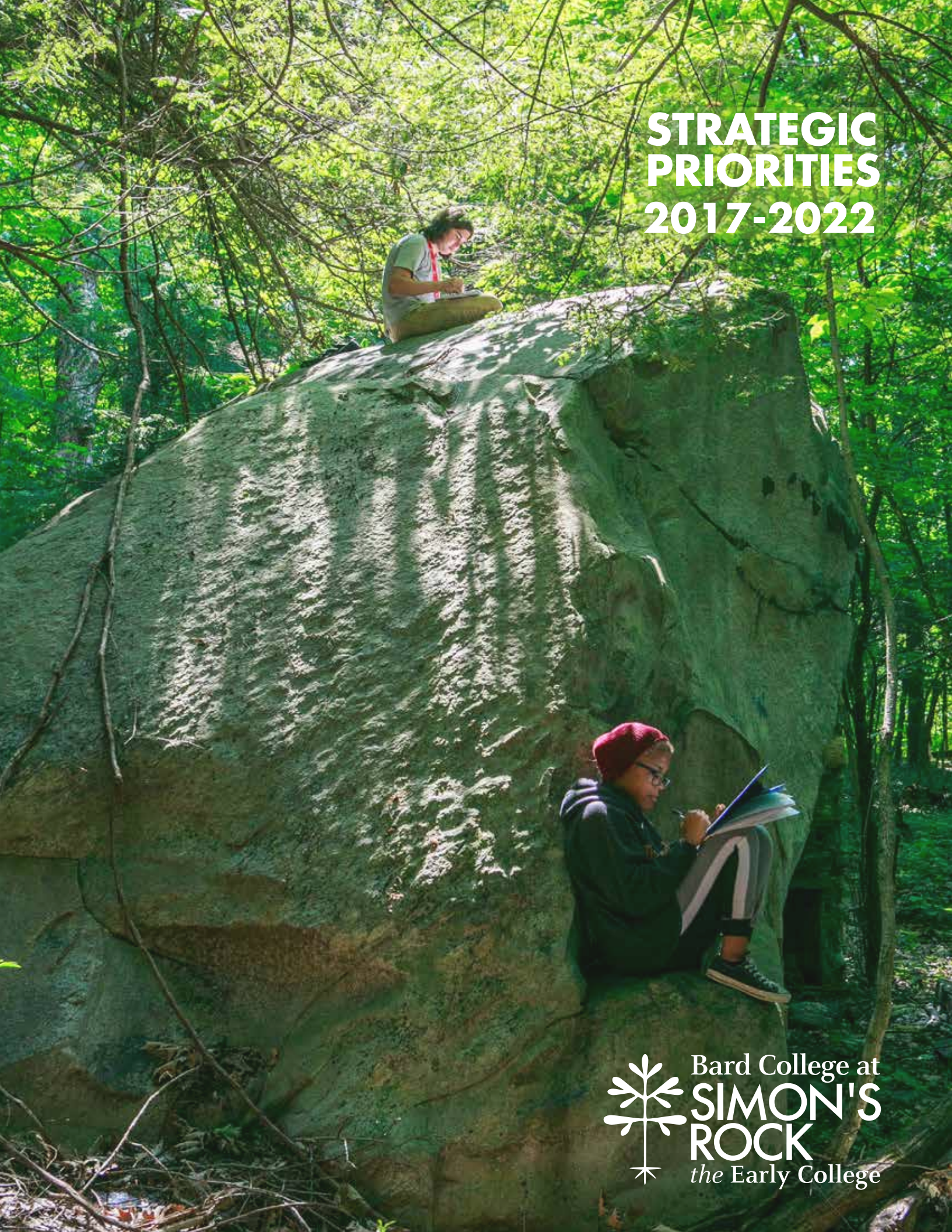


# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2017-2022



Bard College at  
**SIMON'S  
ROCK**  
*the Early College*





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>3</b>	Introduction
<b>6</b>	Our Mission
<b>7</b>	Our Approach: The Six-Year Arc
<b>9</b>	The Five-Year Outlook
<b>11</b>	Our Strategic Priorities
	ADVANCING THE SIMON'S ROCK IDEA <b>11</b>
	CONNECTING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE <b>13</b>
	ENHANCING EQUITY AND INCLUSION <b>16</b>
	SUSTAINING OUR MISSION <b>17</b>
<b>20</b>	Next Steps

Once practiced only  
on our campus,  
the Simon's Rock idea  
is now at the heart of  
the growing Early  
College movement.

