

Connected with Purpose



MACALESTER
STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Division of Student Affairs 2026-2031 Strategic Direction

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Connected with Purpose

The Division of Student Affairs at Macalester College plays a critical role in shaping the student experience and learning. The programs we offer are accessible to all students, supportive, and transformative. Guided by our core values—equity and inclusion, well-being and safety, and learning and development—we are committed to fostering a campus where all students feel a strong sense of belonging and safety, develop meaningful relationships, and are empowered to lead with purpose.

In alignment with [*Imagine, Macalester*](#), the College’s strategic plan, the Student Affairs Strategic Planning Task Force was charged by the Vice President for Student Affairs with developing a five-year direction (2026–2031) that will serve as a roadmap for the division. With a strong focus on building connections as outlined in the college’s strategic plan, Connected with Purpose is grounded in holistic student development and designed to advance our capacity to enhance on-campus student life; create a seamless student experience; attract, invest in, and develop talented staff; and assess operational efficiency.

Throughout the planning process, the task force examined national trends and best practices in student affairs, reviewed our division’s current programs and structures, and actively sought input from students, staff, and campus partners. The resulting strategic direction reflects both our aspirations and our responsibilities—identifying opportunities to build stronger partnerships, celebrate student achievement, and create conditions where every Macalester student can develop.

This document outlines our mission, vision, and the strategic priorities that will guide the Division of Student Affairs over the next five years. It also includes an implementation framework to ensure accountability, sustainability, and meaningful progress toward our goals. In short, this document provides an added detailed look into the strategic approach the Division of Student Affairs will take to actualize *Imagine, Macalester’s* efforts to increase student connections.

Vision

To cultivate an inclusive and caring community where every student is empowered to connect, grow, and lead with excellence.

Mission

We are student-centered educators who foster growth, well-being, and belonging in our student body.

Frameworks and Key Concepts

This section outlines the foundational frameworks and key concepts that shape our approach to student affairs. These ideas provide a shared language and lens for understanding our work, guiding how we support students, collaborate as a division, and align our practices with institutional values. Whether offering care, advancing equity, or promoting student development, these concepts ground our strategies in well-established theories and models while reflecting Macalester's distinctive ethos. Together, they help ensure our efforts are intentional, equitable, and responsive to the complex contexts in which students live and learn.

Care - A shared commitment to fostering an environment where kindness, mutual respect, and personal and collective well-being are prioritized through standards-based practices. In practice, this means we respond to and support students in crises while providing a high standard of care. It reflects our belief that caring for one another and ourselves is foundational to creating a campus climate of safety, belonging, equity, inclusion, and growth. This culture is grounded in clear communication, healthy boundaries, and mutual accountability.

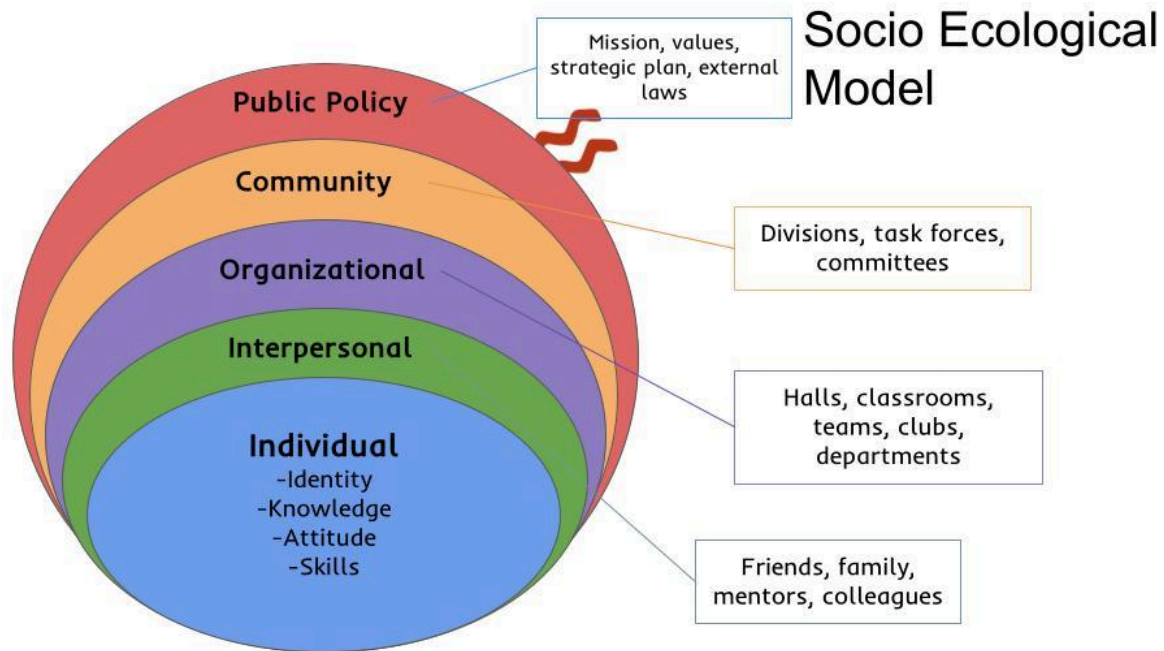
Shared Equity Leadership - A collective process that makes diversity, equity, and inclusion everyone's work rather than siloing it in a single office or in one leader's portfolio. This form of leadership is both individual and collective and has three main components—a personal journey toward critical consciousness for those building a commitment to equity work, a set of values that undergird the work, and practices that leaders enact collectively (Kezar, Holcomb, & Vigil, 2023).

