

Strategic Planning: Mission Sub-Committee
Concept Paper

MISSION

Elms College, a Catholic institution founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph, derives our distinctiveness from our mission: to educate a diverse group of students in a vibrant and supportive learning environment, thus forming ethical, principled, and caring individuals for themselves and for the world. The overarching priority in this section of the strategic plan is to articulate how Elms College plans to remain attentive to our distinctive mission both now- in the outcomes that we seek in our students- and for the future- as we are intentional about ensuring that we remain faithful to our founding mission.

Summary

Since its founding in 1928 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Elms College has upheld its Catholic identity and belief in the transformative power of a liberal arts education. In keeping with our founders' vision of making higher education accessible to all, Elms College is a diverse and vibrant community of students, faculty, and staff, committed to the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph to "unite neighbor to neighbor and neighbor to God without distinction."

Elms College advances its mission by educating creative, principled, and reflective thinkers poised to make meaningful contributions to their communities and professions. Our core values – faith, community, justice, and excellence – are not just aspirational; they are foundational and inform every facet of our life and work.

An Ever-Changing Landscape

For over half of its nearly century-long history, Elms College was staffed predominately by Sisters of St. Joseph and diocesan priests. The Sisters taught most courses, while priests taught philosophy and theology. In the late 1940s, three laymen were hired to teach laboratory sciences, but major faculty and administrative roles remained the domain of Sisters and priests until the mid-1960s. This period marked the beginning of a gradual shift to a more lay-inclusive faculty and staff.

By the early 1990s, as became the case for many Catholic institutions of higher education, the College's faculty and staff were composed primarily of laypeople. In 2024, only one Sister of St. Joseph and one diocesan priest serve at Elms College.

The longstanding presence of Sisters and priests on campus fostered an atmosphere that helped promote, in an organic way, fidelity to the College's Catholic identity and mission. As a growing number of individuals from various backgrounds join the ranks of Elms faculty and staff, and as we anticipate the day when no full-time Sister or priest may be assigned to Elms College, intentional strategic planning is crucial to ensure that future faculty and staff of Elms College remain steadfast around the mission of educating a diverse group of students in a vibrant and supportive learning environment, in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and moved by the charism of our founders.

In 2024, the College continues to advance our mission through: a revised liberal arts core in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition anchored around the College's core values of faith, community, justice, and excellence, beginning with First Year Seminar, where students are exposed to the college history, mission and the Catholic Social teachings, continuing through religious studies courses, extracurricular opportunities, and programming offered through The Institute for Theology and Pastoral Studies (ITPS), The St. Augustine Center for Ethics, Religion, and Culture (CERC), The Center for Equity and Urban Education (CEUE), D'Amour Center for Faculty Teaching Excellence, and The Office of Campus Ministry. One of the consistent threads of this strategic plan is the articulation of the outcome that our mission statement seeks for Elms College graduates in our contemporary world. Rooted in faith, educated in mind, compassionate in heart, and responsive to civic and social obligations, Elms College students are empowered to effect positive changes in the community and in the world. In our increasingly polarized yet pluralistic society, the College aims for an Elms graduate to be distinctively well-prepared to be an ethical and just leader in their field.

Strategic Priorities

- 1. Implementation of a revised Liberal Arts Core in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.** The D'Amour Center for Faculty Teaching Excellence (DCFTE), will work to articulate the mission and core values of the college into the liberal arts core. Working across disciplines and the institution, the D'Amour Center will strengthen the connection between the mission and the liberal arts core through professional development and faculty initiatives integrating the revised curriculum into their teaching (See Relevance Priority 1,). Under the leadership of the VPAA, the D'Amour Center, the Curriculum Committee, and other relevant committees will pay particular attention to ensure that the implementation of the core curriculum produces the outcomes that this strategic plan seeks for an Elms graduate.
- 2. Implementation of co-curricular programming in support of the mission.** Working closely with the Special Assistants to the President, the CERC, the VPSA will ensure the infusion of a sense of mission into student activities and athletics. The Elms College Ethical Leadership program will be an important vehicle to prepare ethical and just leaders to effect positive changes in their community and the world. Grant money will

also be sought for mission-related travel to places like LePuy, France where the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded.

- 3. Planning for future fidelity to the Mission.** A Mission Integration Officer (MIO) is needed to ensure ongoing fidelity to the College's Catholic identity and mission, as we prepare for the future. During Year One of the Strategic Plan, job descriptions for a full-time and part-time Mission Integration Officer will be developed. This process will involve widespread consultation with all major stakeholders, including faculty and staff. Specific input will be sought from the Chief Diversity Officer and the directors of ITPS, CERC, CEUE, DCFTE, Campus Ministry as well as the special assistants to the President in developing the job description. Grant opportunities to fund this new position and office will also be explored during Year One.

Contingent upon fundraising, by the end of Year Two, the position of Mission Integration Officer will be posted, and interviews will be undertaken.

In Year Three, the newly created Office of Mission Integration will begin its work. This includes intentional efforts to share an appreciation of the College's mission and the many ways the mission informs all that the College does, throughout offices that directly interface with students (i.e., admissions, student accounts, financial aid, and student activities.)

- 4. Human Resources for Mission.** The Special Assistants to the President will work directly with the Director of Human Resources to include an attentiveness to mission in creating job descriptions, recruiting and onboarding new employees, and evaluating employees.

Finally, succession planning pertinent to the positions of special assistant for charism and mission and special assistant for Catholic identity will also take place during Year Three.