

# **Think Big**

## **Creating Case Western Reserve's Future**

The Case Western Reserve University community participated in a non-traditional strategic planning process that began on December 21, 2018. Acknowledging that traditional strategic planning did not fit the current interests/culture of the campus, and that strategy needed to be addressed with more agility, we embarked upon a process that focused on three elements: building community and culture; identifying a collective vision (what we've called the North Star); and seeking four guiding pathways to inform our institution's decision making and priorities.

The effort was led by a group of 17 faculty, staff and students chosen by the President's Council called The Thinkers. The group sought to listen intently, evaluate strengths, acknowledge weaknesses, survey external trends, and guide our campus to articulating priorities and mission.

At the same time, an accelerator was developed to harvest ideas that could be tested over a short time, to advance the work of the university and inform the work of The Thinkers. Seventeen Seed Sprints were chosen providing innovative and thoughtful solutions to problems that face our community. Other inputs came through engaging our community through meetings, events, surveys and more. The common thread among these items is the effort to build a common culture and community of trust, engagement, and honest dialogue.

## **The Process in Numbers**

- 139 Seed Sprint Applications
- 17 Funded Seed Sprints
- 50 Events & Discussions
- 120 Meetings
- 150 Thinker Applications
- 17 Thinkers (including 3 student liaisons)
- 600 Responses to Alumni Questionnaire
- 60 Residents Involved in Neighborhood Forums

## **Who are We?**

Case Western Reserve University, is a high-impact, comprehensive research institution enriched by educational and cultural assets. But we aspire to do more, and to be greater. Through meetings, and reading, and thinking, and learning about each other, we realized that any strategic planning effort has to deal with reconciling and improving our linked and shared sense of self by crafting deep cultural improvements and better tethering our community—carving a vision that gets us to a place where we can see ourselves as ONE Case Western Reserve University, guided by our North Star.

## Our North Star

Case Western Reserve is  
a high-impact research university  
that aspires to be a community  
where humanity, science & technology meet  
to create a just and thriving world

### Understanding the North Star

Let's make sure we understand the importance of these North Star words:

- **High Impact Research:** We are a comprehensive research university and we will strive to have even greater impact than we do now—from books and publications, to patient care and disease breakthroughs, to product development and beyond.
- **A Community:** We aspire to be a campus community without barriers, to break down silos and eliminate division among faculty and staff. We must build a holistic local to global community that aspires to exchange ideas among all of its people, and in every sense. We must support one another and talk about difficult things. We must be intentional. We must serve as an anchor institution to our surrounding neighborhoods and region, and be a congealing place in University Circle and in Cleveland.
- **Where humanity, science and technology meet:** We must unite our disciplines. We must bring together those who aim to understand and improve the human condition to work alongside those who are making advances in science and technology. We must connect people who have diverse ways of thinking so that they can create new knowledge and new solutions, together.
- **To create:** Physically and philosophically. We must look beyond what is possible to achieve what is new.
- And finally, we want to be intentional in doing our work, with the goal of supporting **a just and thriving world**. This means thriving personally, financially, and professionally. It means legal justice. Human justice. As a university community, we must create with a purpose and meaning.

### Defining our Identity: The Agora Metaphor

This notion of ONE Case Western Reserve University is found in a place with ancient roots. A common meeting space defined by debate, democracy, philosophy and incredible forward movement in our understanding of the human condition. Agora captures the essence of what it means to have all disciplines meet for the purpose of advancing humanity. We strive to create the agora of the future, one that is inclusive and focused on the critical issues of our time. We are pioneers of Agora Academics.

## **Agora Academics**

Ancient Greece was defined by intense debate, the birth of democracy, heady philosophical, artistic, and scientific advances, powerful contemplation, and incredible forward movement in our understanding of the human condition. Much of that activity—plus sports, commerce, military strategy, etc.—took place in a space found in every Greek city-state, the agora.

The agora was the building block of the community. It was a place where uncomfortable conversations happened, but people knew they were surrounded with the trust of their community, enveloped in a safe and protective atmosphere. Such great ideas were ignited here, and such higher order thinking was done here that knowledge itself was fundamentally transformed. In the midst of economy, the agora provided solace not only for useful reasoning, but also for seclusion, contemplation, and so much more.

Agora, seemingly, is the perfect metaphor for us. It enables us to see what's next. Some might call this the confluence of disciplines—the meeting of those disciplines aiming to understand and improve the human condition, working alongside those making advances in science and technology. And it is. But adding the notion of agora allows us to envision the evolution of that concept even more.

