



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
**AGRICULTURE &
LIFE SCIENCES**

2022 CALS STRATEGIC PLAN

**DIVERSITY,
EQUITY &
INCLUSION**

RESEARCH

STUDENTS



About this Document

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) at the University of Vermont is a campus leader in engaging in complex global challenges through teaching and research while cultivating meaningful partnerships in communities across our rural state. CALS includes not only the academic departments but also UVM Extension. This document captures the results of a strategic planning process undertaken in 2020-2021 by CALS staff, faculty, and leadership. The process included reflecting on assets, setting concrete goals, and generating ideas for action to guide the College through the next five years. The Appendix contains a description of our strategic planning process and methods.

This document outlines the core components that will orient the College's work in the coming years. It lays out an updated Vision and Mission for the College and introduces three major Goals and related Sub-Goals and Priority Actions that will help the College achieve its Vision and Mission. It describes five key Strategic Directions that will guide decisions during the implementation of this plan. Finally, this document links the Mission and Vision of CALS to that of the University of Vermont, as defined in [Our Common Ground](#) values, UVM's "Amplifying Our Impact" Strategic Vision and broader institutional priorities.

Table 1: A brief overview of core components and what they mean throughout this document.

Goals	The "what" CALS is focusing on.
Sub-Goals	The "what" CALS is measuring progress towards.
Strategic Directions	The "how" CALS will get the "what" done.
Themes	The action idea categories that emerged from CALS. Community engagement conversations.

Our CALS Community

CALS is home to students, faculty, and staff from six academic departments and UVM Extension. Together, the people and programs of CALS engage in teaching, research, and community outreach activities that promote sustainability, health, and wellbeing at scales ranging from cells to seeds to society.

CALS reaches across Vermont, with a strong and visible presence on our Burlington campus coupled with farms, research facilities, and Extension offices in almost every county of the state.



CALS by the Numbers

- 1,376 undergraduate students (Spring 2022)
- 99 master's degree candidates (Spring 2022)
- 68 doctoral degree candidates (Spring 2022)
- 17 postdoctoral associates (Spring 2022)
- 293 first year enrollment (Fall 2021)
- 13 undergraduate majors
- 19 undergraduate minors
- 6 undergraduate academic departments
- 2 cross-college programs
- \$32.4 million research funding (FY21)
- 5 off-site research and teaching facilities
- 11 Extension field offices
- Approx. 120 faculty across academic units and Extension
- Approx. 160 staff members

Our Approach

In the Fall of 2020, Dean Leslie Parise engaged the services of Cortney Cahill to initiate a strategic planning process for the College. Cortney facilitated multiple engagement sessions, and in February 2021, Dean Parise asked Kelly Hamshaw (Community Development and Applied Economics), Margot Smithson (Morgan Horse Farm), and Alison Nihart (Extension) to coordinate the next phase of strategic planning, which included conducting a SWOT+ analysis, developing a set of Strategic Directions, and analyzing a wealth of material generated through our engagement sessions. In Fall 2021, this team delivered a condensed set of action ideas to CALS Leadership to inform the development of our Priority Actions.

The development of this document took place during a time of extraordinary challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. All engagement activities took place virtually, including initial brainstorming sessions involving all CALS faculty and staff held in January 2021. We leveraged new technology to generate and capture over 1,300 ideas from our CALS community members. The creativity and dedication of all those who participated made this plan possible. A detailed methodology is provided in the Appendix.

What does success look like for this process? We envision the development of an annual review where CALS reflects on progress made to date, gathers data and insights from the CALS community, and provides annual updates to maintain momentum over the lifecycle of the plan. We plan to use a crosswalk approach every three years to ensure alignment with overarching goals of UVM. We believe this work will enable CALS to intentionally pursue a culture shift where our mission, vision, and strategic directions are embedded and integrated into each CALS community member's work. To do so, we will actively use this document to inform decision-making, prioritization, and investments across the college, while enhancing our collective capacity for measuring progress, tackling challenges, iterating in responses to change, and celebrating our successes.



Our Mission and Vision

CALS focuses on natural environments, agriculture, social and biological scholarship, and community engagement to serve Vermont, while translating our impact across the world. In this context, we define our mission and vision as follows:

Mission - Our mission is to deliver collaborative, transformative research, academics, and outreach that create critical thinkers and problem solvers to build resilient, sustainable, inclusive, and healthy communities and environments.

Vision - We *envision* a college that moves society continuously towards science-informed decisions to help our community and environments thrive.

Our Primary Goals

CALS is committed to furthering our collective work in three primary areas, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Research, and Student Success, which are reflected by our goals. Each goal has multiple sub-goals that can be measured and assessed for progress. See pgs. 6-8 for detailed subgoals, benchmarks and impacts.



