Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College has long been the higher education destination for students in the Southeast who want to study agriculture and natural resources. Today, ABAC is a destination for students who enroll in a wide variety of academic areas and for outstanding faculty from a broad range of academic disciplines. Coupled with significant changes in the higher education environment, ABAC’s growth prompted a new strategic plan which will firmly establish ABAC as The Destination for well qualified students and extremely talented faculty.

First and foremost, ABAC will provide programs and initiatives that attract students from the State of Georgia, the region, the nation, and around the world who seek a life-changing educational experience. ABAC is committed to ensuring that these students graduate on time with minimal debt, are fully prepared to enter the workforce, and are ready to embrace a full and meaningful life. ABAC’s focus is on a holistic educational experience, pushing far beyond classroom lectures. ABAC will teach students essential life skills through internships, research experiences, course work, study abroad opportunities, service learning, and mentoring by faculty, staff, alumni, and other partners.

For ABAC to be a Destination which provides a strong holistic educational experience, everyone must be involved. ABAC will fulfill its mission by engaging faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, supporters, business partners, and the community. ABAC will expand its influence beyond the classroom to engage students in diverse, real-world experiences to enhance and reinforce academics. By partnering with ABAC, the community will be a key shareholder in this mission by providing the real-world experiences, internships, and cooperative education opportunities that are vital for students to succeed.

Sustaining these effective partnerships and a robust educational mission requires a strong commitment to excellence and continued support from the institution and beyond. ABAC will support this mission with an infusion of new and modern technology into all areas of the campus. A philanthropic effort from ABAC faculty and staff, alumni, community leaders, and businesses will provide the financial resources to implement the Destination ABAC initiatives and will support all areas of the new strategic plan. The result will be an affordable, life-changing experience for ABAC students.

ABAC is already an institution with a strong reputation that is growing stronger by the day. Through the new strategic plan, ABAC will be a Destination for students seeking a unique educational experience that prepares them for life. When the objectives of the plan are met, ABAC will be The Destination for students seeking a holistic education that prepares them for life and work. Graduates will join a community of alumni whose lives have been changed by their ABAC education and who will continue to pass on this vision to future ABAC students.
Vision Statement
Mission Statement
Background
Rationale
The Goal
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“ABAC aspires to an institutional destination of greatness, a college where committed students seek a life-changing experience and are prepared to contribute positively to the communities in which they live and work.”
“To engage, teach, coach, mentor, and provide relevant experiences that prepare the Graduate for life.”
The Previous Strategic Plan

The previous strategic plan, The 2nd Century Project, informed and guided Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College from 2008 through 2013, a period of unprecedented, transformational change. Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College celebrated 100 years of service to the people of Georgia in February of 2008. As it prepared for its second century of service, the college was confronted with a rapidly changing higher education environment and a constituency whose needs and demands were greatly different than those of the past.

The 2nd Century Project guaranteed that Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College would prepare itself to serve as ably during its second one hundred years as it had during the first one hundred years. The overarching goals of The 2nd Century Project were 1) to situate the College’s structure, processes, procedures, and people and to properly align them with resources, so as to ensure excellence during the second century of service; 2) to create aesthetic, student, parent, programmatic, and public appeal so as to attract students, parents, and supporters; and, 3) quickly transition the former two-year college to a position as Georgia’s State College of Choice.

The 2nd Century Project included five primary strategic initiatives, as follows:

**Initiative 1** - Enhance business processes, budget development, and management.  
*Goal:* Create user-friendly, web-based budget development and management processes that will support participatory budget development and management.

**Initiative 2** – Establish the Office of College Advancement.  
*Goal:* Create a robust, well managed office whose singular role is to advance the College via the acquisition, management, and expenditure of public and private assets.

**Initiative 3** – Transform academic programs.  
*Goal:* Earn a strong state, regional, and national reputation for academic excellence and positive student experience by developing unique and acclaimed two and four-year academic programs and by recruiting and retaining the very best faculty, staff, and student talent.

