

A Vision for Middlebury College

In May 1992 the Board of Trustees adopted the College's Ten-Year Planning Document, a product of intensive and extensive campus conversations, which, in enumerating principles, goals, and recommendations, charted a course for the decade of the 1990s.

We have made great progress in effecting the plan. We have begun to master the disciplines of budgeting, enrollment management, and staff size. The percentage of our fee increase for 1994-95 was below the national average for four-year liberal arts colleges. But planning is necessarily dynamic, and a plan, to be meaningful, must be a living document. Thus, this year, under the leadership of Dean Ronald Liebowitz, we will be revisiting, and updating, our plan. We expect a lively campus discussion, leading to closure by the end of the academic year in May.

Our particular successes in planning frame the context for this year's planning exercise, and allow us to think more boldly about our future and to stretch ourselves to cross a new threshold of excellence in pursuit of our vision. That vision consists of three parts, and requires us to answer these questions:

1. Where do we want the College to be in the year 2004?
2. What will be those areas for which the College will be singularly known in that year?
3. What is required of each of us to get there?

First, where do we want the College to be in the year 2004? Middlebury should seek to be nothing less than the college of choice for the very strongest students—the college of choice.

More specifically, by that year we should be competing successfully for students against those schools with whom we now have the greatest overlap of applicants and acceptances and the least success in competing for matricu-

lants. In 1994, those institutions are Amherst, Williams, Dartmouth, and Princeton. It is risky, if not unseemly, so boldly and baldly to identify one's competition so specifically. We do so in order to lift our sights and to give us a new and higher standard of measurement for ourselves.

In 1983, the Board of Trustees and the Faculty Council agreed upon a list of 25 schools that would constitute a basis of comparison. In that year, we also agreed that Middlebury's proper place on that list, for faculty salaries mainly but also in other areas, was somewhere between sixth and tenth, or, the second quintile from the top. That was a bold declaration in 1983. It raised our sights and our sense of ourselves. After a decade, we have made extraordinary progress toward that goal, but now it is time to raise our sights higher still. Our progress toward greater excellence must not leave us content or self-satisfied.

The college of choice in the year 2004 will be known for several distinctive, defining, and conspicuous strengths. To be sure, Middlebury must be synonymous with general excellence in the liberal arts. The curriculum must be balanced in its offerings and rigorous in its demands, based upon a carefully designed core program and coherent majors that offer study in depth. Much of this is already in place. But more needs to be done, and that is why a renovation and expansion of the Science Center is at the top of our list of capital projects and why we also recognize that within the next 10 years, we must continue the renovation of our residence halls and teaching spaces (notably the Johnson Building), adapt and expand Starr Library to meet the needs and opportunities (posed by technology) of coming generations of student learners, and complete the Athletic Master Plan. It is also why we must, this year,

engage the issue of campus dining and make decisions about whether a renovated Proctor, a new central dining facility, or decentralized dining is the way of the future. All of this is expected of any first-rate liberal arts institution with claims to general excellence.

Furthermore, a Middlebury education must remain accessible to the very best students. This means both that we must continue to seek a strong and diverse student body and that we must provide adequate financial aid to ensure that ability to pay is not a criterion for admission. And, finally, we must hold true to the simple proposition of inclusivity, summarized by the simple rule that all student organizations must be open to all students.

These givens form the base of excellence in the liberal arts and are like the Green Mountains of Vermont: our vertebrae, the source of our strength and the definer of our character, colorful in certain seasons, and the reason some people choose to come here and others choose to stay away.

If general excellence is our Green Mountain chain, there are, within that chain of mountains, certain conspicuous peaks—those that stand out beyond the chain's elevated hills. Among those are Camel's Hump, Mount Mansfield, and, nearer by, the so-called presidential range. These peaks rise above the rest and, on many days, extend above the clouds. They are what one sees from the greatest distance and what one thinks of first when one hears the name Vermont.

We extend this metaphor of the presidential range to describe that small number of areas for which the College will seek a national reputation and which, if successfully pursued, will make Middlebury the college of choice within the next 10 years.

