



# Two-Year / Four-Year

*Snow College Strategic Plan White Paper*

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## Background

The future for community colleges prior to the recession of 2008 was challenging but clear. Now two-year institutions across the nation experience an unfamiliar future of paradoxical forces. The college market is flooded with new learners seeking more and better skills in order to establish themselves in a new economy. At the same time, colleges have experienced uncertainty regarding the resources needed to sustain growth let alone absorb the influx of new learners<sup>1</sup>.

Regionally, Snow College is challenged by mission expansion at all save one other in-state institution. With Utah Valley and, most recently, Dixie State reaching university status, Snow College remains one of two in-state schools with a mission dedicated to two-year degree programs. Compounding this issue is the fact that many of the larger schools continue to award associate degrees. In 2013, Weber State awarded 1,936 associate degrees compared to Snow College's 1,008 degrees. In addition, Weber State conferred 1,974 bachelor's degrees and 181 master's degrees<sup>2</sup> -- an option not currently afforded Snow College.

Two-year colleges are increasingly pressured from both above and below as general education (GE) courses/degrees become more widely available. In Utah, as in most other states, high school students have the opportunity to fulfill high school graduation requirements and concurrently acquire college credit toward an associate's degree. As this practice gains greater acceptance, more students enter college with a good portion if not all of the first two years of college completed. Combined with the sociological phenomenon of a missionary-age reduction proclaimed by the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints<sup>3</sup> (LDS), the relevant mission of the College as a two-year school is significantly threatened.

However, Snow College (by size and mission) is ideally positioned to respond to the increasing demand for postsecondary skill development and learning by offering affordable and relevant programs to people at multiple points throughout their lives. The following programmatic options will have a significant impact on how Snow College successfully positions itself for the future.

## Lessons Learned

**Mission Age.** As the college with both the youngest student body and the highest percentage of LDS students in the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) system, Snow College is uniquely vulnerable to the LDS Church's mission age decrease (only 25% of the College's student population is over the age of 20). Listed among the top reasons to attend Snow College, both prospective and current students cite (1) a desire to be away (but not too far) from home, and (2) uncertainty about their academic major. Both of these reasons are significantly diminished by missionary service because mission service takes these students away from home prior to college and the personal growth associated with the mission experience will provide greater career clarity to these young people. The opportunity to retain a student beyond the traditional two years (while not impeding their efficient progress toward a degree) provides the College with an enrollment benefit offset by minimal infrastructure costs. On the Community College Student

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<sup>1</sup>Sydow, D. & Alfred, R. (2013). *Re-Visioning Community Colleges*. ACE Series on Community Colleges. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2013.

<sup>2</sup>USHE. Databook and individual institutional websites regarding prospective graduates.

<sup>3</sup> 6 October General Conference, 2012.

Experiences Questionnaire administered to Snow College graduates (2012 and 2013), 70% indicated “they would return or continue at Snow College to complete a four-year degree”.<sup>4</sup>

**Carnegie 10% Rule.** In addition, as a rural campus complete with significant dormitories, food services and a large number of active campus clubs and social institutions, Snow College already communicates a four-year culture within a two-year framework. The new Bachelor’s of Commercial Music degree aligns the College within the *Carnegie classification*<sup>5</sup> 10% rule, which affirms that two-year schools can offer bachelor’s degrees provided they represent only 10% of the institution’s graduating class. Snow College typically graduates 800 to 1,000 students, which affords the college 80 to 100 of those students to be bachelor-degree graduates. The Bachelor’s of Commercial Music program forecasts 30 graduates, which gives the college room to develop two or three additional four-year programs without changing its two-year institutional status.

**Relevance of Two-year Degree.** Utah will always have a need for two-year schools, and Snow College fulfills that need with non-competitive growth and success (if not a monopoly) among resident and non-resident students seeking an affordable entrance to education and/or the workforce. The fact that only two schools (Salt Lake Community College and Snow College) offer direct vocational training and transferability positions the College as a (1) unique supplier of well-educated citizens and (2) a critical component to Utah’s rural and overall economy.

