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# **Confident Change Amidst a Dynamic Reality**

## The Value of Vision-Based Planning

*This paper aims to offer campus leaders a tested approach for vision-based planning—the foundational component of confident progress—and to discuss the unique opportunities that the current dynamism provides higher educational institutions.*



# Confident Change Amidst a Dynamic Reality

## The Value of Vision-Based Planning

Colleges and universities across the country currently find themselves amidst a uniquely volatile political, financial, and educational reality. In response to this uncertainty, many institutions and their leaders feel a sense of forced paralysis in progressing the organization's effectiveness to serve its population. As a result, the question facing colleges and universities across the country is: how can we plan, prioritize, and invest confidently to enhance our campus experience during a time chock-full of dynamic variables?



This paper aims to offer campus leaders a tested approach for vision-based planning—the foundational component of confident progress—and to discuss the unique opportunities that the current dynamism provides higher educational institutions. To highlight the potential realization of a disciplined pursuit of vision-based planning and opportunistic capitalization, this paper will highlight Young Harris College, whose commitment to mission-grounded planning and decision making has resulted in perhaps the most ambitious campus expansion plan in the country over the last seven years.

## Academic

YHC offered 13 two-year associate degrees and no bachelor's degrees.

### TARGETED OUTCOMES

YHC determined the need to focus on increasing its academic standards and offerings to provide its students a multi-disciplinary liberal arts education while providing a firm foundation for its graduate studies.

### INITIATIVES

To date, YHC has received accreditation for 20 majors and 20 minors from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools ("SACS") and offers its students a wide variety of academic pursuits. Detailed analysis of physical resources indicated that the college's academic offerings were not restricted by the availability of classroom spaces on campus, but rather that the existing facilities could accommodate a higher utilization for growth. The significant majority of the college's investment pertained to doubling the size of its faculty and the addition of program offerings.

## OBSERVATIONS: DYNAMIC REALITY

### Student Opposition to Proposed Tuition Increases

In November 2014, students staged a sit-in at the University of California, Berkeley to oppose a tuition increase from \$12,804 to nearly \$15,564 over the next four years for in-state students. Out-of-state students, who currently pay approximately \$35,000 in tuition and fees, could see those costs rise to nearly \$45,000, not including student housing or meal plans. The Board of Regents approved the measure shortly thereafter.<sup>1</sup>

### Increased Federal Interest in Cost of Education

In his recent State of the Union address, President Obama announced his intentions to pursue a free community college tuition plan, in which the federal government would fund approximately three-fourths of the tuition costs with the states closing the balance of the funding gap. Modeled after the Tennessee Promise plan that has seen a much higher than expected participation from graduating high school seniors—nine out of ten graduates have applied to the program—the program would support institutions with academic programs whose credits transfer to local public four-year colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup>

### Faculty / Staff Compensation Challenges

The University of Idaho's president has proposed a freeze on undergraduate resident tuition rates if state legislators agree to fund a three percent (3%) increase in faculty and staff salaries. President Chuck Staben has noted that turnover for his employees was 18 percent last year, largely, in response to compensation levels that are 16 percent below the national average for higher education institutions.<sup>3</sup>

### Performance Funding Model Questions

A recent study published in the journal *Evaluation and Policy Analysis* may undercut the assumed efficacy of one of the country's most typically lauded performance-based funding programs for higher educational institutions. Washington State's Student Achievement Initiative, which began in 2007 to more closely align funding for community and technical colleges with how well they are actually

<sup>1</sup> Wax-Thibodeaux, Emily. "University of California Students Protest Tuition Hikes. A Look at Some Campus Protests over the Years." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 20 Nov. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Mangan, Katherine. "Obama Proposes Free Community College for Millions of Students." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. N.p., 8 Jan. 2015. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> "University Of Idaho President Proposes Tuition Freeze In Exchange For Faculty Raises." *University Of Idaho President Proposes Tuition Freeze In Exchange For Faculty Raises*. N.p., 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

## Student Housing

YHC students are required to live in its on-campus housing. As of 2007, all the residence halls on campus were configured as suite-style living.

