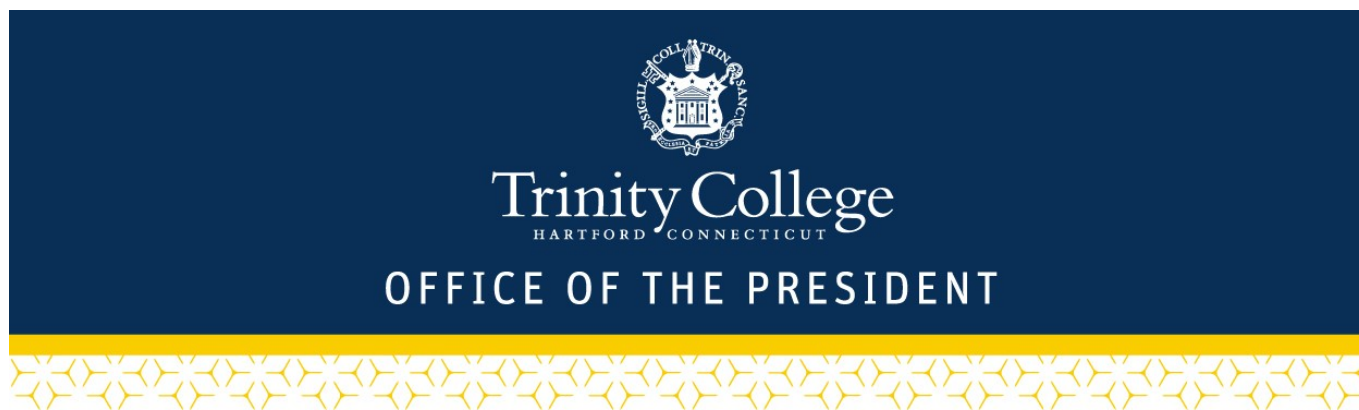


President's Commission for Trinity's Future

President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>

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To: President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>



December 16, 2020

Dear Trinity College Community Members,

As we come to the end of this incredibly challenging year, I want to share with you a summary of the terrific work of the President's Commission for Trinity's Future, which began in the spring and concluded recently. The commission's purview was to look beyond the immediate crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic to consider the enduring success of the college in a world forever changed. I am grateful to the members of the commission for undertaking this initiative, which sets the stage for important conversations for our community in the months ahead.

In announcing the commission in April, the Board of Trustees characterized it as a small, nimble think tank designed to spark dialogue about the college's future and how we might imagine Trinity, in particular, and higher education, more generally, in a post-pandemic world. The commission, comprising trustees, students, faculty, staff, and administrators, took a blue-sky approach to idea generation, while considering critical environmental pressures—internal and external, local and global, economic and social.

At the heart of the commission's work were Trinity's educational mission and our strategic plan, Summit. The commission's task was *not* to wholly reinvent the college or reimagine its future; nor was it an operational committee evaluating specific, practicable solutions. Rather, it sought to be clear-eyed in considering evolving challenges and, given those challenges, to imagine innovations that would enable Trinity's continued success in advancing its mission and ascending to ever-greater heights, to the benefit of individuals, the college, and society broadly.

The commission met weekly beginning in May, held three faculty forums, and conducted a stakeholder survey over the summer, seeking input from faculty, staff, cabinet, the Student Government Association, and alumni groups. And, through research and literature searches and insights from external consultants, the commission examined the current higher education landscape.

The commission shared with trustees in June an update on its research and inquiry, and at the October board meeting, it presented a summary of its work and a host of ideas along a continuum of change,

from modest enhancements to our current model to proposals that would significantly transform it. More important than any single idea that emerged, though, was the framing of the ideas around a necessary set of “enablers,” a collection of must-dos to provide the flexibility and conditions for us to be able to make strategic decisions for the college’s future. The enablers highlighted by the commission include:

- Building the endowment to support Trinity’s ongoing excellence
- Differentiating Trinity and its value proposition
- Diversifying revenue sources in distinctive, mission-focused ways
- Investing in technology and data analytics to transform and enhance our operations
- Creating a campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming to a diverse community
- Embracing experiential and lifelong learning and professional preparation

The commission acknowledged that these enablers should lead to improvements in college rankings, which play a role in how the college is perceived internally and externally. More importantly, these enablers correspond directly with objectives in our strategic plan and with the current strategic focus among divisions throughout the college. But, as the commission observed, there is a fundamental challenge between successfully managing the day-to-day operations of a large, complex organization and cultivating a culture of innovation and transformation. Among the important conversations ahead is one to determine how to optimize the college’s organization for such innovation.

So, what’s next? The commission’s work didn’t result in a lengthy written report, but the group’s presentations to the board were thought-provoking and creative, and we’d like to extend the conversation to the wider community. This letter is the first step in doing so. Early in 2021, we’ll present some of the commission’s findings and convene small-group discussions focused on particular topics. Look out for announcements about these presentations after the new year. Then, later in the spring, we’ll design the infrastructures to support institutional innovation. I hope that by the summer of 2021, we’ll begin to test ideas and to innovate up to and through Trinity’s bicentennial in 2023. We have 200 years of great ideas upon which to build. I am excited for our work together, and, more importantly, I’m excited for Trinity’s bright and creative future.

My deepest thanks to the members of the President’s Commission for Trinity’s Future: Board of Trustees Chair-Elect Lisa Bisaccia ’78 (who chaired the commission); Trustees Lou Shipley ’85 and Craig Vought ’82, P’17; Acting Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs Sonia Cardenas; Vice President of Finance and Chief Financial Officer Dan Hitchell; Professors Christopher Hager, Susan Masino, and Garth Myers; Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Adrienne Oddi; Director of Research, Instruction, Technology Jason Jones; and students Mia Conte ’22 and Giovanni Jones ’21.

I wish you all a healthy and happy holiday season. See you in the new year as we continue our path to the Summit!

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney
President and Trinity College Professor of Neuroscience