

# THE OCCIDENTAL PROMISE

Integrated Strategic Plan



**OXY** Occidental  
College



Dear Occidental Community,

By any measure, this is a critical juncture in higher education more generally and in Occidental's history more specifically. Now is a time not only to assess where we are but to ask, "Where do we hope to be as a college in five years? In seven years? By the year 2030?" Simply put, we want Occidental to thrive now and tomorrow. We need the school to be fiscally healthy, as we strive to be recognized as a national leader in liberal arts education. Currently, we lay the groundwork for the College's ascension. Fundamentally, this collective vision and the following detailed integrated strategic plan, "The Occidental Promise," sets out to make the school, by 2030, the principal destination for the urban liberal arts experience.

The Occidental Promise, then, points to the College's distinctiveness as well as its exciting potential. The Occidental Promise will further our commitment to delivering an exceptional liberal arts education by strategically creating new harmonies among academic training, real-world experience and social impact. In constructing The Occidental Promise, we will build on our strengths, uphold our values, foreground our mission, and determine and develop forward-minded initiatives that elevate the College and enable it to prosper.

This promise extends to the entire Occidental community and ideally well beyond. We promise students an education that is holistic, encompassing the whole student experience, and challenging, pushing students to think critically, to work collaboratively, to ask questions purposefully, to solve rigorous problems confidently. We also promise our students an exceptional and devoted faculty, and our faculty exceptional and motivated students. We promise our faculty an environment conducive to their best work in both research and pedagogy. For our staff, we will ensure a work atmosphere that encourages community

within an institution that values their work, provides them with critical benefits, and affords them opportunities for professional development on a beautiful campus for which they feel ownership. Achieving this goal will require an appreciation of and solutions to workload issues, work-life balance, and suitable compensation. We promise parents that we will prepare our students for and launch them into fulfilling lives of impact. For our alumni, we will inspire pride not only in what Occidental has been but where the school is going. We will invite alumni to engage with the Occidental College of today and to help build the Occidental College of tomorrow.

The prefix of “urban” signals a liberal arts experience that is unique by virtue of interaction with our location in the vibrant, dynamic global city of Los Angeles. Traditionally, small liberal arts colleges operate as worlds unto themselves with bucolic but isolated campuses set in rural areas far away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Occidental is different. Our urban environment with its permeable boundaries, its spectacular views of the City of Angels spreading out before us, its gates that open onto the teeming real world enriches the very idea of what constitutes a liberal arts experience. Connecting to the city in experiential ways that foster learning and knowledge production in exciting forms is crucial to Occidental’s identity. Because of its environmental diversity, Los Angeles offers simultaneously the space for oceanic exploration and drought tolerance experimentation. Our urban locale facilitates exclusive strategic partnerships and asks not simply what L.A. can do for Occidental but what Occidental can do for the city. Our relationship with Los Angeles will continue to amplify our distinction, and clearly differentiate us from our peers and attract interest from prospective students, peer institutions and organizations, groups, and industries in Los Angeles.

While I have been at the helm of this Integrated Strategic Plan (“ISP”) guiding its construction, it has truly been a collaborative endeavor. Over the course of the past two years—even with the strains of the COVID pandemic—faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni and parents have shared their perspectives and influenced our direction towards this final document. My thanks to all of you for your active participation in this purposefully collective project. Special thanks go out to all those faculty, staff and students who served as members of the ISP Steering Committee and ISP Working Groups, as well as the trustees, especially those who served on the Board of Trustees ISP Working Group, for their time, insight and dedication. We are not at the end but at a new beginning. I look forward to working with all of you as we endeavor to make this plan a reality.



Harry J. Elam, Jr.  
Occidental College President

# THE VISION

**Occidental College will be the principal destination for a distinctive urban liberal arts experience, one that engages the full potential of global Los Angeles at its doorstep. With a commitment to academic excellence, equity and justice, immersive student learning and an innovative pedagogy that creates meaningful opportunities for hands-on research and practical experience, Occidental prepares our graduates to lead fulfilling lives of impact.**

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## INTRODUCTION: THE OCCIDENTAL PROMISE

Three governing questions fundamentally inform the priorities and objectives that animate The Occidental Promise: How do we achieve financial strength? How do we maintain academic excellence? And how, in an increasingly competitive environment, do we increase our visibility and gain national prominence for the great work that we do? How we address these questions affects and is affected by everything from fundraising to faculty recruitment to admission yields and acceptance rates.

The answer to these questions, therefore, lies partly in understanding who our students are, what they want from their college experience, and how we build a program defined by excellence that will continue to attract them. Our students are incredibly gifted, intelligent, capable, and caring, as in the past, yet today's Oxy students, and the landscape of their existence, also exhibit compelling differences. How we address these important divergences in this moment will continue to reverberate into the next.

Our students are curious and intellectually vigorous with extremely eclectic academic interests. They often double major and minor in seemingly disparate disciplines – chemistry coupled with comparative literature, computer science coupled with art history – driven simply by a thirst for knowledge and growth. Professors have



**Emma Galbraith '25** balances twin passions for environmental justice and theater, taking on both community organizing and starring in a Geffen Playhouse production in Los Angeles. Oxy provides her with a path to pursue both.

praised our students for caring far more about learning than grades. Students come to Occidental with a strong desire to make a social impact amidst a volatile world marked most recently by racialized violence, hatred and nationalism, environmental nihilism, and a fractious and polarized political climate. They do not want to wait until after college to make that difference, for the needs of the world they inherit are far too pressing.

**“Our students are drawn to diversity, recognizing it is essential to excellence, and that Oxy is one of the most diverse schools in the country. They challenge us to also create and safeguard inclusion and equity.”**

And with these tremendous strengths, our students also arrive carrying new burdens. Enduring COVID during critical learning years, our students report that the pandemic continues to affect not only their academic skills and performance, but their social relationships, mental health and well-being as well. Our students do not check these challenges at the gate, and we must help them develop resilience and tools for addressing these challenges if they are to thrive at Oxy and beyond. Our diversity is an asset, but students from historically marginalized and minoritized communities still face barriers inside and outside of the classroom that we must address. Confronting the skyrocketing cost of a college education, students and families are eager to understand Oxy's value proposition, and Oxy's ability to prepare students for professional pursuits after college. These strengths and challenges, together, shape our vision for the future.

Amidst the backdrop of a lingering pandemic, and tectonic shifts in the admissions landscape including declining demand for small liberal arts colleges, the role of standardized testing, and the impending Supreme Court decision on affirmative action, the road ahead for Occidental and other small liberal arts colleges is marked by significant uncertainty. Maintaining a diverse class remains a persistent challenge as well, and we have seen particular volatility in our diversity of gender, socio-



economic class, race and ethnicity, and political thought. With our unwavering dedication to diversity, inclusion and meeting demonstrated financial need, we must ensure our financial planning enables us to manifest our steadfast commitment to our stated mission of excellence, equity, community and service. In the immediate years to come, we and our peers will also face a profound demographic shift, with the diminishing numbers of college-age students. This looms ahead as we strive to increase our applications, our selectivity, and our yield.

Accordingly, raising our visibility nationally and internationally as the destination for an urban liberal arts experience is paramount. This recognition has the potential to impact our success in myriad ways, including our application volume and acceptance and yield rates. Prospective students, parents, counselors—even some in LA itself—who may not have known

about Occidental and the rich community and lasting education need to become aware. No longer can we be a so-called “hidden jewel” of a school. Hidden? No. A jewel? Yes.

This plan outlines three principal “promises” as the key strategic objectives that will build on Occidental’s distinguishing strengths to propel us into that kind of visibility:

**The Promise of Ensuring Academic Excellence;**

**The Promise of Forging Unique and Mutually Beneficial Partnerships with the City of Los Angeles; and**

**The Promise of Educating the Whole Student and Renewing Community**



These objectives are crucial to the future of the College and to reaching our fullest potential as an institution of higher learning. There are two other important promises/strategic objectives that are purposefully woven into the other three: **the Promise of Safeguarding Equity and Justice** and **the Promise of Advancing Sustainability and Climate Resilience**. Justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity (JEID) are endemic to our mission and everything that we do, and as such, throughout this document we note how an equity lens has been applied in designing the initiatives, in addition to specific initiatives focused on JEID. Similarly, mitigating the impacts of climate change and promoting climate resilience are important obligations to maintain a safe and sustainable campus, and to act as an institution on one of the most pressing global crises our students inherit. Accordingly, we offer an initial strategy for propelling our sustainability efforts and throughout this document we note sustainability considerations within many of the initiatives.

These three promises are interconnected and their implementation will require collaborations across departments and divisions. In addition, this plan reflects financial integration as budget and financial planning have informed the development of the plan throughout the process, and the plan explicitly reckons with budgetary constraints. From the beginning of the ISP process, the Financial Planning Working Group has sought to nail down our financial assumptions and priorities to ensure the plan’s vision and initiatives are feasible and to determine how these initiatives might contribute to the fiscal health of the College. Ideally, this plan offers important opportunities to fundraise while also offering a prudent and creative approach to what we can implement and accomplish as a college.



