher education that "combines structured academic study with experiential challenges and plain hard work" and who hope to become "responsible problem solvers" and "stewards of the environment as they pursue productive lives." Toward that end, we seek students who desire a liberal arts education with an ecological focus. [Workroom docs: Admission policies]

Sterling is committed to enrolling a diverse community of students, with particular focus on serving low-income and first-generation college students. Sterling's identity as a federally recognized Work College informs the College's focus on this population. The commitment to serving low-income and first-generation students is expressed as follows in our Strategic Plan:

The impact of our educational model and its pertinence to society place financial access for prospective and current students among our highest priorities. As part of its mission, the College seeks to serve a diverse student population whose passion for environmental stewardship is paramount.

In addition to Sterling's focus on serving low-income and first-generation students, older students, and veterans, the College is putting special emphasis on recruiting students of color and students who identify as members of the LGBTQ community. This focus is expressed in the Strategic Enrollment and Recruitment Plan, which states that Sterling will specifically use resources to expand awareness of the College's environmental stewardship brand through earned and paid media among the following communities and populations:

- African-American Community
- Latino Community
- LGBTQ Community
- Non-traditional college age
- Transfer & community college students
- Veterans
- Women

The addition of women on this list of populations for special emphasis in recruiting reflects Sterling's commitment to maintaining a balanced male/female ratio in the student body. Many elements of Sterling's curriculum prepare students for careers and pursuits that are disproportionately populated by men. It is important for the College, and consistent with its mission, to actively encourage women to pursue these fields of study, and related careers.

Sterling codifies and publishes the Sterling College Diversity Commitment, which guides the College's approach to and initiatives regarding diversity:

We believe that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity and that our community is strengthened through differences. Sterling College is committed to creating and maintaining an environment and a community that:

- Values different perspectives
- Is free from racism, sexism, homophobia, and other prejudices
- Is free from the weight of hate, discrimination, and fear
- Promotes and fosters physical and emotional safety
- Fosters civil and respectful dialogue

Admission counselors recruit students via extensive personal outreach, including email communication, phone calls, and strategically limited in-person recruiting. In-person recruiting is focused on recruiting among specific populations that the College seeks to

enroll. For example, admission counselors have attended Campus Pride college fairs in 2014 and 2015, to recruit LGBTQ students. Admission counselors also frequently visit the campuses of the Community College of Vermont to recruit low-income and first-generation transfer students, many of whom are veterans or students of non-traditional college age. This is also one of the goals of our nascent dual-enrollment relationships with local public high schools.

Recruitment of students of color relies upon building relationships with specific secondary schools, college counselors, and non-governmental organizations that have a mission of educational access and work primarily with students of color. Examples of schools with whom Sterling has developed relationships include the Common Ground High School in New Haven, Connecticut and the Walter Biddle Saul High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition, Sterling is building a relationship with Summer Search, a non-profit college-access organization that operates in seven U.S. cities. In the past three years, four Summer Search students have attended Sterling, three of whom identify as Latina and one of whom identifies as African-American. All four are the first in their family to attend college.

Sterling emphasizes access and affordability, which is reflected in its admission materials, including the College website, to support the goal of enrolling and supporting more low-income and first-generation students. Admission materials, including the Viewbook and the website, also illustrate the ways in which Sterling is a diverse and welcoming campus community. For example, the Admission Viewbook includes photos of students participating in a Pride Parade, along with images of students of all genders and of different ages and ethnicities. [Workroom Docs: Admission Viewbook]

Affordability is central to Sterling College's mission. In 2015, 98% of students received some form of financial aid. Information about financial aid is clearly described on the College's website, including clear criteria for merit scholarships. Student eligibility for need based awards are determined based on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and students may also file a Sterling College Financial Aid Application, which presents an opportunity for them to share any additional information about their ability to pay for college that the Director of Financial Aid can take into account in consultation with admission officers while calculating need-based awards.

Aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until all available funds are used. The FAFSA and the Sterling College Financial Aid Application may take up to two weeks to process, so students are encouraged to submit both of them as soon as possible. Students are also encouraged to apply for state grants through their home state's financial aid agency (for example, Vermonters can generally access funds via the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation).

The Work Program also gives students a means to offset the cost of attendance. Students earn a minimum of $800 per semester through their successful participation in the Work Program.

Sterling's recruitment strategy has shifted away from engaging with students who apply to college in their senior year of high school, and towards increased engagement with transfer students, adult learners, and student veterans. Over half of the 50 students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 were transfer students, and the average age of all Sterling students in 2013-14 was 22 years. In both the fall of 2014 and the fall of 2015 transfer students accounted for slightly more than 40% of newly enrolled students, and the average age of all Sterling students dropped only slightly, to 21 years.

The College accepts applications via both an in-house online application and via the Common Application. If a student is unable to use an online application, a paper application is provided [Workroom Docs: Application for Admission].

Information about admission to Sterling College is readily available on our website, and outlined in the Admission Viewbook, which is distributed via mail and at college fairs attended by Admission representatives.

The Admission Office at Sterling College actively encourages prospective students and their families to contact admission counselors throughout the application process. Admission counselors strive to consistently engage in personal communications with prospective students, applicants, and their families, guiding them through a process that can otherwise seem overly bureaucratic and intimidating. This commitment to personal communication is consistent with Sterling's focus on community building and helps enable a successful program of outreach to low income students, many of whom are the first in their family to attend college.

Sterling College is a member in good standing of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), and abides by the ethical standards codified in the Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP) that is produced by NACAC.

Admission Standards

The Admission Committee strives to achieve a balanced understanding of each applicant's academic abilities, personal qualifications, and overall fit for Sterling College. This is accomplished through both a comprehensive application process and via personal communication with each applicant, and in some cases with their recommenders as well. Whether a student chooses to use the Common Application or Sterling's in-house online application, an application is not considered complete and ready for review until the applicant has submitted a personal essay, a high school transcript, transcripts from other all other colleges attended, and two letters of recommendation. In rare cases, the admission committee may elect to waive one letter of recommendation. Home-schooled applicants may submit a portfolio of work equivalent to a high school transcript.

Sterling College practices test-optional admission. Students may choose whether to submit SAT or ACT test results. Students who elect not to submit standardized test scores are at no disadvantage during the application review process.

At the beginning of the 2015 admission cycle, the admission committee began interviewing all applicants who submitted a complete application. This interview has proven to be a highly effective means of identifying students who are a poor fit for Sterling College.

During the fall semester of 2015, the Admission Office revised the worksheet and rubric used to assess applications for admission. The updated document is currently being reviewed by the Community Council, Academic Council, and Administrative Council. The new document priorities the following characteristics: academic ability, work ethic, personal character, and environmental mission fit. [Workroom Docs: Admission Rubric]

International students are required to submit TOEFL scores, in addition to a video chat interview, to ensure that they have the English language ability to thrive at Sterling. Sterling's Primary Designated School Official, Tim Patterson, meets regularly with each international student to advise on visa issues.

A designated Admission Counselor is responsible for serving student veterans throughout the application process, and interfaces with student services to ensure that the expectations and needs of student veterans are met as completely and efficiently as possible.

During the application process, admission counselors work to identify any special needs of applicants via letters of recommendations, conversation with the prospective student, and the required interview. Although applicants are not required to disclose any need for learning support, they are encouraged to have candid conversations about their learning style and educational needs throughout the application process; this approach builds the foundation for the College's self-advocacy student support model. Any information related to learning support is communicated to the faculty via regular meetings between the Director of Admission & Financial Aid, the Dean of Community, and the Dean of Academics. The Deans are then responsible for communicating with the Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising and with individual faculty members.

Admitted students who require additional learning support are encouraged to meet regularly with the Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising, as well as their academic advisor. Students who are identified as requiring remedial support are enrolled in "College Learning Skills," a course designed to prepare students for further study. While Sterling does not provide tutors for students, the Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising facilitates connections between students and outside tutors, as needed.

Appraisal
Enrollment at Sterling College is growing, with three consecutive years of increases in applications for admission, and a student body that has grown by one third over three years, as planned for in a strategic enrollment and recruitment plan. This success follows a period of time from 2008–2012 when Sterling struggled to meet enrollment goals. The transition to a year-round model in 2010 successfully bolstered the bottom line enrollment number of fiscal full-time equivalents (FFTE) by keeping many students enrolled for the

equivalent of an additional semester in each calendar year. However, during the period of transition to a year-round model recruitment of new students remained weak, hampered by economic uncertainty and a decline in the number of high school graduates in New England, traditionally a core recruitment market for the College.

Starting with the cohort of 50 students who arrived at Sterling in or near the Fall of 2013, however, the College has experienced more success with recruitment, enrolling to residential capacity in 2013, 2014, and 2015. A strategic decision to devote more institutional resources to financial aid, specifically for scholarship support for low-income students, helped the College meet enrollment goals while also serving one of our most important target populations: low-income students.

It should be noted as well that higher rates of retention from 2013 to 2015 took some pressure off the recruitment effort. Although it is challenging to pinpoint specific causes contributing to student retention, Sterling faculty and administrators recognize that student retention as a metric is indicative of a complex and nuanced environment that supports student success and engagement. A strengthening curriculum, increasing flexibility in student curricular planning, improvements in campus infrastructure, and new faculty appointments have all contributed to increased student satisfaction and the improvement in retention. The College could work more actively to assess which specific measures have influenced student retention [see E-series form]. It is important to note that enrollment growth did not come at the expense of admitting students who were not a good fit for the College's program; on the contrary, the overall increase in the size of the student body in the last three years was made possible by attracting and enrolling students who match our mission.

Sterling is increasingly becoming a more selective college. Before 2015, the percentage of applicants who were granted admission was in the range of 90-95%. The admission committee was diligent about denying applicants who were clearly not suited for the program, but was not able to select between qualified applicants. In 2015, the admit rate fell to 78% for first-time first-year students; the admit rate was 83% overall. This decrease can be attributed to an increase in the number of applicants seeking admission to the College and to the implementation of an interview as part of the application process. Once an application is complete, admission counselors contact the applicant for an interview, and no applicant is offered admission without having completed this interview. The interview is conducted either in person or via telephone / video chat, and has proven to be a highly effective screening tool, enabling members of the admission committee to identify applicants who are a particularly good fit for Sterling College. The Admission team has also begun consulting with the Deans when there are questions about an applicant's readiness to join our community or successfully engage in the academic and Work Programs. These consultations serve the additional purpose of alerting the student services teams to particular resources and supports that need to be made available with each incoming class.

This increase in selectivity has clear benefits for the community and the program; it means we take fewer risks with students who are less committed to the program or who may be marginally qualified, leading to stronger retention and greater academic success.