“There’s a culture of respect for what students have to say and helping students learn how to listen to each other. When you look at what students write about learning at Simon’s Rock...it’s often about the value of hearing a wide range of opinions in the class and going through a process of understanding why someone else might see things differently.”

**PAT SHARPE**  
DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

## INTRODUCTION

For 50 years, Simon’s Rock has occupied a unique space in the educational landscape, practicing the simple yet radical idea that many students are ready for college at a younger age. Breaking from the conventional chronology, for these students, is to choose an education defined by critical inquiry, adventurous expression, and active exploration of the self and world.

Simon’s Rock continues to develop innovative ways to express its core mission. We served as the model for Bard’s extremely successful network of public Early Colleges, which now includes eight schools in five states. We reimagined high school as a two-year rather than four-year experience for highly motivated students. And we connected high school and college in one cohesive six-year arc, rather than an eight-year span comprising two disconnected parts. As we celebrate our 50th year, the Simon’s Rock idea is more important than ever in answering the challenges facing both secondary and higher education.

The priorities outlined in this document arose from the following far-reaching, collaborative, and strategically oriented self-study processes and will guide our evolution for the next five years.

### 1. The 2014-15 Study Group

These four processes began with the 2014-15 Study Group, a self-organized collective of faculty, students, staff, and alumni who, at the conclusion of a yearlong grassroots institutional self-study, submitted to the Board of Overseers their comprehensive Study Notes. In the words of Chair Emerita Emily Fisher, the Study Notes became “required reading” for Simon’s Rock stakeholders.

The Study Group adopted many of the elements of a conventional strategic planning process: a form of SWOT analysis gathering perspectives from across the community, committees developing and detailing recommendations,



and a collaborative writing effort, resulting in the Study Notes. That the process was convened and steered by non-administrative constituencies enabled transparency and discovery of an unusually rich variety.

## **2. 2015 Annual Leadership Retreat**

The senior leadership team, led by former Provost Peter Laipson, focused its 2015 annual retreat on long-term strategic priorities. The ideas developed and outlined at the retreat provided the foundation upon which our strategic priorities are built.

## **3. NEASC Accreditation**

Also underway at the time was our 10-year NEASC accreditation self-study—an elaborate process examining every aspect of our mission, curriculum, operations, and governance. The resulting 100-page report, along with the NEASC site committee’s recommendations, provided extensive data and fact finding in support of our strategic priorities.

## **4. Bard Early Colleges Five-Year Plan**

Provost Ian Bickford, in his former role as Dean of the Bard Early Colleges, served as one of the committee chairs in the recently completed five-year strategic plan for the public Bard Early College network. That planning process yielded many lessons important to Simon’s Rock, and we have sought to articulate our priorities in part to reflect synergies with our partner schools and to illuminate new opportunities for collaboration.

The final step was the authoring of this document, submitted on January 20, 2017, for review by the Simon’s Rock Board of Overseers.

“In the classroom, we mostly have discussions, which I really like because you get to hear what other people are saying and then you get to respond to them. But you’re not just responding to them. You’re really talking to the whole class, the teachers, and your peers.”

**JULIAN MATTHEWS**  
SIMON’S ROCK STUDENT





## **OUR MISSION**

At Bard Academy and Bard College at Simon's Rock, age doesn't define intellect: our mission is to inspire the curiosity and creativity of motivated younger scholars with a challenging, empowering, and inclusive education in the liberal arts and sciences.



There is no innovation with more promise to reshape national assumptions about who goes to college, when, and at what cost, and no institution better positioned than Simon's Rock to lead the Early College model to its nearing and needed fruition.

