

Calvin College

Vision 2030 Rationale

Disruptive changes in higher education today present major challenges for Calvin College. These changes include a declining number of high school graduates in Michigan and the upper Midwest, the unbundling of higher education, and innovations in digital learning technology. Short-term solutions will not be adequate to deal with these changes. Calvin must think strategically about its future, making choices rather than reacting to changes.

Calvin has exciting opportunities in the next decade to enhance its mission, expand its reach, and serve more people. The Calvin 2030 vision upholds our historic mission and builds on our current distinctive strengths, extending them in new directions. Calvin will continue to have at its center residential undergraduate education. And it will pursue an innovative vision that branches out from these roots: (1) to become a university with a Christian liberal arts approach to learning; (2) to become a trusted partner for learning throughout life and in service; and (3) to promote a Reformed Christian faith that is global, diverse, generous, committed, hospitable, and inspiring.

Become a University

A hallmark of Calvin University will be collaboration across the many domains of learning. In becoming a university with global influence, Calvin will expand what it does well and experiment with new directions. It will have a university-wide core grounded in the liberal arts and consist of a strong college of arts and sciences and thriving schools associated with professional programs, all of which will be structured, governed, and resourced in ways that maximize potential to grow enrollment and sustain Calvin's mission. Renaming the institution as a university will make Calvin more visible to and better understood by international students. A university structure combined with a strong collaborative impulse will drive growth by creating opportunities to innovate within and across disciplinary families, professional programs, and centers and institutes.

Calvin will provide programs that bridge the needs of high school students, undergraduate and graduate students, professionals in the middle of careers, and people interested in unaccredited learning, as in our CALL program. The university will work with partners locally and globally to promote trans-disciplinary learning that fosters intellectual growth and critical reflection and to address the complex problems of the 21st century. At the same time, Calvin will clarify and reaffirm the formative approach to teaching, learning, service, and scholarship that unifies it.

A Christian liberal arts approach to education undergirds all of the work that Calvin does, especially in its undergraduate curriculum and co-curriculum. "Liberal arts" does not refer here to a particular set of disciplines but to a way of learning that integrates distinctive knowledge, methods, and wisdom from programs in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. This way of learning defines Calvin's core curriculum and shapes key aspects of its undergraduate majors and minors. It also animates the trans-disciplinary scholarship, service, and community engagement of Calvin faculty, departments, and [centers & institutes](#). Calvin will continue to be a place "[for looking outward](#)" and "equipping" people to understand the world and bring a redemptive message to it.

Opportunities and Context:

- In response to disruptive demographic and market trends in higher education, Calvin has opportunities to create new lifelong learning options (degrees, certificates, badges, CEUs).
- In the context of local, national, and global demand for various kinds of post-secondary education and for partnerships that connect scholarly expertise to the needs of communities, Calvin has the opportunity to develop more options for learning beyond the Knollcrest campus. [Our program at the Handlon Correctional Facility](#) in Ionia, MI, is a current example.
- In the context of growing global competition for international students, not just among schools in the West but also in Asia and Africa, Calvin has the opportunity to develop more global connections (e.g., international students; partnerships with Christian universities, church organizations, local communities, and NGOs).
- In pursuing our calling to promote “the welfare of the city and the healing of the world,” Calvin has the opportunity to rethink how to both promote the distinctive methods of the disciplines and integrate them to address 21st century social, ecological, and economic needs.

Become a Trusted Partner

In the context of distrust of higher education as elitist, politicized, and overpriced, Calvin University will secure a place as a trusted partner that helps address the needs of diverse students and communities in holistic ways. To be recognized as trustworthy, Calvin must ensure that highly qualified faculty and staff continue to be the signature of the new university, and it must enhance and extend its partnerships with communities and institutions locally and globally.

Our city, nation, and world have many needs that Calvin is uniquely equipped to meet. Calvin faculty, staff, and [centers & institutes](#) have deep expertise in a variety of areas and believe they are called to promote learning and “the welfare of the city and the healing of the world.” Diverse audiences will view Calvin University not merely as a center or source for scholarly engagement, deep learning, and practical expertise, but more so a trusted institutional partner that seeks reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationships with church communities, businesses, non-profit organizations, and communities, locally and around the world.

Illustrative possibilities include:

- Combining expertise in the Education Department, Kuyers Institute, Nagel Institute, and Calvin Theological Seminary, provide curriculum and services related to Christian leadership, in North America and globally.
- Responding to growing interest in Christian associates degrees, develop programs in liberal arts studies and in technical education, focusing on areas in which Calvin has expertise.
- Building on faculty expertise across the disciplines, develop a master’s program integrating faith and learning, designed for educators at emerging Christian universities around the world.
- Expanding on the example of the Clean Water Institute, provide sustainability and development services for communities around the world.

