

*Susquehanna University:*  
*A Plan for Greater Intellectual Engagement*  
*and a Stronger University Community*  
*2003 - 2008*

**Approved by the Board of Directors**  
**November 3, 2003**

## Introduction

Susquehanna University is a strong and vibrant institution. The University has gained strength during the past 25 years through the extraordinary efforts and generosity of faculty and staff, board members, alumni, parents, and friends, and a series of thoughtful and focused planning activities. The most recent strategic plan called for “ambitious growth in quality, size, diversity, and institutional strength.” We have realized much of what the plan imagined, and as a result, the health of Susquehanna University is better than ever. These successes have bolstered confidence and elevated the expectations of the campus community.

The current planning process began in November 2001 and continued through the integration of planning with the University’s decennial Middle States review process. From the beginning, this planning process has sought to be inclusive and to model collaboration among faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents and friends. More than one thousand persons responded to our invitations to come together to assess the University and to imagine how we might strengthen the experiences of our students.

Several factors have influenced the current planning process, including a major generational shift among faculty and staff, the University’s new classification as a national liberal arts college, and the need to re-dedicate our efforts to bolster diversity and to become a more inclusive community. During this time, the national economy has been deeply challenged, and we live in an era of new security concerns both at home and abroad. These factors have resulted in a growing sense of appreciation for the University’s mission, health, and position, along with a determination to act as responsible stewards, while also embracing new ways to strengthen the learning experiences of our students.

The initial planning activity resulted in the faculty and the Board of Directors adopting a Statement of Strategic Vision and Themes (see Appendix A). This framework established two commitments – achieving **greater intellectual engagement** and a **stronger Susquehanna University community** – that have guided the planning effort. These became the touchstones of the planning process, along with a set of requirements that call for us to match resources to commitments, transform practices to accomplish objectives creatively and collaboratively, and to assess our efforts in ways that foster realistic appraisal and continuous improvement.

The planning and self-study processes have also included a thorough review of the University’s statement of mission and guiding values. This planning document includes the revised mission statement and guiding values that served as the foundation for consideration of the strategic initiatives. While the planning and self-study processes have yielded dozens of worthwhile ideas, it is our intention to focus institutional efforts and resources on a small set of initiatives that we believe will most enhance the student experience and strengthen the University. These strategic initiatives are aimed at constructing a more challenging and supportive educational environment.

Susquehanna University is a remarkable institution. The combination of a talented and devoted faculty and staff, strong programs, and beautiful campus and facilities make Susquehanna University an exceptional laboratory for learning. To fully realize our promise and potential, we must all think of ourselves as both teachers and learners. This strategic plan seeks to enhance the student experience, further strengthen the institution, and secure the University’s standing as a national model for exemplary undergraduate education.

## **Mission**

Susquehanna University educates undergraduate students for productive, creative, and reflective lives of achievement, leadership, and service in a diverse and interconnected world.

## **Guiding Values**

Susquehanna University is

- A selective, residential, national liberal arts college focused on an undergraduate education integrating the liberal arts and preparation for professions and careers.
- A learning community that values diversity; intellectual collaboration among faculty and students; scholarship and research; health in mind, body and spirit; and learning in and out of the classroom.
- A working community that recognizes its faculty and staff as its greatest resource, values cooperation, and expects ethical behavior and mutual respect from all its members.
- A responsible community committed to financial stability, good stewardship, and a pragmatic and ambitious approach to its work.
- A valuable resource serving the local community and region, while engaging in the larger world through strong urban and international connections.
- A physically attractive setting for reflection and learning.
- A community that expresses its Lutheran heritage through the free and open exploration of ideas, commitment to service, development of individual talents, and the welcoming of individuals of all backgrounds and beliefs.

## **Priorities to Develop Greater Intellectual Engagement and Strengthened Community**

Modern colleges and universities at their best express the understanding that learning takes place in human communities. While learning is a dimension of all human activity, colleges and universities are distinguished by the intentional creation of multiple and overlapping communities that focus on carefully selected learning environments and methods. In a university, students become members of a larger community and many smaller communities: a class, lab, residence hall, place of work, ensemble, team, club, or organization. Each helps students to understand what they want or need to know and how to know it. Thus, learning is itself a learned process that reflects the characteristics, techniques, and mores of the communities in which it takes place.

Susquehanna University is an academic community striving to be its best. Learning is about making and maintaining meaningful connections: connections among people, connections with knowledge, and connections to communities both local and global. Students who enroll at Susquehanna University accept an invitation to engage in a number of formal and informal communities of inquiry, practice, and shared experience.

Because our learning is in no small measure constituted by the communities in which we participate, a concern about learning must be coupled with a concern for the cultivation of the communities that frame, surround, invite, and constitute learning. Thus, our work for the next five years must focus sharply on initiatives that will enhance our efforts to create a climate and culture that will both increase intellectual engagement and strengthen community. This plan sets out four broad priorities and their attendant initiatives to move us toward this goal.

