

Strategic Planning: Relevance Sub-Committee  
Concept Paper

**RELEVANCE**

*In the new Massachusetts environment, the overarching priority of this section of the strategic plan is to clearly articulate the value and relevance of a private, Elms education: to prepare real-world-ready, ethical and principled leaders and doers both traditionally and flexibly for the benefit of our students and our employers-partners, in selected areas.*

**Summary**

At the core of a holistic Elms College education is the passion to educate our students in keeping with our Mission Statement, which is anchored in our Catholic heritage and the Charism of our Founders, the Sisters of Saint Joseph. By serving our students, we also serve the local and global community. To serve our students well, we must think strategically to utilize the best of Elms College, through personalized instruction and academic support, experience in accessible programming for all students, and a dedication to helping a diversity of students in a diversity of settings. We must offer relevant programs and learning experiences that flexibly prepare students to be career-ready and life-long learners.

**Overview**

As Elms College prepares for the future, we must acknowledge the changing environment in which we recruit students: fewer high school graduates, the new Massachusetts initiatives for free community college and extended Pell grants for public higher education, and many students looking for affordability and accessibility as essential program features. We must be prepared for the intensively competitive environment in which we offer academic programs to prospective students. To be relevant, we must clearly articulate the Elms advantage by embracing and communicating the essential and distinctive components of the Elms experience and the outcomes that make the case for an Elms education. Our value added is the following: we prepare ethical leaders and doers to be career-ready and career-advancement-ready, with the skill set to be successful life-long learners in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

The new Liberal Arts and Sciences Core, intimately tied to experiential learning and innovation, explicitly and distinctively reflects the Elms College Mission, Core Values, our Catholic Identity as manifested by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, our focus on ethical development, and the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching. It is an invitation to all students to expand our understanding of human diversity in a pluralistic society. In addition, the core must be communicated as an integral and distinctive

component of an Elms' holistic education, known and articulated by all in the Elms' community as what shapes an Elms College graduate.

### **Relevance—Areas of Focus**

1. A distinctive and relevant Elms undergraduate education manifested through the new Liberal Arts and Sciences Core, experiential learning, ethical development, and innovation.
2. Ensure that high-quality online learning is an essential component of teaching and learning at Elms College.
3. Develop and launch career and workforce-aligned academic programming for non-traditional students, to grow Continuing Education students.

### **A Distinctive and Relevant Elms Undergraduate Education manifested through the new Liberal Arts and Sciences Core, Experiential Learning, Ethical Development, and Innovation**

Ensure that the knowledge, skills, and outcomes reflected in the revised Elms College Liberal Arts and Sciences Core are fully integrated into a distinctive and holistic undergraduate education that embraces diverse perspectives, preparing all of our students for life-long learning and success.

Relevant elements will include:

- A coherently implemented liberal arts core, centered around the mission and core values of faith, community, justice, and excellence;
- Internships and other experiential learning opportunities;
- Innovation Challenge for First-Year students;
- Academic and co-curricular ethical leadership development;
- Opportunities for spiritual development and reflection;
- Data and artificial intelligence literacy essential for all careers.

Elms College will educate students to be ethically and morally centered citizens of the world with essential 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills, and ready to lead in an increasingly pluralistic society.

### **Ensure that online learning is an essential component of teaching and learning at Elms College**

1. Guided by a Vision Statement on Online Learning, prepare a *New Academic Program Plan: 2025-2027* for the development, approval and launch of new online undergraduate and graduate programs through the Kirley School that offer flexibility and accessibility, initiating at least three new programs by 2027. This plan should be developed concurrently and collaboratively with the multi-year Strategic Enrollment and Finance Plan.

2. As part of the Kirley School of Continuing Education's plan to stabilize and grow undergraduate bachelor's degree completion enrollment from community colleges, thoroughly assess the effectiveness of the various program modalities (fully in-person, hybrid, synchronous online, asynchronous online).
3. Develop, market and launch a full suite of affordable online summer courses with core and select major-specific courses to provide opportunities for students to jump start or catch up on requirements.

**Develop and launch career and workforce-aligned programming for non-traditional students**

1. Utilizing community needs assessment data, develop and launch microcredentials, certificates, certifications, modules, and technical and associate degree programs that provide immediate skills development, and multiple pathways to a full bachelor's degree.
2. To better engage with the business community, and to ensure that new workforce-aligned programs meet the needs of employer and employee, Elms College will put in place organizational structures and processes within the Kirley School that will facilitate connecting with the local community, gathering and analyzing career skill needs data, and sharing out the information widely to the Elms community.
3. Develop a four-course Dual Enrollment Career Pathways to guide high school students toward an area of interest, e.g., Nursing, Criminal Justice, Biology and Pre-Medical, Education, and Business and form an Early College partnership with a local school to create a pathway to a designated degree.