

STRATEGIC PLAN – CORNISH COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

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Institutional Background and Context

Since its founding over ninety years ago, Cornish has evolved from a small arts school into a highly respected multi-disciplinary college recognized for its outstanding contributions to the cultural life of the region and for the quality of the professional education it provides to aspiring visual and performing artists.

The last ten years have produced dramatic and positive changes at Cornish. Strong and visionary leadership by the President and Board of Trustees during this period has resulted in an extraordinary number of accomplishments at all operational levels of the College. The indicators of this success are:

- Enrollment growth and improved retention rates
- Measurable improvement in the effectiveness of students' first-year experience and in the general education curriculum
- Increasingly competitive faculty/staff salary and benefits packages
- Exceptional new facilities with options to complete campus consolidation
- Professionalized and expanded student support systems
- Significant gains in the acquisition and appropriate use of technology
- Professionalized academic and administrative infrastructure
- Impressive success in fundraising

Supported by these accomplishments and the strong foundation they have provided, Cornish is now positioned to pursue national recognition as a top-tier educational institution offering innovative and professional training in the arts. The Strategic Plan lays out the goals and initiatives that set a bold and inspiring agenda for the future.

The Vision

Cornish College of the Arts is nationally recognized as a premier college of the visual and performing arts. A pioneer in arts education, Cornish is committed to the cultivation of the individual student voice by stimulating experimentation and risk-taking while providing a rigorous grounding in professional technique. Cornish is dedicated to the development of artistic excellence, serves as a highly respected resource and effective catalyst in the arts community, and contributes to the vitality of the arts in contemporary society.

Institutional Mission

The mission of Cornish College of the Arts is to provide students aspiring to become practicing artists with an educational program of the highest possible quality, in an environment that nurtures creativity and intellectual curiosity, while preparing them to contribute to society as artists, citizens, and innovators.

Cornish College of the Arts realizes this mission by offering baccalaureate studies in the performing and visual arts and by serving as a focal point in the community for public presentation, artistic criticism, participation and discussion of the arts.

Core Values

The core values that have historically distinguished Cornish College of the Arts are affirmed in the College's renewed commitment to:

- Provide an educational environment that offers personalized attention and acknowledges the whole person, cultivating artistic potential and individual voice.
- Supply a rigorous and balanced arts education that encourages experimentation and innovation while providing a solid grounding in technique and craft.
- Provide a fine arts education that develops imaginative and critical thinking capacities grounded in knowledge, producing not just trained, but educated artists.
- Create a college environment that demonstrates respect for equal opportunity for all persons and the inclusion of diversity in the curriculum and in the ranks of the student body, faculty, staff and Board of Trustees.
- Offer a faculty of practicing artists whose accomplishments serve to inspire and inform students seeking a professional career in the arts.
- Contribute meaningfully to the cultural vitality of the community.

The Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Planning Committee of the Board provided oversight for the entire planning process. In cooperation with the President, and with the consent of the Board of Trustees, the Committee articulated a vision for the future of Cornish College of the Arts and identified five strategic goals consistent with that vision and with the mission and values of the College.

That work was not done in isolation. The strategic plan was developed with the active engagement of the entire Cornish community. A central steering committee planned and implemented a community-wide retreat, organized and directed the work of identified task groups, managed information flow, and made recommendations for strategic initiatives. Students, staff, faculty, alumni and trustees were all involved at various stages of the planning process. Administrative officers, including members of the President's Cabinet, academic department chairs, and directors of vital operational divisions, such as the Library, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, prepared area-specific strategic plans analyzing division strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The resulting strategic plan represents a highly inclusive process and provides a comprehensive road map for the long-term health and ongoing success of Cornish College of the Arts.

Strategic Planning Goals

The five Strategic Goals are interconnected and interdependent. Progress in achieving each goal is fundamentally related to progress in achieving all of the others. Each goal is critical to the evolution of the College over the next ten years. Achieving all five goals will depend on continued success in fundraising, strategic enrollment management and prudent financial management.

Initiatives and rationales have been developed for each strategic goal and are enumerated in the text. A separate implementation plan charts action steps over the next three years necessary to address both short-term and longer-term goals. The Implementation Plan establishes an operational timeline and articulates staff responsibility for the identified action steps which flow from strategic planning initiatives. It also establishes the framework for more detailed annual work plans. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually and revised as necessary by the President and by the Board of Trustees.

