

Aug 1999

FOUNDATIONS OF EXCELLENCE

REPORT OF THE PRIORITIES PLANNING GROUP

DAVIDSON'S IDENTITY AND MISSION

Davidson College's identity has been shaped by a longstanding sense of educational leadership and a traditional commitment to offer an undergraduate educational program of the highest quality. Davidson's mission is to educate broadly young men and women for productive and meaningful lives of scholarship, leadership, and service in a complex world. Everything that the College does must directly or indirectly support the College's mission to achieve excellence in education of its students. To carry out its mission, the College must attract, maintain, and support an outstanding faculty dedicated to teaching; recruit, admit, and enroll an outstanding student body; provide personal and individual attention to students in academic and other aspects of campus life; and recruit and retain an excellent staff to support teaching and learning. It must prepare students effectively for academic and professional achievement in the world beyond Davidson; to do so, it must support a learning environment that cherishes diversity, promotes international awareness, encourages service to others, provides excellent facilities, and sustains quality programming in all areas of education and campus life. The curriculum must be responsive to changing needs, but concentrate upon the liberal arts in preference to narrow vocational or skill-based training. The curriculum must insist on a core that fosters breadth of education and on majors and concentrations that encourage both depth and pursuit of individual interests.

Davidson chooses to remain a small liberal arts college with a student body of young men and women; to be a residential college; and to continue its historical relationship with the Presbyterian church.

Of its faculty, the College insists upon excellence in teaching, dedication to accessibility, and engagement in professional activity; of its staff as well as its faculty, it expects commitment to supporting above all else the education of its students; of its present and prospective students, the College will demand high standards of both accomplishment and conduct and preservation of a community reliant upon honor in dealings with others.

A Davidson education commands respect. The College's graduates, the greatest testament to its merits, have distinguished themselves through their professional accomplishments as well as in their leadership and service within the many communities where they live and work. Members of the College's faculty have been noted for their contributions to scholarship and to the profession of teaching. The quality of the student experience has received praise from employers and parents as well as from the students who both participate in and help to create it. Leadership from the College's Trustees and the support of friends, alumni, and donors both large and small have shown faith in what Davidson College has accomplished and in the promise that its future holds.

With both hard work and good fortune, Davidson has taken its place in the higher ranks of nationally recognized liberal arts colleges. It aspires to retain and strengthen that position, one which acknowledges the excellence that has been built upon Davidson's history, its mission, its tradition, and its strong sense of its own character and identity.

STRENGTHS Many qualities contribute to Davidson's reputation and distinction, a reputation acknowledged by consistent placement among the commonly-ranked top 25 national liberal arts colleges. Among those qualities are the following:

- Davidson's ability to recruit, select, admit, and retain students of high quality
- The excellence of Davidson's liberal arts education, with its commitment to high standards in teaching and learning
- Davidson's commitment to its heritage as a Presbyterian college and as the only church-related college among the nation's top 20 colleges
 - The quality of the student experience, with its strong residential nature; its vital Honor Code; its emphasis on service, on values, and on international awareness
 - An athletic program emphasizing physical vigor through intercollegiate and intramural competition and physical education requirements
 - Emphasis on the critical balance between teaching and research in faculty responsibilities
- Notable record of achievement of Davidson's alumni in graduate and professional schools and in lives noted for leadership and service
- Davidson's strong reputation for sound financial management and fiscal responsibility

- Dedicated and generous support for Davidson from trustees, alumni, parents, corporations, foundations, and the general public
- Davidson's beautiful and physically coherent campus

Davidson's greatest strength, however, is the foundation for all that lies above: Davidson's sense of itself both as a community and as a part of a wider one. The Davidson College community is characterized by its insistence on personal qualities of respect, integrity, and civility, by its camaraderie and esprit de corps, and by its relationship with the Town of Davidson. Davidson's emphasis on international matters, on service, and on the sense of responsibility manifest in the Honor Code helps lead all who are part of Davidson to view themselves also as contributors to the world about them. A strong sense of community marks life at Davidson and shapes those who have shared in a Davidson education.

CHALLENGES In no way is Davidson College unique in its institutional need to preserve its strengths, use its resources prudently, and assure its continued excellence. The College's determination to hold a clear sense of its mission, to affirm its fundamental values, and to express confidence in its ability to maintain its prominence demands an understanding of various contemporary challenges and a community planning how best to meet them. Other institutions face challenges similar to Davidson's; Davidson is determined to excel in meeting new challenges as it has in meeting older ones. The challenges faced by higher education in general and liberal arts colleges in particular center on issues of competition, expectations, and accountability.

