

NORTH CENTRAL COLLEGE
Strategic Plan 2012-2017

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ENVIRONMENT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING: 2012-2017

Five years is a long time. In 2007, when the current Strategic Plan was developed, the arrival of the Great Recession just one year later—with its dramatic impact on the mood of the nation, the climate in which students would be recruited (and pay for their education) and North Central's endowment and fundraising—was unforeseen. In 2012, the shadow of the continuing economic downturn, high unemployment, stock market volatility and government and private sector debt crises has yet to lift, and must, inevitably, shape planning perspectives for the next five years. But the College's success in 2007-2012—constructing and paying for the two largest capital projects in its history, growing the full-time student population, raising the endowment to above its pre-recession levels, maintaining balanced operating budgets and undergoing a successful 10-year accreditation review—is a reminder that even when there are dramatic, unanticipated changes in the environment, an effective Strategic Plan is not a fixed set of goals and tactics for achieving them, but dynamic, able to adapt and make “mid-course corrections” along the way. At the same time, an important lesson from the past five years is not to overreact to changes in the external environment. In the worst economy since the Great Depression, students applied in record numbers. There were no layoffs and no pay freezes, even while carefully implemented economies made possible a one-year “holiday” in drawing income from the endowment. The more than 500 beds added to residence hall capacity were filled. Improved advising of and engagement with first-year students, new and upgraded facilities and strengthened student services brought better retention. Staying the course on investment strategy—and taking no drawdown in 2008-2009—brought a rebound in the endowment. Colleges make abrupt shifts at their peril, undermining reputation and human capital built over many generations.

With these cautionary notes, what does an environmental scan tell us about the next five years?

1. The most important factor mitigating the effect of the depressed economy on North Central enrollments since 2008 has been the growing impact of the federal Pell Grant program (from 444 recipients in 2007 to 690 in fall 2011, and overall support of \$1.8 million to \$2.6 million), and the continued availability of federally subsidized student loans. The slow pace of economic recovery, the changing national political climate and concerns about both federal and personal debt make the continuation of the (positive) status quo over the next five years unlikely. The effects of cutbacks or caps, even if phased in over a period of years, would be felt in enrollments and/or College resources used to substitute for these monies.
2. The role of the State of Illinois' Monetary Award Program (MAP) is parallel to that of the federal need-based (Pell) program. Here the reductions have already begun (maximum grant, 2011-2012, \$4,720 versus \$4,968 in 2007-2008), and there is little likelihood in the current state funding climate that this trend line will be reversed. With 31 percent of students receiving MAP grants in 2011-2012 (total: \$3.5 million), continuing erosion of this program will significantly impact enrollments and/or College resources.

3. The environment for recruiting traditional-age college students has never been more competitive, but North Central's market position has never been stronger. The constraints on raising enrollments are primarily internal, relating to facilities and the mix and size of the student body desired, although "net cost" of attendance may become an increasingly important factor if there are limits on federal and state grant and loan funds.
4. The College's experienced administrative team—with more than 120 years of combined service to North Central in the president's cabinet—is an asset whose strengths were never more in evidence than in the years of the Great Recession. Whatever challenges arise from the external environment in the next five years, that team, intact for the past decade, will go through a significant transition—and confront at least some of those challenges with new members, including a new president. The management of these changes—the recruitment of the right people, with new energy and vision—will be central to how the College responds to an evolving external environment, as well as the achievement of ambitious strategic planning goals.
5. North Central's relationship with its neighbors and the City of Naperville is currently very positive. Fiscal pressures on the City and issues arising out of the College's growth can, however, bring a reversal of this healthy condition if the College is not both sensitive to political realities and vigilant in making its case.
6. The arrival of a generation of students whose learning and leisure experience from infancy has included significant digital and technological elements has significant implications for teaching and learning at North Central and for the demands that will be made on the College's IT capabilities.
7. The market for top-tier faculty coming out of elite doctoral programs has never been more favorable to North Central, a well-located institution that is hiring tenure-track faculty at a time when more and more colleges are retreating from historic commitments to full-time tenure-track positions.
8. The emphasis in recent years by federal and state regulators and policy makers on assessment and increased accountability for what colleges are achieving in the education of their graduates (per tuition dollar) will accelerate. A college that does not take this trend seriously in future years may pay an immense price in reputation and possible limits on public support.
9. The proportion of individuals of color in the populations from which the College recruits students and staff will continue to increase and should be reflected in the future mix of students and staff. Faculty, recruited from a national pool that is far less diverse, will need to be a special area of focus to keep in step with a changing student body.