- Enhancing the work of Nursing, Speech Pathology and Audiology, Social Work, and the Service-Learning Center, develop a deeper array of local health and social service partnerships.

Opportunities and Context:

- In response to non-traditional competitors in higher education delivering curriculum (often badges and certificates), Calvin has the opportunity to be a multimedia resource for degree and non-degree learning, packaging the knowledge and insights of Calvin faculty and staff.
- In the context of secularization and “culture wars” in the U.S. and other parts of world affecting Christian education, Calvin has the opportunity to work with partners (e.g., Kaufman Institute) to promote ecumenical and interfaith dialogue among religious communities and in public life (building on resources such as the Service-Learning Center, Henry Institute, and Center for Faith and Writing).
- In becoming a university and a trusted source in the context of financial/market constraints, Calvin has the opportunity to draw in partners compelled by its 2030 vision (new kinds of students and clients; donors; content, service, and learning partners).

Reformed Christian Faith

Success for Calvin depends on enacting a diverse, inclusive, and global vision of the Reformed Christian tradition in a culture that increasingly is post-denominational, post-biblical, and religiously diverse. Calvin University will be countercultural in both keeping faith with its Christian tradition and seeking dialog with people across religious differences.

Reformed Christianity has profoundly shaped the life and work of the college, across the many offices and departments that sustain it, in teaching, scholarship, service, and worship. Calvin has aspired to honor God’s sovereignty over all things and to work in and under the broad, covenantal reach of Scripture. Calvin has affirmed its foundational theological commitments, practiced active piety, and engaged in a transformational vision of the world. And Calvin has insisted that curiosity and conviction are mutually enriching, as we seek understanding in all domains of learning and across religious and cultural differences. We must continue to do these things, and do them better, if Calvin is to flourish as a Christian learning community that is generous and inclusive in welcoming diverse students, staff, and faculty and in working with diverse partners around the world.

For Calvin to respond faithfully to its calling, it is critical that Calvin faculty, administrators, and staff are equipped well for their work in higher education. Consequently, Calvin University will aspire to a program of ongoing development of faculty, administrators, and staff that attracts and retains faithful Christians who are eager to engage with and be formed by a global vision of Reformed Christianity and who can bring this vision into all areas of work and life. Such development will encourage authentic commitment to the college’s mission, help us meet our goals in diversity, and inspire creative, wise, and redemptive work within the university and in the world.

Opportunities and Context:

- In order to recruit and retain students, staff, and faculty from diverse Christian traditions and cultural backgrounds, and be a trusted partner for local, national, and global audiences, Calvin

will promote a distinctive global vision of Reformed Christianity that unifies and animates its work.

- In the context of its covenant relationship with the Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA) and of Christians losing touch with heritages that shape community, piety, and worship, Calvin will enhance its support of the CRCNA and other Reformed denominations and promote a catholicity that is deeply rooted in confessional traditions and scripture.
- In response to higher education—secular and Christian—having become contentious and polarized, Calvin will position itself as a community that joins in intellectual discussion from a Christian perspective, doing so in a manner that generously and critically engages other worldviews and diverse cultures, taking differences seriously and celebrating catholicity.

Embedded Assumptions

The following are strategic initiatives required to implement the components of Vision 2030 and areas of continuity that we seek to strengthen and improve.

- Providing formative residential undergraduate education that remains central to Calvin's mission.
- Sustaining advanced research and scholarship in concert with innovative teaching and learning.
- Assembling means such as a digital platform, satellite campuses, programs shared with other institutions, etc., to enact Vision 2030.
- Creating a marketing strategy for Calvin University as a trusted source—for the institution, discrete units (e.g., centers and institutes), and individual faculty and staff.
- Developing an investment model for Vision 2030 that is financially sustainable and allows faculty, staff, and students to flourish.

Historical Context

In response to significant changes in the higher education landscape, institutions can reduce expenses, hire more adjunct faculty, increase tuition, and try to increase traditional enrollment. Such responses are only short term and lead to ongoing constraints, particularly when trends such as competition for a declining number of students continue (see Appendix B). Calvin has used such consequential measures in the past five years to achieve financial stability. This approach, however, is not sustainable.

Long-term solutions involve identifying the institution's core mission and distinctive strengths and then choosing a strategic vision that improves on those strengths and invests in new areas that align with the institution's mission, broaden its reach, and increase its revenue streams. Shifting from short-term tactical responses to a long-term visionary strategy fits with the Calvin 2019 strategic plan, which prepared the college by laying the foundation for a transformative plan with Vision 2030. This strategy promises to be sustainable and allow Calvin University and the people who are part of it to flourish.

