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# CHARTING THE FUTURE:

Creating a New Learning Environment for the 21st Century

*A Statement of Strategic Values*



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## Introduction

### The Challenge of the New Millennium

American higher education today must take the lead in addressing major societal transformations: emerging social issues, now international in scope, representing a global multiplicity, not just of cultures but also of perspectives, ideas and demands; the constantly rising level of necessary technological sophistication; and, students' need to learn not just a discipline but the ability to grow and change intellectually throughout their lives.

As colleges and universities embark upon the new millennium, they face an environment of increasing public expectations and dwindling traditional resources. It is a time when many institutions - those who do not rise to these unprecedented challenges - will not survive. Yet we believe that the University at Albany can attain a new level of distinction which will enable us to surpass, not just meet, the daunting expectations and challenges facing us.

We, the members of the Strategic Planning Committee, have been charged to recommend a course for this institution in such a complex environment. We will be guided by the University's own *Mission Statement*, adopted in 1992, which says, in part, that "today's University at Albany community eagerly seeks opportunities to enhance its educational mission - both in the creation and in the dissemination of knowledge." We also acknowledge the words of our President, Karen Hitchcock, in her inaugural address of 1996: "In fundamental ways we are being challenged to reexamine our intellectual and ethical assumptions, our traditional modes of teaching and learning, the structure and content of our curricula, our long-standing commitment to diversity of peoples and ideas, and the nature and extent of our service relative to our community, state, nation and the world."

How then shall the University at Albany respond to this complex set of conditions that characterizes society now and for the new millennium?

**Commitment to Change.** We must ourselves take charge of change. We must revisit the questions of how we discover and disseminate knowledge. We must creatively seek out new opportunities for our students as they enter and help change a truly global society. We must be prepared to reallocate our resources

and build on our strengths – current and emerging - as we develop a set of goals and strategies that will help us to advance the values of our institution. At the same time, we must design administrative structures to assure that the most innovative faculty initiatives in support of these goals receive maximum support.

**Commitment to Society.** We must be responsive to society, which has placed its trust in us to address the many issues which confront us. Looking to our partners in the community, state and around the world, we can identify and nurture new coalitions - with business, government, other communities of scholars, and alumni - to leverage our resources as we serve the public. Through such partnerships, we can prepare for the new century with a sense of both confidence and purpose.

**Commitment to Excellence.** As we plan our future, it is useful to look to our past. Albany was founded in 1844 by a small group of bold visionaries who embraced daring concepts for the era, including the idea that a teacher must master both pedagogy *and* subject matter. Above all, our founders were committed to excellence. Albany developed into a nationally acclaimed, highly selective four-year College for Teachers, and now has evolved into a mature public research university. While our mission has changed since then, that boldness of vision and commitment to excellence remain.

### **Values: Framework for Change**

Throughout its history, the University has demonstrated flexibility, creativity and responsiveness to the changing needs of society. We have developed innovative approaches to thinking and learning across the disciplines, enriched our undergraduate curricula with unusual opportunities for research and learning, and devised new ways to link theory and practice. We can now build on this rich legacy of leadership and innovation to forge our own daring concepts and a new framework of shared values.

We have defined these values as: *Engaged Learning; Discovery; Societal Responsibility; and Innovation through Technology*. All of these values will be advanced in the context of a fifth value...that of institutional *Distinctiveness*. (Each will be discussed in detail later in this report.) These capture in a few words what members of the University at Albany academic community consider to be Albany's paramount strengths, responsibilities and opportunities. These values are not abstractions; rather, they operate at several discernible levels, including the theoretical and the applied. They must serve as a framework on which to build new programs and strengthen current ones.

### *Strategic Values Defined*

#### **Strategic Value 1: Engaged Learning**

Engaged Learning is the active and enthusiastic involvement of both students and faculty with the learning process - at every stage and level. Faculty and students will come together in a common quest to appreciate inherited wisdom of the past and to participate in the discovery of new knowledge.

