INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Planning Committee submits for the community’s discussion and comment this report on the current state of the College, the future state to which we believe we should aspire, the essence of what a Mount Holyoke education seeks to be, and the broad strategic directions we see as necessary to take us from our present condition to a stronger future in both the short and long term.

The President’s charge to the SPC is to consult widely and iteratively with campus and external constituencies, gather information about the state of the College and factors likely to affect its choices in the future, engage as openly as possible with the community, and aim to produce by the end of the year a strategic plan featuring goals for the College accompanied by measurable objectives and reflecting community input and vetting.

Our approach to this task has been guided by the Institutional Planning Process presented to the community in the fall, the essence of which is to:

- consult widely in building an assessment of the state of the College,
- assess the needs of the College,
- from those needs, formulate strategic goals for the College,
- formulate measurable objectives for those goals,
- then focus the considerable energy and talents of the Mount Holyoke community toward achieving those goals and objectives.

This report speaks to our progress on the first three of those steps. In weighing the current state and needs of the College, we have focused on areas we perceive as particularly challenging either to protect or to change (or both). These areas fall under the broad headings of Education and Resources. Our report is not a comprehensive description of the institution as a whole, of the sort we write every decade for reaccreditation review. Readers will thus not find every aspect of Mount Holyoke represented here, though we hope that all readers will recognize the College we describe.

We invite members of the community to comment on what we may have underemphasized, overemphasized, or missed entirely. We particularly invite comment on whether the strategic directions we have identified will enable all of us to protect the core of what is distinguished and distinctive about Mount Holyoke, even as we must change if we are to serve with sustainable strength new generations of students, faculty, staff, and alumnae in a world of evolving needs.

There are three ways for you to respond to this report. First, we have designed a brief survey for you to register your views. Second, we welcome comments to our email address mhc-planning@mtholyoke.edu. Third, we will seek opportunities during February and March for conversations about this progress report. We encourage groups with regularly scheduled meetings to set time aside for this purpose.

We also invite you to speak with any one of us. Members of the Strategic Planning Committee are Barbara Baumann, Alison Donta-Venman, John Grayson, Steve Herman, Hannah Howard, Eileen Kraus, Ruby Maddox-Fisher, Mary Jo Maydew, Don O’Shea, Paula Pierce, Cynthia Reed, Mike Robinson, Jessica Sidman, Sally Sutherland, Sarah Tulimat, and Peggy Wolff.
EDUCATION: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM AND THE FACULTY

The academic division consists of thirty academic departments and six support entities ranging from the largest (LITS), to PE/Athletics, the Art Museum, and three centers. The academic departments house 225 full-time and 58 part-time faculty (244 FTEs) and the division houses 183 other staff. Mount Holyoke’s faculty is unusually diverse: a little over half are women and a little over a quarter are persons of color. A sizable proportion is international and they collectively speak over 60 languages. Both faculty and students value the extraordinary intensity of the faculty-student interaction which is central to the academic experience at Mount Holyoke. The faculty are exceptionally strong scholars and artists. Competitive, peer-reviewed research grants awarded to faculty members, often for work with students, always exceed two million dollars per year (indeed, it is not unusual for annual awards from the National Science Foundation alone to cross this threshold) which consistently puts the College in the top five liberal arts colleges nationwide for such grants. Books published and other metrics tell the same story. (The number of books faculty publish per year is seldom less than 40 – this year 22 appeared in the three months from October to December.) The College’s location in the Five Colleges and its tradition of strong scholarship, enriched by its history as a women’s college, have aided immensely in the recruitment and retention of first-rate faculty and staff.

We currently offer 49 majors, and many certificates and minors, all in the liberal arts. We are also increasingly supporting the development of mechanisms, like the Nexus program and many distinctive activities in the College’s three centers, which allow students to link their academic experience with their lives after Mount Holyoke. We do not currently have pre-professional programs, despite the potential demand.

While the academic program has significant strengths, some conditions warrant attention. Although the student-faculty ratio is 9 to 1, the ratio of students to present-and-teaching faculty members is slightly higher than 10 to 1. Moreover, the number of continuing faculty (defined as tenured, tenure-track, and lecturers) is 179, which has dropped from 188 in the mid 1990s (and higher in the late 1980s) while the number of students has crept up to its current 2,345. Work that faculty do to mentor and advise students on an individual level differentiates the experience we offer from the experience generally offered by universities. However, this kind of teaching, together with producing scholarly work and performing administrative duties, leaves the current faculty stretched. We need to find ways to make what we do sustainable, either by increasing the number of continuing faculty or by distributing work differently or both. Mount Holyoke’s sabbatical policy, which includes a fully paid pre-tenure sabbatical, supports scholarly and creative work. But faculty need help with identifying funding sources for research and with post-award processes. The College lacks a robust program for supporting teaching and the implementation of new pedagogies. There are real questions about whether the teacher/scholar model can withstand the increasing amounts of administration and management that the College asks of its continuing faculty, and we need to find ways to help faculty and academic staff work more efficiently and focus on high impact practices.

