

To the Augustana College Board of Trustees,

On behalf of the Augie Bold Task Force, I want to express our gratitude for the opportunity to address a number of important questions the college faces as it emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and then faces the “demographic cliff.” Members of the task force all contributed in meaningful ways and embraced the assigned task. And, although members did not always agree, the discussions were always civil and kept Augustana College’s success at the center.

What follows is our report. It addresses the many questions put before us by President Bahls early this fall. The answers are intended to be as direct as possible. It’s important to note that the answers provided are what the task force believes are the right and most relevant responses for this time. We hope you will view the report as thoughtful and realistic.

In addition, as President Bahls invited, the task force has offered some ideas about what the college can do *now*, *near* and *far* to ensure our success. The task force, once again, has emphasized realistic efforts and those areas that will ensure the college is “fit for the future.” All members of the task force recognize that the ideas offered in this report will be made stronger through engaging in shared governance and responsibility for their successful outcome. Therefore, the task force is excited to share some of the ideas more broadly with other interested stakeholders to better shape and imagine the outcomes.

What is most exciting about this report is that the four areas identified as deserving of institutional focus in the *near*-term are consistent with the addendum to *Augustana 2020, Augustana Forward*, which was approved by the Board of Trustees in January of 2020. We hope the task force report will simply be a booster at an important time to regain momentum as we emerge from the pandemic. Institutional prioritization of these areas at this time is essential to improving student outcomes, stabilizing and strengthening enrollment, and advancing Augustana’s reputation.

The task force also believes that the four areas of focus can provide a road map for the college for the next two to four years, until new leadership is in place and familiar enough with our values and ambitions to launch the college’s new strategic direction. And, while this report is not designed to be a strategic plan, we hope it provides some direction regarding strategic and institutional emphasis for the years ahead.

Finally, partway through the process a member of the task force discovered that the Augustana in Sioux Falls, SD, has a strategic plan called “Augie Bold.” We thought that was cute and decided that our task was perhaps more focused on fitness for the future: the energy to emerge from COVID-19, and the endurance to withstand the demographic cliff. We are pleased to introduce our thoughts about readying Augustana College to be fit for the future.

W. Kent Barnds, Executive Vice President of External Relations (chair)

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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## Augustana College: Fit for the Future

In the summer of 2020, President Steve Bahls appointed a task force, formed of the President's Cabinet, three trustees, three faculty members and one student, to develop a report for the Augustana College Board of Trustees that would focus on preparing "fertile ground" for the college's next strategic plan. One member of the Augie Bold Task Force described the work as "ensuring that Augustana is fit for the future."

The idea of fitness for the future is attractive for Augustana College because it implies the need to focus on certain areas to be developed in order to compete successfully in the future.

### FIT FOR THE FUTURE

One might think of the work of the task force as something similar to a 10-week training plan for a half-marathon. Such a fitness regime requires commitment, choices and a strategy to get a runner prepared for race day and the ensuing competition. And, while such a training plan may also include modifications to certain habits, its primary focus is on how many miles an athlete needs to run each week to develop the endurance and fitness level for the race.

Augustana College needs to take similar steps to be fit for our future. We must focus time, attention, resources and organizational energy to these four main areas in the near term:

- Infuse inclusion into everything we do to assure a sense of belonging for all and affirm the human dignity of each member of our community (students, faculty, staff).
- Place character, skills, and the attributes our students need at the center of our liberal arts education and exploration to ensure our graduates emerge as leaders.
- Create the necessary framework to facilitate new programs and renew/transform existing programs to respond to the changing needs and demands of students, employers and society.
- Reimagine CORE to respond to a post-COVID world and the pressures of the demographic cliff and take a more deliberate approach to ensure our graduates are career-ready by aligning what we do with the expectations of today's students, parents and employers, especially given the tensions created by the pandemic.

Each of these is an area in which Augustana can build recognition and market strength as the demographic cliff looms on the horizon. In short, these are the things the college must do—and do well—to be well-positioned for more dramatic changes in the future. These are the resources and operations we need to be fit for the long stretch ahead.

There are several suggestions in this report that outline what might be done or considered in each of these areas, but what follows immediately are responses to the questions President Bahls placed before this task force, which met regularly during the fall semester.

## PRESERVING A CULTURE OF STRATEGIC THINKING

The Board of Trustees and Augustana College community can rest assured that planning has become central to the college's culture, and strategic planning has guided decision-making throughout President Bahls' tenure. Strategic planning guides the president's annual goals shared with the board and serves as the annual playbook for the college.

Augustana College has been guided over the years by four distinct strategic plans: *Authentically Augustana (2005)*; *Affirm, Assure, Assess (2011)*; *Augustana 2020 (2014)*; and *Augustana Forward (2020)*. These plans have included goals and significant operational detail, and have guided financial investment and programmatic energy.

These plans and the implementation of each have been possible because of a commitment to, and clear understanding of, the values associated with shared governance and the shared responsibility that goes along with it. To date, every stakeholder (trustee, president, faculty and staff member) has played an important role in the college's successful development and implementation of each of these plans. A firm commitment to shared governance has been central to success.

