

Occidental College will be the principal destination for a distinctive urban liberal arts experience, one that uniquely 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.

In developing a strategic plan, we articulate a shared vision for the future of the College that will orient our collective efforts and identify the objectives, strategies, and initiatives that will lead us to realize this vision. The Occidental Promise sets out to make the College, by 2030, the principal destination for the “urban” liberal arts experience. 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 Oxy Promise, we will build on our strengths, uphold our values, foreground our mission, and determine forward-minded initiatives that elevate the college and enable it to prosper.

The Process to Develop an Integrated Strategic Plan

Just as it is a promise to our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents, the Occidental Promise will require the commitment of our entire community. Helmed by President Elam, developing the plan has been a truly collaborative endeavor. Over the course of the past two years faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni and parents have shared their perspectives and influenced our direction towards this final document. In 2021, President Elam appointed and charged a Steering Committee that included staff, faculty, and students. The Steering Committee was crucial in collecting community input from over 600 participants in surveys, focus groups and open fora (both virtual and in person), and in analyzing the input to identify key considerations for the plan. Building on these efforts, in June 2022, President Elam appointed and charged five working groups to propose initiatives to address the key considerations identified through the environmental scan. In Fall 2022, guided by President Elam’s charges and periodic discussions with him, the working groups developed initiative proposals, preliminary cost estimates, and preliminary thoughts on assessing initiatives’ efficacy and success. Based on the vision, the working group proposals, and ongoing dialogue with faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, and trustees, we collaboratively developed The Occidental Promise.

The Occidental Promise

How will we attain Occidental’s true promise? How do we come to thrive financially? How do we maintain academic excellence and, in so doing, stake a resounding claim for the continued relevance of a liberal arts education in the 21st century? The answer to these questions lies partly in understanding who our students are, what they want and need from their college experience, and how we build a program defined by excellence that will continue to attract them.

Oxy students today are curious and intellectually vigorous polymaths with extremely eclectic academic interests. They are change-makers who seek out Occidental with a strong desire to make a difference in a volatile world marked by racialized violence, hatred and nationalism, environmental nihilism, and a fractious and polarized political climate. And Oxy students do not want to wait until after college to make that difference. The needs of the world they inherit are far too pressing. Our students are drawn to diversity, recognizing it is essential to excellence, and challenge us to create and safeguard inclusion and equity.

And with these tremendous strengths, our students arrive carrying new burdens. Enduring COVID during critical learning years, our students report lingering effects not only on 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 students develop resilience and tools for addressing these concerns if they are to thrive at Oxy and beyond. Our commitment to diversity and inclusion must continue to extend beyond admissions as students from historically marginalized and minoritized communities still face barriers inside and outside of the classroom. 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.

The Structure of the Plan

The plan consists of three animating, interdependent objectives, or promises, that will define our strategic approach to achieving the vision of Oxy as *the* principal destination for the urban liberal arts experience, and in so doing, redefining the broader enterprise of liberal arts education. The emphasis on “urban” liberal arts builds on our location in the vibrant, dynamic global city of Los Angeles, compared to the traditional small liberal arts college operating with bucolic but isolated campuses set far away from the dynamism of city life. Occidental is different. Our urban environment – with its permeable boundaries, its spectacular views of the City of Angels, its gates that open onto the teeming real world – enriches the very idea of what constitutes a liberal arts experience. This plan builds further on our unique environment, and our relationship with Los Angeles will continue to amplify our distinction and differentiate us from our peers.

The three promises both build on Oxy's existing strengths and chart new opportunity, each animated by a series of strategies that will both fortify our foundations and realize new distinction for the College:

- 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 Campus Community

Woven through each of the three promises is our foundational commitment to equity and justice, and the plan articulates throughout how an equity lens is applied in designing every initiative, in addition to specific initiatives focused on justice, equity, inclusion and diversity (JEID).

In addition, this plan will integrate financial analysis, as issues of budget and financing have informed the development of the plan throughout the process. The realities of our financial framework do require us to make hard choices about where we will invest, but Oxy would not be served well by a plan that is any less bold or ambitious. This plan aims to identify the strategic investments, and fundraising opportunities, including academic areas (sites of emphasis) that require specific resources to fulfill catalytic potential. Enabling the College's future also depends on our ability to address pressing needs now. The environmental scan and subsequent discussions surfaced immediate academic, technological, and operational systems that require attention. In addition, consistent with our mission and values, we must consider how Oxy will foreground sustainability and climate resilience in its operations.

