



# Vision 2015

The Report of the Vision 2015 Task Force



EMPIRE STATE  
COLLEGE

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

# The Vision

In 2015, Empire State College, of the State University of New York, is widely recognized as a pioneering and innovative public university college. It provides high quality and affordable liberal, interdisciplinary and professional education to motivated and engaged lifelong learners everywhere in New York state and beyond.

The college, as the premier institution for adult learning within SUNY and across the nation:

*With clear expectations of its learners and of those who serve them, not only does the college continue to rank first in SUNY surveys of student satisfaction, it also has improved in all of its own unique indicators of quality.*

- supports learners as active partners in their education;
- transcends the boundaries of time, place and ways of learning;
- integrates and engages learners with their past, present and future creative and intellectual lives;
- creates and supports cooperative initiatives among all segments of the population to foster respect, civility and a welcoming environment; and
- supports the social, cultural and economic development and sustainability of both its learners and their communities.

With clear expectations of its learners and of those who serve them, not only does the college continue to rank first in SUNY surveys of student satisfaction, it also has improved in all of its own unique indicators of quality.

This attention to quality, plus the introduction of new offerings – both in person and online – has led to steady annual growth in the size of the college in terms of learners, graduates, and the number of faculty and staff.

Empire State College's profile and reputation is enhanced, especially through its strategic partnerships, and as a result of more focused attention to profiling the college's accomplishments in its

- innovative and unique modes of networked mentoring and learning;
- research and scholarship;
- advocacy for nontraditional learners; and
- organizational effectiveness.

# Implications of This Vision

*The following ideas and propositions arose during the development of the 2015 Vision, and are intended to inform the 2010 - 2015 strategic planning process. These ideas are developed further in the supplementary resources found on the 2015 Vision site: <http://www.esc.edu/Vision2015>.*

## Implications for Learners

### Learners' Needs

The college reaffirms its commitment to serving busy people who are engaged with the world about them, and are serious about enriching and expanding that world through education.

The average age of our learners has decreased somewhat recently, and learners' needs are evolving. They have more choices as to where to study, and many have expectations about the use of communications technologies in their learning. We must respond accordingly within the context of our mission, commitments and core values.

We will continue to innovate to enhance accessibility, quality and affordability for all motivated learners. Such diversity is not only core to what we offer; it also enriches us and our work. However, the college needs to develop a comprehensive approach that enhances our ability to be welcoming to all qualified learners, regardless of

- race, national origin or ethnicity
- gender
- class
- religion
- sexual orientation
- gender identity and expression

We must be clear about how we want to help learners who are not yet ready for college-level study. This could include developing qualifying studies, increased academic support and resources, and referral to community colleges and local agencies.

We expect that more learners will come to us under the auspices of a formal partnership, especially with community colleges and the public and private sectors.

We will be explicit about declaring ourselves to be a dispersed but highly networked college that harnesses the affordances of communications technologies to link to each other and to global academic resources, and to support our personalized mentored-learning approach.

We must therefore welcome learners who are less able or less willing to connect with us in this way, and see this as an opportunity for them to learn new ways to engage with the world effectively, irrespective of which mode of study they prefer.

### Academic Offerings

A rolling college academic plan and process is being developed to track and organize the various areas in which the college may expand its offerings, including public affairs/service, graduate nursing, adult learning, and a variety of undergraduate and graduate certificate programs. The plan also will include a schedule and process for program review and/or accreditation.

With a few exceptions, Educational Planning is the only study required of every Empire State College learner. It engages the learner and mentor in the design of an individualized degree plan that meets both personal and professional needs, while ensuring that the requirements of SUNY are fulfilled.

This unique study:

- differentiates the college from all other higher education institutions;
- is often a revealing and enjoyable experience for both learner and mentor;
- develops the skills for independent learning;
- lays a foundation for each learner's future success; and
- establishes an interpersonal relationship between the student and his or her primary mentor that remains in place and is active from first registration to graduation, and often beyond.

As learners' needs evolve, the college will develop creative, innovative and systematic ways of delivering educational planning in sustainable ways. In so doing, it will ensure equity of opportunity and experience for all undergraduates through more structured and consistent approaches to information sharing and orientation.