COMPETITION:

- Shifting demographic realities are decreasing the traditional student base of middle-class and upper-middle class students in residential liberal arts colleges.
- There is increasing and varied competition for philanthropic funding and support.
- Among programs on any campus, competition for scarce resources exists.
- The familiar challenge of competing with other colleges to secure the best faculty is paralleled by increasing competition to secure the best professional staff.

ACCOUNTABILITY

—There is increasing pressure on colleges to demonstrate accountability in the educational program, in aspects of campus life, in financial matters (price restraint, cost containment, and productivity), and in stewardship of gifts.

—There is continuing need to communicate to the public the benefits and value of a liberal arts education in the face of growing public emphasis on specialized skills; liberal arts education competes with more skill-based education and confronts some skepticism about the value of the liberal arts experience.

—Expanding government regulation creates new demands and expenses to meet them.

—Public pressure is growing to strengthen higher education's moral and legal responsibilities for students' behavior, sense of citizenship, and ethical development.

EXPECTATIONS

—Voices within education and without expect higher education to play a greater part in enabling a variety of groups more successfully to participate in the academy, the economy, and other positions of leadership.

—Students and parents expect improved services to students, particularly in areas of information technology—areas in which faculty and staff have greater expectations, as well.

—For faculty members, there is a growing tension between intense and complex teaching demands and the expectation and desire to engage in research and demonstrate loyalty to their discipline as well as their college or university.

As is true of any institution, however, Davidson's history has also left it with particular challenges as well as unique strengths. Some of Davidson's challenges, indeed, may flow from recent years of relatively rapid achievement of deserved national prominence; present challenges may thus more nearly testify to accomplishment than to weakness. If one of Davidson's most fundamental strengths is its aspiration to achieve and maintain a position of excellence, then its most fundamental challenge is to assure that it can support well both what it does and what it dreams. While challenges particular to Davidson are of many sorts, and parallel similar challenges elsewhere, one group of challenges seems to flow from Davidson's history as, until a mere few decades ago, an all-white, all-male, regionally prominent institution; a second, from adjustments accompanying the end of a period of growth in size of student body and available resources.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO IDENTITY AND TRADITION

- Negative as well as positive general perceptions created by the College's proud heritage as a Southern, church-related institution
- Tensions between the interests of today's students and the College's expectations relative to its traditional curricula and programs
- Pressures related to equity in gender and racial matters across all campus constituencies

CHALLENGES OF LIMITED RESOURCES

- The challenge of developing and sustaining a new strategic planning process that carefully defines and measures objectives of central importance and ways to direct resources to objectives of the greatest priority
- Deficiency of the College's financial resources relative to those institutions with which we compete for students, faculty, and philanthropic dollars
- Ongoing demands for major resources in the general area of information technology
- Need to achieve College-wide levels of staffing that are both affordable and appropriate for the College's mission and the quality of services it offers
- Tension between the opportunities, including revenue, of increasing the size of the student body and the implications, including cost, of such an increase for the College's mission and the quality of its student experience
- Difficulties in sustaining a residential community for faculty and staff in the face of high housing costs in and near the town of Davidson

CONSENSUS AGREEMENTS

The Priorities Planning Group generally accepts the following assumptions as guides to further discussion—though with, it should be noted, some range of opinion about each.

- Davidson will remain an undergraduate liberal arts college with its first priority being a strong academic experience, requiring a low student/faculty ratio.
- Davidson will continue to be highly selective in its admission of students and will continue actively to seek a well rounded and diverse student body with an approximate balance between numbers of men and women.

- Davidson will continue to emphasize teaching as the primary duty of its faculty.
- Davidson will remain a residential college. For the next five years, its on-campus enrollment will remain at about 1600 students, though the assumption should not be taken to preclude discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of increasing Davidson’s size. Investments in infrastructure should include a prudent level of excess capacity.
- Davidson will maintain its historic relationship with the Presbyterian Church (USA).
- Davidson will continue its particular emphasis on service.
- Davidson will continue its efforts to emphasize international awareness.
- Davidson will continue to emphasize its Honor Code.
- Davidson will continue to emphasize physical education, including opportunities for intercollegiate competition appropriate to the identity and mission of the College.
- Davidson will continue its tradition of fiscal responsibility and its efforts to maintain financial equilibrium.
- Davidson will continue to value the importance of its alumni as emblematic of the College’s achievements and as vital to the College’s future.
- Davidson will continue as fundraising permits to build a new College Union and to remodel for new uses the present Gray building and Love Auditorium.

