Introduction

The Franklin and Marshall College Alumni Association is one of the oldest alumni organizations in the country, originating in 1840 and now representing more than 26,000 living alumni from 50 states and more than 90 foreign countries. Throughout its history, the Alumni Association has served to sustain a connection to the College for its graduates and to foster a relationship that is mutually beneficial for both our members and our alma mater.

In January 2015, the Alumni Association Board of Directors began a review of its strategic plan, last updated in May 2012. Over the past three years, the Board’s operating budget from our endowment has remained constant at $60,000-65,000 per year, and the Board expects no material changes to that budget for the foreseeable future. However, the Board and the College have reallocated responsibility for funding certain alumni programming, most notably events held within the Regional Chapters, to the College. A number of additions to the staff in the College’s Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving have strengthened the College’s relationship with the Board. Finally, over the last three years, the Board has observed, understood, and assisted with the implementation of President Porterfield’s vision for the future of the College. President Porterfield has increased the College’s national profile, changed the demographic of the student population and introduced a capital campaign.

As we enter the 175th year of the Alumni Association, the Board’s strategic plan remains focused on alumni engagement. However, over the next three years we endeavor to take this focus further, building on the progress made over the last three years to increase the Board’s visibility among alumni, students, and others and to recognize – and act on – the principle that one size does not fit all in our engagement efforts. We endeavor to broaden the Board’s reach to more alumni, to increase the engagement of alumni we have already reached, and to involve faculty and students in our goals. We intend to think more about what engagement means, how we measure it, and how that engagement can further the College’s strategic plan.
Mission Statement

The mission of the Franklin & Marshall College Alumni Association is to advance the welfare of the College and its alumni by engaging alumni in the life of their alma mater; fostering and strengthening the connections between and among alumni, students, and the rest of the college community; and inspiring in alumni and students a life-long sense of loyalty to, pride in, and support of the College.
Goal 1: Build and sustain alumni communities

The Alumni Association is as an umbrella community for all alumni, which also serves to foster a network of smaller communities within it that personalize the continuing F&M experience of our alumni. As examples, affinity groups have been formed based on academic major, professional career, club or activities, and geography. Our Regional Chapter network alone has grown to 20 total chapters.

Our goal is to continue to assist alumni groups of various sizes, geographies, and College-related interests as they develop and flourish because each of these groups serves the core of our mission to engage alumni. These groups include: Regional Chapters, Affinity Groups, professional networks, athletics, Greek affiliation, academic major or department, club organizations, date of graduation (including class year, reunion year, and GOLD alumni)

Strategy 1.1: Develop structure, programs, and resources to support the growth and development of self-sustaining alumni groups. Training, guidelines, and criteria for success can provide alumni group leaders the tools to build and maintain their groups’ memberships. These resources can be tailored to be applicable to alumni groups, but should be streamlined to promote consistency and best practices throughout the groups. Liaisons between alumni groups and the Board strengthen the link for these groups not only to the Board, but across alumni groups to develop a network of resources and opportunities.

Strategy 1.2: Assist alumni groups in planning and executing events that serve to link alumni communities with their members and with other communities or groups where possible. While the ideas and energy for such events should come from the alumni groups themselves, and logistics should be coordinated with the College, the Board can help to arrange for attendees, to coordinate across alumni groups, to ensure consistency among the groups, and to provide a limited amount of funding to support certain events for alumni groups.

Strategy 1.3: Increase the use of technology to enhance networking and provide methodologies to encourage activities within affinity groups and communities. Examples include developing “exchanges” and assistance with suggested engagement ideas on social media among alumni group leaders, webinar and teleconference trainings, and discussions and sharing best practices for use of technology to promote alumni groups.
Goal 2: Cultivate and maximize the potential of our volunteer corps

The spirit of volunteerism is a catalyst for much of what we do as an Alumni Association. Many alumni achieve a great sense of satisfaction and engagement by contributing their time and energy to the College. This makes the effort and enthusiasm of our volunteers one of our most precious assets. As such, the more we can do to nurture the quality and commitment of our volunteers, the more value we should be able to return to all alumni.

