Summary Report  
SWOT Analysis Results, All-CLS Meeting, Sept. 3, 2015

This report identifies the most consistent themes that emerged from the SWOT analysis conducted during the College of Liberal Studies All-College Meeting on September 3, 2015. At this meeting, CLS faculty and staff were grouped randomly by tables and, in groups, asked to identify the college’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The results reported here were tallied from the submitted worksheets. The full data will also be made available for general perusal.

Current Strengths

Diversity and Inclusive Excellence
This was the most consistent theme emerging from the Strengths category of the SWOT analysis. CLS Fall Meeting participants specifically highlighted the dedication and commitment of CLS to increasing campus diversity and inclusive excellence, as well as noting the recognition of specific efforts geared towards increasing diversity. Further, several participant groups identified the diversity of faculty—including the diversity of disciplinary specializations and approaches to teaching and research—as a College strength. Fewer participants considered the diversity of the student body as a strength.

Faculty
Another consistent theme recognized the talents and quality of CLS faculty. Adjectives used to describe faculty included: experienced, talented, strong, quality, innovative, and creative. Further, CLS faculty were consistently described as dedicated to and enthusiastic about teaching, as well as committed and connected to students. Finally, some participants highlighted both our quality early-career faculty and our nationally recognized award-winning faculty in CLS.

Curriculum and Student Learning
Most consistent in this theme were participant observations about the critical, complex, lateral and analytical thinking encouraged by CLS curricula and evinced in CLS students. Additionally, CLS curricula engages skills in communication, citizenship and engagement, as well as international and global ideas. Further, some participants identified CLS as the creative hub of the University, serving as a bridge between the university and the community due to its focus on the humanities, arts, and social sciences via programs like Hear Here, MVC, the Center for the Arts. A few participants cited as a strength CLS’s central role in general education and undergraduate curriculum requirements.

Students
Building on the previous category, several participants CLS students’ work ethic, academic preparation, and skills as a strength. Further, participants noted that CLS provides excellent
opportunities to develop these strengths by engaging students in problem-based or experiential learning, involving students in undergraduate research, and meeting students’ needs more generally.

**Collegiality and Communication**
A smaller but still significant theme emerged from participant statements related to collegiality and communication. A few groups indicated that faculty colleagues within CLS are supportive and collegial; in fact, one participant group described CLS as the most collegial of the three UW-L colleges. Communication between departments was identified as a strength, as well as the strong relationship with and services provided by CATL. Two groups mentioned available mentoring support for faculty, including new and mid-career faculty.

**Community Connections**
This final category of strengths described community connections. Participants acknowledged a strong connection between CLS and the local La Crosse community, evidenced by project-based learning initiatives (e.g., internships, research, and/or other community involvement).

**Desired Strengths in the Future**
Participants indicated the need to close student achievement gaps and to continue to work to increase the diversity of faculty, staff, and students in CLS. Two participant groups suggested an increase in required CLS courses across the colleges. Overall, establishing stronger and more cohesive communication and opportunities for partnership across the college and the University as a whole was recommended. Relative to community outreach, participants saw the need for a stronger link to the La Crosse community, with the establishment of more service- or project learning opportunities. Increasing CLS visibility and increasing local and state-wide support for--and understanding of--the value of liberal education was strongly desired by many participants; this implies future strengths in the areas of marketing and public relations. In terms of students, participants advocated for stronger enrollments, which must be derived from better recruitment of students into CLS disciplines.

**Suggested Actions to Bring About Future Strengths**
By far, the most consistent response from participants to this prompt involved improvements to public relations and communication efforts, targeting both the campus community and the broader La Crosse community. CLS (and administration) were called on to more aggressively defend, communicate, and shine a spotlight on the liberal arts and sciences, promoting their value to both new and returning students. In addition, CLS should advertise events more widely across campus and in the community, and collaborate more strongly across colleges and departments. Another theme emerged identifying faculty workload, retention and promotion issues, also calling for an increase in professional development opportunities related to teaching and advising. Finally, a few participant groups mentioned the need for fundraising to enable CLS to preserve its existing strengths and increase future ones.
Current Weaknesses

Promoting the Value of CLS
Two closely-related trends emerged in the responses to the Weaknesses prompt: challenges in articulating the value of a liberal education and in promoting that value to multiple audiences. Collectively, this category suggests that CLS must not only clearly identify the importance and value of a liberal education, but also improve in how it explains and promotes this value to students, colleagues across the university, and--crucially--audiences outside of UW-L. Many comments in this category focused on the difficulty of communicating CLS’s value to external constituents--particularly, doing so in a way that does not appear as self-serving, self-important or defensive. At the same time, CLS should be “tooting [its] own horn;” participants suggested that CLS begin to market messages that specifically celebrate the liberal arts and sciences, rather than defending them. Participants also highlighted the need to communicate the value of a liberal arts and sciences degree clearly to students--not only within the context of the job-market, but also as a necessary part of culture and life beyond the university.

Image Problems
Building on the category above, a theme emerged that further identified specific challenges related to current CLS promotional strategies. Comments included negative perceptions from external constituents (both in the University and the community), who might see CLS disciplines as “easy” or not intellectually challenging, or, as other examples cited, perceive an “us vs. them” mentality. It was also observed that CLS students do not know how to market their liberal studies degree, particularly in comparison to other colleges and majors that offer more distinct and direct pathways to careers. A lack of communication about the value of the CLS core may further contribute to this negative image, as students may not know why they are required to take additional coursework outside of their field.