Academic excellence is central to any conception of Mount Holyoke. Excellence means not just a faculty that is excellent, students who are bright, talented, and fully engaged, and first-rate facilities. It also refers to curricula and to the intensity of the academic experience among faculty and students.

EDUCATION: TRENDS AND VIEWS BEYOND THE CAMPUS

Looking beyond our gates, we see several trends affecting all of higher education and likely to affect Mount Holyoke directly. These include students’ increasing need for financial aid, a difficult fundraising environment, decreasing
endowment income, an unsustainable tuition model, the challenges of living up to the promise of access, the growing gap between wealthy and less wealthy institutions, changing populations of students including life-long learners, changing delivery methods including online modes, challenges to liberal arts education as not relevant—or not perceived to be relevant—to the real needs of students, the challenge of updating a traditional curriculum, the challenge of adapting to constant change in technology, and an increasingly competitive higher education market both nationally and globally.

The challenge to liberal arts education is acute for us, but not without opportunity. For example, Mount Holyoke could stake a clear claim to bridging classroom and career, to what the Strategic Planning Committee has begun calling “applied liberal arts” and what the Mellon Foundation has characterized as “the vocational turn.” This expansion of purpose would entail better coordination and links between the curriculum and work-related skills and experience; improved contacts to offer high-quality internship experiences; majors, coursework, programs, internships, and learning experiences that are more flexible, more responsive and adaptable, and more aware of the world beyond the campus; a deeper appreciation of the current world into which our students will graduate, including conditions and expectations of the workplace; seizing the opportunity to compete successfully in a climate of increasing globalization of education and careers; and exploring ways to enhance existing—and to add new—degree and certificate programs whether in partnership with other institutions or on our own.

Movement in these directions has resonance with our graduates. Because our 32,000 alumnae are the embodiment of the education we provide, and because they have an acute (though by no means unanimous or uncomplicated) sense of how the College prepared them for the diversity of conventional and unconventional work that has followed their Mount Holyoke experience, we are eager to explore further our graduates’ hope that the College will retain outstanding faculty, maintain academic excellence, ensure financial stability, enhance brand and rankings, reinforce our commitment to access, sustain a focus on women’s education, and promote lifelong learning.

In 2010 Mount Holyoke received a record number of applications (3,359). Applications are up 48.7 percent since 2004, with particular growth in the international pool. The enrolling class was quite strong with 38 percent ranked in the top 5 percent of their class (the highest since at least 2000). Mean SAT scores were 1297, higher than in 2000, but somewhat lower than the past couple of years. (In 2007, they were 1323.) Yield has consistently fallen over the past few years. The diversity of the entering class remains high compared with peer schools, with 26 percent of the class being students of color and 25.5 percent international. Since reaching a high in 2008, domestic applications have declined 3 percent, due in part to unfavorable demographics. The number of high school graduates in New England has been declining and will continue to decline at least through 2018. This is the region that in the past has supplied 35 percent of Mount Holyoke’s domestic applicants. High school graduates in the South will increase over 16 percent by 2018, though at present this region supplies only 15 percent of the College’s domestic applicants.

While the number of applications has risen, student ability to pay has declined. In the past year, more students (69%) received need-based aid. Correspondingly, over the past two years, the average revenue per student declined. From 2001 to 2008, net student charges rose by 53% overall and by 42% per student. However, in the past two years, net student charges revenue has reached a plateau, partly in response to the recession and partly due to the increase in the international segment of the pool. A modest increase in net student charges was attributable to an increased number of students attending the College. Mount Holyoke has used need-sensitive admissions, merit aid, and aid targeted toward high-ability-to-pay admits with some success in managing net tuition revenue, but now the College needs to explore new models of financial aid leveraging.

Mount Holyoke continues to hold a good academic reputation among liberal arts colleges. US News and World Report has consistently ranked the College’s academic reputation in the top 20 of national liberal arts colleges since 1999. Our overall US News ranking, however, is somewhat lower (top 30), due to lower ratings in some other sub-categories. For example, our rank of 45 in Faculty Resources accounts for a fifth of our overall ranking; our rank of 45 in Graduation and Retention
accounts for over a quarter of our overall ranking. On some key measures in other ranking systems, however, Mount Holyoke outperforms many of its peers. The reputation of the faculty, who receive numerous grants and publish prolifically, is strong. And perhaps as one of the best endorsements of the very essence of the product we offer, in 2010 The Princeton Review ranked Mount Holyoke number 1 in having the best classroom experience. This highlights the fact that the Mount Holyoke which current students, faculty, staff, and alumnae describe is in some ways markedly different from the perception of the College in the marketplace where students and parents shop for colleges.