### TARGETED OUTCOMES

In evaluating the role of student housing in achieving potential targeted outcomes, YHC determined that housing needed to play a more significant role in the personal development of its students.

Students are now offered a progressive housing model that appropriately matches unit type with the student's position on the developmental curve. It was determined to be important that students have access to increasingly independent living situations (traditional, suite-style, apartment housing) as they progressed during their time at YHC.

### INITIATIVES

By fall 2013, YHC had an additional 674 new beds over three different projects on campus in variable unit configurations, providing the full spectrum of residential independence. In the process, YHC has focused on the need for each housing facility to support itself financially through rental revenues to ensure that it maintains flexibility in responding to other housing needs as they arise.

serving their students, displayed no statistically significant improvement in student retention or degree completion when compared to other in-state public colleges without such performance-based funding models. Many states have considered the formulation and implementation of similar performance funding models.<sup>4</sup>

### Fundraising Outlook

The latest CASE Fundraising Index, which is based on a survey that asks higher educational institutions'

fundraisers to estimate the level of giving for the year ahead, predicts that giving to colleges and universities will increase 5.7 percent.<sup>5</sup> Further, a 2014 survey completed by the Council for Aid to Education demonstrated that charitable giving to American colleges and universities has reached an historic high for the second straight year—a record \$37.4 billion—representing the largest gain since 2000.<sup>6</sup> However, increased student debt is accruing and the motivation behind donating is shifting. A study done by Eduventures in 2014 shows that 50 percent of baby boomer alumni cited their reason for giving as “obligation” compared to only 27 percent of millennials. Millennials' donations are largely due to impact-related motivations such as enhancing national rankings, supporting current students, and the like.<sup>7</sup>

## OPPORTUNITY

Amidst the well documented volatility and uncertainty across various sectors, higher educational institutions have a significant advantage in that their time horizons, or outlooks, are considerably more certain than those of other participants in the global financial marketplace. While a private business, for example, is forced to make bottom line decisions for financial performance over the short term (i.e., quarterly, annually), the increased need for colleges and universities to support the growing global workforce provides a comparatively dependable level of long-term stability. This allows higher educational institutions to lessen the effect of the current dynamism on its decision making processes relative to others seeking investment. At the core of this dynamism, colleges and universities have the opportunity to respond with thoughtful, disciplined, vision-based planning and confidently take advantage of a historically favorable cost of capital to implement their mission-critical initiatives.

<sup>4</sup> Bidwell, Allie. “Reprt: Performance Funding Might Not Help Students.” US News. U.S. News & World Report, 14 Jan. 2015. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

<sup>5</sup> “CASE - U.S. Educational Fundraisers Predict Steady Growth in Giving for 2014-2015.” CASE - U.S. Educational Fundraisers Predict Steady Growth in Giving for 2014-2015. N.p., 12 Aug. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Will, Madeline. “‘Huge Explosion of Wealth’ Drives Record \$37.5-Billion in Gifts to Colleges.” The Chronicle of Higher Education. N.p., 28 Jan. 2015. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Woolf, Max. “Eduventures, Author at Eduventures - Page 2 of 14.” Eduventures RSS2. N.p., 24 Nov. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.





“A college is just like any other organism. If you are not growing and progressing, you are going backwards.”

— Cathy Cox  
President  
Young Harris College

## YOUNG HARRIS COLLEGE: CONFIDENCE IN CHANGE

In 2007, Cathy Cox, formerly Georgia’s Secretary of State, was recruited by the Board of Trustees at Young Harris College (“YHC”) to lead the institution’s transformation from a private two-year college to a comprehensive four-year, baccalaureate degree-granting operation. This required, in turn, more than doubling its overall enrollment. “We were the best black-and-white TV in a color TV market,” notes Cox, describing the quality of Young Harris College’s two-year program. “We just realized that the private, two-year associate’s degree model was the dinosaur of higher education and that to meet our overall mission for serving students, we had to make a bold change.”