While these plans have been explicit in identifying goals, initiatives and anticipated outcomes, the college's operational strategy and reality, as a tuition-driven college, may actually be more implicit. We might better summarize our operational strategy through the following statement, which is guided by the college's values and an unwavering commitment to financial stewardship, thoughtful and strategic program development and care for students and employees:

In order to maintain the highest quality academic and co-curricular experience, Augustana College has worked to continually improve and strengthen its financial position to enable strategic, yet nimble, investment in its people, programs and physical plant. Exceptional resource management combined with a deliberate focus on adding new programs and renewing existing programs to attract students, while meeting students where they are academically, has made this possible.

No matter what public refinements of the college's strategic direction may occur through future planning processes, it's very likely that this implicit operational strategy, guided by the college's financial stewardship, thoughtful and strategic program development and care for students and employees, will guide what Augustana College does to remain strong and nimble.

However, it's not the sort of strategy statement that typically graces the pages of a strategic plan or strategic framework, which is why the Augie Bold Task Force offers the following responses to the questions President Bahls asked of the task force.



## AUGUSTANA: NOW, NEAR and FAR

As suggested by President Bahls, the task force identified actions for the now, near and far, which are described briefly below.

### NOW

- Coexist with COVID-19 to ensure a successful 2020-2021 academic year.
- Stabilize finances.
- Stabilize enrollment.
- Determine what capacities have been developed that can be successfully leveraged in the coming years, both near and far.
- Prepare for leadership transition.

### NEAR

- Infuse inclusion into everything we do to assure a sense of belonging for all and affirm the personal dignity of each member of our community (students, faculty, staff).
- Place character, skills, and the attributes our students need at the center of our liberal arts education and exploration, to ensure our graduates emerge as leaders.
- Create the necessary framework to facilitate new programs and renew/transform existing programs to respond to the changing needs and demands of students, employers and society.
- Reimagine CORE to respond to a post-COVID world and the pressures of the demographic cliff and take a more deliberate approach to ensure our graduates are career-ready by aligning what we do with the expectations of today's students, parents and employers, especially given the tensions created by the pandemic.

### FAR

- Identify and invest in areas of distinction to advance Augustana's reputation.
- Develop revenue streams that improve Augustana's financial position and enable continued investment in people, programs and our campus.
- Advance Augustana's reputation among liberal arts colleges as a leader in the area of diversity, inclusion, sense of belonging, and justice and social change.
- Build upon Augustana's strengths in developing career-ready graduates with uncommon emotional intelligence.
- Ensure a campus climate that combines the passionate curiosity promoted by a liberal arts education with the practical skill development that ensures relevance for years to come.

As mentioned above, the task force believes attention to those areas described in the near are critically important at this time and lay the foundation for the following: 1) strengthening the college in advance of the demographic cliff, 2) identifying a preliminary agenda for new leadership, and 3) laying the groundwork for the far. The task force has included as APPENDIX 1 some ideas for actions within the near-term; these ideas need future discussion and development and are intended to be thought-provoking examples, rather than specific recommendations.

Unleash passionate curiosity that empowers students to live with joy and purpose.



Carnegie Dartlet leverages nine archetypes which represent recognized human personalities. Representing Augstana's brand personality: Orange is creative and collaborative. Yellow is imaginative and transformative, Purple is dedicated and nurturing, and green is exploratory and curious.  
*(May 2020 - Reputation strategy research)*

## RESPONDING TO PRESIDENT BAHL'S

In addition, President Bahls posed these very specific questions to the task force:

**Q: What can Augustana do to improve its competitive position as it rebuilds and prepares for the demographic cliff? What actions should be taken in six months, 12 months and 18 months?**

Augustana can do five things that are essential to improving its competitive position and preparing for the demographic cliff.

1. Continue to develop/relaunch academic and co-curricular programs, while optimizing existing programs: New program development and re-launching existing programs to meet market demands has been an important part of Augustana's success in recent years. As the college approaches the demographic cliff, the college must continue to identify and develop programs that will meet changing student and societal demands. Resources should be reserved annually for program development costs or re-launch, and program champions should be expected to identify the potential ROI for each new program or re-launch of an existing program.
2. Fully implement the enrollment marketing surge: Recruitment marketing is more important than ever before in an increasingly crowded marketplace, increased price competition regionally, changing demographics and disruption to traditional recruitment tactics. The college must continue with an additional three years of \$250,000 annual investment in enrollment marketing. This surge will allow the college to explore new recruitment and marketing strategies and expand marketing into non-traditional areas as needed to make up for the disruption to traditional techniques.
3. Ensure the Recruitment Response Plan developed in the summer of 2020 is successfully implemented: After poor student recruitment results for the fall of 2020, President Bahls asked the division of enrollment management to develop a strategic response to the fall 2020 results and to prepare for the coming demographic cliff. The plan should be monitored and measured throughout implementation. This plan is available for review upon request.
4. Direct post-campaign fundraising efforts on innovation, diversity and inclusion, CORE, financial aid, endowment and unrestricted giving: Given the successful conclusion of AUGUSTANA NOW, fundraising will not be guided by campaign priorities for some amount of time, depending upon how quickly a new strategic plan and campaign are launched following a leadership transition. In the near term, the college and President Bahls should focus fundraising efforts on the following areas: CORE, innovation, diversity and inclusion, financial aid, endowment and unrestricted giving. The college and President Bahls should emphasize the need to invest in these areas and connect these priorities to strengthening the college in advance of the demographic cliff and stabilizing Augustana's finances for new leadership.
5. Reimagining CORE: The vision for CORE that was developed as part of *Augustana 2020* remains unfulfilled. There are many reasons for this, but this is not the place to discuss those. In short, what was perceived to be an innovative way to approach a student's winding pathway to post-Augustana success, fully integrating the various pathways of the student experience, has not produced breakthrough efforts in programming, outcomes or placements. Still, the foundation for excellence exists and the original framework has many of the elements needed for CORE to be a breakthrough initiative. But, CORE must recall and restore the vision it was intended to be: a unique