With the reality of our fiscal framework, strategic planning requires us to make hard choices about where we will invest. This does not mean Oxy's plan will be any less bold or ambitious. Still, enabling the College's future also depends on our ability to address pressing needs now. In discussions with faculty, staff, and students during our initial environmental scan and subsequently in continuing discussions with departments, divisions and programs as well, we have become all the more aware of immediate academic, technological, and operational systems that require attention. Accordingly, we must fortify our foundations through immediate or imminent steps.



# **THE FISCAL AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

## FINANCIAL IMPERATIVES

The Occidental Promise has twin financial imperatives. First, the plan cannot generate unfunded priorities; everything proposed must have a reasonable flight path to being funded that may include fundraising but does not involve increasing the endowment draw for operations. With fundraising as a primary vehicle to support the plan's strategies, the plan must also offer initiatives that foretell an exciting future for the College to catalyze alumni engagement and fundraising efforts. Second, the plan must be built on a budget model that ensures that the College can be fiscally sustained, weather shifting economic winds, and ultimately thrive.

In addition, we have determined that we will develop a campus master plan that identifies capital projects in both curricular and co-curricular spaces, some of which are noted in this plan. It is essential that we maintain and enhance our campus facilities if we expect to continue attracting high-achieving students and faculty. Our current financial model includes annual growth in the facilities operating budget to keep up with depreciation of the physical plant and our next fundraising campaign will include a focus on critical capital projects. To be sure, this is a long-term enterprise and will impact the growth of the College well after 2030.

## FORTIFYING OUR FOUNDATIONS

While the pandemic delayed the launch of this ISP process, it also provided invaluable insight into the institution's needs, clarifying some and exacerbating others. Taking these insights, coupled with the environmental scan phase of the ISP, building on earlier fiscal analysis from the 2012 strategic plan and incorporating the efforts of the Vision and Strategy Task Force, we have identified significant gaps in the College's "infrastructure" in the broadest sense - aging physical plant, operational/process shortfalls, growing pressures in how we serve students, and a growing need to address climate change impacts and climate justice. These gaps remind us that we must fortify our foundations to execute on our vision for the future.

We have charged three critical campus groups to focus on the present and foundational institutional issues that must be addressed with urgency. These groups address issues that require immediate attention, but they will not be short-lived or term-limited. Working alongside and outside of the ISP process, and directly with the President, these groups will seek resources for the solutions they identify through the College's budget process and, as appropriate, trustee committees for current and ongoing financing of projects designed to have an immediate and long-term impact.

## Oxy Committee on Climate Resilience and Equity (OCCRE)

Occidental College recognizes the grave problem of climate change and its associated impacts, particularly for our most vulnerable communities. Climate change poses a danger to the environment and humans, animals, and broader ecosystem communities locally, nationally and globally. With urgency, we must take action to do as much as we can to arrest and adapt to rising temperatures, extreme weather, and associated social and economic vulnerabilities from climate crises, including exacerbation of existing environmental injustices. While these challenges are systemic and global, the College as a local institution stands poised to act in ways that will protect future generations and that create a healthier ecosystem on the campus and beyond.



Occidental College's solar array, as seen from Highland Park.

Consistent with the recommendations of the Oxy Committee on Climate Resilience and Equity (OCCRE), we will continue this crucial work by reinstating a sustainability coordinator position (which remained unfilled during the pandemic) to advise on, among other things, further staffing necessary for our sustainability efforts and the necessary preparedness to adopt the Second Nature pledge. The sustainability coordinator will have the crucial task of assessing our current carbon footprint and charting the course to carbon neutrality, while also identifying and supporting campus efforts to improve climate resiliency.

## Operational Excellence Working Group

Currently, too many units around campus rely on operational tools and processes that are past their prime, including an abundance of paper forms and manual processing, rather than taking advantage of the latest software and technology. These conditions hinder our ability to work effectively as well as to be conscious stewards of our environment. The recently charged Operational Excellence Working Group (OEWG) will provide support and guidance to divisions and offices across the College on establishing and enhancing processes, practices, and procedures that improve the efficiency and quality of our administrative work. OEWG will facilitate the formation of responsive, accessible, and expeditious administrative operations for everyone in the Oxy community.

Partnering with academic and administrative units from across the College, OEWG is identifying critical areas to increase effectiveness and efficiencies and supporting the implementation of these processes. Through staff training, cross-functional collaborations, and, where warranted, the implementation or upgrade of software systems, the OEWG will help modernize workflows. Fundamentally, OEWG will facilitate and accelerate foundational improvements in the operations of the College. This year, the OEWG has begun working with the Office of the Registrar to modernize this important aspect of students' experience as well as with the Department of Human Resources. Taken together, these two departments affect a broad swath of the Occidental community, and improving their workflows should have an impact on students, faculty, and staff. In addition, IT will work closely with the Institutional Advancement Department to improve the data systems that undergird their crucial work.

### **Assessment and Accreditation Committee**

Through the strategic planning process as well as the process for WSCUC's<sup>1</sup> recent reaffirmation of our accreditation, we have cultivated a deep understanding that delivering an exceptional urban liberal arts experience depends on our ability to develop a comprehensive institutional assessment strategy, with metrics and outcomes for all programs and divisions. We have created a committee and will soon hire a director of institutional assessment and accreditation to ensure that we undertake an institution-wide plan for assessing departments' work toward institutional goals. Our work on The Occidental Promise will also inform, and be assessed as part of, an institution-wide assessment of our curricular and co-curricular delivery of the urban liberal arts experience. In coordination with both academic departments and administrative units, we will utilize the data gathered from ongoing assessment to inform strategic decisions and resource allocations across the College.

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<sup>1</sup>WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) Senior College and University Commission.

# 1. THE PROMISE OF ENSURING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE



Ensuring academic excellence at Occidental, in this rapidly evolving and complex learning environment, entails developing and maintaining a rigorous and transformative academic experience that challenges students and equally emboldens them to become co-producers of meaning in their own education.

**“We encourage our students to take responsibility for their own education as participants in the process of knowledge-making, rather than as passive recipients of information. This requires nurturing and cultivating the circumstances in which motivated students productively interact with talented teachers, artists, and scholars whose recruitment, retention and professional development we will foreground.”**

Academic excellence at Occidental entails educating students beyond silos of domain expertise, creating unique opportunities for students in order to prepare them for the many and varied careers they are likely to have over their lifetime. We can create new harmonies in our cutting edge, cross-disciplinary curricula, creating with our students a broad, rich, inspiring and empowering educational experience that intentionally helps students translate and apply their higher learning and knowledge in the worlds beyond college.

Academic excellence at Occidental also extends lessons and learning beyond what happens in the classroom and purposefully conjoins theory and practice. We renew our commitment to educating students for lives of impact—with the understanding that “impact” can mean many things across many different fields (e.g., social justice, public service, international affairs and global understanding, reform in the health industry, technical innovation, law, arts, sustainability, climate justice, etc.). With signature programs and courses, such as the Obama Scholars Program, Campaign Semester, the Kahane Oxy at the U.N. Program, and new immersive courses, we expand the space of education, and we explore distinctive modes of learning and interactive pedagogy that rely on hands-on, project-based experiences. Our approach to academic excellence at Oxy does not consider practical learning as antithetical to, but rather crucial to, a liberal arts education today and into tomorrow.

To advance this vision of academic excellence, we must first bolster the faculty as the cornerstone of academic excellence. In addition to the plan to expand the tenured/tenure-track (“T3”) faculty that is underway (“Project 170”), we will create a course equivalency model to help manage faculty workload. Through these twin initiatives we can better enable faculty to deliver the high-touch, personalized education that is and will continue to be our hallmark.



## **STRATEGY 1: ADVOCATING FOR THE FACULTY THROUGH T3 EXPANSION AND WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT**

Recruiting and retaining exceptional faculty is critical to our maintaining and furthering academic excellence. Only through encouraging and enabling faculty drive and persistence, ingenuity and innovation, dedication and commitment, can our Occidental education prosper.

Thus, fundamental to The Occidental Promise is creating an environment where faculty have the support they need to do their best work. One of the key pressure points for faculty—exacerbated by the demands of remote teaching during the COVID pandemic—is the faculty workload. Nominally, faculty are expected to teach five courses per academic year (a “3:2” load), advise first-year students and majors in their department, conduct research, and perform service. The service expectation spans several domains including departmental committees, faculty-wide governance committees, and College-wide committees and decision-making bodies. Each of these tasks alone is expansive; when taken together, these expectations present an unsustainable model, exacerbate burnout, and damage morale and retention.

### **Course Equivalency Model for Faculty Workload**

To address these concerns, we will develop a new approach to faculty workload that supports faculty recruitment and retention while creating conditions for Oxy’s excellent faculty to do their best work. Specifically, we will develop and implement a model that treats faculty participation in clearly defined teaching, research, and service activities as course equivalents and reallocate classroom teaching time in support of those activities. This plan will require the work of a faculty committee to determine course equivalencies and will operate in conjunction with Project 170. For the faculty to thrive at Oxy, the College must foster conditions in which its faculty are able to produce original work in their field, function with energy and innovation in the classroom, believe they are fairly compensated and feel satisfied that their working lives are stable and sustainable over the long run.