Those peaks include the following:

1. *Cutting edge leadership in language study and pedagogy.* Since 1915, the Middlebury Language Schools have earned a reputation as the most demanding and rigorous programs of their kind. Each summer, a distinguished faculty and committed students descend upon our campus, partaking of a unique mode of instruction that has effectively populated the teaching staffs of our nation's best high schools with holders of a Middlebury M.A. Indeed, it is already the case that language instruction and Middlebury College are synonymous.

To broaden and enhance this reputation will require us to become, as we must and shall become, a hothouse of innovative pedagogy. This has already begun, through a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which supported a conference this past summer for college language teachers, and which will establish Middlebury as the headquarters—the flagship—of a consortium that will develop multimedia instruction in language. This past summer we also launched the Language Schools' Research Fellowship Program, which brings specialists to the summer campus to do research in adult second language acquisition. Before the end of this decade we will be in the business of producing technologically advanced language teaching products, attaching the Middlebury name as the "Good House-keeping" seal to an entrepreneurial venture that will not only extend that name, but quite possibly create a significant new revenue source that could relieve some of the burden on our fee-paying families.

Middlebury cannot afford and should not attempt to be on the cutting edge of every discipline. But in the development of language teaching courseware, we must be, and we shall be.

2. Though this may seem to be principally a summer venture, its effect must suffuse every sector of the College. Because a second peak in the presidential range we envision is that this College will become singularly known as a place that insists upon, and teaches, *a global understanding that radiates from a core*

linguistic and cultural competency.

International studies at Middlebury, as elsewhere, is an area of growing importance. Advanced language study is at the core of each of these programs, which sets our approach to international studies apart from those at all other liberal arts colleges. Our achievements in language teaching place us in the enviable position of leading other colleges in the development of international curricula. As confirmed in a glowing report prepared this summer under the auspices of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs, Middlebury has far more extensive teaching resources in this particular area of the curriculum than peer institutions, but our efforts to date have not been fully focused. We need to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

A major goal for the next few years must be to consolidate our efforts in international studies and bring greater coherence to the whole. East Asian studies, Russian and East European studies, American civilization, international politics and economics must cross paths intellectually. To enhance this possibility, we need to continue to develop the Freeman International Center in order to house multimedia facilities and equipment, conference space, and teaching and office space for both language and non-language faculty.

It is time to answer, and to answer in the affirmative, the question of Middlebury programs in Latin America, in Asia, and in the United Kingdom. And it is time to recognize and exploit the opportunities that exist, on campus and in our programs abroad, to study both contemporary and historical topics from a global perspective.

One of these topics, perhaps the most challenging, in our own time and in a new century, is the environment. The third peak in the presidential range is, therefore:

3. *The environmentally aware campus.* Once again, here is an area in which the College is already demonstrating aspects of conspicuous excellence. Our recycling efforts have received national acclaim, have involved every member

of the community, and have saved the College considerable sums of money. These efforts, fostered by a growing interest in student volunteerism, relate directly to our fastest growing major, environmental studies, and lead us to identify as a 10-year goal the establishment of *the* preeminent undergraduate Environmental Studies Program.

This program must continue to develop its substantial scientific core. Indeed, science should be to environmental studies as language is to international studies: the basis of understanding and the mark of distinction. To this core must be wedded an emphasis on public policy, in political science and economics, in a global as well as domestic setting, taking into account multiple perspectives, including that of business, on environmental issues. Furthermore, as the liberal arts college with the most advanced computer-based environmental analysis facilities through our GIS lab, Middlebury's technological capabilities in this area offer students opportunities for hands-on experience in environmental planning and policy-making.

Our Environmental Studies Program will be rigorous, comprehensive, and global—a curricular peak.

The fourth peak in Middlebury's presidential range will be:

4. *The preeminent program in literary study.* The name of Middlebury College should become synonymous with the serious and disciplined study of the written word. To say this is, of course, to remind ourselves that our reputation in this field is already well advanced, and also to recognize that many of the ingredients for greater excellence still are already in place:

—The Bread Loaf School of English, with its three campuses in Ripton, Santa Fe, and Oxford, offers graduate instruction of genuine breadth and distinction and is a place where no single critical perspective dominates and none seeks to subvert or supplant another. That in itself is a mark, and promise, of excellence.