### **Strategic Value 2: Discovery**

Discovery is the creation, publication and dissemination of knowledge in an environment where research and teaching are viewed as interrelated parts of an holistic enterprise of scholarship, creative performance, and learning.

### **Strategic Value 3: Societal Responsibility**

Societal Responsibility is the obligation of the University to respond to the expectations placed upon it by its external community. These expectations include inclusiveness of access, the quality and types of our programs, and the application of our teaching and research to the needs of society.

### *Strategic Value 4: Innovation through Technology*

Innovation through Technology reflects the commitment to creatively harness new technologies in the development of innovative curricular programs and pedagogy, and to prepare students to be contributing citizens in a world that is being transformed by technology.

### **Strategic Value 5: Distinctiveness**

The final strategic value reflects the view that the programs we support must not only be *distinctive* through their adherence to the values of *engaged learning, discovery, societal responsibility* and *innovation through technology*, but also distinguished. While remaining committed to our mission as a comprehensive research university, this value of Distinctiveness acknowledges that choices will need to be made as we continue to invest in programs of strength and importance to our overall missions.

## *Strategic Values Expanded*

### **Strategic Value 1: Engaged Learning**

Engaged learning is the active and enthusiastic involvement of both students and faculty with the learning process - at every stage and level.

### **Engagement as a Hallmark**

Striving to make engaged learning a hallmark of a University at Albany education will help us to realize one of the institutional qualities enunciated in our Mission Statement: "...an intellectual climate in which the research and

creative endeavors of the faculty enlarge their sense of inquiry on behalf of their students, so that at all levels students enjoy the stimulation and challenge of engaging in active, rather than passive learning, and the satisfaction not only of assimilating the inherited wisdom of the past, but also of participating in the creation of new knowledge."

As a public research university, the University at Albany emphasizes the integration of teaching, research, creative expression, and public service in its undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. Faculty bring their research and creative endeavors to bear in their teaching so that students at all levels enjoy stimulating and engaging learning. Our students should experience the satisfaction of both appreciating inherited wisdom and discovering and transmitting new knowledge. With the character of the University at Albany's educational mission so defined, it is only fitting that the foundation of our institutional vision is *engaged learning*.

Although there may always be a natural tension between research and teaching, we must acknowledge that they are both necessary for engaged learning. We must commit to an educational approach that links the two while still providing clarity of purpose and coherence in our curriculum. We must experiment with more effective and interactive instructional formats. Such innovations in pedagogy can serve to enhance the learning environment.

Finally, faculty members must be able to meet across disciplines with undergraduate and graduate students so that they, together, can confront the intellectual issues at the core of the enterprise.

### **The Centrality of Arts and Sciences to a Strong General Education**

Engaged learning calls upon us to demonstrate the centrality of the arts and sciences to the total undergraduate experience. We can accomplish this by demonstrating how qualities that the arts and sciences promote – such as critical thinking, aesthetic sensibility, and an intellectual capacity for synthesis – serve as both the means to and the reward of a liberal education.

We should demonstrate to students how these qualities have served us in our individual pursuit of knowledge as well as the progress of knowledge in our respective fields.

### **A Commitment to General Education**

The University at Albany, in its commitment to a liberal education for all its students, must ensure that the best university teaching and research manifest themselves in the general education curriculum. The general education program should reflect the value of discovery, and demonstrate the unity of research, teaching, and public service. The general education program should also be intellectually and programmatically coherent. It should take full advantage of faculty strengths across the University's multiple programs. Such courses, traditional or team-taught, should bring senior faculty, working on the

frontiers of discovery, into the program in a variety of instructional settings.

It is further recommended that consideration be given to including in the general education curriculum opportunities for students to develop proficiency in a second language as well as to receive special training in information technology.

Since learning is not the exclusive property of the "classroom," we should also recognize the positive value of integrating academic life with co-curricular activities. We should use governmental, corporate, public service and other regional and international resources to provide students with internship opportunities and community service volunteer experiences.

