



## STRATEGIC PLAN, 2017-2022

### OUR MISSION

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) is the Commonwealth's public liberal arts college and a campus of the Massachusetts state university system. MCLA promotes excellence in learning and teaching, innovative scholarship, intellectual creativity, public service, applied knowledge, and active and responsible citizenship. MCLA prepares its graduates to be practical problem solvers and engaged, resilient global citizens.

### OUR VALUES

- **Access:** We believe a high quality liberal arts education should be available and affordable to all who aspire to it and are prepared for its challenges. MCLA is committed to providing this opportunity.
- **Critical Thinking:** Through MCLA's role as leader, convener, and partner, we cultivate critical thinking and analysis in our learning and teaching. We promote a spirit of informed and open-ended inquiry. Our community members demonstrate consideration, deliberation, and planning in addressing challenges and opportunities in our society.
- **Discovery and Understanding:** We understand intellectual disciplines and specific courses of study interact dynamically in academic and co-curricular experiences. We believe in strengthening student, faculty, and community interaction through engaging coursework, shared research, and service.
- **Global Awareness:** We know that a liberal arts education affords students an appreciation of the wider world, both as a subject of intellectual discovery and through engagement with our society. We work to create and sustain the breadth of curriculum, experiences, and opportunities that lead us all to understand our active roles as knowledgeable global citizens.
- **Inclusive Community:** MCLA is committed to creating a campus climate and culture of mutual respect that represents and honors diversity in our society. We celebrate this diversity and affirm the dignity and worth of all people. We intentionally integrate topics of social, cultural, and physical diversity in the curricular, co-curricular, and work life of our community.
- **Innovation, Experimentation and Creativity:** We promote creativity and inquiry, and the role of a liberal arts institution to provide students with the freedom and means to explore ideas and take intellectual and creative risks.
- **Leadership:** We believe that leadership is a shared responsibility, and encourage all members of the MCLA community to develop their affinity for leadership through formal coursework, professional development, co-curricular training, and practical application. We cultivate leadership opportunities and development programs to further these goals.
- **Lifelong Learning:** We empower learners to develop habits of learning that have integrity and engender respect for tradition. We deploy 21<sup>st</sup> century tools for learning in our academic and co-curricular programs that prepare students to be informed, engaged, and capable learners.
- **Practicality and Application:** We believe that the disciplines of arts, sciences, and professional studies empower individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values and ethics. In its programs and initiatives MCLA forges the connection among academic study, experiential learning, civic engagement, and future success.
- **Stewardship:** We manage our resources responsibly and sustainably, and offer a variety of educational, cultural, and recreational experiences for the campus and local communities. We provide unique resources for the greater Berkshire region. We encourage a spirit of service among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees as stewards of the future.

## OUR POSITION TODAY AND OUR VISION FOR TOMORROW IN BROAD STROKES

**Today**, MCLA is a small-but-mighty public liberal arts institution offering a high-quality, affordable education in a close-knit living-learning community where students can engage and excel right from the start.

One of only 29 public liberal arts colleges in the nation, MCLA is **distinguished** by its approach to integrating the liberal arts with professional studies and by a unique location that enriches students' overall educational experience. The College is further distinguished by the talented faculty and staff it attracts, its distinctive niche programs, the wide range of learning and leadership opportunities it offers, and the accomplishments of its alumni.

As the College plans for the future and prepares to make strategic changes where necessary to address critical issues, confront challenges and seize opportunities, certain commitments **will remain** firm, among them MCLA's commitment to:

- ensuring its education is accessible to all and challenging for all;
- promoting excellence and quality across the board;
- building its educational program on the foundation of the liberal arts and sciences;
- being a diverse and inclusive community;
- being a place where no one is a stranger and no one falls through the cracks;
- connecting with our external community and serving as a cultural, intellectual, and economic resource; and
- responding to regional and Commonwealth needs in creative, value-adding ways.

Building on our strengths and remaining faithful to our core commitments, we aspire to be even better and stronger **in five years**. The MCLA we envision in 2021 will be a nationally known, top-choice destination for those seeking an affordable liberal arts education of the highest quality; indeed, we aspire to be the #1-ranked public liberal arts college in the nation by 2021.

The College will be well known for a cutting-edge, innovative, 21<sup>st</sup>-century curriculum rooted in the liberal arts that also is responsive to and connected with the evolving world of work. MCLA will be a model academic community where faculty and staff thrive and students' lives are transformed. Diversity will be reflected at all levels of the institution, including in leadership roles.

