

# Dixie State College of Utah Strategic Plan 2012/13

## Mission Summary & Core Themes

Dixie State College of Utah is a publicly supported institution of higher education that strives to enrich its community and the lives of individual students by providing associate and baccalaureate degrees and certificates, by fostering lifelong learning, and by sponsoring activities and events that meet the educational and cultural needs of its regional constituents. DSC accomplishes these objectives directly by delivering excellent teaching in a learning environment recognized for its personal relationships, values, service, diversity and open access, and by creating strategic partnerships for learning opportunities. In short, DSC is all about student success.

DSC's mission is embodied in, and communicated through, its three Core Themes:

**A Culture of LEARNING**

**A Culture of VALUES**

**A Culture of COMMUNITY**

## Strategic Plan

The strategic planning process at DSC began with a series of facilitated meetings held throughout the 2011/12 academic year, which included representatives from DSC's student body, staff, faculty, and administration; as well as representatives from local businesses and community leaders. Referred to as DSC's "2<sup>nd</sup> Century Strategy Committee," these individuals were each personally invited to participate by DSC's president. The purpose and outcome of these sessions was to garner input for use in developing DSC's strategic plan, including a traditional "SWOT analysis" (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). The input from this broad group of constituents ultimately fed into a strategic planning retreat at which the strategic plan was fine-tuned and formalized by DSC's president and executive staff.

**Strengths** - As a result of the strategic planning process several internal strengths emerged including:

- Personalized education
- High value proposition
- Location
- Safety

- Customer service orientation
- Flexibility and responsiveness

DSC has a long-standing tradition of friendliness and strong teacher-student learning relationships that uniquely and positively impact its students. The institution's name "Dixie" embodies a tradition of hospitality, friendliness, kindness, and inclusion for all those associated with the institution. This same attitude is found among the staff and employees of DSC who provide excellent customer service throughout DSC's academic, student, and support services. The tradition of cooperation and conscientiousness at DSC also provides agility, flexibility, and responsiveness as it faces new challenges.

Reflecting the values of its community, DSC has one of the safest campuses in the country. The desert environment and pioneering spirit of southwest Utah provide the foundation upon which DSC has built a tradition of thrift and self-sufficiency. DSC carries on this tradition by maintaining the lowest tuition rates in the region, thus providing Utah and area students with an outstanding value in obtaining a college degree. The area in which DSC is located boasts the mildest climate in the state, and is rich in natural beauty and recreational opportunities. With close proximity to the Grand Canyon and a number of other national parks the area has become a global tourist destination. This naturally serves to attract students to DSC and is of particular service to any who have difficulty dealing with harsh winter weather.

**Weaknesses or Challenges** - The strategic planning process revealed several internal weaknesses or challenges, which include:

- Maintaining quality during high growth
- Limited financial endowments
- Limited diversity among students and faculty

DSC's student enrollment has ballooned by nearly forty percent over the last several years and is quickly approaching a headcount of 10,000 students. As with any institution hyper-growth creates challenges and exposes weaknesses. Southwest Utah has historically been one of the most economically deprived areas of the state, and although DSC is over 100 years old, it has only been in recent years that the college has expanded and the area has emerged economically. These factors combine to leave DSC with a relatively small financial endowment or other economic support outside of state funding and student tuition. The historical isolation of the community is also evident in a student body and faculty still relatively homogenous in ethnicity and perspective.

**Opportunities** - Opportunities identified in the strategic planning process include:

- Obtaining university status
- Adopting new learning technologies

- Adding select Master's degrees
- Regional expansion
- Maintaining and forming mutually beneficial partnerships
- Promoting and supporting undergraduate research
- Development of physical facilities

For the last several years DSC has been working with the Utah State Board of Regents and state legislators to prepare for a move from its current status as a "College" to that of a "University." This change is consistent with the institution's significant growth in both enrollment and degree offerings, and provides the institution with opportunities for future growth and development including additional funding. University status also opens the door for adding selected graduate degrees, and for recruiting locally, regionally and globally. In anticipation of future growth DSC has constructed a new flagship building (the Holland building), which houses the library, academic & student services, a career center, a digital learning center and lab, and other resources focused on student success. The new digital learning center provides a resource for faculty to experiment with and adopt new teaching and learning technologies in a supported environment. DSC believes that new technologies provide opportunities to enrich teaching and learning, and will continue to pursue those opportunities.

With the pace of change continuing to accelerate DSC will search for and seize opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships for the purpose of enhancing the success of our students. These partnerships may include teaching agreements with other institutions, partnerships with businesses and other organizations for student internships, and partnerships with community organizations. Over the last several years a grassroots effort among DSC's faculty has emerged to provide students with opportunities to do and present undergraduate research projects. This enhances student success by preparing them for graduate studies and/or employment that requires superior quantitative skills. DSC believes this opportunity should be expanded and is taking steps to do so.