### **A Coherent Educational Experience for All**

To be a meaningful and lasting value in the lives of all our students, engaged learning must be a hallmark of every student's education at the University at Albany. Thus, our strategic vision must endorse continual renewal of this University's commitment to the undergraduate experience simultaneously with the preservation and promotion of graduate and professional programs of the highest caliber. This means that the faculty, staff and administration of this University must bring their collective ingenuity, vision, and leadership to bear upon the creation of a coherent educational experience for all.

Prospective students and new faculty must understand that engaged learning is a core value of this university, and that this value will be reflected in the evaluation of their academic and professional performance within a community that emphasizes teaching, research and service as integral, related parts of one's academic responsibility.

At the undergraduate level, we must develop an appropriate balance between general education and the major. We must ensure the coherence of the general education program, and strike a balance between breadth in overall lower-division studies and depth in upper-division studies, both within and outside of the major. We must ensure that all undergraduate offerings support students in their pursuit of a coherent program of study, beginning in the freshman year.

At the graduate level and in our professional programs, we must provide resources and develop programs that combine specialized skills with broad experiences including, where appropriate, internship placements, interdisciplinary research activities, and fieldwork in countries that can benefit from the University's expertise in specialized areas.

The active involvement of faculty in advising and mentoring students at the graduate and professional level should serve as a model at the undergraduate level. We should create a campus culture for learning in which faculty and students interact outside the course structure as an extension of their academic activities.

In keeping the commitment to the quality of every undergraduate's educational experience, we must take an active role in better preparing teaching assistants, both as a component of their professional training as graduate students, and in the context of their own role in engaged learning at the undergraduate level.

### **Strategic Value 2: Discovery**

Discovery is the creation, publication and dissemination of knowledge in an environment where research and teaching are viewed as interrelated parts of an enterprise of scholarship, creative performance, and learning.

#### **Discovery – the Heart of a Research University**

Free and motivated inquiry is the leading edge of our enterprise and the heart of discovery. We urge consistent, active attention to concrete measures that enhance the status of the University as a research institution. Research – "the pursuit and advancement of knowledge, [both] for its own sake and for its practical benefits to society" (*University at Albany Mission Statement*) - nurtures the spirit of inquiry among both faculty and students.

The University must place greater value on consistent productivity in research and publication, recognizing the time and resources that are necessary. High quality research and scholarship, as well as creative performance, should be adequately reflected in the criteria for achieving tenure and promotion. Supporting such scholarly activities will depend on access to sufficient resources, and we must make the necessary fiscal choices based on how well the programs support our commitment to discovery and the promotion of distinctive and distinguished programs across the University.

Further, we are committed to creating an environment for discovery where research and teaching are viewed as deeply interrelated. By so doing, the University at Albany will realize a goal enunciated in its Mission Statement: "Its educational mission sustains an intellectual climate in which the research and creative endeavors of the faculty enlarge their sense of inquiry on behalf of their students, so that at all levels students enjoy the stimulation and challenge of engaging in active, rather than passive, learning, and the satisfaction not only of assimilating the inherited wisdom of the past, but also of participating in the creation of new knowledge."

As a research university, the University at Albany is able to provide connections between its strong research and graduate programs and the undergraduate experience by teaching problem solving and critical thinking, and providing students with experience in a wide range of research and scholarly activities. We must make every effort to maintain these synergies.

Discovery in both the research setting and the teaching environment defines the very idea of a research university. Members of the academic community of the University at Albany must therefore be prepared to be judged by our success in creating such an integrated learning environment.

While acknowledging the inevitable tensions that sometimes arise, we reject the suggestion that research and teaching represent inherently alternative or competing endeavors. Instead, we view research and teaching as interrelated dimensions of a broad enterprise of scholarship, creative performance, and learning. Similarly, just as research and teaching exert a significant impact on the quality of learning, so too they animate our mission of service.