## OUR APPROACH: THE SIX-YEAR ARC

Recognizing that many students are ready for college before the conventional age of high school completion, Bard Academy and Bard College at Simon's Rock provide supportive and challenging courses of high school and college study, bridging the whole of secondary and undergraduate education in a coherent, comprehensive six-year arc.

### The six years at Simon's Rock comprise three programs:

- **Bard Academy** is a two-year high school for boarding and day students, offering an innovative curriculum in the liberal arts and sciences, with courses designed and taught by college professors and leading to entry into college after the 10th grade.
- The **Lower College**, culminating in the associate of arts (AA) degree, combines a strong core curriculum with opportunities to explore broadly in the liberal arts and sciences while also pursuing individual interests in depth.
- Extending from these foundations, the **Upper College** invites students into an intensive and highly customized course of study featuring more than 35 concentrations, with options for study abroad and away, and concluding with the yearlong senior thesis and the bachelor of arts (BA) degree.

Students may spend two, four, or six years at Simon's Rock, with admission options at each level. All Simon's Rock students enter intending to complete at least the AA: some begin high school at Simon's Rock, some complete the BA at Simon's Rock, and some do both. At each successive transition, we invite reflection, self-assessment, and engaged planning for the next stage of our students' education.



**At each successive transition, we invite reflection, self-assessment, and engaged planning for the next stage of our students' education.**

Our classes, taught at all levels by experts in their fields with a commitment to adolescent learners, are small, participatory, and writing intensive, emphasizing collaboration over competition. Most feature active, seminar-style discussion, in which students learn to take responsibility for their own ideas and engage constructively with the ideas of others. The classroom experience is informed by the Writing and Thinking Workshop, completed by all new students in the Academy and in the College, establishing a common language and culture for shared inquiry and inclusive discourse.

Based on an understanding of adolescence as the beginning of adulthood rather than the end of childhood, our academic and campus life programs offer substantial independence, supported in extensive advising and mentoring, with an emphasis on individual and collective well-being, concern for others, social justice, and restorative practices.

These values and practices extend beyond our 275-acre residential campus in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, to our partners in the greater Bard Early College network, where the Simon's Rock idea informs and transforms opportunities in public, urban education. There is no innovation with greater potential to reshape national assumptions about who goes to college, when, and at what cost, and no institution better positioned than Simon's Rock to lead the Early College model to its nearing and needed fruition.



“I think that having a small class size is really important for the student to foster a personal relationship with the faculty member. There are many students that I’ve had in the past who are still in contact with me, and I don’t think that would have ever been the case at a larger institution.”

**COLETTE VAN  
KERCKVOORDE**  
FACULTY IN LANGUAGE AND  
LITERATURE

## THE FIVE-YEAR OUTLOOK

Once practiced only on our campus, the Simon’s Rock idea is now at the heart of the growing Early College movement. We demonstrate with our partners in the national Bard Early College network that Early College fosters inclusivity, engagement, and mutual respect in diverse communities defined by motivation, talent, and creativity. We replace rigid, expensive, tightly guarded college admission checkpoints that distract from true learning with unbroken, practical, meaningful segues from secondary to higher education. And we encourage younger students, at their moment of greatest intellectual energy and potential for growth, to regard themselves as full and active participants in their education.

Our 50th anniversary coincides with the 15th anniversary of the Bard High School Early Colleges, founded by President Leon Botstein in collaboration with Simon’s Rock faculty and administrators, and now constituting a network of Early College programs in public urban districts across five states. The phrase “Early College,” our coinage and animating principle, was formally defined in December 2015 in the Every Student Succeeds Act, and hundreds of new programs nationwide have adopted our concept that many students are ready for college at a younger age. With the establishment of Bard Academy in 2015, we join the public Bard Early Colleges in authentically bridging high school and college. The Simon’s Rock idea promises to change the national landscape of secondary and higher education.