### **Priority I: Develop the Common Experience of Our Students**

This priority would create at the heart of our environment a formal set of shared learning experiences to further engage students in our academic community during their time as undergraduate students and prepare them for lives of committed citizenship during and after their Susquehanna experience. Several pilot programs are already underway. The intention here is not to override or replace this work but rather to gather some of our best ideas to date and supply further support and impetus to complete this transformation. Initiatives under this priority are:

#### ***Initiative 1: Entering the Community***

Strengthen and focus the first year program for students. This program should provide students with an introduction to this learning community in ways that foster the development of the whole person. It would include strengthened and focused attention on the transition into the University environment, beginning with accepted students' first contacts with our community, orientation to the residential living and learning environment, and an introduction to liberal education. We will introduce students more fully to the responsibilities and rewards that are hallmarks of membership in an academic community. Development, implementation, and coordination of this program will require meaningful collaboration between all components of our campus, but especially between those units responsible for curricular and co-curricular life. We will give particular attention to general academic expectations and preparation in foundational skills for

continuing study, especially in reading critically and writing well. We will introduce new students to the concept of integrated and intentional learning that takes place across the student experience rather than being limited to the classroom.

*Outcomes:*

- Students experience a more intentional and immediate sense of personal, social, and intellectual engagement with faculty, staff and other students during their first year.
- Students are self-directed learners; they understand the importance of taking responsibility for their education.
- Students are formally introduced to the philosophy and concepts of liberal learning, the importance of diversity, and the unique character of a Susquehanna education.

*Actions:*

- A committee of faculty and staff, in consultation with appropriate others, studies and revises the curricular experience of first year students, including exploring the implementation of a first-year seminar and a summer reading program that emphasizes liberal learning and diversity.
- A committee of faculty and staff consider new models of academic advising and registration for first-year students.
- Under the leadership of the Dean of Academic Services and the Dean of Students, working with the Coordinator of First Year Programs, staff members review and enhance transition experiences for new first-year and transfer students, including Placement Days and Parents' Orientation, summer communication/mailings, a new early arrival program (e.g. service, adventure, wilderness), and orientation.
- The Deans and Department of Residence Life enhance the residential environment for first-year students in the residence halls, considering new options such as living communities connected to first-year courses.

*Benchmarks:*

- Positive change in responses to National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as measured between first and senior years and across time.
- Positive change in responses to Cooperative Institution Research Project (CIRP) and Your First College Year (YFCY), surveys administered at the beginning and end of first year, and positive change in trends as tracked across multiple years of administration.
- Comparison NSSE, CIRP and YFCY information with peer or like institutions.
- The attainment and maintenance of a 90% first to second year persistence rate (from current 5 yr average of 87%).
- Decrease in the number of students who are in academic difficulty at the end of the first year (e.g. with a GPA below 2.0).

***Initiative 2: Making Connections***

Provide for all students educational opportunities that connect practice and experience to scholarly reflection, integrate liberal and professional education, and foster civic engagement. This experience could take many forms – off-campus study, service learning, internships, self-

designed experiences – but would be bounded by some structure of oversight and accountability that would include temporal minimums and reflective components.

*Outcomes:*

- Students' undergraduate careers include one or more off-campus experiential learning projects, e.g., study abroad, internship, service learning, etc.
- Students acquire the maximum meaning from the experience, as a result of preparation, reflection, and integration with their entire educational experience as it has progressed to date.

*Actions:*

- Faculty, with leadership provided by the Curriculum Committee, Deans, and Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), agree on a broad definition and set of parameters for the Making Connections experience.
- Faculty design and build the curricular components of the experience—incorporating existing programming and creating new courses and opportunities as appropriate.
- The VPAA and Deans create the appropriate administrative structures to support the experience—incorporating existing structures and creating new structures as appropriate.
- Faculty, with the support of the VPAA and Deans, create faculty development opportunities so that faculty advisors are able to make informed recommendations to students about opportunities in satisfying this experience.

*Benchmarks:*

- Internal progress toward 100% compliance that all students graduate having had a Making Connections experience.
- Results from newly developed pre- and post-experience student survey.
- Positive change in responses to NSSE in the area of “Enriching Educational Experiences.”

***Initiative 3: Demonstrating Achievement***

Develop a capstone experience for all students. This experience would be marked by disciplinary and interdisciplinary flexibility and, in most cases, be a component of a student's major and/or minor curriculum. These experiences would culminate in a common Senior Capstone Celebration that publicly recognizes student work through presentations, performances, posters, portfolios, or exhibitions over the course of an appropriate time frame.

*Outcomes:*

- Students have a capstone experience. Although there are expected to be disciplinary differences in the form of a capstone experience, it should have the following general characteristics:
  - disciplinary or interdisciplinary scholarly research or creative work
  - original, novel, or inventive, oriented toward the creation of new knowledge, new insight, new creative works, or new perspectives that build on an existing topic or work

- independent or conducted as part of a peer collaboration but always intensively mentored by one or more faculty
- advanced and requiring the application of knowledge and skills acquired through previous coursework
- Students disseminate the product of their capstone experience in a public forum; at least some portion would be featured in an annual celebratory event that would engage the whole campus community.
- Faculty accommodate this effort within an evolving curriculum and flexible workload structures.

