

# STERLING COLLEGE:

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2020-2030

### OVERVIEW

Sterling is a mission-defined and vision-inspired institution that provides learning about and engagement with the natural world. For more than a half century, we have believed that neither the narrow technician nor the uninformed idealist alone can address the critical issues facing humanity. It is imperative that we address the accelerating crises facing the social and natural communities of which we are all members. Sterling does this by equipping people with a bridge between thought and deed so that they can live meaningful and rewarding lives that are closely connected to the natural world.

### MISSION

To advance ecological thinking and action through affordable experiential learning that prepares people to be knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible leaders in the communities in which they live.

### VISION

Sterling uses education as a force to address critical ecological problems caused by unlimited growth and consumption that is destroying the planet as we have known it, such as:

- Fossil fuel dependence and rapid climate change.
- Destruction of biodiversity and loss of wild places.
- Promotion of harmful agricultural practices that threaten human and natural communities.
- Persistence of structural oppression that impacts human and ecological wellbeing.
- Deterioration of civil society through estrangement from community, nature, and place.

Our vision is informed and guided by five competencies gained through learning assessed by our faculty:

- Achieve a sophisticated understanding of, and personal engagement with, ecological systems.
- Understand societies and cultures as dynamic and complex systems of relationships and interdependencies.
- Use research and creative endeavor to explore concepts, experiences, and artifacts.
- Articulate ideas and share information clearly, using a diversity of approaches.
- Demonstrate effective, knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible leadership in community.

### OUR STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

To advance ecological thinking and action through learning, Sterling has made five overarching commitments in this planning initiative. This effort reflects the work of a galvanized community ready to fulfill a long-standing mission and a contemporary vision that will transform and secure the future of the institution.

#### Commitment I

Provide effective transdisciplinary, experiential, competency-assessed educational programs that meet student aspirations.

- Create and sustain educational programs that are anti-racist, anti-biased, and that promote equality and justice.
- Support transdisciplinary educational programs that integrate learning and support faculty creativity.
- Adopt a competency-based assessment model for learning achieved through study and work.
- Establish a calendar and schedule designed to best support faculty, experiential learning, and community wellbeing.
- Investigate delivering cohort-based, transdisciplinary, competency-based educational programs through undergraduate, graduate, online, and professional study and work, as well as personal growth learning experiences.

## **Commitment II**

Attract, develop, and retain an exceptional and increasingly diverse faculty and staff.

- Recruit an increasingly diverse leadership, faculty, and staff while preparing all employees to work to ensure that all programs and institutional practices are inclusive and promote equality and justice.
- Take an equitable and comprehensive approach to human resources that supports effective operation of the College.
- Provide highly competitive compensation and benefits that support employees at all stages of professional life.
- Increase opportunities for teaching field study courses, conducting scholarly work, and professional development.
- Expand and enrich the employee experience through educational programs that regularly engage with a diverse assortment of speakers, field practitioners, and distinguished visiting faculty.

## **Commitment III**

Extend the reach and impact of our mission by attracting and retaining an exceptional and increasingly diverse and underserved student population.

- Merit a reputation as an anti-racist and anti-bias institution focused on promoting equality and justice.
- Fulfill the aim of affordable education by moving towards debt-free programs for residential students and overall reduction in reliance on tuition to fund operations.
- Promote a cohesive and engaged community of students at all locations by strengthening educational, governance, community, and wellness programming to holistically support students.
- Develop a pre- and post-graduate advising program led by faculty, and supported by alumni, that supports a holistic and seamless approach to post-study opportunity.
- Develop and invest in a comprehensive identity, marketing, and recruitment plan that accurately reflects the institution and supports meeting these commitments.

## **Commitment IV**

Promote our mission and vision through collaborative relationships and partnerships.

- Develop partnerships with organizations that commit to anti-racism and anti-bias that promote equality and justice.
- Use the partnership model with The Berry Center to inspire further initiatives with other organizations.
- Develop partnerships that support onsite and online visiting students and faculty from other organizations.
- Increasingly engage in public presentations and professional work through relationships and partnerships.
- Expand public knowledge of our mission and vision through collaborative relationships and partnerships.

## **Commitment V**

Develop an organizational model that promotes ecological, social, and financial sustainability.

- Fulfill our vision of anti-racism and anti-bias in our organization, governance, and use of resources.
- Further develop and commit to an organizational culture of sustainability and institutional improvement based on regular assessment, community governance, and input from all stakeholders.
- Establish a plan for the diversification of sources of revenue that strengthen our capacity to meet our mission and to become an increasingly affordable educational opportunity for students, including increasing the endowment and developing self-sustaining enterprises.
- Complete a comprehensive study and implement a plan to ensure efficient ecological use of all operational and capital resources, including a transformation of energy systems.
- Support our historic place in Craftsbury Common by working to improve facilities and the beauty of our property and the village.

## **KEY TO THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE & PLAN: 2020 - 2030**

The Strategic Initiative 2020-2030: Mission, Vision, and Five Commitments were approved with support by the Faculty Council on April 15, 2019 and by resolution of the Board of Trustees on April 20, 2019

### **Resolution of the Board of Trustees**

*Whereas: Sterling's fiscal health has never been stronger, this is an era bringing unprecedented challenge to the role of higher education in general and the survival of small colleges in particular.*

*Whereas: We are fortunate to have college leadership with an inspired, inventive, mission-driven plan, for the long-term viability and global impact of Sterling College.*

*Resolved, therefore, the Board of Trustees unanimously and strongly endorses the 2019 Ten-Year Strategic Initiative with the mission, vision and commitments it describes, and urge all members of the Sterling community to endorse and commit their considerable intellect and energy to timely and tangible action in fulfillment of this plan.*

### **The Strategic Plan 2020-2030: Goals & Action Steps**

The Board of Trustees structure will change to create five councils. Our progress in fulfilling each of the five commitments included in the strategic initiative will be assessed by these five newly established councils with membership that is composed of trustees, faculty, staff, and students. The councils will meet quarterly in July, October, January, and April.

Each of the five commitments will be met through a progressively evolving list of goals and action steps. These goals and action steps have been, and will continue to be, derived through quarterly community-wide planning exercises and through the work of our established community governance bodies, like Leadership Council, Faculty Council, Community Council, and the Racial Justice Committee.

Goals of the strategic plan and action steps of the strategic plan will often, but not in all cases, be advanced by the work of a task force for which the President or Board of Trustees has articulated a specific charge/mandate. Task forces will typically focus on a specific effort of research and/or planning and will be disbanded when the charge has been met. Task forces will work closely with already established community governance bodies.

Progress toward fulfilling our commitments through our stated goals and related action steps will be measured by rubrics that form an assessment dashboard for each commitment that are quarterly reported to the President and the Board of Trustees.

For more information about assessment, rubrics, and dashboards, there is a copy of David Grant's book, *The Social Profit Handbook*, on reserve in Brown Library.