DEI Goal: Create a culture of belonging that affirms the experiences and identities of diverse faculty, students, staff, and community partners.



Research Goal: Build on our reputation for exceptional research and scholarship to maximize local to international impact.



Student Success Goal: Develop and support a dynamic community of students and alumni who make a difference in the world.



Our Strategic Directions

CALS has five strategic directions that will guide the college in making decisions during the implementation of this plan. These strategic directions are compelling and relevant across CALS as a whole and its individual units.

1. CALS will pursue integrated responses to complex problems (Examples include: One Health, climate change, structural inequities, healthy people and communities).
2. CALS will deliver applied, experiential, hands-on learning using innovative high impact practices.
3. CALS will deepen integration of education, research, and service across the state and around the world via innovative internships, study abroad and other mechanisms.
4. CALS will sustain energy, willingness, and openness to foster collaboration.
5. CALS will build an appreciative, inclusive, and unifying community within our college.

Community Engagement Themes

CALS staff and faculty members participated in three engagement sessions held in January 2021. Each session was dedicated to one of the three goals, and participants were asked to generate ideas for tangible actions the College can take in pursuit of a specific sub-goal. These small group conversations, organized by goal area, proved to be quite productive, yielding over 1,300 ideas for actions the College can take to achieve our goals and sub-goals. These ideas were reviewed and grouped into themes, which resulted in 70 themes across the three goals (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Research, and Students). Table 2 provides the top five most frequent themes by goal area.

Table 2: Most Frequent Themes by Goal Area

DEI	Research	Students
Safe Feedback Mechanism	Collaboration - internal	Recruitment, Marketing, & Outreach
Build Community	Grant strategy	Build Community
Safe, inclusive culture	Fundraising strategy	Active Learning Opportunities
Represent and recruit diversity	External Communications	Development, Fundraising, & Industry Partnerships
Training	Staffing strategy	Internships



Our Primary Goals, Subgoals, Benchmarks and Impacts

CALS is committed to furthering our collective work in three primary areas - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Research, and Student Success - which are reflected by our goals. Each goal has multiple sub-goals that can be measured and assessed for progress.

DEI Goal: Create a culture of belonging that affirms the experiences and identities of diverse faculty, students, staff, and community partners.

- **Subgoal 1:** Increase opportunities to advance cultural competencies for students, faculty, and staff.
 - **Benchmarks:** Increased awareness and implementation of new approaches in the classroom and other settings. Increased feeling of belonging.
 - **Impacts:** More and better perspectives, opinions, ideas, creativity, insight, processes. Improved national and international relationships, partnerships and exchange.
- **Subgoal 2:** Create a culture that supports a diverse and inclusive community within CALS.
 - **Benchmarks:** Increased awareness and implementation of new approaches in the classroom and other settings. Increased feeling of belonging.
 - **Impacts:** More and better perspectives, opinions, ideas, creativity, insight, processes. Improved national and international relationships, partnerships and exchange.
- **Subgoal 3:** Provide mechanisms for safe feedback.
 - **Benchmarks:** Confidential reporting might only be captured by anonymous survey and/or UVM-approved mechanisms. Other benchmarks are increased numbers of advocates, improved learning formats.
 - **Impacts:** More trust in systems, potential feedback for learning opportunities and corrective actions.
- **Subgoal 4:** Make diversity a valued criterion in recruitment, hiring, and retention of students, faculty, staff, and outreach volunteers.
 - **Benchmarks:** Visibly increased commitment to diversifying CALS along with measurable increased diversity of the college.
 - **Impacts:** Impacts: More and better perspectives, opinions, ideas, creativity, insight, processes. Positive feedback loop of more diversification.
- **Subgoal 5:** Create educational and research opportunities to advance diverse learners.
 - **Benchmarks:** Increased participation of diverse learners in all programs.
 - **Impacts:** Improved recruitment, retention, yield; improved national/international perception of CALS and UVM.



Research Goal: Build on our reputation for exceptional research and scholarship to maximize local to international impact.

- **Subgoal 1:** Increase research activity (size and numbers of extramural grants).
 - **Benchmarks:** Growth in sponsored grants; catalyzing internal funding to external; increased success rate; increased indirect return; increased publications; increased visibility of outputs.
 - **Impacts:** Improved faculty success; team science; graduate and postdoctoral outcomes; local to global impacts; trajectory toward UVM goal of R1.
- **Subgoal 2:** Enhance quality and visibility of CALS graduate programs.
 - **Benchmarks:** Increased enrollment in graduate programs, funding available for graduate students, interest in programs, collaboration among units in CALS and beyond; success of graduate students after graduation; increased number of graduate student-authored publications.
 - **Impacts:** Continue to recruit and retain outstanding students and programs; growth in graduate programs; ability to hire more faculty.
- **Subgoal 3:** Optimize philanthropy and corporate partnerships to support research.
 - **Benchmarks:** Annual increases in major donations and partnerships.
 - **Impacts:** Enhanced reputation for high quality research across CALS units and UVM; Reputation impacts visibility.
- **Subgoal 4:** Optimize research collaborations with Extension and other partners.
 - **Benchmarks:** Increased synergies between academic units and Extension as measured by increased numbers and amounts of awards, teaching opportunities, job satisfaction vs 2022 baseline.
 - **Impacts:** Increased national and international reputation as measured by invited talks, major service role with key funding agencies, i.e., a seat at the table.