Faculty Workload
Another consistent theme was the difficulties of negotiating workload for faculty in the college. In sum, participants felt that CLS faculty work extremely hard for little compensation. Specific examples cited included: inequitable distribution of courses, lack of professional development opportunities, and lack of grant funding/support for research. In addition, participants noted that CLS faculty are compensated at a lower rate than those at other institutions of similar size/scope, are often juggling a heavy committee load, and suffer from the limitations of a department structure that prevents collaboration with colleagues in other disciplines.

Collegiality and Competition
The weaknesses identified thus far contribute to overall concerns with collegiality and competition (among and between colleges) for resources, students, and recognition. Participants noted a competitive culture at the university, and described CLS as having “an inferiority complex” when compared to the other colleges. An internal “us vs them” mentality is apparent between colleges but between departments, and between faculty, IAS, and classified
staff. Participants cited a “silo-based mentality” as one significant reason for this competition over funds, students and other resources. In addition, there was an implicit need for the College to remain competitive in offering resources to students and faculty—notably, a call to increase scholarships for students.

**Diversity and Inclusive Excellence**
Several participants noted that—while the University may be committed to inclusive excellence—there is a persistent lack of diversity in the CLS student body and among the faculty, and a lack of consistent support for and understanding of inclusive excellence initiatives. This was described by one group as a gap between “aspiration” and “reality.” A lack of support for international students was also mentioned.

**Leadership/Administration**
A final theme identified CLS leadership and administration as a weakness. Participants mentioned the lack of communication, innovation and transparency from leadership. A few groups associated low morale with how the administration distributes funding and incentivizes research and service. Finally, some participants expressed frustration with the organization of the College, its resistance to change, and its lack of overt political support for faculty.

**Actions to Reduce Weaknesses**
Participants made several suggestions for actions that could reduce these weaknesses. Actions with the most support from participants included: the need to advocate for CLS both internally and externally, and to promote the value of the liberal arts. Relatedly, participants also wanted to build a cohesive College identity. Participants further suggested that the College incentivize collaboration between departments in order to cohere the CLS community of scholars. Financial support and morale-building opportunities for faculty—regardless of level—were common action items, as were the suggestions to improve retention of faculty and recruitment of students.

**Opportunities**

**Community Involvement / Outreach**
Many participants noted the need to move beyond the university into the community, with key themes revolving around involvement, outreach, collaboration and partnership. Participants suggested that the university could be positively impacted by community connections that fostered instructional pedagogy (e.g. service learning) and promotional opportunities (e.g., CLS communication strategies). Participants also recommended the development of multi-disciplinary initiatives that could creatively address external concerns in the La Crosse community. A final theme emerging from this category suggests the need for community collaborations and partnerships that will enable CLS to fully realize the goal of the Wisconsin Idea in which the “boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state.”
Recruitment/Career Advising
Participants encouraged the College to actively engage in promotional and recruitment strategies aimed at bringing the benefits of CLS to a broader audience. One potential audience would be prospective high school students and their parents; participants suggested outreach to the schools that would tout the benefits of liberal education as a career and/or as a complement to the STEM fields. Other potential audiences identified by participants included nontraditional and transfer students, and international students (direct collaboration with IEE was encouraged here). In all cases, CLS should coordinate with various university constituencies to provide a strong and consistent message about the value of liberal studies as a career, and/or as a minor that could complement a pre-professional degree program.

Promotion and Partnerships
Participants believe that stronger promotion of CLS will strengthen the institution’s overall image and value to the La Crosse community. CLS is encouraged to develop a consistent message (of five or six talking points) that can be easily incorporated into media outlets, and communicated to all University employees. Other suggestions included creating a marketing plan to make us more visible (both within and outside of university walls) and to emphasize the positive aspects of a liberal education (e.g., encouraging creative problem solving, teamwork and critical thinking). Finally, it was observed that professionals in the university tend to be siloed in their offices or units; regular social opportunities might promote collaboration among university employees.

Curriculum
There was a pattern of responses that reflected a need to encourage cross-disciplinary and inter-departmental initiatives, including (but not limited to) multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary courses and increased options for promoting diversity and cultural competence.

Threats

Political Climate in Wisconsin
The most consistent theme in the Threats category identified then hostile political climate in Wisconsin and related issues, including legislative intolerance and disrespect for higher education, threats to faculty governance, erosion of the Wisconsin Idea, and most importantly, threats from budget cuts.

Faculty Retention, Recruitment, and Morale
Participants of the college meeting consistently named issues of faculty recruitment and retention as threats to CLS. These include: recruitment difficulties given low pay/benefits, lack of resources, loss of tenure protection, and the state’s political climate. Participants shared that faculty retention is particularly concerning as many faculty are either searching for new positions or have left UW-L because of compensation, morale, fear of cuts, and threats to tenure. A few
groups underscored the low morale of faculty as a threat, including the fear of debate and confrontation in a climate that appears to lack support for academic freedom.

**Public and Community Perceptions**
Groups shared consistently that the public has a poor understanding of what faculty in CLS do. Further, the public seems to misunderstand the value of liberal studies and/or perceives liberal arts as fluff. To combat these threats, CLS must communicate better what we do as a college and as an institution.

**Enrollment & Curriculum**
At least two participant groups specified that the emphasis on STEM education at the exclusion of the value of liberal arts threatens CLS. At least two other groups talked about decreasing student enrollment in CLS as a threat resulting in reduced relevance to students and legislators.

**Administration**
A small theme emerged that identified the administration of CLS as a threat. Participants emphasized a lack of clear communication, concerns about the reassessment of College priorities and about short-term and long-term planning for CLS.

Respectfully submitted by CLS Strategic Planning Committee 2015-16

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