



# LAS Strategic Plan

2021-2025



**College of Liberal  
Arts & Sciences**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



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[go.las.illinois.edu/StrategicPlan2021-25](https://go.las.illinois.edu/StrategicPlan2021-25)



## A Message from the Dean

Dear Colleagues,

When we began work on this strategic plan in May 2019, we could not have imagined what would transpire in the ensuing months: pandemic, economic disaster, a reckoning of race and social justice in America, a highly unconventional election, and a hybrid teaching model on our campus. Our college, like the rest of campus, has been focused on making the constant adjustments needed to carry on our work while ensuring the safety of our community. In fact, our great faculty, staff, and students were at, and continue to be at, the forefront of many of these efforts.

Despite this, we never stopped planning. We couldn't; the liberal arts and sciences are too important. Our college plays a fundamental role in the success of our campus. Nearly every undergraduate student takes one of our courses. Our faculty and graduate students drive research in labs and libraries across campus. Our alumni go into the world and make a difference that is simply immeasurable. We believe an ambitious plan for the future and a strategy for implementing it are more important now than ever. While we're facing unprecedented changes that this plan cannot fully anticipate, we believe it can help us maintain our focus as we navigate our way forward. With this strategic plan, we set a course for the college for the next five years.

The liberal arts and sciences are the foundation for developing well-rounded individuals who contribute to society in meaningful ways. We are known for the intellectual breadth and depth we offer students in our college and students from all corners of campus. In LAS, our students learn

cultural competence, teamwork and leadership, and habits of mind that allow for continuous learning and success across a lifetime. For over 100 years, the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences has been the heart of our university. Our college must continue to lead the way.



Work on this plan began under the direction of former Dean Feng Sheng Hu, was nurtured and shaped by our college leadership team, and was brought to life by ideas from administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students from all areas of LAS. I am pleased to present this plan on behalf of the college.

I am confident that this plan will lead us forward as a college. We are facing many challenges created by the pandemic. This plan will guide us as we meet those challenges and push into new and important areas of research, teaching, and outreach. By identifying clear goals and objectives, this plan will guide us as we adapt to what lies ahead and enable us to shape the future of our campus. We likely cannot imagine all that the next five years will bring, but we will make sure the liberal arts and sciences continue to contribute to our society in life-changing ways.

With great optimism for the future,

**Gene E. Robinson**

Interim Dean  
Swanlund Chair in Entomology



## College Overview

**For more than 100 years, the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences has been the heart of the University of Illinois, offering a comprehensive education and research portfolio founded in the longstanding principles of the liberal arts.**

LAS recognizes local and global realities facing our students in the 21st century, including issues of equity in education and social mobility, and the representative needs of an increasingly multicultural society. More than ever, students from all backgrounds and experiences desire and deserve a comprehensive education in order to succeed and thrive in a competitive global marketplace. As a center for discovery and knowledge across the breadth of human experience and the natural world, LAS recognizes the definition of a 21st century liberal education by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as encompassing a “broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest” while helping students to “develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.” Promoting and enacting these core goals of liberal education is what defines our strength and excellence as a college.

We in LAS augment this education through our commitment to multidisciplinary research taking place in, and between, our college’s centers, departments, and schools, and in cross-campus research and inquiry. We also celebrate the many undergraduate and graduate student contributions to our faculty laboratories, field sites, and other venues supporting our vital research enterprise. As the intellectual and pedagogical heart of the Urbana campus, LAS is an academically diverse stronghold for study in the humanities,

social sciences, and sciences. The broad range of disciplines that comprise our college have supported and anchored our larger campus mission of excellence and inclusion and augmented the goals of other colleges at the University of Illinois since its inception.

It is also an essential role of the modern university to grapple with the most challenging issues facing society as a whole. LAS is particularly well equipped for such an effort. Many of the units in our college, for example, have a crucial role to play in understanding historical and ongoing struggles with racism, sexism, ableism, and anti-immigration. Many of the people who make up the fabric of our college are national and international leaders in problem-solving, discovery, and innovation in addressing societal grand challenges. Social and political upheavals of the last few years, both in the U.S. and abroad, have demonstrated the fundamental importance of wrestling with these issues that can exist on the apparent margins of scholarship, both in research and in the classroom, and bringing them to the center of ongoing conversations. The university and LAS have an essential role to play as a location for these conversations and the scholarship that emerges from them.