Enrollment goals are set by the Board of the Trustees, in consultation with the Administrative Council. An enrollment report produced monthly by the Director of Admission & Financial Aid helps the administration keep abreast of enrollment trends.

Retention and Graduation

Retention begins with the newly adopted New Student Orientation and Engagement Plan, which delineates the ways in which Sterling supports students from their first moment of contact (though the Admission office) through their first semester, encompassing coursework, academic advising, and student services.

Key to orientation and engagement begins with "A Sense of Place," (ASOP) a two-week intensive integrative introduction to life, culture, and ecology in and around Sterling. Taken in a student's first two weeks at the College, the course grounds students in a culture of academic rigor, community and personal accountability, restorative practices, and resilience. Additionally, "ASOP" provides opportunities for assessment and intensive and proactive development of learning plans for each participating student. These two weeks are critical in engaging students within the community, academics, and work of Sterling College. All employees and student leaders are available, accessible, and focused on supporting a high-quality, intentional, and engaging student experience. "ASOP" confirms for new students their decision to join the Sterling community, and supports exploration, connection, and inspired learning. "ASOP" delivers a curriculum that creates culture and provides a foundation for success for each incoming student.

The coursework that undergirds "ASOP" includes sessions that focus on natural science, natural history, writing, reading and discussion, self-assessment, academic goal-setting, and other areas. "ASOP" is the first Integrative Studies (INT) course in which students enroll at Sterling College, and, as such, it builds the foundation for a rigorous academic emphasis on inquiry, critical thinking, and the ability to both understand and question interrelationships among different discourses and knowledge domains. Specific emphases in writing and ecology both assess and build competencies that will be further developed throughout the first year curriculum.

Through intentional experiential and developmentally relevant activities, "ASOP" begins to build and support the College-wide competencies (see Standard Four).

In addition, in their first year and throughout their tenure at Sterling, students are provided with the scaffolding necessary to help them develop the following broad community-centered skills:

Sense of Belonging
"ASOP" provides meaningful and engaging opportunities for new and returning
students to build community with each other. Traditions are established within a
culture of welcome.

Engagement
Students are provided with clear expectations of and opportunities for engagement
within the Sterling community. Introduction to Common Table, with an emphasis
on personal advocacy within advising and social relationships.

Commitment to Community
Students clarify their expectations of community and begin to identify roles they
may choose to explore within our community. Students are introduced to concepts
of Community and Community Competencies, Community Behavioral Guidelines,
and Work Program expectations. All new students will be asked to create and sign a
Community Accountability Agreement during "ASOP," establishing and indicating
awareness of and willingness to engage in academic, community, and work
expectations.

Accountability
Students learn about and interact with our shared governance model and explore a
variety of restorative practices. Emphasis on personal and community accountability
in the context of safety, healthy relationships, and peer support.

Exploration, Curiosity, and Healthy Risk Taking
Students are provided with opportunities to explore resources within the Northeast
Kingdom, and to practice healthy risk taking using the tools and supports gained
through the Experiential Education model at the root of the Sterling experience.

Communication
Students are introduced to the model of Compassionate Communication, and the
shared community values of respect, honesty, accountability, and integrity.
Technology training is provided and its value emphasized.

Resources
"ASOP" introduces students to Sterling and community resources, including
student support, wellness programming, learning support, and social opportunities.

Assessing Student Success
The implementation of an integrated student information system in 2015 provides the
College with an effective tool to use for consistent and regular reporting, including the
ability to track success rates for specifically recruited groups. Prior to 2015, the College had
separate student information systems for the Registrar, the Business Office, the Work
Program, Financial Aid, and Admission. These separate systems led to inconsistent and
occasionally error-prone reporting of student information, and although retention and
graduation rates were regularly reported to the Board of Trustees, measures of student

success often relied too heavily on personal knowledge and often used inconsistent methodologies.

Sterling's Academic Council, in cooperation with the Community and Work Council and the faculty, is moving toward the development of a clear and effective competency-based assessment practice for all students. Based on the College-wide competencies, this assessment will further emphasize the student-centered and individualized nature of a Sterling College education (See also Standard 4.48-4.54).

Throughout Sterling's record-keeping processes, we use the guidelines of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. College policies are not currently online, but can be found in Registrar's office.

Retention among Sterling's Pell eligible students has been between 70% and 75% over the past three years, which is consistent with our cohort colleges' overall retention rates.

Retention Among all Pell Eligible Students 2013-2015

Academic Year	Pell Eligible Students	Eligible to Return	Returning Students	Retention rate
2012-2013	60	44	32	72%
2013-2014	63	44	33	75%
2014-2015	63	56	51	73%

Retention Among all First Generation Students 2013-2015

Academic Year	First Gen. Students	Eligible to Return	Returning Students	Retention rate
2012-2013	25	18	14	78%
2013-2014	29	20	14	70%
2014-2015	33	30	20	66%

Our four-year graduation rates show a consistent disparity between our success with first-time first-year students and transfer students. As the table below illustrates, Sterling typically has greater success with students coming to Sterling from another institution with prior college experience.

Additionally, the data demonstrate that Sterling has historically better graduation rates (and retention) with students who begin at the start of the fall semester than those who enter in January. Specifically, between 2009-2011, of the 28 students who started in January, only ten (36%) completed their degree at Sterling. Students entering in January are primarily (75%) transfer students (based on the 2009-2011 cohorts).

Four-Year Graduation Rate Comparison

Year of Graduation	FTFY grad rate	Transfer grad rate	Combined grad rate
2013	9 of 28 (32%)	13 of 18 (72%)	48%
2014	12 of 19 (63%)	10 of 17 (59%)	61%
2015	6 of 23 (26%)	17 of 27 (63%)	46%

Appraisal

Although the continuing evolution of "ASOP" has helped to develop a more successful first experience for students, with regard to the initial contact with faculty advisors, additional training and support is needed to ensure consistency and an overall sense of capacity and competency:

- Expectations
- Developmental Advising
- Boundaries
- Learning Styles
- Motivational Interviewing
- Resources and Referrals

Moving forward, all new students will be provided the opportunity to meet with their advisor one-on-one, weekly through their first year at Sterling. We must consider designating advisors specifically for new students, transfer students, and fourth-year students. It is imperative that advisors for new students be on campus and accessible throughout "ASOP."

We are only in the initial semester of full deployment of the student information system, and moving forward, the College will create a plan to assess the effectiveness of the system periodically.

Institutional goals for retention are consistent with our admission processes, student support services, community, and academic cultures and expectations. In short, Sterling is becoming more adept at attracting and retaining students who are an exceptional fit for the College's curriculum and community. The College currently reviews retention and

graduation data in Administrative Council, in Board of Trustees meetings, and among academic administrators.

Results of data assessment regarding retention are used to inform resource allocation and implement improvements. For example, in 2015, poor retention figures among the cohort of first-year students with major interest in Outdoor Education led the faculty to engage in a self-study of the Outdoor Education curriculum. Outcomes of this analysis led to increased support for an expedition style global field study program and informed the search criteria during the hiring process for a new faculty member in the Outdoor Education program. Another example of a change implemented in response to retention data analysis involves first-year students who struggle in "ASOP." Once this group of students was identified as at a higher risk of attrition, a policy change was made so that students who struggle in "ASOP" are now immediately placed on academic review at the end of the intensive block, instead of waiting until the end of the semester. We continue to develop instruments to help effectively assess student fit and success and modify processes accordingly.

The College has identified, for example, areas of wellness programming to be of significant importance to students across Sterling, and over the past three years, we have begun to implement a range of wellness initiatives including wellness workshops, increased nurse staffing, recreational and competitive athletic programs, and so on.

Student Services
Advising and Learning Support
The Advising and Learning Support Program at Sterling is:

Individualized
With small numbers of advisees, faculty advisors are able to meet as frequently as students' needs warrant to craft a learning plan that enhances opportunities, supports student learning needs, builds on students' personal goals, and capitalizes on their strengths to support success throughout a student's tenure at Sterling.

Responsive
In their work together, advisors and advisees are empowered to identify and set goals, identify learning outcomes and learning strategies that can help adapt to meet students' changing needs. As a team, course faculty, Deans, the Coordinator of Learning Support, and faculty advisors help to shape a student's learning experiences.

Multidimensional
Advisors address concerns ranging from pragmatic academic issues such as course registration to a student's involvement in the community and development of personal as well as academic goals. The advisor-advisee relationship is based on a progression of ongoing, curriculum-based, and goal oriented conversations.

Developmental
Sterling's Advising and Learning Support Program scaffolds student opportunities for success in a way that is appropriate for each individual student's level of need and academic and community development.

Cooperatively Designed
Students work one-on-one with advisors to co-create individualized learning plans. Advisors, in turn, collaborate with a student's course faculty, the three Deans, and other appropriate College staff to holistically support the student learning experience.

The Sterling College Writing Center is located in Simpson Hall and is available to students during set hours and by appointment. The Writing Center is staffed by faculty, staff, and students who have demonstrated strong writing and peer-editing skills.

Advising is a cornerstone of the Sterling experience. A close, caring, and concerned relationship between faculty advisor and student advisee directly supports the mission, culture, and strategic plan of Sterling College. Advising is integral to the faculty role and the teaching and learning process. Advising at Sterling is focused on supporting students as they explore and address their academic, social, and developmental goals, and must be responsive, compassionate, consistent, and reliable. Advisors work closely with student support teams, including Deans, Community Advisors, Work Program supervisors, and Learning Support. Consistent and individualized advising and feedback is essential as we build relationships and community, two key indicators of strong retention.

From the very first days and weeks of the semester, each entering student is invited to work closely with a group of faculty advisors to help build a solid foundation for a rewarding learning experience at Sterling College. "ASOP" provides opportunities for assessment and intensive and proactive development of learning plans for each participating student. These two weeks are critical in engaging students within the community, academics, and work of Sterling College.

"ASOP" serves as an opportunity to identify students who may need increased learning and community support; the College has developed processes and policies that help identify and support students as soon as possible. In addition to meeting with their advisors both on the day of their arrival and throughout "ASOP," all students receiving a C- or lower for "ASOP" will be placed on Academic Review immediately following Intensive to help build a supportive structure for their success in the following Long Block semester.

Over the first semester, students typically meet weekly or biweekly with advisors, each of whom, in turn, works with Sterling's Deans and the Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising in order to best support a student's individual goals, needs, and expectations in the community, in coursework, and throughout their Sterling experience.

The principal goal of all Sterling faculty advisors is to provide resilient and responsive learning and access to community support to help students achieve high levels of success and engagement throughout their college experience.

The Sterling Advising and Learning Support Program is grounded in the principle of cooperatively designed learning and is goal oriented, ongoing, and curriculum based. This approach integrates universal instructional design principles with a developmental advising approach that underscores a holistic approach to student support.