“Simon’s Rock has been one of the most inviting and welcoming places that I’ve ever lived or worked. Regardless of ethnic background, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity, everyone here has always been really open and willing to have conversations about a diversity of topics.”

**MARK MIRASOL**  
ASSOCIATE DEAN OF  
CAMPUS LIFE

In the next five years, the integrated, interdependent, and forward-looking priorities established in this document will steer our response both to immediate institutional needs and to the extraordinary opportunities and substantial challenges presented by a dynamic, evolving moment in national education.

**1. Advance the Simon’s Rock idea** by establishing Simon’s Rock nationally as the origin of and point of orbit for a rapidly growing and overwhelmingly successful educational model while continuing to provide thought leadership for new extensions and iterations of the model.

**2. Connect high school and college** with the development of our new six-year comprehensive arc, built of three interlocking two-year programs.

**3. Enhance equity and inclusion** on our campus in recognition that our model of Early College in the liberal arts tradition fulfills its mission only in serving a diverse student population in a community that is inviting, safe, and equitable for all members.

**4. Sustain our mission** through new key programs, strengthened new enrollment and retention, diversification of our philanthropic donor base, and pursuit of foundation support.



## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

“Simon’s Rock is an important cause, not only another college. It’s not about grades, it’s not about standardized tests. It’s about real learning, real curiosity, and real ambition.”

**LEON BOTSTEIN**  
PRESIDENT, BARD COLLEGE

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY ONE

## ADVANCING THE SIMON’S ROCK IDEA

Early College and Simon’s Rock were synonymous for most of our history. That this is no longer true is a promising development—both for an improved national conversation about excellence and equity in secondary and higher education, and, in the long run, for Simon’s Rock. We benefit from an environment in which students and families actively consider not only *where* to go to college but *when*, and in which Early College is a recognizable and better-understood concept. The concept, already entering the mainstream in some states, is at just such a tipping point, and Simon’s Rock must play a leadership role in guiding the future of the Early College movement. Simon’s Rock is no longer the only Early College in the United States, but we can and must serve as an active proponent for our model, articulating its transformative possibilities nationally and for our own students.

### Bard Center for Early College

The Bard Center for Early College was established to preserve and promote the Early College idea through ongoing activity in three spheres: forging new partnerships, developing and articulating our pedagogy, and advocating for public policies that support our model. Stewardship of the Center for Early College is shared between Simon’s Rock and the Bard Early Colleges.

#### *Initiatives:*

- Host the annual Early College Summit to encourage interorganizational conversations about policy reform, social justice, and best practices in partnership and collaboration

**Our approaches will remain targeted yet flexible, attentive to a rapidly changing media environment and the evolving conditions of secondary education, nationally and internationally.**

- Increase participation in the summer Writing and Thinking Conference for Early College educators, encouraging faculty across the Bard network to learn and integrate key pedagogical techniques for student engagement
- Commence a five-year study of Simon's Rock and Bard Early College outcomes to demonstrate the value of the Early College model in American education: the study will focus on transfer outcomes, graduate school enrollment, and career placement; total cost analysis of early versus conventional college (private and public); and retention
- Continue to develop collaborative relationships with our partners in the Bard Early College network

## **Regional Outreach**

Simon's Rock is an invaluable resource to the local Berkshire-Taconic region, enhancing the area's cultural and economic vitality and offering a full calendar of more than 100 free programs and events throughout the year. As we continue to welcome members of the local community to enjoy our campus and facilities, attend events, and learn about our comprehensive and highly regarded academic programs in the liberal arts and sciences, we will also volunteer the collective talents of our faculty, staff, and students in service of regional educational and civic priorities.