Over the next five years, our mission will remain central to that of the campus. Working together, LAS will make the University of Illinois stronger and more significant in improving and supporting the lives and livelihoods of our students, faculty, and staff. The more successful we are at that, the better we will serve our state, nation, and world.





## Strategic Planning Process

We began our strategic planning process in May 2019, with the Office of the Dean reviewing our college's mission, values, and priorities, and subsequently identifying four goals that would form the basis of the new strategic plan. In June and July 2019, the Office of the Dean collectively authored four white papers, each keyed to one of the four goals in the plan, with the intention of setting a broad direction and framework for the overall planning process. These white papers were provided to four strategic planning working groups made up of 10-12 faculty, staff, and students, who were charged in August 2019 to create a report outlining key actions and issues focusing on how to best achieve each goal in the plan. Between late August and mid-October 2019, these working groups drafted their reports, using the white papers as a starting point. They also consulted other data, including: the campus strategic plan; community feedback collected on our LAS website; existing documents, reports, and past surveys relevant to each goal; and peer institution college and campus strategic plans. The working groups also facilitated two lunchtime roundtables in October 2019, which were attended by more than 160 faculty, staff, and students, in order to gather more focused feedback from these constituencies.

In November 2019, the four working group chairs presented their reports to LAS faculty in the

all-college Fall Faculty Meeting. Thereafter, the working group reports and the white papers that informed them were made available to the full LAS community on the LAS website. The Office of the Dean also met during November and December 2019 with other key college groups. Further meetings were held between the three area associate deans for life and natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities and interdisciplinary programs and the respective executive officers in these areas to gather additional focused feedback. A meeting was also held with LAS undergraduate and graduate students in a roundtable session during December 2019, for additional feedback on issues in the plan most relevant to students.

This aggregated input became the basis for a draft plan collectively composed by the Office of the Dean during a day-long retreat in March 2020. Over the summer months of 2020, this draft plan was refined. It was then shared with the LAS Executive Committee in late September 2020, and with LAS faculty and staff during two open webinar-style town hall meetings in early October 2020. Further feedback from those conversations resulted in the shape and content of the final plan, released in November 2020.

## University Mission and Vision

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is charged by our state to enhance the lives of citizens in Illinois, across the nation and around the world through our leadership in learning, discovery, engagement and economic development.

We will be the pre-eminent public research university with a land-grant mission and global impact.

## College Mission, Vision, and Values

**Mission:** As the heart of the university, our various disciplines engage with fundamental questions and societal grand challenges. We prepare individuals for a productive lifetime of inquiry, leadership, and service in a diverse global community. Our college creates the vital interdisciplinary and intercultural connections that empower people to change the world.

**Vision:** We will be the model for a 21st century college of liberal arts and sciences at a public research university defined by inclusive and diverse communities, dynamic external partnerships, innovation and discovery, and transformative practices in learning and teaching.

**Values:** Our college's pursuit of its mission is motivated and animated by shared values. We in LAS work to embody ambitious curiosity, imagination, and creativity devoted to discovering and engaging with new and long-standing fields of inquiry to create new knowledge. We act with courage and from a collective responsibility to confront societal grand challenges and promote social and racial justice; and we see diversity, equality, and inclusivity as transformative, multidirectional sources of understanding and productive change. Thus, we rely on an openness, tolerance, and empathy toward different ideas, perspectives, and people. We value collaboration in our work with one another and with the broader public.





# College Strategic Goals

The following goals will structure our long-term activities and guide daily decision-making to meet the mission and vision of a 21st century liberal arts and sciences college.

**Excel in Research and Creative Activity**

We will foster our core strengths in creative activities and research across the college through strategic investments that enhance excellence. We will invest in new creative activities and research programs that facilitate interdisciplinary partnerships to address societal grand challenges.

**Re-Design the Student Experience for Today's World**

We endeavor to provide all students with world-class experiences through advising excellence, enhanced curricular creativity, and transformative learning experiences.

**Foster Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

We commit to promote the access and inclusion of underrepresented faculty and staff in research, creative, and instructional activity and to promote the access and inclusion of underrepresented graduate and undergraduate students in education and research. We will achieve equity, inclusion, and diversity through eliminating barriers in our policies, processes, and programs that impede entry and success in academic endeavors.