The reasons for this difference are many and complex. Data from the Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) tell us much about how the pool of accepted applicants rates Mount Holyoke on a variety of measures relative to peer institutions, including academic reputation, location, special academic programs, merit scholarships, extracurricular opportunities, and preparation for career. Mount Holyoke does better than peers on some measures and less well on others, just as Mount Holyoke wins cross-admits against some schools and loses cross-admits to others. Because the reasons are complex, the College needs to explore the aspects of Mount Holyoke that attract or discourage potential students. To the extent that attractive aspects can be better known, and discouraging aspects remedied, Mount Holyoke needs to develop plans that will move the College in those directions.

RESOURCES

An array of financial factors, some external and some internal, are affecting Mount Holyoke’s present and foreseeable future. On the external front, the recent economic downturn was severe and the recovery looks to be a slow, multi-year process. The high unemployment rate and difficult environment for housing prices and mortgage defaults are both expected to continue for some time, putting pressure on family assets and incomes. Projections for annual endowment returns for the intermediate term are in the range of 6% to 8%, lower than previous returns and assumptions of returns. Gifts to higher education are declining nation-wide (by 11.9% for 2009), both as a result of the economic downturn and the proliferation of non-profit organizations which provide alternative opportunities for charitable giving. The fixed costs of higher education, particularly competition for highly qualified faculty and staff and ballooning benefits costs, are outpacing revenue growth. The use of tax-exempt debt by colleges and universities to fund campus improvements has increased substantially in the past twenty years. In particular, the recent growth of variable rate debt (69% of institutions as of 2008) exposes institutions to the risk of additional costs as interest rates rise or the market for tax-exempt debt softens in the wake of the financial problems facing many states and municipalities. And as tuitions at selective private colleges and universities continue to increase, an ever smaller percentage of college students are able to pay those tuitions without financial assistance.

Looking internally, it has become very clear that Mount Holyoke’s current financial model is unsustainable. That this is also true for a host of other colleges does not make it any less pressing. Barring a change in the financial model, Mount Holyoke projects a structural deficit of $3 million to $5 million annually. If Mount Holyoke wishes to maintain key components of its historic and present mission, including a very fine faculty and an economically diverse student body, the College must develop a framework for financial and institutional equilibrium. The College is competitive with peers in terms of giving, and the generosity of alumnae has played a major role in the success of Mount Holyoke in recent years. But gift revenues are not a large enough percentage of the operating budget (about 12%, including the annual fund at 8% and another 4% for specific operating budget purposes) nor are they growing at sufficient rates to have a material impact on the basic financial structure. Endowment performance has been strong over time, but the College is under-endowed compared with its closest competitors. Expense budgets have been constrained for a number of years, resulting in departments that are struggling to support the programs and services that the College requires to remain in its current position as a selective liberal arts college. Balancing the operating budget going forward will require either significant new sources of revenue or a significant reduction in the programs and services the College offers.
The College has made major improvements in its physical and technological assets over the past 20 years, averaging $7-11 million annually. However, after increasing enrollment by 400 students since 1998, the current size of the student body is beginning to exceed the ability of the campus to support it, despite the new and expanded facilities. The residence halls are full and the kitchens and dining rooms are overextended. Classroom and office space is tight. Mount Holyoke has a reasonable level of debt which is primarily used for capital spending (e.g., expenditures on campus buildings and grounds). Additional debt capacity exists, but it must be carefully weighed against the ongoing needs of an 800-acre residential college versus the inevitably higher borrowing costs that accompany significantly increasing amounts of debt.

Mount Holyoke is fortunate to have a staff of dedicated men and women who serve the College generously and well. Like faculty, however, many staff report feeling stretched by their workload and uneasy about the state of the economy generally and Mount Holyoke’s financial climate in particular. Many staff would give high priority to maintaining and improving benefits (especially health care and child care), professional development, and staff diversity.

Meeting these challenges will require the community to draw on its many strengths and its long tradition of successfully adapting Mary Lyon’s compelling vision for new circumstances and changing times. The Strategic Planning Committee has confidence that Mount Holyoke is more than up to the task.
PART TWO
MOUNT HOLYOKE IN 2037

The Strategic Planning Committee found it useful, before drafting strategic goals or directions for the next five years, to develop a picture of what a thriving Mount Holyoke might look like several five-year plans into the future—in 2037, the College’s 200th year. Given the pace of local, national, and global change, this may be a fool’s errand. But a college must have aspirations, ideally aspirations that grow from shared commitments and values. These are ours.