Student Development Theory - Student development theory helps us understand how college students grow, learn, and change during their time in school. It looks at how students develop in many areas—like their sense of identity, how they think and make decisions, how they relate to others, and how they find meaning and purpose. These theories often fall into one of five different areas including 1) Psychosocial, 2) Cognitive-Structural, 3) Person-environment, 4) Humanistic- Existential and 5) Student-Development Process Model. These theories give us tools to support students in ways that match where they are in their journey and help them thrive both in and out of the classroom.

Excellence - Excellence is the practice of striving toward the continuous improvement of oneself and the collective through a commitment to core values, reflection, and development. This value is about more than improving outcomes, it is about understanding that our lives often move through cycles of growth and the understanding that with critical reflection we can improve. This value often sits in tension with other values, as we recognize that the concept of excellence has historically harmed marginalized communities. However, we reframe this core value through a critical lens that captures our persistent pursuit of improvement while balancing our efforts with critical reflection.

Distinction - Excellence becomes distinction when our values are not only upheld but embodied in ways that reflect Macalester’s unique identity and contribute meaningfully to student thriving and institutional impact.

Ecological Model - Consecutive layers of context that influence the development and behavior of individuals on an individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and public policy level. In other words, on a micro, meso, and macro level. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; See figure 1 below).



Values

As student affairs practitioners, our work is grounded in a shared set of values that guide our decisions, shape our culture, and define our commitment to the student experience. These values, Equity & Inclusion, Well-Being & Safety, and Learning & Development, are not only ethical imperatives, but also the foundation of our pursuit of excellence (see figure 2 below). When fully realized, they inform distinctive practices that set Macalester apart within the landscape of higher education. The student affairs strategic direction seeks to articulate how we intentionally live out these values in our daily work. Excellence becomes distinction when we clearly articulate the unique ways our division contributes to student growth and development and institutional success.

Equity & Inclusion: We advance inclusion by identifying systemic inequities, innovating programs, and maximizing resources to meet the diverse needs of our community.

Well-Being & Safety: We foster environments that support holistic well-being and safety using ecological and community-based models of care.

Learning & Development: We champion lifelong learning as a dynamic, inclusive, and transformative process for all community members.

Strategies

These strategies represent behaviors in which the division already excels. The descriptions are not exhaustive representations of the strategies. Instead, the descriptions provide some explanation of how those strategies are defined through action.

Student Development and Engagement - Our ability to work alongside students as they grow, guided by our expertise in student development theories and knowledge of best practices in the field established through decades of experience working as student affairs practitioners.

Collaboration - Our ability to work together across departmental and divisional boundaries to create opportunities for shared work and increased positive impact on student learning.

Communication - Our culture of sharing information strategically with partners within and outside of the division to enhance student safety and development.

Investment in Competition - Our effort to deploy resources in ways that allow our students to compete successfully in programs like athletics, forensics, and entrepreneurship and innovation.

Staff Development - Our focus on investing in continued staff development through the introduction of new knowledge, re-enforcement of existing knowledge, and access to professional networks.

Goals, Actions, and Metrics

1. Enhance Student Life through increased co-curricular programming designed to meet the future needs of a growing residential student community.

Key Actions

- Charge a cross-departmental team with creating a plan to scale high-impact programs such as living learning communities for returning students.
- Outline the scalability of the current systems across student affairs related to safety, wellbeing, and standard of care in preparation for more students living on campus.
- Examine the third year experience at other institutions within the Associated Colleges of the Midwest with longer residency requirements.

Metric

Maintain or grow occupancy within residence halls

Increase participation in Living Learning Communities (LLCs) for residential students by growing the number of LLCs and partnership across campus

2. Create a Seamless Student Experience through increased collaboration, effective use of resources, and increased capacity for shared initiatives that prioritize student learning while fostering an enduring sense of curiosity.