**Initiative 4** – Commit to institutional effectiveness and process improvement.  
*Goal:* Create a program that is committed to enhancing all aspects of institutional effectiveness and efficiency through the use of technology, institutional research, and process improvement.

**Initiative 5** - Market, promote, and enhance public relations.  
*Goal:* Increase public awareness of educational and career opportunities for students, faculty, and staff at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.
The Rationale for a New Strategic Plan

ABAC had largely achieved these goals by late 2012, and the need for a new strategic plan that would inform and guide the College during the next few years was evident. Furthermore, the higher education environment was still changing rapidly. Meetings with leaders from across the campus reinforced many commonly held views about strategic planning. While gathering initial input, consensus emerged on the following:

1. **The current strategic plan is five years old and completed.**
2. **Every institution needs a strategic plan** to set direction, communicate a common vision for the future, provide a framework for decision makers, and instill confidence among investors and supporters.
3. **A strategic plan is essential to support accreditation.** The College must be able to show a current strategic plan to the various accrediting bodies, on whose opinion we rely to ensure operations.
4. **A strategic plan will help identify, define, and acknowledge uncertainties and risks,** which will help the College prepare appropriate avoidance and mitigation strategies.
5. **A strategic plan will identify, define, and focus on opportunities** which are essential to future growth, viability, and relevance.
6. **A new strategic plan will advance the College** by ensuring modest growth in the number of graduates, enhanced financial viability, and enhanced visibility and reputation for the College, its programs, and its graduates.
7. **A new strategic plan will drive change,** create vitality, and ward off complacency.

With acknowledgment of the need for a new strategic plan, ABAC’s senior leadership initiated the next strategic planning cycle by conducting an environmental scan. Analyzing the results of the scan revealed the following about the near future:

1. **Competition for students will become more fierce** because the number of well-prepared and committed Georgia high school graduates is limited; there is excess higher education capacity in Georgia; and students have many options, including a growing online and for-profit presence in the State. ABAC must remain competitive.
2. **A complex and changing political environment** that is responding to a variety of forces including changing demographics within the state, a struggling economy, and an array of regulations from the federal level, is resulting in a highly manipulated higher education system. ABAC must adapt.
3. **A complex higher education marketplace is evolving** that has complicated price and cost relationships and is increasingly dependent on third party payers and student borrowing. ABAC must position itself to maximize opportunities in the marketplace.
Having reviewed the accomplishments achieved under the previous plan, having considered the rationale for a new strategic plan, and having completed a new environmental scan, ABAC’s leadership team concluded that the College should engage in a strategic planning process with the following goal:

*Develop and implement a strategic plan that will drive change, transforming ABAC to become a unique, highly respected baccalaureate institution with a specialized mission within five years.*
Creating the Task Force

Facilitation: To accomplish the aforementioned goal, ABAC’s senior leadership sought professionals to facilitate the strategic planning process and contracted with Michigan State University’s Center for Simplified Strategic Planning (CSSP) to facilitate the process.

Task force structure: ABAC and CSSP leadership carefully considered how to achieve an appropriate balance among the many competing factors that would be at play with respect to developing a strategic plan for ABAC. Among the important questions were the following:

- Who are the stakeholders?
- How is balance to be achieved between the need for broad input and the demand of time and effort on part of participants?
- How well prepared and informed are potential participants from across the stakeholder spectrum? How much time and effort will be required for participants to be sufficiently versed in the issues in order to meaningfully contribute to the outcome?
- What is the optimum size task force structure that can reasonably be expected to produce a strong implementable plan within an acceptable time?

The all-inclusive set of stakeholders is very large. While it was desirable to include all stakeholder groups in the process, doing so was very difficult.