**Articulated Degree Agreements.** *Articulated 2+2 or 3+1 agreements* between Snow College and existing four-year programs will provide learners in the College’s service region more palatable options for degree and/or career advancement with minimal disruption to work obligations and family life. Such access is a part of the College’s core theme to provide locally-based advanced degree attainment and professional development with four-year higher education institutions (Core Theme/KPI 3.5.2) and supports the state’s K-16 alliance as well as the 66 in 2020 goal (among the 18 to 35 year-old population). Articulated agreements with four-year programs allow Snow College to maintain its two-year distinction without a threat to enrollment, mission, or the College’s standard of excellence. The College can expand its course, program, and degree offerings without changing the fundamental nature that has sustained the College as the “jewel” of the state of Utah for decades.

In addition, any progress toward four-year degrees offered by Snow College is more readily advanced because articulated agreements have pre-established the infrastructure required for “in-house” programs. Currently, the education department has established articulated transfer agreements with four in-state universities. Education students at Snow College complete 67 credits of program specific GE and pre-requisites prior to seamlessly transferring to either Utah State’s, Weber State’s, Southern Utah’s, or Utah Valley’s education programs. The goal for these students is to enter the workforce in four years rather than the typical five years associated with general transfer agreements. Similar agreements have been established by the College’s pre-engineering program (with Utah State University) and pre-pharmacy program (University of Utah) with new program articulation being developed by the College’s business program.

**Athletics.** Offering limited four-year degrees combined with well-articulated two-year transfer degrees allows Snow College’s athletic teams to maintain their excellence in conference and national NJCAA (junior college) competition. Moving from NJCAA to NAIA or NCAA classification comes at a very high cost to current athletic programs in terms of dollars, eligible athletes, and competition. It is in the best interest of the College’s athletic programs to offer four-year degrees while maintaining a two-year status.

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<sup>4</sup> Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire. Local Question #20 on Snow College’s 2012 and 2013 administrations to graduating students.

<sup>5</sup> [http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/ugrad\\_program.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/ugrad_program.php)

## National, State, Regional Trends

**Need for Two- and Four-Year Degree Options in Six County Region.** Limited access to higher education has contributed to the fact that residents (n = 66,000) from Snow College's six county service area are significantly below the state average for the percentage of residents 25 or older with a bachelor's degree (state average: 26.1%, six county average: 15.9%) and above the state average for percentage of residents living below the poverty line (state average: 10.3%, six county average: 12.5%).<sup>6</sup> Snow College represents the most convenient option for these citizens to receive the advanced education and training needed to build businesses and improve lives.

**Utah State Board of Regents Support.** There is sentiment among the members of the Utah State Board of Regents that Snow needs to evolve to have continued viability. There are local and national examples of institutions that have successfully transitioned to offer baccalaureate programs. Utah Valley University and recently Dixie State University moved from two-year to four-year status by legislative mandate. Through similar government involvement, the Florida system of education offers four-year degrees at two-year schools and 22 additional states are following suit. All of these examples have resulted in significant increases to enrollment and state-funded budget dollars in order support the infrastructure required for the degrees. Snow College now offers a four-year Bachelor's of Commercial Music degree and has successfully created the infrastructure to accommodate this new program.

**Articulated Degree Agreements.** Transfer programs have been a part of the higher education landscape since the beginning of the junior college (1900s) which served as an extension of the high school curriculum offering freshman and sophomore level courses along with occupation and life skills<sup>7</sup>. However, current labor statistics show that most high wage and a growing number of median wage jobs require a bachelor's degree for entry-level positions or job advancement. In response, many two-year institutions have developed formalized articulation agreements (known as 2+2 or 3+1) with their four-year counterparts over general transfer programs. According to a brief written by the Center for American Progress<sup>8</sup>, "the average community college student [amasses] 140 credits while pursuing a bachelor's degree even though only 120 credits are typically necessary." The additional credits represent time, effort and money. Articulated programs enable a student to complete the first two or three years of a specific program at one institution and, using the accumulated credits, graduate with a bachelor's degree at another institution in a shorter period of time. This compliments the traditional two-year college role by providing students greater access to education through already established open-door, low cost opportunities within the comfort of their locale.

