

# Pitzer College Staff - Recommended Strategic Planning Priorities

## Introduction

This document is a compilation of recommended priorities to consider for the Pitzer College Strategic Plan from the perspective of Pitzer Staff. The content of this document was generated by Staff Council with heavy input from staff at an All Staff Meeting on March 14, 2018. 70 staff attended that meeting. At the meeting, Staff Council put forth suggested priorities for consideration. Staff then voted on what they felt was most important. In this document, priorities are ordered based on the level of consensus for each item. All items Staff Council put forth for consideration received support and most recommended additions were details that should be considered in the implementation phase of the strategic plan.

## **Priority 1: Develop Pitzer to be an open and collaborative community; a place where well-informed conversations and decisions happen with respect.**

Pitzer is a place that values shared governance and the input from stakeholders to make decisions. This is something that supports buy-in and helps Pitzer reach its potential as an organization. We are a community of activists, organizers, and people who are passionate about our core values. However, as a whole Pitzer is not good about effective communication, creating a climate that is sometimes one of division and mistrust. This is a threat to the organization moving into the future. Staff want to see:

- A) **Improved Communication** – Individuals need to listen to one another, especially those with different opinions and/or experiences to make Pitzer a more inclusive place. People need to seek to understand, not just to be understood.
  - a. Retention of students is sometimes impacted by the rhetoric on campus, as some find the community too divisive.
  - b. Some experience a culture of bullying, especially on email. That should not be part of Pitzer. We need to empower individuals to be able to communicate their thoughts and ideas in a way that shows respect, demonstrates understanding of other ideas, and promotes productive dialogue.
  - c. Staff regularly report being questioned in a way that implies their expertise is not legitimate, especially by faculty. This impacts staff morale and creates division in the Pitzer community.
- B) **Informed Decision-Making**
  - a. Pitzer constituents need to gather the necessary information from published data and experts, especially internal ones, before having an opinion on a matter relating to the college. Anecdotal information should be confirmed with data before being used to make decisions. Data-driven opinions and decisions offer more credibility and ultimately will strengthen the college.
  - b. Job searches with selection committees should involve more staff, especially for Cabinet and Presidential searches. When the staff representation is significantly outnumbered by faculty on a search, the result is a lack a diversity of important voices and opinions.

Staff roles are varied making it difficult for a small number of staff to represent the great variety of perspectives and knowledge.

- C) **Adapt Shared Governance** – Staff support the concept of Pitzer’s shared governance model. It supports collaboration, buy-in, and in theory brings different perspectives to the table. However, it needs to be adapted to maximize its success.
- a. Representation of staff is lacking on governing committees. Faculty, often by a large number, frequently outnumber staff (and students) on committees. As staff we want to highlight that we have a significant number of subject matter experts, strategy experts, technical experts, and data experts that could make significant contributions to the effectiveness and efficiency of committees. Unlike faculty and students that do very similar work, staff work in a variety of roles and bring deep tactical and operational expertise. It does not make sense to have a conversation without the relevant experts as part of the conversation.
  - b. There are positional disparities in terms of represented voice. Staff don’t have votes on all committees, even when they are just as much or more an expert on the topic than faculty and student members (e.g. BIC). When committees are in the process of making recommendations or decisions, feedback should be provided from all parties early on in the process, especially those impacted and responsible to implement the change (e.g. making plans for technology without getting input to make sure IT can support it).
  - c. We are missing important perspectives on shared governance committees. Cabinet members do not have standing memberships to governance committees. Since they cannot serve on Staff Council (according to the bylaws), they are excluded (exceptions apply to the Dean of Faculty and Treasurer). Leaving out these key experts is a hindrance to Pitzer’s ability to be act more quickly and enact change. Trustee voices are lacking on shared governance committees, even though they are a crucial voice at the college.

**Priority 2: Become more nimble at adapting to changes.**

The world is changing at a rapid pace. Compared to 20 years ago, the needs of students are quite different. Addressing these problems proactively and strategically requires a much more significant investment in technology, databases and staff dedicated to data analysis.

- A) **Improve Support for Students** – Students come in with expectations and needs that the college is not structured to support.
- a. Pitzer needs to be able to adapt to changing student academic interests. We need to be able to supplement training/classes in growing student interests (e.g. data science, environmental science), it could help with recruitment, student satisfaction, and grant opportunities.
  - b. Pitzer needs to ensure offices that support students have the appropriate level of staffing, infrastructure, and resources. The demands of their positions have changed significantly in the past 10+ years without significant shifts in expectations or staffing. These offices has to be proactive and reactive at the same time.
  - c. Pitzer needs to better aid students in their post-graduation plans. Many students enter the workforce after graduating and need significantly more career services support than what we can currently provide.