## **Interdisciplinary + Community + Culture = Agora Academics**

Interdisciplinary approaches infused with community and attention to culture is the new agora. This is the next level evolution of interdisciplinary research and education—adding deep considerations of community and knowing that culture must follow.

By bringing community (local and global) into the arena and considering those members as full participants, we make possible richer explorations of research, teaching, and social impact. We create better leaders, more collaborative thinkers, and we equip students for working more collaboratively in the workforce.

For a school located north of Macedonia, east of Elyria, on a site in University Circle (that was once described as a "modern day Parnassus"), and boasting a mascot who is the Spartan, agora is a metaphor of our essence that can capture where we want to go.

By invoking this concept, coined Agora Academics, we are compelled to adopt an approach, a way of operating, a behavior that will positively move this community forward by addressing fundamental aspects of our culture and society.

## **Agora Academics: Four Pathways to Success**

With culture and community identified as core issues, we then looked to find four critical areas for investment that will help lead us toward our North Star. These four areas are best conceived of as pathways that will guide decision-making and prioritization. While these pathways can stand alone, they are more impactful as they intersect, enabling the full impact of Agora Academics that is unique to CWRU:

### **Pathway 1: Realizing Interdisciplinary Research & Education**

The problems facing our globe and society are multi-faceted and complex, such that solutions require learning and expertise that falls outside the boundaries of the traditional structures of higher education. It falls across disciplines, across methodologies, across ways of knowing, across institutions, across communities, and across opportunities for learning outside the classroom. Our campus has continued to court the concept of interdisciplinary research and education, but we've yet to fully organize and operationalize ourselves appropriately. Supporting interdisciplinary research and education entails developing more enabling structures in how we conduct research, how we educate our students, and how we tend to our finances.

### **Pathway 2: Addressing the Human & Technology, Together**

From health-related inquiry to social sciences to the humanities, CWRU uses technology to deepen and enrich the disciplines, yet always keeps the human element at the center. Excellence in technology for the improvement of humanity is a strength and differentiator of CWRU. Building upon this will allow us to better address social problems and achieve new levels of understanding, but will also raise ethical questions about what it means to be human today. CWRU must be at the forefront of examining how technology and people are merging. We must do so by unleashing our campus creativity to define the next level of interaction, while catapulting our research and the world of education in the process.

### **Pathway 3: Achieving Social Impact through Translation & Distribution**

Social impact is important to CWRU. To achieve a deeper impact, we must disseminate our research and teaching much more widely beyond our campus, and we must embark on meaningful partnerships to do so. To increase our external student and faculty activities, we must redefine our relationship with industry and how we partner with external entities to distribute our educational assets. We must become a more distributed university by extending access to our classrooms and scholarship to communities that did not have such access in the past. This will extend a broad impact of our students beyond our traditional boundaries through their co-curriculum activities.

### **Pathway 4: Becoming the Agora of the Future**

We believe in changing how our campuses, our communities, and our world treat one another and how we reflect one another. The future community is made up of citizens and technology that reflect a greater totality—and a greater interaction among that totality. In envisioning and embodying the community of the future, we break boundaries on and off our campus. It means having dialogue and debate and working together to tackle difficult issues. It means embracing our cultures, our interactions, and our engagement. It means focusing on well-being and creating an environment for healthy growth. It means putting people at the center of our decisions and prioritizing diversity of thought, of mind, of background.

### **Next Steps & Feedback**

During the summer of 2019 we will be seeking input on this plan and these pathways, and will be developing associated metrics. We are also keenly aware that any good plan needs to be backed by tangible support, and we are working diligently to identify funding opportunities in philanthropy, government, and our existing resources.

We ask you to review this plan and these pathways and tell us, "What types of activities, programs and initiatives would you like to see in support of these pathways?"

Tell us via our online form at [case.edu/thinkbig](http://case.edu/thinkbig) or in Workplace group, "[Think Big: Strategic Plan](#)." We will also be hosting several Campus Meet-Ups where small groups can discuss the plan and the path forward. Get all the details at [case.edu/thinkbig/events](http://case.edu/thinkbig/events).

We look forward to hearing your feedback and welcoming you back to campus this fall as we delve into the future of Agora Academics at CWRU.

**SAVE THE DATE** for August 22, from 9 to 10 a.m. in the Thwing Ballroom as we officially kick off the new academic year and a new North Star.