way of approaching a student's college experience and development, rather than a centralized collection of student service offices. Relaunching CORE with a focus on breakthrough practices and a distinctive way of approaching a student's four-year career development is critically important to successful student outcomes, recruitment, reputation enhancements and improving perceptions of value.

**Question: What are the two or three steps Augustana can take now to prepare Augustana for alternative scenarios for the far? How do we ensure these two or three initiatives have a critical mass of resources to ensure high impact?**

There are four steps that Augustana College can take now to better prepare for the far. Those steps are described below:

1. Reimagine CORE: Please see response above, which illustrates the need to reimagine CORE and how this approach can serve Augustana students.
2. Continue to focus on diversity, equity, justice and inclusion with a more deliberate emphasis on belonging: Emphasizing sense of belonging is critically important as the demographic cliff approaches, and focusing on this aspect of the college's diversity and inclusion agenda will help position Augustana for the future as enrollment becomes more dependent upon traditionally underrepresented students. It is also critically important that the college continues to make gains in creating a workforce that is more inclusive and diverse and provides all with a sense of belonging and worth. This focus is an important part of Augustana's mission and vocation. Further developing a sense of belonging should be viewed as an important outcome.
3. Emphasize transferable skills v. expertise or existing organizational structure: During the college's management of the COVID-19 pandemic, many members of the workforce have been called upon to use transferable skills from the job they were hired to do, to contribute in a new way to help. In most cases, members of the workforce did so without objection and demonstrated and built competency in their temporary role. In many ways, our workforce reflected the adaptability we hope for from our graduates. In order to be fit for the future, Augustana should take steps now to reimagine its workforce and increase the expectation that individuals can fill a role outside the job they were hired to do. Perhaps career counseling and corporate outreach would become 1/5 of a development officer's responsibilities, because of relationships staff enjoy with alumni and employers? Or, maybe a career coach could assist with registering incoming students during the summer months when current students are on break? Maybe athletic coaches could assist with game-day management during their off-season, to help spread the administrative load in athletics? Perhaps members of the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion might have 1/5 of their positions dedicated to alumni relations? There are examples already on campus that have allowed for a reduction in employees but no diminution of service.
4. Actively experiment with remote instruction, re-skilling and up-skilling to determine the feasibility for revenue: Augustana should certainly continue to experiment with remote instruction and further explore up-skilling and re-skilling as a way to generate revenue. Success with these experiments may lead to development of specific programs, but it's advisable to start small and build. Perhaps further investment in academic administration to equip an associate dean would help formalize these experiments, or perhaps Augustana should consider some administrative role focused on innovation and experimentation to ensure that these efforts are not lost in the fog of many responsibilities. In any event, faculty members should be supported in their use of technology to aid in the classroom, even in the traditional classroom.



**Question: Do any of the “temporary” changes we are making in response to COVID-19 provide opportunities to bridge to the far?**

Two main areas seem to present opportunities to bridge to the demographic cliff and beyond. Each has been mentioned and described previously.

1. Actively experiment with remote instruction, re-skilling and up-skilling to determine the feasibility for revenue.
2. Emphasize transferable skills v. expertise or existing organizational structure within the college’s workforce.

**Question: How can Augustana best prepare graduates to address the urgent issues that can heal the divisions in our country and address issues of inequality?**

Augustana College must draw upon its historic and worthy mission, Student Learning Outcomes, Community Principles and the Five Faith Commitments to ensure that all members of the community engage deeply and communicate across difference in order to address longstanding issues of inequality and division and affirm the human dignity of all. Augustana is positioned better than most colleges to do this because of the aforementioned resources and foundational documents.

Promoting the ability to engage in civil discourse inside and outside the classroom must be a priority – to develop and nurture the skills needed to live out the college’s commitment to free expression, on campus and in life beyond campus. This includes helping students learn to talk through challenging concepts and override any desire to silence voices that are in disagreement with one’s own, or with “mainstream” thinking.

This will require more than a single training or seminar or two on the importance of community discourse and free expression; it will likely require a longer-term commitment that should involve all community members. Associating with entities such as PEN America, whose principles of free speech on college campuses have been endorsed by Augustana, to offer unique programming for students over the course of their Augustana education could be not only a point of distinction for Augustana, but an innovative approach to offering education on an increasingly important communication and leadership skills.