The recommendations in this document—become a university and trusted source locally, nationally, and globally, and reimagine how the college promotes its Reformed identity—are a long-term strategy and commensurate with the college's history of institutional transformations.

“Calvin” did not become a college until its 45th year. It began as a seminary with a preparatory academy, serving a Dutch Reformed immigrant community. It added a junior college in 1906. It turned the junior college into Calvin College only in 1920 (the academy becoming Grand Rapids Christian High). The college and seminary separated in the early 1990s. The college has been categorized as both a liberal arts college and as a “regional” or “comprehensive” college over the past 25 years.

Becoming a university might seem a dramatic change, but it is consistent with Calvin’s history of institutional evolution. In 1970, in conversation with the college and seminary, the Synod of the CRCNA recommended that Calvin develop graduate programs and potentially become a university. College policy documents consistently have affirmed that a Christian integrative mission includes a liberal arts core combined with academic disciplines, professional programs, graduate programs, and service to the church, to the academy, and to public culture. These policies can be found in documents approved by faculty senate dating back to the 1960s:

- *Christian Liberal Arts Education* (1965)
- *Professional Education and the Christian Liberal Arts College* (1973)
- *Expanded Statement of Mission* (1992; rev. 2004)
- Various reports from the college and CRCNA on graduate studies (Report to Synod in 1970; Calvin College report in 1990; *Report of the Ad Hoc Graduate Studies Committee* in 2015).

Calvin has been a trusted partner of the CRCNA since its founding. In the past 60 years, the college has been a trusted partner for Christian institutions more broadly, notably those in the CCCU; for the academy; and in West Michigan.

Aspiring to be a university and a trusted partner globally—for Christian, religiously diverse, and secular communities—is an ambitious vision. But it is not out of line with the college’s historic values and practices. Vision 2030 builds on current work by faculty and staff in various parts of the college, notably centers and institutes, Off-Campus Programs, and the Service-Learning Center.

A more diverse and inclusive vision of Reformed Christianity, with a new plan for recruiting and developing a world class faculty, builds on Calvin’s evolution from a school that served an immigrant population and church to a vision of Christian service to people from every nation. Our goal, in aspiring to a generous and hospitable way of being Reformed, is to more fully include in the Calvin community the diverse voices shaping Reformed Christianity today, as people from around the world have made their presence felt in concert with those from Europe and North America. This goal is a recognition of who we are as Christians globally and a promise to become more self-consciously so as a community. This exciting vision adds breadth and depth to the vision of being a university and trusted voice and partner for people in North America and around the world.

Comparative Context

Becoming a university, with goals of serving a variety of kinds of students and being a trusted partner for global audiences, requires clarity about what kind of university Calvin should become. A recent [AGB white paper](#) outlines five models of small colleges/universities (see Appendix A):

- Traditional: campuses are focused almost exclusively on the undergraduate liberal arts.