10. The graduate student market should remain robust, but also extremely competitive, marked by new programs and new delivery systems—including competition from online, for-profit schools—models and approaches that do not fit easily into North Central’s historic framework for graduate content delivery.

11. While the overall economic outlook is not positive for fundraising efforts over the next five years, some of North Central’s most successful alumni will experience their 50th reunions—an opportunity for significant breakthroughs.

NOTABLE CHANGES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Facilities

Gross square footage on campus increased from 714,452 to 1,011,250 (excludes Dixon and rental).

The number of students living in residence halls rose from 998 in 2005 to 1,466 in 2011. Residence hall capacity is 1,532, up from 998 in 2005.

College obtained residence hall space in downtown Naperville for 145 students. The Naper Place building was constructed for senior adults but was leased to the College in 2007.

The 2009 opening of Residence Hall/Recreation Center, and subsequent completion of the fourth floor, added nearly 400 beds to campus, along with a 200-meter indoor track, recreational facilities, a sports history gallery and athletic training classrooms. It received Silver certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) from the U.S. Green Building Council.

The 235-seat thrust stage theatre in Meiley-Swallow Hall was completed in 2008 and accommodates speakers, concerts and small stage productions.

The \$30 million Wentz Concert Hall and Fine Arts Center was dedicated in 2008, adding a 605-seat concert hall, 150-seat experimental theatre, an art gallery, rehearsal rooms, classrooms and offices.

The A.A. Smith House, built in 1885 by longtime College professor Henry C. Smith, was donated to the College by Bartley and Maricela '99 Madden in 2008. The black box theatre in the Fine Arts Center was named for the couple.

The Harold and Eva White Activities Center was renovated in 2008 to improve The Cage dining area along with the addition of an elevator, new bathrooms, a more open lobby and patio. Other major building upgrades included a new HVAC system for Kroehler Science Center and Goldspohn Hall.

The College teamed up with Follett Corporation to open a new free-standing bookstore in 2010 at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Ellsworth Street.

The former bookstore space in the Harold and Eva White Activities Center was remodeled to accommodate two classrooms. A new classroom was added in Benedetti-Wehrli Stadium for the Learning Studio Research Program, designed to gain input for planning future academic spaces.

Improvements to athletic facilities included new tennis courts, new Field Turf for Kroehler Field and a new surface for Buikema Track at Benedetti-Wehrli Stadium.

A paved area that combines a loading zone with handicap parking for events was completed at the west side of Pfeiffer Hall.

The Naperville City Council approved a 10-year update to the College's Master Land Use Plan. Topping the list of potential projects is a new science center. Potential sites include the north campus, a mid-campus site adjacent to the Kroehler Science Center and south campus near the DuPage River. Other provisions addressed improvements to Kimmel, Seybert, Geiger and Student Village residence halls; Larrance Academic Center (if not replaced by a new science center); Oesterle Library; Merner Field House; and Pfeiffer Hall. Two sites were included for a new classroom building.

Academics

An expanded program (First-Year Experience/FYE) for first-year students includes orientation, a summer reading assignment and a new seven-week FYE course taught by the student's faculty advisor. The FYE program has been credited as one factor in boosting the College's first-year to second-year retention rate to 82 percent for 2011.