Augustana could also consider building upon initiatives like the Justice and Social Change Micro-scholarship program by developing a Justice and Social Change Experiential major or minor. And, while matters of justice are already well represented in the college’s mission, The Five Faith Commitments, SLOs and Community Principles, the college could consider a specific Student Learning Outcome promoting themes related to equity and justice.

**Question: What are the metrics that we could use at the end of six to 24 months to determine whether we achieved the impact we intended?**

1. Possible metrics to consider include the following, which would certainly be indicative of resilience and the agility needed to be fit for the future:
2. Reducing operating cost reliance upon the endowment in order to fulfill the objective of reducing the overall draw to 4.5% by FY 2022
3. Meeting the new and renewed program enrollment expectation in alignment with the 4-year budget model projections

# FIT FOR THE FUTURE REPORT

4. Continued development or reimagining of existing academic or co-curricular programming with a focus on new student enrollments
5. The ability for the annual budget to fully reserve for depreciation by FY 2023
6. Stabilization of first-year recruitment program with f-y enrollment, without compromising academic quality and potential, of 675+ and 50 transfers with continued growth in diversity measures
7. Continued progress increasing the retention and graduation rates among traditionally underrepresented students
8. A yet to be determine measure of sense of belonging
9. A yet to be determined measure of career and graduate school placement outcomes
10. Restoration of an annual budget contingency of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000



## APPENDIX QUESTIONS AND TASK FORCE ANSWERS

### 1. We welcome the heightened discussion of justice and social change issues, including racial justice, economic justice and environmental justice. These issues are in urgent need of attention. Is Augustana equipped to help our students lead for a more just society?

*The second of Augustana's "Five Faith Commitments" is Social Justice, which is described in the following way: "Augustana encourages the development of a campus community that seeks justice, loves kindness, and acts with love and humility."*

*To be a true leader in the Quad Cities and in our region, the college must more fully embrace this faith commitment as a part of fulfilling our mission, and work to align all segments and stakeholders around a common purpose to ensure a sense of belonging for all. Alignment around this objective has good momentum, but more work is needed to stand out in this area.*

Augustana College must draw upon its historic and worthy mission, Student Learning Outcomes, Community Principles and the Five Faith Commitments to ensure that all members of the community engage deeply and communicate across difference in order to develop an appreciation and awareness of the need to address longstanding issues of inequality and division and affirm the human dignity of all. Augustana is positioned better than most colleges to do this because of the aforementioned resources and foundational documents.

*An emphasis on social justice more broadly has appeal to today's students, as well. EAB identifies "socially responsible" and "purpose-driven" as two of the five defining characteristics of Gen Z.*

*Augustana College is well-positioned to equip its graduates to lead and advocate for a more just society. The college's commitment to robust programming in Campus Ministries and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, in combination with President Bahls' multiple statements of support and related efforts, demonstrate that the will exists to do more in this important area.*

*Many efforts are underway or have already been accomplished. And, there is certainly substantial momentum in large pockets across campus to more closely and purposefully align justice, social change and belonging into all we do at Augustana. However, there is also room to improve at the institutional level.*

*This particular value has not been as high-profile as it should be to be fit for the future. Now is a good time to explore the many ways a commitment to justice and social change can be more connected and integral to the college's mission, which is described in the following way: Augustana College, deeply rooted in the liberal arts and sciences and an inclusive expression of Lutheran higher education, is committed to offering a challenging education that develops the qualities of mind, spirit and body necessary for students to discern their life's calling of leadership and service in a diverse and changing world.*

**2. The strategy of this administration has been to develop new programs (both academic and athletic) within the strictures of a typical liberal arts college. It has eschewed dramatic change for incremental change. Will this strategy be sufficient to keep Augustana strong and true to its mission in five to 10 years? Or can the Augustana administration take a lead in defining what it means to be a healthy liberal arts college throughout the 21st century?**

*Augustana has met with success and has a very good track record of adding the right programs at the right times. Often an early-adopter of new programs, Augustana has experienced greater program success when it leads rather than follows the market.*

*While there are few examples of program additions that did not have substantial enrollment/revenue impact, there are a number of examples of programs that resulted in substantial impact; those program additions include neuroscience, graphic design, environmental studies, lacrosse for men and women, women's bowling and men's volleyball. These programs have substantial numbers of students who in all likelihood chose to attend Augustana because of the program offering. In addition, the start-up costs were recovered swiftly.*

*These incremental changes have allowed for the preservation or recreation/restructuring of traditional liberal arts majors and have increased Augustana's attractiveness to prospective students. As the college faces an increasingly uncertain future, it will be important to identify specific programs that require reinvention/restructuring in order to maintain both quality and a robust demand by students.*

*While the college should continue to identify academic and co-curricular programs that are consistent with mission, will attract students and have a measurable ROI, it is very likely that program reinvention/restructuring will become more important as it becomes more expensive or more difficult to add new academic and co-curricular programs.*

*Program reinvention/restructure should also be guided by the following questions:*

- *Will reinvention/restructure enhance the student experience and improve outcomes?*
- *Will reinvention/restructure attract new or different students to the college?*
- *Will reinvention/restructure include hands-on experience, simulations, teamwork, immersive components that cannot be replicated in an online experience?*
- *Will reinvention/restructure efficiently use staff and college resources?*