KEY INDICATORS

While the College’s success in fulfilling its mission does not always find numerical expression, some data do help indicate its health as an institution, its progress toward stated goals, and its accountability to others for what it does. As a College, we need to watch many figures and the relationships among them; as a community, we need to make much of that information readily available to one another to help us illuminate and inform our decisions as we plan our future and examine our present. A list of indicators important to watch over time is appended to this document. Included in the sections to follow are some that appear most significant to our planning in several broad areas. There is no implication intended, nor should inference be drawn, that our listing of key indicators sets as goals maximum or minimum

values for each. Key indicators serve only to help examine aspects of the College’s life that are susceptible of numerical measurement.

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Davidson College has as its central mission the education of its students. Its aspiration remains the provision of the best possible liberal arts education for undergraduates, and the core of that mission and aspiration lies in the interaction between teacher and student. To fulfill its mission, the College seeks the best students available; the finest faculty it can obtain; an outstanding staff dedicated to fostering the intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, and physical development of Davidson’s students; and the array of facilities and services necessary to fulfill the College’s mission in an atmosphere reflecting expectations of excellence.

ADMISSION OF STUDENTS

Recruiting, admitting, and enrolling the best students available will remain an objective of paramount importance. Our **objectives** should include

- Building a scholarship endowment which, in combination with other resources, is sufficient to meet the demonstrated financial need of any student qualified for admission
- Maintaining a need-blind admissions policy within the limits of cost control over financial aid funds
- Increasing the prospect pool to at least 35,000 and converting 8-10 per cent of that pool to applicant
- Sustaining yield and acceptance rates consonant with the College’s classification as “Highly Selective Plus” or better
- Increasing the diversity of the applicant pool and of the group of accepted students

Key performance indicators (Admissions)
Percentage of freshman applicants accepted—target, less than 40%
Percentage of accepted freshman applicants who matriculate (yield)—target, 40% or higher
Academic strength of entering class Average SAT/ACT scores Percentage of admitted class in top 10 % of high school graduating class
Percentage of total students on institutional grant aid
Institutional grant aid as percentage of total tuition income

Tuition dependency
Total tuition/fee income as percentage of total income budget
Tuition/fee income exclusive of institutional aid as percentage of total income budget
Diversity
Percentage of various groups (African-American, Hispanic, etc.) in admitted class
Measure of geographic diversity
Measure of socioeconomic diversity
Average student debt each year and at graduation
Number of applicants “gapped” and average size of gap

FACULTY AND INSTRUCTION

Davidson’s faculty must consist of a diverse group of outstanding men and women dedicated to teaching undergraduate students, distinguished in professional qualifications and accomplishments, and committed to good personal relationships with students outside the classroom. Faculty members need to be accessible to students, supported in professional development, and numerous enough to permit low average class sizes. Our **objectives** should include:

- Achieving a mean faculty compensation comparable to the mean of an institutional peer group, adjusted for time in rank and service
- Assuring that full-time faculty represent 90 per cent or more of total faculty, while avoiding a tenured proportion greater than 80 per cent
- Maintaining the percentage of faculty with appropriate terminal degree at 90 or greater
- Evaluating departmental staffing levels on a continuing basis, with enrollment being only one factor in such an evaluation
- Maintaining a student/faculty ratio of approximately 11 to 1; and an average class size of approximately 18, with a high percentage of classes having fewer than 20 students and a low percentage of classes with more than 50
- Using a variety of approaches to increase the diversity of the pool of applicants for faculty positions in order to increase the possibility of hiring individuals from underrepresented groups

Key Performance Indicators (Faculty and Instruction)
FTE Students / FTE Faculty —target, 11/1 or lower
Average class size —target, 18 or less
Percentage of classes under 20 —target, 60 per cent or greater
Percentage of classes over 50 —target, 2 per cent or less
Percentage of faculty part-time —target, 10 per cent or less

ADVISING AND MENTORING

Faculty and staff members share responsibilities for advising and mentoring students, with some clear areas of primary concern for each group. Advising plays a major role in retaining students as well as in enabling them best to take full advantage of their Davidson experience.

