

**Reshaping the Simpson Experience:  
Preparing Students to See, Serve  
and Shape the World**

**Working Draft  
October 5, 2007**

**Prepared for  
Simpson College Board of Trustees**

Dear Friends,

It is with a keen sense of excitement that we present the results of our yearlong strategic thinking process. It has been a year filled with hard work, helpful insights, and multiple opportunities to view Simpson College and its future possibilities. The culmination of that work is captured in this document, “Reshaping the Simpson Experience: Preparing Students to See, Serve, and Shape the World.”

The results of Simpson’s strategic thinking process establish a strong direction for the college’s future development, while also reaffirming many of our historic values and traditions. Most importantly, the planning process resulted in a strategic plan that proposes a set of learning initiatives which we believe will prepare our students to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. These learning initiatives focus on:

- Intellectual and practical skills
- Integrative learning
- Responsible citizenship in a global context
- Leadership
- Personal and social responsibility

Each of the above five initiatives are outlined in more detail in this document. During the coming year, the Simpson community will develop a long-range plan to integrate each of these initiatives into the curriculum over the next three to five years. Once completed, this new curriculum will prepare students in a way found at very few institutions around the globe.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of the individuals and groups that have worked so hard to complete the strategic portion of our planning process during the past year. The high quality of their work has been obvious to those of us who have been privileged to listen to their discussions and to read their preliminary reports. The initiatives that have been developed will truly transform the education of our students, and in doing so will better prepare our students to live successful and satisfying lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Byrd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

John W. Byrd  
President

## **Defining characteristics: building on our heritage**

A valuable outcome of the process was the reaffirmation of the college's heritage and mission. Our constituent groups clearly felt the college should maintain its important place as a selective, church-related, comprehensive college, strongly grounded in the liberal arts; and dedicated to excellence in private higher education.

In addition to reaffirming the mission, our stakeholders believe the college should continue to honor and build on the core values of community, quality, and respect, as well as the three historic traditions that have shaped the college throughout its history: its liberal arts tradition, its relationship to the United Methodist Church, and its commitment to valuing diversity.

With the resolve to honor and strengthen our heritage and values, we envision a future where Simpson College will:

- Strengthen its role as a comprehensive institution strongly grounded in the liberal arts with a strong regional reputation and growing national visibility.
- Maintain its status as the region's premier provider of evening, weekend, and selected graduate programs.
- Assemble and reward an energized and productive faculty, administration, and staff who embrace the mission of the college and believe passionately in the teaching-centered approach of the college.
- Increase the diversity of the faculty, staff, administration, and student body to levels that reflect the diversity in our state and region.
- Provide technology and facilities that support teaching and learning and enhance student growth and development inside and outside the classroom and laboratory.
- Create a vibrant campus environment that engages students in quality extra-curricular programs in athletics, music, theatre, Greek life, and through the myriad of clubs and organizations on campus.
- Become an exemplary model for other organizations with regard to sustainability and other environmental issues.
- Maintain a strong financial model characterized by:
  - Annual growth in the Simpson Fund
  - Annual growth in the endowment resulting from prudent investing and increased success in planned giving
  - Growing enrollments that meet the resource needs of the college

## **Success in a changing world: reshaping the Simpson Experience**

When talented and dedicated faculty and staff work with well-prepared and motivated students, the potential for success is virtually unlimited. For generations of students, that defining formula has been at the heart of the “Simpson Experience.” And while it may appear simple, the true complexity of the Simpson Experience is expressed in an overriding and unwavering commitment to the unique ambitions, goals, and dreams that each student brings to the collegiate experience. The Simpson Experience is further defined by extra-curricular activities, internship opportunities, and service to others – all of which reflect the values and traditions that have made Simpson such a special place to live, learn, and serve for over 147 years.

But in working to understand the changing world our students will both serve and shape, we have learned that much more will be expected of them. The strategic planning process – and the resulting learning initiatives that emanate from that plan – will reshape and strengthen the Simpson Experience.

### **The future begins to emerge: ideas that will lead to action**

As input from more than 1,000 people was evaluated, several key concepts emerged that will serve as guideposts as the major initiatives of this plan are implemented. These concepts are categorized under the three broad areas outlined below.

1. Develop a community that:
  - Values and celebrates diversity
  - Celebrates learning and academic achievement in a collaborative learning environment
  - Understands and acts on its core values
  - Supports a faculty who maintain a passion for their discipline
2. Develop a curriculum that:
  - Is cross-disciplinary and global
  - Incorporates experiential education
  - Requires transcultural experiences and develops cultural competence
  - Strengthens reading, writing, and critical thinking skills
  - Promotes leadership skills
3. Develop students who value:
  - Being a person of character
  - Being a responsible citizen in a global setting
  - Lifelong reflective learning
  - Liberal arts education and how that translates to engaged citizenship

## **The future defined: strategically reshaping the Simpson Experience**

From the above ideas related to community, curriculum, and student development, the major initiatives evolved. These are the pillars that will reshape the Simpson Experience in powerful ways, and prepare students to see, serve and shape the world.