This approach to workload management seeks to promote these conditions of sustainability, satisfaction, productive scholarship, and student orientation by creating additional faculty course releases through a robust and well-defined set of course equivalencies. Relieving some of the faculty workload in the areas of greatest burden will provide a catalyst for faculty investment in research and teaching, thus bolstering the excellence of Occidental’s academic community.

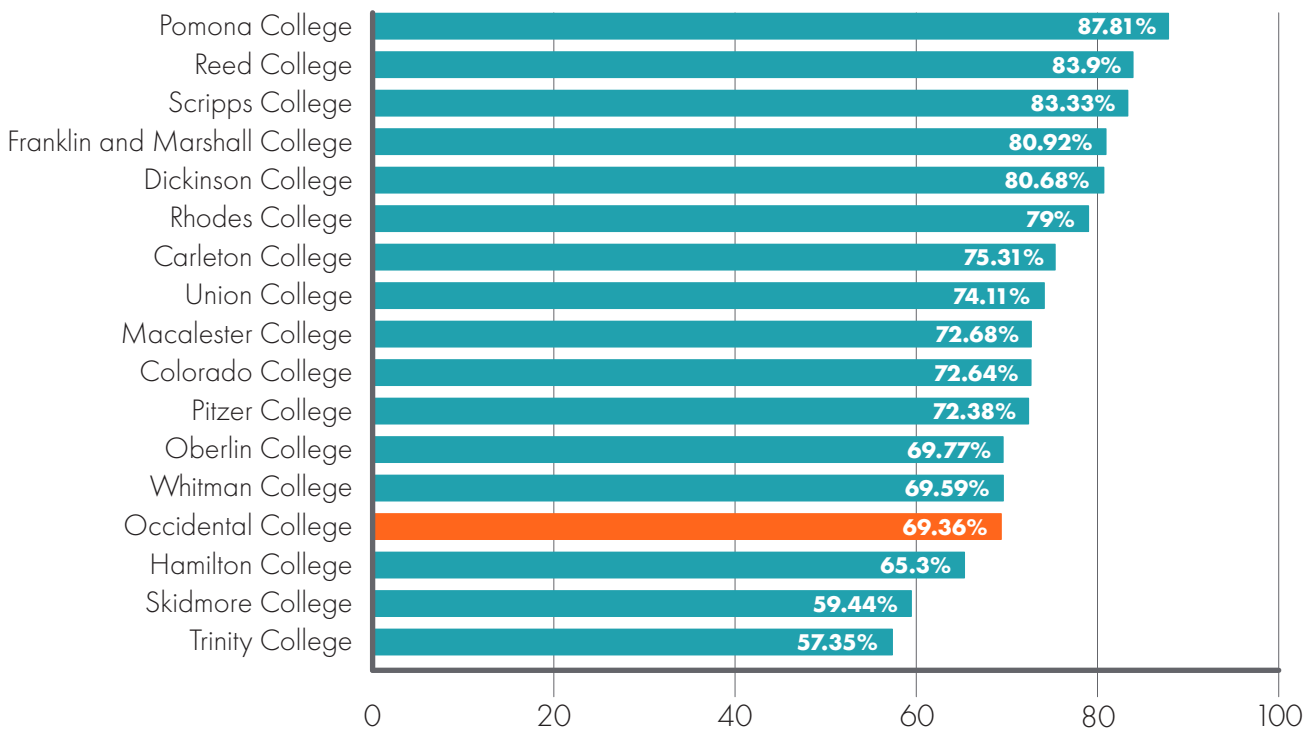




### Project 170: Expansion of the T3 Faculty

The course equivalency model to manage faculty workload will be coupled with the expansion of the T3 faculty. Expanding the T3 faculty adds more contributors to shoulder the teaching and service workload borne by the faculty. In addition, the T3 faculty serve an equally, if not more, important role in providing an optimal academic experience for students. Having stability in the faculty facilitates the maintenance of the all-important student-faculty relationships that continue even when students become alumni. Strong student-faculty relationships foster stronger letters of recommendation, better mentorship and research opportunities. With more T3 faculty we can create and launch the new elements of the curriculum outlined below. Currently, 69% of our total faculty at Occidental are T3 faculty, which is near the bottom of our peer group.

**Percentage of Full Time Tenure or Tenure Track Faculty: Oxy & Peers (2020)**



The plans for expanding the T3 faculty are well underway, with an overall goal of reaching 170 T3 faculty by 2030 (170 T3 faculty would equate to roughly 75% of our FTE faculty). Currently, there are some 143 T3 faculty. The Dean of the College, working with the associate deans and the Academic Planning Committee, has developed a system for evaluating and projecting each department’s ongoing need for faculty positions—based on current and recent course enrollment, estimated student demand, expected growth, current majors and class sizes. Some of the cost of these additional faculty salaries can and will be accommodated through the existing faculty budget and its growth over time.



## STRATEGY 2: EXPANDING IMMERSIVE EDUCATION

In a time when students' education has become particularly static, limited by smart phones and social media, constrained by COVID-induced remote instruction and its effects on student anxiety and nascent interpersonal skills, students need opportunities for experiential, hands-on, project-based, interdisciplinary learning, now more than ever. Immersive experiences enable students to learn about themselves and their world in profound ways. Notably, Oxy has already offered inventive, interactive immersive programs for some time. These programs run the gamut from a coordinated semester in which students take interconnected, interdisciplinary courses focused on a single, pressing issue, to "task force" and clinic courses where students engage in research and problem-solving for and with a community organization, cultural institution, city agency or department, or other external entity. This type of education is in our DNA, and we aim to expand it in ways that will both reimagine and reaffirm liberal arts education. At Occidental, immersive education is crucial to ensuring academic excellence.

Through immersive courses, we will promote a liberal arts education with practical application that speaks to the needs of students today. Immersive education encourages students' professional development through experiential learning. It promotes the intersection of critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and civic engagement. Indeed, immersive liberal arts are not simply about adding vocational or practical training to the more traditional liberal arts curriculum. Rather, immersive education speaks directly to the needs of our current and future students and the changing world they face, opening up possibilities for students to find and pursue a mission as well as a major.



Students proudly share their campaign placements for Campaign Semester 2022, a program that places Oxy students full time in a key presidential, Senate, House, or gubernatorial campaign for 10 weeks.

**“At Occidental, immersive education is crucial to the development of academic excellence and helps enable students to learn about themselves and their world in profound ways.”**



## The Immersive Curriculum

We will create a two-course sequence<sup>2</sup> required for all first-year students and sophomores that will build on our already well-established First Year Seminars program (“FYS”) and add high-impact practices<sup>3</sup> including an outward-facing, project-based experience in a student’s first year at Oxy. This experience, as it is designed for first-year students, will be carefully scaffolded by faculty but has the potential to build students’ skills and self-confidence for increasingly complex and independent projects.

Specifically following the current design, every first-year student will take seminars in classes of no more than 16 students taught by T3 and resident faculty<sup>4</sup> and comprised only of other first-year students. In the fall of their first year, students take a FYS focused on developing the critical skill of expository writing that functions as an onramp to college discussion and critical thinking. Under the new formula, these courses will possibly explore big ideas, major questions past and present and how one might approach them intellectually and practically. These courses will be taught (for enhanced teaching credit) by full-time ongoing members of the faculty (T3 and residents), who will serve not only as instructors for these courses, but also as advisors for the incoming students in their FYS. FYS faculty will engage with their cohort of students during the summer prior to matriculation, and will build community with these students throughout the first semester with a focus on their transition to Oxy. Advising, particularly for first-year students, who do not yet know what to expect from an advisor, can be particularly challenging. However, this proposed approach of tying advising directly to the seminar program is one of significant potential. Students will have immediate and close contact with their advising professor and the professor will have more firsthand knowledge of the students and their unique needs.



At Orientation, the Quad is blanketed with first-year students meeting with academic advisors. Tying advising to the first year seminar program has the potential to strengthen academic advising.

<sup>2</sup>Ideally, in the first year of implementing the ISP, this program will be developed in more detail and submitted for approval through the Academic Planning Committee (“APC”).

<sup>3</sup>The American Association of Colleges & Universities designates 11 educational practices as high-impact practices based on evidence of significant educational benefits for students who participate in them. While Oxy offers many opportunities for students to learn in these enriched ways, Oxy students are currently only guaranteed access to two: first-year seminar, and writing intensive courses. The Immersive curriculum would add guaranteed access to two additional high-impact practices (collaborative projects and assignments; and diversity learning).

<sup>4</sup>Resident is a special class of continuing non-tenure track faculty on renewable contracts. Residents do not have a research expectation, and teach six courses. Some residents carry out technical/creative support functions for a department, such as the costumer in theater, the orchestra and chorale directors in music, and the lab instructor in chemistry (as examples).