In graduate programs, a general computer science degree was converted to a niche degree in Web and Internet Applications (2009), and the Master of Leadership Studies experienced tremendous enrollment growth with the addition of tracks in higher education leadership, sports leadership and social entrepreneurship. New programs to be introduced in 2012 include specialized tracks in the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies and a new Master of International Business Administration degree.

Majors were added in Art History (2010) and in Chemical Microscopy (2011). Minors were added in Environmental Studies (2007), English Language Learning (2010) and Bioinformatics and Neuroscience (2011). Bachelor of science options were added to Exercise Science, Athletic Training and Physics. A bachelor of arts option was added to Applied Mathematics.

A 2010 visit by the accrediting team from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools resulted in continued accreditation, with the next review scheduled for 2019-2020. The team was impressed by North Central's culture of assessment, fundraising efforts to build new facilities and the overall comprehensiveness of the self-study process.

A team from the University Senate of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry approved the College "for continued listing, without qualification, as a United Methodist-related institution."

To establish a culture of assessment on campus, a commitment to assess all academic programs has resulted in a scheduled review of each program once every seven years. The current cycle began in spring 2006. Faculty also conduct course-level assessments to determine if students are achieving stated learning outcomes.

The number of students studying abroad for a semester or longer grew from 60 in 2007 to 85 in 2011 and the number of direct enrollment programs grew from 12 in 2007 to 25 in 2011. D-Term offerings and enrollment grew from 111 in four programs in 2007 to 152 in seven programs in 2011. A policy change allows administrative staff to travel as chaperones.

A full-time recruiter for international students was added in 2006. A Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence visited the campus in 2009 as part of an international focus on global environmental change.

The College hired a pre-professional health program coordinator from Rush University Medical School to help students prepare for professional programs in the health sciences.

In the past six years, two North Central students received the Goldwater Fellowship in Science, the highest national undergraduate award for achievement in the natural sciences, and three others have received honorable mention. Emily Albright '10 earned a three-year National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship. In addition, North Central students have been awarded two Fulbright grants and a James H. Dunn Fellowship Award.

In 2010, two students were honored as Graduating Senior of the Year and Junior of the Year, respectively, by the INROADS Great Lakes Region chapter.

In 2011 and 2012, North Central was represented at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research by more students than any other college or university in Illinois and was among the top 10 percent in the nation.

The number of students who have received a Richter grant for an independent research project has increased from seven in 2007 to 15 in 2011.

During the 2010-2011 academic year, the Office of Academic Opportunities provided travel funding for 48 students presenting research projects at national conferences, a 66 percent increase from 2007.

Library circulation increased by 40 percent between FY 2007 (29,357) and FY 2010 (41,266).

The College established a Teach First program for first-generation students who aspire to be teachers, which has grown from fewer than 20 students to nearly 50 in only three years.

North Central's formal school partnerships increased from five in 2007 to 15 in 2011.

Athletics

North Central won seven NCAA Division III Team National Championships (2009 and 2011 men's cross country, 2010, 2011 and 2012 men's indoor and outdoor track and field) in athletics, along with 26 College Conference of Illinois & Wisconsin (CCIW) team championships. North Central student-athletes achieved 107 individual All-America selections and 92 national academic honors.

The sports information staff grew to include a second full-time staff member, enabling North Central to expand the athletic department's role in the marketing of the institution and become a leader among its peers in its online and social media presence and national championship coverage.

The new graduate assistant program supplemented the athletic staff, with primary focus on recruitment and retention. In 2011-2012, 20 graduate assistants were employed by the athletic department.

In 2009, the College added women's lacrosse as the 22nd varsity athletics program, making North Central the first NCAA Division III institution in Illinois to compete in the sport at the varsity level. North Central joined the Midwest Women's Lacrosse Conference in 2011 and qualified for the conference's first postseason tournament.

The history and accomplishments of all the College's athletic programs are featured in the Gramarosso Gallery, located in the Residence Hall/Recreation Center.