Student Success Goal: Develop and support a dynamic community of students and alumni who make a difference in the world.

- **Subgoal 1:** Optimize relevancy and quality of offerings to attract a range of learners (e.g., traditional, nontraditional, international).
 - **Benchmarks:** Increased numbers of learners, improved course reviews and learner satisfaction.
 - **Impacts:** Improved student credit hours, career placement and trajectories, national reputation.
- **Subgoal 2:** Maximize enrollment, increase retention and graduation rates of students.
 - **Benchmarks:**
 - First-year annual enrollment of 350 students by 2026.
 - First-year retention rate to 90 percent by 2026.
 - Increase four-year graduation rate to 70 percent by 2026.
 - Increase graduate student enrollment by 25 percent by 2026.
 - **Impacts:**
 - Improvement in national rankings.
 - Increased applications and yield.
- **Subgoal 3:** Optimize philanthropy and corporate partnerships for scholarships.
 - **Benchmarks:**
 - Increased numbers of scholarships.
 - Increased paid opportunities.
 - **Impacts:**
 - Increased applications and yield from underserved, first generation students locally to internationally.
 - Increased job placement with local industries.
- **Subgoal 4:** Optimize interactions with Extension and external partners to expand student opportunities (internships/study abroad/research, service-learning, etc.).
 - **Benchmarks:**
 - Increased numbers of internships.
 - Closer interactions between academic units and Extension.
 - Increased networking of CALS with community.
 - Increased study abroad.
 - **Impacts:**
 - Increased career options for students.
 - Increased relations and contributions from industry partners.
 - Coordinates well with UVM goals.
 - Increased ranking and reputation of UVM.



Appendix: Strategic Planning Process & Methods

Development of Mission, Vision, Goals, and Sub-Goals

Our Strategic Planning Consultant, Cortney Cahill, facilitated a process with CALS Leadership to identify high level statements that serve to orient the College in the coming years. This process produced a mission statement, a vision statement, and three primary Goals that cut across the College. Additionally, each primary Goal statement has specific, measurable Sub-Goals.

Brainstorming Ideas for Action: January Engagement Sessions

Three virtual engagement sessions were held in January 2021 to bring together faculty, staff, and graduate students from across all CALS units. Each session was dedicated to a particular goal and participants were sent into breakout rooms to generate ideas for tangible actions the College can take in pursuit of a specific Sub-Goal. Using a virtual brainstorming platform called Mural, participants were asked to write their ideas on “sticky notes” and then prioritize their top three ideas for long-term and short-term implementation. Over 1,300 ideas were generated over the three working sessions. Each Mural board was then downloaded, transcribed into a spreadsheet, and reviewed to identify common Themes. The ideas and full list of themes are available in a supplemental spreadsheet.

SWOT+ Exercise

In April 2021, the CALS chairs and directors participated in a modified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) exercise led by facilitator Cortney Cahill. The strengths and weaknesses were framed as external factors in the broader landscape of higher education while opportunities and threats were framed as internal factors at the college level. Additionally, chairs were asked to identify friction points and synergies within the university as an ecosystem. These conversations generated important insights, and the key findings were then cross-referenced with the major themes that emerged from the engagement sessions to craft the Strategic Directions statements.

Consolidating the Action Ideas

With the objective of generating a manageable list of tasks for the college to undertake in pursuit of the identified goals and sub-goals, the ideas from the January brainstorming sessions were reviewed and similar ideas were consolidated and put into actionable language. The consolidated ideas were organized into pivot tables to create a single list of action ideas under each goal, along with the number of times similar ideas appeared in the spreadsheet (note: ideas that showed up with higher frequency are not inherently better ideas, these were just more frequently mentioned). This generated 70 unique action ideas in the DEI goal, 157 unique action ideas in the Research goal, and 70 unique action ideas in the Student goal. The full list of action ideas is available in a supplemental spreadsheet.

Prioritizing the Action Ideas

The CALS dean’s team reviewed a narrowed list of action items provided by the project management team as described above. They were added to our strategic planning templates and prioritized as indicated by the year we will have capacity to take on the goal. We also fully expect that our initial relative prioritization will change each year.