

CHAPTER ONE: MISSION, GOALS, PLANNING: RETROSPECTIVE ON THE PARADIGM SHIFT

Characteristics of Excellence: Through this chapter Trinity will demonstrate compliance with these Middle States standards:

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal

At Trinity's May 2015 Commencement ceremony, Speaker Patty Stonesifer, CEO of Martha's Table, asked the graduates who were the first in their families to earn a college degree to stand. Almost the entire graduating class stood up. She then asked all of those to stand who worked while they were in school; the few remaining in seats also stood up. She then asked graduates to wave who had children, who attended part-time, who juggled responsibilities at work and in families as well as attending school; hundreds of hands waved high.

That moment crystallized the essence of who Trinity students are today: whether just starting college at age 18 or finishing at age 58, whether just beginning a professional career or planning to make a mid-career move, Trinity students are virtually all the "first" in their families, self-supporting to a large extent, students who struggle to earn and learn all at the same time. They are mostly women and some men for whom earning a degree is a life-changing experience, not only for themselves but also for their children and families. They are predominantly African American and Latina, young and middle-aged, often single parents who have no other sources of support beyond their own grit and determination to succeed.

Key Indicators for Trinity Students:

- 2,142 total enrollment in Fall 2015, including 1017 undergraduate women in CAS; other enrollments include 466 (SPS); 367 (EDU); 173 (BGS) and 145 (NHP) (Chapter Two includes significantly more detail on enrollments);
- 82% of first year CAS students and 65% of all undergraduates receive Pell Grants; 100% of CAS undergraduates receive some form of financial aid;
- \$25,000 = median family income for first time CAS students; 25% report family incomes below \$10,000 ([DR 1.1: 2015 CIRP Trinity First Year Survey](#))
- All students: 67% African American; 14% Hispanic; 4% White; 93% female.
- 52% of Trinity undergraduates are residents of the District of Columbia, most graduating from the D.C. Public Schools or D.C. Charter Schools. 30% are from public or charter schools in nearby Prince Georges and Montgomery Counties.

This is the profile of a truly mission-drive institution.

A. The Paradigm Shift at Trinity: 1996 to 2016

American higher education in 2015-2016 confronts numerous questions about accountability, effectiveness, affordability and competition from new delivery systems. Ultimately, the national conversation on higher education is all about institutional change, and in many ways, Trinity exemplifies key elements of the change movement. Historically a deeply traditional, very elite Catholic liberal arts college for women, in the last 25 years Trinity has experienced a transformation into a broad access university welcoming a diverse population of students who are predominantly low income African American and Latina students --- still predominantly female, but with a small population of male students in graduate and professional programs. This transformation --- the “paradigm shift” in the student population at Trinity --- was the central theme of prior Middle States Self-Studies in 1996, 2006 and 2011.

This transformation has made Trinity economically strong and also affirmed mission in some surprising ways. The transformation made it possible for Trinity’s women’s college to double in size, reaching its largest-ever enrollment as a result of Trinity’s focus on the educational needs of women in the city. The transformation also made it possible for Trinity to become a more inclusive and innovative institution by diversifying the institutional model to develop multi-dimensional academic units tailored to the needs of each student population.

Trinity managed change and growth across the last two decades by rooting strategic plans, budgets and programmatic initiatives in a deep understanding of mission, cultivating a clear philosophy of the difference between timeless mission values and the more temporal ways an academic institution must adapt to modernity in its programs, delivery systems and populations served. Trinity continues the undergraduate liberal arts college for women (CAS) while also offering a broad range of coeducational professional programs through the School of Professional Studies (SPS), School of Nursing and Health Professions (NHP), School of Education (EDU), and School of Business and Graduate Studies (BGS). **Chart 1.1** shows the conceptual model for Trinity’s contemporary academic organization with five academic units.

Chart 1.1



Trinity’s contemporary strategic academic design with five distinct units ensures that students have the curricula and programs, faculty and support services that are appropriate for each population and degree level. Each unit has a dean, advisors, administrative staff and faculty appropriately credentialed and focused on the needs of the students enrolled in that unit’s programs. Broad institutional structures and services undergird the core academic design, with the expectation that centralized administrative services (e.g., Student Affairs, Enrollment Services, Academic Support Services, Admissions) will meet the needs of each student population. Subsequent chapters of this report document the ways in which core institutional services work together with each academic unit to ensure effective outcomes for all students. (See [DR 1.2: Master Organization Chart](#) and [DR 1.3: Strategic Organizational Design](#) chart)

“Paradigm shift” is a phrase that Trinity first used in the 1996 Middle States Self-Study to capture the changes then underway in the student body, faculty, curricula and programs. Now, two decades after that first report, Trinity continues reflection on the still-dynamic process of paradigm shift as one of the most essential forces driving the commitment of all faculty and staff to Trinity’s mission and institutional renewal and vitality.