North Central was awarded the right to host the 2013 NCAA Division III Indoor Track & Field Championships on the Al B. Carius Track at the Residence Hall/Recreation Center.

The National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Directors' Cup was instituted for Division III in 1995-1996 and North Central finished 76th. In 2006-2007, North Central was 31st and in 2007-2008, 45th. During the 2010-2011 academic year, North Central finished 17th among 443 Division III institutions.

Advancement

The endowment increased in value from \$79.6 million in 2006-2007 to \$94.2 million in 2010-2011.

Construction of the \$29.38 million Wentz Concert Hall and Fine Arts Center was completed in fall 2008, fully funded.

Seventeen gifts of \$1 million or more were received in the past five years. Average annual giving over the past five years was \$11.24 million per year.

Presidents Club donors (\$1,000 and up) increased 21 percent (561 to 679) in five years.

The College received three properties (A.A. Smith House, Dixon property, Naperville condominium) valued at \$6.05 million total.

The Scholarship endowment increased from \$16.1 million to \$25.3 million.

Since the Wentz Concert Hall and Fine Arts Center opened in 2008, ticket sales have more than tripled from \$204,743 to \$680,487, and attendance has increased by 69 percent (25,251 in 2008-2009 to 42,330 in 2010-2011). The fine arts team has expanded from two employees in 2008 to eight (seven full time; one part time) in 2011.

Campus Technology

A 27 percent increase in the number of PCs, from 700 to 950.

The number of T1 lines on campus grew from 13 to 74.

The number of wireless access points grew from 2 to 74.

A redesigned College website was unveiled in 2010, with a new content management system for distributing news, video, fresh content and clear descriptions of majors, minors and programs.

Clickers have been purchased for many classrooms and allow students to give responses during lectures.

To support the Interactive Media Studies program, 30 Mac Pro workstations were installed in the graphics lab. Also installed were a sound booth and chroma key wall for video production.

All tuition bills are available through Merlin, eliminating paper, printing and mailing costs. In addition, the new Manage MyID allows students, parents and others to view account balances while enabling ID cards to be used as credit cards.

All faculty were given the choice of working on PCs or Macs in 2011 as their computers were replaced. ITS has hired personnel to support Mac platforms.

A new event scheduling and calendar system was implemented on the College's website.

Card access for campus buildings is available for all on campus residence halls, along with Kiekhofer Hall, Meiley-Swallow Hall, Goldspohn Hall, Kroehler Science Center, Old Main, Carnegie Hall, Merner Field House, Oliver Hall, Wentz Concert Hall/Fine Arts Center and Res/Rec.

Sustainability

A sustainability coordinator was hired and implemented co-curricular programs, developed College policies, obtained grant funding, improved campus-wide communications and helped implement sustainability projects into the environmental studies curriculum.

Efforts in operations have focused in the following areas: greenhouse gas inventory (FY2006-FY2010); composting in Kaufman Dining Hall; Community Garden Project; tracking/analyzing building energy consumption and campus fleet fuel use and mileage; installing occupancy sensors; started/expanded outdoor and other recycling programs, including light bulbs, ballasts, batteries, carpet, metal, document destruction, electronics, toner, reusable items, kitchen oil

and grease waste, and expanded recycling strategy for athletic events; purchased recycling bins for each residence hall room; implemented alternative transportation programs, including Red Bike program, Zipcar and Cardinal shuttle; purchased two electric vehicles (Campus Safety car and maintenance truck).

The Princeton Review named the College as among the most environmentally responsible colleges in North America and included the College in the second annual edition of "The Princeton Review's Guide to 311 Green Colleges: 2011 Edition."

Student Affairs

The number of veterans on campus has grown from seven veterans two years ago to 35 veterans/dependents in 2011-2012. Two veterans have been hired to conduct admission work and to run the Veterans Club. G.I. Jobs magazine named North Central a Military Friendly School for 2012 based on efforts to recruit and retain military students/veterans.