**3. Augustana has been steadfastly committed to face-to-face education. Is there a role for online education after the COVID-19 crisis ends? If so, have we made a sufficient investment to support online education?**

*Since the onset of the pandemic, Augustana College has made significant strides to support remote learners and deliver distance education. The college and the faculty have developed literacy in a version of distance education, but Augustana College is far from mastering this specialty form of education.*

*Many faculty members are developing increased capacity for remote learning, but as an institution we remain far from being competitive in the field of online education. The technology and training investment has been adequate to deliver the program we set out to deliver, which is a blending of in-person and remote instruction. But the college does not have the technology, expertise and funding in place to expand in the area of online education to the scale necessary to be broadly competitive with established on-line providers.*

*Augustana could credibly offer a handful of online courses and has for some time as part of a summer school pilot, but an expansion of online offerings is unlikely at this time. Simply put, to invest the time and the necessary resources to developing the platforms and market our program to become effective providers of online teaching pedagogy would deflect from our core mission. Effective online education differs significantly from what Dr. Doug Parvin referred to as “highly-engaged remote instruction,” which is the version of online learning Augustana has been offering since March of 2020.*

*If Augustana were to choose to expand beyond offering a handful of online courses, there is no question that a new online learning platform would be needed and a significant amount of professional development would be required. While both of these are manageable, there are more significant questions about the attractiveness of the online experiences to the students we typically attract.*

**4. Augustana has believed that it is relatively immune from competition by online providers and lower-cost providers because of the value we provide as a residential campus. Might other forms of education be a threat to Augustana? Are we ignoring other possible disruptions? Should Augustana be a disrupter?**

*Augustana College and other residential colleges face many threats from lower-cost providers and other disruptors. However, the greatest threat may not be from other “institutions,” but the disruptions to the traditional approach to higher education and the credentialing process.*

*Purely online providers cannot provide the immersive experience in athletics, music, leadership, community service and personal development that a college like Augustana offers. This all-in experience will continue to be in demand. And, COVID-19 seems to have strengthened, rather than lessened, the appeal of the type of education provided by a place like Augustana College. Furthermore, a recent study from EAB, commissioned by Augustana College, on the feasibility of additional graduate programs, painted a somber picture for the appeal of most graduate programs. The exceptions were in the areas where experiential education, clinical and hands-on experiences were central components to the program outcomes. Experience seems to be very important, and Augustana can offer an experience that is still in demand.*

*However, one of the greatest threats from online providers and lower-cost alternatives may be in how they express the delivery of the education they provide.*

*For example, Google Career Certificates, Microsoft Certification, micro-credentials and badges may soon convey a more significant value to employers of a potential employee’s competencies for work than the bachelor’s degree. Higher education and places like Augustana have preferred to take the long view of education and the symbols of competency have been through majors, minors and concentrations. It is prudent to find ways to lead among liberal arts colleges in this area.*

To successfully compete with low-cost and online providers, Augustana College will need to reconceive how to express the value of the learning that happens here to successfully position a degree earned in the minds of employers and prospective students and parents.

Augustana College should disrupt where it can and where it makes sense, but where it makes sense for Augustana may be non-traditional, if considered within the context of Clayton Christiansen's definition of a disruptor. Augustana's ambitions to disrupt are more likely to be more measured and focused on being a convener of partnerships, organizations and institutions with an eye toward savings or revenue growth, as opposed to committing precious resources toward a big idea and a risky, unproven idea. Augustana could disrupt by being a more thoughtful, strategic collaborator and should work toward this objective as a way to improve perceptions of value.

#### **5. Augustana has been committed to adding services to meet student needs. Have we become too expensive for our students?**

Gen Z is described as more cost-conscious than previous generations, and their thriftiness will certainly lead to more questions about the cost and value of a college degree. Affordability and access to higher education will undoubtedly be in the spotlight for years to come and the Biden administration has signaled interest in addressing college costs. However, today's students and parents also have very high expectations for customer and student services.

So, while quite cost-conscious, this generation also expects customization, immediate service and timely problem-solving (just like they have had from Amazon their entire lives). More importantly, though, is the fact that many of today's students need more extensive services than ever before. And, Augustana College has rightfully committed to providing excellent academic and student service. In fact, Augustana's commitment in this area is a core part of its identity and brand.

Investments in student advising, learning support, counseling services, Title IV management, diversity and inclusion, international student support, etc., cannot simply be viewed as investments driving up the cost to students. These are essential services for student success and are central to Augustana's value proposition.

Augustana College must find even more effective ways to illustrate the value of an Augustana education and preserve its position as a good value.

Historically, Augustana College has addressed cost and affordability through the strategic use of financial aid and a financial aid optimization plan that allowed the college to enroll the required number of students to fund the budget. The college has been able to accomplish goals related to diversity and academic profile, but growth in net revenue has been modest over the past 10 years, requiring growth in the student body in order to grow revenues.

For now, the college could continue to address perceptions of expense through efforts to address net cost to students and by optimizing expenses, demonstrating and communicating the value of an Augustana education, growing student revenues, increasing unrestricted annual giving and building the endowment.