The Promise of Ensuring Academic Excellence

Academic excellence at Occidental means a rigorous and transformative academic experience that challenges students and equally emboldens them to become co-producers of meaning in their own education. It entails educating students beyond silos of domain expertise, creating unique opportunities for students to prepare them for the many and varied careers they are likely to have over their lifetime. It extends learning beyond the classroom. Through a broad, rich, inspiring, and empowering educational experience, we renew our commitment to educating students for lives of impact. Expanding on a tradition of excellence and building the unique and potent urban liberal arts experience, we will: 1) bolster the faculty as the cornerstone of academic excellence; 2) expand immersive education; and 3) invest in sites of emphasis (Scientific Research & Inquiry, Arts & Culture), academic areas where Oxy has achieved distinction and attracted strong student interest, and which have the potential for even greater distinction with proper resources and focus.

1. **We will strengthen the faculty through expansion and addressing workload concerns.** To maintain and further academic excellence, including expansion of labor-intensive immersive education, we must strengthen our faculty by addressing faculty workload concerns and expanding the number of tenured/tenure-track (“T3”).

Faculty are expected to teach 5 courses per year (a “3:2” load), advise first-year students and majors in their department, conduct research, and perform service (including serving on departmental committees, faculty-wide governance committees, and cross-divisional committees and decision-making bodies). Each of these tasks alone is expansive, and when taken together, these expectations present an unsustainable model, exacerbate burnout, and damage morale and retention.

To address this concern, 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. This course equivalency model will dovetail with efforts already underway to expand the T3 faculty (this effort is termed “Project 170”).

Project 170 is well underway with an overall goal of reaching 170 T3 faculty by 2030 (170 T3 faculty would equate to roughly 75% of our faculty FTE). 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.

2. **We will expand immersive education.** Students need and want opportunities for hands-on, project based, interdisciplinary learning, as well as professional development through experiential learning. Moreover, creating 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. Immersive education promotes the intersection of critical

thinking, creative problem-solving, and civic engagement. More than just vocational or practical training tacked on to the traditional liberal arts curriculum, immersive education is central to academic excellence in the service of students' and society's higher strivings, and in service of their efforts to lead fulfilling lives of impact.

Through the Immersive Curriculum built on the foundations of the existing Core Program, we will create a two-course sequence required for all frosh and sophomores that will build on our already established First Year Seminars program (FYS) and add high impact practices including an outward-facing, project-based experience in a student's first year at Oxy. Specifically, in their second semester students will build further on the first semester emphasis on expository writing skills, 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. In addition, the proposal will add a version of the Diversity Wraparound curriculum (first developed by a faculty working group in 2017), aimed to help students examine diversity and difference, reinforced by living in a residential environment in which they learn to both express their views and listen with empathy.

Beyond these first-year experiences, we will expand the availability of internships to provide students with meaningful applied and experiential learning opportunities through immersion in workplace environments. Oxy currently offers several forms of internship-based experiences that we would like to expand, including course-based internships or practica; internships curated by an academic department for credit; internships that are part of a signature program such as the Kahane Oxy at UN Program and Campaign Semester; a full-time summer work placement with an L.A. nonprofit funded by the College; etc.

3. **We will build up sites of emphasis, specifically in Scientific Research & Inquiry and Arts & Culture.** Even as we support a broad curriculum that enables multi- and cross-disciplinary learning, we will also invest in academic areas where we have or can achieve distinction and continue to attract students.

Scientific Research & Inquiry: From interdisciplinary majors to increasingly diverse classrooms, Oxy has positioned itself to be a leader in developing future generations of ethical scientists and social scientists. Our nationally and internationally recognized faculty work diligently with students to create new knowledge, producing groundbreaking research on topics ranging from battery flow to marine conservation. The College has recently increased funding for research and administrative support for sponsored research. But important investments remain if we are to realize our full potential in this area. Investments include renovating Norris Chemistry, grant-writing support, and promoting equity and access in STEM.

Arts & Culture: Nestled at a global crossroads of creative endeavor, the College can distinguish itself by providing transformative learning experiences through collaborations with Los Angeles arts and cultural institutions and the arts industry. Our potential is reflected in the astronomic rise of our Music Production program and the growing enrollment in both Music and Media Arts and Culture ("MAC"). Opportunities to invest in Arts & Culture include: renovating music spaces in Thorne; creating a shared building to house Computer Science and MAC; cultivating

partnerships with local arts and cultural organizations; and attracting more productions to use campus arts performance spaces.

The Promise of Forging Unique and Mutually Beneficial Relationships with Los Angeles

Our location in the heart of Los Angeles continues to define and differentiate us. Many students choose Oxy because we can create opportunities, uniquely possible due to our location, to their educational and co-curricular experience. Indeed, we are uniquely able to center immersive education as a strategy for academic excellence because of our position 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.

With 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 Los Angeles, including immersive learning experiences we are uniquely positioned to offer. To build on this existing strength, we must 1) coordinate our many dispersed Los Angeles engagements to support and uplift these partnerships for co-thinking and collaboration, research, professional development, community building and leadership; 2) expand community-engaged learning across our departments, using both existing and new models for co-thinking and collaboration with partners; and 3) expand our partnerships across disciplines and sectors.