*Actions:*

- Faculty, with leadership provided by Department Heads, Program Directors, Curriculum Committee, Deans, and VPAA, agree on a broad definition of capstone experiences.
- Departments and programs not currently offering capstone experiences use the University definition to create capstones appropriate to their curriculum and discipline. At the same time, departments and programs that do currently offer capstones use the University definition to modify and strengthen their offerings as necessary.
- The VPAA and the Deans, working with Department Heads, Program Directors, and the faculty, create appropriate workload structures to accommodate the unique challenges of administering Capstone experiences. In particular, these structures will be able, within the regular measures of faculty work, to account for the increased individualized instruction that will likely be central to capstone experiences in many disciplines.
- Faculty, deans, and the VPAA work together to expand the venues at which students could disseminate the products of their capstone experiences. This would include venues at the departmental, school and university levels. The last would include expanding the current Senior Scholars Day. In addition, increased student participation in off-campus venues (both disciplinary and undergraduate conferences) would also be encouraged.

*Benchmarks:*

- Internal progress toward 100% compliance that all students graduate having had a capstone experience.
- Participation rates in annual celebratory event of both senior presenters and audience of 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup> year students; results from an evaluation instrument developed for the event.
- Number of student presentations/performances at national and regional conferences; goal by 2008 would be to have 25% of senior class participate in one such event.
- More competitive scoring within Liberal Arts category on NSSE senior data on Level of Academic Challenge and Interaction with Faculty.

We recognize that the curriculum and graduation requirements are the province of the faculty through its Curriculum Committee and so the details of any specific proposals for change are subject to the approval of both. These initiatives are not intended to write curriculum but rather to indicate in broad strokes some directions around which there appear to be a growing consensus and desire for sustained effort.

## **Priority II: Foster a Culture of Intellectual Engagement**

During the next five years, the Susquehanna community will focus on developing and fostering a more intentional, widespread culture of intellectual engagement. Improving teaching and learning at Susquehanna in this way will require coordination and collaboration at every level: among individual faculty and staff members; within and among academic, student life, and other units; and across disciplines. We must be willing to embrace new partners, experiment, and reflect critically on our efforts. Four specific initiatives comprise this priority:

### ***Initiative 4: Experiment with and institute various advanced forms of student/faculty collaboration***

The experience of a number of our academic departments with forms of advanced student/faculty collaboration has persuaded us of the high value of this kind of activity for students. Consequently, we are intent on creating opportunities for student/faculty collaboration in what we may term “advanced professional activity” within a discipline or across disciplines. We will need to experiment to discover those forms of collaboration that are both educationally compelling and feasible in order to be able to offer such opportunities to all advanced students. Indeed, this is essential if we are to accomplish the goal of developing a capstone experience for all students. As faculty work with students and with one another through academic departments and committees to develop suitable forms of collaboration, a broader question also should be addressed: what forms of collaboration among students and between students and faculty at various stages of students’ development will foster a culture of intellectual engagement and prepare students for the advanced activity proposed here? Our answer to this and related questions should result in a more refined understanding and definition of various forms of faculty collaboration with students, a clearer focus for such faculty efforts, and a better recognition of both the value of this work and of the financial and instructional resources required to do it well.

#### *Outcomes:*

- Departments and programs have opportunities for student/faculty-staff collaboration in their curricula.
- The campus recognizes and celebrates student/faculty-staff collaboration in ways that demonstrate the value that we as a community place on it.

#### *Actions:*

- The VPAA, working with the Deans and faculty, create structures to support undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity, including the ability to fund proposals from students for supplies, travel, etc, that are necessary for their research activity.
- The VPAA expands the Summer Research Partners Program beyond its current focus on the natural sciences to provide student stipends for summer research in any discipline.
- Faculty and staff supervisors of work-study students provide opportunities for those students to engage in advanced professional activity whenever possible.
- Admissions and Financial Aid expand the University Assistantship program to further promote student/faculty-staff collaboration.

- The VPAA, Deans, faculty, and staff find ways to celebrate and recognize student/faculty-staff collaboration (symposium, University web page). Data on such activity is regularly collected.
- The faculty consider establishing criteria for a “project-based” category of courses that would involve significant amounts of student/faculty collaboration.

*Benchmarks:*

- Increase in student/faculty-staff collaboration activity from baseline of 2003 data.
- Increase in number of student presentations at national and regional conferences.
- Increase in number and quality of student/faculty-staff publications.
- Positive comparative data concerning student/faculty-staff collaboration from our peer group.

***Initiative 5: Enhance sustained faculty scholarship and creative activity***

Faculty scholarship and creative activities contribute to a quality of intellectual engagement that is an essential ingredient in effective teaching. Sustaining faculty scholarly and creative activities requires a partnership between faculty initiative and institutional support. In light of the increased size of the faculty, as well as its professional accomplishments and aspirations, a review of current University financial support for, and policies and practices governing sabbatical leaves, workload flexibility, and evaluation and recognition of faculty professional development should be undertaken. The review also should consider how best to mentor both new and continuing faculty about their professional development as scholars and should propose recommendations about how best to provide incentives to faculty that will encourage external grant seeking in support of scholarly activity.

*Outcomes:*

- A higher proportion of faculty members are engaged in scholarship and creativity, and the faculty also collectively produces more scholarship and creative works. Such work enjoys significant recognition and prominence in campus culture and is nationally recognized by the respective disciplines and professional organizations to which faculty belong.
- Adequate internal and external resources are devoted to supporting faculty scholarship and creative activity.
- Flexible workload structures are in place that encourage faculty to be teacher-scholars.