- 6. Augustana has excelled at teaching its students critical thinking skills and equipping them to become advocates for justice. We also have listened to the voices and needs of our students and met them where they are when it comes to social issues. In the past we have rejected majors such as criminal justice and social work. Should we reconsider these majors as new opportunities, being professions that have capacity to deliver a more just society? What if our country had more law enforcement officers and social workers with a liberal arts background and the sense of calling our students have? Are there other majors or programs we should offer to prepare those who provide direct service such as law enforcement, social work, developmental education, etc.?**

*If academic programs in areas such as those identified in this segment are deemed to connect with mission, the college should evaluate the feasibility of offering these programs.*

*With a renewed or greater emphasis on justice and social change, as discussed previously, the exploration of these programs could take on more importance and urgency.*

*The addition of programs in these areas, though, should follow the formula of success Augustana has had for adding programs in the past. There must be clear evidence of student demand and a return on investment.*

- 7. Augustana is one of 80 independent colleges in Illinois. Most agree that there will be significantly fewer in five years. Higher education institutions have shunned mergers, acquisitions, and deep partnerships with campuses elsewhere. Should Augustana pursue any of these strategies?**

*Mergers, acquisitions and partnerships, beyond articulation agreements, remain uncommon in higher education. While there are certainly good examples, they tend to be concentrated among very large universities with far greater financial resources, colleges or universities interested in short-cutting their way to a competency they don't already have, and those colleges that are so desperate that they have nothing to lose. Augustana College does not currently fall within any of these brackets.*

*Merging cultures has proven to be difficult and much of higher education remains very risk-averse, which undoubtedly limits mergers and acquisitions. Sadly, many colleges would prefer to die a very slow, painful death, rather than allow their independence to be impacted by a merger or acquisition.*

*In recent years, Augustana College has expressed greater openness to deeper partnerships than most colleges. The college pursued a partnership with a college that had an established engineering program and has been engaged in discussions with organizations over the years about expanding into a variety of health-related fields.*

*Augustana College should remain open to partnerships that add to the college's financial strength, strengthen the college's reputation, and make the college more attractive to prospective students. Augustana should take the broadest possible view of what it means to partner and should focus partnering relationship on fulfilling student needs and outcomes.*

*The college should make sure that the broader world of higher education understands that Augustana is prepared to pursue partnerships, and to be pursued for what it can bring to such collaborations. If conditions change and college mergers become more common, Augustana should be prepared to acquire other institutions if such growth can contribute to the mission and sustainability of Augustana.*

*Augustana should be open to and seek, when appropriate, opportunities less aggressive than mergers. Those partnerships may include more articulation agreements with two-year colleges; agreements to jointly provide courses (particularly synchronously); joint ventures to provide specialized programs on Augustana's campus; and partnership with graduate programs in the nature of 3:2 agreements. Augustana should position itself as a leader in pioneering these types of partnerships as opportunities arise.*

**8. We have viewed Augustana as a college that serves almost exclusively students ages 18-23. Yet this population is projected to decrease in our market area. Should we offer more graduate programs, certificate programs and other programs? Is our mission narrowly defined to help B.A. students from 18-23 years of age grow in mind, body and spirit? Or should our mission extend to such things as education programs at employers' workplaces, partnerships with community colleges, non-degree certificate programs, and the like?**

*Given the demographic cliff and its potential impact on colleges like Augustana College, it seems ill-advised to dismiss consideration of serving new student segments, whether graduate or non-traditional students. However, Augustana College must approach new programming in the way that it has approached successful program additions in the past.*

*If the college were to expand programming to meet the needs of students not traditionally attracted to Augustana (adults, graduate students, professional development students), it should be in fulfillment of the college's mission, rather than at odds with mission, and should include a full evaluation of market conditions and success thresholds.*

*It's interesting to note that a recent study from EAB on the feasibility of adding graduate programs painted a somber picture for its appeal. The exceptions were in the areas where experiential education, clinical and hands-on experiences were central components to the program outcomes. These cautions should guide any program development the college might consider and should also limit Augustana's ambitions to add graduate programs that don't have a clinical or substantial immersive or experiential component.*

*Augustana would be a new player in the mature adult/continuing education market in the region. With mature players and existing lower-cost providers, it's difficult to imagine Augustana College meeting with immediate success in most areas.*

*The addition of programs in these areas, though, should follow the formula of success Augustana has had for adding programs in the past. There must be clear evidence of student demand and a return on investment.*

*While foolhardy to dismiss the potential new markets associated with graduate, adult and professional education opportunities, the college needs to conduct thorough study of the opportunities and risks before committing to expanding into these uncertain markets. Currently, Augustana College lacks the expertise and capacity to compete in these new areas.*

*Augustana may have an opportunity to focus on "up-skilling" and "re-skilling" in specific areas that benefits local industries or alumni segments. For example, the physics department has been approached to offer a very specific course to working professionals that would serve as professional development/continuing education for these working professionals. Another example is the current development of a post-baccalaureate*



program that prepares college graduates from academic fields other than communication sciences and disorders for a master's degree in speech-language pathology. These offerings could lead to incremental revenue if priced, positioned and promoted with the market in mind.