### **How Many Learners?**

Given the current and projected demand for quality, affordable higher education, and given the public mission to serve learners in unique and flexible ways, some growth in our activity is required if we are to fulfill our promise. In view of increased competition, and given our recent trends, a growth of about five percent per year in activity through higher retention and increased headcount is a reasonable target, assuming that:

- we are able to provide the faculty, staffing and facilities to accommodate this growth without sacrificing quality, and
- we are able to develop effective scalable and sustainable delivery and support systems.

Whatever overall rate of growth in activity occurs, it will not be uniform across regions, modes of delivery or levels. Based on current trends and depending on how we structure and link centers and evolve our offerings, we expect faster enrollment growth in the more “technology enabled” offerings.

The strategic planning process will develop this profile in more detail, and set targets for retention.

### **Services**

Consistent and accessible services for learners demystify college processes from application through graduation. Along with these, timely and appropriate academic support also is key to improving retention rates.

Improving organizational effectiveness assures seamless communication of policies, services and support throughout our diverse geographic, curricular and technological offerings.

### **Academic Support**

Academic support services are organized and staffed to meet the needs of learners in all environments, with a full array of integrated, learner-centered academic support services and resources that promote learning and success, from enrollment through to graduation and beyond.

### **Mentoring and Learning Models**

Mentoring is a key feature of Empire State College, and it informs all that is done for our students. Going forward, the college will:

- define and promote excellence in mentoring;
- learn from experience through research on the impact and effectiveness of mentoring on student retention, satisfaction and success;
- provide on-going professional development opportunities in mentoring, and build community among all mentors;
- adapt to new in-person and online environments (including the use of emerging technologies);
- anticipate and respond to shifts in student demographics and populations;
- explore new models for mentoring that build on students' experiences and promote authentic, substantive and collaborative academic learning communities;
- become a national leader in training for mentoring and the scholarship of mentoring, including a new master's program focused on adult learning; and
- promote a research agenda and publication base, and sponsor or host events in mentoring and learning.

### **Prior Learning Assessment**

The college provides national and international leadership in the field of prior learning assessment through innovative practice, research and scholarship, and ongoing engagement with the multiple ways knowledge is created, used and valued.

Our approach to prior learning recognizes that each of our learners is a knowledgeable participant in a complex and multifaceted society. We thus strive to develop:

- pedagogy as a mutual recognition of mentors' expertise and of students' learning and experiences;
- curriculum as continually shaped and reshaped through the interaction between communities of knowledge and practice; and
- multiple, well-supported and innovative methods of documenting and assessing learning that combine academic rigor, consistency and fairness with a respect for learning in all its complexity and individuality.

Not only is this approach consistent with all the college's values, it is an increasingly strategic advantage and will be profiled more deliberately.

## Implications for the College's Reputation

### Brand and Image

The college will build on its existing profile, making its image bolder and more contemporary, with a new tag line and a corresponding strategic marketing campaign. It will continue to leverage the experience and networks of its College Council and Foundation Board.

### Role of Alumni

With the number of alumni to exceed 75,000 by 2015, the college is making more strategic use of this huge resource to help recruitment, to raise the college's profile in every way, and to provide the college with many compelling stories of how our graduates' lives have been changed, and continue to change.

### Social Mandate

Our mission is to provide education to people who are actively engaged in sustaining and seeking to improve a challenging, diverse and problematic world.

Our role as a public institution is not separate from our citizenship in the same world that challenges our learners. We must endeavor to provide the education they need to thrive as individuals, as members of communities, as active citizens and as agents for change.

We therefore reaffirm our commitment to incorporating liberal and interdisciplinary studies, relevance, accessibility and respect for all throughout our offerings and services.

### Higher Education Profile

The overall profile of Empire State College among the general public and key decision makers is too low.

While being supportive in principle of our unique mandate, many do not understand quite what we do, nor what the potential is for the college to help address many issues, both economic and social.

We will be more engaged with SUNY system at all levels with a common message, and to promote innovative initiatives that raise the overall profile of the institution in Albany through our accomplishments.

There are some areas, such as prior learning assessment, mentoring, online learning and a unique research and scholarship profile where we should actively assume a central and leadership position and unashamedly brag about it.

We also will develop and execute an advocacy campaign to ensure access to financial aid for all part-time, adult learners.

The college lacks a coordinated strategy with respect to national recognition. The college is linked with many associations and initiatives across higher education, and we need to map these and identify

areas where we might become more actively involved. Other sections of this vision link to this profile, especially with respect to our leadership in mentoring and learning, and our research and scholarship.