Grants from such organizations as Teach First, Dunham Fund and NCAA help to leverage the College's resources and achieve goals.

The College developed and implemented comprehensive marketing and recruitment plans for each of the six graduate programs.

The Dyson Wellness Center staff anticipated and absorbed a doubling in faculty and staff usage of medical services starting in early 2011. Sally Carpenter earned her advanced practice nurse (APN) licensure in December 2010, dramatically increasing the hours of clinical service provided each week.

Key Data Points from 2006-2007 and 2011-2012

- Full-time undergraduates: 2,021 to 2,516
- Graduate students: 320 to 260
- Total headcount: 2,556 to 2,989
- Resident students: 1,091 to 1,464
- Freshman to sophomore retention: 76 to 82 percent
- Freshman applications: 2,204 to 3,052
- Full-time faculty: 125 to 140
- College Scholars: 196 to 250
- Student-athletes: 513 to 638 (unduplicated)
- Number of T1 lines: 13 to 74
- Gross square footage (excludes Dixon and rental properties): 714,452 to 1,011,250

STRATEGIC PLAN BASELINE ASSUMPTIONS: 2012-2017

- North Central is a comprehensive liberal arts college affiliated with the United Methodist Church committed to excellence in teaching and learning.
- North Central's mission is grounded in the liberal arts, a balanced curriculum, a rich array of co- and extra-curricular experiences and an emphasis on leadership, ethics, values and service.
- North Central is a community of learners, in which faculty, staff and students witness for values of free and open inquiry, integrity and civility.
- North Central is a historic undergraduate institution with a strong residential tradition that offers graduate and professional programs consistent with that focus and heritage.
- A North Central education is personal in character, with mentoring, engaged faculty and staff, and a commitment to a healthy student-to-faculty ratio with small classes.
- North Central has "one faculty, one standard" for all graduates, with rigorous expectations of students and of faculty as teachers and scholars.
- North Central College is strongly committed to recruiting and supporting students, faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, and to global learning that enhances understanding of and engagement in the wider world.
- North Central—a regional, national and international college in its recruitment, programs and aspirations—has a special relationship with Naperville and the Chicago metropolitan area, and serves the community with its programs and facilities.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: 2012-2017

Strategic planning at North Central College is an opportunity for the campus community to step back every five years and ask fundamental questions about how to best fulfill our mission in an environment of constant change. Some of those changes are internal. The North Central College of 2012 has 500 more full-time students than it had in 2007 and 80 more employees, and the physical campus has grown by 300,000 square feet. Others are external. The role of government—as a regulator and as a financial supporter—has changed significantly in the past five years and is likely to evolve more dramatically in the years to come. The diversity of the prospective student population increases with each census. And every technological change—which come with increasing rapidity—brings new opportunities, challenges and costs.

Amidst all this change, it is clear that the success of the College in the 21st century, like the success of the institution over the seven generations that preceded it, has been grounded in its inviolable commitment to teaching and learning, an environment in which students experience engaged mentoring in every facet of their education, in and out of the classroom, within a community and culture of rigorous inquiry, shaped by enduring values. More than just words or a foundational piety, every new direction must be tested against this defining standard, which has served the institution in its growth and progress over a century and a half.

Important in the development of this strategic plan is the recognition that this is a time of transition for the College. The past decade has brought explosive growth, with a 50 percent increase in full-time undergraduates and many new or revised programs. The College has also become more residential in character and more focused on full-time, traditional-age students. Moreover, a period of exceptional continuity in upper-level administration is coming to an end with the impending retirement of both the president and the vice president of academic affairs and dean of faculty. It is appropriate at this juncture that the College reflect on its character and aspirations, renew its commitment to academic excellence, ensure the sustainability of its infrastructure and allow new leadership the flexibility to shape the College's future with new vision and perspectives. If every Strategic Plan is a "work in progress," to be reassessed at numerous points in the ensuing years, that is even more the case with this one. It should not be viewed as a straitjacket to constrain new leadership, but rather, as an institutional expression of hopes and possibilities at the College's Sesquicentennial that should inspire top candidates to want to be part of defining and achieving North Central's most promising future.