- d. The college needs to review and prioritize budget items more frequently to strategically allocate resources and address current needs. For example, for 10+ years the College has not provided an increase to financial aid funds despite the fact that tuition, room and board, and living expenses have all increased.
  - e. Students come in with significantly more anxiety, stress, and depression than they did 20+ years ago. The college needs determine and address what action should be taken to meet these needs. This may include addressing Pitzer's support structure and helping with building skills to develop resiliency.
  - f. We need to create a more inclusive community so that groups that may feel more isolated (e.g. students of color, first gen, students with disabilities) sense more support on campus.
- B) Improve Support for Staff** – Staff are an important resource to the college and it is costly for the college to have turnover. Many staff are struggling with the high cost of living (especially with [housing](#) and [childcare](#)). Managers report issues filling positions in some departments because of lower pay compared to peer schools. Additionally, there are limited opportunities within the current model to promote employees. If Vice Presidents had more flexibility to manage their budget and positions, it could make a big impact on employee retention. It is important for the college to be strategic about the pay and benefits for staff to maximize what is most helpful to retention.
- C) Upgrade Campus Technology** - The campus facilities at Pitzer need to evolve. For example, if the College streamlined technology across classrooms, people would have an easier time using technology. This can promote innovation and reduce staffing demands.
- D) More Effective Communication Tools** - We need to find more efficient and effective ways to communicate to one another. Improved communication with one another will lead to better-informed decisions, students able to maximize campus resources, and better use of everyone's time.
- a. Many Pitzer constituents report being able to unable to find something on the website as they don't know where to look for information.
  - b. There isn't a central place to be able to access information internal to the Pitzer community. Many other schools have made investments to these kinds of internal websites/portals.
  - c. People report being bombarded by emails. So much communication is sent by email so that people either miss it or receive so much that they don't bother to use email to access information.
  - d. There is limited or no collaboration across the college in regards to: 1) when communications are sent, 2) best practices/training in effective messaging, or 3) sharing of technology tools when appropriate.
  - e. In all communication tools and technology, it is essential that they work well on mobile applications.
- E) Improve Campus Climate** – Good morale is key to the success of the college. It is the time to start taking action using the existing data already collected in many surveys (e.g. Institutional Research, Mercer). Continually requesting more data and not taking action is disheartening. We are a small enough school without a lot of red tape that we should be able to act more quickly.

### **Priority 3: Maximize Pitzer's existing strengths.**

Pitzer College is in many ways in an excellent position as an institution. However, staff see missed opportunities where we have strengths on which we could capitalize. As an institution without the financial resources of many peers, it is essential that Pitzer take advantage of every opportunity.

- A) **Maximize our connection as part of The Claremont Colleges** – An incredible aspect of Pitzer College is the consortium. It is a powerful resource with outstanding potential. Pitzer and the other Claremont Colleges need to think strategically about shared resources.
  - a. There are many more opportunities for colleges to pool resources using The Claremont Colleges Services (TCCS). For example, there may be staff positions that could be under TCCS but used on project or on a temporary basis at schools. The person would be available first-come first serve and the cost billed to the school.
  - b. We could use shared services that could be offered across The Claremont Colleges that would help all schools recruit and retain faculty/staff. For instance, on-site childcare that could be discounted for employees on a sliding pay scale would make the schools more appealing to people with young children.
  - c. There should be a strategic group from all the schools in the consortium (outside of the Presidents and involves staff) that regularly looks strategically at opportunities to maximize our connection to one another.
- B) **Better Demonstrate the Value of a Liberal Arts Education** – The liberal arts and in some ways higher education as a whole are being scrutinized more deeply in today's society. There appears to be a lack of awareness of the true value of a Pitzer College education. All Pitzer degrees give students an amazing skillset including:
  - a. Critical thinking/analytical reasoning
  - b. Written Communication
  - c. Oral Communication
  - d. Decision making and ethical judgement
  - e. Collaboration/teamwork

(List taken from the National Association of Colleges and Employer's article, "[Reinforce Value When Helping Liberal Arts Majors Articulate Their Skills to Employers.](#)")

Pitzer students need to be able to better articulate and understand the skills they are building through their education. Faculty should play a larger role in helping students see the skills they are building and that these skills can be used in a variety of ways outside of academia. If students were more well-equipped to understand the skills they possess and the career opportunities available to them (which may or may not relate to the content of their major, but would definitely use skills), they would be likely to achieve their post-graduate plans more quickly. This also should impact satisfaction with Pitzer, which would lead to other positive outcomes. Pitzer should not be okay with maintaining the status quo with other liberal arts colleges but instead take the opportunity to be a leader in helping students apply their liberal arts degree. This would require additional investments such as increased resources to career services and coordinated collective support across the Pitzer community.

*Document written by the following members of Staff Council: [Kristina Kelpo](#) and [Cristi Hendry](#). Approved by Staff Council on September 19, 2018*