Strategic Goal 1:

Strengthen existing academic programs and develop viable new ones appropriate to the mission and values of Cornish College of the Arts.

The academic mission is at the heart of the strategic plan, and all planning strategies ultimately serve it. The College is committed to strengthening its current academic programs and curricula while exploring options for new programs that serve its mission. The initiatives below focus on program development, faculty development, and the pursuit of innovative practices designed to position Cornish as a leader in innovative arts education.

Initiative A: Promote academic program excellence.

Rationale: Achieving the next level of academic excellence requires commitment to continuous program improvements and enhanced institutional support of existing departments. New structures for developing and strengthening the current faculty, as well as strategies to attract and retain new faculty of notable stature are key to this endeavor.

Initiative B: Develop processes for the creation of new degree-granting programs and expand community education options.

Rationale: In order to be competitive at the national level, present new opportunities for artistic development and generate additional revenue streams, new degree options will be developed and current programs must endeavor to develop new curricular tracks and degree options.

Building on its successful preparatory offerings, as well as recent summer programs and continuing education initiatives, Cornish will develop community education programs that strengthen its presence in Seattle and heighten its visibility in the region.

All new program proposals will be scrutinized for market viability and their consistency with the mission of the College, and will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees.

Initiative C: Pursue innovative practice in arts education.

Rationale: To maintain its competitive appeal, Cornish asserts its commitment to innovation in arts education through the pursuit of the academic and artistic utilization of technology and through interdisciplinary curricular experimentation.

Strategic Goal 2: **Consolidate and unify the campus.**

Throughout the strategic planning process, all primary constituencies endorsed the planned consolidation of campus facilities in the College's new downtown location as a critical priority. While the ultimate physical configuration of the campus will evolve over time, all facilities-related decisions in the next ten years will serve the mandate to consolidate and unify the campus. Priority will be given to addressing primary programmatic needs as well as providing student housing. Exceptional facilities will be designed to promote collegial interchange and encourage interdisciplinary arts exploration.

Initiative A: Complete update of Master Campus Plan to reflect the Cornish commitment to consolidate the College within the Denny Triangle neighborhood.

Rationale: The consolidation of the College within the Denny Triangle neighborhood will enrich the quality of educational experience for Cornish students in all areas of study and increase the stature and visibility of the College in the community. A comprehensive planning document will be utilized to guide decision-making processes and to inform ongoing financial and operational analyses designed to perpetuate the College's economic well-being and to minimize risk.

Initiative B: Pursue opportunities for campus consolidation.

Rationale: Over the next five to ten years, a series of decisions will be made in response to known opportunities and funding strategies that will determine the eventual configuration and scope of the campus while minimizing financial risk. These decisions will be made incrementally by the Board of Trustees with advice from the Executive Committee of the Board and the President.

Initiative C: Strengthen internal communications infrastructure.

Rationale: Administrative communication and information systems require a variety of upgrades and improvements to promote ease of information flow. An administrative plan for technology renewal, increased faculty and student operational access, and upgrades in administrative systems will be developed and updated annually.

Strategic Goal 3:

Promote and support the educational growth and general well being of students.

If the faculty is the backbone of the educational enterprise, students are the heart. Cornish embraces the centrality of the student experience in its continuing mandate to provide students with excellent instruction and with a curriculum appropriate to their aspirations as developing artists. In addition, Cornish seeks to provide an education that defines students as citizens, developing their critical thinking skills, compassion, respect for self and other, and the discipline to engage in artistic practice with commitment and purpose.

Initiative A: Develop and enhance academic support structures.

Rationale: Student success and retention are connected to the development and reinforcement of basic academic skills, as well as meeting the specific demands of the major. Cornish will develop the most effective means possible to enhance and expand curricular supports for the development of writing, research, math and information technology skills. Furthermore, it is imperative that structures be developed to meet the diverse needs of all students admitted to the College so as to better address second language and disability needs.

Initiative B: Improve strategies to address the health and wellness needs of students.

Rationale: Student satisfaction and retention are also connected to how well a college can meet the developmental needs of students. Cornish is committed to providing institutional support for the promotion of healthy life choices through ongoing improvement of its counseling, academic advising and co-curricular programs.

Strategic Goal 4:

Build and strengthen community relations through educational programming, community partnerships and presentation of the arts.

