

Seaver 2020: In Pursuit of Excellence

A Strategic Plan for Seaver College

The Seaver College strategic plan is the result of significant discussion among the various stakeholders of Seaver College. It is rooted in and reflects the thinking and work provided by three principal sources: the most recent Seaver College vision statement, “Lighting the Path to Leadership;” the 2010 presidential address, “Boundless Horizons;” and the University strategic plan, “Pepperdine 2020: Boundless Horizons.” With these principle sources as a guide, this strategic plan strives to maintain the core values and genius of Seaver as an undergraduate school fully committed to delivering an educational experience that is academically rigorous and spiritually nourishing. It also aspires to outline a transformative educational experience that addresses the unique contemporary challenges of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex educational and global environment.

In his “Boundless Horizons” address, President Benton articulated five key themes for Pepperdine University and highlighted five areas of opportunity. His five themes were: advancing learning, knowledge, and scholarship; developing resources; building community; respecting diversity and promoting global understanding; and honoring God and heritage. He addressed the following five areas of opportunity: national and international engagement and presence, alumni leadership and institutional ownership, the library of the future, endowment and excellence, and right-sizing and financial stability.

The Pepperdine University strategic plan, “Pepperdine 2020: Boundless Horizons,” developed five goals for the University based on the president’s address. These University goals are: advance student learning and superior scholarship, strengthen our commitment to the faith mission of the University, build meaningful community and enduring alumni loyalty, increase institutional diversity consistent with our mission, and develop resources that support the aspiration to be a premier, global Christian university.

Using these three aforementioned documents and the Seaver College vision statement as a springboard, the Seaver College strategic plan articulates the manner in which the college will realize the five University goals through the remainder of this decade. This strategic plan also implicitly recognizes the historic value of mission and vision documents produced in previous periods of Pepperdine and Seaver’s history. These documents evidence a consistent emphasis upon the twin commitments of the University and college to provide a transformative educational experience that is simultaneously academically rigorous and spiritually nourishing, especially highlighting the powerful role students, faculty, staff, and administrators play in that experience. The following goals embrace and enrich those previous commitments.

This strategic plan addresses the focus and mission of Seaver College as a whole and so remains more general than specific in its application to the various entities of the college. It is assumed that particular areas of Seaver College (e.g., academic divisions, international programs, student affairs, Seaver alumni affairs, and enrollment management) will develop strategic initiatives that articulate the implementation of the college plan in their specific areas.

Goal 1 – Advance Student Learning and Superior Scholarship

Advancing student learning and producing superior scholarship at Seaver College will require continued and diligent attention to bringing together a distinctive type of student, faculty member, staff member, and administrator. Advancing student learning will require constant attentiveness to the curriculum, ensuring that the curriculum provides general education courses that are intellectually rigorous, integrative, reflect the best practices associated with a liberal education, and intersect meaningfully with the numerous majors and minors at Seaver College. The curriculum will also necessarily offer majors and minors that develop knowledge, skills, and abilities applicable to the current and future marketplace, to the mission of the college, and to the geographical setting of the college in Southern California on the Pacific Rim.

Advancing student learning will involve recruiting students who are intellectually curious, who desire an education that provides breadth of knowledge as well as depth of understanding, and who seek an education that is easily applicable to life challenges and societal needs. Producing superior scholarship will flourish as Seaver College continues to hire faculty and staff who are themselves lifelong learners actively engaged in meaningful research and scholarly productivity. Bringing together such students, faculty, and staff will result in a transformative educational experience that transcends the formal period of study and offers students the opportunity to engage in learning inside and outside the traditional classroom environment.

To fulfill this vision, Seaver College will:

1. Offer a curriculum that is uniquely relevant to the undergraduate experience while simultaneously preparing students for graduate school and the professional world. All curricular changes will seek to retain the best of the current curriculum while introducing innovative changes that enhance and enrich the learning experience. New curricular offerings, especially those using new format delivery systems such as online or hybrid learning, will move forward only after a successful pilot offering demonstrates that students perform as well or better in the new format.
2. Offer a curriculum that fully engages key high-impact practices most beneficial to high-achieving Seaver students. These practices will include, but not be limited to, intentional sequencing of courses with the major, capstone courses for each major, undergraduate research opportunities for all majors, internships, community-based learning experiences, and global learning opportunities through international study abroad experiences.
3. Deliver academic courses that reflect best pedagogical practices. These courses will highlight active and integrative learning, and demonstrate the interaction of discipline-specific knowledge in a multidisciplinary environment. These courses will also engage innovative approaches to student learning (e.g., the creative use of technology to enrich and expand the learning environment). Seaver courses and academic programs will strive to create synergy between action and reflection. Intentional learning necessarily involves reflecting upon our actions; our actions are then informed by our reflection.