In the spring semester, students will take a course that builds on and continues to refine the expository writing skills developed in the first semester, while turning their focus outward to work on a project that would potentially be of interest to stakeholders (community partners, artistic groups or companies, broader academic or scholarly communities, industry partners, etc.) outside the classroom. Students will ideally present their work at a community-wide celebration (perhaps on Founders' Day in April).

The first-year immersive curriculum provides students with the foundation needed to encourage their involvement with the full range of what Occidental has to offer over their four years. This immersive experience will serve as incentive for further exploration. Notably, students will complete their first year having engaged in significant mentorship interactions with at least one permanent member of the Oxy faculty as well as having participated in a collaborative project with their classmates that they helped bring to completion. These rigorous experiences will lay the groundwork for enabling all students to take intellectual risks and to explore the myriad of opportunities available during their four years at Occidental.

**EQUITY LENS:** Just as the FYS helps level the playing field by ensuring all students develop fundamental writing skills at the outset of their Occidental education, infusing high-impact practices in the first year serves our equity and inclusion goals. Whereas some students who enter the College with the cultural capital of knowledge and confidence to seek out challenging opportunities, or experiences that give present professionalization opportunities, the Immersive Curriculum creates a supported, scaffolded opportunity for all students to experience the rewards and development that comes with this kind of coursework.



Notably, the Immersive Curriculum is built on the foundations of the existing Core Program, with a commitment to foregrounding its learning goals.<sup>5</sup> The Immersive Curriculum presents the potential for curricular innovation and advancement within the framework of infusing high-impact practices. For example, developing disciplinary and interdisciplinary research seminars for sophomores in major programs can prepare students for the type of questions and topics required for original scholarly and/or creative work within their major disciplines.

<sup>5</sup> [oxy.edu/academics/core-program/learning-objectives](https://oxy.edu/academics/core-program/learning-objectives)

**EQUITY LENS:** This curricular component supports important JEID goals, not only by incorporating anti-racism into the required coursework, but by helping students build skills through challenging, compassionate and empathetic dialogue.



Oxy's Immersive Curriculum will furnish incoming students with common intellectual experiences while allowing them to directly explore topics that most excite them, animate their academic interests. By giving students an outward facing, project-based experience in the first year, the Immersive Curriculum also meets our students' deep desire to make a difference, to see early in their education the relevance of what they are learning to the societal challenges that motivate them.

**SUSTAINABILITY LENS:** There is no dearth of work on the climate crisis in Los Angeles, and indeed there are myriad courses and immersive opportunities already offered at Occidental that address climate change, climate resilience, and climate justice. We will look for opportunities to encourage curricular growth in this field, including interdisciplinary work that addresses the critical nexus between climate and environmental science and environmental justice. These offerings are crucial to prepare our students to live and lead, and to combat the pervasive climate nihilism that impacts our students' well-being.



## Expanding the Availability of Internships

Internships can provide students with meaningful applied and experiential learning opportunities through immersion in workplace environments. Even as students, faculty, and local community partners all recognize the value of such hands-on opportunities, they currently too often experience unequal funding possibilities. Supply and demand issues inhibit equity and availability. Before the pandemic, the applications for the InternLA program exceeded the number of slots by 4 to 1. By 2030, we will expand internship-based offerings so that all students will be able to access an internship during their four years at Oxy. We believe in the power of internship experiences to maximize engagement and to create reciprocal connections between Oxy and the city of Los Angeles for the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of our students and faculty, and for the good of Los Angeles.



Toward this goal, internships will provide applied and experiential learning opportunities and experience in workplace environments. Oxy currently offers several forms of internship-based experiences that we would like to expand:

- Course-based internships or practica in which (as part of the work in the course) students are placed with a company, a community agency, an arts group, etc.
- Internship experiences for individual students curated by an academic department to provide credit-bearing units that can be applied to satisfy major requirements.
- Internship experiences as part of an immersive semester for course credit, based outside of L.A. (e.g., Kahane Oxy at the U.N. program, Campaign Semester, Washington D.C. semester).
- A full-time summer work placement with an L.A.-based non-profit organization or small arts group funded by the College (e.g., InternLA; UEPI Summer Program).
- An academic year or summer placement with an organization, cultural institution, business, or municipal office, that may result either in payment and/or the awarding of academic credit (currently these opportunities may either be identified by Oxy and offered through the Hameetman Career Center or other College entity, or may be identified by the student themselves). These opportunities may be in Los Angeles or elsewhere.

## **Course Schedule Changes to Support Immersive Learning and Engagement with Los Angeles**

Enabling the infusion of place-based learning throughout the curriculum and throughout a student's four years will require us to think creatively about transportation and other logistical matters that can enable students to access the city. As an example, the current class schedule does not provide windows where faculty and students can readily get into Los Angeles for curricular and co-curricular activities. We will reevaluate the schedule to create class-free blocks of time (or reserve certain blocks for community-engaged classes or those with field trips or engagements in the city) to facilitate that effort. This schedule would also facilitate other opportunities for group learning and project-based exercises or even campus-wide activities.



## SPOTLIGHT ON IMMERSIVE LEARNING



Oxy's InternLA program enables as many as 25 students each summer to work throughout Los Angeles in paid internships. Prithvi Dinesh Chandra '23 interned at the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum.



Every two years, Occidental students venture to the trenches of political campaigns, learning hands-on and earning full academic credit as participants in Campaign Semester—the only program of its kind in the nation.



The Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College is an applied research and advocacy center. The Institute's mission is to advance community-driven programs and policies to build healthy, thriving communities while achieving social, economic and environmental justice.





Each fall, participants in the Kahane United Nations Program move to New York City to conduct high-level internships at United Nations agencies, country missions (government offices) and related non-governmental organizations.



The Young Initiative at Occidental College is funded by an endowment that supports programs and research designed to promote national or international economic, social, financial policies and actions of general public and social benefit.



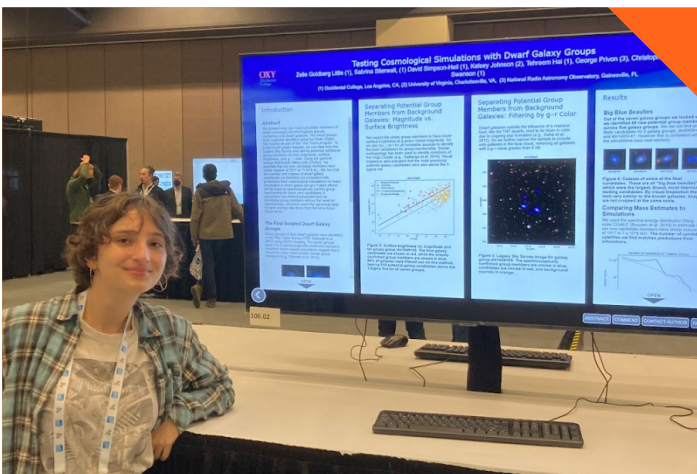


## STRATEGY 3: BUILDING SITES OF EMPHASIS

Even as we support a broad curriculum that enables the multi- and cross-disciplinary learning that our students seek, we will also invest in sites of emphasis: academic areas where Occidental has or can achieve distinction, and that are a significant attraction to our students. The focus on immersive education calls for investments in, and builds heavily on, innovative programs in the social sciences. In so doing, we foreground the interdisciplinary nature of social science thinking and reflect the distinctive, engaged practices of the social sciences at Occidental. In addition, we will invest in Scientific Research and Inquiry, and Arts and Culture, as two areas where Oxy has already achieved distinction (and attracted increasing student attention) and which have the potential for even greater distinction with the proper resources and focus. Supporting these sites will not only strengthen and bring recognition to those particular programs but to the College as a whole.