**9. Augustana, like most liberal arts colleges, has not diversified its revenue streams. If we cannot reopen to live instruction, we expect to lose 75% of our revenues, resulting in structural damage to Augustana. Can we afford not to diversify revenues?**

*Diversifying revenues has long been a topic at Augustana, yet a solution has been elusive. Too frequently, efforts resort to trying to unrealistically expand facility rentals or the perceived promise of low-cost graduate programs. Candidly, neither of these has resulted in substantial new or diversified revenues that relieve the reality that Augustana College is a tuition-driven institution.*

*What may be overlooked are the ways in which Augustana College has increased revenues by market-smart program additions, consistently attracting new students to the college and therefore maintaining revenues sufficient to run operations.*

*Some examples of changes in revenue streams include the significant expansion of international student enrollment at a time when domestic enrollment was perceived to be problematic; the Close the Gap Scholarship program, which replaces a significant amount of unfunded financial aid with funded aid; our incredibly successful grant-writing efforts and the partnership with McAllister & Quinn, which is bringing in millions of dollars and helping underwrite some existing costs; and aggressive capital fundraising for a number of recent capital investments. All of these represent efforts to diversify revenue streams. However, it seems the rating agencies are hoping we might open new lines of business, unrelated to our core competencies.*

*There is no easy answer for Augustana to minimize its reliance on student fees. This should not be a surprise, given our core purpose, which remains educating traditional students in a residential environment. Without a substantive change to mission, Augustana is not likely to see significant change in this area.*

**10. Most of Augustana's capital expenditures have been for building improvements and renovations. With our 2004 campus master plan essentially completed, how should the excess resources (beyond those needed for operating expense) be invested? Have we made appropriate investments in technology? Should we develop a deeper source of funds for new program development? What about partnerships with or acquisition of other institutions?**

*Augustana College had strengthened its finances considerably over the course of the last decade, which has enabled the college to consistently budget a contingency, fully reserve for depreciation on an annual basis, and pay both principle and interest on its debt. Careful budget management and goodwill among a variety of stakeholders has enabled Augustana to withstand the impact of COVID-19 fairly well.*

*Augustana has focused much of its discretionary investments over the course of the past 18 years on much-needed physical plant improvements, after a period of inattentiveness preceding this time. In addition to discretionary investment, funded primarily through the reserve for depreciation and plant reserves, the college has focused a*

# FIT FOR THE FUTURE REPORT

good deal of its fundraising efforts during the last two campaigns on capital projects. Since 2003 Augustana has made nearly \$100 million in campus improvements.

However, much of the 2004 Campus Master Plan has been completed, with the notable exceptions of the renovation of Bergendoff Hall and three remaining residence halls, and it may be prudent to reimagine how the college's budget strength could be used to ensure the college remains fit for the future.

Some have suggested that a portion of the reserve for depreciation should be used for new program development, innovation and strategic investment in efforts that provide Augustana with competitive advantage. On an ad-hoc basis the reserve for depreciation has funded one-time costs for strategic initiatives, but perhaps it is necessary to formalize a process to identify efforts worthy of college-wide investment? As the demographic cliff comes closer, it will be important to accelerate the process and practice of investing in initiatives that have an immediate return on investment for the college.

Dedicating a portion of the reserve for depreciation—perhaps \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 on an annual basis—for innovation and strategic initiatives seems to be timely.



## APPENDIX A

### Ideas for the *near future* of Augustana College

The Augie Bold Task Force offers the following ideas to consider as Augustana College prepares to be fit for the future. The ideas that follow are directional in nature and represent what could be done, rather than recommendations for immediate action. In the spirit of shared governance, the task force recognizes that the best solutions and efforts to advance these important areas will come as more stakeholders are engaged in discussion.

These ideas were developed by smaller groups within the task force, and like any effort at Augustana College, can be strengthened by involving more voices.

#### **1. Infuse inclusion into everything we do to assure a sense of belonging for all and affirm the human dignity of each member of our community (students, faculty, staff).**

1. Invest in employee professional development:
  - Tuition remission program: flexibility in schedules for hourly employees to take courses at Augustana
  - Employee mentoring programs for those employees who are underemployed or who desire to move into other positions
2. Continue to address and invest in contemporary issues that are of interest to college students and advance the greater good (e.g., environmental justice, racial justice, LGBTQ+ equity).
3. In the areas of human diversity and racial justice, seek improvement in three areas consistently identified by students:
  - **A more diverse campus employee base.** Approach both recruiting and retention of employees with focus, and measure and report on progress. Develop initiatives to support the retention of diverse faculty members, in particular. Consider formal mentorship programs and course release for the student support and interaction that is part of their work.
  - **Training and other efforts to greatly diminish microaggressions** and bias incidents on the Augustana campus. Include frequent training, development efforts on cultural competency, and expectation of senior leadership to model behaviors and create accountability for the same within their divisions.
  - **Student Infrastructure and programming** outside of culture houses and OSID and OISSS. Challenge student life, recreation services, SGA, Greek groups and others on campus to examine the demographics of students served, and develop and implement plans for activities, programs and offerings that will engage all students.
4. Consistently demonstrate support and successful action among college leadership. Upon the eventual retirement of the President of the College, one key attribute for a potential successor should be a record of success on diversity and inclusion, such as what Augustana's current president has demonstrated and continues to pursue.