**Strengthen the People of the College, and Strengthen its Resource Base, Visibility, and Impact**

We affirm that people are the core of our college. Supporting and developing faculty and staff as well as maintaining, building, and using college resources in a transparent and meaningful way are essential to achieving the objectives described in goals one through three. A coordinated and strategic approach to human resources, financial planning, facilities management, advancement, and marketing and communications is critical to achieving our goals.





## Excel in Research and Creative Activity

*We strive to foster our core strengths in creative activities and research across the college through strategic investments that enhance excellence and through investments in new creative activities and research programs that facilitate interdisciplinary partnerships to address societal grand challenges.*

**Objective 1:** Increase faculty excellence by protecting the rich intellectual diversity in the college and expanding core strengths – including emerging areas – in creative activities and research across the college through strategic investments that maintain or enhance quality and distinction.

**Actions:**

- Initiate a process through which units in the college identify their core strengths in research and creative activity.
- Engage with the LAS research community to evaluate the intellectual diversity of the college.
- Maintain and enhance core strengths through strategic hires and improved infrastructure.
- Enhance programs to reward faculty excellence in research and creative activities.

**Objective 2:** Increase faculty excellence by promoting intellectual diversity and facilitating interdisciplinary partnerships to understand and address societal grand challenges.

**Actions:**

- Create thematic hiring programs around societal grand challenges.
- Value interdisciplinary programs and collaboration in faculty evaluation.
- Provide resources and logistical support for emerging, cross-cutting creative activities and research.

**Objective 3:** Increase research excellence by promoting the inclusion of historically underrepresented minority groups in research and creative activity. Expand the range of research

that we value to promote the research agendas of scholars from historically underrepresented minority groups and eliminate barriers that have impeded the inclusion and success of those scholars.

**Actions:**

- Task a working group with developing strategies to better recognize and encourage the full range of research in LAS disciplines.
- Increase research support for faculty from historically underrepresented minority groups.
- Create and support pathways to involve historically under-represented minority students in research, and encourage and enable those students to participate in them.
- Encourage faculty members to include students from historically underrepresented minority groups in research and creative activity (including through such programs as TRIO McNair Scholars).

**Objective 4:** Promote and support excellence in undergraduate and graduate student involvement in research and scholarship.

**Actions:**

- Develop a structure that academic units can adopt for an undergraduate student capstone experience.
- Develop partnerships with university programs such as the Discovery Partners Institute and the Office of Undergraduate Research to support funding for student research.
- Create the position of research liaison to connect undergraduate students to research mentors across LAS.
- Support faculty efforts to secure extramural training grants for student researchers.
- Provide students with information about intramural and extramural research funding opportunities.



# Re-Design the Student Experience for Today's World

*We endeavor to provide all students with world-class experiences through advising excellence, enhanced curricular creativity, and transformative learning experiences.*

*The objectives and actions will enable each student to create their own "Illinois Trajectory": a path through his/her/their years here that is marked by meaningful intellectual, social, and psychological integration and growth in a diverse environment.*

**Objective 1:** Provide high impact support for student success through coordinated advising, mentoring, programming, and related activities to foster the skills and mindsets for life-long learning.

## **Actions:**

- Conduct a comprehensive review of our current advising model across the college and invest in systemic changes and ongoing assessment to best support our diverse student body.
- Create the LAS Advising Academy to formalize and focus on best practices for advisor training and professionalization across the college.
- Create a promotional path for academic advisors.
- Expand opportunities for students to reflect on, intentionally map out, and engage in their wellbeing and career readiness while at Illinois.
- Provide life and career coach training for advisors and others who work directly with students for student well-being and career readiness.
- Identify and implement best practices in advising, mentoring, and professional development of graduate students.

**Objective 2:** Deliver creative and innovative teaching and learning experiences in and out of the classroom, using best practices that take into account the needs

of historically underserved students.

## **Actions:**

- Reinvent the LAS Teaching Academy to disseminate research-based best practices in teaching and support instructors at all career levels.
- Develop and promote programs that allow students to build relationships with members of the faculty.
- Increase opportunities for innovative teaching and experiential learning, including community-based programs, global education, interdisciplinary collaboration, and enhanced research opportunities for undergraduate students.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for LAS online education.
- Identify needs for 21st century teaching facilities across the college, including classrooms, labs, and flex spaces.
- Expand students' engagement with digital technologies to prepare for today's society and workforce, including the ethical and cultural matters surrounding their usage.
- Create measures to help students focus on core skills and values, in line with the Illinois Student Learning Outcomes.