Although advisors are initially assigned by the Registrar and Deans according to student academic interest and foreseeable needs, students may choose to switch advisors at any point in their tenure at Sterling. Third and fourth year students may find that advisors more closely associated with their Senior Project or major might serve them more effectively. Advisors assist students with course selection and meeting program requirements, including developing a long-term study plan. All faculty and staff members act as resources available to all students.

Learning support takes many forms at Sterling College. Every student is given the opportunity to create an individualized learning plan with their advisor, identifying goals, timeline, and supports needed. All students meet with their advisor during "ASOP" and in the first week of Long Block, to create a learning and support plan. Plans may include enrolling in "College Learning Skills," regular meetings with the Learning Support Specialist, accessing private or Sterling tutors, creating a support team (advisor, faculty, Work Program supervisor, Deans, Nurse, Community Advisors, etc). We will continue to encourage self-advocacy, while increasing our outreach and engagement efforts across the student body.

The Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising encourages one-on-one meetings with students to plan and support learning strategies for dealing with individual learning challenges. The College provides for students with reading challenges, such as dyslexia, using advanced text to speech software (Kurzweil 3000) and equipment. The College can convert also text documents into digital audio files for students to listen to, depending on the individual license arrangement, on a personal computer, laptop, portable audio player, or campus lab workstation.

Students who need assistance with time management and organization may be advised to enroll in "College Learning Skills." Additionally, students who need extra support in mathematics may enroll in "Quantitative Skills," which prepares students for Sterling's upper level math and science requirements. The term "learning disabilities" is a broad term referring to a variety of learning difficulties; Sterling faculty and learning support staff often choose the term "learning differences" to help alleviate the stigma that may be associated with disabilities as well as to recognize that all students have differences in their learning styles and thus can all benefit from learning support of some kind. Students with learning differences can obtain adjustments to a course or program that minimizes disability-related barriers based on individual need.

The Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising keeps all disability related information confidential to the extent required by law. Sometimes, in order to determine or provide the most effective accommodations, the Associate Dean of Learning Support and Academic Advising may share relevant information with other Sterling College faculty or staff.

Faculty are asked to include the following statement on all syllabi:

> Students bring a variety of learning styles to class. At Sterling we do our best to support different learning modes by mixing lecture, discussion, hands-on work, and visual information. Please let us know what mode works best for you—we will do our best to accommodate your learning style. If you have a learning challenge or documented disability, please check in with our Learning Support Coordinator. The Learning Support Coordinator can help you determine accommodations that can be helpful in this course.

Student peers play an important role in learning support as well. A number of courses have teaching assistants (a course titled "College Teaching Experience"). Students must apply for and be selected by the course faculty member for this role, and they receive credit. Student Writing Center mentors are regularly available throughout the semester to help students at any stage of the writing process, from generating ideas to drafting to proofreading. Mentors are selected and trained by a faculty supervisor, and they work in this position as part of their Work Program responsibilities.

Wellness

The Wellness Team consists of the Dean of Community, Counselor, Nurse / Nurse Practitioner, and between seven and 14 Community Advisors. The Wellness Team ensures a safe, welcoming, and vibrant community by providing services that assist students in identifying, clarifying, and achieving their personal, wellness, and educational goals. In addition to direct assistance to students, the Wellness Team develops programs that improve the quality of life and learning in our community. Wellness programming promotes and sustains diversity of culture, history, and lifestyle, fosters respect for the campus environment and ecological systems, and facilitates a productive and transformative exchange of ideas.

The Wellness Team offers support to students around issues of stress, transition, general mental health, and crisis response. Acute mental health issues are referred to a licensed psychologist or emergency services, if necessary.

The College Nurse is available during scheduled hours to consult on matters of general, physical, or mental health and to assist with insurance claim forms for accidents. The College increased nurse coverage from four to 20 hours a week in 2014. A 20-hour a week therapist was also hired in 2014 to support students' mental health needs. If a doctor's examination is required, the Wellness Center staff will assist with appointments and

transportation. Excellent facilities are available in Hardwick, ten miles from campus, and at Copley Hospital in Morrisville, 20 miles away. Students with chronic or long-term illness are encouraged to maintain the care of their home practitioner or to establish themselves with a doctor in the community.

Both the team of Community Advisors and the Student Activities committee have been deliberate in offering a range of events, speakers, and workshops to be of interest for the entire student community. Among the offerings this semester have been a Winter Festival, a Substance Abuse Support group, Listening Circle, Improv Group, Women's Circle, Men's Group, Writing Circle, nature walks, a Survivors of Sexual Trauma group, Equity Circle, a table tennis tournament, and weekly basketball nights at the Craftsbury Academy. Additionally, the College has facilitated field trips to regional agricultural, ecological, and wellness conferences and hosted workshops focused on self-care, sexual health, and herbalism. There is rarely a night without something to do and connections to be made. This sense of belonging is one important part of a strong culture of engagement and success. (6.13)

Student initiated and supported clubs, including the coffee club, card club, social justice club, and outing club support a range of student interests and regular speakers, performers, and workshops—often student suggested and supported through Student Activities funding—are also an integral part of the student experience at Sterling.

Athletic Program

Sterling athletic programs, since their launch in 2013, have also played an important role in supporting student wellness; nearly 20% of the student body regularly participated in College supported athletics between 2013 and 2016.

Sterling's athletic programs are a natural complement to the College's ecologically-focused curriculum and supportive campus community. Core athletic teams including Trail, Mountain, and Ultra Running and Nordic Skiing are foremost extra-curricular means of immersing students in the natural world and empowering Sterling community members to not only see themselves as active participants in the world on the roads, trails, and woods around Craftsbury, but also to engage in supportive competition with peers beyond Craftsbury Common. The associations and leagues in which Sterling student-athletes participate are inclusive and supportive and offer students exceptional learning, networking, and social growth experiences that are difficult to replicate on campus. The programs are fully inclusive and accessible to all students in good academic standing. The Director of Athletics is currently working in cooperation with the Dean of Community to develop and formalize athletic policies that will both help students be accountable and help students balance their desire to participate in sports with their overall experience at Sterling.

In the spring of 2013, the Work College Consortium engaged Noel-Levitz to conduct a student satisfaction survey with all member colleges. 95% of our students completed the survey, indicating on most questions that they were more than satisfied with the Sterling

experience. Campus climate items that relate to personal support for students were rated particularly highly. For example, using a Likert scale in which 7 represents "very satisfied" our students gave:

- Concern for the Individual: 6.05
- Student Centeredness: 6.08
- Campus Climate: 5.89
- Campus Support Services: 5.86

[Workroom document: Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory]

Governance
Academic Council
The Academic Council has responsibility for presenting formal recommendations to the Dean of Academics concerning development, review, assessment, and modification of the credit-bearing components of Sterling College programs. The Council reports recommendations to the faculty for review, comment, and/or approval before making final recommendations for implementation to the Dean of Academics.

The Academic Council's purview includes approving proposals for new courses and self-designed majors, approving proposed changes to academic policies, and generating ideas for curriculum development. Other topics may be discussed at the request of the Dean. The Council may also make recommendations to Faculty Meeting, other councils, committees, instructional teams, and the President concerning other needs of the academic curriculum. This council may also establish task forces to research and make recommendations on specific topics.

The Academic Council is chaired by a full-time member of the academic faculty, invited by the Dean of Academics, and its membership is composed of faculty representatives from the breadth of the college's instructional areas, other academic staff, and one to two students, as well as the Dean of Academics. Faculty members typically serve two-year terms.

Academic Council members serve as liaisons to their respective areas by bringing agenda items to the Academic Council and reporting back to their constituencies.

Community Advisors and Work Advisors
Community Advisors (CAs) are a direct link between the student residents and the Dean of Community. CAs represent the hall and are a source of information from the broader community to the residents. The job of the CA involves numerous roles and responsibilities. They advise and advocate for students with questions, problems, and/or crises; maintain community norms, rules and regulations set by residents and the College; and support the mission of the College.

Work Advisors supervise and support crews of students in the Work Program. Community Advisors and Work Advisors become involved in a complex net of interpersonal

relationships with residents, staff colleagues, supervisors, and the broader community. This demands sophisticated communication skills, the ability to exercise good judgment, and the gathering, integration and dissemination of information as appropriate.

Community Council
Community Council is a regular opportunity to engage in conversations around the state of the College and our strategic plan. All members of the College may join Community Council, and there is a core group of students, administrators and advisors who have committed to the concepts of restorative justice and community accountability. Additionally, Community Council will convene when it is determined that deeper conversations around community behavior expectations are necessary.

Community Meetings
Sterling students, faculty, and staff meet as a community every Wednesday after lunch in order to share stories, announce upcoming events, and discuss issues of importance or interest to the whole community. Each Community Meeting is facilitated by a student volunteer, and is important because it a time for us to sit in a circle, look at each other, and address issues as a holistic community.

Hiring Committees
Students are active members of every personnel hiring committee. They assist with the creation of job descriptions, review application materials, participate in interviews, and engage in hiring decisions. The College is in the process of formalizing the hiring process for full-time faculty.

[Workroom Docs: Employee Handbook; Hiring Process]

Lands and Energy Committee The Lands and Energy Committee is a clearinghouse for information on projects, which affect the physical plant and land use on Sterling College property. The Committee serves as a forum for discussing facilities and land use planning, budgeting, and long-range issues. The Lands and Energy Committee is comprised of faculty, staff, and students.

Risk Management Committee The purpose of the Risk Management Committee is to identify, monitor, and manage hazards and dangers in order to reduce the potential for incidents that could result in injury, illness, fatality, or damage. The committee is charged with developing and revising a written Risk Management Plan and an Emergency Action Plan; for assuring that incident reports, including near misses, are completed in a timely manner; for appropriate safety briefings and training; and for meeting on a monthly basis.

Student Activities Committee The Student Activities Committee seeks to provide a high standard of quality for student life at Sterling College by supporting and sponsoring events, activities, and entertainment for the community. The Dean of Community advises the Student Activities Coordinator, who is appointed by the Work Program to facilitate weekly meetings of the Committee. All students are encouraged to participate in the Student

Activities Committee. The Student Activities Committee meets weekly to discuss financial requests from students who wish to utilize the Student Activities Fund. The Coordinator establishes meeting times and location, and sets the agenda.

Community Accountability

The guiding philosophy and approach to student conduct at Sterling College is one that encourages compassion, care, and reflection, focusing on student development through individual growth and accountability for behavior.

Our goal is to support students as they become the people they want to be in the world. We are committed to providing the tools, resources, and supports for students to make informed decisions about their lives and their interactions within the community. The processes for addressing violations of Community Behavioral Guidelines are designed to support student accountability and to balance the rights of the individual with that of the health and safety of the community.