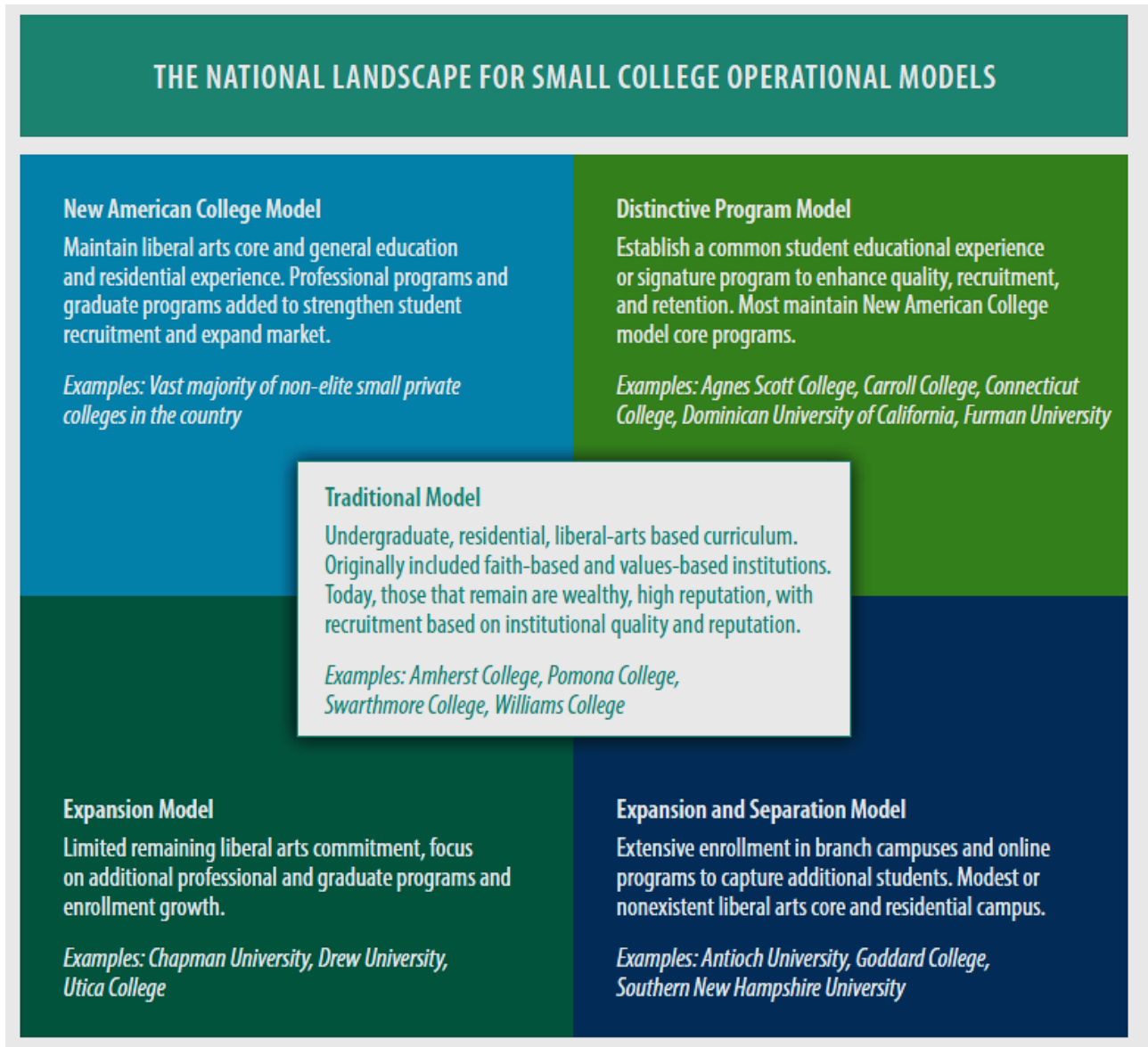
- New American College: maintains a liberal arts core, has a breadth of disciplinary offerings and professional and graduate programs, and emphasizes service to the local community.
- Distinctive program: builds its programs and identity around a common student experience.
- Expansion: responds to shifting student demands and develops facilities to pursue them.
- Expansion and separation: extends the expansion model by aggressively adding high-demand programs, while also pursuing new markets through a change in educational delivery systems.

Calvin College today includes elements of several of these models but is closest to the New American College model, with our wide range of programs, our formative approach to learning, and our emphasis on service. To pursue Vision 2030, Calvin should embrace its strengths as a comprehensive institution. It should aspire to expand and grow as a university and a trusted center for learning, with an innovative vision of learning and service. And it will remain rooted in and promote a global Reformed vision that engages with religiously and culturally diverse students, staff, and faculty, as well as community and institutional partners. Success requires all divisions at Calvin to commit to expanding in these new directions.

Conclusion

Vision 2030 requires us to respond boldly to the challenges that higher education faces today. This vision does not require change to Calvin's mission or core values. It keeps faith with the institution's Reformed roots, its Christian liberal arts approach to learning, its tradition of residential undergraduate education, its vision of Christian faith shaping all aspects of life and work, and its commitments to diversity and inclusion. At the same time, Vision 2030 is audacious in aspiring to reach new kinds of audiences and to increased global influence.

Appendix A:



Mary B. Marcy, *The Small College Imperative: From Survival to Transformation*, An [AGB White Paper](#), May 2017.

Appendix B:

ADAPTING TO A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT FOR SMALL COLLEGES: FROM SURVIVAL TO TRANSFORMATION			
	Stewardship	Short-Term Response	Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainability
Assumptions about the fiscal reality	Condition stable	Short-term, very serious cyclical challenges	Problems are not short term; long-term solutions sought
ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build endowment ■ Balance budgets ■ Clean audit ■ Manage deferred maintenance ■ Maintain low student:faculty ratio ■ Commit to tenure lines ■ Successful accreditation(s) ■ Meet enrollment targets ■ Fundraise for new projects ■ New projects are add-ons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Significantly reduce non-personnel expenses ■ Hire more part-time faculty ■ Increase tuition ■ Increase enrollment ■ Contract out/collaborate with other institutions on select services ■ Ratchet up fundraising ■ Refinance debt ■ Attend to deferred maintenance 	<p>Assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Affirm essential elements of mission ■ Identify unique characteristics and strengths of institution ■ Evaluate likely student demographic profile <p>Select:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Most promising of small college models ■ Strategic vision based on choice <p>Transformation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Align programs and systems ■ Develop multi-year sustainable budget models ■ Align fundraising and marketing

Mary B. Marcy, *The Small College Imperative: From Survival to Transformation*, An [AGB White Paper](#), May 2017.