—The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference passes to new leadership next year. Under Bob Pack, the Conference earned

a well-deserved reputation for collegiality in the hard work of producing and recognizing good writing. Under Michael Collier, additional faces and new voices will be added to the mix.

—*The New England Review/Middlebury Series*, just reconstituted and now edited by Stephen Donadio, will maintain its commitment to publishing writing of exceptional quality in all genres and draw on the rich literary resources that have always been associated with the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and the School of English. *The New England Review* will expand its mission to keep its readers aware of emerging developments in other media, as well, in countries all over the world. It will also invite reassessments of current artistic reputations and of imaginative achievements of earlier periods that may have dropped out of contemporary consciousness.

—The existence of separate language departments, in which national literatures are taught in the target languages and in translation, and departments of English and American literature carry the College's strength in literature into the undergraduate program. And here there is more work to be done. Professor John McWilliams, chair of the literature division, will head a reexamination of staffing and course offerings in his division, so that, by the year 2004, Middlebury will have no equal in the range, depth, coherence, and quality of its literature offerings, undergraduate as well as graduate.

Finally, the fifth peak, and perhaps the most innovative and practical for a liberal arts institution:

5. *Opportunities for students to apply what they learn about the liberal arts to real world situations.* Our academic programs, in conjunction with our Career Counseling and Placement Office and the Alumni Association, must seek to expand opportunities for internships, summer jobs, and other varieties of hands-on or firsthand experience. We need to encourage students to pursue these opportunities as a means of broadening their education.

These five areas will set, and be

known to set, Middlebury apart from other liberal arts institutions. They will become the basis for our successful competition for the strongest students. They will make us the college of choice.

Which brings us to the third and final question, What is required of each of us to get there? To achieve these objectives will require the following:

1. A commitment to work of the very highest quality by every member of the college community. We must insist upon not merely adequate, but excellent, performance.

2. A disciplined allocation of human and financial resources. We have demonstrated this discipline over the last three years: bringing enrollments under control, slowing the rate of growth of the comprehensive fee, and carrying out a successful voluntary separation program. We need to continue to scrutinize our operations and encourage everyone in the community to bring forth ideas for managing our affairs more intelligently and efficiently.

3. A commitment to innovation, of which technology must be a significant instrument. "The way we've always done it" must be required to bear the burden of proof. We need to revisit fundamental questions of how students learn best and at least acknowledge the possibility that not all subjects are equally well learned in 12-week terms, three hours a week, with a final exam at the end and mid-terms in the middle. Much is made these days in the popular press of productivity. Too often, where higher education is the target, productivity reduces to larger classes and more teaching hours. We disagree. The appropriate definition of *productivity* is how much, and how well, students are able to learn. The attention we pay to productivity must have this object in view.

4. Increased opportunities for off-campus study.

5. Quality facilities and equipment that support our core academic program and reinforce our commitment to conspicuous excellence in the areas already noted.

6. A commitment to secure vast

new resources.

7. A determination of the direction of social and residential life at Middlebury. We recognize that the Commons and House System continues to evolve. It won't do simply to say, "Let it evolve as it will." We must decide, this year, whether residential life should be a peak in our presidential range—something that sets Middlebury apart from other schools—or another part of that larger range that contributes to liberal arts excellence.

What we have described here is an ambitious agenda. It is the work of a decade, not of a single year. By the year 2004, if we have been successful in the pursuit of this vision, we will have become the college of choice. And we will have done so by risking the comfort and security of the *status quo*. If we succeed, we will have successfully posed a new, and more subtle, question: No longer will one wonder merely, "What does it mean to go here?" but instead will ask, "What does it mean to have gone here?"

To go here is of course to experience a splendid physical setting, to make lifelong friends, and to spend four years growing socially and intellectually. But that is not enough. The relationship and obligation between student and institution are mutual, and lifelong. That is why "to have gone here" is ultimately what should matter most. To have gone here is to have a lifetime of opportunities, made possible by the very best liberal arts education. Students will more readily make Middlebury their college of choice when they recognize that having attended means even more than simply attending. To have gone here is ultimately what should matter most.

We now take up our tasks for the year, more readily, perhaps, for the vision of the future that can be ours. We must dare to set our feet on lofty places. The next step begins today. There is work to be done. Let's get on with it. ■