**Threats** - The external environment also generates threats to DSC. These threats include:

- Radical changes in federal funding for students
- Disruptive technologies
- Tuition erosion
- Safety
- Public attitudes toward education
- Economic stagnation

The recent hyper-growth in DSC enrollment appears to be partially driven by easy access to federal Pell grants for many students. This phenomenon is not unique to DSC and has resulted in tremendous costs to the federal government. If the federal government, for

whatever reason, should decide to eliminate or cut back on these grants it is likely that DSC and all institutions of higher education would experience significant drops in enrollment.

Although DSC strives to maintain a leading position in the adoption and use of new technologies, the pace of technological change is becoming so fast that there is an increasing risk of the emergence of unanticipated new technologies that could disrupt traditional forms of education. These technologies may result in education costs becoming so low, or the education process being so changed, that DSC might not be able to maintain its current structure and processes. DSC acknowledges this risk and has adopted a strategy to help mitigate it.

Although DSC and its community are consistently rated as the safest in the United States, the last decade clearly shows that no place is completely safe and that constant vigilance is required.

Another significant threat to DSC, and to all of higher education, is the ongoing deterioration of public attitudes towards higher education. It seems that public attitudes have moved from a perspective of higher education as an investment in overall social and economic improvement, towards a perspective of higher education as a needless and wasteful public expense. DSC sees this shift reflected in a constantly deteriorating percentage of the state budget that is allocated to higher education.

## **Plans & Objectives**

In the next phase of DSC's strategic planning process it determined how to utilize its strengths to take advantage of opportunities, and to mitigate threats. The process also examined how best to deal with weaknesses in order avoid missing opportunities, and how to avoid any combination of weaknesses and threats that could harm the institution or prevent it from achieving its strategic goals.

The primary objective of DSC's strategy is to promote student success. Paramount in achieving that objective is DSC's continued progress towards university status. Many other objectives revolve around this including; regional expansion, new partnerships, undergraduate research, further growth and development of physical facilities, the addition of master's degrees, and obtaining greater diversity in faculty, staff, and students. The necessary pre-work has been completed as DSC progresses towards obtaining university status, with a target effective date of 1 July 2013. Final authorization must come from the Utah Regents and the state legislature, which can only be influenced, not controlled, so there is some risk associated with this objective, particularly with the timing. Nevertheless, DSC remains optimistic and is eager to move forward with this change.

DSC's has an opportunity to adopt new learning technologies, which plays well with its strength in responsiveness and flexibility. DSC has very few administrative layers and is

able to make decisions quickly while maintaining widespread institutional support. This institutional agility also contributes to DSC's ability to form mutually beneficial partnerships with other institutions and organizations. Although the opportunity of adding select master's degrees must be preceded by the change to university status, it is enhanced and facilitated by the high number of DSC faculty holding terminal degrees. This also aids DSC in its efforts to increase undergraduate research opportunities.

Growth presents one of the greatest and most difficult challenges for any organization. DSC is aware of this challenge and vigilant in maintaining and strengthening relationships within and between students, faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders. This can be seen in the investments DSC is making in student services, student government, clubs, intramurals, events, faculty hiring, and training. DSC's core themes (i.e., learning, values, and community) also serve to provide a consistent perspective and purpose even during periods of radical change caused by growth and/or technology.

Limited financial resources will continue to provide perhaps the greatest constraint to DSC's accomplishment of its strategic objectives. However, improvements in alumni relations, steady but still below-market tuition increases, and other revenue generating opportunities help soften the blow. In case cutbacks are made in federal student funding or the country experiences further or prolonged economic stagnation, DSC's high value proposition will greatly mitigate these threats. Should economic conditions further deteriorate, it is even conceivable that DSC could benefit as students priced out of other institutions come to DSC.

The timing and potential effects of disruptive technologies are, by their nature, difficult to anticipate or predict. However, playing on the strength of its flexibility and responsiveness, and with continued adoption and use of emerging technologies, DSC hopes to lessen this threat to the extent that any organization can. Likewise, the threat of dangerous behavior and random acts of violence are, by their nature, unpredictable. Nevertheless, DSC has put in place plans, procedures, and training to identify and eliminate potential threats before they occur, as well as to effectively handle incidents should they actually occur.

Public attitudes toward education can only be influenced over time with consistent effort. Through its relationships and partnerships with community organizations, and through its public relations and media outlets, DSC is persistent in promoting both the social and the economic value of higher education. It is hoped that these efforts will eventually yield some positive shift in the public's attitude towards DSC and all of higher education.

As part of the strategic planning process each of DSC's operational areas, including both academic and non-academic support areas, submitted their own plans and objectives in support of DSC's core themes, mission, and strategic plan. Those supporting plans and objectives are held within each of the areas and not included in this summary.