We believe students should view their education as an investment, not a debt, and accordingly the MCLA we envision in 2021 will be a place where every qualified admitted student's full financial need will be met. We believe it is possible for MCLA to lead the state public higher education system in retention and graduation rates, and so we will work toward that goal.

MCLA will remain deeply rooted in its community and region, and by 2021 our engagement with other organizations and institutions will be both deeper and wider, mutually benefitting our students and our partners. MCLA will be an institution that is nimble and flexible, not afraid to make change or take calculated risks. The College's funding sources will be more diversified and adequate to support ongoing operations and strategic investments in support of the vision and goals.

## OUR PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

### Selected Facts and Trends that Likely Will Influence MCLA's Options, Choices, and Future Paths

#### The Environment in Which We Operate

- There is and will be an inherent tension within the higher education sector between two goals: lifelong learning and workforce preparation. (Source: DHE)
- MCLA will continue to believe and assert that liberal-arts-educated students are well prepared to engage in a lifetime of further self-organized learning, to respond to the likelihood of frequent vocational opportunities and changes, and to participate purposefully in civic life.
- There are 660,000 college-educated workers set to retire in the next decade in Massachusetts. Demographic changes are going to create degree shortages unless colleges and employers are proactive in opening educational access wider. (Source: DHE)
- By 2022, the overall rate at which young Massachusetts residents earn college degrees will pivot from growth to decline unless college completion rates increase for all students. (Source: DHE)
- The model of anytime-anywhere learning is a challenge to the full-time residential model. (Source: DHE)
- Competitive student recruitment markets and shifting demographics will create a smaller pool of more selective applicants in the traditionally aged, college-going segment of 18-23-year olds.
- National trends related to college choice, such as staying closer to home and opting to commute due to costs, will require MCLA to utilize new marketing strategies.
- Shifting student needs and profiles, both financially and personally (in terms of college-readiness, mental health support, medical support, and dietary needs), will require expanded and shifted professional development and resourcing for existing staff and operational areas, as well as new staffing patterns.
- Future college-bound students are going to be drawn from a pool more diverse than today's. Some 30% of the Commonwealth's children under age five are African-American and Latino/a. Through 2028, Latino/a students are the only group of high school graduates expected to increase significantly in number. (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2012)
- Free-college programs in states such as New York (Excelsior Scholarship) and Rhode Island have begun to, and will continue to, cause enrollment losses from those states for MCLA.
- A free-college initiative in Massachusetts could spur enrollments, though the impact (i.e., size of any increase) would likely depend on the nature of the initiative.
- The City of North Adams will improve its economic base through expanded cultural and lodging enterprises (such as expansion of Mass MoCA, planning for an Extreme Train Museum, and the Redwood Motel project).
- The demographics of North Adams and the surrounding area will continue to make it challenging for MCLA to attract and retain diverse faculty and staff, who are as eager to see themselves reflected in their communities as diverse MCLA students are eager to see themselves reflected in the College's adult population (faculty and staff).

### Financial Realities and Constraints Affecting How We Operate and Our Future Options

- The new federal administration could adversely affect availability of federal loans for students in certain programs of study or, potentially, students who choose to attend liberal arts institutions. Diminishing funds for federal loans and grants will increase the financial aid gap for MCLA students.
- The financial need of our student population, as reflected in Pell-eligibility rate (which is the highest among Massachusetts state universities and also among the 29 public liberal arts institutions in the country), will continue to put pressure on the institutional financial aid budget at MCLA.
- MCLA will remain reluctant to increase fees at the pace of its peer institutions because of the high-financial-need demographic of its student body.
- State funding will remain insufficient to cover even the college's payroll (currently \$22M).
- MCLA's most significant unfunded obligation is the cost of collective bargaining increases. While the Legislature typically funds the first year of any new labor contract, for every three-year cycle, the unfunded payroll costs in years two and three must be absorbed by the College's operating budget. (Currently this cost is estimated at nearly \$1.7M.)
- Minimal funding from DCAMM, MSCBA and bond bills for capital projects will require investment by MCLA in fundraising in order to generate necessary funding for a variety of additional capital projects. The state reimbursement rate for deferred maintenance/preventive maintenance of MCLA's infrastructure, 50%, is unlikely to improve.
- The cost of maintaining a 24-hour campus infrastructure does not vary much with student volume. If variable revenue volumes (relating to enrollment and tuition/fees) drop below the cost to maintain that infrastructure, the only expense areas where one could make cuts/find savings to balance the operating budget are the few variable expenses that MCLA is able to manipulate. Of these, deferred maintenance is one, and payroll is by far the largest.