*Actions:*

- Faculty, with leadership provided by Department Heads, the Faculty Development and Research Committee, Deans, and VPAA, initiate a campus-wide discussion of scholarship and creative activity.
- VPAA, with Deans and Department Heads, initiates training for those conducting personnel evaluation to support appropriate expectation setting, evaluation and reward in the area of faculty professional activity.
- Director of Corporate & Foundation Relations, with academic administration, institutes a program for faculty and other professional staff to support grant seeking and grant writing by individuals, collaborative groups and the institution.

- VPAA, working with University Relations and the Faculty Development and Research Committee, finds ways to expand funding to support faculty research including providing some project support for sabbaticals and leaves. Such funding would continue to be distributed on a competitive basis.
- VPAA and Executive Vice President for Planning and Administration (EVP) continue to collaborate on facilities planning to construct the kind and amount of space that encourages interaction necessary for scholarship, creativity and collaboration.
- VPAA, with Deans, Department Heads and Faculty Affairs Committee, explores flexible workload and teaching load structures that support ways to give faculty increased opportunities for sustained attention to research including in pre-tenure years.

*Benchmarks:*

- Positive change in level and quality of scholarly and creative activity.
- Positive change in level of support for scholarly and creative activity, including greater external grant support for such activity.
- Positive comparative data concerning level and quality of professional activity from our peer group.

***Initiative 6: Creating a Cycle of Continuous Improvement***

Assessment of student learning and development is critical to improving our practice and demonstrating successes. Thus, assessment ought to be a routine, ongoing, integrated component of our work reflected in how we approach student learning and how we develop, offer, and revise University programs, services, and initiatives. Formal student learning outcomes should be generated to provide guidance for our work. The development of the student learning outcomes should be a collaborative process involving a wide representation of the campus community. More specific learning outcomes should also be developed at the unit (e.g. academic, co-curricular, service) and individual (e.g. courses, programs, events) levels. A comprehensive program of learning outcomes assessment should include initial and continual faculty and staff development, a timeline to introduce and sustain mechanisms for evaluation, revision, and reapplication, and a plan for personnel to assist in data gathering, analysis, and dissemination.

*Outcomes:*

- The University has in place a systemic, periodic review process of student learning and development in both curricular and co-curricular programs.
- Faculty and staff regularly gather and interpret data about student learning in ways that enhance the individual student learning experience.

*Actions:*

- VPAA and the Faculty Affairs Committee create a University Assessment Committee to oversee and coordinate work in this area.
- The academic administration, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Assessment Committee provide ongoing opportunities for faculty and staff to learn more about learning outcomes and the language of assessment.

- Departments and programs, working with deans and other administrators, determine appropriate learning outcomes at the school, program, department, and course level.
- The Curriculum Committee determines appropriate learning outcomes for the Core Curriculum. These will then be submitted to the faculty.
- The Assessment Committee helps to identify assessment methods that will determine if learning outcomes are achieved.
- Faculty and staff use established learning outcomes in academic and co-curricular programs and gather data on their success.
- All members of the community review and revise relevant learning outcomes and change them as desirable.

*Benchmarks:*

- Compliance with guidelines of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.
- Overall improvement on NSSE that indicates improved satisfaction with student learning.
- Comparison of present practices with development of learning goals at the course, department, program and university-wide level.

***Initiative 7: Integrate Major University Events in a Way that Enhances Intellectual Engagement***

The University will strive to integrate its cultural, intellectual, and social events. Such activities will generally have a greater impact if they are targeted and connected with courses or co-curricular activities so that their impact is cumulative and promotes active reflection on learning experiences. The benefits here might be even greater if connected through common themes in a given academic year or semester. To accomplish this, Susquehanna must coordinate the planning and scheduling of major cultural, social and intellectual events on the campus in order to achieve the most significant and lasting impact on the learning experience.

*Outcomes:*

- Across campus, there is a widely understood definition of what constitutes a major university event (MUE).
- Scheduling of MUE's happens typically at least 18 months in advance: adequate time for planning and for maximizing opportunities for intellectual engagement.
- Broader participation in/attendance at MUEs by students, faculty, staff, members of the community, alumni, and friends.
- Improved publicity and coverage for MUEs.

*Actions:*

- Vice President for University Relations (VPUR) convenes planning group to define a MUE and identify needed communications and support structures. Definition will include statement of desired goals/outcomes for MUE's, including expectations regarding intellectual engagement. Planning group will include representation from areas that are event producers and event supporters: academic deans and faculty, University Relations, Admissions, Student

Life, Athletics, President's Office, Chaplain, Continuing Education, Registrar, Facilities Management, Technical Support, Campus Scheduler, ARAMARK, Follett.

- Planning group reviews the deployment of available endowments and other restricted funds that have been established to support lectures, residencies, and performances.
- Planning group develops review criteria to categorize existing or proposed university events and identify events that qualify as MUE's. Group defines appropriate levels of support for each event category and works to standardize an events planning cycle.
- An MUE subcommittee is established to organize, support, and evaluate MUE's.

*Benchmarks:*

- Attendance records at MUE's, especially among students, faculty and staff.
- Media placements resulting from MUE's.
- Regular post-event evaluation process.
- Periodic audience surveys.