This objective will have a two-pronged mission to both identify and recruit new volunteers and develop and maintain the existing volunteer network.

Strategy 2.1: Further the development of True Blue Corps. The goal of True Blue Corps is to build and maintain an active, engaged group of “ambassadors” who are able to speak effectively about the various aspects of the College within and beyond their communities. Members of True Blue Corps agree to take on the responsibility of and accountability for representing and advocating for the College. In doing so, True Blue Corps members are key to engaging alumni and to raising the national profile of the College. The Board, through its Volunteer Development Committee, should continue the roll out of the introductory membership program, and consider ways to not only reach new members, but to retain and continue to engage existing members.

Strategy 2.2: Develop a pool of tools to aid in the training of volunteers that will enhance their effectiveness and improve their experience as volunteers. Coordinate with other Committees and College departments, including the Office of Admission and the Office of Student and Post-Graduate Development, to develop volunteer group-specific training that has consistent messaging and resources as trainings for other volunteer groups. Examples of such training would include events held on campus or in regional locations, training guides, webinars, and other digital assets designed for easy participation and administration.

Strategy 2.3: Consider the spirit of volunteerism to the College to begin during a student’s first days on campus and continue through graduation and beyond. Ideally, the most active student volunteers will become active alumni volunteers as well, and less active students will still have some level of interest in volunteer participation. GOLD alumni often lose their connection to the College and have trouble re-establishing it. By focusing on sustaining a volunteer connection this opportunity can be reduced both directly and indirectly. The Blue and White Society and Alumni Leaders of Tomorrow, as well as existing campaigns like True Blue, are natural starting points.
Strategy 2.4: Develop support mechanisms to organize already engaged volunteers and assist in collaboration and communication. This can be especially valuable for volunteers who perform similar roles, but in different regions or areas of focus. Helping reunion volunteers from different classes share ideas that improve attendance or the event itself, or connecting affinity group leaders for the exchange of ideas and successes could help achieve this.

Strategy 2.5: Enhance the Alumni Association's program for recognition of volunteers. Recognition should be broadly applied and not limited to the best or a chosen few. Seek additional ways to recognize and thank all who contribute their time and efforts, such as the recently created GOLD awards for young alumni. Coordinate with the College to support the already established volunteer recognition programs.
Goal 3: Create lasting F&M pride for alumni through all stages of their lives

While it is natural for graduates of any college or university to be proud of their institution, it is not necessarily self-sustaining. Over time the perspective of alumni and their relationship to their alma mater will change and evolve. This objective seeks to maintain, or rekindle, connections through maintenance and growth of the intangible, but emotionally connecting, element of pride in the College and its traditions that encompass alumni.

**Strategy 3.1: Continue to develop and preserve campus traditions.** The Board has successfully partnered with the College to support the Alma Mater Challenge, the Senior Toast, and the Sophomore Declaration Dinner, and has provided “True Blue” t-shirts to promote pride within each class. The Board should continue to support these traditions purposefully and transparently, as well as support the ideation of new, and ongoing support of existing, campus traditions.

**Strategy 3.2: Re-engage alumni by exporting the College digitally and geographically.** The Board should continue to support alumni groups in their promotion on social media, but should also continue to promote and utilize newly developed platforms including the Alumni Association Facebook page, the Alumni Spotlight in the digital College Reporter, and through the College’s redesigned website.

**Strategy 3.3: Provide peer recognition for outstanding alumni and their accomplishments in their careers and service to others.** The Alumni Association is in a unique position to honor its own members for their accomplishments. This recognition includes formal awards such as the prestigious Alumni Citation, which recognizes outstanding accomplishments in a chosen field, and the Alumni Medal, which recognizes significant volunteer service to the College. But, recognition can also be extended to a broader awareness for all alumni of the contributions made by many of our graduates each year. This strategy will seek ways to broaden recognition of alumni and use it to foster continuing pride in F&M.