We must confront the difficult decisions required for the preservation and continued improvement of distinguished graduate programs that play a major role in defining the distinctiveness of our University. This does not diminish the need for a coherent and distinctive undergraduate experience. How these programs are integrated in the future will play a major role in defining the distinctiveness of our University. Clearly, if research and teaching are to be truly integrated, we must place greater emphasis on programmatic and resource allocation decisions that enhance this distinctive strength of the University.

### **Strategic Value 3: Societal Responsibility**

Societal responsibility is the obligation of the university to respond to the expectations placed upon it by its external community, including inclusiveness of access, the quality and types of programs, and the application of our teaching and research to the needs of society.

#### **Societal Responsibility and the Life of the Mind**

Our societal responsibilities will be fulfilled within the context of five discrete, yet interdependent, qualities described in our Mission Statement: "A commitment to the pursuit and advancement of knowledge, and to that reinforcement of character, through co-curricular experiences, which enables [our students] to develop emotionally, physically and socially even as they mature intellectually; a commitment to the ideas of social justice; a commitment to freedom of thought, inquiry and expression, and to the rights and obligations of the faculty and students to pursue knowledge wherever it may lead; and, a commitment to profit intellectually and imaginatively from differences of opinion and of culture."

Within the context of these five qualities, it is asserted that the life of the mind should be a universal opportunity. Our societal responsibility includes the prevention of artificial barriers of access to that opportunity because of handicapping condition, economic, social or cultural factors such as gender, race, religion and sexual orientation. The university must always be inclusive, existing as a community of diverse individuals committed to benefiting from that diversity. At the same time, there must exist a set of core values to which all are expected to adhere.

#### **Responding to Both Our Internal and External Constituencies**

A university committed to societal responsibility is one that is internally

coherent and externally linked to its societal partners, including government, not-for-profit organizations, and the private sector. Inclusiveness of participation is encouraged as part of our mission as a public research university.

A University's societal responsibility is defined by both its internal and external stakeholders. Internally, we must vigorously strive to fulfill our commitment to providing an educational environment characterized by inclusiveness and quality. The University at Albany is committed to establishing and maintaining an internal community — students, faculty, administrators and staff — responsive to the needs, talents and interests of all members of a diverse society.

We must also continue to accept the responsibility of structuring our activities to respond to the requirements of our external community — including citizens, government, business and alumni. We must respond to their need of and expectation for relevant and convenient educational programs that provide opportunities for lifelong learning. And, we should support and promote programs of research and scholarship which can address a variety of societal needs.

### **The Inevitability of Change**

Change in our internal and external communities is inevitable. The economic status and demographics of our students, the need for a quality learning environment which addresses the needs of both traditional and non-traditional (e.g., adult) learners, and the curricular and pedagogic innovations needed to prepare students for an inter-connected, global society, are all indicative of changes required in our internal community.

Further, the changing and increasing needs of our external constituencies make ever more urgent the application of our teaching and research capabilities to the needs of society. Opportunities abound: the need for economic revitalization of our region; the fiscal constraints of state and federal governments; the need to improve health, education and other social services in the State; the increasing need for expertise in national and international issues.

The challenge to the University is to respond to these internal and external changes and needs in a strategic manner which will permit choices to be made among potentially competing opportunities. The inevitability of change — and yet the uncertainty of its nature - makes effective planning essential for the University at Albany. Our societal responsibilities require adoption of a strategic plan which provides broad latitude for entrepreneurship and rapid adaptation to emerging challenges and new opportunities.

### **Responding to the Challenges: Structures and Incentives**

The structures and incentives of the University need to support and recognize the critical role of the faculty in meeting, through their teaching and

scholarship, the needs of society. To fail to do so is to abandon our traditions, sacrifice our distinctiveness, and place ourselves at risk in terms of economic and societal support.

There are many potential constraints to our progress in this area. We must meet the need for sufficient resources to encourage experimentation and change. We must overcome a tendency to focus solely on individual interests at the expense of broader university concerns. And we must deal with the fact that our population of students, faculty and employees must become more diverse.