**Priority III: Create a Diverse Community**

A focus for this university during the next five years must be the intentional construction of a more diverse community. According to the American Association of Colleges and Universities' 2002 affirmative action statement, "Persuasive research indicates that for all students, engaging diversity on campus and in the curriculum promotes intellectual development, enhances critical thinking, reduces prejudice, improves intergroup relations, and contributes to student academic success and satisfaction. Exploring diversity also produces graduates more likely to engage as informed citizens in remedying unsolved social problems." To achieve Susquehanna's educational mission it is critically important to increase diversity on our campus and to create an environment that is supportive of diversity in all of its forms. Specific initiatives that will contribute to this priority are:

***Initiative 8: Increase Diversity***

Recruit, support, and retain students, faculty, and staff from historically underrepresented groups with the goal of achieving levels of participation that more accurately reflect the population of the United States. Diversity in many forms contributes to our educational goals and our community needs to embrace diversity in these many forms. Our focus for the next five years will be to increase the number and percentage of individuals in our community from historically excluded groups. Successful recruitment of African-Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans is at the heart of our desire for greater access and inclusivity in higher education both nationally and at Susquehanna University.

*Outcomes:*

- Annual, sustainable initiatives to increase the recruitment, support, and retention of students, faculty, and staff who will add to the diversity of the Susquehanna community are implemented.
- Susquehanna successfully recruits African-Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans in proportions that more accurately reflect the U.S. population in order to

provide access to higher education at Susquehanna for historically under-represented student populations and to provide role models, mentors, and friends for the students we recruit.

*Actions:*

- Senior staff, in consultation with other members of the campus community, sets and seeks to achieve annual, measurable targets for the recruitment of minority students, faculty, and staff.
- In support of these goals, the affirmative action officer leads an effort to clarify the role of affirmative action in hiring procedures and student recruitment programs. With the VPAA, the deans, and the Director of Human Resources, he continues to work with search committees to ensure that hiring processes support our commitments to diversity and inclusiveness and yield positive results.
- Senior staff leads efforts to develop new sustainable relationships (such as those with the SEED School) that connect SU with minority students early in their secondary schooling.
- The Financial Aid Office and Development Office seek ways to provide additional financial aid and other opportunities to support a diverse student body.
- The Presidential Task Force on Diversity (see Initiative #9) coordinates the development and delivery of workshops, campus events, and classroom experiences that 1) help the campus community understand and value how diversity contributes to our educational and communal goals and 2) challenge myths and stereotypes about gender, age, race, sexuality, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

*Benchmarks:*

- By Fall 2008 achieve a more diverse, inclusive Susquehanna community as follows:
  - students from 6.9% American minority students in fall of 2003 to at least 10%
  - faculty from 8.1% American minority faculty in fall 2003 to at least 11%
  - administrators from 6.3% American minority staff in fall of 2003 to at least 9%
  - hourly staff from 2.9% American minority staff in fall of 2003 to at least 5%
- 5-year persistence to graduation rate for American minority students continues to increase and approaches rate for all students.

***Initiative 9: Create a Sustaining Environment for Diversity***

Understand, develop, and promote a community that finds strength in the diversity of all its members. This work requires that we look forward and take new steps to develop a common understanding and common sense of purpose about the many forms of diversity and their importance for our educational and communal goals. We will examine the curriculum, co-curriculum, scholarship, programming, and other activities of our community as a means of making progress toward our goals of creating a sustaining environment for all members of our community. Toward the realization of this initiative the president, with the support of the Board of Directors, will appoint a Presidential Task Force on Diversity to recommend a comprehensive mechanism by which the various units of the campus will determine how best to engage in the process of helping the campus attain its primary diversity goals and how to monitor those processes for sustained effectiveness.

*Outcomes:*

- Susquehanna provides a sustaining environment for all members of our community. Women and members of minority groups feel welcome and are treated fairly. All aspects of the campus culture - curriculum, co-curriculum, scholarship, programming, and other activities – are seen as ways to contribute to and support diversity.
- A Presidential Task Force on Diversity provides leadership and guidance to the campus community in determining how best to engage in the process of helping us attain our primary diversity goals and how to monitor those processes for sustained effectiveness.

*Actions:*

- President appoints and charges the task force during October 2003.
- The task force will:
  - conduct an assessment of diversity/inclusiveness at Susquehanna and propose benchmarks for measuring progress
  - survey “best practices” at other institutions
  - develop an institutional statement on diversity/inclusiveness
  - serve as the primary source of communication, coordination, and example of Susquehanna’s diversity efforts and commitments
  - examine the findings and recommendations of the Middle States self-study with regard to diversity
  - meet regularly to address issues within the scope of its charge and makes appropriate recommendations to the president
  - pursue other tasks in consultation with the president

*Benchmarks:*

- To be proposed by the task force.

**Priority IV: Support Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity**

For Susquehanna to become its best, we must create the conditions that maximize the contributions of every member of the university community. In our efforts to embrace excellence, we believe that everyone is both a learner and a contributor to learning. This priority is most importantly about cultivating ways of thinking and acting. Specific initiatives will be:

***Initiative 10: Nurture a Culture of Continuing Development***

We will design, implement, and sustain a professional development program for faculty and staff that fosters continuing skill development and supports effective communication and collaborative decision-making within a culture of open exchange. This program should include effective orientation for new faculty and staff and on-going opportunities for continuing faculty and staff that support their performance, both before assuming new duties and after.