There also are many ways to raise the college's international profile and to help SUNY and the state achieve their related objectives. The 2010 - 2015 strategic plan needs a clear statement of what an appropriate international profile, reputation and presence should be.

### **Communities Profile**

In 2015, Empire State College should be recognized within its communities (whether the public at large, businesses, nonprofit organizations, governments, and/or educational partners) as a valuable resource and a preferred partner in educational, economic and social matters. Our faculty and staff will be sought out for their expertise, and the college will be looked to by community and business leaders as a key player in local, regional, and state projects and activities.

There are many potential linkages with state and federal departments and agencies that would not only raise the profile of the college statewide and nationally, but also would increase our ability to access grants to support the achievement of this vision.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

To compete in this challenging economy, businesses, agencies and organizations will need to maintain a skilled and knowledgeable workforce to help them meet the needs of their customers, clients and members. In concert with this, learners seeking to maintain and improve their positions will need to upgrade and enhance their skill sets through higher education. The college has a successful track record in, and we will continue to pursue, such partnerships.

With unions we will continue to ensure that workers have the knowledge and tools to advance their interests. With government agencies we will promote

adult-friendly educational services and benefits, and to influence public policy.

While these endeavors often require legitimately disparate approaches, they are all rooted in John Dewey's belief that an informed and socially engaged workforce is essential to democracy.

It is important that Empire State College be deliberate about its intention to reach and recruit individual learners through such partnerships. The strategic planning process will consider the proposition that we strategically invest in, and organize ourselves accordingly, to be effective partners with diverse organizations, with appropriate principles, policies and processes.

This college is positioned as the key partner with all SUNY community colleges in developing pathways and options for their graduates to achieve bachelor's degrees. This reach has extended to include CUNY community colleges.

Likewise, we have invested and organized to serve veterans and military personnel and their families, building on current successful initiatives.

## **Implications for the College**

### **Organizational Culture, Structures and Processes**

This vision process has amplified the call for us to regard ourselves as truly "one college." By this we mean that we cease to operate in the silos we have inadvertently created. We will share all our expertise, resources and best practices through new structures and processes.

We will balance the needs of regional centers and units to serve local needs with the call for more consistency and equity of opportunity for learners across the institution. There will be more permeability among centers, graduate programs, distance learning, etc., so we can capitalize and harness the full expertise of a relatively small faculty complement. This has manifested itself, for example,

in a renewed and more important role for areas of study in how we hire new faculty, how we use digital networks to better connect learners and mentors who have mutual interests, how we develop our marketing strategies, and how we provide consistent orientations for both learners and staff.

One way to address the complex matrix of collegewide centers/coordinating center policies, practices and cultural issues is to have a fairly well developed sense of what it means to establish, lead and participate on a “team.” (This differs from governance committees and related task forces, where roles and mandates are clearly established.) Teams are key to implementing policies and processes, and to achieving many of the goals of a strategic plan.

### **Quality and the Learning Organization**

We will enhance and increase ways to enable and encourage our organization to achieve its vision.

We will have clear definitions of what quality means in a mentored learning context, and have developed a college report card to measure our achievements as an organization in these areas:

- our academic expectations of our graduates
- measures of satisfaction, retention, graduate success, responsiveness, time to completion, general education, etc.
- learning outcomes
- program review and renewal
- documenting our academic quality
- quality of our faculty and staff
- quality of service to each other
- our institutional effectiveness and efficiency
- our progress towards other strategic goals such as environmental impact and scholarship
- opportunities to support and link innovation in mentored-learning and services to a research and scholarship plan, and thus to contribute to the college becoming a true learning organization

- documentation of how we connect our metrics, innovation and scholarship to continuous improvement.

### **Research and Scholarship**

Significant potential exists for the college to better organize, support and reward all elements of Ernest Boyer’s concept of research and scholarship, in order to:

- become a “learning organization” and improve our own ability to serve learners’
- sustain the quality of work life,
- raise the profile and reputation of the college in many ways,
- create more opportunities to generate revenue.

A solid research and scholarship strategy generates its own momentum, both internally and externally.

### **Employee Self-renewal**

The health and effectiveness of the college requires that time and space be available for self-renewal not only of the organization itself, but also for all its employees that involves reflection, rejuvenation, recreation, refreshment and invigoration. We should look forward to opportunities to reinvent ourselves and to reconnect with our intellectual and creative lives.