Further, we must expand our relationships with our many external communities and strengthen our ability to communicate effectively our strengths, accomplishments and areas of possible collaboration. We must, as a faculty, work harder to look beyond our campus borders. We must recognize that our external constituencies do not necessarily understand the possible relevance (and importance) of our research activities in contrast to our teaching mission. And, we must identify ways to overcome the structural insularity of our campus facilities.

The foregoing list of constraints is only a portion of those that exist. While each represents an opportunity for institutional growth, we must also recognize and acknowledge the inevitability of conflict as we seek to enhance the role of our institution in fulfilling our responsibility to society. Indeed, what some colleagues may see as a constraint to increasing our institution's responsiveness to societal needs (and, by so doing, increase the financial support of their research and teaching through new partnerships), others may see as protection from too deep an engagement with our society. A workable consensus for change, rather than unanimity, will have to guide our strategic planning in this area.

#### **Strategic Value 4: Innovation Through Technology**

Innovation through technology reflects the commitment to creatively harness new technologies in the development of innovative curricular programs and pedagogy, and to prepare students to be contributing citizens in a world that is being transformed by technology.

#### **The Technology Challenge**

To seize the opportunities and master the challenges of the Information Age, the University at Albany must embrace innovation and harness new technological tools which are inexorably transforming the nature of higher education and the way we learn. If we are to remain nationally competitive as a research university, we must assure the institutional flexibility which will be required for the campus to keep pace with rapid change. Indeed, our *Mission Statement* states our commitment to encouraging the development of "...curricula characterized by innovation."

#### **The Importance of Innovation**

Increased access to communication and information technologies must be regarded as a major institutional priority. We will need to be innovative if we are to identify the advantages and opportunities these technologies present to us at every step — for recruiting and retaining students, for enriching interactions between faculty and students, for reaching out beyond physical campus boundaries; for creating and disseminating new and inherited knowledge; and for fostering the regional, national, and global exchange of ideas.

We must also look to technology to improve our administrative systems, reduce bureaucratic processes, put more information directly into the hands of users, and generate information in a form that is more timely and more accurate, as well as more easily understood and analyzed.

Advances in information technology are shrinking the world and making the learning environment less bound by place and time. Satellite hookups, the Internet, interactive web sites and fax machines are transforming the distribution of information and images. By harnessing these new technologies, innovative and more effective curricular programs and pedagogy will be possible. We need to recognize that these technologies are capable of transforming the learning environment, and we must be creative in utilizing them to extend our reach as an institution of learning.

Each year brings to campus a new group of freshmen who are technologically better prepared than the last. During their time at the University, we must assure that they master these information tools so that they can be fully-contributing members of an inter-connected global society. To fulfill this responsibility to our students, University faculty and staff must themselves be technologically proficient so they are more able to enhance the campus learning environment.

### **The Value of Technology to a Research University**

Such new (and constantly evolving) information technologies are vitally important to knowledge creation and, hence, the University's status as a major research university. The research accomplishments of Albany's faculty have propelled the University to high rankings among the nation's public research universities. As an institution, we must make the financial choices necessary to assure the continued competitiveness of our faculty.

We must provide the technological infrastructure necessary for the research programs of our faculty. Further, highly trained support staff are critical resources in providing appropriate institutional support.

### **Challenges**

Clearly, an up-to-date technology program in a research university environment is costly and resource-intensive. Communications hardware, state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, and the institutionalization of programs to

ensure continuing faculty, student and staff development all require significant up-front investment and constant infusions of capital, even in a funding environment that remains, at best, steady-state.

While external funding for research will absorb some costs, the campus will have to make up the difference by encouraging a culture of entrepreneurship which provides a setting where governmental agencies and business partners will be encouraged to share the investment with us. Reallocation of resources will also be required if we are to provide the technology infrastructure essential to realizing the University's values of engaged learning and discovery.

To make the investment worthwhile, there must be a corresponding "attitude of support" within the University community. The potential for technology to bring about real improvement in the learning process has already been admirably demonstrated in many quarters of the campus. For many of our faculty, students and staff, the use of communication technology has already become second nature.

