

# COLGATE UNIVERSITY'S THIRD CENTURY

A VISION STATEMENT

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# A VISION FOR COLGATE UNIVERSITY

## I. COLGATE AT 200 YEARS

Colgate, as it nears its bicentennial, has emerged as both a distinctive and strong national institution. It has, through the decades, seen remarkable changes and developments that have contributed to its unique form and character. To contemplate the future, it is wise, first, to consider this history and the ways in which these unique characteristics of Colgate emerged.

Some of these changes and developments seen at Colgate were part of large, important national trends. First, as was seen at many colleges and universities in the mid- to late 20th century, Colgate adopted coeducation in the early 1970s. Further, as was the case with many leading institutions in the nation during the late 20th century, Colgate diversified both its faculty and student body, leading to an enriched campus culture. Colgate changed, thus, in much the same ways as many elite, private colleges and universities.

A number of other decisions, however, made by the faculty and board during this same period, produced unique characteristics for Colgate.

First, Colgate, following its decision to admit women, significantly grew its student and faculty populations, emerging as one of the largest institutions among liberal arts colleges. Currently, with a student body just under 3,000, Colgate has a scale of activities — as seen in the size of its faculty and number of academic and nonacademic programs — that is unusual among national undergraduate colleges and universities.

Next, when the NCAA reclassified its institutions in 1973, Colgate, together with Ivy League schools and those that would eventually form the Patriot League, chose to join the Division I rank. The presence of a Division I athletics program at the university remains a distinctive attribute of Colgate and sets it apart in important ways from smaller liberal arts colleges that do not compete on the national level.

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Less publicly discussed, though undoubtedly as striking, were changes in the academic life at the university in this period. In the second half of the 20th century, Colgate vigorously committed itself to developing and maintaining a research-intensive faculty. The university decreased the annual course load of the faculty from six courses to five and began significantly investing in its research infrastructure. Support for faculty research — in the form of grants, improved leave schedules, and increased infrastructure support — grew noticeably during the end of the 20th century. Further, in the first part of the 21st century, Colgate built facilities directly linked to increasing academic aspirations, most notably seen with the dramatic improvements to the library (2006) and the completion of the Ho Science Center (2007). The national regard for the faculty — in the form of research grants and national awards won — has risen sharply as a result of these investments.

Much of what is part of Colgate's distinctive character and quality, however, did not emerge in the late 20th century but has been in place for many decades. A number of these features are worth highlighting as they remain defining attributes for the university.

First, Colgate has long sustained a profound commitment to the liberal arts. At the heart of the university remains a curriculum that calls on students to study broadly across the humanities and arts, the natural sciences, and the social sciences — and, now more increasingly, encourages students to move across traditional disciplines. Critical inquiry, effective argumentation and communication, and creativity remain hallmarks of a Colgate education.

Second, Colgate has retained its general education, or “core” curriculum, through which all students complete a number of multidisciplinary courses focused on issues and topics that go beyond any single academic discipline. This program connects students in a common academic experience, engages a large proportion of faculty, and remains a key touchstone for Colgate alumni.

Third, Colgate has sustained a long-standing commitment to international study. Colgate's faculty-led study-abroad programs have an illustrious

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history. At a time when many institutions seemed content with an introverted college experience, Colgate was sending its students to France, the U.K., and China, among many other places. The idea of moving outward — of taking one's studies to foreign locations and growing through exposure to different cultures and ideas — has long been part of the Colgate experience.

Fourth, another constant feature of the Colgate experience has been its commitment to having the vast majority of students living in university-owned or affiliated housing. When Colgate alumni are asked what prepared them for life after graduation — beyond their professors and their studies — they cite lessons learned in close community with other students. This universal residential system includes distinctive sub-communities such as nationally affiliated fraternities and sororities, or those found in theme housing in former Greek houses. A larger number of students live in university-owned apartments and townhouses.