Objectives in the area of advising and mentoring include:

- Continuing to evaluate the quality and consistency of advising, with particular attention to the distinct responsibilities of faculty and staff
- For pre-major advising, maintaining a low student/advisor ratio

—Developing an approach to the advising of first- and second-year students that includes projected course work beyond the immediately approaching semester, projected off-campus study (including international study), summer experiences, internships, and opportunities to develop leadership and other skills and interests

—Enhancing the cooperation between the Office of Career Services and others involved in advising of students

—Assuring the consistency and availability of information on the careers and achievements of graduating seniors and recent alumni

—Providing fee-based psychiatric care and additional learning disabilities counseling, along with more cost-effective after-hours medical care

Key Performance Indicators (Advising and Mentoring)
Pre-major advisees per advisor —target, no more than 10
Percentage of students who matriculate after their first year
Percentage of students who graduate from Davidson in their class cohort
Percentage of students employed or fulfilling military obligation within six months/ within one year after graduation.
Percentage of students in graduate or professional schools within one year / within five years after graduation

FACILITIES, SERVICES, AND SUPPORT

An environment for the learning experience requires facilities and services that reflect and support the quality of that experience. Achieving a high quality of facilities in support of academic goals and the broader goals of student learning, along with services that assist in the broad development of Davidson students, implies the following **objectives**:

—Providing and maintaining adequate financial and equipment resources for academic departments and programs

—Maintaining a library that meets the teaching, learning, and research needs of faculty and students, taking account of technologies enabling a greater diversity of access to information

—Planning for the renovation of Chambers Building and other teaching facilities

—Developing the College Union in ways that provide attractive social space for students, faculty, and staff; that provide appealing social alternatives to Patterson Court; and that help meet the academic as well as general need for performance space

- Providing sufficient residence hall space for at least 90 per cent of students in residence
- Expanding experiential learning opportunities within the curriculum where appropriate
- Developing and encouraging service opportunities for students, faculty, and staff
- Developing services related to student health with close attention to the growth of health-care facilities in and near Davidson
- Achieving a cost-effective, vital, and competitive program of intercollegiate athletics consistent with the overall educational mission of the College
- Maintaining excellent and accessible recreational and athletic facilities for students, faculty, and staff

Key Performance Indicators (Facilities, Services, and Support)
Number of students living in campus housing as percentage of total student population
Educational program expenditures per FTE student
Library expenditures per FTE student

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SERVICES

New information technologies have become central to the College as a component of its educational program, a facilitator of communication both within the campus and with the world outside, an indispensable component of planning and administration, and a large component of the annual budget. Our intention is that such technologies be employed with wisdom and in accord with the College’s mission and values; that they reflect new developments; and that investment in information technology achieve clear educational benefits. **Objectives** include:

- Completing and maintaining the campus network, offering network-based services suited to the mission and goals of the College
- Providing facilities and support for applications of technology to teaching and learning
- Applying the Banner database and related applications to administrative operations and to support for management and planning
- Managing college-wide information technology resources to maximize return on investment

- Studying and developing an appropriate mix between central and distributed provision of information technology services
- Developing support for students, faculty, and staff in learning to use technology, and setting an expectation of participation
- Considering the advantages and disadvantages of establishing Information Technology Services as a separate campus-wide budgetary and organizational division of the College

Key Performance Indicators (Information Technology)
IT expenditures per FTE student
IT expenditures as percentage of total budget

RESOURCES

To say that Davidson’s ability to realize its educational mission of excellence is dependent on stewardship of its resources is a truism, not an expression of alarm or a sign of impending crisis. That Davidson has been able to achieve and maintain its high national ranking in the company of institutions far richer in endowment bears witness to its ability to use its resources wisely. Continuing to do so in the face of challenges noted earlier requires that the College remain focused on its mission, active in its quest for greater resources, and prudent in its financial management. The College needs deliberate planning, attention to specific indications of performance, and continuing attention to the foundations on which our future will rest. Whatever the College’s priorities, they will be mere words if they lack the support of financial resources coming from tuition revenue, endowment growth and income, aggressive fund raising, and prudent management.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The College is its people. Compensation accounts for two thirds of the annual budget, but Davidson’s people are an immeasurable component of its wealth. To fulfill its mission, to serve its students well, demands attention to certain **objectives** directed toward finding and keeping the people on whom the College depends:

- Recruiting, supporting, retaining, and effectively utilizing the skills and abilities of an outstanding and diverse faculty and staff
- Ensuring competitive compensation, including benefits, for faculty and staff
- Fostering an environment of open communication and mutual respect
- Nurturing an appreciation for different perspectives and for racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and socioeconomic diversity
- Creating opportunities for broad participation in decision-making and governance
- Enabling and encouraging cross-functional and cross-departmental collaborative work teams to help achieve the highest possible levels of staff productivity and efficiency

Key Performance Indicators (Human Resources)
Compensation competitiveness: Davidson mean vs. appropriate comparison group mean for each constituent group (faculty, staff, biweekly)
Number of salaried staff and biweekly staff per student FTE
Minorities as percentage of total number of faculty, salaried staff, and biweekly staff

FUNDRAISING AND ENDOWMENT GROWTH

Davidson’s endowment is low compared to many of its peers, but its alumni and friends are exemplary in their support of the College’s mission. The perceived need to dampen the rate of tuition growth makes fundraising all the more imperative, and the absolute priority for us to serve as stewards of the College’s future makes endowment growth a vital need. **Objectives** for fundraising and endowment growth include:

- Increasing the size of the College’s endowment through concerted fundraising efforts and prudent management, including a limit on endowment draw
- Emphasizing and expanding unrestricted giving through the Annual Fund and other gift vehicles
- Raising support from alumni, parents, friends, corporations, and foundations for programs and projects reflecting the College’s priorities
- Developing alternative and additional sources of revenues, including auxiliary enterprises and user fees
- Planning and initiating a comprehensive campaign to support key elements of the strategic plan, including endowment growth, scholarships, endowed professorships, facilities, technology, and operating expenses

Key Performance Indicators (Fundraising and Endowment Growth)
Total gifts and pledges, subdivided to include totals for: Planned giving Annual Fund Scholarships Capital projects Endowment
Alumni participation in Annual Fund – target, 53% or higher
Young alumni participation in Annual Fund—target, 50% or higher
Cost per dollar raised

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Good financial management is absolutely essential to the success of strategic planning and to our ability to assure the ongoing health of the College. The list of performance indicators appropriate for financial management is a long one; only the most general are listed below. In addition to the indicators below, we need closely to observe the twelve financial indicators used by Cambridge Associates in the “Comparative Financial Review of Independent Colleges.” **Objectives** for financial management include:

- Achieving and maintaining a state of financial equilibrium following accepted professional guidelines
- Achieving efficiency and savings in all areas through cost containment
- Improving financial controls and operating procedures
- Building reserves for renewal and replacement of depreciating physical plant and equipment at least sufficient to preserve their useful life

Current income must equal or exceed current expenses.
Growth rate of income must equal or exceed growth rate of expenses.
Endowment spending must be held at or below a level preserving the fund's inflation-adjusted purchasing power.
Annual spending or saving for renewal and replacement of depreciating physical plant and equipment assets must meet or exceed a level necessary to preserve their useful life.

PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Objectives not already noted include:

- Utilizing existing facilities and services more effectively
- Developing facilities and timing their construction or renovation consistently with the College's Strategic Plan
- Guiding the physical evolution of the campus in a way that enhances community and facilitates interaction among students, faculty, and staff on a daily basis
- Achieving greater operating, maintenance, and energy efficiencies
- Maintaining a reasonable balance between preservation and construction in meeting emerging needs, considering first the creative and adaptive reuse of existing structures
- Requiring that technology expenditures meet identified College priorities and increase efficiency

ALUMNI AND OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Objectives include:

- Strengthening the relationship with alumni, engaging them in meaningful ways as volunteers, leaders, and advocates
- Employing the expertise and talents of trustees to further the goals of the institution
- Engaging parents and friends as resources in attaining the College's goals

FINANCIAL MODELS

Like the Key Indicators, the attached financial model is a scale of measurement rather than a plan of action. Clearly, we would not propose a plan that calls for budgetary deficits. The model shows the interlocking effect of certain assumptions regarding tuition, faculty and staff size, compensation, endowment income, income from auxiliary services, and gifts. It sets aside an amount for ongoing maintenance—an inadequate amount by national standards, but the College has not previously included at the most basic level of its budgetary process a percentage earmarked for maintenance. The budgets do indeed show deficits; the spreadsheet of which the model is a snapshot will assist in ascertaining what combination of altered assumptions can remove those deficits.