*Outcomes:*

- Susquehanna University is a learning organization that plans for and supports well-utilized, respected development activities for all its employees in ways that drive the institution's decision-making processes, support our educational mission and enrich our employees, our students and our community. Such development activities include suitable orientation for new employees and continuing opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and perspectives in a context of ethical application, self-assessment, effective evaluation and accountability.

*Actions:*

- Senior staff develops a statement of ethics as a standard for all employees.
- Director of Human Resources (HR) and academic deans develop formal new employee orientation programs tailored to the needs of each employee group (faculty, salaried and hourly staff). Each program includes a mentoring component, a review of SU's statement of ethics, and an introduction to diversity at SU.
- The chief financial officer (CFO) develops a policy statement on the appropriate use of professional development funds.
- The CFO includes in the operating budget a pool of funds to support training opportunities for hourly staff, administered by the HR director.
- The HR director and Director of Public Relations/Publications (PR) work with senior staff to retain external consulting support in developing and administering a triennial faculty/staff satisfaction and needs survey.
- The HR director develops an annual calendar of training sessions available to faculty and staff on skill topics such as IT, performance management, safety, diversity, ethics, budgeting, recruiting, and other areas identified in the satisfaction/ needs survey.
- The HR director works with senior staff to implement new performance management tools for salaried and hourly staff.

*Benchmarks:*

- Results of triennial faculty and staff satisfaction/needs surveys.
- Employee absenteeism and turnover comparisons.
- Biennial student satisfaction surveys.

***Initiative 11: Cultivate a Culture of Open Exchange***

We will design, implement, and sustain a comprehensive communication plan. This project includes identifying communication inefficiencies, formulating recommendations to improve campus communications, implementing recommendations, and assessing the plan's effectiveness.

*Outcomes:*

- The campus community is stronger and more open and is a place where all faculty, staff, students and alumni receive timely information on a regular basis that embraces appropriate involvement from all campus constituencies in decision-making.

- Susquehanna has greater morale, greater productivity, and an increase in alumni interest and participation including annual giving.

*Actions:*

- Internally, the PR director convenes an Internal Communications Advisory Group (ICAG) to identify communication problems and develop recommendations for improvement.
- ICAG devises strategies to create a culture of open exchange, based on feedback from triennial employee satisfaction/needs surveys, and incorporate into a communications plan. Examples:
  - create opportunities for campus-wide gatherings during the workday, both social and issue-based
  - encourage supervisors and campus leaders to share information and recognize jobs well done
  - provide equal access to general campus information, electronic and other forms
- The president shares information from his student lunches with ICAG for incorporation into its communications plan.
- Externally, the Alumni Office continues alumni outreach activities that take SU speakers on the road and further develops and promotes electronic communications with alumni through the online community (i.e., development of e-newsletter, surveys).

*Benchmarks:*

- Internally, same benchmarks as Initiative #10.
- Externally, increased alumni engagement with the institution as measured by participation in volunteer organizations, annual giving, and enrollment of alumni children.

***Initiative 12: Plan for Institutional Assessment and Renewal***

Just as we recognize the need to focus on educational assessment, so too must we strengthen our ability to assess institutional effectiveness. In a learning community, plans, budgets, implementation, assessment, and revision are linked constants that inform decision-making and create a climate in which best practices are enthusiastically embraced by all. We will develop and implement comprehensive institutional renewal plans for human resources, facilities, and finances. This will include developing and utilizing new institutional performance benchmarks. Regular attention to these indicators will yield important information for planning and decision making, especially in light of the University's new competitive context. We will give special attention to developing benchmarks in areas such as finance, facilities maintenance, equipment replacement, technology, development, staffing, and compensation.

*Outcomes:*

- 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) annually measure institution-wide progress.
- Benchmarks are used to assess financial performance, staffing levels and compensation, fundraising success.
- Life-cycle replacement plans are in place for facilities and equipment.
- Resource allocations are driven by strategic initiatives.

*Actions:*

- Senior staff develops a set of KPI's for Board approval as part of the strategic plan.
- EVP prepares annual reports on KPI results for Board review.
- Senior staff develops an institutional research function.
- Director of Facilities Management (FM) completes a facilities audit.
- FM and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) use the audit to develop life-cycle replacement plans for facilities and capital equipment.
- CFO prepares an annual capital budget in addition to the annual operating budget.
- CFO leads implementation of an integrated, campus-wide data information system.
- CFO's financial reports to the Board outline how budget allocations support strategic initiatives.

*Benchmarks:*

- KPI's benchmarked against our internal targets and data from our peer group.
- Annual AAUP, CUPA special studies of salaries at peer group institutions; local wage surveys; triennial benefits surveys with same groups.
- Participation in at least two national college IT surveys.