Founded in 1886 in the rural Blue Ridge Mountains area of North Georgia—a two-hour drive from Atlanta—YHC has taken on many different forms during its 128-year history. During that time, it has been a four-year college, an academy for high school grades, and since the early 1900s, a two-year college, but always with a residential, liberal arts-focused campus. To help with its new charge toward a four-year status, President Cox knew the value of vision-based planning.

## Then

In 2007, YHC offered 13 associate degrees and zero bachelor's degrees.

In 2007, YHC was a junior college.

In 2007, YHC competed in the National Junior College Athletic Association.

YHC had not completed a capital campaign for more than a decade.

## Now

In 2015, YHC offers 20 bachelor's degrees and 20 minors. Faculty has doubled in that time period.

In 2012, the institution was honored as a College of Distinction.

Now, YHC completes in NCAA Division II athletics.

In 2014, YHC successfully completed its aptly-titled \$70 million capital campaign, "Investing in the Future."

"Bold change requires a strong foundation. You have to know who you are before you can confidently know where you need to go tomorrow, let alone 10 or 20 years down the road," says Cox. "Every institution should periodically go through a major, detailed assessment of what it is, what it is doing, and what it should be doing in order to ensure that it is appropriately responding to its mission, vision, and market realities. The result of not doing this is obsolescence."

When asked about YHC's confidence in the institutional investments required amidst a historically volatile time, Cox noted, "There are things that you can and cannot control. An institution must focus on the things that it can control and pursue excellence with full force, consistent with its mission. Failure is not an option in progress...Despite the fact that dark clouds seem to be circling, no institution can afford to sit still. Higher education leaders must be committed to institutional risk. This risk," Cox says, "must be thoughtful, informed and vision-based, however, to ensure that responsible decision making can occur."



## YOUNG HARRIS COLLEGE: RESULTS

As a result of its mission-grounded planning efforts and resultant investments, YHC achieved eight consecutive years of record enrollment—growing from serving approximately 600 students to more than 1,200 students in only seven years. In 2007, YHC offered 13 associate degrees and zero bachelor's degrees. In 2015, the college offers 20 bachelor's degrees and 20 minors. YHC's faculty more than doubled in the same time period.

In 2007, YHC was a junior college. The institution has been named a College of Distinction in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

In 2007, YHC competed in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Now, YHC competes in NCAA Division II athletics.



## Campus Recreation

As of 2007, the existing opportunities for indoor recreation available to the campus community were contained in an outdated basketball gymnasium and swimming pool facility. The facility conditions and lack of resources within the recreation department led to a significant gap in recreational participation when compared to its peer and aspirational institutions.

### TARGETED OUTCOMES

In understanding the targeted outcomes that campus recreation needed in order to progress, YHC prioritized the development of students' wellness and life-long skills, an outlet for stress mitigation, and personal fitness—all of which are associated with successful recreation programs. Additionally, campus recreation was to support enrollment management as a driver in the recruitment and retention of its students and to create a central gathering opportunity for community-building on campus.

In 2014, YHC successfully completed its \$70 million capital campaign aptly-titled, "Investing in the Future." Its last campaign was more than a decade ago.

Such growth requires confident strategic investment with the future in mind. In the words of President Cox: "For Young Harris College to successfully respond to our mission, we had to make comparatively short-term investments to ensure long-term viability."

## VISION-BASED PLANNING: CONFIDENT PROGRESS IN TEN STEPS

Confidence in planning during the current dynamic reality requires the same discipline as that done during times of prosperity and growth. It is only now that the importance of this discipline is heightened to ensure value maximization of its investments that have been limited by external factors (e.g., financial restrictions, decreased discretionary income). Clear articulation of the overall vision and mission of an institution is not a new concept—it can likely be found in a single mouse click on every college and university's homepage.