1. **We will establish a center for partnerships with Los Angeles** to coordinate, generate, and advocate for Los Angeles-engaged work across divisions and departments. The center will also house and drive specific community-engaged projects and programs and help source partnerships between Oxy faculty and students and Los Angeles community, civic, and industry partners, including alumni. This will enable us to centralize resources and communication for Oxy's myriad community-engaged endeavors, eliminate duplication and create efficiencies in daily operation.

In addition to this coordinating role, the center will develop a signature program fostering cross-sector collaboration on critical challenges and opportunities facing Los Angeles, showcasing the role Oxy can play in meeting the thorniest problems with interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral solutions. This 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).

Finally, the center will foster programming on L.A.-relevant topics, both local and global. This 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.

2. **We will expand resources for community-based learning**, proliferating our unique pedagogical approach across departments. We will invest in more robust staffing for the faculty-supporting Center for Community-Based Learning to enable a greater breadth of faculty to deepen 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. CCBL is grounded in equity and in ensuring that all students can take courses and learn in community connected ways, and also strategizes to create opportunities for students of marginalized identities to lead learning opportunities.

3. **We will expand 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. Some crucial areas to explore include partnerships with arts and cultural institutions, a unique opportunity rooted in our location in one of the premier arts capitals and cultural centers in the world. 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, among others.

The Promise of Educating the Whole Student and Renewing Community

By attending to students' health and well-being, offering opportunities for exploration and connection, and fostering belonging, and community, we equip our students to lead fulfilling lives of impact. The current challenges to students' health and well-being and sense of belonging are both pressing and not unique to Oxy, but we have both an opportunity and an obligation to embrace the challenges of the moment to craft a healthier and more satisfying student experience. To do so, we will: 1) offer expanded preventative and therapeutic services, education, and training for mental health and wellness; 2) upgrade residential spaces; 3) increase programs and transportation to access Los Angeles; 4) invest in greater JEID training for faculty, staff, and students to support equity, inclusion and belonging for all students; and 5) instill restorative justice practices to foster community that is both diverse and animated by shared values and accountability.

1. **We will proactively promote student health and well-being** through a pilot Health Promotion Program (generously funded by a number of trustees) 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. The program will incorporate 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. The program will focus on the student body as a whole as well as attend to the unique needs of marginalized and minoritized communities within the broader student population. In addition, as we develop a campus master plan, we will consider how spaces supporting student health and well-being can be incorporated when we improve existing or build new spaces.
2. **We will elevate the residential experience** that is "home base" for students' health, well-being and academic success. Student housing is at the center of the residential experience and can have significant impact on students' health, well-being and academic success. In addition to immediately addressing safety and security concerns with best practices and improvements, we will develop an ongoing schedule for refreshing residence halls to improve the living environment for all students and increase the sustainability and climate resilience of residential spaces. Beyond operationalizing ongoing residential asset renewal, we will undertake a long-term space analysis with the goal of eliminating "forced" triples. As we rethink how we use residential space, we will also look for opportunities to create space for

activities that enhance student wellness. Given the cost of living in Los Angeles and in surrounding areas near campus, pursuing off-campus housing is not financially feasible for all students, and a poor on-campus housing environment can exacerbate inequities between students who can afford other options and those who cannot. Thus, providing safe, comfortable on-campus housing for all students who want it is a matter of equity.

3. **We will expand 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. These activities also support student well-being, self-discovery and connection by safely offering new experiences for students to explore. By expanding immersive and community-engaged learning for academic credit or via paid internships we create equitable access to the curricular benefits of a campus nestled in the vibrant city. In addition, we will cultivate resources to help students more independently navigate and engage with the city, including exploring more effective (and sustainable) transportation, and better communication about available resources and opportunities
4. **We will facilitate student access to academic and support resources.** First, we will create a Student Success Center, co-locating offices that provide student support services in a single location (ideally on the ground floor of a renovated Academic Commons). This will generate a “one-stop shop” for students to access the support resources and opportunities that are critical to their academic success and personal well-being. In addition, we will develop a “Transitions” program for first-generation, low-income, transfer and undocumented (“FGLITU”) students. In recent years, we have developed some programs to support FGLITU students in their acclimation to college. Still, FGLITU students’ levels of satisfaction and sense of belonging lag others and addressing this will require more focused attention. Consequently, we will develop robust programming and support for these students’ transitions to and progress through college and beyond.
5. **We will foster understanding and community through JEID training and restorative practices.** With a commitment to diversity and inclusion as excellence, we will establish comprehensive and multifaceted JEID training and build JEID consciousness as part of the social fabric of the school. 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.

Restorative justice offers an important model for community building, establishing community values, and restoring community after a breach of those values. Though the pandemic disrupted our efforts to build College-wide restorative practices, we will renew this effort, which aims to first build trust and develop shared community values that can also ultimately serve as a foundation for relational problem-solving through personal storytelling and values-driven conversation.

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