Community Council and Community Review are practices of accountability based on the values of restorative justice. The Dean of Community will investigate accusations of violations of community behavior guidelines, which may result in a Community Review contract. These individualized plans may include mediation, counseling, and service, and are reflective of the nature of the incident. A student may choose not to honor the conditions of the Community Review, and may be asked to withdraw from the College. Additionally, a student who chooses to consistently or frequently disregard Community Guidelines may be asked to leave the College.

It is the right of students and administrators overseeing processes to request and recommend the use of a Council if there are questions of fact in a particular case, or if the violations present a significant concern within the community as a whole. Interim measures may be taken for community safety following an incident and until a case can be heard.

A Community Council will convene when it is determined that deeper conversations around violations of community behavior guidelines are necessary. The Council will discuss the issue at hand by asking: Where is the harm? Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these? And, What should be done to repair the harm? This process allows all parties to express how they have been affected by the issue, and for the Council to hold itself accountable for the wellbeing, safety, and integrity of our community.

Issues of sexual assault, harassment, discrimination, and violations of Community Review contracts will not be brought to Community Council.

All policies relating to Community Behavioral Guidelines and Community Accountability are posted in the Community section of the website, and published in the Community Guidebook which is distributed to all incoming students during "ASOP."

Problem-Solving Procedures
Sterling recognizes that occasionally a student may feel that they have been treated unfairly or that an error has been made in the interpretation or application of a policy. When this situation occurs, Sterling wants each student to be aware that the problem solving procedure described below is available to assist in reaching an equitable resolution. This procedure should not be followed for complaints of harassment or discrimination, which should be directed immediately to a Title IX Coordinator.

1. A student should bring any concerns or complaints directly to the attention of the person in conflict to try to reach a resolve the situation when appropriate. This should be done in a timely manner relative to the action or incident that is the basis for the complaint. If the student with the complaint would like informal help with this action, they are encouraged to ask their Academic Advisor or Community Advisor for support.

2. Though most problems will be solved by informal discussions, a student who still feels dissatisfied may bring the concern to the attention of one of the Deans. The Dean should respond promptly, usually within three working days.

3. If the student's complaint is with a Dean, then the student should submit a complaint to the President.

Appraisal
Moving forward, we plan to create greater clarity about the advising and learning support process and, as appropriate, sharing information about student needs. Such an increase in transparency is in direct response to student feedback regarding perceptions of the decision-making process as being less than fully inclusive. The administration has already taken steps in this direction (more regular council and committee reports at weekly community meetings and more effective use of student representatives in councils are two examples).

Additionally, we must demonstrate our absolute commitment to student support by bolstering the academic, social, and therapeutic resources available. The first two weeks of each semester must be focused on assessing student challenges and strengths, and identifying and immediately engaging support structures for each and every student in our community. Learning support at Sterling will include expanded outreach and the exploration of alternative accommodations. The hiring of a new Associate Dean of Learning Support and Advising this academic year will enhance and support both the advising and the learning support programs.

The Dean of Academics and the Dean of Community are cooperatively developing ethical standards that will serve as a guide for student services, grievance procedures, and related matters.

Sterling's present strategy to expand brand awareness outside the United States will be opportunistic rather than strategic over the next two years, largely because of the expense and professional time associated with direct international recruitment. As domestic enrollment grows, the college will design an international recruitment plan to be launched in the Spring of 2016. The initial step in this effort will include the identification of agents who might, consistent with the National Association of College Admission Counseling good practices, represent Sterling on a "commission" basis in the People's Republic of China and other countries.

Projection
The College is investing in web marketing and digital content in order to raise awareness of Sterling in regions beyond New England. A newly designed website is planned to launch in the Spring of 2016. A comprehensive SEO and content strategy will be implemented that should increase Sterling's programs in search engines and ensure that prospects that seek our programs or educational model can find us online. There will be many call to actions (CTAs) in the new website that will support prospects to apply, inquire, live chat with Admission counselors, or connect with students that are currently studying relevant subjects or holding work positions that the prospect would like to know more about. Continued blog posts by students, faculty, and staff as well as a sustained presence on social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter supports our inbound marketing strategy and, via original content, we hope to draw in interested parties and then reveal our programs to them.

The Office of Admission and Financial Aid is currently reviewing the rubric used for assessing prospective students with a focus on integrating feedback from both the Academic and Community/Work Councils. [Workroom Docs: Admission Rubric].

Sterling's Enrollment Council will develop a plan for more regular reporting of enrollment, retention, and graduation data to help the College move from a predictive model of enrollment management to a more intentional system of projection. The very formation of the Enrollment Council, along with the new Associate Dean of Academics and the continuing work of the College's first full-time Dean of Community (formerly Dean of Students) will guide the Sterling in its next phase of developing clear systems to support student success and engagement. The newly implemented Enrollment and Engagement Plan is a codification of some of these new initiatives. [Workroom Docs: Enrollment and Engagement Plan]

Multi-Year Enrollment Projections

The following multi-year enrollment projections were presented to the Board of Trustees in Fall 2015. The projections illustrate our goal of slow and modest growth, as well as even greater selectivity. Modest growth is a key to further cultivating Sterling financial stability and our efforts to increase the diversity of the College's social and intellectual community.

	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020
Inquiries	1100	1700	1900	2000	2100
Applicants	155	175	195	215	220
Admitted	130	140	150	160	170
New Enrolled	50	48	50	52	54
Returning	81	85	90	95	96
Discount	48	48	47	46	45
LOA	8	8	8	8	8
Total Heads	139	141	145	149	149
Total Bills	131	133	137	141	141
Total FFTE	**126**	**128**	**132**	**134**	**134**

Given its commitment to enrolling a diverse student body, it should be no surprise that Sterling College is preparing to serve more international students. Although the College has not yet prepared an international recruitment campaign, the Strategic Enrollment and Recruitment Plan calls for international recruitment to launch during the Spring Semester of 2016.

Institutional Effectiveness

The President, Dean of Community, Dean of Academics, Registrar, and Director of Admission and Financial Aid meet regularly to assess the effectiveness of recruitment efforts and the corresponding effectiveness of student services. The Director of Admission and Financial Aid reports monthly to the Board of Trustees. The Deans meet biweekly with the President to discuss initiatives, programs, and student issues, faculty report on student success and challenges weekly at faculty meeting, and trends are also discussed weekly at Administrative Council meetings.

STANDARD SEVEN: LIBRARY AND OTHER INFORMATION RESOURCES

"A university is just a group of buildings gathered around a library."
Shelby Foote quoted in: North Carolina Libraries, Vol. 51-54 (1993), p. 162.

At the heart of any academic program is its library, humming quietly in the background. Students use its resources to support their studies, projects, and personal growth. Faculty members conduct research and request materials to support their courses. Sterling College's library has come a long way since the beginning of the four year baccalaureate program: converting from a card catalog to an online system and then, more recently, upgrading to a new web-based information system; starting with zero internet access and eventually gaining a state-of-the art information technology network with wireless service; expanding the collection to include ebooks and several journal databases. No matter the size of the institution, it is imperative that the library provides the resources and services expected at a college and also keep current with changing information and technology.

Resources, Archives, and Access

Description
Sterling College's current strategic plan, established in 2013, includes several objectives that expand the resources/services of the library and information technology department. These include the implementation of an institution-wide student database to be shared by all administrative offices, which we deployed in fall 2015. Planned initiatives also include regular information technology training for all community members, and an increase in technological resources available across the College and specifically in support of the Work Program.

Additionally, throughout 2014-2015 we had been working toward establishing an on-campus archive consistent with modern preservation standards. A small space has been designated for temporary storage of the Sterling Archives. The part-time Library Assistant, who has training as an archivist, dedicated some of her time to planning, assessment, and exploring funding opportunities. She interviewed people on campus, resulting in a Statement of Need.

The library and information technology departments have their own budgets, each of which is broken down into line items for all resources except for books in the library budget, which is split and allocated to two other accounts. Early in the Spring semester, the Library Director meets with the Director of Finance to discuss budgetary needs/possibilities for the coming year. The Director of Technology also meets regularly with the Director of Finance and submits an annual budget in the spring semester.

The library budget has been sufficiently funded, with some fluctuation. In 2012-2013, the library dropped its most expensive database subscription, which had also been showing a steady decline in use, and was thus able to pay for a long-overdue conversion to a new web-

based integrated library system (Koha). After the initial cost of implementing the new system, just an annual support fee was required. This explains the drop in materials funding for the years following 2012-2013. In budget projections, the Director of Finance factors in cost increases for resources such as periodicals and journal databases. The Library Director will monitor the effects of any increase in enrollment and curricular needs, which may necessitate an increase in resources.

The library is staffed by a full-time director with an MLS (35 hrs/week). She had been supported by a part-time professional assistant (8 hrs/week), who is pursuing studies in Simmons' program, Library and Information Science (MS): Archives and Management Concentration, though this position is not currently funded. Each semester there are two or three student assistants from the Work Program, who cover the desk for some evening hours. The College also employs a full-time Director of Technology, who is responsible for all aspects of campus technology and who is a member of the College's Administrative Council.

In addition, the Library Director serves as a student advisor, attends faculty meetings, and sits on the Academic Council. The library facility is open 24/7 to the Sterling community, as well as to the public during library office hours.

New students are introduced to the library and its resources as part of the class "A Sense of Place" (ASOP). Faculty are encouraged to schedule further instruction for their classes during the semester, which can take place either in the library or in the classroom, for instance senior capstone research project courses. The library is the College's principal clearinghouse for reference questions throughout the semester, usually via email.

Upon request, faculty and staff receive individualized assistance and training in using the library's resources, as well as instructional and information technology. The library maintains course reserve shelves and, for faculty who do not use Google Sites for course management, the library director has set up a site for e-reserves.

Every student receives at least an introduction to library resources, with an exercise to help increase familiarity and comfort level. Several classes visit the library each semester, including the core writing course ("Writing & Speaking to the Issues"), with only one or two requesting some formal instruction. At the start of an assignment/project, faculty often choose to give some guidelines and introduction to research themselves, encouraging their students to seek out the library for assistance.

The library's website serves as a portal for accessing its resources, no matter where students and faculty may be conducting research. The library catalog is freely available on the web and is mobile friendly. Subscription databases can be accessed through an EZproxy link. Reference and interlibrary loan services are available through links on the web page. Email is also an acceptable avenue. Though rarely used, chat options are available through Gmail and the library Facebook page.

Appraisal
The library collection includes print resources (books and periodicals) as well as audio-visual media and electronic resources (ebooks and journal databases). Electronic resources are accessed via the library's web page, which also includes a link to a proxy server for off-campus access. The library supplements its collection with resources obtained through interlibrary loan.