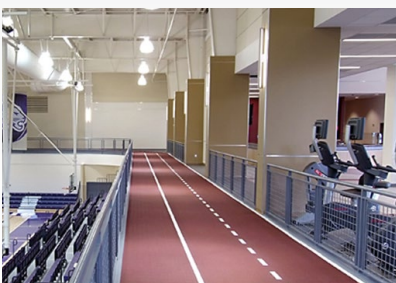
The importance in gauging how best to specifically enhance your campus experience to the mission's end, however, must rely on extending this global declaration to individual segments of the institution. For example, defining the strategic role of student housing in forwarding one's mission and determining the appropriate allocation of university financial resources when compared to other campus needs are the challenges with which many institutions are currently struggling. It is critical to articulate and prioritize these initiatives and allocations to ensure that efficient investment of increasingly limited resources is effective and widely understood throughout the campus community. Without this, stagnation, decreased return on investment, and frustration are certainties—even when removed from today's unique climate.



## Campus Recreation

### (CONTINUED) INITIATIVES

In fall 2010, YHC opened the doors to its new 57,000-square-foot Recreation and Fitness Center. Funded partially by student fees, this facility houses state-of-the-art weight and fitness offerings, a three-court gymnasium, multipurpose classroom spaces, and a 37-foot indoor climbing wall. YHC hosts a variety of community events in the facility, including graduation ceremonies, fundraising events, alumni experiences, and NCAA Division II varsity basketball competitions.



How, then, can we plan, prioritize, and invest confidently to enhance our campus experience during a time chock-full of dynamic variables? Thorough, systematic, and honest vision-based planning should serve as the cornerstone of an institution's decision making process. Disciplined adherence to each of the steps summarized below will determine the successful prioritization of campus initiatives and confident investment of its resources.

**1 Ensure clarity of the institution's overall mission and values.** At the forefront of any confident decision making must be a clear statement of institutional mission and values. Institutions must review their existing mission and values to ensure their applicability and consistency with the views of the campus leadership. It is not infrequently that incoming campus leadership "inherits" a mission and proceeds to lead without conviction of the stated directive. This can also be seen at an institution that has conducted detailed strategic planning, for example, that is eventually found to be unachievable or inconsistent with its core values. This can be seen in many places through the hasty implementation of physical or facilities master planning processes that draw investment to areas that are later deemed less effective than originally anticipated. It is important to note that an institution's current inability to achieve excellence in a particular area of its mission does not necessarily require the mission's revision, but rather discourse among all stakeholders to ensure that its inclusion is consistent with the values of the organization.

**2 Define the institution's targeted outcome categories.** Once an institution confidently clarifies its overall mission and values it must begin to define and categorize specific targeted outcomes that are available to higher educational bodies. These outcome categories (e.g., recruitment, retention, leadership development, balance sheet utilization, alumni relations) can all be sorted into five overarching sets of drivers: educational outcomes, enrollment management, campus community, financial performance, and sustainability.

**3 Discuss the responsibility that each "campus asset" currently exhibits for each targeted outcome.** A campus asset can be defined as a particular segment of the overall campus composition. For example, student housing, campus recreation, the biology program, and the student union are all campus assets. However, each of these is likely to serve a different role with respect to a particular targeted outcome. Foodservice operations, for instance, may currently play a limited role in the



## Student Union

As of 2007, YHC's student union and activity spaces centered on a 2,000-square-foot lounge area in a building constructed in 1912 and otherwise used for administration. The student center area included limited tables, chairs, and other soft seating for a small portion of the overall campus community. An all-you-care-to-eat dining venue was located in a separate building and experienced significant crowding during traditional meeting times.