Cornish emerged some ninety years ago from a single woman's vision. That vision included a pragmatic, comprehensive and integrated view of the arts and of arts education. The College affirms its community mission to serve as a focal point for the presentation and discussion of the arts in the following ways:

- **Programming:** The success of non-degree programs, including Preparatory Dance and the Summer Teen Programs reinforces the Cornish commitment to arts education beyond its college programming.
- **Partnerships:** The new Main Campus Center facility has made it possible to engage in a series of collaborations with major arts groups within the city, notably those whose mission it is to cultivate artistic development for the young.
- **Presentation:** The leadership role of Cornish in the community is apparent in all artistic venues of the city where Cornish faculty, students and alumni regularly perform and exhibit their work. On campus, Cornish reinforces this tradition through the presentation of high-quality public performances and gallery exhibitions.

These commitments will be further developed in the next five to ten years through an expansion of performances and gallery exhibitions, expanded community-based, non-degree programs (see Strategic Goal 1, Initiative B) and new and strengthened collaborations with practicing artists and community arts organizations.

Initiative A: Expand academic and artistic outreach.

Rationale: To ensure that the College becomes more highly recognized as an institution of academic and artistic distinction, it will strengthen its ties to the local community through the active pursuit of academic and artistic alliances and formal partnerships.

Initiative B: Support artistic connections between the College and its alumni.

Rationale: For the mutual benefit of the College and its alumni, the Office of Alumni Affairs and the academic departments will collaborate to strengthen alumni involvement in the academic and artistic life of the College.

Strategic Goal 5:

Ensure financial resources necessary to achieve the strategic plan.

Cornish is supported by two primary sources of revenue: income from tuition and funds contributed for current operations and the capital campaign. Effective enrollment management strategies and business practices, as well as significant increases in contributions, will be necessary to achieve the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan.

Increases in tuition income are dependent on recruitment and retention of students. The strategic plan for student recruitment and admissions outlines strategies for enrollment growth and for improving all aspects of the recruitment cycle leading from prospects to applicants to enrolled students. It also identifies goals for geographical expansion and the development of additional target schools. Next stages in strategic planning for recruitment will focus on financial-aid leveraging and diversification of the student population.

The strategic plan for advancement provides the blueprint for securing the contributions required to meet strategic fundraising goals. The plan presents a comprehensive approach to securing gifts for annual operations and the capital campaign. Achieving the College's long-term strategic goals and short-term annual and intermediate goals will require significant broadening and deepening of benefactor support for Cornish through enhanced Board leadership, additional staffing and improved data-gathering systems.

Initiative A: Secure contributions necessary for facilities expansion and meeting endowment and capital campaign goals.

Rationale: The academic goals and initiatives set forth in the strategic plan will be accomplished if the College is able to consolidate its campus in the Denny Triangle neighborhood, expand its facilities, increase its endowment and reduce its debt load. Significant contributions to the capital and annual campaigns are critical to achieving these aims.

Initiative B: Increase income yield in support of annual operations.

Rationale: The College's annual operating budget is heavily dependent on tuition. Increases in enrollment yield and strategic management of tuition dollars will allow the College to better meet departmental needs, provide additional scholarship support for students, recruit faculty of notable stature, and fund strategic initiatives focused on quality improvements.

Initiative C: Cultivate support from all Cornish constituencies and the larger community.

Rationale: The support of all Cornish constituencies, including current and former trustees, alumni, faculty, staff and parents, is critical to the College's ability to make the case for support to the larger community. To demonstrate the College's contribution to the cultural vitality of the community, improve its regional and national reputation and build a strong alumni base, Cornish must increase its visibility through targeted marketing efforts and outreach to alumni. In order to successfully appeal to members of the larger community such as arts patrons, civic leaders and philanthropists, Cornish must be recognized and highly valued as a community asset.

Strategic Plan Management

The Board of Trustees has embraced a vision of national prominence for the College, a prominence grounded in innovative programming, pedagogical excellence, state-of-the-art facilities, student health and well-being, and a solid community presence and stature.

Upon approval by the Board of Trustees, the President, his Cabinet and assigned personnel of the college will commence implementation of the Strategic Plan. Work plans will be developed annually appropriate to the goals and initiatives of the Plan, and review processes to evaluate progress will be developed by the President and Committees of the Board.

The Strategic Plan sets clear priorities and goals to ensure the ongoing success of Cornish College of the Arts. Because it is a living document, it will require adjustment as priorities shift and opportunities arise. Commensurate with its responsibilities, the College's Board of Trustees will execute effective risk management and take timely action in response to unforeseen opportunities and challenges as they emerge.