The professional staffing of the library is currently adequate. The personnel are able to keep up with the demand for resources and with requests for information/instruction. In a Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory conducted in the Spring of 2013, using a Likert Scale on which 7 represents "very satisfied," our students gave 6.48 (compared to 5.65 for other four year private institutions) to the statement that library staff are helpful and approachable. Our students also gave 6.18 (compared to 5.54 for other four year private institutions) to the statement that library resources and services are adequate.

In Spring of 2013, the library upgraded to Koha, a new web-based integrated library system. This has provided a vast improvement in design, usage, and reporting. A self-checkout station was also set up at the front desk, particularly helpful given our 24/7 open access.

In 2012, the Center for Northern Studies facility was closed and about 3,700 titles were removed from our book collection. Since that time, all categories of our collection have once again been growing steadily. The addition of ebooks is new in the past five years. Library books have also been deaccessioned over the years to keep the collection current and relevant. The most recent project involves reducing the collection of VHS tapes, which are rarely used, and replacing a majority with DVD format.

This past year, as part of a new collaboration with New York University, Sterling received a donation of roughly 1,000 books related to food studies. These books are currently being organized "bookstore style" in another building. They have not been included in the library's current book tally, as they have not been catalogued in our system.

As for collection development, the Library Director continues to rely on reviews, however the increase in the number of independent studies and self-designed majors has also prompted a "purchase on demand" model, filling requests from faculty and students across all levels. The local public library, which is a pleasant walk across the Common, also welcomes Sterling students and increases the diversity of offerings.

Since 2011-2012, there has been an increase in the number of student requests for assistance with finding information, usually via email. Though Sterling offers no online courses and few off-site courses, other than field programs, students and faculty do need, and are provided with, off-campus access to information resources. Through Google Analytics, the College is now able to track hits to the library website, which increased dramatically from 313 to 847 (170%) in less than a year. The library will continue to provide current access options, while keeping aware of new technologies.

Information and Technological Literacy

Description
During "ASOP," all new students are given an orientation to the library's resources, as well as instruction regarding the campus computers and network. Thereafter, student use of information resources and technology is primarily embedded in courses throughout the curriculum.

Although there is no official gate for tracking, there has been a noticeable increase in the use of the library facility itself these past two years, as observed during daytime hours. Circulation of library materials per student has remained fairly steady over time, as has borrowing through interlibrary loan. Full text article requests from databases have fluctuated according to enrollment numbers, increasing these past two years.

Most courses at Sterling provide a list of readings for students, which often include a mix of books, journal articles, online resources, and media. Major presentations, e.g. for internships and senior projects, involve the use of PowerPoint. The document Information Literacy Mapping lists courses that include research assignments/projects and arranges them according to discipline and level. Not all syllabi were available to the Library Director, nor does this chart include the numerous independent studies in which many students engage. The majority of the core courses, taken by all students, require use of information resources. All students work on research projects and presentations for various classes throughout their four years. During their junior and senior years, students complete a Senior Capstone project. [Workroom Docs: Information Literacy Mapping]

Appraisal
The evaluation of information resources should be an integral part of any research assignment/project. In 2009, Sterling successfully applied for a $97,000 grant from Davis Educational, which called in part for students to participate in a revised writing and information literacy curriculum at Sterling College to help them learn to use digital technology, communication tools and/or networks appropriately to access, manage, integrate, evaluate and create information in order to function in a knowledge economy. This initiative was not realized in the timeframe of the grant, and continues to be an under-supported aspect of the College curriculum.

While composing the Information Literacy Mapping chart, it was noticed that several syllabi specifically emphasized the use of credible, reliable sources (HM110 / NS206 / NS245 / INT431 / INT432). If we were to look further at the specific assignments/projects and rubrics, we would undoubtedly find more evidence of this.

The Library Director would like to offer more support to students at point of need, by visiting and sitting in on some key classes when they are engaged in a research project. This would offer another, perhaps less formal, opportunity for students to ask questions and get assistance.

It would be useful to survey faculty and staff to see if the current model of assistance as requested works for them or if they would also like some group training for using library (especially electronic) resources.

A more suitable physical space needs to be found on campus for housing the archives. The college is hoping to obtain a grant that will support the organization and maintenance of the archives, as well as establish a part-time archivist position. Increasing visibility and use of the archives will be promoted by providing photographs and history for projects such as a monthly blog on our website and a weekly post ("Throwback Thursday") on Sterling College's Facebook page.

Projection
The library collection will likely continue to grow at a moderate, yet steady, pace. The Library Director currently sits on the Academic Council, an excellent opportunity to keep apprised of new courses and changes in the curriculum. More resources will be needed if enrollment continues to rise and new courses are proposed. The development of an Archives program will require a larger and more suitable environment, either as part of the library or in another building.

The College will consider revising the list of College-wide competencies to include an information literacy statement. Additionally, the Library Director will continue to work with the Faculty to map the integration of information/technological literacy across the curriculum from the first-year experience in "ASOP" to "Senior Research" and "Senior Seminar" courses.

Institutional Effectiveness
As for the library and its information resources and services, the gathered data demonstrate that there is at least an annual evaluation through statistics. Student and faculty surveys every year or two (as conducted in the past) would provide even more useful information. Instructional and information technology is also evaluated/reviewed in some way, as evidenced by the major work done in the past years to update equipment and revamp the network.

STANDARD EIGHT: PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

More than most colleges and universities, the growth of Sterling's student body, facilities, and capacity reflect an intentionality embedded in the College's dedication to sustainable land use and ecological thinking. Sterling is focused on the most critical emerging issue of our time as humans on the planet: the ability of the planet to sustain human life. Learning to be environmental stewards is critical in this fight, and Sterling provides the education to allow their graduates to move outward to a larger global population, teaching others environmental stewardship, through the lessons learned in the classrooms and the fields. The campus must be a beacon for environmental stewardship, for not only the students; its lessons must likewise flow outward to a larger global population. Sterling College's core values are imbued in its students and its growing campus.

Description

Sterling has a maintenance staff of three full-time employees and a total of eight Work Program students to assure that proper management, maintenance, and operation of all physical facilities are accomplished by adequate and competent staffing. We have increased our overall maintenance staff by one full-time employee since the College's five-year review in recognition of the growing need for facilities support. Students continue to manage the cleaning and upkeep of the residence halls, and one full-time custodian (supervising five Work Program students who specialize in Grounds and Campus Care) is responsible for the remaining campus buildings.

The College's grounds, farm, gardens, and forest are under the management of individual faculty, instructional teams, and the Lands and Energy Committee. As with most areas of the College, it is Sterling's curriculum, in concert with institutional, ecological, and peer best practices, which undergirds the majority of decisions regarding facilities and land use. 25 students work in support of the various areas of the College grounds and environment, including Trail Crew, Forestry Crew, Garden Crew, and Farm Crew. [Workroom Docs: Work Crew List]

Any challenges with physical and technological resources (specifically classrooms, labs, materials, and teaching equipment) are reported on by faculty on a case-by-case basis through an email-based work order system. All community members are able to submit work order requests, which are administered by the Director of Facilities and addressed in order of priority.

The classrooms and facilities on campus are primarily housed in retrofitted, renovated, or rebuilt historic buildings, and as such demonstrate a range of positive attributes as well as some challenges. The College's largest computer lab (12 networked desktop computers) was retrofitted several years with a grant from the Davis Educational Foundation, and we continue to upkeep two other computer labs, although data indicates that the majority of our students arrive on campus with their own laptops and/or other mobile devices.

The College recently added two new instructional spaces adjacent to the north and south ends of campus respectively. First, a two-story former arts center has served the College's fiber arts classes over the past year, and second, a stand-alone building adjacent to the existing campus is being used as multi-disciplinary classroom space. This newly named Common House serves Sterling's largest classes and is used as a presentation and gallery space.

Additionally, the College has recently added the Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems, consisting of the Alfond Draft Horse Barn, a farrier shop, a hoop house, and has renovated the existing McCarthy Barns.

Sterling has added three residence halls and has substantially renovated several others in the past five years.

- Houston House, a former inn, hosts many of Sterling's hands-on food systems classes and houses a multi-use classroom space on its first floor. The second floor houses students in dormitory rooms with private bathrooms. In 2010, the college purchased the inn with a grant from the State of Vermont. The inn was renovated to meet code requirements as a dormitory and placed into service in the fall of 2010. In fiscal year 2015 the college received a gift of $80,000 for additional repairs and restoration. Windows were updated, insulation was upgraded, the front entryway was restored, old and overgrown trees surrounding the building were trimmed or removed, clapboarding was repaired, and the building was painted.
- South House, an annex building to the former inn, is occupied by non-traditional students in suites and larger rooms.
- North House, the former Sterling College President's residence, is an intentional community-based residence hall with its own kitchen.
- Madison Hall received a building envelope refurbishment and upgrade in Fall 2009.
- Jefferson and Hamilton Halls on the College's Lower Campus have been completely renovated to house a larger number of students. Jefferson Hall is also designated as substance-free housing.

Consistent with Sterling's Strategic Plan and the College's core values and ecological focus, in July 2013 Sterling took a leadership role in the national debate about fossil fuel use and completed the divestment of its endowment from the fossil fuel industry. This decision was a direct complement to the College's curriculum, and in the two years since the decision, College administrators, faculty, staff, and students continue to engage in dialogue, decision-making, and action to help move the College to alleviate its reliance on fossil fuels to support its infrastructure and utilities. To that end, we will be adding 11 solar trackers on the main campus over the 2015-2016 academic year, which will produce a significant percentage of the College's electricity needs. [Workroom Docs: Divestment Statement]

The Director of Facilities integrates departmental oversight of maintenance, grounds, custodial services, quality control, staff training, and ongoing communication with the

campus administration. The Director evaluates staffing, tracks maintenance and repair schedules, reviews campus compliance regulations, and works with senior administrators to coordinate and manage all construction and renovation work performed by qualified service contractors.

With regard to campus safety, the College is supported by an internal Risk Management Committee, which also completes an annual year-end review that integrates review by outside committee members. Risk management policies currently reside in a variety of handbooks in use across the institution, including the Community Guidebook, Employee Handbook, Outdoor Travel and Education Handbook, and Driver's Handbook. [Workroom Docs: Community Guidebook, Employee Handbook, Outdoor Travel and Education Handbook, and Drivers' Handbook]

In July 2013, the Administrative Council adopted a proposal that recognized Sterling's fleet of serviceable vehicles, which then included four 15 passenger vans and one seven passenger minivan, represented a liability both with respect to maintenance costs associated with an aging vehicle fleet, with regard to curricular support and student retention, and potentially with regard to safety. Collegiate and field program best practices recommend minimizing the use of 15 passenger vans due to the increased risk of accidental vehicle rollover. As a result, since 2013, Sterling has contracted with SafetyVan, a company which retrofits 12 passenger vans with additional safety features to provide the safest appropriate transportation for the College's short and longer term field-based curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. The College maintains a roster of drivers certified by the College's van certification process, which must be renewed by each driver annually [Workroom Docs: Drivers' Handbook].