### TARGETED OUTCOMES

With no significant spaces currently on its campus, YHC identified a large number of gaps that needed to be closed in its student union facilities. An investment had to be made to create a central hub for activity on campus, emphasizing the importance of faculty/staff/student interaction.

Additionally, increasing students' opportunities for out-of-classroom experiences that integrate academics and extracurricular activities was critical in achieving campus community outcomes.



professional development of students when compared to the campus recreation program that employs 75 student workers and provides them with job-ready skills. It is important to note that this portion of the planning process is not intended to judge whether or not a particular asset is performing well, but rather to understand the intensity with which that campus component is currently pursuing a particular targeted outcome. This process must be accomplished through a vehicle that allows for consistent and comparable evaluation among the various campus asset types.

4

### Discuss the responsibility that each campus asset type should have for the targeted outcomes.

Once an institution has an understanding of each campus asset's current attainment levels for particular targeted objectives, a discussion should take place among stakeholders about what the targeted aspiration should be for each outcome to most effectively achieve the overall mission and values. It is important that this discussion not be restricted by current real or perceived barriers (e.g., financial, spatial, cultural, and so on). This phase of the process is intended to allow campus constituents to voice an ideal outcome that will eventually be reconciled with various realities, as further detailed below. For example, even though an institution may not showcase its recreation facilities on its campus tour because the facilities are dated, should the recreation facilities play a role in an institution's campus tour impact to advance the overall mission and vision? Again, this process must be accomplished through a vehicle that allows the targeted aspiration to be consistent and comparable among the various campus asset types.

5

### Identify the gaps between current and desired future attainment levels for each campus asset type.

An institution can now begin to quantify the gaps that exist between the current and targeted attainment levels for each of the outcome categories by asset type. It will

## Student Union

### (CONTINUED)

#### TARGETED OUTCOMES

The student union was also identified as a facility that required spaces to encourage student participation in organizational, leadership, and leisure activities, and was meant also to provide a place for students to interact during nights and weekends. This facility needed to play a significant role in the recruitment of students, giving the sense of a “living room” that they and their classmates could envision themselves enjoying for four years.

#### RESULT

The \$41 million, 121,000-square-foot Rollins Campus Center opened its doors in October 2014 and is the largest facility ever constructed at YHC. The center contains a 60,000-square-foot multi-purpose student center, an expanded dining hall with a wide variety of food stations, a 350-seat, versatile banquet facility, and a 40,000-square-foot modern library. The campus center houses student organizations, activities, and services in a versatile, loft-like space with dedicated areas for student government, media publications, and other student clubs. In overt support of the facility’s role as the recruitment centerpiece, the admissions offices are also located in the facility.

need to be able to understand the gaps for athletics in the same way it understands the gaps for its student union. Only through a common language will an institution effectively evaluate the results of this self-assessment.

#### 6 Prioritize targeted objectives consistent with attainment gaps.

The institution must now comparatively analyze all the current gaps and prioritize them to identify those that indicate a significant difference between current and aspirant attainment levels. The largest gaps designate those areas that require the most immediate attention and serve to underscore the need for specific investment in detailed initiatives to align an institution’s actions and investments with its stated mission and values. One surprising outcome of this gap analysis for many institutions is that a particular campus asset may be pursuing a certain targeted outcome with a higher level of intensity than is required by the mission and vision. While this may be a case of overachievement, it more likely indicates inefficiency in the investment of time or other resources in a particular area that may be better suited for application to one of the existing gaps.

#### 7 Publicly affirm the institution’s identification of, and commitment to, closing the gaps.

An institution must be willing to share its prioritized targeted objectives with the campus community at large as well as with external stakeholders to allow for community buy-in. Many avoid this communications process, believing in human nature’s seemingly natural aversion to change; however, thoughtful incorporation of multiple viewpoints in the planning process is important in order to establish well-tested ideas.