**Faculty Collaboration.** Faculty who participate in the development of articulated program agreements engage in a collaborative environment that provides for an exchange of ideas benefitting course content and pedagogy. Noted as a guiding principle for assessing strong articulated programs, Ignash and Townsend (2001)<sup>9</sup> argue how faculty "from both two-year and four-year institutions have primary responsibility for developing and maintaining articulation

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<sup>6</sup>US Census Bureau. *State and County Quick Facts*. <http://quickfacts.census.gov>.

<sup>7</sup> O'Meara, R., Hall, T. & Carmichael M. (2007). A Discussion of Past, Present, and Future Articulation Models at Postsecondary Institutions. *Journal of Technology Studies*, Volume 33, No. 1, pp.9-16.

<sup>8</sup> As cited by Richard D. Kahlenberg in *Facilitating Community-College Transfers*. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 3, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Ignash, J.M., & Townsend, B. K. (2001). Statewide transfer and articulation policies: Current practices and emerging issues. In B. K. Townsend and S.B. Twombly (eds.), *Community colleges: Policy in the future context* (p. 173-192). Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

agreements” (p. 178). As content area experts, faculty (not administration) should develop these agreements.

## Strategic Themes

Snow College is not exempt from the paradox of success and uncertainty associated with community colleges across the nation. As the College celebrates 125 years of excellence, it faces a future for which remaining a stand-alone two-year college is impossible. The following themes will help position the College as the center for higher education and workforce preparation excellence across the state of Utah.

- **Support and Development of Four-Year Degree Programs.** Snow College already offers a bachelor’s degree in commercial music. With Regent and faculty support, the current program should serve as a model for the development of additional four-year programs/degrees.
- **Support and Development of Articulated Transfer Agreements.** Snow College’s existing 2+2 articulation agreements with other in-state schools should be supported and serve as models to develop similar agreements for all the College’s programs.
- **Carnegie 10% Classification.** Snow College conveniently fits within the 10% rule for bachelor-degree graduates with room to grow yet remain within that classification.
- **Athletic Competition.** Snow College benefits from NJCAA affiliation both regionally and nationally and must continue that affiliation with existing and any developing sports programs.
- **Technology.** Snow College benefits from technologically based instruction through EdNet, on-line courses, and enhanced classroom space. The need for technology support to both students and faculty needs to be addressed. This need is represented by a serious and deliberate investment in hardware, software, and training that support the diverse ways by which current and future students seek learning. The use of computers, educational software, technical support, and faculty trained in technologically based instruction serves as the backbone to all strategic planning efforts.
- **Workforce/Vocational Training.** Snow College’s support and funding of industry-based programs for the six-county area assertively supports the career training needs of current students as well as the economic development needs of the six-county area. Particular attention should be paid to STEM industry opportunities.
- **Diversity.** Outside of transfer and workforce preparation, Snow College has the unique opportunity to offer a variety of degrees and learning pathways to a wide array of learners. This allows the College to advance instruction and activities that better prepare students to become more productive and engaged local and global citizens.

## Options

**Remain a Two-Year School with One Four-Year Degree:** Snow College has a long history of providing excellent transfer preparation; consequently, there is some resistance on campus to moving in the direction of four-year degrees and abandoning our two-year transfer mission. The college has survived 125 years with this mission. Currently the College offers one four-year degree in Commercial Music.

**Hybrid Two-Year with a 10% Ceiling on Four-Year Programs.** Snow College could maintain its current transfer and certificate mission, but also introduce new four-year programs so that up to 10% of graduates would graduate with bachelor degrees (conservatively based on a four year graduation average). Those programs would need to be carefully selected, and could be identified based on community need, career opportunities, faculty preparation, reputation of a program, and academic balance.

**Hybrid Two-Year with a 25% Ceiling on Four-Year Programs.** Snow College could maintain its current transfer mission, but more aggressively seek additional four-year programs with up to 25% of graduates earning a bachelor's degree. Again, those programs could be identified based on community need, career opportunities, faculty preparation, reputation of a program, and academic balance.