### Site of Emphasis: Scientific Research and Inquiry

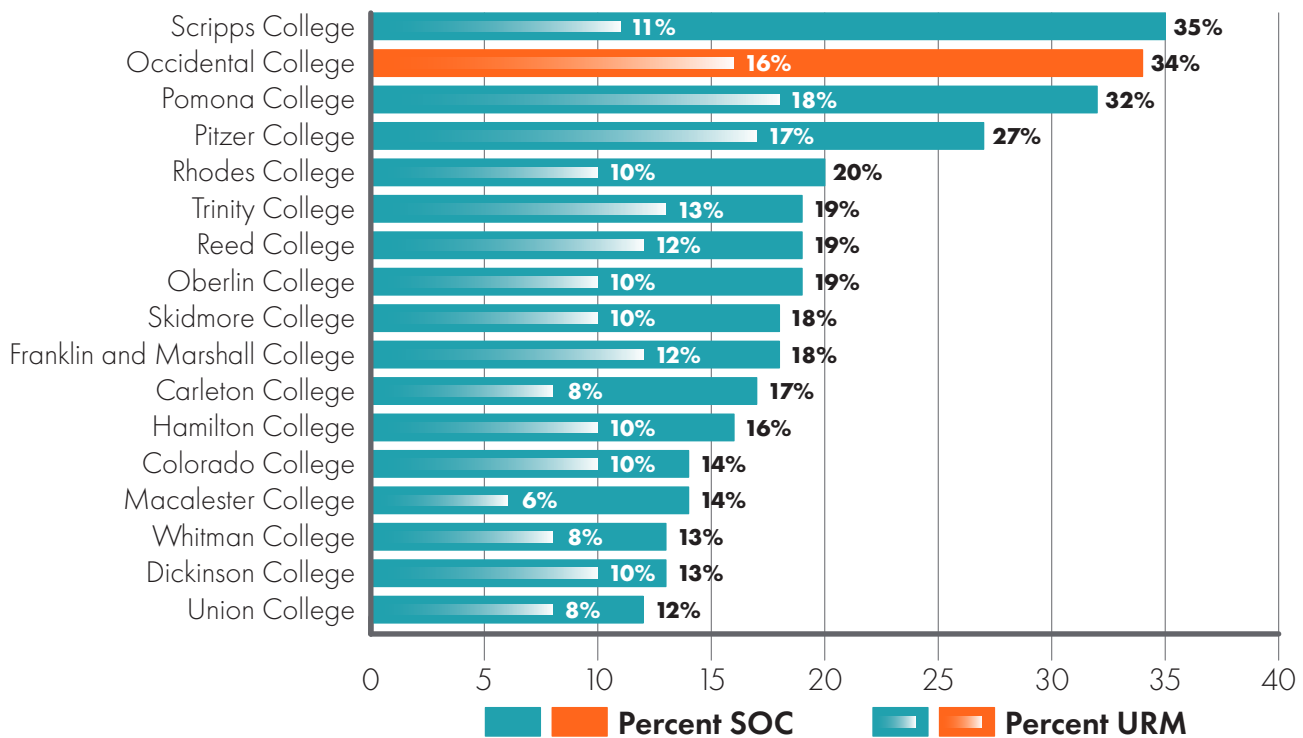
From interdisciplinary majors to increasingly diverse classrooms, Oxy has positioned itself to be a leader in developing future generations of ethical natural and social scientists. Our talented teacher-scholars have worked diligently with their students to produce groundbreaking scientific research on topics ranging from battery flow to marine conservation. As a result, our faculty has received national and international recognition. They are the recipients of highly competitive national grants for research, pedagogy, and supporting diverse populations of students. Students have worked alongside faculty and have participated in the creation of new knowledge. Beyond merely assisting with research, our students have been able to produce meaningful scientific discoveries through immersive, direct, hands-on engagement. In fact, several students have emerged as published authors alongside their faculty advisors, a highly unusual feat for undergraduates.



**Zelie Goldberg Little '25** (MAC and physics double major) conducts independent research with the guidance of her faculty advisor, Physics Professor Sabrina Stierwalt. In January 2023, Little presented her research at the annual winter meeting of the American Astronomical Society.

Despite limited resources, our science faculty provide an outstanding example of the role of scientific discovery in advancing the values of the liberal arts. The College strives to provide the necessary support for faculty to thrive, and continues to improve its funding for faculty scholarly work. The College has increased annual funding for faculty research, invested in the Center for Research and Scholarship as well as professional development programs for faculty, and has now added new administrative support for sponsored research. Even before adding this new staffing, faculty success in grant-seeking has been quite strong, and student interest in the sciences at Oxy is robust, with some 40% of our students majoring in the sciences. Oxy science departments boast one of the most diverse cohorts of science majors among our peers. We have a strong track record of women and BIPOC students majoring in the sciences, and this is in no small part due to our pedagogical approach.

**Percent of Total Degrees Awarded to Students of Color and Underrepresented Minority Students, 2015-2019 Graduation Years Combined**



While at other schools, chemistry serves as a gatekeeper preventing students from pursuing science, particularly women and students of color, chemistry at Oxy has proven to be a gateway, opening up possibilities for our students interested in pursuing scientific careers. For all of these reasons, we must invest in scientific research and inquiry as a site of emphasis. This will entail:

- 1. Renovating the 62-year-old Norris Chemistry Building.** This will enable us to double down on our efforts to be one of the best and most diverse undergraduate scientific research programs in the country.



2. Increasing support for science faculty in grant writing and patents.
3. Increasing resources, including personnel and supplies, for lab preparations and research.

4. **EQUITY LENS:** Promoting equity and access in STEM, including fundraising to institutionalize funding for currently grant-funded outreach and engagement activities, will effectively promote diversity and inclusion in STEM fields.



5. **Developing partnerships with graduate institutions to create pathways for students to pursue professional training and studies, particularly in the allied health professions.** Many students, particularly those who are first-generation college students, may not be cognizant of the pathways to achieve their professional goals through a liberal arts education and may benefit from partnerships with graduate institutions. These pathways can support recruiting by creating a graduate or professional pathway for students who might otherwise forego a liberal arts education for a school that has graduate and pre-professional programs.

## Site of Emphasis: Arts and Culture

Arts and Culture also represent an important site of emphasis that has the potential to impact the strategic objectives of The Occidental Promise, creating excellent academic opportunities that build on our connection to Los Angeles. Highlighting arts and culture furthers our ability to provide unique and transformative learning experiences for Oxy students through collaborations with Los Angeles arts and cultural institutions. These innovative educational opportunities create distinction for Occidental and are rooted in our location in one of the world's premier arts capitals and cultural centers. They also give rise to Occidental becoming the destination for students interested in the business of art and arts in a liberal arts context.



Through Oxy's music production major, **Anoop D'Souza '19** has been able to parlay playing musical instruments as a child into producing for major-label artists. "The resources—not just at this campus, but the connections you're able to make in Los Angeles—make this the hub in terms of music... [Oxy is] literally 15 minutes away from Studio City and downtown, and that's something special you don't really get anywhere else. The biggest thing I've gotten out of Oxy is opportunities."

We have the location and the faculty and have already begun creating the facilities to achieve this goal. Oxy's music major, with its innovative music production emphasis has been recognized as one of the best programs in the world. Enrollments of majors and minors in both music and media arts and culture (MAC) have grown considerably, with some recent MAC graduates garnering immediate recognition for their film work. Faculty in art, music, and theatre and performance studies all have gained national (and in some cases, international) reputations for their creative and scholarly work.

The aspirational goals and programming for Arts and Culture as a site of emphasis include:

1. **Renovating music spaces in Thorne.** Majors in music and the demand for the music production program have grown exponentially. The new Choi Family Music Production Center has launched exciting possibilities, and we must take the next step by adding practice rooms, performance space, and rehearsal rooms. Opening the orchestra pit at the Thorne stage will also expand the range of performances we can stage.
2. **Creating a shared building to house computer science (CS) and media arts and culture (MAC).** Constructing a shared home for CS and MAC will amplify the distinct and synergistic directions of these two programs. Unlike conventional CS departments, our relatively new CS department places ethics and humanistic concerns at its core, especially in its engagement with machine learning and artificial intelligence. Similarly, our inventive MAC department combines technical production, critical theory, and social impact in the rapidly evolving digital media landscape. We are interested in how these departments can continue to evolve, separately and together, connecting in mutually beneficial ways.
3. **Cultivating opportunities for students to engage with local arts and cultural organizations,** including established partnerships with The Huntington Library, The Autry Museum of the American West, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Natural History Museum, Center Theatre Group, the Museum of African American Art, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, and the GRAMMY Museum. As we build on these existing partnerships, we will also explore opportunities to develop new collaborations with institutions such as La Plaza de Cultura y Arte, The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture, The One Archive, The Museum of Film and Television, and The California African American Museum. This opportunity is discussed in greater detail in the second promise.
4. **Finding new harmonies across the arts and with seemingly separate disciplines.** We can explore a range of tools to foment connection between and among disciplines, such as collaborative courses.



5. **Developing a strategy for a robust slate of productions and other uses for campus arts performance spaces.** Hosting a range of performances and dialogue on the arts in our venues can draw important attention to Oxy. Examples include promoting and producing arts conversations with distinguished arts personalities in Thorne, hosting summer performances produced by high-profile companies and organizations in the Remsen Bird Hillside Theater, and offering a summer program on Creative Research and Storytelling that parallels the current Summer Research Program.
6. **Establishing an arts and technology fund to support artistic innovation.** As the connections between arts and technology continue to expand rapidly, our faculty need opportunities and resources to explore and experiment with the newest technologies. How can these new innovations inform and transform pedagogy, artistic creation? New harmonies?



**2. THE PROMISE OF  
FORGING UNIQUE  
AND MUTUALLY  
BENEFICIAL  
RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH THE CITY OF  
LOS ANGELES**



Our location in the heart of Los Angeles continues to be a defining institutional differentiator for Oxy. We can build on both Oxy's physical surroundings and the College's cultural connections with its environs—including wider Los Angeles; up-and-coming Highland Park, Eagle Rock and the emergent diverse communities redefining and expanding L.A.'s identity; those past and living indigenous cultures upon whose land Occidental was built and who also warrant deeper engagement; and the fact that embodied in Occidental's very name is its east-facing orientation with the Pacific Rim.