- Intellectual and practical skills
- Integrative learning
- Responsible citizenship in a global context
- Leadership
- Personal and social responsibility

Importantly, these bear a close resemblance to the learning initiatives identified in a comprehensive national study by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. The study determined that higher education must change along these lines so that students have the tools necessary for a lifetime of success.

### **A closer look: what each learning initiative means to future Simpson students**

To understand each of the strategic initiatives, more specific descriptions and examples are helpful. These strategies focus upon curricular revision, creating a 24/7 learning environment, enhancing the capacity of faculty and staff, and developing structure and resources necessary to effectively implement these strategies. Each of these initiatives fit with the mission, culture and resources of Simpson, and are designed to build on the historic strengths of the college and position Simpson as one of the premier institutions in the United States.

#### Intellectual and Practical Skills

Simpson must be a place where the liberal arts work. Therefore, we must constantly strive to provide an environment that encourages students to learn and demonstrate the core skills of educated citizenship: thinking critically and creatively; communicating effectively; the abilities of inquiry and analysis; quantitative and information competencies; and the ability to collaborate as a member of a team. The college is a place where intellectual rigor is supported and celebrated, and where campus-based learning is supported by opportunities for hands-on application. These are a sampling of initiatives that will support and sustain such a learning environment:

- Revise the general education curriculum to prepare students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and develop a comprehensive core curriculum with strengthened first-year and senior-year programs.

- Support the faculty and staff development programs to provide for skill enhancement in technology for all college employees and in teaching pedagogy for faculty.
- Adapt existing academic and college structures to better prepare students for the complex contemporary and enduring challenges of work and global citizenship.

### Integrative Learning

Integrative learning provides significant and meaningful learning opportunities for students to demonstrate both synthesis and application of knowledge in solving contemporary problems. Community service and service learning, internships, research and travel are all vital ways of enhancing and expanding the learning environment. A well-developed coordination of activities will serve as an effective way to interweave theory and practice at multiple levels for Simpson students. These are a sampling of initiatives that will maximize the impact of integrative learning at Simpson:

- Create a Center for Experiential Learning to coordinate campus-wide experiential and integrative learning programs.
- Increase support for student volunteerism, service learning, student research and student travel in order to involve students in experiential activities each year of their Simpson experience.
- Develop an experiential learning portfolio in which students translate theory to practice and engage in a vocational reflection with all service, internship, and trans-cultural experiences:

### Responsible Citizenship in a Global Context

Simpson College is intentional in assisting students to understand the responsibilities of being a global citizen. This includes understanding diversity in the United States as well as in the world. In addition, Simpson is in a unique position to help future world citizens develop an understanding of the social, economic and ethical implications of globalization. These are a sampling of initiatives that will support and sustain such a learning environment:

- Initiate a study abroad or domestic trans-cultural experiential requirement for all students including students in the evening and weekend programs.
- Recruit more international and minority students, faculty and staff.
- Create multiple connections with diverse organizations in Des Moines to facilitate local trans-cultural experiences.

### Leadership

Developing graduates who can serve as responsible leaders in their work environments as well as the communities in which they live is at the heart of what a Simpson education is about. The college is purposeful in developing leadership skills and potential in students. Leadership development is wide and deep – wide to meaningfully impact all students at Simpson and deep so that those students who desire can develop a significant concentration, both academic and experiential, in leadership. These are a sampling of

initiatives that will help move the college in implementing a comprehensive leadership development program:

- Implement a comprehensive leadership model that intentionally connects the theme of leadership and responsible citizenship and engages students from first through senior year both in and out of the traditional classroom.
- Increase student participation in leadership skill development through an expanded Wesley Service Scholars Program, residential learning communities, a quarterly leadership and character lecture series, coordinated academic course offerings and student retreats and conferences.
- Create a leadership certificate and leadership academic minor for students.

#### Personal and Social Responsibility

Simpson is committed to forming persons of personal integrity and character. The college mission encourages the cultivation of character and a commitment to social justice. Character education and civic responsibility requires significant strategy and Simpson is intentional in its efforts in order to aid student development in the area of personal and social responsibility. These are a sampling of initiatives that will allow the college focus more intentionally on character education:

- Incorporate character development into the core curriculum of the college.
- Communicate the values and virtues of the Simpson Experience and convey expectations of students to act with honor and integrity as they relate to all matters of behavioral and academic conduct.
- Strengthen college-wide support services that assist students to address ethical and behavioral challenges of contemporary college life and to examine, reflect and act on the moral and ethical challenges of contemporary society.

## **The next steps: development of a plan to integrate the initiatives into the curriculum**

Some of the steps necessary to integrate these initiatives are:

- Transition from strategic ideas to operational plans
- Review general education program and academic structure of the college
- Review programs and activities to determine how each will appropriately support the five strategic student-learning initiatives
- Develop long-range plans
- Build implementation plans into budget

The learning initiatives outlined here will begin the journey to realize a revitalized and improved Simpson Experience. The vision is set. The plan is clear. Simpson's future depends on our commitment to follow the vision and put the plan into action.