We strive for excellence, expansion and exploration of all of our individual talents and potential and all that they bring to the college. These endeavors should be supported by resources for professional development.

The college has a staffing plan that will match growth with targets to increase the percentage of full-time faculty.

### **Greening the College**

Between today and 2015, Empire State College should be prepared to serve a growing body of students while generating a smaller carbon footprint, providing a full array of studies and degree programs

related to the environment and sustainability, and modeling environmentally sensitive behavior in communities across the state.

We also will play an active role within SUNY and beyond as an advocate for sustainability in higher education.

## College Finances

Progress towards achieving this vision will be driven by the availability of state funding, our freedom and ability to generate other financial resources through tuition, fees, philanthropy and grants, and by our own organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Our internal budget model will adapt to reflect the goals of the new strategic plan, and the college will lobby on all fronts to ensure it gets its full share of state resources through the SUNY budget allocation process.

# Getting There From Here

## Strategic Planning

During the six months from Sept. 1, 2009 to Feb. 28, 2010, the college will engage in strategic planning, led by the president, with support from the Office of Institutional Research. This broadly-based process will gather input from all corners of the college and from key external stakeholders.

The mandate of the planning process will be to:

- a) **engage all sectors of the college and key external stakeholders in an iterative process of consultation and feedback;**
- b) **develop a long-range plan of action, with responsibilities, timelines and anticipated costs for the college to achieve the 2015 vision. This plan will inform the budget development process for 2010/11;**
- c) **establish specific goals and targets in all key areas of the vision, strategies that will be adopted to achieve the goals, and metrics needed to determine progress towards those goals;**

- d) **coordinate the progress and direction of planning and related activities that already are underway or planned, including**
  - development of a strategic technology, academic and marketing plans;
  - development of a comprehensive approach to ensuring learner diversity;
  - building the capacity to undertake partnerships;
  - creating a vision for a “green college;”
  - continuation of the task force on faculty professional responsibilities;
  - creating a vision and plan for government relations.
- e) **ensure regular and effective communications and consultation with the college community and others as appropriate**
- f) **annually update and adjust the plan as circumstances change**

The process will be led by the president, working with a researcher and a writer, with the college’s Program, Planning and Budget Committee acting as an advisory body.

## Consultation

### During the Fall of 2009

- At key stages, the team will hold open forums in each region
- Present updates and drafts at each Senate meeting (and using Senate sub-committees to comment on specific sections of the plan) as well as at College Council, Foundation Board and Alumni Federation Board meetings
- Use groups that reach across various college constituencies (President’s Council, SSPs, AAOS, DAS, DAR, outreach, etc.) to provide updates and drafts
- Align this plan with SUNY’s goals

- Host a Web site where documents are easily accessed and comments can be provided at any time.

In January and February of 2010, final drafts of the plan will be formally shared with Senate, College Council, President's Council and SUNY.

Support and approval of the final plan will be sought from the chancellor and the SUNY Board of Trustees.

**Development process:**

The planning will be iterative, generating draft documents at key stages that will invite feedback and discussion, and working through these tasks in the following sequence:

1. Translate the vision into a strategic plan framework: what key goals and specific objectives will comprise the plan, and how will other plans nest within the larger plan (technology, college academic plan, environmental impact, etc.)?
2. Undertake a gap-analysis for each objective
3. Identify actions and strategies for getting to each objective
4. Identify measurements and targets for each objective
5. Identify those responsible for overseeing implementation and documentation of the plan.

For 2010/11 and beyond, budget requests and narratives will be closely linked to the plan.

## 2015 Task Force Members

Alan Davis (Chair)

Rebecca Fraser, HVACLS

Julie Gedro, CNYC

Elana Michelson, CGP

Susan Forbes, NFC

Mary Mawn, CDL

Ed Warzala, GVC, Senate

Gerry Lorentz, NEC

Kristin FitzSimons, Admissions

Kate Reis, NEC

Viktoria Popova-Gonci, LIC

Tai Arnold, OAA

Curt King, OET

Lisa Sax, OEM

Chris Rounds, CNYC

Tina Ungeheuer, Student Financial Services

Toby Tobrocke, OEA

Resource people: Evelyn Buchanan, OEA, Mitchell Nesler, OAIR, and Lynne Wiley, GVC