B. Mission and Goals

Trinity’s Mission Statement articulates the clear values and characteristics of the university:

Trinity Mission Statement

Trinity is a comprehensive university offering a broad range of educational programs that prepare students across the lifespan for the intellectual, ethical and spiritual dimensions of contemporary work, civic and family life.

Trinity’s core mission values and characteristics emphasize:

- *Commitment to the Education of Women* in a particular way through the design and pedagogy of the historic undergraduate women’s college, and by advancing principles of equity, justice and honor in the education of women and men in all other programs;
- *Foundation for Learning in the Liberal Arts* through the curriculum design in all undergraduate degree programs and through emphasis on the knowledge, skills and values of liberal learning in all graduate and professional programs;
- *Integration of Liberal Learning with Professional Preparation* through applied and experiential learning opportunities in all programs;
- *Grounding in the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Catholic tradition*, welcoming persons of all faiths, in order to achieve the larger purposes of learning in the human search for meaning and fulfillment.

Quite intentionally, the mission statement incorporates the kind of balanced approach to mission characteristics that enabled Trinity to incorporate changes in populations, programs and services across the years while remaining deeply faithful to the fundamental elements of mission. Hence, the commitment to women's education as a primary mission characteristic remains, but Trinity also welcomes men in the four professional schools. Trinity does not view the presence of men as antithetical to the purpose of a primary mission commitment to women. Trinity believes deeply that a 21st Century women's college should not be defined by the absence of men, but rather, by the affirmative encouragement of women's leadership and advancement, and adherence to principles and practices that promote gender equity.

1. Commitment to the Education of Women

At various times in the last two decades, Trinity has reviewed the data on women's colleges (see [DR 1.4: Women's Colleges and Institutional Innovation](#) web page) and made affirmative decisions to continue the College of Arts and Sciences as a women's college. Several important factors led to Trinity's reaffirmation of historic mission: first, Trinity's women's college enrollment has grown more than 150% in the last 15 years due largely to the increased focus on low income women of color in the city, along with creation of more professionally-focused programs like Nursing, Occupational Therapy and Criminal Justice. Moreover, Trinity's study of the data about women's colleges and historic women's colleges that went coed revealed that academic programs and student body diversity had significant influence on institutional health and resilience. About 100 of the historic women's colleges continue to operate as coeducational institutions, with an average enrollment of about 2,600 and populations that are nearly 70% female. After considering the data and Trinity's market position in Washington, with a large number of coed universities in relatively close proximity, and the substantial unmet educational needs of low income women in the region, Trinity determined that its mission should remain focused primarily on women's education, albeit with coeducational opportunities as well in the graduate and professional programs.

The 2006 visiting Middle States Team noted that Trinity found a way to sustain historic mission through embracing the paradigm shift in students and programs. The team report stated, "The team recognizes ... the University's rejection of the notion that paradigm shift means abandonment of historic mission. Rather, we discover in the work and vitality of Trinity of 2006, a most obvious continuity with Trinity's 110 year old mission expressed with a renewed relevance and vigor." ([2006 Middle States Team Report](#), p. 5)

2. Liberal Arts and Professional Preparation

Trinity embraces the idea that a liberal arts education is not agnostic about the important goals that all students have today to join the workforce, but rather, liberal learning done well is the essential platform for lifelong professional development. By promoting the fundamental knowledge, skills and values of liberal learning in the inquiry and research processes, critical analysis and effective expression, numeracy and scientific literacy, Trinity promotes the ability of students to become lifelong learners able to adapt to changing circumstances across the numerous career pathways their lives will follow.

Trinity's integration of the goals for liberal learning as the foundation for professional preparation becomes even clearer in the ways in which programs in Education, Business, Nursing and Health Professions incorporate liberal arts principles. The faculties in each of the professional units engage with the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences to ensure appropriate integration of learning goals and effective pedagogies across all units.

3. Grounding in the Mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame and Catholic Faith

Trinity's faith dimension also reflects the institutional ethic of inclusion. From the start, Trinity's founders, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, did not limit admission to Catholics only, although Catholic students were the majority until the 1990's. As the demographic characteristics of the student body changed, the religious affiliation of students also changed, and Trinity sought ways to welcome a broadly ecumenical and interfaith population.