**Strategy 3.4: Target broader range of alumni in the pursuit to develop pride in F&M.** The Board has had significant success in the past few years with engaging current students and GOLD alumni. While continuing to develop the strengthened ties to these demographics, the Board should seek to engage older alumni to fuel or reignite their pride in F&M, not only as the College that they attended as students, but as the institution it is now and will be in the future.
Goal 4: Cultivate and sustain a spirit of philanthropy

Alumni contributions of time, money, and resources are vital to the support and growth of the College. As the College continues the “quiet” phase of the capital campaign, the Board will work to increase alumni participation by promoting a culture of giving throughout our alumni communities.

**Strategy 4.1: Take an active role in increasing the alumni participation rate.** Much of what we do as a Board gives us the opportunity to engage with thousands of alumni. This strategy will develop methods to support greater participation levels in annual giving. The Board has been supportive of College initiatives to increase the alumni participation rate, including the annual GOLD Chapter Challenges, and has begun to implement its own initiatives, including the Philanthropy 500. In order to increase the annual participation rate, the Board should continue to support College-based initiatives as well as develop its own.

**Strategy 4.2: Identify alumni relationships that can support the College’s major gifts program, particularly with respect to the capital campaign.** The relationships we share with each other as classmates can be used to help the College development process by providing informational updates and arranging introductions. These connections will be of particular importance as the quiet phase of the campaign continues.

**Strategy 4.3: Use segmentation strategies to more effectively appeal to alumni.** This can include developing specific appeals for each different era of alumni, or finding ways to solicit different alumni for different kinds of contributions. An example would be to appeal to our most engaged volunteers to encourage 100% participation within their group, just as the Alumni Board and Board of Trustees aspire to each year. The Board should also continue to collaborate with the College in employing segmentation strategies – the GOLD Chapter Challenge is an example of a successful College segmentation strategy that the Board has actively supported for the last several years.

**Strategy 4.4: Educate students and alumni on the role that philanthropy plays in sustaining the College.** It is incumbent upon us to explain the basic principle that current students are supported in part by the alumni who have come before them. As a result, we should clearly communicate our hope that students will continue that support and find it to be a fulfilling experience. For alumni the education challenge is much the same: helping them understand the importance of their role in sustaining the strength of the College.
Goal 5: Connect with students to improve their F&M experience and develop them as future engaged alumni

Many of the colleges and universities with strong, active alumni organizations report instilling current students with the concept and value of being an alum and of a lifetime relationship with their institution. In addition, many alumni report that engaging with current students is one of the most fulfilling ways they can connect with the College. By integrating alumni interaction with the ongoing student experience, we can help create a seamless and positive transition from student to alum.

Strategy 5.1: Work with the Offices of Advancement and Student and Post-Graduate Development to build alumni pods of professional specialties. Build alumni “pods” by region, geography, major, post-grad schooling, or professional interests. Match students looking for summer jobs with alumni in their area in coordination with the Offices of Advancement and Student and Post-Graduate Development. The Board’s support of the Sophomore Declaration Dinner is a natural launching point for alumni pods.

Strategy 5.2: Develop and assist with alumni mentorship programs. Alumni can instill confidence and provide encouragement for students. We can help with choosing majors, forums on careers, and professional networking. Part of this strategy might include connecting student groups with alumni advisory boards in their major/interest. Another part will be to assist efforts within the Office of Student and Post-Graduate Development to enhance their mentoring programs.

Strategy 5.3: Build a bridge to students through academic departments. Make a deliberate outreach to academic departments at which students “anchor” during their junior and senior years to help students with career ideas and advice. Partner with faculty to make these connections and to offer support for students.

Strategy 5.4: Capitalize on the energy of alumni-focused student groups to reach more students and engage them as future alumni. Groups such as the Blue and White Society and Alumni Leaders of Tomorrow are groups of self-identified engaged future alumni who can share the Board’s mission and strategy with other current students to make its programs more effective and far reaching.

Strategy 5.5: Support the College’s Office of Admission in its efforts to continue and strengthen the work of FAN who assist with student recruitment and interviewing. FAN has grown exponentially in the last few
years. Members of the Board are encouraged to volunteer to serve as members of FAN and likely are in a position to identify other engaged alumni to participate.