Information security and individual privacy are a priority at Sterling College. The College strives to protect the information that it collects and uses this information for College business purposes only. Policies published in the Community Guidebook and on the Brown Library's webpage detail specific privacy policies regarding campus technology. [Workroom Docs: Community Guidebook].

Personally Identifiable Information including financial information that may be provided during the admission, registration, gifting, or employment processes is used solely for those purposes and is restricted and protected in accordance with College policy and procedure, relevant State and Federal laws and regulations, and by secure network and data storage technologies. Sterling College does not sell or share nonpublic personally identifiable information or client lists with a third party, unless necessary to complete a transaction in the ordinary course of business, or as required by State or Federal law or regulation such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Complete information on the handling of student records in accordance with FERPA may be found in the College's Student Records policy. For further guidance on other information practices at the College, contact the Business Office or the Registrar. [Workroom Docs: Student Records Policy].

Official Sterling College websites such as www.sterlingcollege.edu and crc.sterlingcollege.edu reside on servers managed by Sterling College. These servers collect and log information according to industry standards in order to analyze usage of the website and to improve its design and usability. The information that is logged does not contain personal data about the user and is used only internally by Sterling College. Logged information includes the user's IP address, browser, operating system, session date and time, and referring/exit web pages.

Appraisal

Most classrooms and facilities are adequate in capacity, although the number of concurrent classes occasionally creates scheduling challenges—particularly when classes are in need of SmartBoard or science lab facilities. As outlined in the Strategic Plan, as the College continues to grow, classroom space will need to be expanded and/or made more modular to accommodate a diversity of uses. Part of this expansion includes the designation of spaces (rooms or buildings) for several of the College's main instructional areas that do not already have identifiable spaces of their own. These include Ecology, Outdoor Education, and Environmental Humanities. By designating specific spaces students and faculty can call "home," we hope to increase opportunities for communication, collaboration, and for imparting a sense of ownership among students and faculty alike.

The results of the College's ongoing planning efforts (see Institutional Effectiveness, below) have been an increase in funding, Board of Trustees approvals and support, and a wide range of critical implementation actions. Per the plan, there are implementation actions ranging from short term to long term. Highly significant progress has been made across all areas of need. Some examples are:

- a new draft horse barn with instructional space
- a new hoop house for other small animal "residences"
- a remodeled and expanded existing barn complex
- revised composting areas
- a renovated dormitory
- a newly leased historic inn for dormitory space for married and non-traditional student housing
- an additional historic building for faculty/staff housing
- major capital maintenance projects on six buildings
- new campus signage
- landscaping improvements
- significant expansion of campus acreage for agricultural fields (row crops and pasture)
- programming for three significant building redevelopments
- initial design plans for three buildings
- removal of isolated parking areas and parking consolidation
- implementation of the first stages of the Energy Plan

The implementation of the Energy Plan began with fossil fuel divestment, and continued with the installation of the solar collection PV array sufficient to power the campus. The

schematic design is completed for biomass based heating, with associated geo-exchange system for heating and cooling, with cost estimates for implementation. As each building is renovated, the energy efficiency improvements will average a 42% reduction in use. In the interim, the "low hanging fruit" energy improvements are being instituted, including Dunbar Hall's commercial kitchen. All of these implementation actions are consistent with the College's planning, core values, institutional needs, and financial and strategic plans.

Technology at Sterling College continues to improve. The network continues to be robust and reliable. Implementation of the new student information system (SIS) continues, with Financial Edge (Business Office), Raiser's Edge (Advancement Office), and Education Edge (Registrar's Office) live and in place. The College is renewing an Internet service contract with Fairpoint, and increasing bandwidth from 100 Mbps to 150 Mbps in anticipation of increasing enrollment.

Our recent Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey data also shows that existing computer labs are perceived as adequate and accessible by our students at a score of 5.70 (out of 7) compared with a 5.42 average at other schools, and our farm facilities have been significantly renovated and expanded through the Rian Fried Center project. Some classrooms and facilities are appropriately equipped while others would benefit from additional equipment such as SmartBoards, mounted projectors and screens, and new whiteboards.

Incoming students receive introductory training sessions on using the Blackbaud SIS, accessing Sterling College email, and locating information on the College's website. Faculty also receive periodic training; however, faculty expertise and facility with computer systems remains inconsistent, and the use of some hardware and software remains limited to as few as one or two members of the staff (these include assistive technologies and the College's SmartBoards).

The majority of staff and faculty have received a new leased computer. For the first time on Sterling College's campus, no staff or faculty member is making do with a second or third-hand computer, his or her own personal computer, or a computer that is well over five years old. Not only does this help the productivity for staff and faculty, but it also means that no one is working with an operating system that is a security risk for the College. From a broader network perspective, however, the College's file server is not backing up correctly, and the Director of Technology is challenged by the antiquated, unsupported operating system that was installed on the server. He has asked that everyone use Google Drive for backups, rather than rely on the local file server. Currently, for its education clients, Google Drive has unlimited storage. It may be difficult, however, for staff to transition to a new backup routine in the longer term.

Projection
In response to the need for additional instructional spaces specific to the needs of instructional teams and students in particular majors, the College is launching a fundraising initiative to support the construction of a Center for Outdoor Education over

the next three years, and we have been pursuing funding to support the near-term renovation of Simpson Hall classrooms and science lab facilities to bring them in line with curricular needs. The renovation of Paradise Hall is another infrastructure priority.

11 solar trackers were installed on the main campus in 2016; these will produce a significant percentage of the College's electricity needs.

The Director of Technology is currently reviewing options for upgraded file and print servers on campus, as well as what might be needed to eventually bring Common House onto the campus network. He is also currently reviewing the campus leased printers and what might need to be replaced, as well as examining classroom technology (SmartBoards).

Institutional Effectiveness

The campus assessment program is multipart; as part of a long-term assessment, campus planners have considered needs in fourteen areas related to sustainability, utilities, cost, connect to curriculum, and related topics. [Workroom Docs: Master Plan]

This planning effort is integrated with the financial plan and the strategic plan, and its development process continues to include staff, faculty, and students. Students have been further engaged in planning, some examples are: by a classroom focus, campus drainage planning; by an intern, energy use and carbon footprint; and by the on-campus Work Program, measuring buildings for base drawings to enhance the database. Faculty are engaged in the ongoing planning process by departmental focus groups: defining building and equipment needs, future curriculum support requirements, and review of design programs and design plans. Staff engagement ranges from the daily addressing of needs by Facilities to the special projects such as the residential life survey. This multi-part approach represents an ongoing engagement by a range of campus constituencies using a variety of techniques.

The Sterling College Campus Master Plan (drafted April 2013) documents existing physical resources as well as proposed resources for the college including energy uses. It includes an academic resources section that addresses the farm, outdoor education program, laboratories, classrooms, and landscape features other than agriculture. The plan was developed by a consultant to the college, John Feinberg, with input from faculty, staff, and students, as well as a needs evaluation. The Plan also includes sections on residential life (dorms, etc.), sustainability practices (trash, recycling, compost), parking, energy, signage, landscaping, campus utilities, and facilities (inventory and uses, costs to maintain and operate, conditions, assessments and treatments, and deferred maintenance list and cyclical maintenance plan). Each section is brief and should be elaborated.

Much of the physical resource planning is linked to academics in some form. The updated forest management plans for the main campus and Bear Swamp are used in courses and independent studies; the "Wildlife Conservation and Management" class drafted the Wildlife Management Plan for the main campus; and data for energy sustainability is gathered frequently by the Environmental Science class.

The Lands and Energy Committee will complete a Comprehensive Energy Plan and Stormwater Plan in mid-2015 and a management plan for the Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems later in the year.

STANDARD NINE: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Description
Although student enrollment is small by design at Sterling, the College continues to generate, and dedicate, the resources needed to implement and grow our program of study. Instrumental to this has been the implementation of a five-year strategic plan. Completed in 2013, this plan, the first comprehensive plan in many years, directs the college toward financial equilibrium through a broadened and more disciplined budget process, thoughtful intentional growth in enrollment, strategic fundraising campaigns intended to increase the contribution of annual fundraising to operations, raising dedicated capital funds to strengthen the facilities available to support a growing student body, and increasing support provided by the endowment through careful investment and increases to the corpus. [Workroom Docs: Nourish the Roots Strategic Plan]

The document summarizes the College's audited statements of financial position and revenues and expenses over the ten-year period from 2005 through 2015, and shows steady improvement in the College's financial position. During this period the net assets of the College have grown by 35%, from $2,918,000 to $3,943,000, and 91% since 2010 alone, from $2,065,000 to $3,943,000. The endowment has shown steady growth, due in part to dedicated contributions, as well as conservative use of the revenue generated, increasing by 72%, from $641,000 in 2005 to $1,105,000 at the end of fiscal 2015. The College's fixed assets, net of accumulated depreciation, have grown in value from $2,069,000 in 2005 to $3,762,000 in 2015, an increase of almost 82%, more than doubling during the period from 2011 to 2015. [Workroom Docs: Audit]

Historically, the major source of the College's operating budget has been generated by net tuition and fees, with annual unrestricted giving representing 16% -18% of all operating revenue. While 2014 and 2015 saw unrestricted annual giving representing, respectively, 27% and 34% of the total operating revenue, fiscal years 2012 and 2013 showed unrestricted giving representing 21% of operating revenue. The endowment, with modest growth of 32% following the 2008 crash, has provided a small but useful financial resource of approximately 1% of the total operating revenue since 2012 in the form of annual allocations of unrestricted earnings.

The College's operating expenses have increased at an annualized rate of 11% over the last ten years while its corresponding operating revenue has increased by an annualized rate of 14%, due in significant part to the success of fundraising in the past two years. The areas of most significant growth have been student services and instruction. As full time enrollment has increased by 21% in the last ten years (from 98 in 2006 to 115 in 2015), the College has not only invested in improving faculty compensation but has dedicated significant resources to improving existing instructional programing and creating new instructional programing. The $836,000 growth in student services and auxiliary enterprises since 2005 corresponds to investments being made in admission services and community life (dining services and residences). Overall, including institutional financial aid to students, 84% of

all expenditures go towards academic and student support programing, 13% is directed towards management and administrative support, and 3% is dedicated towards fundraising, with an efficiency rate of 93%. [Workroom Docs: Audit Analysis on Trustee Site].

