What’s the Big Idea?
Framing and Communicating the Value of Liberal Education at Two Small Colleges

AAC&U 2017 Annual Meeting
San Francisco, CA - January 26, 2017
Why Agnes Scott Needed a “Big Idea”

Elizabeth Kiss, President
Agnes Scott College
Decatur, GA

Women’s Liberal Arts College
Founded 1889

Educating women to think deeply, live honorably, and engage the intellectual and social challenges of their time
Our Students

- 930 women
- 36 U.S. states & territories and 37 countries
- 12% international ; 54% students of color
- 44% Pell grant recipients
- 20% first-generation
Our CHALLENGE

Long-range financial forecast demonstrated that the college was financially unsustainable in the long term.

We need to grow to 1100 or more students.

But to get there, we need a more compelling and market-relevant answer to the question, “Why Agnes Scott?”
How we selected our “Big Idea”
Conventional Strategic Planning is Inward-Looking

Who are We?
What will make us better?
A Different Approach:

The Art & Science of Strategic Planning

What can WE do that is true to OUR Liberal Education Mission and Values (Internal Test)

That will move OUR markets? (External Test)
The Planning Process:

Recognize the need for **change**
Search for a **Big Idea**
**Test** Big Idea Candidates in the marketplace
Big Idea Candidates

Self-Knowledge    Experiential Learning
Career Preparation Pre-professional focus
Social Justice    Global Learning (3 levels)
Leadership

Sisterhood for life v boys next door
Strategic Positioning Study

Conducted by Art & Science
during the 2012-2013 enrollment cycle

With students in our INQUIRY and ADMITTED APPLICANT POOLS

Using Simulated Decision Modeling
Effect of initiatives on number of applications and matriculations – INQ & AA

Base conversion rate (N) = 4.0% (379) & Base yield rate = 29.0% (205)
The Results...

Implemented boldly and quickly, a **universal** focus on **leadership development** and **global learning** will increase applications by a conservative estimate of 25-30% (with potentials of up to 50%) and achieve a separate matriculation effect of up to 15%.
SUMMIT’s Impact So Far
Curricular transformation completed in 18 months and approved by 82% of faculty in March 2015
SUMMIT fully launched in Fall 2015

- Two record-breaking first-year classes in a row
- 25% increase in yield -- highest yield in 7 years (30.2%)
- THREE out of FOUR said SUMMIT was “important” or “very important” to their decision to enroll
Also...

Record-breaking retention

Dramatic increases in student satisfaction with advising - only 3 percent of students dissatisfied with their advisors

Student revenue up by $3.4M over pre-SUMMIT levels

Currently 6% up in apps, 22% up in completed apps
What IS SUMMIT?

Kerry Pannell, Vice President for Academic Affairs
EVERY student...

Completes a core curriculum focused on global learning and leadership development, including a faculty-led global study tour in her first year

Builds a four-member personal Board of Advisors, including a career mentor, and

Creates a Digital Portfolio to document her learning journey inside & outside the classroom
Four Facets of SUMMIT
Global Learning Core

• First-Year Sequence:
  – Gateways (1 credit)
  – Journeys (4 credits)

• Language requirement

• At least one additional global learning course (can be in Arts & Humanities, STEM, or social sciences). One Gen Ed breadth course must focus on relationships among dominant and marginalized cultures, subcultures or groups.
Journeys:
A Signature Global Experience for All Students

Taken in the spring semester of the first year

Includes a one-week faculty-led travel seminar in March

Cost included in tuition
Journeys Toronto: Digital Story-Telling with Japanese-Canadian Seniors
I'd like to thank Agnes Scott for the opportunity to see ways of life so different yet so similar to my own.

Journeys Jamaica: Conducting Fieldwork for a new Heritage Tour
Journeys New York: Behind the Scenes in the Art World
What is Leadership?

• Grounded in the liberal arts

• Five basic leadership skills:
  – Critical Thinking
  – Writing
  – Public Speaking
  – Teamwork
  – Digital Literacy

• Leaders reflect, analyze, and act with moral courage
Leadership Dialogues

Leadership & Climate Change

Philosophy, Business and Leadership

The Art of Communicating Science

Collaboration in Art and Leadership

Leadership and Diversity

Environmentalism, Music and Math
Board of Advisors

SUMMIT Advisor: assigned at matriculation

Peer Advisor: assigned at matriculation

Major Advisor: selected by student before end of sophomore year

Career Mentor: recruited by student during sophomore or junior year
Digital Portfolio

A self-curated Digital Space in which every student integrates, reflects on, and showcases her SUMMIT learning journey...

... and can serve as a digital resume with employers & graduate schools.
Lessons Learned

Beth Hackett,
Associate Professor of
Women’s Studies & Philosophy
Interim SUMMIT Director, 2014-2015
LESS JUDGEMENT
MORE CURIOSITY
Actual Summit Workplan

What I planned.

What happened.

Julia
Communicate, communicate, communicate... and then say it again.
Expect “freak out” moments

I see change...
Change everywhere...
Faculty Ownership

- Election v. appointment
- “Pop-up” task forces
- Investing in people as *strategic* investment
- Clickers!
Break down silos between trustees, faculty & administrators ....

.....to create an ecology of innovation

The secret weapon? Wine & Cheese! (Data helps too)
And Remember....
Humor and Poetry can save the day!

Tough Faculty Meeting?
Write a Haiku!
For more information, visit agnesscott.edu/summit