Members of the PPG have expressed varying opinions regarding a financial model. One extreme reflects the view that financial forecasting depends almost completely on the unpredictable and the uncontrollable—endowment income on market performance, or acceptable tuition levels in part on the actions of peer institutions, for instance. As a consequence, a detailed model might be both flawed in its assumptions and needlessly limiting in the face of circumstances that change either favorably or unfavorably. The other extreme observes that models themselves create no inflexibility of action, and that five-year projections can be reasonable, sound, and helpful. Detailed models, moreover, might tend strongly to encourage planned schedules of maintenance, can reflect significant year-to-year differences in the costs of debt service, and can open possibilities for initiatives of any sort that are deliberate rather than reflective of a particular year's fundraising success. As a consequence, we have not so much a model as a projection of current assumptions and a foundation for understanding the ways in which they relate to one another financially.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

During its months of discussion, the PPG divided into three subgroups. Their reports, themselves drawing upon the work of divisional task forces, provided the material for this summary narrative. Those reports form part of the PPG's final statement and are available from the President's Office.

INTO THE FUTURE

Davidson must continue to strengthen and build upon the foundations upon which it stands. Examining where we stand and the challenges we face leads us to focus most sharply on three areas, each helping shape the community that is our greatest strength.

First is the central reason that Davidson exists, its students. When Concord Presbytery met in 1835 to begin establishing a college, its leaders contemplated a student body neither restricted to the prosperous nor sectarian in its scope. As costs of education have increased, we find a danger that though the Davidson student body may be diverse past all dreams of its founders, becoming part of it may be an opportunity closed to too many. Moreover, diversity that enriches the education and experience of all demands careful nourishment and continuing attention. To open opportunity to the most promising students whatever their financial resources, and deliberately to increase other aspects of diversity, requires significant increases in financial aid funds, especially from the endowment. We need both to work at increasing those funds and at noticeably and quickly increasing diversity using opportunities already available. To do less would betray the founding principles of the College.

Second is the recognition that excellence begins with people. To find the best students and give them an education less than they deserve would be to betray the trust they and their parents place in Davidson. We must secure the resources necessary to make certain that for faculty and staff, the college does not lose its best candidates because of limited compensation. Evidence exists that uncompetitive levels of compensation impede our efforts to hire and retain both faculty and staff members whom we consider best suited to our mission and most representative of the excellence we demand. Such a trend, once started, requires immediate attention lest it become even more difficult to reverse. Through both initiatives in endowment fundraising and care that available funds not be dissipated by eagerness to add positions, we must consider faculty and staff compensation a major priority.

Third is the understanding that a project already in motion before our efforts began, the new College Union, can be significant in fostering the sense of community that is one of the College's strengths. Properly envisioned, the Union is the cornerstone of deliberate efforts to bring together the College community, provide new avenues of outreach to the broader community, and become—in the words of a report from another time and another campus—the place where all paths cross. As central to a series of changes, the new Union can also make possible other improvements, including freeing the Love Auditorium space for a mix of faculty

offices, classrooms, and seminar rooms; helping remedy shortcomings in facilities for theater and music, activities that include large numbers of students and others; and releasing other space potentially to help bring back together various scattered offices that are as uneconomical as they are inimical to a sense of campus community. We recognize that the Union justly stands as one of the College's highest priorities, and believe that along with attention to financial aid and to compensation matters it will support our vision for the College's future.

From the outset, the Priorities Planning Group has taken as its premise that our vision for the future must rest upon careful stewardship of present resources. To speak of priorities is to speak of reasoned choice; to speak of planning is to speak of judicious foresight. Much of our effort has been devoted to and informed by financial models. Though not blind to the danger that models and their assumptions can too easily limit creative vision, we are even more certain that the greater peril lies in letting those limits distract us from the necessity of informed projection. Were there no constraint upon resources, there would be little need for either choice or foresight; and were our sense of stewardship weak, we would be untrue to our tradition, our mission, and our community. We believe that our report is informed not just by hope, but by reality.

We refuse, however, to let a snapshot of reality dissuade us from a vision of the excellence we must exemplify, a faith that we can meet the challenges to our mission, or a clarity about the goals that lie before us.

The wise indeed do build upon rock. Davidson's foundations lie in its history and in its present, in its mission, in its community. Those foundations have served an institution highly regarded, justly admired, and often envied. But building never ends, and the demands of excellence never rest. Pride in what we are and in what we have done is manifest not in contentment, but in striving. Continuing to strive is our challenge to ourselves and to our community.