Many of our students choose Oxy because of the opportunities that are uniquely available due to our location. Indeed, we are distinctively able to center immersive education because of our place in a vibrant city that sits in the most populous county in the nation; that is home to the largest port complex in the country and the second largest school district; that contains a multitude of natural resources and distinct biomes; that offers a global nexus of numerous creative disciplines; and that is animated by unparalleled diversity, cultural opportunity and challenges.

We will both deepen and expand our mutually beneficial relationships with Los Angeles-area community, civic, and industry partners. By emphasizing, previously, urban liberal arts as a centerpiece of the 2012 strategic plan, Oxy has developed important opportunities for faculty and students to engage in and with the Los Angeles area, including immersive learning experiences that we are uniquely positioned to offer and expand. To build on this existing strength, we must first coordinate our many dispersed Los Angeles area engagements to support and uplift these partnerships for co-thinking and collaboration, research, professional development, community building and leadership. We must also focus on expanding community-engaged learning across our departments, using both existing and new models for co-thinking and collaboration with partners, which can also bring Oxy distinction as a valued partner on issues facing Los Angeles communities. And we must expand our partnerships across disciplines and sectors.

## **STRATEGY 1: ESTABLISHING AND DEVELOPING AN OXY CENTER FOR PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOS ANGELES**

Establishing an Oxy Center for Partnerships with Los Angeles is an important engine for fulfilling the great potential of our relationship with Los Angeles. The Center will coordinate, generate, and advocate for Los Angeles-engaged work across divisions and departments, house and drive specific, innovative community-engaged projects and programs, and help source partnerships between Oxy faculty and students and Los Angeles community, civic, and industry partners. This plan can only offer a sketch of the roles the Center will eventually play, and the crucial next step is to hire a director who will help chart a plan for the Center's development as a critical hub for Oxy's engagements in Los Angeles.



Over the last 10 years, Oxy has built a strong slate of meaningful, reciprocal engagements with Los Angeles, both academic and co-curricular. These important collaborations, however, are not yet consistently coordinated. Such coordination would effectuate several important goals. First, the Center would convene and support the groups on campus that drive much of our current community engagement. This will enable Oxy to centralize resources and communication about these many endeavors, eliminate duplication and create operational efficiencies. While many L.A.-engaged activities take place at Oxy, aggregating and promoting the full, wide-ranging slate of offerings will enable the programs themselves to expand (through stronger communication and outreach) and grow Oxy's reputation by uplifting the work being done. Second, serving as a hub for many spokes, the Center can help to surface shared challenges with community-engaged activities (e.g., student transportation, course scheduling limits), and help coordinate solutions. The Center can also source collaborators at Oxy for prospective external entities, and find potential partners for Oxy faculty, staff, and students seeking new L.A.-based experiences. Coordination would enable more stable, systemic assessment of college-wide learning outcomes and institutional goals within the context of L.A.-based experiences: the Center would play an important role in ensuring our L.A. engaged activities are both driven by and assessed against these outcomes and goals, and disseminating best practices related to community-engaged activities and their evaluation in an academic context.

**SUSTAINABILITY LENS & EQUITY LENS:** Developing effective transportation for students is crucial to creating equitable access to the opportunities of the Los Angeles area. Our approaches to transportation access should consider climate impacts of group transportation as well.



In addition to coordinating Oxy's L.A.-engaged work, the Center will eventually launch a new signature program that fosters cross-sector collaboration on critical challenges and opportunities facing Los Angeles. Los Angeles' thorniest problems require interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral solutions. This cross-sector engagement will create an unparalleled immersive experience for students by rotating them, over the course of an academic year, through experiential placements (for academic credit) in the nonprofit, government, and private sectors (potentially with a fourth rotation in an arts/media placement focused on storytelling for change). Ideally, this program will bring together students working in different sectors at different times to share and learn from one another, and even bring together the partners with whom they are working to dialogue and collaborate. Moreover, by prioritizing cross-sector collaboration, this program can drive Oxy to expand our robust slate of nonprofit and government partnerships and form more private sector partnerships. In addition to diversifying students' professionalization and career exploration, more engagement with the private sector might also catalyze new philanthropic support.





The Center will foster multi-year programming on L.A.-relevant topics, both local and global. An emphasis on the global recognizes the importance of cities in determining global, cultural and political interactions. Thus, the focus on Los Angeles represents not an impediment to international engagement but rather an enabler. This global programming might include supporting faculty and student research, hosting speakers and other campus events, developing relevant internships, and making an effort to engage with private, public, and nonprofit institutions who work in these areas. Topics might include the impact of hosting the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles; global sustainability, climate resilience and climate justice; food justice; immigration/migration; etc. In this and in other endeavors, the work of the Center will serve Oxy's curious students eager to make a difference with interdisciplinary programming and learning opportunities on the topics of the day that affect (or are affected by) Los Angeles and its people.

**EQUITY LENS:** One of the Center's primary objectives will be increasing the accessibility of L.A.-engaged activities to students and faculty. Expanding opportunities to work with L.A. partners for academic credit will serve as one method for addressing the inequity in volunteer work, whereby students who cannot work in addition to their course schedule because they must earn money are unable to participate. Creating (paid) internships, practica with industry sponsors, and community-engaged learning opportunities can also offer resume building work experience, networking connections, and career exposure, which is particularly valuable for students who do not have those opportunities independent of the College. Finally, by hosting L.A.-focused programs (speakers, panel discussions, events) on campus, students who struggle to afford transportation into the city can also experience L.A.



## STRATEGY 2: EXPANDING COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING

Oxy has developed important and effective models of community-engaged learning over the last ten or more years. These models create immersive learning opportunities for students, and they foster our deep ties with community partners. To support our engagement in and with Los Angeles, and to create a breadth of opportunities for immersive learning, we will expand and proliferate these approaches across departments.

First, we will invest in more robust staffing for the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL),<sup>6</sup> to ensure that it has a director (search currently underway), an associate or assistant director, a faculty director and administrative support (potentially shared with the Center for Partnership with Los Angeles). A fully staffed and resourced CCBL will enable a greater breadth of faculty to deepen and expand their community-engaged courses and scholarship. CCBL has the important opportunity to elevate community-based learning and research, in part by expanding its reach to all majors. High-level leadership and staffing in the CCBL will cultivate and maintain the CCBL portfolio of innovative and inclusive teaching and learning programming and partnerships for faculty and students. Offering a greater number and breadth of community-engaged courses, even in majors where community-based learning and research are not yet as common, is an important opportunity to build on the existing strength of our community-based learning and research model.

Through a CCBL course, students helped develop an exhibit of vernacular photography documenting United American Indian Involvement's work near Los Angeles' Skid Row, providing shelter and support for American Indians who found themselves on Skid Row, the result of a federal urban relocation program. Students participated in archival research, catalogued and scanned the images, through this course co-developed by Oxy faculty and community partners.



<sup>6</sup>The Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL) is a faculty-supporting entity that strives to institutionalize curriculum-based civic engagement and community-based learning at Oxy, and builds and maintains partnerships in support of this work. CCBL also provides pedagogical expertise and connections to national networks, and serves as a critical thought partner to faculty who are developing and expanding their pedagogies for community engaged teaching and learning, particularly pedagogies for social change, social justice-infused methods, and other forms of engaged teaching and learning.

We will also look to expand the clinic or task force model of courses (such as those currently offered through Young Initiative partnerships on topics of global and local economy) to other departments and subjects as well. These task force or clinic classes serve as a mutually beneficial immersive learning experience with L.A. organizations in the arts, sciences, politics, business, etc. Through these courses, we are able to offer students a unique professionalization opportunity (rather than a single student in a single internship placement), while offering our area partners research on existing problems and challenges that can point to potential solutions informed by that research. In this model, our Los Angeles area partners define the research they need to support their goals, and actively oversee student teams, while our faculty develop syllabi and continued instruction and oversight that scaffolds our students' foundational knowledge and skills to support our partners' research needs.

**EQUITY LENS:** Creating a multitude of community-engaged learning opportunities for academic credit supports equitable access to the many curricular and professionalization benefits of community-engaged work, for students who could not otherwise afford to take part in these opportunities. In addition, given that the CCBL is grounded in equity and in ensuring that all students are able to take courses and learn in community-connected ways, we will charge the new director with co-creating and evaluating strategies to enable students of marginalized identities to participate in and lead these learning opportunities. Additionally, the way we cultivate and maintain community partnerships will reflect an equity-based approach. For example, the courses developed in Oxy's singular community-based learning model are rooted in our four interconnected principles: reciprocity, social and racial justice, resource and power sharing, and contributing to ongoing learning. By working with community partners as collaborators and co-thinkers who help drive students' work and course of study, we model those principles.