**Objective 3:** Develop more opportunities to promote a diverse, inclusive, and accessible community, particularly for historically underserved U.S. students, students with disabilities, and international students.

## **Actions:**

- Foster diversity and intercultural learning by increasing the number of courses and programs of study that offer experiences to engage meaningfully with cultural differences.
- Integrate values of diversity and equity strategically and frequently into communications with students, including in



syllabi, advising websites, and college-level communications.

- Review, assess, and adjust the current model of advising, courses, and other support for historically underserved students to ensure retention, graduation, and post-graduation placement success.
- Review and revise curricula, both at the lower levels and at the level of completion, for accessibility to students coming from under-resourced high schools in Illinois.
- Create a strategy for and increase staffing of recruitment for diversity and equity activities, including creating relevant outreach and academic programming for under-resourced high school students, and communicating regularly with high schools and community colleges to ensure students have information and support needed for their application to Illinois.

**Objective 4:** Commit to supporting and promoting student well-being throughout our college community.

## **Actions:**

- Collaborate with campus partners to support student well-being through creative and integrative programming and through opportunities to expand campus mental health counseling staff.
- Integrate values around well-being regularly into communications, including in syllabi, websites, newsletters, social media, and other college-level communications.
- Develop opportunities and incentives for instructors, advisors, and other staff to support student well-being and provide resources for students' academic, personal, and professional development.
- Develop a holistic well-being coaching program for instructors and staff to promote students' healthy lifestyles as a direct response to the mental health crisis on campuses today.





## Foster Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

*We commit to promote the access and inclusion of historically underrepresented minority faculty and staff in research, creative, and instructional activity and to provide access to, and the inclusion of, historically underrepresented minority graduate and undergraduate students in education and research. We will achieve equity, inclusion, and diversity through identifying barriers in college and campus unexamined practices, policies, processes, and programs that impede entry and success in academic endeavors. And we will actively eliminate those barriers, ensuring that all in our college are welcomed and able to flourish.*

*Because diversity, equity, and inclusion must be understood as central to college and campus excellence in teaching, research and service – not as a separate or distinct goal apart from other categories of “excellence” – the objectives and actions of this goal are referenced in this section and integrated throughout our strategic plan.*

**Objective 1:** Lead campus efforts to recruit and retain historically underrepresented minority faculty, staff, and students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

**Actions:**

- a. Strengthen support structures for historically underrepresented student success through ensuring adequate resources for the Access & Achievement Program, graduate fellowships, and undergraduate scholarships.
- b. Work with the relevant campus offices to improve hiring practices and policies in order to increase and diversify departmental staff involved in recruitment, administration, advising, and other elements of departmental culture.
- c. Seek out and support college and departmental initiatives to develop and improve long-term reciprocal partnerships with local K-12 schools, community organizations, and minority-serving institutions.
- d. Reassess the role of public engagement as

a form of scholarly work, recognizing the importance of such work for the research, teaching, and service of historically underrepresented faculty members.

- e. Work with the campus to expand the Target of Opportunity Program (TOP) to include salary funding until the faculty member resigns or retires, expand the Dual Career for Academic Couples Program (DCAC) to include financial support for faculty with partners eligible for academic professional or some civil service positions, and expand the minority start-up funds program to include transgender faculty and faculty with disabilities.
- f. Develop data dashboards and collect metrics to assess and hold the college and its departments accountable for their climate and for the diversity of their students, faculty, and staff.

**Objective 2:** Elevate our status as the campus center for scholarship and teaching by historically underrepresented minority faculty and as the campus center for scholarship, teaching, and programs focused on improving both intercultural competence and the climate for international students, faculty, and community members.

**Actions:**

- a. Build on the academic excellence and support the essential activities of the American Indian Studies Program and the Departments of African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Latina/o Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies through the construction of a modern instructional and research facility. Provide increased funding for faculty, students, and curricula through budgeting, grants, awards, and gifts.
- b. Lead the campus-wide implementation of the U.S. Minority Cultures General Education requirement through the development of courses and pedagogical resources for graduate students and faculty involved in this instruction.



- c. Leverage the work of the college's Student Academic Affairs Office and the School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics to continue building and supporting programs and curricula aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of international students and the intercultural competence of students, staff, faculty, and community members in the college and across campus.
- d. Work with college units to develop intellectual communities that help all members of the college thrive.