The College's Finance & Investment Committee, consisting primarily of trustees, oversees the management of the endowment investments and investment policy. The College's endowment is intended to provide operating support to the College in perpetuity. With the adoption of the current investment policy in May of 2013, the board voted to divest the College's endowed assets from the 200 fossil fuel extraction corporations identified by 350.org as of February 2, 2013. By doing so, Sterling College became the third college in the United States, and the first in Vermont, to divest from fossil fuel investment. Management of the investment portfolio was transferred from The Vanguard Group, Inc. to Trillium Asset Management in June 2013. The current target asset allocation is 75% equities, 20% fixed income, and 5% cash. The College's Board of Trustees Finance & Investment Committee is obligated to meet at least once a year to review the endowment's funds and rebalance the asset if, or as, deemed appropriate according to the investment policy. [Workroom Docs: Trustees Webpage]

Over the last three fiscal years the management of the College's finances has grown in sophistication and resources. In 2013, with the retirement of College's tenth president, and the hiring of President Derr, the Board reinforced its commitment to the strategic importance of strengthening the two major sources of revenue for operations, and that the infrastructures required to support such initiatives would need to simultaneously be upgraded. Two significant underlying strategies from the five-year strategic plan have been to increase the student population to 120 FTE and to strengthen support for the annual fund. Subsequently, with the 2014, 2015, and 2016 budgets the trustees authorized several strategic investments to increase classroom and student housing capacity, upgrade information technology, and address some of the most severe areas of physical plant deterioration (detailed below). Concurrently, beginning in 2013 when the College created two dedicated full time positions, previously been held at part time and shared: Director of Communication and Director of Technology; operational funds were designated to strengthen staffing in the Office of Admission and Financial Aid, the office of Advancement and Alumni Relations, and website development. These staffing changes are all intended to increase external awareness of the College, and strengthen internal processing. The combined cost of the staffing advancements is in excess of $200,000 annually. These initiatives have been funded through a combination of designated giving and increased operating revenue (growing from $3,057,000 in 2013 to $5,431,000), borrowing, and short term draws from the endowment.

This transition period has been characterized by a complete conversion to a comprehensive student and financial information system, which has integrated the advancement and registrar's databases with the general ledger, accounts payable, student billing, and payroll. The President has also initiated changes in key staff positions. Over the three years, 2013

through 2015, the 1.5 FTE positions of marketing, web design, and information technologies was expanded to three FTE positions providing information technology, marketing and publications, and web design support and services, each with one full time employee. The 1.5 FTE billing and finance department consisting of the comptroller and part-time clerk was expanded to two FTE and the comptroller position was upgraded to Director of Finance. The position of Dean of the College was returned to Dean of Academics in an effort to sharpen focus and increase attention to the instructional needs of the College and the faculty. The .5 FTE position of Director of Financial Aid retired and was not replaced. The position of Director of Admission was upgraded to Director of Admission and Financial Aid and the 2.5 FTE admission staff was expanded to 3.5 FTE.

An important principle of the College is the involvement of the community in the development of the major policies and procedures of the College. Equally as important to the College is transparency in the decisions made by management. While final budgetary decisions remain with the President and the Board of Trustees, preparation and analysis of the budget and related issues involves much of the community. The budget process for the subsequent year begins in late January with financial issues and priorities being discussed by department heads, informed by initiatives laid out in the strategic plan, prior and current year financial activity, and faculty, staff, and student priorities expressed in instructional teams, Community Council, and All-College meetings. Throughout the process and discussions, it is widely accepted that the primary purpose of any budget is to help the College function within its means while providing the maximum educational benefit to students.

An important principle of successful financial management is the trust placed in faculty, staff, and department heads that are responsible for daily financial decisions. These managers take their roles seriously and are extraordinarily responsible in controlling the expenses of their budgets while fulfilling the mission of the College. On a monthly basis, the Director of Finance distributes to all budget managers their departments' financial reports comparing the current year's activity to budget. As a reference point, these reports include last year's, year to date activity, vs. final audited results. Four times a year a complete set of financial statements, prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, along with a summary of the budget progress, is presented to the Board of Trustees for review, and is then posted on a password-protected webpage for faculty and staff.

At the end of each fiscal year, the financial records, financial statements, budget reports, and accounting policies are audited, along with the College's management of Federal financial aid funds (A-133 audit). The College continues to receive clean audit opinions and favorable management letters as a result of the audit process [Workroom Docs: Financial Audit].

Appraisal

Historically the financial equilibrium of the College has been, in a large part, attributable to the dedication of its faculty and staff, and deferring activities that might otherwise have been priorities. Salary increases have ranged from zero or below inflation rates, to a reduction of the top wages following the market crash in 2008, resulting in the generally recognized salary inequity described in other sections of this self-study. For many years physical plant capital repairs, outside of special projects funded by dedicated giving, have been minimal, which has resulted in areas of the campus suffering from serious decay. In fiscal year 2013, after years of tight budgets, and during the transition in presidential leadership, it was clear that simple budget cuts would only hinder the progress of the College. Therefore, it was determined that that the College community prioritize the completion of a comprehensive strategic planning process. As part of developing the five-year strategic plan, the community also worked with consultants to develop a campus master plan [Workroom Docs: Campus Master Plan] and a multi-year financial model [Workroom Docs: Financial Model]. Both the campus master plan and financial model are integral, supporting components of the five-year strategic plan. The multi-year financial model shows that the College can balance the budget, address the needs for salary corrections, and grow the fiscal strength of the College by achieving certain goals outlined in the strategic plan: grow student enrollment to 120 FTE while keeping the institutional discount rate below 50%, develop ancillary programs that enhance the regular curriculum, and draw non-matriculating interest to campus, increase unrestricted annual giving to help reduce operations' dependence on net tuition and fees, and launch a comprehensive capital campaign to repair, improve, and expand the facilities of the campus. While the goals in the strategic plan direct the initiatives of the College, the multi-year fiscal model helps determine where resources need to be focused, in order to support the initiatives that will grow the College and help it meet the goals outlined by the community, in the strategic plan.

In 2006, with the promise of increased enrollment, the College attempted to dedicate significant funds—$216,000 over a three-year period—towards catching up on much of the deferred capital repairs; however, this action and inflationary pressures on uncontrollable costs such as utilities and health insurance made it difficult to keep salaries and wages at pace with inflation, much less start bringing them in line with our peer institutions. Initially it was believed that the College would be able to support the campus repairs without special funding, although as the extent of the damage to the facilities became clearer, the College determined it was necessary to use borrowing to help bear the cost of repairs without causing a detrimental effect on already stretched programing budgets, or slowing other growth initiatives. At the end of fiscal year 2014, the Board of Trustees authorized a construction loan of half a million dollars. During the summer of 2014, the College dedicated $250,000 towards repairing some of the most severe cases of building decay and addressing long neglected parking and grounds upgrades. In order to support the conversion to the integrated information system noted earlier, the College dedicated an additional $250,000 towards installation of a comprehensive underground fiber optic system, including the internal phone system, a new network switch system, updated

wireless connectivity to all buildings, and the initial capital investment to the Blackbaud student information system.

Between 2012 and 2015, with the support of a $250,000 challenge grant from an alumnus and family foundation, as well as many supporters, the College was able to invest $500,000 to transform its agricultural facilities into the Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems. The new facilities have allowed the College to develop new curriculum in areas such as sustainable food systems and climate justice. Additionally, the College has been able to launch a continuing education program that both deepens the educational opportunities for the College's matriculated students, as well as broadens the appeal of the College's curriculum to professionals seeking new skills and perspectives. [Workroom Docs: Rian Fried Center webpage]

At the end of fiscal year 2015 the College received, from a trustee and an alumnus, gifts totaling $100,000 dedicated towards the renovation of the Office of Admission and Financial Aid. These renovations further support the initiatives of increased recruitment by creating an updated, professional, and welcoming first impression for all visitors to the College. The renovations open up, and level out, what was previously a cluster of small or shared offices down the dark and uneven hallway of one of the College's oldest buildings. The new suite includes offices with more privacy and a meeting space where Admission Counselors can conduct interviews with prospective students and families in confidence and comfort. Additionally, for the first time, the Office of Financial Aid will be housed with the Office of Admission.

Annual budgets have been closely scrutinized. A very important component to the budget of the College, short and long term, has been, and always will be, net tuition. Because of the small scale of the College, our sensitivity to small variations in one or two students full time equivalency, or the financial need dynamic of students leaving and entering any budget cycle make it difficult to precisely project our discount rate and fiscal full time equivalency. Prior to implementation of the strategic plan, the College struggled to meet enrollment goals hampered by economic uncertainty and a decline in the number of high school graduates in New England. Concurrently, attempts to control the institutional discount rate further hampered recruitment efforts. In 2008, the institutional discount rate jumped by eleven points, from 23% in 2007 to 34%; however, following that adjustment, the College continued to hold the discount rate between 35% and 40%, until 2014. The College's Enrollment Committee including, among others, the Director of Admission and Financial Aid, the Registrar, the Dean of Academics, and the Dean of Community was tasked to work closely with the Enrollment Committee of the Board of Trustees to review admission patterns and financial aid practices. It was determined that to help improve the selectivity of students being admitted, without reducing yield, a strategic investment of resources would need to be dedicated to increasing the admission staff as well as increasing institutional aid to students. In the ten years since 2005 the institutional discount rate has more than doubled, and increased ten points, from 39.3% to 49.6% since 2013 alone.

Since 2013, the College has met its goals for new enrollment; however, the pressure on the discount rate has slowed the growth in net tuition revenue.

In response to the College's financial sensitivity to, and the variable nature of, net tuition and fees, the College, informed by the strategic plan, launched the most ambitious capital fundraising effort in its history. *Nourish the Roots: The Campaign for Sterling College* has a goal of $9 million to raise for scholarships, endowed faculty support, and energy efficient campus capital projects. At the time the College launched the active phase of the campaign—March 25, 2015—$4.5 million in gifts and commitments towards the goal had already been raised. In fall of 2014, the support staff in the Office of the President was expanded from .5 FTE to 1 FTE, allowing the individual who had been splitting her time between Advancement and the President's Office to focus solely on advancement needs. In May of 2015, the College announced the conclusion of a successful search for a Director of Advancement and Alumni Relations, increasing the number of staff dedicated to advancement by 1.5 FTE over the previous 12 months. Unrestricted annual giving for fiscal year 2016 is expected to be approximately 20% of operating revenue. [Workroom Docs: Nourish the Roots: The Campaign for Sterling College]

Fiscal year 2016 is the first year that the College has successfully completed a truly zero-based budget process, producing the first budget under which the operating expenses will not exceed operating revenue. Historically, budget managers would produce their proposed departmental budgets with input from community members within their particular areas of the College. These proposed budgets were then submitted to the finance department for consolidation and adjustment based on expected revenues for the coming year. As part of the fiscal year 2016 budget process, the senior staff of the College participated in several group exercises designed to enrich and inform the budget development. Using the strategic plan as a reference, senior staff worked cooperatively to categorize all staff and faculty positions and desired operating initiatives across the College into one of six categories; core, enrichment, revenue, risk, welfare, and instruction. These exercises helped budget managers to prioritize staff and faculty positions and operating initiatives first by need and then by desire.