At their best, our student-living patterns provide experiences that mature the individual, teaching him or her the skills and practices of empathy, sociability, flexibility, and respect for others. We cannot, of course, be blind to some of the shortcomings and challenges present in aspects of the Colgate social system and scene, and the ways where our local social patterns have not kept up with changes in broader societal values or the ways in which they can divide students, preventing them from forming larger class year or university-wide bonds and sense of affiliation. But a key component to Colgate's institutional ethos has long been its commitment to living in close proximity to one another and within the boundaries of institutional oversight.

This history of Colgate university — the events, choices, and decisions — has led to the university we now see. Colgate is now a strong institution, and a distinctive one, with characteristics that define life on the campus and the reflections and affections of its alumni.

## II. THE INTANGIBLES OF THE UNIVERSITY

In addition to understanding the unique and specific (and quite visible) attributes of Colgate — those features that contribute to its distinctiveness in American higher education — it is important, as one thinks about the future of Colgate, to understand other intangible factors that define Colgate University.

### *Colgate's Scale*

A notable characteristic of Colgate is its size. The university has long had a larger student body and faculty than those institutions to which it is most often compared. Its cultural feel — based on this scale and the activities of the campus, including its athletics program — can often make Colgate seem less like Williams or Swarthmore colleges and more like Dartmouth College or Duke University.

We should recognize that, due to this scale and the array of activities on the campus, the university has the possibility, unavailable to smaller colleges, to be excellent in multiple ways, whether in the classroom, on the athletics fields, or in artistic production.

### *The Energy of the Campus*

Whether because of its size, its history, or its traditions, Colgate has a sense of energy. This, too, if developed in thoughtful ways, can be a powerful source of possibility for its future.

Colgate students are passionate. They engage deeply in their endeavors and they work together easily. They are not passive in their beliefs or their aspirations. This energy can be channeled into fruitful means, both academically and socially. It can also be a source of engagement as students seek to enter the leading graduate and professional programs, as they seek prestigious post-baccalaureate fellowships (such as Rhodes, Marshall, Watson, Truman, and Fulbright), and as they consider how best to use their time between semesters and in the summers.

### *A Sense of Place*

Finally, and importantly, Colgate has always been a beautiful place. The beauty of the campus is, and has always been, a defining feature of the Colgate experience. Visitors notice the striking beauty of the campus immediately, students are affected by it, and alumni recall with emotion the beauty of the campus set in the Chenango Valley of central New York.

The quality of the campus shapes the experience of Colgate, and has been a central ingredient in the campus experience since the university's founding. One *arrives* at Colgate's campus. Driving from either the south or the north, the campus emerges strikingly in the valley, with large buildings set on a hill, arrayed above a small lake. The campus sets the stage for students, faculty, and staff and leaves its mark on Colgate graduates who speak emotionally of their experiences on a striking campus that has long had a sense of place.

There are, of course, many other college campuses that are beautiful and dramatic. Very few, however, engender the impact that Colgate's does. This sense of place should be understood as a source of possibility, in that it can support a sense of community and serves as a powerful connection of alumni to their university.

### III. THE FUNDAMENTALS FOR COLGATE'S FUTURE

On the verge of entering its third century, Colgate is a distinctive, strong national institution. It is one of the most important undergraduate universities in the nation, if not the world. Its history has created unique characteristics for the university, and its intangible qualities make it appealing for leading students, faculty, and staff. It thus looks toward its third century with enormous possibility.

Our task now is to understand these characteristics and history, and to push the institution to new heights. This will be achieved to the extent we are focused on the following fundamentals for Colgate's future and are committed to being one of a handful of leading undergraduate universities in the nation and the world.

#### *Building and Supporting a Culture of Intellectual Rigor*

The first foundation upon which Colgate's future rests will be the extent to which we continuously strengthen the intellectual reach and impact of the university and nurture a culture in which intellectual rigor marks all of our endeavors.

Simply put, to attract students of the highest potential, faculty of the highest regard, and staff who are leaders in their fields, Colgate must be known — even more than it is today — as an academic institution committed to intellectual rigor. This lies at the heart of the university's mission and is essential to Colgate's future.

Colgate needs to focus on building and maintaining a top-tier faculty. Supporting the creation of knowledge and its dissemination through teaching, publication, and public engagement requires significant focus. Colgate must also create and support a curriculum that is relevant and challenging.