### **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

As the College pursues its mission and vision, and as it addresses the opportunities and challenges ahead, the following factors will be most critical to MCLA's success:

- Sufficient public and private funding from stable, sustainable sources
- A sense of hope and optimism, coupled with support from faculty and staff for the vision and goals
- High-quality, committed staff and faculty with time and space to dedicate themselves to their work and achieving their goals
- A public profile, strong brand identity, and clear messaging to answer the question, *Why MCLA?*
- Champions in the Legislature and strong support from all MCLA boards (trustees, Foundation, alumni)
- An assertive and sustained approach to diversity and inclusion
- Optimal, stable enrollment
- Clear, effective, transparent internal communication
- Community relationships
- Attractive, competitive infrastructure
- Resilience

## OUR GOALS FOR 2017-2022 AND SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

### **GOAL 1: Respond to student and community needs in ways that enhance MCLA's distinctiveness, its role as a pioneering educational leader, and its value as an engine of regional growth**

#### Strategies:

- a. Fortify the integration of a liberal arts foundation with career preparation at MCLA in ways that will distinguish both our students and our institution
- b. Redesign MCLA's core curriculum to enhance its educational impact and also establish it as one of MCLA's marquee programs
- c. Nurture innovative faculty scholarship and continue to apply emerging pedagogies in ways that enrich learning and distinguish MCLA as an educational leader
- d. Leverage the unique cultural, natural, and economic resources of MCLA's location to offer distinctive programs at the intersection of established programmatic strengths, emerging student interests, and evolving needs of the wider community
- e. Expand living-learning communities and more effectively integrate academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular programming to provide an intentionally holistic student experience
- f. Integrate high-impact practices (HIPs) throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum, expanding opportunities for students to engage in experiential, community-based learning
- g. Promote greater interdisciplinary and inter-departmental dialogue, program planning, and collaboration
- h. Provide more diverse and flexible program delivery options to meet the needs of non-traditional, non-residential students
- i. Create opportunities for faculty, staff and students to bring their talent and the College's resources to bear on the social and economic issues of concern in communities beyond campus
- j. Develop more transfer pathways from community colleges and increase dual-enrollment programming that provides pre-/early-college experiences
- k. Work creatively and in collaboration with the community to expand access to an MCLA education by underserved populations and students whose academic preparation and socioeconomic status disadvantage them

### **GOAL 2: Enhance student persistence, completion, and preparation for post-college success**

#### Strategies:

- a. Take a more intentional and integrated approach to promoting student self-awareness, understanding of cognitive processes, and self-regulated learning
- b. Continue to build a culture of high-quality, inclusive teaching and learning grounded in evidence-based practices
- c. Continuously put student success at the center of the MCLA community and set clear, consistent expectations regarding the foundation and benchmarks for success
- d. Place renewed emphasis on advising as fundamental to student success and retention
- e. Ensure that all students can access resources, support systems and tools that facilitate adjustment to college life and promote social and intellectual development throughout their college experience
- f. Encourage and support the creation of additional communities and affinity groups to foster sense of belonging

- g. Provide all students with comprehensive career services that are well integrated with their academic endeavors
- h. More fully integrate transfer and non-traditional students into the life of the College so they experience a deeper sense of identity and connection
- i. Strengthen and deepen alumni networks and local connections that expand post-graduation transition pathways for all students
- j. Meet a higher percentage of student financial need so that cost of attendance is not a barrier to completion
- k. Make our programs and spaces more available to those with a variety of physical, learning and sensory disabilities or conditions

### **GOAL 3: Strengthen and demonstrate our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion**

#### Strategies:

- a. Promote a pluralistic student experience and a campus culture that embraces diversity, cultural awareness and sensitivity, and social responsibility
- b. Ensure students of diverse backgrounds see themselves reflected in the faculty, administration and staff on campus and in the College's leadership
- c. Provide faculty, staff and administrators continuing education/training on issues relating to diversity, inclusive pedagogies and programs, creating respectful classroom and office spaces, and managing difficult conversations
- d. Ensure the experiences of underrepresented communities are reflected in course offerings, programs, and high-impact practices
- e. Create, coordinate and maintain transparent policies and processes that model inclusion and equity
- f. Create programs and designate accessible physical space to promote interaction and collaboration among diverse and marginalized groups on campus
- g. Pursue collaborations and other opportunities to help students feel more welcome in and connected to the North Adams community