### **STRATEGY 3: EXPANDING OUR PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND SECTORS**

Oxy's existing partnerships are impressive and expanding them even further will only support immersive education, the student experience, and Oxy's relevance to Los Angeles. CCBL will create demand for additional partnerships in the nonprofit, public and private sectors as it supports faculty and departments in expanding community-engaged learning courses and opportunities. So, too, will the Center itself in seeding its cross-sector internship program. As mentioned above, the Center will play a critical role in developing partnerships, which will help our fundraising efforts as well as strengthen our relationships with high schools and community programs in L.A.



Some crucial areas to explore include partnerships with arts and cultural institutions, which can provide transformative learning experiences for our students. These innovative educational opportunities are rooted in our location in one of the world's premier arts capitals and cultural centers. By expanding current formal partnerships and forging new ones,<sup>7</sup> the College will enhance the capacity to embed student research skills in the curriculum and to develop internships, while local arts and cultural institutions will benefit from the collaboration with students and faculty who conduct research in their collections and contribute to projects in consultation with curators and staff. Formal partnerships would establish a process for hiring curators and arts industry professionals to teach departmental topics courses. Notably, the range of arts and cultural institutions in Los Angeles is almost as diverse as the city itself. By focusing on these collaborations, we support even greater inclusion of diverse opportunities, stories and histories in the curricular experiences we offer.

Similarly, increasing our partnerships with for-profit L.A.-based businesses and industries has unique potential for our faculty and students. These partnerships can provide a rich pipeline of opportunities for students through internships, networking, and research opportunities. Similarly, we might explore offering teaching opportunities for “professors of the practice” (from the private sector and the public and nonprofit sectors), who can bring their experiences of leadership, problem solving and effecting change in a workplace setting. Fostering deep connection with the private sector might also create access to new philanthropic support from foundations and individuals.



Sophia Brown '20 interned for The GRAMMY Museum in downtown Los Angeles as part of Occidental College's InternLA program.

<sup>7</sup>Current or recent partnerships include the Huntington Library, The Autry Museum of the American West, the Museum of Contemporary Art, The One Archive, Natural History Museum, Center Theatre Group, the Museum of African American Art, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, and the GRAMMY Museum. We would also explore opportunities to develop new collaborations with institutions such as La Plaza de Cultura y Arte, Cheech Marín Center for Chicano Art and Culture, The Museum of Film and Television, and The California African American Museum.



# **3. THE PROMISE OF EDUCATING THE WHOLE STUDENT AND RENEWING COMMUNITY**



By promising to educate the whole student, we aim to support students' personal growth and well-being, in addition to and in support of their academic thriving. We promise our students an exceptional educational experience that extends beyond the classroom to include the student's mind, body and soul.

**“By proactively attending to students' health and well-being, we create opportunities for self-discovery and exploration, for identity formation and new connections. We seek to foster belonging and community.”**

The current challenges to supporting students' health and well-being and encouraging a sense of belonging are both pressing and not unique to Oxy. Almost daily, we hear news stories of the rise of depression and anxiety among college students, accelerated and exacerbated by the pandemic. The national conversation about race sparked by George Floyd's murder has surfaced tensions and divides that impact how students and others conceive of community and their own place in it. With the pandemic, political division, systemic racism, gun violence, and climate change weighing on them, students too often struggle in what should be great years of newfound independence, personal and intellectual growth, friendship, and connections. Oxy has a significant opportunity as well as an obligation to embrace the challenges of the moment to craft a healthier and more satisfying student experience.

By offering expanded preventative and therapeutic services as well as education and training around mental health and wellness, we can potentially equip students with greater self-awareness, resilience and resourcefulness that will help them find fulfillment at Occidental and beyond. By upgrading the residence halls, we can enhance the residential experience and serve students' overall well-being and engagement with one another. As we increase programs and transportation to access L.A., we can create more inclusive opportunities for students to explore the city, and in doing so, learn about themselves, connect with others, and form deep ties to L.A. and Oxy. By investing in greater JEID training for faculty, staff, and students, we can support equity, inclusion and belonging for all students. By creating greater and more equitable access to Oxy resources, we can support students' academic success and their well-being. And by instilling restorative justice practices, we can foster a community that is both diverse and animated by shared values and accountability.



## STRATEGY 1: PROACTIVELY PROMOTING STUDENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

### Health Promotion Program

According to a June 2022 Boston University study, depression among college students has increased by nearly 135% in the last eight years, and anxiety has surged by 110%. The pandemic has had a profound impact on students' mental health, yet the rate of help-seeking among struggling students has decreased, especially among racial and ethnic minorities. With generous gifts from a number of trustees, we are able to pilot a Health Promotion Program for five years that aims to enhance the culture of health and wellness at Oxy, and thus support student health and success, and improve student, faculty and staff retention.

Led by a health promotion specialist (hiring process currently underway in Spring 2023), the Health Promotion Program will consist of evidence-based offerings tailored to the specific needs of Oxy students as determined by student surveys and other campus-wide health behavior data. The program will incorporate peer education (a noted best practice in the field), to educate and empower students to become advocates for their wellness. The range of health promotion strategies may include marketing to reduce stigma around help-seeking and to ensure awareness of campus resources; awareness campaigns to promote healthy behaviors; online education modules; collaborations with certain departments (e.g., the Intercultural Community Center or the International Programs Office) to provide audience-specific education and resources; and partnering with faculty to provide pedagogical strategies for supporting student well-being in academic environments. The program will include an assessment plan, and if early data indicate that it is likely to be effective, we will strive to fund it beyond the pilot period.



Students enjoy time with puppies on campus, part of a series of fun and relaxing activities during finals week.



In addition to the Health Promotion Program, by developing a campus master plan we will also be able to consider how spaces supporting student health and well-being can be incorporated into the renovation and construction of existing or new buildings.

**EQUITY LENS:** The Health Promotion Program is designed to focus on the entire student body as well as provide specific focus on underrepresented populations within the Oxy community (e.g., BIPOC students, athletes, LGBTQIA+ students, international students), as data show these groups often disproportionately experience health concerns. The first step in designing the Health Promotion Program will include reviewing data, including surveys that measure various aspects of the student experience (including satisfaction and belonging) and segment the analysis by underrepresented groups.



## Athletics and Student Well-being

We recognize that competitive intercollegiate athletics, wellness and sports participation are critical elements in our mission and vital components of a liberal arts education. They contribute significantly to the well-being of many students. Indeed, some 25% of Occidental students participate on our athletic teams. Accordingly, we will continue to advance the recommendations brought forth by the Occidental College Commission on Athletics (OCCA) from its December 2021 comprehensive report on intercollegiate athletics.

## STRATEGY 2: ELEVATING THE RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE

Student housing is at the center of the residential experience, and it consequently plays a significant role in students' health and well-being. Feeling secure, safe, and a sense of belonging in their "home away from home" also positively impacts students' academic performance. Students and Residential Life staff consistently report that addressing the physical space and qualities of campus residential spaces will significantly impact student well-being. In parallel to strategic planning, and post-pandemic, we must resume a regular schedule of refreshing residential spaces.





To improve the living environment for all students, Residential Life, Facilities and Campus Safety divisions informed by student input will identify safety and security features and best practices (e.g., better lighting, working CCTV, etc.) that can be implemented in residence halls immediately to support students' feelings of safety. We will also determine an ongoing schedule for refreshing residence halls (new paint, updating furniture, minor repairs). As important, we must determine the proper proportion of major renovation and repair ("MR+R") funding to allocate for renewal of residential spaces. Similarly, as heat spikes increase in frequency and duration, we must address climate control within the residence halls. Beyond the current preparation for the possibility of dramatic temperature spikes by Fall 2023, we are also undertaking an analysis of the implementation needs and costs to add air conditioning to residence halls where it is not already in place.

Beyond operationalizing this ongoing residential asset renewal, we must undertake a long-term space analysis. In the short term, we are assessing how to reconfigure existing spaces to meet student demand for on-campus housing by Fall 2024.<sup>8</sup> We will assess our current housing capacity, weighed against the amount and kind of space we can offer. Students indicate that reducing triple-occupancy rooms and increasing single-occupancy rooms would have a dramatic positive effect on overall student well-being. While some students elect triple-occupancy rooms for financial savings, we currently have "forced" triples or triple-occupancy of rooms with scant more space than a double-occupancy layout. The pressures on these students from sharing small space can exacerbate academic stress, impact sleep, and give rise to distracting conflict (Residential Life and Housing Services staff report that many of the conflicts requiring their support arise among students in triples).

By assessing our current residence hall designs, we can consider how we can reconfigure existing spaces to better meet student needs, as well as whether we should acquire additional housing capacity off-campus or build additional space on campus. As we rethink how we use residential space we will also look for opportunities to create space for activities that enhance student wellness. This might include spaces for health and well-being as described above, creative spaces, practice rooms, or other gathering and study spaces.