#### 8 Efficiently pursue planning and implementation activities rooted in closing these gaps.

The result of identifying these gaps and comparing the severity of the differentiation between individual current and aspirational attainment levels is an institution that can more effectively and efficiently invest its resources in particular initiatives aimed at closing the gaps. It is only at this point that resources must be committed to evaluate the detailed market demand factors, financial realities, physical realities, and competitive context within the marketplace (peer and aspirational institutions). These initiatives may come in the form of needs assessments, business planning activities, existing facility analyses, and the like, that will lead to either operational or physical modifications.

#### 9 Determine the appropriate funding strategy to implement the plan that is available to the institution.

The institution must reconcile the importance of its prioritized targeted objectives with its

## Keys for Confident Implementation

1. Enlist strategic advisors, not simply professional service providers
2. Initiate thoughtful, vision-based planning
3. Investigate others that have faced similar change prospects
4. Form educated, accurate capital and operational budgets
5. Develop implementable risk mitigation strategies
6. Commit to delivery within stated project parameters

## Results of Confident Implementation

1. Increased campus community confidence
2. Increased board of trustee confidence
3. Increased lender confidence
4. Increased credibility for effective investment
5. Increased opportunity to implement strategic programs

corresponding balance sheet utilization, institutional risk tolerance, overall financial burden posed to its students, and the potential effect on its credit rating. The funding strategy for implementing an initiative must be rooted in, and consistent with, the institution's overall mission and vision in order to make progress. Failure to do so will inevitably result in derailed projects, frustrated and angry campus community members, and a restricted ability to accurately correspond investment with prioritized objectives.

**10 Re-evaluate regularly with discipline.** While this process can be time consuming for an institution and its stakeholders, the end result will be a more efficient organization with clarity in its need for repositioning its strategic campus assets to achieve the overarching mission and vision. However, colleges and universities exist within dynamic realities that constantly evolve. It is critical that as an institution progresses, it remains disciplined in self-evaluating the current and aspirant attainment levels for particular targeted objectives. Of particular note, because some of the widest gaps are closed through assessment and resulting implementation, tangential and perhaps previously-unforeseen benefits or consequences may serve to support (close the gaps) or inhibit (widen the gaps) particular targeted objectives, thus modifying the prioritization.

## CONCLUSION

In order to confidently plan and achieve excellent results, as evidenced by Young Harris College, strict adherence to mission and vision cannot be compromised. Vision-based planning is essential to ensure that all decisions are made in support of unified progress rather than in conflict with other targeted objectives. When executed properly, this planning will allow institutions to realize clarity in their priorities and resultant implementation that enhances their campus experience. "Even if you aren't building new facilities, leaders cannot underestimate the importance of constantly assessing their organizations," notes President Cox. "What are our strengths and weaknesses? How can we be more competitive? And most importantly, how can we more effectively meet the calling of our mission?" Cox notes, "What's the worst thing that happens? You come out on the other side with solid ideas and your community is reenergized to advance."







## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Chet Roach** is a Regional Vice President at Brailsford & Dunlavey (B&D). He has served Young Harris College as a strategic advisor through the planning, design, and construction of its quality-of-life and other facilities during its exciting time of growth in student housing, campus recreation, athletics venues, student union, library facilities, foodservice, performing arts, bookstore, and academic spaces. Currently directing B&D's Atlanta, Georgia regional office, Mr. Roach has guided institutions across the country in strategic visioning, resultant planning efforts, and the successful oversight of design and construction teams of approximately one million square feet of quality-of-life facilities valued at more than \$500 million. In total, he has provided project development services for organizations' physical assets valued at more than \$2 billion.

B&D is a program management firm with comprehensive in-house planning capabilities dedicated to serving educational institutions, municipalities, public agencies, and non-profit clients. It has served more than 450 higher education institutions.

## CONTRIBUTOR

**Cathy Cox**, President, Young Harris College

**Photographs courtesy of** Young Harris College