

Augustana College

Strategic Framework for the Office of Vice President for Culture and Connection

2026-2029

Mission of the Office of Vice President for Culture and Connection

To offer visionary leadership and strategic guidance for inclusive cultural transformation, actively participating in strategic planning, program development, and policy formulation. Our purpose is to cultivate an equitable environment that maximizes student thriving and success and ensures all members of the Augustana College community experience sustainable belonging and a deep sense of community.

Rooted in Faith, Committed to Justice

At Augustana College, our commitment to the work of Culture and Connection is not merely programmatic, it is theological. As a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we are called to create a community where each person is valued as made in the image of God. Grounded in the Lutheran affirmation of the goodness of creation, the call to vocation, and the spirit of ongoing reformation, our culture and connection efforts seek to transform lives, systems, and communities “so that all may belong.”

This strategic framework reflects our deeply held belief that diversity enriches education, that equity is a spiritual and structural commitment, that inclusion demands intentional design, and that justice is a lived, ongoing responsibility. It builds on the College’s Lutheran values, the mission of the Office of the Vice President for Culture and Connection, and the community’s shared responsibility to foster transformation through grace, accountability, and love of neighbor.

Pillar I: Equity-Minded Learning & Leadership

Strategic Intent: Cultivate leaders formed by intercultural fluency, ethical reasoning, and inclusive professionalism, hallmarks of an Augustana College education.

Theological Grounding: All are called to use their unique gifts to serve others. Lutheran higher education affirms that educational opportunity and leadership are not privileges, but expressions of faithful vocation.

Key Strategic Initiatives:

- Reframe general education to embed intercultural rich interdisciplinary themes, preparing students for a diverse and dynamic world.
- Advance experiential learning across student life, athletics, and Greek life with a focus on equity-centered leadership development.
- Ensure equitable access to internships and pre-professional pathways for PACE and international students, including through summer and J-term placements.
- Integrate intercultural learning outcomes into academic programs to develop competencies in cultural humility, ethical collaboration, and social responsibility.
- Expand a campus-wide Inclusive Leadership Initiative that includes, Global Mentors, PACE Mentors, Gather & Grow, and Sustained Dialogue facilitators.
- Develop an inclusive professionalism course tailored to equip underrepresented students with career readiness and confidence.

Pillar II: Institutional Capacity for Belonging

Strategic Intent: Transform policies, structures, and cultures to foster a campus where every member can thrive with dignity and purpose.

Theological Grounding: Belonging is the fruit of justice and grace. Created in God's image, each person is inherently worthy of welcome, support, and community.

Key Strategic Initiatives:

- Launch a campus-wide policy audit to identify and eliminate structural barriers that impede student success.
- Embed culture-focused professional development into faculty and staff growth systems, co-led with Human Resources, Academic Affairs, and the Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship (CELTS).
- Expand access to culturally affirming wellness resources, including multilingual counseling and enhanced English as a Second Language (ESL) and academic support services.
- Create identity-conscious pathways into shared governance for students of all identities and backgrounds.
- Establish and resource the Sustained Dialogue and Gather & Grow programs as signature experiences for community-building and conflict transformation.

- Introduce interfaith engagement as a key dimension of belonging, including allyship training, interfaith dialogues, and inclusive policy education.
- Partner with the Augie Mentoring Program to scale peer mentoring for students through Global Mentors and PACE Mentors.

Pillar III: Community Engagement as Equity Practice

Strategic Intent: Leverage civic partnerships as a vital expression of vocation and justice, advancing mutual transformation across campus and community.

Theological Grounding: Justice requires action. As a Lutheran institution, Augustana College embraces the responsibility to dismantle systems that perpetuate exclusion and to serve as a bridge for collective flourishing.

Key Strategic Initiatives:

- Position Augustana College as a regional civic anchor by reimagining institutional boundaries through Rock Island revitalization and neighborhood partnership.
- Build public-private partnerships that extend engaged learning while addressing local community needs.
- Deepen collaborations with community-based organizations (CBOs), co-creating culturally responsive student engagement programs.
- Develop an Inclusive Leadership Certification Program in partnership with Augustana College faculty and Quad Cities businesses to promote equity-centered professional development in the region.
- Create systems to assess community impact and elevate the voices of partners, ensuring accountability and sustainability in outreach initiatives.

Conclusion

This framework represents Augustana College's commitment to advancing intercultural understanding and building intentional connections as both a strategic imperative and a faithful expression of our Lutheran identity. Guided by the principles of grace, reform, and love of neighbor, we dedicate ourselves to building a campus and a world where all may belong, not in word alone, but in structure, spirit, and shared life.