Social Justice is a central tenet of the Catholic faith and the animating value of the Sisters of Notre Dame (SNDs) and Trinity. Students, faculty and staff of many faith traditions also resonate with the commitment to action for social justice. In many ways, Trinity's paradigm shift is a manifestation of this deep institutional commitment to social justice. By welcoming a large population of students of color from the city who have great economic needs, Trinity embodies the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to protect human life and dignity, to act in solidarity with the human community and to take special care to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

[DR 1.5: Trinity's DC Impact Statement](#) illustrates the ways in which Trinity serves some of the neediest populations in the District of Columbia.

As Trinity's campus population has become religiously diverse, SNDs on the faculty and living at Trinity have worked with the faculty, staff and students to create programs to educate the campus community about Trinity's faith dimension and the real meaning of social justice. For example, the Billiard Center for Social Justice, named for the founder of the Sisters of Notre Dame, St. Julie Billiard, conducts a lecture series open to all students and faculty, as well as other events to engage campus constituents in service for social justice. ([DR 1.6: Billiard Center Report](#)) As well, Campus Ministry is a vital center of campus life, spearheading community service projects, developing worship and spirituality programs for all faiths, supporting the ecumenical Gospel Choir and leading the Alternative Spring Break program.

For more on Trinity's integration of faith commitments with institutional change see [DR 1.7: "Civic Virtue Starts at Home: Faith and Freedom for Institutional Transformation,"](#) McGuire remarks to the Lilly Fellows Conference in Scranton, 2013.

C. Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal

Trinity's very clear understanding of mission drives all planning and resource allocation, and these processes have made institutional renewal a continuous source of strength and vitality.

Strategic planning at Trinity has been a dynamic process since the early 1990's. The current Strategic Plan *Envision Trinity 2020* ([DR 1.8: Strategic Plan](#)) continues the thread of prior plan documents in its emphasis on developing enrollments through strategic program initiatives and other investments in technology, human resources and facilities. **Chart 1.2** illustrates the design of the strategic plan with ten goals. The primary goal is enrollment development, and the other nine goals support that primary goal.

Chart 1.2



Like prior institutional plans, *Envision Trinity 2020* is the foundation for annual plans of the academic units and administrative departments cited throughout this self-study. The institutional plan as well as the individual departmental plans undergo continuous review at the Board, Senior Staff and departmental levels to assess progress toward goals. These plans are the basis for annual budgeting.

Several examples illustrate the integral dynamic of mission, planning, resource allocation and institutional renewal at Trinity.

1. Development of Nursing and Health Professions Programs

Historically, despite requests from the Washington Hospital Center decades earlier, Trinity had been reluctant to develop a Nursing program because, "We are a liberal arts college, we don't do applied studies." But by 2006, when the Washington Hospital Center asked again, Trinity was educating a majority population from the District of Columbia and had reorganized into the comprehensive university model based on the 2000 mission statement that embraced the

integration of professional studies and liberal arts. As documented in prior Middle States reports, the journey to that point was long and fraught, but the destination proved very fruitful.

Trinity received a planning grant for Nursing, and launched the first Nursing Program, the RN-BSN in 2007. The pre-licensure program began in 2010, and the MSN began in Fall 2015. Trinity also launched the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program in 2013, and launched the MOT in Fall 2015.

All new programs proposed at Trinity require a plan that ties the program to the institutional strategic plan and spells out costs and benefits. Each of these health professions programs began with a plan that spelled out the investments necessary and likely returns, and each had to satisfy the very stringent requirements of specialized accreditors and licensure agencies.

Nursing is a natural mission-fit for Trinity in many ways. As Trinity developed a more distinctive focus on educating women from the city, the obvious potential for a pipeline from neighborhoods to local healthcare providers became clear, and those providers eagerly worked with Trinity on clinical placements, equipment and faculty needs. Nursing and the later addition of Occupational Therapy programs (OTA, MOT) also align well with Trinity's mission commitment to social justice.

The addition of Nursing and Occupational Therapy to Trinity's academic portfolio had an unanticipated and astoundingly positive effect on the traditional liberal arts: enrollments grew rapidly, placing heavy demands on previously under-enrolled courses. Most pronounced, enrollments in the sciences skyrocketed. Suddenly, the old science laboratories were bursting at the seams, and the need to repurpose space for new labs as well as to acquire new technologies and provide more faculty education became urgent.