**Objective 3:** Provide transformative leadership that produces an inclusive climate and culture for faculty, staff, and students.

**Actions:**

- a. Continue to implement a comprehensive program for departmental training on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in areas such as hiring, evaluation, promotion, and retention.
- b. Implement a five-year cycle of climate surveys for all college units, leading to action plans that promote a diverse, equitable, and inclusive climate free from harassment based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or nationality.
- c. Provide in-person workshops on diversity, equity, inclusion, and sexual and gender-based harassment that are grounded in best practices for transforming work cultures.
- d. Recognize actions by departments, faculty, and staff that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through emphases in annual reports and evaluations and the allocation of resources.
- e. Work to diversify administrative leadership at the campus, college, and departmental levels through developing leadership training opportunities, and reward and recognize leadership roles occupied by women and historically underrepresented minority faculty and staff.



## Support the People of the College, and Strengthen its Resource Base, Visibility, and Impact

*We affirm that people are the core of our college. Supporting and developing faculty and staff as well as maintaining, building, and using college resources in a transparent and meaningful way are essential to achieving the objectives described in goals one through three. A coordinated and strategic approach to human resources, financial planning, facilities management, advancement, and marketing and communications is critical to achieving our goals.*

**Objective 1:** Improve support, mentoring, and recognition of civil service employees, academic professionals, and specialized faculty across the college.

**Actions:**

- a. Develop unit-level plans for professional development and mentoring of professional staff members and specialized faculty.
- b. Create, distribute, and implement college-wide policies for the annual review of professional staff members and specialized faculty.
- c. Create additional programs to acknowledge the vital role of professional staff and specialized faculty.

**Objective 2:** Increase understanding of college resource administrative processes, improve clarity on budget and allocations, provide transparency on resources and protocols, and encourage faculty governance.

**Actions:**

- a. Establish annual strategic budget reporting process for academic units.
- b. Engage faculty to develop and evaluate budgeting policies in the college.
- c. Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the college structure and operations throughout the college. Identify and

implement recommendations.

- d. Prioritize the college's values, including creative and innovative pedagogy and diversity, equity, and inclusion, when evaluating potential and existing initiatives and programs.

**Objective 3:** Maintain, enhance, and create physical spaces in support of the college mission.

**Actions:**

- a. Evaluate current and future programmatic needs of college units and initiatives utilizing master planning and space usage analysis.
- b. Seek opportunities and resources to revitalize and create state-of-the-art facilities and technology for research, teaching, and student support.
- c. Increase efficiencies, make environmentally and fiscally conscious decisions, and manage facilities in a responsible manner to preserve resources.

**Objective 4:** Build a model marketing and communications operation that creates visibility, drives engagement and affinity with key stakeholders, and increases resources for the college.

**Actions:**

- a. Build a branding and messaging strategy grounded in research that leverages the new campus brand.
- b. Continue to develop and implement a college-wide marketing plan for recruiting and diversifying our undergraduate student body.
- c. Establish new community partnerships and boost public engagement efforts to increase visibility of the college.
- d. Create an enhanced communications plan for sharing research from across LAS, articulating its impact and contributions to the community.



- e. Review, assess, and make recommendations on communications support across college units, creating clear expectations on the role of unit communicators.
- f. Continue implementing and improving the college website framework to ensure consistent messaging for key audiences including prospective students and donors, with the goal of 100 percent unit participation.
- g. Cultivate and support faculty to excel at communicating their expertise to broad audiences.

**Objective 5:** Build relationships with key constituents in order to leverage their time, talent, and other resources for the advancement of the college and its mission.

**Actions:**

- a. Educate, train, and mobilize unit executive officers to create strategic plans that will build strong advancement partnerships across the college.
- b. Optimize the advancement structure of LAS to reflect college and unit-level priorities and needs.
- c. Take a lifespan approach to connecting with alumni across all stages of their lives through a variety of opportunities that appeal to all forms of philanthropic engagement.
- d. Build connections and infrastructure to leverage opportunities for corporate and foundation support of research, scholarships, and job placement.
- e. Enhance alumni advocacy to advance college priorities.
- f. Reinvigorate the Lincoln Scholars Initiative to secure the next generation of support for LAS students with demonstrated need.







# College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

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