Ultimately a decision was made to include stakeholders who were:

1. Well versed on a broad range of issues and who could make informed decisions on critical issues, and
2. In a position to successfully implement the plan.
The strategic planning process involved several steps, starting with formation of the Core Team of the Strategic Planning Task Force which consisted of the President, the Vice Presidents, the Deans of each of the six schools, and representatives from each school. Members were:

Dr. Tim Marshall, Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Dr. Ray Barber, Dean of the School of Science and Mathematics

Ms. Susan Driscoll, Dean of the Stafford School of Business

Mr. Mark Driscoll, Dean of the Stafford School of Business

Ms. Wanda Golden, Dean of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences

Dr. Bobbie Robinson, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts

Dr. Darby Sewell, Dean of the School of Human Sciences

Ms. Bernice Hughes, Dean of Students

Dr. William Moore, Professor, School of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Ms. Donna Campbell, Associate Professor, School of Human Sciences

Mr. Keith Perry, Associate Professor, School of Liberal Arts

Mr. Abul Sheikh, Professor, Stafford School of Business

Mr. Troy Spicer, Associate Professor, School of Nursing and Health Sciences

Ms. Amanda Urquhart, Assistant Professor, School of Science and Mathematics

Mr. John Clemens, Vice President for Planning and Operations

Dr. Niles Reddick, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Mr. Paul Willis, Vice President for External Affairs and Chief of Staff

Dr. David Bridges, President
The Winner’s Profile

The Core Team was charged with developing and implementing a strategic plan that would drive change and transform ABAC into a unique, highly respected baccalaureate institution with a specialized mission within five years.

Equipped with the results from the environmental scan, the Core Team met with the facilitator during late September of 2012 and developed guiding principles, a few concepts, and a framework to solicit input from a larger group of stakeholders. The Core Team concluded that being a unique, highly respected institution with a specialized mission would mean that ABAC was a “winner”. Therefore, initially the Core Team focused on developing a “winner’s profile”. They speculated that various stakeholders would identify ABAC as a winner if it had the following attributes:

For students – ABAC offers unique programs, a great college experience, and good value.

For faculty – ABAC recruits and retains quality faculty, promotes and supports scholarship, and maintains a highly motivated and engaged faculty.

For business partners and the community – ABAC is financially solvent, efficient, effective, and competitive for high quality students, faculty, and staff.

For political decision makers – ABAC contributes to the State’s economy, garners broad-based political support, and is a good steward of public resources.

For the private sector – ABAC demonstrates a strong commitment to students and is a good steward of private resources.

Strategic Competence

Furthermore, the Core Team concluded that being an institution of excellence and achieving a unique identity would depend on identifying, focusing on, and investing resources in strategic competencies. Strategic competency was deemed to arise from:

1. Attributes that have significant value, i.e. strongly connected to mission and for which significant demand exists in the marketplace and society.
2. Attributes that provide differentiation, i.e. difficult if not impossible to copy by competitors.

Strategic Focus

The Core Team sought input from its peers across the College and concluded that the College’s primary strategic focus should be to prepare graduates who provide value and contribute positively to the communities in which they live and work and to prepare graduates to be life-long learners.
**Strategic Stakeholders and Strategies**

The Core Team identified primary strategies aimed at each of nine (9) strategic stakeholders.

1. Students – improve the quality and commitment to education of new students.
2. Employers and next level educational institutions – cultivate relationships.
4. Board of Regents and USG Staff – enhance and improve relationships.
5. Faculty and staff – engage.
6. Donors and friends – cultivate relationships.
7. Alumni – expand influence by strengthening relations with some and reconnecting with others.

**Initial Strategic Objectives**

In working with their peers across the College, the Core Team developed preliminary action plans for seven (7) strategic objectives.