Goal #1: The Character of North Central College

Advance the College's commitment to academic excellence and its wider reputation through strategically managed growth of the undergraduate and graduate student population, building upon its character as a comprehensive liberal arts college and diverse community of learners.

1. Utilize the College's strong market position to achieve a full-time undergraduate population of 2,800-3,000 and graduate population of 400-500 over the next five years, with emphasis on a more balanced mix of academic majors and an increasingly diverse student body.
2. As the College's undergraduate population grows, expand teaching and learning space as needed and add sufficient residence hall (and dining hall) capacity to maintain the historic ratio of resident to nonresident students.
3. Explore and, as appropriate, develop major new academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels consistent with the College's character and vision, societal needs (e.g., nursing, engineering), the campus' physical environment and resources to ensure appropriate staffing and academic excellence.
4. Reinforce the College's commitment to diversity with new investments in hiring, training, student recruitment and academic programming.
5. Develop and implement targeted programs, funded by grant and gift resources where possible, to attract and retain greater numbers of high-achieving students, with particular emphasis on high-achieving minorities.
6. Sustain the momentum of the past decade in internationalizing the North Central experience, building the infrastructure to handle more students from abroad and provide more students with international experiences.

Goal #2: The Family of North Central College

Take the pride of students, faculty, staff and alumni in the College at its Sesquicentennial—and the College’s recognition as a “great place to work”—to the next level, including developing and implementing strategies reflective of and responsive to the increasingly diverse population we serve.

1. Embrace upcoming changes in the College’s administration, promoting a smooth and transparent leadership transition, maintaining the College’s momentum and fiscal health, and giving every segment of the campus community a stake in the success of new leaders.
2. Enhance North Central College’s identity as “a great place to work” by expanding the impact of wellness programming on students, faculty and staff, and bolstering human resource initiatives that improve faculty and staff recruiting, training, supervision and feedback, and career progression.
3. Invest in strategies that will sustainably support a growing campus community and advance academic excellence with sustainable faculty resources.
4. Bring alumni more fully into the life and culture of the College.

Goal #3: The Programs of North Central College

Reinforce the strength of the academic program and its reputation.

1. Build upon the success of the academic program review process by initiating the first comprehensive review of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum in more than a decade, with particular attention to changes in pedagogy required for the “mobile technology generation”; the role of alternative delivery systems in individual and collaborative learning; benefits and costs of alternative calendars; necessary staff support; and ways of better utilizing assessment of learning outcomes.
2. Identify and address structural barriers to success in graduate programming.
3. Identify and address structural barriers to programmatic success in the uses of technology for teaching and learning, research and administration.
4. Establish and achieve “markers of academic excellence,” including but not limited to business school accreditation, Phi Beta Kappa membership, nationally recognized

student honors (Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Eisenhower, Goldwater, Fulbright), increased numbers of undergraduate researchers and College Scholars and a targeted percentage of students going to graduate and professional school.

5. Expand on an already strong array of athletic, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs, utilizing appropriate “markers of excellence.”
6. Take the College’s positive relationship with the neighborhood and community to the next stage, including implementing substantial partnerships with major area businesses and nonprofit institutions, and greater utilization of community talent in teaching, mentoring and job placement of students.

Goal #4: The Resources of North Central College

Maintain the College’s positive trajectory in improving campus facilities, and fiscal and physical sustainability.

1. Fund, site, design and construct new science facilities.
2. Renovate and repurpose existing buildings to improve teaching classrooms, and physical spaces that support students, faculty and staff.
3. Continue fundraising for scholarships, endowed professorships and program initiative goals.
4. Fund and maintain a commitment to technological competitiveness.
5. Advance sustainability as a campus-wide ethic as well as an institutional commitment.