Some believe there is a trade-off between faculty members who are productive scholars at the forefront of their fields and faculty members who

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are good, supportive teachers and community members. At Colgate, we would not be true to our institutional ethos if we accepted this position. The high-quality liberal arts education that we will offer to future generations of students must be built upon lively and active scholars who bring new ideas and perspectives into the classroom and transform students with their own enthusiasm for their work.

Related to this, we must introduce our students to the challenges and power of rigorous, academic discourse. In an era of heated rhetoric and political divisions in which shouting is prized, we will give our graduates a profound gift should they leave the campus with the power to summon reason, to gather facts, and to engage in a discourse that is sound, fair, and powerful. Through those tools, we will send into the world the next generation of Colgate graduates able to shape our world as accomplished, empathetic leaders.

An equally important part of the academic environment at Colgate is the student culture we build on campus. While our students are at Colgate, we must ensure that they contribute to an academically dynamic community. Colgate professors should be as enlivened and motivated by the interests, passions, and skills of our students as our students are inspired by our faculty. We need to cultivate a student body that leads to our reputation as a great place to teach and pursue one's academic interests because of the engagement and skill of the students.

In sum, Colgate must be known as an academic institution committed to intellectual rigor, an academic institution of the first order, an undergraduate university distinguished by a world-caliber faculty engaged

in rigorous scholarship, and a university whose students demonstrate the habits of thoughtful intellectual engagement. To accept anything less than this would be to deny the arc of the long trajectory of Colgate's history.

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*Attracting Outstanding Students*

A university is, at its most essential, the product of the people it attracts.

Talented students, a leading faculty, and professional staff all must be in place on the campus should Colgate wish to be consistently regarded as among the finest colleges and universities in the nation.

In the arena of admissions, Colgate faces an ever-increasing challenge: how to attract and enroll students of profound promise and achievement when faced with increased costs of attendance. Colgate has long relied on the enrollment of a sizeable portion of the entering class who can meet the fully stated price of a Colgate education. While this will remain true for the foreseeable future, Colgate must seek additional funds to make its education available to all those who will bring energy, intelligence, and talent to the campus.

Colgate must also seek a student body from a wider geographic footprint, one that shows the university attracting students from all corners of the nation and the world. And, of course, Colgate must attract a student body that reflects the vibrant diversity of our nation.

If we aspire to greatness, we cannot compromise our efforts on this point. In America today, a great institution is a diverse institution. It is one that brings students of different socioeconomic backgrounds, races and ethnicities, and religions to campus. There are myriad reasons for this to be a priority, not least of which is our obligation to the broader American community in which we have been permitted to prosper. But beyond any responsibilities we might feel to the commonweal, or

principles by which we might be motivated, is the simple acknowledgment that an education today is a poor thing if it does not include firsthand engagement with a wide range of perspectives and experiences. We simply cannot claim to be a first-tier institution providing a first-tier education to our students if we do not expose them to a rich diversity of perspectives and backgrounds in their educational and social experiences.

*Creating and Nurturing a Community Marked by Affection, Ritual, and Pride*

Colgate possesses remarkably proud and loyal alumni who, while at Colgate, developed strikingly strong bonds to each other and to their alma mater. These connections — these bonds of affection — have proved to be sustaining for Colgate graduates and a significant source of strength for the university over many decades. For our alumni, the ways in which they built their connections proved to be a valuable and profound complement to their classroom learning.

Of course, times have changed and many of the social patterns of the Colgate community continue to evolve. As it enters its third century, Colgate must overtly and explicitly seek to create a deep, clear, and compelling campus culture — nurtured and expressed through our residential programs, our athletics program and other student activities, our ceremonies and traditions, and through the overall campus experience. This must be a campus culture that fosters bonds among members of the community and connects, in a meaningful and sustained way, students, faculty, and staff to the institution itself. Our students and faculty hunger for this. And Colgate's long-term vitality requires this.