### **GOAL 4: Attract and retain great talent and promote a campus climate that is collegial, collaborative, and creative**

#### Strategies:

- a. Foster a supportive campus culture and climate aligned with MCLA's core values
- b. Develop creative approaches to building a more robust and more diverse pipeline of future employees and future leaders
- c. Enhance support for new staff and faculty who relocate to the region, and connect all faculty and staff more extensively to the city and region
- d. Expand professional development opportunities and emphasize lifelong learning for faculty and staff
- e. Align workloads and role-related expectations of faculty and staff at MCLA with the resources and time necessary to meet those expectations effectively and efficiently
- f. Strengthen the sense of community and unity within and beyond campus
- g. Expand opportunities for teamwork and collaboration among members of the campus community and across departments and divisions

- h. Encourage, facilitate and reward innovative thinking and entrepreneurial solutions throughout the College

### **GOAL 5: Improve internal communications and enhance our external reputation**

#### Strategies:

- a. Develop and implement strategies to improve the flow of information on campus and promote greater transparency around decision making
- b. Ensure all members of the campus community can easily access up-to-date, accurate information related to policies, procedures, programs, and other matters affecting how students, faculty and staff function on campus
- c. Increase informal interaction and community-building among faculty, staff, students, administration, and alumni
- d. Promote a heightened sense of pride in MCLA's identity and the accomplishments of members of the MCLA community
- e. Continue efforts to promote public awareness of and appreciation for the value of a liberal arts education and MCLA's status as a top-tier public liberal arts education
- f. Fortify MCLA's unique "brand" and aggressively showcase the College's distinctive strengths and competitive advantages, including its size and location
- g. Draw the wider world's attention to the impact MCLA has as a highly invested and innovative partner in promoting the local region's health and prosperity

### **GOAL 6: Improve facilities and technology infrastructure in support of our mission**

#### Strategies:

- a. Leverage opportunities to bring Campus Master Plan priorities to fruition
- b. Renovate or improve current College space on and off campus as required to enhance the experience of teaching, learning, living, working, engaging in research or creative pursuits, and socializing
- c. Continue to promote environmental responsibility as a core institutional value and work toward environmental sustainability
- d. Assure that the campus is safe, secure, and conveniently connected to North Adams and the region
- e. Continue to enhance library resources and advance the vision of a learning commons model
- f. Strengthen our technology infrastructure to support the evolving demands of instructional, classroom and communication needs
- g. Provide students, staff and faculty with the support and training they need to expand the use of technology and information resources

### **GOAL 7: Promote enhanced organizational effectiveness**

- a. Promote active, collaborative, and effective governance at all levels
- b. Promote greater transparency in decision making, and ensure faculty and staff feel they have a voice in setting strategic direction and priorities
- c. Align human and physical resources with program development, student enrollment and success patterns, and other changing needs
- d. Expand data-driven assessment efforts, program reviews, and decision making throughout the College

- e. Create and institutionalize an inclusive process for developing and vetting new programs to ensure alignment with College priorities and Commonwealth goals
- f. Promote innovative practices such as design thinking across campus to address issues and solve problems
- g. Foster a campus culture that promotes active citizenship and shared accountability
- h. Eliminate redundancies and streamline processes

## **GOAL 8: Diversify revenues and build a more sustainable financial model**

### Strategies:

- a. Advocate at the state and federal level for positive changes in government funding of higher education, student loan programs, and grants
- b. Pursue opportunities to reduce costs through sharing of resources, conservative budgeting, and careful fiscal management
- c. Develop a multi-year enrollment plan, targeting growth opportunities that can maximize revenues without overextending
- d. Enhance graduate and continuing education offerings and entrepreneurial programs to increase non-state revenue to the College
- e. Create a culture of stewardship and philanthropy that inspires students, faculty, staff and alumni to give back and help strengthen the College
- f. Expand individual donor base and grant funding in support of strategic priorities
- g. Utilize campus facilities and capacities to generate incremental income