

2021-2022 Community by Design Strategic Memo

August 25, 2021

Campus Community,

Last year in my annual strategic memo I wrote, “the proof of our success in this difficult time will not be measured for another year as we will be tested through 2021.” Although we continue to navigate the pandemic, the campus exceeded my expectations. You made the operation our top strategic priority keeping the campus safe, while leaning into some important *Community by Design* initiatives. The 2021 fiscal year was focused on four key elements, which produced the following results:

- Operational Excellence**—The operation is strategic in 2020-2021. Navigating the upcoming fiscal year safely (physical and mental health) and adapting the student experience, while continuing to unite the campus is the top priority.
Result: Operated successfully through the COVID-19 pandemic by effectively executing the multiple phase plan to utilize federal funds ensuring financial strength and keeping the campus safe with minimal disruption. Limited disease spread with good access to testing and vaccines while balancing the board approved budget. Operations stayed within the first, least disruptive scenario horizon.
- Community by Design Initiative Focus**—Lean into initiatives that will directly impact students—career, student debt project, Partners Across Campus (PAC), retention and inclusion.
Result: Career and Student Debt Project both saw positive results. Pre-graduation placement rates were 3X the national average and the student debt project participation exceeded 200 students while reducing average projected debt at graduation by \$10,000 per student. PAC (non-athlete/non-auto restoration) and women recruiting are both up. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work included discussion and training for employees as well as the formation of the President’s DEI Council. The council includes students of color who are working to better engage the student body and assess campus policies/procedures through a minority student lens. Fall to spring retention was down from the previous year, but on budget.
- Assess and Learn**—Continue to push for learning across campus and assess the situation often to gauge when more focus can be on the strategic initiatives.
Result: Regular meetings with cabinet, faculty, and staff to understand loss and learning has led to important areas of focus (technology, DEI, communication, operational and management excellence) moving out of the pandemic. Assessment and learning will be the starting point for discussions leading to the next version of *Community by Design*.
- Steer clear of the Iceberg and create space to look beyond**—Find time and resources for leadership to look beyond the current situation to build deeper bench strength with campus leadership, create an enterprise risk management plan and reset the *Community by Design* strategic plan.
Result: Management development and legacy plans created with Provost and CFO transitions in place as well as enhancements in admissions, communications, student life, athletics, and advancement. Enterprise risk management plan was completed and reviewed by the board in March. Renewed focus on campus center with site plans to be completed by September 2021. Listening session completed in July and August to gauge impact of pandemic and move forward.

As the *Community by Design* plan is set to expire, I offer some reflections on the past five years implementation in preparation for kicking off a campus wide strategic planning process this fiscal year.

In 2017, after a year-long process involving the board of trustees and campus community, McPherson College initiated the *Community by Design* strategic plan. The plan set out to increase enrollment by nurturing entrepreneurial faculty who model the success of the automotive restoration program; design and articulate the McPherson College community; plan and build facilities that nurture, welcome and sustain a growing community; and engage the McPherson College community to make plans to build a \$1B endowment.

Progress on *Community by Design* since 2017 has been significant and includes the following:

- Significant enrollment gains (10 percent ahead of goal) and the creation of a new **Healthcare Initiative** with an updated Health Science degree modeling success of automotive restoration.
- The **Student Debt Project** is engaging nearly 40 percent of all MC students and driving a new net tuition revenue model that replaces the current institutional discounting strategy which incentivizes students to work and contribute dollars to their student accounts and reduce debt.
- Comprehensive **career** and experiential learning model is engaging more students and continues the tradition of high pre/post-graduation career placement rates. In May of 2020 and 2021, MC graduates were placed (jobs, service, and graduate school) before graduation at three times the national average.
- **East McPherson Concept** developed to transform MC from a traditional residential campus to a vibrant community—offering all the amenities of a modern campus—started with planning for the new Campus Common, as well as the addition of a campus health center.
- **Awareness Campaign** focused on student debt has increased MC visibility in Kansas, with impressions of traditional and digital media up nearly 400 percent and south-central Kansas prospective student inquiries up over 200 percent.
- Non-binding endowment commitments for planned gifts moved past \$250M, and two MC donors made a significant public signal regarding their future interest to support the **\$1B endowment plan**.
- **MC Student Experience Framework** was created with a focus on events, initiatives and programs for students that is concentrated on inclusion, career, and community building. A mentoring network aimed at impacting student retention is the newest addition.
- *7X Chronicle of Higher Education* “**Great College to Work For,**” with 2021 recognition in every category— including first-time recognition in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Areas of opportunity include:

- **General Education Task Force** work to reinvent general education was cut short during the pandemic, but the team has outlined next steps for a more efficient, engaging curriculum. Plans include resetting the effort in fiscal year 2023 after the Provost transition.
- Although the **MC Student Experience Framework and the East McPherson Concept** including the new health center and future campus center are a good start to “redefining the residential experience,” more work needs to be done in housing, food, social activities, and inclusion.
- **PAC** was a good start to engaging admissions and faculty members in academic program growth. Other opportunities in PAC should be developed to expand non-athlete student recruiting.
- **Campus education campaign** efforts were focused on employees with regular huddles, presidential email updates, KLC training and systematic cabinet communications; however, communication with students was limited and should be a focus of future efforts to better reinforce why students chose MC and to provide a better sense of belonging.

- New donor goals were met, but primarily through friends of athletics and automotive restoration. More work needs to be accomplished around a tradition of **Bulldog Pride** to better connect with our younger (under 40) graduates. Alumni mentoring programs are a move in the right direction.

The board of trustees spent two days in July at their annual retreat diagnosing *Community by Design* progress and setting a framework for the next plan. At the retreat, the board acknowledged your remarkable work navigating the pandemic while laying the groundwork the past five years for the future of McPherson College. In addition to continuing our work to drive key initiatives within the plan, our focus this year will be to outline a 10-year plan that sets a new trajectory for *Community by Design*. I look forward to sharing more about this process in a few weeks.

One of the remarkable characteristics of *Community by Design* is that we were able to provide the campus a space to work on some of our greatest long-term opportunities, while ensuring our operation served students. When I wrote my strategic memo last year, I never imagined your resilience and commitment to our work. Thanks to each of you.

There has never been a greater day to be a Bulldog!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michael P. Schneider".

Michael Schneider
President