It may seem that undertaking overt efforts to nurture loyalty, pride, or affection is hopelessly retrograde. It is not. It may seem that to call for development of community must come at the expense of individual development. It does not. When authentic and based on genuine

experience, a shared culture can be a source of considerable energy and spirit for any institution. Through these efforts, all will feel included in a greater project that animates the university. They will belong to, and with, Colgate.

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Much of this is connected to the residential and social life of the campus. Colgate has long offered an extremely wide range of residential options, unusual among the liberal arts colleges. The Colgate residential inventory includes traditional residence halls (e.g., Andrews and Stillman halls), a small number of multiunit residential complexes (e.g., Bryan Complex and 113 Broad Street), numerous quasi-independent townhouses and apartments, Broad Street theme houses, and fraternities and sororities. This complexity allows students to forge their own paths, yet it also tends to divide the campus and creates systems in which there might appear to be social-residential “winners” and “losers.” From a residential and social perspective, Colgate — long a place marked by community and bonding — can often feel divided.

Colgate needs to develop long-term programs to enhance the quality of student housing and the overall quality of student life. Further, Colgate should ensure that all students belong to the university and that they share this institutional bond while they are also developing those more individual social bonds that sustain them.

It is important to state here that it is not the role of the administration to engineer all relationships built across our campus. We need to acknowledge that the character building and maturing that occurs at Colgate occurs most often in informal ways — between students and faculty, between students and students, and, indeed, between students and the surrounding Hamilton community. The role of the administration is to ensure that settings and contexts exist to facilitate such encounters, and that all students who come to Colgate have equal opportunities to enjoy the social dynamics of our institution and be included in all its gifts and

opportunities. This involves building out meeting places, living spaces, and social spaces that give outlet to our students’ innate social tendencies.

There is one additional, deeply important consideration when speaking of these matters. It is clear today that the future of this country will belong to those who are culturally dexterous. To be culturally dexterous is to be able to navigate across diverse cultural perspectives with authenticity and skill. We would be doing a disservice to our students, and would relinquish our standing as a leading American institution of higher education, if we did not take seriously our charge to enhance our students’ cultural understanding and adroitness. These are qualities that depend not only upon the classroom but on what happens in our residence halls and social spaces. It depends upon friendships and authentic intimate contacts between students of different backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems.

In short, Colgate should take overt steps to nurture a culture where bonds of community are developed and where one develops a sense of institutional pride. These ties should be nurtured and expressed through our residential programs, our athletics program, our ceremonies and traditions, and through the overall experience of the campus.

***Sustaining and Improving a Campus of Striking Beauty***

Finally, Colgate must carefully steward one of its most precious assets: the beauty of its campus. The experience of the place that is Colgate has shaped the lives of students, faculty, and staff for generations. Ensuring that this beauty is sensitively enhanced and passed on to future generations must remain a university priority.

When graduates from the 1960s and 1970s return to the Colgate campus, they hardly recognize it because there has been such significant building and improvements made. Predictably, there will be more. However, when such buildings and improvements take place, we must ensure that the basic relationship of the campus to the nature that surrounds it, and the group of buildings that define Colgate,

are not degraded. We should never let progress detract from that beauty but must be supremely sensitive to the marvels of the place.

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We also must make sure that the environs of Colgate and Hamilton provide for our faculty, staff, and students a comfortable as well as engaging place to reside. The livability of the campus and the village will serve Colgate as it will allow us not only to attract leading faculty and students, but will also allow them to work and live in a place that is engaging, connecting, and amenable.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Colgate's task is to understand the platform its history offers and to take the advantages of this moment in the institution's timeline as it stands on the cusp of its third century. Should Colgate commit itself to setting a rigorous course of academic achievement, while nurturing both its spirit and its sense of place, it will surely establish itself as one of the premier institutions of the world.

Colgate is, currently, a strong institution. In many ways, it has never been stronger. Its reputation and attributes are the envy of many colleges and universities. It has much to be proud of as it considers its first 200 years and much to be optimistic about as it considers its next century.

In short, the pathway forward for Colgate is to be a place of academic rigor, a place that attracts students and faculty of great achievement and potential, and a university that sends its graduates off into the world with promise for the future and with care and affection for their alma mater. Our future will be built on these foundations.