Key Actions

- Expand divisional student-centered curriculum that provides a sequenced and scaffolded learning experience across departments which centers the promotion of holistic student development, including physical, emotional, and mental health.
- Cultivate values-driven student leaders through the implementation of a robust student leadership curriculum that spans multiple departments and ties programs together with shared measurements of success
- Deepen faculty partnerships with key areas such as Entrepreneurship and Innovation to better nurture student curiosity in and out of the classroom
- Enhance training for staff to connect students to critical resources by providing warm referrals that connect students directly to people over digital assets like websites, emails, or phone numbers

Metric

>80% of student-facing programs aligned with divisional learning outcomes by 2028.

3. Attract, Invest in, and Develop Talented Staff who can support student learning and success.

Key Actions

- Increase staff visibility at national and regional organizations so that colleagues in the field see Macalester as a potential next step on their career journey.
- Invest in supervisor-specific training for mid-level and senior-level staff that provides them with the ability to set clear expectations, develop departmental policies and procedures, implement support for staff, and develop strategic departmental plans.
- Create a shadowing program for staff wanting to gain experience in different functional areas by supporting them to complete a project within another department.
- Create guiding principles for a professional development framework at all levels to foster growth across the division.
- Support and celebrate staff who aspire to active engagement and leadership within professional organizations

Metric

Increase positive outcomes within staff engagement survey results related to supervision, expectations, and support.

4. Assess Operational Efficiency to maximize student support.

Key Actions

- Utilize the institution's zero-based budgeting structure to create more efficiency in serving students.
- Review and adjust meeting structures to better align with staff availability and professional development priorities.
- Create a framework for departments to conduct a review of their operations, resources, and programs in alignment with the institution's co-curricular seven-year cycle.

Metric

Development of a template and process for department review.

Implementation Framework

The implementation framework is designed to translate strategic goals into sustained action. At its core, the framework consists of three phases of work and four implementation groups. The three phases include Prioritization, Planning, and Execution. The phases provide a structured approach to move each goal from concept to completion.

- The *Prioritization* phase involves sequencing goals across the five-year plan, ordering them by practicality and priority, and assigning the group responsible for planning and implementation.
- The *Planning* phase centers on developing tactical plans within the assigned group to execute a specific goal.
- The *Execution* phase requires the assigned group to implement the goal using the tactics outlined in the planning phase.

While Phase 1 is likely to happen synchronously, goals will move through Phases 2 and 3 asynchronously. Meaning that one goal may be in execution while another remains in planning.

In addition to this phased structure, four primary groups will be responsible for moving the plan forward:

1. Student Affairs Committee
2. Director Level Leaders
3. Macalester Student Government Strategic Plan Committee
4. Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs (OVPSA)

Each group plays a different role at various stages of the process:

- The Student Affairs Committee holds primary responsibility across all phases. It will lead Phase 1 with feedback from both the OVPSA and the Student Government Strategic Plan Committee.
- Once goals are prioritized and assigned, all groups will contribute to Phase 2, with planning responsibilities distributed according to the assignments made in Phase 1.
- In Phase 3, all groups except the student government committee are responsible for execution, depending on their assigned goals.
- Throughout the implementation, the Student Affairs Committee will ensure progress and accountability across all phases.

This framework is designed to be adaptive, allowing the Student Affairs Division to respond dynamically to shifting priorities while maintaining a clear structure for implementation and evaluation.

Phase 1: Prioritization

- **Objectives:** Sequence goals by priority and practicality. Assign responsible groups.
- **Led by:** Student Affairs Committee

- **With input from:** OVPSA and Student Government
- **Output:** Implementation timeline, goal ownership matrix

Phase 2: Planning

- **Objectives:** Develop tactical plans for each goal (resources, timelines, metrics).
- **Led by:** Assigned responsible groups (varies by goal)
- **Supported by:** Student Affairs Committee and OVPSA

Phase 3: Execution

- **Objectives:** Carry out tactics and implement goals.
- **Led by:** Assigned staff groups (SA Committee, Directors, OVPSA)
- **Monitored by:** Student Affairs Committee

Group and Phase Matrix

Group	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Ongoing Role
Student Affairs Committee	Lead process for prioritization	Develop tactical plans for implementation of assigned goals	Monitor and support groups as goals move into execution	Oversight, planning, accountability, reporting
Group of Directors	Advise if needed	Develop tactical plans for implementation of assigned goals	Lead the execution of goals assigned to implement	Execution, planning, management, reporting
Student Government Committee	Provide feedback to SA committee	Provide feedback on tactical plans for implementation of goals	Not directly involved, but still able to provide feedback	Student input and communication
Office of VP for Student Affairs	Provide feedback to SA committee	Collaborate with others groups developing plans	Lead the execution of goals assigned to implement	Strategic alignment, resource support, execution, reporting