### *Initiatives:*

- Recruit a local parent volunteer corps to raise awareness of Simon's Rock, sharing stories of how the school has made a difference in the lives of students and families
- Provide professional development in subject-based and writing-intensive pedagogies to public school teachers in the Berkshire-Taconic region
- Better communicate the rich academic offerings, lectures, and events available to educators and local students in the region and broaden outreach to these groups
- Support dual-enrollment initiatives in the Berkshire-Taconic region with consultation and course offerings by Simon's Rock faculty in local public schools
- Align and collaborate with the nonprofit community in the region, hosting gatherings and events, and supporting the community with on-campus resources
- Increase awareness of the more than 1,300 volunteer hours donated by Simon's Rock students to the local community throughout the year



“In order for our students to show respect to one another, their professors need to model that respect. That’s one of the reasons that students are on a first-name basis with faculty and staff. We are showing that we can engage with one another on an intellectual level, especially when we disagree.”

**EDEN-RENEE HAYES**  
FACULTY IN SOCIAL STUDIES

- Utilize the rich cultural offerings of the Daniel Arts Center and the state-of-the-art facilities at the Kilpatrick Athletic Center to connect with the public and integrate the greater community into the Simon’s Rock family

### **National Publicity**

Sharing the story of Simon’s Rock through web, print, and social media is critical to our growth and stability as an institution. We will celebrate the accomplishments of our students, faculty, and alumni and increase national recognition of the Simon’s Rock name.

#### *Initiatives:*

- Promote Simon’s Rock student, faculty, and staff accomplishments in the local and national press
- Encourage faculty and staff to represent Simon’s Rock at national professional conferences and conventions
- Review and revise messaging to present the six-year arc clearly and effectively to families, educators, the press, and funders
- Affirm Simon’s Rock’s commitment to the public Bard Early Colleges and work with our partners in that network to develop shared messaging

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO

### **CONNECTING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE**

Our model offers a comprehensive six-year arc from the beginning of high school to the conclusion of undergraduate studies, requiring coherence across the curriculum as well as meaningful transitions, both academically and socially, across programs. Imagining the Academy, Lower College, and Upper College together as distinct but interlocking programs provides opportunities for developing unique curricular and pedagogical approaches—those shared in common across the six years, as well as those specific to each program. Then, in rethinking what conventionally would be points of “admission” as, instead, points of reflection and engaged planning, we are able to remove barriers, repair ruptures, and prevent stagnation. Growth and development of the six-year arc is a priority for sustainable enrollment while also opening new and exciting possibilities for our academic programs.



“There is a true north to the education of Simon’s Rock. It has been, since the very beginning, about innovation, vision, bold moves, risk taking, and blue-sky thinking. At 50, it’s just getting started.”

**VERONICA CHAMBERS '87**  
SIMON’S ROCK ALUMNA

## Faculty Recruitment

At the heart of our mission is the belief that college faculty can inspire curiosity and an enthusiasm for learning in younger scholars. By attracting and retaining faculty members who are passionate about their own areas of study and interested in creating a classroom environment rooted in sharing and mutuality, we create the conditions in which students may develop confidence in themselves and appreciation for intellectual pursuit.

### *Initiatives:*

- Develop a faculty recruitment plan accounting for enrollment growth and curricular needs across three programs, with a targeted 9:1 student-faculty ratio
- Formalize and sustain the Bard Fellows program, which brings faculty from the public Bard Early Colleges to Simon’s Rock for one year to exchange ideas for pedagogy and curriculum and to create opportunities for collaboration within the network

## Curriculum

Our faculty and academic leadership regularly review and update programs and course offerings to reflect current needs and standards as well as new developments in scholarship. The six-year arc invites special and specific reflection to ensure coherence among our three programs and to model an integrated approach to high school and college. We are committed to offering courses of study in the liberal arts and sciences that equip students for lifelong intellectual growth and engaged citizenship.

### *Initiatives:*

- Revise the core curriculum and distribution requirements to reflect the six-year arc
- Expand capacity and enrollment in targeted concentrations: Food Studies, Computer Science, and Education, Polity, Society

## Campus Culture

The Simon’s Rock campus is a welcoming space for learning, community building, and celebrating the creative, academic,



**We demonstrate with our partners in the national Bard Early College network that early entry into college fosters inclusivity, engagement, and mutual respect in diverse communities defined by motivation, talent, and creativity.**

and personal development of our students. We combine an uncommon level of trust in our students with an uncommon level of support—a balance that is integral to campus culture at Simon’s Rock.