**Four-Year Liberal Arts School.** Because there is a need in rural Utah, specifically the six-county area, for more bachelor's degrees, the College could position itself to move in the direction of a fully functioning small liberal arts college focusing almost entirely on providing bachelor degrees that will lead to employment and potential economic development in the area.

## **Projected Costs**

It goes without saying that any option other than maintaining our current mission will require funding. It is impossible to speculate as to exact costs without knowing which option is chosen and/or which programs will be developed—all programs are not created equal in terms of cost. However, the options get increasingly expensive as the number of four-year degree programs increases. Given that there likely will not be legislative financial support (at least of any significance), these decisions must be made with full disclosure of costs.

## **Short-Term Goals**

- Maintain the Carnegie 10% classification (between 80 to 100 students graduating from bachelor degree programs) by developing three more bachelor degree granting programs.
- Support the Rural High School Superintendents Initiative to provide high quality college courses via technology across the state. This will help sustain enrollment at Snow College among pre-mission age students and increase the number of potential associate degree seeking graduates.
- Develop a faculty workload policy that consistently and equitably accounts for faculty teaching in four-year versus two-year programs and assists with the transition of faculty from two-year to four-year status.
- Provide systematic changes to student services, financial aid, instructional support, and faculty size. Any change to four-year status would require continuous and careful strategic and enrollment planning to all the College's support services.
- Enhance alternative and technological forms of delivery for place-bound students who would benefit from 2+2 or 3+1 articulated arrangements.
- Re-visit Snow College's GE requirements/offering in a manner that supports the development of articulated program agreements.

## Long-Term Goals

- Achieve the Carnegie 25% classification (25% of the College's graduates being from four-year programs). Concentrate on degrees in Computer Science, Art, Business, and other STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields.
- Maintain all Snow College programs as stackable and/or well-articulated with in-state four-year programs.
- Market Snow College's four-year and well-articulated two-year programs to a variety of students looking for a low cost alternative to start a career leading to a bachelor's degree. Combined with the College's additional merits (location, class size, etc.), this presents a very viable, attractive, and cost effective pathway to an advanced degree and/or job placement.
- Revisit the strategic planning process to further align and advance Snow College's initiatives for program sustainability and growth.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations offer both short-term and long-term options for the College to remain a viable institution within the state's system of higher education, honor its long-standing mission as the intellectual, artistic, musical, educational, and sports center of central Utah, and continue its distinction as one of the top-ten colleges in the nation.

- The College should develop a process and a rubric by which new four-year degree programs can be developed and approved. This rubric should include the following minimal qualifications (in no particular order):
  - Degree qualifications of existing faculty
  - Existing resources supportive of the four-year program
  - Economic stimulus of the program to the College's service area
  - Fulfillment of the College's mission and core themes
- The College should establish articulated transfer agreements with in-state four-year programs as well as some out-of-state four-year programs with the long-term goal (seven years) of having all associate degree programs with strong articulated (2+2 or 3+1) agreements.
- The College should pursue an integrated studies degree at both the associate (short-term) and bachelor's (long-term) levels.
- The College should align degrees and the development of new programs with industry demands and the projected economic development needs of the six-county area and the state of Utah.

## Conclusion

Snow College's mission statement and first core theme express pride in the institution's 125-year history of excellence to students locally, regionally, and internationally. The adoption of core themes based on innovation and engagement convey the intention of the College to establish another 125 years of excellence in providing higher learning to an increasingly diverse population of students.

While there is satisfaction with the past, there is understanding that the College must evolve to ensure future success. With a strong commitment to developing relevant instructional programs and degree opportunities supported by personnel and policy, the College is poised to improve the manner by which it advances students in achieving their educational goals. Snow College's strategic planning process supports these improvement efforts particularly given the socioeconomic and technological challenges that imperil higher education as a whole. The information provided in this paper supports the College's strategic plan by clarifying the steps needed to move the College forward as a world-recognized and well-desired destination institution.