The challenge before the University is to provide the remaining members of the academic community with access to technology and, along with that access, the support required to develop their own capabilities and demonstrate the tremendous potential of new technologies to an enhanced learning environment.

### **Strategic Value 5: Distinctiveness**

#### **Investing strategically in distinctive and distinguished programs**

#### **Investing in Strength**

At a time of declining State resources, responsibly planning for the future requires us to refine and promote a plan of strategic investment. As we make key decisions about investing our resources strategically, we must focus our efforts not only on programs that are *distinctive* - uniquely reflecting our values - but also *distinguished*, marked by eminence, excellence and extraordinary achievement. At the same time, we must identify and support academic programs of evolving excellence.

Our fiscal strength derives from a number of sources: State funding, student tuition, federal and corporate sponsors, and private donors. We must do all we can to maximize these revenues by sharply defining and communicating our areas of distinctive competitiveness. But we must accomplish this while staying true to our commitment to be a comprehensive university, with vibrant programs that embody our own values across the disciplines.

Successfully positioning ourselves among public research universities will increase our access to funding and allow us to strengthen external support. To stabilize, indeed to improve, our fiscal position, we must increase our support of the University at Albany programs that set us apart from other public (and

private) research universities, areas that provide a competitive advantage for our institution. We also need to identify *emerging* academic strengths, research areas and opportunities for outreach to our various communities that also reflect our academic values and represent additional opportunities for *Distinctiveness*. Indeed, our planning must be characterized by such investment in programs of both current and emerging strength.

Investment in strength will clearly require the reallocation of resources on campus. This reallocation, guided by strategic planning, must be undertaken in the context of our values of engaged learning, discovery, societal responsibility, and innovation through technology. We must judge programs according to these values and invest accordingly.

This University is already distinctive for many of its research and graduate programs, as well as many at the undergraduate level, which provide students with a flexible combination of rigorous and innovative academic programs. In addition, a number of our undergraduate programs and graduate programs can be described as distinguished when evaluated by nationally recognized measures.

We must ourselves apply similar objective criteria and recognized professional measures in assessing the strengths of individual programs and in reaching decisions regarding resource allocation. In each and every case, such decisions must reflect exceptional academic strength recognized at the regional, national and international levels. At the same time, we must invest in programs which have the potential for such national stature.

We must continue to address a concern within the University community about Albany's collective will and ability to cooperatively engage in strategic planning that invests in strength — and accept the outcome of decisions that follow.

We must also recognize and support the positive contributions that individual units, and school-wide and university-wide programs such as general education and research centers make to our goal of being known as a comprehensively distinctive and distinguished University.

### **Achieving Strength and Meeting Societal Needs through Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Academic programs that are central to this University's distinctiveness are not necessarily discipline-specific. Distinguished and distinctive programs occur at all levels of the University: at the level of schools and colleges; in departments; and in disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary institutes and centers. Indeed, resolving many of the most pressing issues facing society today often requires an interdisciplinary approach ... requires the collaboration of scholars with expertise in a wide range of disciplinary areas (e.g., issues in the environment, AIDS prevention, youth violence, health care delivery, K-12 education, etc.). In many instances of societal need, progress can only be made if research approaches are interdisciplinary in nature. The campus must support such

collaborative interdisciplinary initiatives. We must identify and overcome physical and administrative obstacles to such interdisciplinary activities.

We believe that a focus on distinctive and distinguished programs will promote the activities of interdisciplinary centers and institutes and foster a cooperative spirit of entrepreneurship. Equally important, this focus will provide an institutional framework that facilitates the academic initiatives of faculty whose teaching and public service interests, pedagogical practices, and research cross or transcend boundaries of more traditional disciplinary departments.

*Submitted by the University's Strategic Planning Committee, Provost Judy Genshaft, Chair, September 25, 1998.*

*Accepted by President Karen R. Hitchcock at the General Faculty Meeting, October 13, 1998.*

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University at Albany  
State University of New York