As a result of early success with enrollment and advancement initiatives, the College has been able to start addressing salary and wage inequities. In the last two years the College has been able to increase the FT faculty count by three (30%), and in the last year the College was able to increase relative faculty compensation by 4%.

Projection
The financial picture for the College has improved greatly over the last decade. Early results from implantation of a comprehensive strategic plan indicate that the next ten years will see significant improvement to the College's financial stability, allowing for growth of new and socially significant programs.

The present comprehensive fundraising campaign emphasizes the need to grow the endowment, improve the campus, and raise consistent support for operations. It is

assumed by the President and the Board of Trustees that the next campaign will focus on endowment; given the age of our first graduates, there is an opportunity for planned giving that the Sterling must capitalize upon.

As many peer colleges have developed degree programs to expand tuition revenue opportunities, Sterling has, because of the specialized hands-on nature of its academic curriculum, not seriously considered online or the addition of master's degree programs. However, the College has and will continue to place emphasis on the development of its continuing education program in artisan food and farming that has recently been named "the School of the New American Farmstead."

- Raise $5 million, largely through planned giving, by 2020.
- Increase fall enrollment to 150 students by FY2018, while maintaining present selectivity.
- Increase the annual fund to $1 million by 2019, primarily through better management of alumni data and direct appeal in support of participation.
- Increase operational revenue from continuing education by broadening the reach of the School of the New American Farmstead by offering satellite programs, such as those being designed for Sonoma County, California by FY2016.

STANDARD TEN: PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Sterling College devotes considerable resources in employing and managing the multiple types of communication required of up-to-date practices in higher education institutions. Through an array of print and electronic media devoted to communications both inward and outward facing, the College strives for clarity, transparency, and thoroughness.

Description

There are two main print publications: the bi-annual College magazine *Common Voice* and the Admission viewbook. In addition, there are five targeted search pieces for prospective students, broken down by interest:

- Ecology & Environmental Humanities
- Sustainable Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems
- Outdoor Education
- General interest
- Students from Vermont

There are also fundraising communications, including:

- A capital campaign subdomain, nourishtheroots.sterlingcollege.edu, which outlines the campaign's priorities, news, and goals
- A Stewardship Society brochure
- A planned giving ("The Margaret Sterling Society") brochure

In terms of electronic communication, Sterling College sends out a monthly email newsletter to alumni and friends, called "The Expeditioner," and a weekly internal email called the "Community News" to faculty, staff, and students. The College's website, completely redesigned in 2014, is mobile-responsive, and is home to all of the College's information and communications. The website is currently being rebuilt, and the new site is scheduled to launch in the spring of 2016.

The website features:

- the Community Guidebook, which encompasses the previous Student Handbook
- intranet portals for students, faculty, and staff that provide links to forms, academic calendars, phone numbers, calendars, and more
- a robust portal for parents and families that provides info on dorm living, community living, events, the Work Program, and more
- advising forms for faculty
- a completely electronic course catalog, which is archived annually
- the College's Economic and Service Report, which details the College's economic impact on its immediate community and records the person-hours and types of community service the College and its students perform

Appraisal

The website itself contains all the photographs, descriptions, and information called for in the Association's data sheet and the details of Standard 10. This includes the Community Guidebook: this document contains everything a community member needs to know about schedules, rules of behavior, policies and procedures, who is who, where offices are, community organization, costs and financial aid, the drug and alcohol policy, and much more.

No matter how much work is put into making our website's navigation logical and easy to use, metrics show that one of the most used features of the Sterling's website is the "Search" feature, which works seamlessly between the academic catalog and the contents of the website itself. Believing that Public Disclosure is only as good as the electronic search engine in front of it, the College conducted a quick experiment. Using words from the 32 categories of disclosure on the Standard 10 data sheet, the College's search engine performed very well.

Projection

Going forward, the Communications and Marketing offices are continually refining the navigation of the website, based on the analytics of how users are actually interacting with the site. Additionally, the College launched the use of Blackbaud as a student information system in Summer 2015. As we develop fluency with this system, the use of Blackbaud on campus will mean more robust portals for students, faculty, and staff, and will mean greater efficiency in the creation of, for example, the electronic course catalog, billing for students and their parents, and class schedules.

We are currently looking to launch a redesigned website in the spring of 2016. The redesigned website will have all of the strengths of the current website, with a new look and feel and text geared to both appeal to potential applicants and for search engine optimization.

Institutional Effectiveness

The College's website also provides increased public disclosure through its various social media sites, such as:

- a new blog that explores the community in-depth through student narratives, faculty essays, photo collages, and more
- links to our social media channels, which include YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter

Social media sites enhance the spirit and practice of public disclosure, and allow the College to have in-depth conversations with the public.

Sterling's print and electronic publications are reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis. The academic catalog, for instance, is under the purview of the office of the Dean of Academics. Working closely with the Registrar and senior staff members, as well as faculty both independently and as a whole, the Dean edits and updates the catalog annually,

having archived the previous year's edition. All marketing material, either on the website or in print, is the responsibility of the Communications Office, covering enrollment, publications, fundraising, events, public relations, and institutional marketing. At Sterling all materials for these outward-facing endeavors are designed, written, and produced in-house. The systematic management of such a complex task relies on outreach with specific program meetings, such as the Advancement or Admission teams, which regularly focuses on current operations, and periodically takes up new ideas, initiatives, and updates.

STANDARD ELEVEN: INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

Description

At Sterling the practices and principles that constitute institutional integrity are evident throughout the College in its policies, its conduct, and its history. We work toward being fully accountable in all of our dealings with students, faculty, staff, the Board of Trustees, external agencies and organizations, and the general public.

Appraisal

Successfully achieving and maintaining a high degree of professional standards takes place on two fronts. The first is in meeting or exceeding the standards and expectations of numerous outside agencies that require the College to reflect upon, document, demonstrate, and practice to the best of its ability the high professional standards expected of these agencies. They include:

- The Federal Department of Education
- The College's auditing firm
- The Association of Experiential Educators,
- Vermont and federal law pertaining to all manner of institutional operations and practice, and
- NEASC

We do this by carefully considering the outside queries and standards outside agencies ask for and by reviewing where we meet these standards, how we could go farther than the minimum baseline of the standards, and where we have gaps and how we can address those gaps.

The second arena in which integrity is central to the successful operation of a community of learners is in the institution's practices on a quotidian basis; how it communicates (see Standard 10), enforces its own standards of behavior, and adheres to the less defined but commonsense ethical standards of openness, fairness, and respect for individuals and groups.

At Sterling, decisions and actions at all levels of operations are conducted openly and through community governance processes. The College currently has three councils that address community, academics, and work; these councils include students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, there are committees that oversee specific areas, such as:

- Personnel Committee, which is responsible for evaluating and proposing standards concerning personnel procedures, responsibilities, and administration
- Lands and Energy Committee, which is a clearinghouse for information and decisions on projects which affect land use and energy development on College property

- Risk Management Committee, which identifies, monitors, and manages hazards and dangers in order to reduce the potential for incidents that could result in injury, illness, fatality, or damage

In matters of governance and policy at the Board of Trustees level, the College demonstrates a level of openness that reflects the institution's attitude and spirit of assuring integrity. All Board meetings, except those discussing personnel issues, are open to student representatives, and the faculty is well represented at the Board level. In addition, the College's by-laws are public and published on the Sterling College website. Academic policies are currently on the Sterling College website as well as in the Community Guidebook. The Community Guidebook and Employee Handbook, complete with policy statements on the following topics, contain an array of documentation that provides openness and direct information that lends to integrity, including:

- Grievance procedures
- The College commitment to equity
- Community behavioral guidelines
- Mandatory reporting policy
- Clery Act reporting
- Academic policies, including academic honesty and plagiarism
- Non-discrimination policy
- Work policies, including All-College Work Days and chores
- Community accountability

[Workroom Docs: Articles of Association and Bylaws; Community Guidebook, Employee Handbook]

Projection
The College's outward facing entities, such as the Office of Admission and Financial Aid, the office of Communication, and the Advancement and Alumni Relations team, pay close attention to matters of integrity and best practice. For instance: Student applicants are required to complete an interview with Admission counselors; we also encourage prospective students to visit the College to see how experiential academics are enacted. Because the College conducts all its advancement outreach and marketing in-house, the team internally assesses as to whether all materials are truthful and exemplify the College's values and mission. Materials rarely get published that have not been reviewed in some fashion by others, including the President. Going forward, the College's new Director of Advancement and Alumni Relations (hired May 2015) will have ultimate authority over Advancement materials and will be able to analyze those publications even more stringently.

Internally, the College has invested considerable resources in hardware and software to support a welcome transition away from numerous isolated, labor-intensive databases and towards a more effective means of managing the growing amounts of information associated with developing and administering our educational initiatives. We have recently

adopted Blackbaud, a student information system (SIS) designed to coordinate databases across the offices of Registrar, Admission and Financial Aid, and Finance. While we are still in the process of developing full functionality, this interdepartmental integration is already greatly increasing the College's efficiency in maintaining accurate and up-to-date information that is readily accessible and appropriately protected.

Institutional Effectiveness

At Sterling, the policies and practices which pertain to institutional integrity are not collected in one place or document, but consist of policy elements from numerous sources; for instance, the by-laws, Community Guidebook, and the College Catalog. Practices, too, such as Community Meeting and Academic, Work, and Community Councils, although very different, lend themselves to the integrity of a functioning community. In addition, in 2013, the entire community, facilitated by President Matthew Derr, drafted a five-year strategic plan that addresses programs and people, resources, and facilities and infrastructure goals. The goals are reviewed periodically. All these practices and policies are under review and assessment formally or through practice and reflection. The result is a standard of integrity that is institution-wide and active, but not codified in any one area as a subject unto itself. This could, of course, possibly change if the community feels the need to create one central committee to review integrity at the College. Currently, the only exceptions are in NEASC reviews, or in the community and board's episodic reviews of the by-laws or mission statement where the College attempts to put under one heading statements or descriptions encompassing the more comprehensive definitions of integrity.