### **Requirements for Realizing Our Commitments**

From the beginning of this planning process, our community has recognized the need to pay attention to what will be required to realize our vision for Susquehanna. We must be sure that our commitments are matched by our resources, and that our practices emphasize communication, collaboration, and creativity. One of the many ways in which Susquehanna has grown stronger since its last strategic plan is in the development of its resource base. Enrollment growth, the Susquehanna 2000 Campaign, conservative budgeting, and some additional borrowing have allowed Susquehanna to add faculty and staff resources, to offer more competitive compensation, to invest significantly in facilities and technology, and to accumulate the reserves needed for future development. Our healthy financial condition also allows for the possibility of some additional borrowing. Thus, while no tuition-dependent small college can ignore the fragility of its revenue base, Susquehanna is one of few institutions in a position to make choices about its future and invest strategically in initiatives such as those identified in this plan. Such investment is timely; information provided to us by US News and World Report indicates that Susquehanna's current level of expenditures on faculty resources and student support services lags behind the levels found at 1st, 2nd and all but some 3rd tier national liberal arts colleges.

The financial modeling we have undertaken to assess our ability to underwrite our vision for the future assumes that the elements that contributed to our current strong financial position will be essential going forward. By Fall 2008, we anticipate modest enrollment growth that will produce 2,000 to 2,150 full-time undergraduates (compared to 1,895 in Fall 03); a campaign for annual support, endowment and capital projects of at least \$75 million; operating results that contribute to reserves; the use of the majority of accumulated reserves for capital projects; and some further borrowing in the range of \$10 million. In our budgeting, we will be guided by the following financial assumptions: in each year, the cash operating margin will be positive; over the five year

period, the financial statement operating margin should average greater than zero, and the last two years must each be greater than zero.

We have begun to consider questions that will require us to ask not only what more we need, but also what we can reallocate or do without. Because this community has demonstrated an ability to work together to make effective use of resources, we are confident that the talent and goodwill exists to make wise choices going forward. Outlined below are the major categories of investments that we believe will be essential to achieving the vision outlined in this plan. While we have reached a common macro-level understanding of what each entails and have attached cost estimates to each, we will continue to work on translating this understanding into annual budgets and multi-year plans.

### **Investment in People and Programs**

As the Guiding Values state, Susquehanna's people are its most important resource. As such, we will continue to monitor compensation levels at our 24 peer institutions as we work to offer competitive salaries and benefits. It also follows that we must make the continuous professional development of all faculty and staff a high priority. This includes providing additional funds to support training opportunities and finding ways of maintaining essential services in units where little or no cross-training is in place or possible.

The Middle States self-study process has identified the need to develop comparative staffing benchmarks for administrative units of the University. In addition, the priorities above – to develop the common experiences of our students, to foster a culture of intellectual engagement, to create and support a more diverse community, and to cultivate a climate of communication, collaboration, and creativity –bring the need for additional people and program support, as outlined below.

### **Faculty**

The need for an expanded investment in faculty time is woven throughout the plan. A primary example is in Priority One: Develop the Common Experience of our Students. While we already have in place some courses and programming for some students, to make sure that all students have all three experiences will require more people than we currently have. These needs, and those expressed in the subsequent initiatives, will require approximately 20-30 additional full-time faculty. While this number includes a response to growth in the student body, it also allows us to:

- Ensure that Writing and Thinking, the newly revised first year writing course, is fully staffed by full-time faculty and thus eliminate our current dependence on adjuncts to staff one quarter of these courses.
- Allow the current pilot course for transitioning students to college, Core Perspectives, to be expanded and more fully integrated with first year advising.
- Permit faculty to increase their oversight of student off campus experiences and to create the curricular links that integrate these experiences into a student's overall program.
- Make possible the creation of capstone experiences for all students. (Approximately 40% of seniors currently do not have them.)
- Expand significantly opportunities for student/faculty collaborative research and creative activity.
- Give faculty some additional time to attend to assessment, co-curricular integration, and scholarship and professional activity.

Such an expansion of faculty would be phased in over the life of the plan. And we would need to guarantee that we hired the right people in the right places. Therefore, some portion of this increase would be defined as 2-3 year short-term positions that could convert to tenure-track as we see evidence of results on the strategic initiatives. The overall net effect will be a reduced student/faculty ratio.

## **Staff**

Concurrent with an investment in faculty, the plan also requires an equal investment in sufficient staff to realize the goals above. We estimate the need for approximately 20-30 additional staff. Some of these positions are driven by enrollment growth, but most are program related. Investment in staff will allow us to:

- Add Student Life staff to work on first-year programs, co-curricular collaborations with faculty, and multicultural programming and to enhance staffing in residential life, counseling, and public safety.
- Expand the Development staff to sustain the anticipated campaign.
- Transition from a series of independent administrative software programs to an integrated database environment by both adding required additional IT staff and temporarily “backfilling” positions as current staff undertake the multi-year implementation/conversion process.
- Address staffing needs created as we have expanded the campus without adding grounds staff. Further expansion will also require additional custodians.
- Increase the number of full-time coaches and trainers so as to counter the national decline of the two or even three sport varsity athlete who could be recruited by a single coach, and the shrinking pool of interested candidates to replace dedicated, veteran part-time coaches.
- Address the campus-wide desire for an institutional researcher.

Parallel to faculty expansion, staff hiring will need to be phased in over the life of the plan. Actual numbers added in any given year will be subject to our ability to fund them within the budget parameters stated above.