*Initiatives:*

- Review the handbooks for each of three programs: Bard Academy, the Lower College, and the Upper College; create differentiated guidelines for each program that attend to the specific needs of students at each point in the six-year arc
- Coordinate biannual faculty and staff retreats in January and September to encourage collaboration and to align goals and priorities across the institution
- Adopt restorative practices as a core feature of community building and code of conduct policy

## **Administration**

The systems that support our faculty and staff ultimately support our students. A strong yet streamlined administrative structure is necessary for the success of our academic programs, enabling the services that help students to thrive.

*Initiatives:*

- Review and revise administrative structures to reflect and support differentiated programs
- Integrate admission, institutional advancement, and marketing and communications into one cohesive, public-facing team
- Integrate College and Academy staff, policies, procedures, and outreach, with attention to differentiation among programs
- Utilize the newly created Deans and Directors meetings to improve internal operations

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE

## **ENHANCING EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

The values of equity and inclusion are intrinsic to our mission, and the community, curriculum, and services at Simon’s Rock should be constituted intentionally and inclusively for all students, faculty, staff, friends, families, guests, and institutional partners. This strategic priority reflects our mindfulness of the need we share in common

with all colleges and universities in the United States to address the very real concerns of underrepresented students and campus professionals.

Our educational model lends an important perspective to this context. Early College offers a structural solution both to college access and to college completion, which too often are treated as separate variables in higher education reform efforts, and our long-term work with the Bard Early College network to address access and inclusion leaves us better positioned—and with a greater responsibility—to create an equitable and inclusive residential campus at Simon’s Rock.

*Initiatives:*

- Conduct annual trainings in cultural competency for new and returning students, faculty, and staff
- Establish best practices for recruitment and retention of underrepresented faculty and staff
- Evaluate and update annual admission recruitment strategies with diversity as a key goal and communicate the importance of equity and inclusion as a part of Simon’s Rock’s values to internal and external audiences
- Position Simon’s Rock at the vanguard of supporting LGBTQ+ students and faculty
- Expand the Social Justice Teach-In to a full week of programming in diversity, equity, and inclusion, to be known as the Symposium on Social Justice and Inclusion
- Forge strategic partnerships (e.g., Multicultural BRIDGE, the James Weldon Johnson Foundation, A Broader Way) to advance regional and national equity goals

STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOUR

**SUSTAINING OUR MISSION**

With a combination of new programs (Bard Academy, PACE, and opportunities for transfer admission into the BA program), stabilization of new enrollment into the first year of college, strengthened retention, modestly recalibrated management of financial aid, efforts to diversify the philanthropic donor base, and new exploration of foundation support, we anticipate long-term financial health at Simon’s Rock. Our goal is to reach full enrollment of 450, inclusive

“The goal, then, is how do you create a community out of this intense diversity of young people that are really smart, that are still learning, still growing? In a setting where you need to find a balance, Simon’s Rock does it really well.”

**ANNA BERNANKE**  
SIMON’S ROCK PARENT

“The students are brave, and their parents are brave too. It takes a lot to let go of a child one or two years earlier than you were expecting. That’s a long time. I think that kind of bravery shines through in the classroom.”

**SAM RUHKORFF**  
FACULTY IN SOCIAL STUDIES

of Bard Academy, the Lower College, and the Upper College, by 2019, and to sustain that enrollment through 2022 with revenue and financial aid targets that will reduce our aggregate fundraising need to below \$1 million per year by 2020 while maintaining socioeconomic diversity on campus and fulfilling our mission to promote college access and inclusivity.

### **Programs**

Students seeking an Early College experience rightly expect more from their education than they have encountered in conventional contexts. Our new and strengthened enrollment pathways allow more students who are ready for a challenging, alternative learning environment to access a Simon’s Rock education.