Trinity invested considerable resources in developing the first wave of laboratories, technologies, personnel and related equipment and materials necessary to launch the health professions programs. As enrollments grew, Trinity at long last was also able to begin planning the long-desired new academic center incorporating new science and nursing laboratories and new classrooms.

2. The Trinity Academic Center

The new [Trinity Academic Center](#) is a good example of the ways in which new programs arising from mission and planning stimulate achievement of other strategic goals. This project would not have been possible without the growth and revitalization of the sciences that Nursing and Health Professions sparked.

Chapter Nine on Resources discusses the Academic Center in more detail. For this chapter, the development of the Academic Center is used as an example of the dynamic interplay of mission, strategic planning and careful investment of resources that guide Trinity's decision-making every day.

As with all major projects and initiatives, Trinity's development of the academic center is rooted in the institutional strategic plan and the allocation of resources for this project is informed by the strategic plan. The size of this project --- 80,000 square feet, \$35 million --- is informed by Trinity's goals for enrollment development and financial management. The financial plan for the project includes \$20 million in charitable gifts (\$19 million achieved toward that goal to date) and \$15 million in a loan from SunTrust bank.

The Trinity Academic Center will open in Fall 2016. All disciplines in all units will benefit from these new facilities, with Science and Nursing programs obviously reaping the greatest benefits from this investment. As happened with the development of the Trinity Center for Women and Girls in Sports in 2002, Trinity also anticipates additional enrollment development opportunities as a result of opening the new academic building.

3. Other Examples:

Other examples of the ways in which mission, planning, resource allocation and institutional renewal animate Trinity's work can be found in these initiatives:

- *Early Childhood Education:* responding to local and national demands for improved pre-K education, and consistent with its historic mission-driven initiatives in teaching and school leadership, Trinity has added associate and baccalaureate degree opportunities for teacher aides and teachers in pre-K along with strengthening its existing M.A.T. program in early childhood education, and also adding a track for early childhood center administrators in the M.S.A. school administration program;
- *Trinity at THEARC:* in 2007, at the invitation of a group of service and educational partners who had come together on a new center in Ward 8, the most economically under-served area in the city, Trinity opened the first and still-only degree program "east of the river" at THEARC (Town Hall Education, Arts and Recreation Campus); Middle States approved this location in 2010; this program serves about 85 adults each semester with an associate degree program in general studies, and also a program for teacher aides in early childhood centers;
- *Undergraduate Research Focus:* with the leadership of Clare Boothe Luce Professors in the sciences, and soon joined by faculty in Education, Psychology and other social sciences who are active in the Council for Undergraduate Research, Trinity is developing a distinctive focus on the use of undergraduate research opportunities as a means to engage students in exciting pedagogies and to help students to build portfolios that will strengthen their transition to graduate school and work; as a result of this initiative, Trinity students have been able to give research presentations at professional conferences, and have secured summer research internships at sites including the Harvard School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins Medical Center, the National Institutes of Health, Georgetown University and other locations; in Fall 2015, the CAS faculty received a Mellon grant which will help to expand undergraduate research in Arts & Humanities disciplines;

Conclusion to Chapter One

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, Trinity may be a relatively small institution, but its dynamic embrace of the elements of mission, planning, resource allocation and institutional renewal make it a good model for other private colleges and universities contemplating the change imperative. Trinity demonstrates that new articulations of historic mission can help an institution to thrive through a dynamic plan and well-chosen allocation of resources to stimulate maximum growth and effectiveness.

20 years after first describing the paradigm shift, Trinity is still moving with the dynamic processes of institutional change and renewal. Trinity has learned how to adapt to new demands and changing circumstances, and the strong planning and assessment discipline of the institutional managers makes it possible to cope with cycles of uncertainty or downturns without a sense of crisis.

Not all of the plans and processes turned out as envisioned, as the subsequent chapters of this report illustrate. Nursing propelled a great enrollment boom, but disappointing results on the NCLEX exam among graduates of the first few years of Nursing slowed growth as the dean and faculty retooled the program to improve performance. Since 2014 a downturn in graduate and professional enrollments, documented in the next chapter, have slowed progress toward the strategic goals in the professional schools. The regulatory climate imposes new burdens on innovation (e.g., state approval requirements make extensive investment in online programs less likely for Trinity in the near future). However, Trinity has learned to offset slowdowns and missed cues with other opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Remaining faithful to mission while finding new ways to reach new audiences who will profit from this education is one of Trinity's great strengths and will serve the institution and its students well in the future.
- Continuing to exemplify mission through programs and services will remain a hallmark of Trinity's core values and fidelity to the vision of the Sisters of Notre Dame.