## **Programs**

While people are the main ingredient for accomplishing our twelve Strategic Initiatives, we have identified at least \$500,000 worth of additional program support costs as well. These resources would allow us to:

- Expand the first year Orientation program.
- Invest in faculty development for new curriculum and assessment work.
- Provide support for the research and creative projects of students and faculty, both individually and working in collaboration.
- Support recommendations from the Presidential Task Force on Diversity.
- Implement a more systematic and inclusive program of staff training and professional development.
- Create a life cycle funding program that is informed by a comprehensive facilities and equipment audit.

As with personnel costs, this funding will be phased in over the life of the plan.

### **Investment in Process.**

Feedback from a variety of recent surveys suggests that Susquehanna's faculty and staff are working hard. Indeed, increasingly time seems to be our most precious resource. While additional people will ease some of this time crunch, the ambitious plan outlined above will necessitate that we both continue to work to capacity and consider ways to find current work that could be eliminated or done more efficiently.

On the administrative side, this rethinking of current work is already underway as we use the opportunity afforded by the adoption of a new campus information system to re-examine current business practices and streamline processes. There is also interest in finding ways to introduce more flexibility into faculty workload arrangements—for example averaging individual loads over multiple rather than single semesters. Such efforts will require the collaborations of deans, department heads and individual faculty to find the appropriate flexibility that maximizes student opportunities and faculty productivity. This experiment will hopefully find some parallels for staff. However, we will still need to continually consider letting go of some existing work so as to focus on our strategic priorities.

As Susquehanna continues to grow, we will need to maximize our use of campus facilities even as we invest in new spaces. Consequently, we need to revisit the “master schedule” to more flexibly and creatively create spaces for classes, athletics, performance groups, programs, and common meetings.

Resource allocation processes will also need to be re-examined in light of our strategic priorities. In as much as is possible, existing budgetary and restricted funds need to be directed toward these 12 initiatives. In addition, we will need to identify appropriate outside funding to support our goals and increase our level of grant writing.

Both the Middle States and strategic planning processes have focused attention on the need to more efficiently collect, analyze, and make centrally available institutional research data to support and even streamline decision-making processes. While hiring an institutional research director might be a first step, this is not a task that a single person accomplishes alone. Once again, the new campus information system can have an impact, but only if we consciously deploy and use it to its fullest capacity. We need to consider how the data we each generate can be used by others, leading to more attention to formats, timeliness, and information flows.

### **Investment in the Campus.**

As a residential college, Susquehanna is committed to providing its students with a seamless learning environment that requires ongoing investment in virtually every physical space. Even if Susquehanna remained at its current size, the need to make significant investments in facilities would remain. During the period of this plan, we will need to address needs in student housing, dining and social space, in science facilities, in classroom enhancements, and in infrastructure. We must also be prepared to make strategic property acquisitions as they present themselves.

We will continue to refine the capital planning model that allows us to translate these proposed projects into multi-year construction timelines and long-range financial plans. Our preliminary work suggests that the full scope of these projects is greater than any funding plan we can envision at the

present time. This should neither surprise nor discourage us. The architectural planning studies completed in 2002-03 have been valuable in translating needs into desirable and exciting projects, and necessary in helping us understand the costs associated with each. We have and will continue to refine our objectives, set priorities, and devise an appropriate funding strategy that includes the prudent use of reserves, additional borrowing, and successful fundraising. We are optimistic that we will be able to expand and enhance our campus in ways that will create excellent spaces to support change and innovation in a community dedicated to teaching and learning.

## **Conclusion**

Susquehanna University's first century was marked by a constant struggle for survival. It has evolved during the past 50 years into an institution that approaches its sesquicentennial with strength and optimism. Yet, it also looks to a future full of uncertainty. The future will not likely be an extension of the past. Healthy, forward-looking institutions such as Susquehanna increase their value to society by understanding their role in higher education, building upon their strengths, candidly assessing their shortcomings, and working collaboratively to realize their goals.

We believe that the strategic initiatives outlined in this planning document are appropriate and critical goals for the immediate future for Susquehanna University. The University must invest in its people, programs, and facilities in ways that help to move the institution forward. At the same time, we can realize these goals fully only by embracing the requirements that call for us to think about the institution and its work in new ways. If we work together effectively, our efforts to create greater intellectual engagement and a stronger university community will lead to enhanced student learning and a healthier University.

## Appendix A: Statement of Strategic Vision and Themes

### Vision/Purpose/Identity

**Susquehanna University is a distinctive national liberal arts college committed to excellence in achieving its mission of educating undergraduate students for productive and reflective lives of achievement, leadership, and service in a diverse and changing world.**

### Commitments – Susquehanna University is:

#### ***Committed to greater intellectual engagement that:***

- Integrates liberal and professional education
- Promotes disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Explores the meaning and value embedded in the diversity of human experience
- Connects practice and experience to scholarly reflection
- Fosters civic engagement – from the local to the global

#### ***Committed to a stronger Susquehanna University community that:***

- Expects all – students and faculty, staff and administrators, alumni and friends – to contribute to learning
- Finds strength in the diversity and contributions of all its members
- Evokes a common sense of purpose and the value of shared experiences
- Provides a learning experience that fosters the development of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit

### Requirements

- Matching our resources to our commitments
- Transforming our practices to accomplish objectives creatively and collaboratively
- Assessing our efforts in ways that foster realistic appraisal and continuous improvement