#### *Initiatives:*

- Grow Bard Academy enrollment to 80
- Grow the Pathways to Academic Choice (PACE) program to 12-15 new students annually
- Develop transfer opportunities into the BA program, with pipelines from the Bard Early Colleges and external Early College and dual-enrollment programs

### **College Enrollment**

The majority of our students will continue to reach us after the 10th or 11th grade. We will continue to improve upon methods for reaching students at the midpoint of their high school years and communicating the value of early entry to college, especially in the liberal arts and sciences. Our approaches will remain targeted yet flexible, attentive to a rapidly changing media environment and the evolving conditions of secondary education, nationally and internationally.

#### *Initiatives:*

- Continue to increase numbers of applicants and enrollees with a combination of marketing initiatives and recruitment strategies
- Create a retention task force, composed of faculty and staff from across offices and divisions
- Target 100 percent moderation and 60 percent retention into the Upper College



## **Institutional Advancement**

The Simon's Rock idea inspires passion among the families and alumni who have experienced the unique benefits of Early College. We invite people who share our priorities to participate in philanthropy, volunteer service, and spreading awareness about Simon's Rock.

### *Initiatives:*

- Leverage our 50th anniversary narrative to achieve near-term engagement goals
- Increase alumni participation in Annual Fund giving to 15 percent by 2019 and 20 percent by 2022
- Expand foundation support
- Increase leadership donations (defined as gifts of \$25,000 or greater)
- Launch multiyear capital and endowment campaign, to begin in 2019

## **Campus Maintenance and Planning**

Simon's Rock is in the midst of an exciting period of growth and expansion. Keeping our campus in good repair and planning for its ongoing maintenance are central to creating a firm foundation for our future at Simon's Rock. We will continue to create an environment that nurtures our students and builds community with the local region.

### *Initiatives:*

- Create and implement a staged deferred maintenance schedule
- Develop a campus master plan
- Renovate the Mods for fall 2017 to accommodate growth in enrollment and enhance a sense of community on campus (occupancy 44)

## **Investing in Our People**

Faculty and staff who are drawn to Simon's Rock share an appreciation for independent thinking, freedom of expression, and intellectual discovery. All Simon's Rock employees are regarded as educators, whether or not the classroom is their primary professional space. Together, we serve and nurture our students, each of us adding to the network of support they experience during their time on campus. Retaining talented faculty and staff requires us to

**We encourage younger students, at their moment of greatest intellectual energy and potential for growth, to regard themselves as full and active participants in their education.**

“It’s true that this is a place of learning, and every time we learn something, we change a little bit. But we want you to bring all of who you are, and Simon’s Rock will change a little bit because you’re here. That’s something we welcome and celebrate, as we welcome and celebrate you.”

**IAN BICKFORD**  
PROVOST, BARD COLLEGE AT  
SIMON’S ROCK

From his welcome address to new students on Arrival Day 2016

remain competitive with peer schools and colleges. It is our goal to ensure adequate and equitable compensation for all employees of Simon’s Rock.

*Initiative:*

- Undertake a comprehensive compensation review, benchmarked to peer schools and colleges, establishing three- and five-year compensation goals



## NEXT STEPS

Our collective work in the next five years is to sustain an environment at Bard Academy and Bard College at Simon’s Rock where younger scholars have the latitude, encouragement, and support they need to cultivate their intellectual capacity and curiosity. To achieve this, we must provide resources that serve students in every area of life, bolstering their academic, emotional, physical, mental, and social well-being.

The Simon’s Rock idea—that many students are ready for college at a younger age—has attracted truly dedicated, talented educators into its service for the past 50 years and inspired passion and enthusiasm in students and families of all backgrounds. We are committed to building an increasingly secure foundation for Simon’s Rock that will support new generations of students for decades to come.

Beginning immediately, and throughout the next five years, we will convene across the institution to enact our strategic priorities. We invite all members of the Simon’s Rock community—faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and friends—to take part in the process.





Bard College at   
**SIMON'S ROCK**  
*the Early College*

84 Alford Road, Great Barrington, MA 01230  
[simons-rock.edu](http://simons-rock.edu)