In 2037, Mount Holyoke College will be recognized and ranked as a top institution of higher education for academically high-achieving students, and will be known within and outside academe for the excellence of its programs and the quality of its graduates. The College will have forged new alliances locally (especially in the Five Colleges), nationally, and globally, building and participating in new networks for educational enrichment and occupational opportunity. Mount Holyoke’s graduates will be sought after by the finest graduate and professional schools throughout the world, will be highly valued by employers, and will achieve significant levels of responsibility and leadership in their fields.

EDUCATION
In 2037, Mount Holyoke College will be ranked among the best of its peer institutions based on its challenging and rigorous curricula, the quality of student-faculty interaction in and outside the classroom, the professional reputation and achievement of its faculty as both researchers and teachers, the importance of the on-campus experience in undergraduate life, and the institution’s abiding commitment to woman-centered education. Mount Holyoke’s undergraduate curriculum will retain the central place of the arts and science disciplines and cross-disciplinary inquiry, preparing students for the complex challenges of the world they will inhabit. The College will forge robust linkages between students’ academic experience and careers, opening new pathways for professional preparation. Educational programs and delivery methods will be expanded while retaining the values and integrity of a liberal education.

STUDENTS
In 2037, Mount Holyoke will attract a large pool of qualified applicants, and from this pool will enroll a class that is academically strong, intellectually curious, artistically talented, and athletically competitive. The resulting community will be at once socially and culturally aware and bound together through a common and transformative educational experience. Mount Holyoke will strive to make its education accessible to all its students through a balanced and affordable program of financial aid. The College will be recognized and ranked as one of the best institutions for women in the world, producing graduates who are leaders in their chosen fields, and who share their talents and wisdom both with the College and with one another throughout their lives.

COMMUNITY
In 2037, Mount Holyoke will be a broadly diverse and inclusive community that values collaboration, respect, collegiality, openness, and engagement.

RESOURCES
In 2037, through sound investment practices, growth in alumnae giving both in dollars and in participation rates, growth in other gifts and grants, increased tuition revenue, reduced discount rate, and revenue from complementary programs, Mount Holyoke will achieve revenue streams sufficient to fund its institutional aspirations for excellence and will continue to build its endowment significantly. Enrolled students will generate sufficient net tuition revenue to support the College’s operations at a sustainable level. Institutional prosperity will fund improvements in campus appearance and functionality, keeping Mount Holyoke one of the most beautiful college campuses in the United States. The campus will also be physically and technologically forward-looking, with modernized facilities to support its programs, and environmental stewardship fully integrated into the physical, curricular, and co-curricular life of the College. Mount Holyoke will be marked by agility, innovation, fiscal responsibility, effective and efficient processes, good management practices, and high morale.
PART THREE
MOUNT HOLYOKE: THE ESSENCE

With the particular encouragement and assistance of the President, the Strategic Planning Committee also found it useful to try distilling the College's purpose to a single paragraph. We are not yet sure whether this is a statement of mission, or of vision, or of values. It has elements of all three. We seek community comment on whether it is the Mount Holyoke we are and seek to be.

Mount Holyoke is recognized nationally and internationally for the excellence of its academic programs and for its conviction that educating women is crucial to the welfare of the world. By forging the alliance of a liberal education with purposeful engagement, we foster and inspire a community of thinkers who understand how to identify and respond to complex problems. Mount Holyoke integrates an extraordinary learning experience with a dynamic co-curricular environment and a distinctively inclusive community of faculty, students, and staff. This integration endures beyond the College gates and prepares students for leadership and success in all aspects of their lives.
PART FOUR
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

In between where the College is and where the College needs to go, lies the work of planning and prioritizing. Together with many at the College who have studied the data summarized above (see also the documents posted on the Committee’s web site), we think it clear that significant change is needed, and that business-as-usual is a recipe for decline. We also see ways forward that build on our great strengths.

EDUCATION

- Articulate, develop, and deliver a notion of liberal education that connects classroom to career, giving students the skills they need for purposeful and successful engagement with the world.
- Support and enhance faculty excellence in teaching, scholarship, mentoring, and advising.
- Articulate learning goals and measurable outcomes, and develop a culture of ongoing assessment for internal improvement as well as external reporting.
- Ensure that students admitted to the College will have the support to achieve those outcomes.

RESOURCES

- Develop a sustainable financial model that enables Mount Holyoke to achieve its short term and long term goals.
- Articulate, create, and claim a distinctive position in the landscape of higher education in order to improve reputation, recruitment, and retention.
- Analyze the possibility of serving expanded populations of students.
- Keep a Mount Holyoke education accessible to qualified students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

COMMUNITY

- Ensure that Mount Holyoke’s policies and campus climate are inclusive and will attract and retain the best faculty, staff, and students.
- Embed the principles of environmental stewardship and sustainability throughout the campus.