4. Deliver courses that reflect the increasingly interdisciplinary world in which we live, and that address the distinctive foci of a faith-based institution (e.g., social justice issues, concern for the less advantaged, theological rationales for ethical discussions). These courses will demonstrate the positive ways in which theologically-informed scholarship advances learning, and the educational power of courses that view knowledge holistically.
5. Hire and incorporate support staff who are uniquely able to merge the cocurricular offerings with the curricular offerings. Create an educational environment where learning occurs throughout the campus. Provide opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to develop deep and sustained relationships.
6. Review and revise current graduate programs at Seaver College. Improve and empower those graduate offerings that have local geographical relevance, that uniquely fulfill the mission of the university, and that enrich and enhance the related undergraduate offerings.

Goal 2 – Strengthen Our Commitment to the Faith Mission of the University

Strengthening our commitment to the faith mission of the University will require sustained conversation and intentional action. Historically, Seaver College has wrestled with the relation of the college to the particular heritage of the University, Churches of Christ. To sustain and enrich commitment to the faith mission of the University, Seaver must regularly engage the discussion of faith in an academic environment and systematically evaluate presumed progress. The college needs to initiate renewed conversation not only about the role of a particular heritage in the faith commitment of the college, but also the imagery and language used to delineate that relationship, and the roles played by all participants in this most important endeavor.

In the past, Seaver College, like the rest of the University, has often suffered from language that suggested exclusiveness rather than inclusiveness and relied upon terminology such as “critical mass” that at times exacerbated the situation. “Critical mass” language, while useful in external discussions attempting to delineate the varied types of faith-based institutions, in intramural discussions, unintentionally suggests there are those belonging to the “uncritical mass.” Thankfully, we can shelve this language for more theological language and imagery that will strengthen the commitment of the entire college community to the faith mission of the University. Preferable language and imagery derives from the world of hospitality. If one envisions the college as a dwelling, then those inhabiting the dwelling as *permanent residents* are faculty, staff, and administrators, regardless of denominational affiliation. Students inhabit the dwelling as long-term guests who benefit greatly from the educational hospitality afforded them during their stay. Significantly, *all* faculty and staff have a role to play in offering hospitality. The unique role played by faculty and staff from Churches of Christ is to ensure that the entire community engages and supports the benefits and genius of the University’s-Restoration heritage.

Historically, Seaver College and the University have maintained a fairly singular interpretation of the faith mission of Pepperdine. “Member of the heritage” was almost exclusively defined as a

member of Churches of Christ. Pepperdine University began in an era that delineated rather precisely various constituencies of the Restoration tradition. It is time for Seaver (and the University) to embrace more fully its Restoration roots and heritage. In the broader Christian climate, and in the current Restoration climate, Seaver should be a leader in embracing the original ecumenical focus of this heritage and the importance of unity and inclusiveness so prominent in the earliest stages of the Restoration movement. Such a move would place Seaver at the forefront of dialogue among Christian universities struggling with the challenges of balancing inclusiveness and affirmation of all Christians while maintaining close ties with a particular religious heritage. It would also acknowledge the invaluable contributions brought to Seaver by faculty and staff members who belong to other Christian traditions. Such acknowledgement would allow students as our long-term guests to engage simultaneously the manifold diversity and theological unity of the Christian faith.

Seaver College should also take the lead in helping the University recapture the manifold blessings and theological insights offered by its Restoration heritage because many of these theological distinctives align well with the noblest virtues of a liberal education. These emphases include, but are not limited to,

- a vision of Christianity that is largely non-denominational in worldview,
- a relentless search for truth against a gracious theological backdrop that affirms those seeking that truth are “Christians only, not the only Christians,”
- a tireless pursuit to restore the genius of prior knowledge and understanding while refusing to canonize that knowledge as ultimate,
- an overriding concern to return always to original primary texts and sources for inspiration (*ad fontes*),
- an undying conviction that all are responsible for the delivery of academic excellence within the context of Christian mission (“priesthood of all believers”),
- an emphasis upon congregational autonomy (though all Christian universities may share several features in common, each individual university must work out its own unique contribution to that grand enterprise).

With these goals in mind, progress will occur in this area through the following initiatives:

1. Aggressively recruit and retain key student constituencies that uniquely fulfill the college’s commitment to its Restoration heritage and to its broader commitment to all Christian groups.
2. Surface and recruit faculty and staff from the Restoration heritage committed to advancing Seaver’s Christian mission and its drive for academic excellence.

Goal 3 – Build Meaningful Community and Enduring Alumni Loyalty

Building meaningful community and enduring alumni loyalty enhances and enriches the previously mentioned goals. Continuing with the hospitality metaphor, the meaningful community created while students inhabit Seaver’s dwelling will continue upon graduation. The principal difference between students and alumni becomes the geographical proximity to the physical community and the frequency of geographical involvement with that community. If the

educational experience during a student's undergraduate years is truly transformational, alumni will leave the institution as life-long learners who simply continue their pursuit of knowledge and commitment to service in a wide array of venues throughout the world. The location changes; the essence of what it means to be a Wave does not. The empowering vision of a life given to purpose, service, and leadership dominates the landscape for both current students in pursuit of a baccalaureate or graduate degree and for alumni with a completed degree. To create a meaningful community and alumni base that is empowered by this vision, Seaver College must:

1. Provide a vision and path for graduating students to move seamlessly from the student community to the alumni community.
2. Provide a rationale and path for Seaver alumni to connect with their alma mater in meaningful ways and create opportunities for alumni to engage faculty and staff.
3. Provide on-campus opportunities for Seaver students that mirror the powerful community experiences so meaningful to those students who study abroad in our international programs. Specifically, move more intentionally toward the expansion of living-learning communities on the Malibu campus that capture the strengths of the communities created in the study abroad experiences.
4. Increase and expand geographically the use of alumni in the student-recruiting process.
5. Develop a cohesive and coherent plan for "Waves promoting Waves" among Seaver College alumni. Coordinate closely with the Career Center in this endeavor.
6. Expand and enrich the various convocation experiences and student-led ministries for Seaver students.

Goal 4 – Increase Institutional Diversity Consistent with our Mission

Increasing institutional diversity consistent with the University mission requires studied attention to the challenges and a willingness to become more focused in thought and action. Simply wishing and hoping for increased diversity will not result in a more diverse community; desire for diversity without the institutional fortitude to act courageously upon stated goals will deliver little change. Seaver must become more intentional, deliberate, and relentless in its pursuit of diversity. Seaver must first ensure that the community has a compelling theological vision that clearly articulates the divine impetus for diversity. At a Christian university, diversity is never simply a capitulation to current whims of political correctness in the secular arena; rather, it is fully embedded in the will of a Creator who clearly celebrates diversity in his creation while calling the vast diversity of his creation to come together as one. Theologically-rooted diversity empowers community members to celebrate unity and inclusiveness without sacrificing the beauty and wonder of diversity. While the college has made great strides in meeting its goals for diversity among the student body, it continues to struggle with increasing diversity in its staff and faculty. To increase diversity consistent with the mission, Seaver College must do the following:

1. Maintain its initiatives to secure a diverse entering student class. At the same time, Seaver must redouble its efforts to recruit diverse students from the immediate Los Angeles area and provide enrollment pathways for first-generation students. Recent articulation agreements with local community colleges should be aggressively pursued to ensure the college is serving diverse populations in its own backyard. Recent changes in moving Posse recruiting to Los Angeles and efforts to attract foster students to Seaver College reflect this commitment to increased diversity among the student body.
2. Develop and articulate a more aggressive approach to hiring within the context of diversity. All search committees will follow the hiring guidelines in the “best practices” hiring handbook provided by the provost’s office. Search committees will also avail themselves of relevant databases listing diverse candidates in various disciplines. In future hiring, search committees must not only include diverse candidates in the short list of finalists, but must also provide a rationale for not selecting a diverse candidate, if that candidate is not selected as the finalist.
3. Utilize resources such as the SALT and Academic Affairs committees to assess regularly curricular offerings to ensure topics and themes relevant to diversity occur across the curriculum.
4. Provide increased service opportunities for Seaver students studying abroad, opportunities that place the students in diverse contexts and settings. Similarly, provide increased opportunities for international students to engage with the larger Seaver population to increase understanding of the varied cultures and worldviews from which all our students come.

Goal 5 – Develop Resources That Support the Aspiration to be a Premier, Global Christian University

Developing resources that support Seaver’s aspiration of to provide a world-class, global Christian education will be paramount. The Seaver College vision – to become an undergraduate school considered among the best undergraduate institutions in this country – will only occur if the allocation of current and future resources is intentionally and studiously funneled toward the singular genius of the college – academic excellence in the context of Christian mission. To realize its aspiration to become a global Christian university, Seaver College must sustain those best efforts to send Malibu students abroad and bring international students to Malibu. Loss of focus and vision in these areas will certainly hinder the college’s ambition to meet its lofty goals. To achieve its goals in this area, Seaver must do the following:

1. Maintain a consistent focus upon fundraising that specifically benefits Seaver’s initiatives and programs. This requires grounding all funding requests within the context of academic excellence, Christian mission, and global reach.
2. Complete the Seaver College portion of “The Campaign for Pepperdine.”

3. Target new revenue to further the academic- and mission-related initiatives of Seaver College.
4. Explore the possibility of a loan forgiveness program for students entering service fields related to the mission of the college (e.g., ministry, education, nonprofit).

Conclusion

The goals for Seaver College in this strategic plan are challenging but attainable. They all find their locus in the overarching goal of the college to provide a transformative educational experience for our students that seamlessly interlocks academic excellence with Christian mission. Appropriately, these goals also have solid theological grounding. Both higher education and the Christian faith rely heavily on two key terms central to their focus and mission: wisdom and transformation. The wisdom of the past and present empowers serious analysis, reflection, and action to transform the present and impact the future. In a Christian university, wisdom and transformation are uniquely embodied in the academic pursuit and those directly involved in that pursuit – students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Read against the backdrop of the academic enterprise, the following passages take on increased meaning and power:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your *mind*. . . . You shall love your *neighbor as yourself* (Matthew 22:37, 39, emphasis added).

Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2, emphasis added).

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom . . . wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy (James 3:13, 17).