## II. Place character, skills, and the attributes our students need at the center of our liberal arts education and exploration, to ensure our graduates emerge as leaders.

### Create Viking Crews

Small groups of students (20 or fewer) are aggregated by class, with inducements, to complete together a yearlong program of activities and learning opportunities based on themes related to their progress toward a degree.

CORE would supervise, though facilitation would be by faculty and staff volunteers willing to commit to monthly engagements with students, roughly nine or ten in the course of an academic year. Students who complete the program might be eligible for a modest financial aid “sweetener,” a letter of recommendation, “badge,” etc.

Potential themes:

- **First Years – Success in college.** Include components from OSL’s EMERGE program coupled with relationship building from Orientation/Welcome Week small groups; components on Learning Commons, Tredway Library resources, Success Services, intro to the Quad Cities, etc.
- **Sophomores – Tackling big ideas.** Leverage diversity, equity and inclusion programming to address embracing difference, overlaid with emphasis on effective communications in oral, written and digital formats.
- **Juniors – After Augie:** Aggregate groups by major, division, post-grad interests, or generalists looking at success strategies for the job market, grad school, leadership and life skills (such as financial literacy), etc.
- **Seniors – Project Next:** Groups interact with extraordinary alumni (digitally “live” when possible, but also through recorded formats) to learn about leadership and service in a variety of pursuits. Include robust networking components, especially with local and Chicagoland alumni.

Background resources curated by the Office of Academic Affairs, the Dean of Students Office and CORE would help faculty/staff mentors reinforce critical thinking, working with others as a member of a team, effective communication, embracing difference, and other critical learning objectives. Employee volunteers who plan and execute nine such conversations through a year could be recognized for this service in annual reviews and at a following A-Day, for example.

## III. Systematically promote/market the career readiness skills developed in each course by highlighting Student Learning Objectives in each course.

Develop a system that uses and leverages the Student Learning Objectives identified as “important” or “essential” as a part of the IDEA Learning Objectives associated with each course. Identifying these skills\* and developing a system that summarizes the areas that have been a primary focus of each student’s coursework can expand each course beyond the content described in the catalog, and provide each student with a new, valuable way to describe the range of skills they have developed and acquired at Augustana.

Using the Student Learning Objectives, which are the foundation for the development of “soft skills,” capitalizes on an existing system at the college and can bring new focus to the practical applications of skills developed in each class. Leveraging this existing system to highlight the skill-driven aspects of a liberal arts education could provide a jump-start to ensuring that an Augustana College education continues to be—and is perceived to be—relevant and focused on career-readiness.

Such an effort could even result in some kind of “mastery” designation for students, and could provide students with new ways of talking about the outcomes of their Augustana education.

*\*These are the Augustana Student Learning Objectives tracked, many of which align with what employers seek in new employees:*

- *Gaining a basic understanding of the subject (e.g., factual knowledge, methods, principles, generalizations, theories)*
- *Developing knowledge and understanding of diverse perspectives, global awareness, or other cultures*
- *Learning to apply course materials (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions)*
- *Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to the course*
- *Acquiring skills in working with others as a member of a team*
- *Developing creative capacities (inventing; designing; writing; performing in art, music, drama, etc.)*
- *Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity (music, science, literature, etc.)*
- *Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing*
- *Learning how to find, evaluate, and use resources to explore a topic in depth*
- *Developing ethical reasoning and/or decision making*
- *Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view*
- *Learning to apply knowledge and skills to benefit others or serve the public good*
- *Learning appropriate methods for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting numerical information*

#### **IV. Create the necessary framework to facilitate new programs and renew/transform existing programs to respond to the changing needs and demands of students, employers and society.**

Develop a consistent framework that focuses on ongoing generation and assessment of academic programs.

##### **Generation of academic programs:**

- Faculty process
  - Regularly encourage faculty generation of new programs (*Faculty Meeting/Group to encourage generation?*).
  - Incentivize innovation.
  - Clarify standards for approval and align with strategic initiatives.

- Non-Faculty process
  - Share opportunities with Faculty/Faculty Council ASAP.
  - Faculty shall have voice (if not, adopt as a recommendation) to the Board of Trustees.
  - These ideas may come from a variety of sources: administration, board, foundation, donors, etc.

**Assessment of academic programs:**

- New and existing program assessment
  - Meets external demand
  - Financial investment/cost predictions is accurate
  - Fits with college mission
  - Fits with curriculum
  - Number of students in major/minor (estimate v. actual) rises
  - Contributes to general education
- New program assessment – additional
  - Retooling existing vs. all new?
  - Ramp up process/timeline
  - Financial investment
  - Efficiency with existing curriculum
  - Demand assessment?

**V. Reimagine CORE to respond to a post-COVID world and the pressures of the demographic cliff and take a more deliberate approach to ensure our graduates are career-ready by aligning what we do with the expectations of today’s students, parents and employers, especially given the tensions created by the pandemic.**

There are a number of initiatives underway in this area already.