Given the cost of living in Los Angeles and in areas surrounding campus, pursuing off-campus housing is not financially feasible for all students. To a significant extent, students' residential

<sup>8</sup>In Fall 2024, we anticipate the cumulative increase in enrollment and subsequent housing demand may meet or exceed our housing supply. Ensuring campus housing is available to any student who wants it reflects important equity considerations, given the escalating cost of housing in Los Angeles and in the areas surrounding our campus. Calculating our housing need depends on several variables including student retention, transfer student enrollment, student interest in on-campus housing, the cost of off-campus housing and future enrollment. If enrollment is consistent with our fiscal modeling, and student retention is consistent with recent years, we anticipate high demand for limited housing. Planning is underway now to determine if we can reconfigure existing spaces (e.g., office spaces in residence halls), and if we can identify space near campus to acquire or occupy.



space and surroundings can impact their academic and personal thriving. The on-campus housing environment can exacerbate but also can decrease inequities between students. Thus, providing safe, comfortable on-campus housing for all students who want it is a matter of equity. It is also a critical initial step in developing a long-term strategy for residential life in which it works in purposeful, holistic collaboration with the academic program to provide support for the intellectual, emotional, social well-being of our students.

**SUSTAINABILITY LENS:** Repairs, renovations, and expanding residential spaces creates an important opportunity to incorporate building measures that reduce our environmental impact. We will also prioritize projects that foreground sustainability. In addition, we will look for partnerships between our sustainability coordinator and departments such as Residential Life to educate our community to minimize waste and resource impacts.



### STRATEGY 3: EXPANDING RESOURCES AND INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO ACCESS LOS ANGELES

If the urban liberal arts experience is our calling card, and our location in Los Angeles is our distinction, we must ensure equitable access to students to explore the city and all it has to offer. Expanding immersive and community-engaged learning for academic credit or via paid internships will help to create equitable access to the curricular benefits of a campus nestled in this vibrant city. Expanding on pre-COVID programs that coordinated off-campus engagement, we will coordinate off-campus co- and extracurricular activities that enable students to enjoy the full breadth of what L.A. has to offer, with its extraordinary outdoor recreational opportunities; arts, cultural and culinary offerings; and opportunities for valued and valuable service.

Currently, leaving students to find their way into the city on their own creates a barrier for students for whom public transportation is too time-consuming and private transportation is too costly. Moreover, these activities support student well-being and self-discovery by safely offering new experiences for students to explore. They can also foment student connection and belonging by offering ways for students to come together around common interests, complementing the curricular activities that we will expand through other strategies in The Occidental Promise.



New students get to know one another on a tour of L.A. icons, including the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles.



In addition, we will cultivate resources to help students more independently navigate and engage with the city. In addition to exploring more effective (and sustainable) transportation, we will develop better communication about resources and opportunities for exploring the city.

## STRATEGY 4: FACILITATING STUDENT ACCESS TO ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT RESOURCES

Oxy offers myriad resources for student academic and personal success, though students indicate it is sometimes difficult to identify, navigate and coordinate the different support and services that might benefit them. Centralizing these resources in a single location will help students identify and utilize them more effectively, and will also help the various offices that support students to coordinate their efforts as well. In addition, it is equally important to foster equitable access to all campus resources and opportunities.

### Student Success Center

By co-locating offices that provide student support services in a single location (ideally on the ground floor of a renovated Academic Commons), we will create a “one-stop shop” for students to access the support resources and opportunities that are critical to their academic success and personal well-being. Offices to be co-located might include Disability Services, the Writing Center, the Advising Center, a Language Learning Center, peer learning and academic success coaching, and the Undergraduate Research Center. The space might also include satellite advising/counseling space for Emmons counselors or the Dean of Students’ office to hold drop-in hours; group study spaces; and spaces to host relevant programming.

### Supporting Strong Student Transitions

**EQUITY LENS:** In recent years, we have developed various programs to support first generation, low-income, transfer, and undocumented (“FGLITU”) students in their acclimation to college. Still, markedly addressing FGLITU students’ levels of academic success, satisfaction, and sense of belonging at Oxy will require more intentional and focused attention. Consequently, we will develop robust, and more consistent and deliberate, programming and support for these students’ transitions to college and throughout their four years at Oxy and beyond.



Simultaneously rooted in the divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the Office of Vice President for Equity and Justice, this programming, “Transitions,” would serve as a comprehensive support system to help ensure the social acclimation and academic progress of FGLITU students. This support system will include programs, workshops, and activities for FGLITU students focused on building community, enhancing their sense of belonging, and supporting their academic success. Program elements may include pre-Orientation programming, peer mentorship between new and continuing FGLITU students, social gatherings and workshops, and training for faculty and staff in supporting FGLITU students.



Oxy staff, faculty, and alumni share their own first-gen experiences with first-gen students at a December 2022 luncheon.

## STRATEGY 5: FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNITY THROUGH JEID TRAINING AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

We envision a college where equity and justice are understood as intertwined with, and imperative to, academic excellence, infused in the everyday work of faculty, staff, and students. In fact, equity and justice have been a fundamental throughline at Oxy through much of its history, and formally a part of Oxy’s official mission for more than 40 years. Concerns around these issues animate the activism of our students, feature in the faculty’s scholarship and pedagogy, and ground the work of our staff. Promulgating equity, inclusion and justice requires consistent use of an equity lens in all of our work, understanding fostered through consistent training and education, and dedicated resources to help all of our students embrace the full breadth of opportunity that is the promise of an Occidental education.

### Offering Consistent JEID Professional and Co-curricular Training

We will establish comprehensive and multifaceted JEID training to build JEID awareness. Offered through myriad professional development programs tailored to Oxy and for



particular faculty and staff job functions, this training will help faculty and staff scaffold a more inclusive and equitable learning experience and environment for students. Training can be integrated into processes such as new employee/faculty orientation, leadership and management training, the annual performance evaluation process (for staff) and the review, promotion, and tenure process (for faculty). Similarly, we will expand co-curricular JEID training for students, beyond new student Orientation. The details and structure of the faculty, staff, and student training will be determined through the appropriate administrative offices, in coordination with and supported by the Office of Equity and Justice.

### Infusing Restorative Practices

Restorative justice offers an important model for community building, establishing community values, and restoring community after a breach of those values. Restorative practices at Oxy developed initially in response to the need to build trust, community, and new ways of communicating as a foundation to addressing historic and ongoing conflicts. Oxy took important strides from 2017-2020 to train Student Affairs staff, RAs, Orientation Team leaders, and others to facilitate community building circles, and to build the language, philosophy and experience of restorative practices. However, the pandemic disrupted and curtailed this work. We will renew this effort, which aims first to build trust and develop shared community values.



THE OCCIDENTAL PROMISE

# ATTAINING THE VISION

While the Occidental Promise represents the culmination of a nearly two-year, community-wide collaborative process, we are just beginning the work of implementing our bold vision for Occidental College. The strategies in The Occidental Promise, in most cases, require further development, resourcing, or both.

To realize the vision, the College (including the president and senior administration) must make important advancements in several key areas, including:

- 1. Addressing academic departments' present needs.** We can only move forward and step boldly into our future if we honor and address present needs. As evidenced by the environmental scan of the strategic planning process, the dean of the College's comprehensive departmental reviews, departments' annual budget requests, and their requests via faculty leadership, academic excellence depends on securing essential resources for programs and departments.
- 2. Creating a fundraising strategy to expand endowment and operating resources.** Fundraising, and endowment fundraising in particular, is pivotal to resourcing The Occidental Promise and its strategies. As we conclude the most successful comprehensive campaign in Occidental College's history, it is an opportune and critical time to evaluate our advancement strategies and operations to prepare for the important work ahead of growing investment in the College. We are committed to managing carefully existing resources to achieve what we can within the constraints of our financial model, and by phasing in initiatives of The Occidental Promise as operating resources become available.
- 3. Developing curricular and workload proposals through faculty governance processes.** The curriculum is the purview of the faculty, and any changes must be reviewed by certain duly constituted bodies of the faculty. Ideally in the next year, the faculty will further define and develop the Immersive Curriculum and will work towards outlining the course equivalency model for faculty workload. At the same time, the faculty, working in concert with the Dean's office, must determine how to reduce course offerings to create greater faculty bandwidth for myriad endeavors, including expanding labor-intensive immersive education and high impact practices.
- 4. Assessing opportunities for reallocation.** Before looking to add resources to support new initiatives, we must evaluate the opportunities for reallocating existing resources. This is particularly important given our ambitious vision for a holistic educational experience.

- 5. Working with the Board of Trustees to monitor progress.** The Board of Trustees will play an essential role in supporting implementation of The Occidental Promise, including overseeing our progress towards our promises. We will work with the Board to track our key performance indicators, to examine the lead up to launching initiatives as well as to analyze the outcomes of initiatives once they are launched.

Through the phased implementation of The Occidental Promise, we will promote and advance further the transformative power of Occidental's urban liberal arts experience. With the support and partnership of the Occidental community, we will meet this time of urgency in higher education not only by responding to its challenges, but by leading the change these challenges compel. By building on our strengths, bolstering our core, adhering to our vision, we will achieve our promise and reach our fullest potential. The Occidental Promise!





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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