1. Vision - develop a vision for the College, obtain commitments from stakeholders, develop stakeholder capability, and replace those who are not willing to commit to realizing the vision.
2. Brand redefinition - develop a comprehensive marketing plan using the “Winner’s Profile”.
3. IT masterplan - develop a comprehensive IT master plan.
4. Engagement - develop integrated engagement plans for students, faculty, staff, parents, supporters, and community.
5. Relationships - develop action plans for departments to cultivate appropriate relationships with prospective employers and next-level institutions.
6. Employee recognition - find a way to reward those who engage, i.e."walk the walk".
7. Philanthropy - coordinate approaches to friends and donors to maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

**Refinement and Preliminary Action Plan**

The Core Team was divided into smaller groups and tasked with refining the objectives and developing preliminary action plans. This step was the final opportunity to solicit input from a broader group of participants. Once this final input step was complete, the Core Team, by consolidation and refinement, narrowed the seven objectives to the final 5 Strategic Initiatives that were approved by the Cabinet.
College-level actions

1. **Strategic Initiative 1**—ABAC will create, implement, and promote programs that attract students from the State of Georgia, the region, the nation, and around the world. At ABAC, students will be offered the opportunity for a life-changing educational experience.

   1.1. Program Enhancement
   1.1.1. ABAC will develop and conduct a comprehensive program and curriculum review.
   1.1.2. All current programs will be reviewed on a regular basis to assess viability, production, curriculum, and alignment with mission.
   1.1.3. New program proposals will be evaluated based on alignment with mission, student and market demand, and required resources.
   1.1.4. ABAC will develop a rubric to address “essential skills,” which can be addressed in Area B, or other areas of the Core Curriculum. Possibilities include:
      1.1.4.1. A course (or curriculum overlay) in analytics or logic.
      1.1.4.2. A course, “Perspectives on the Workplace: Preparation for Internships and Life”.
   1.1.5. ABAC will develop College-wide internship guidelines.

   1.2. Enrollment
   1.2.1. Develop and implement an enrollment and recruitment plan to increase enrollment at a 3%-5% annual rate of growth.
   1.2.2. Implement a closed-loop recruitment model.
      1.2.2.1. Focus on end goals, i.e. careers, graduate school, etc. rather than talking with prospective students about college-entry, i.e. major.
      1.2.2.2. Show students how ABAC can prepare them for their goals by “closing the loop”, i.e. map the progression from enrollment, to programs of study, to internships, to field experience, to graduation and credentialing, preparing them for a career or further study.
      1.2.2.3. Convey expectation that graduates will truly “close the loop” by recruiting other students to follow in their footsteps at ABAC.
   1.2.3. Conduct research to better understand:
      1.2.3.1. Targeted recruitment efforts.
      1.2.3.2. ABAC’s “opportunity” markets for students.
      1.2.3.3. Ways to increase conversion rates from applicant to accepted to matriculated.
      1.2.3.4. Student decision making processes regarding college application and enrollment.

   1.3. Implement a comprehensive marketing plan to promote the College’s signature programs, its value, and the opportunities it provides.
2. **Strategic Initiative 2** – Commit the College to ensuring that students graduate on time with minimum debt and are prepared for life and work.

2.1. The College will ensure timely graduation by providing effective advising.

2.1.1. Intrusive, redundant advising is expected. The process cannot depend on the industriousness of student follow-through alone.

2.1.2. Advising will focus on timely completion of degree requirements and will require documented, semester-by-semester student course plan.

2.1.3. Advisors will help students select a major or pathway that aligns with their educational goals and career interests.

2.1.4. The College will ensure effective advisement through training, implementation of technology, and accountability measures.

2.1.5. Advisors will educate students about the consequences of frequent changes of major.

3. **Strategic Initiative 3** - ABAC will engage faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, supporters, business partners, and the community in mentoring students and providing real-world experience through internships, cooperative education, and study abroad.

3.1. ABAC will create/foster a culture that supports faculty engagement.

3.1.1. Provide opportunities and incentives for faculty to engage with students in and out of the classroom.

3.1.2. Include “engagement” in faculty evaluation rubric.

3.1.3. Celebrate and reward faculty who excel in developing interdisciplinary collaborations, internship opportunities, undergraduate research, and academic enrichment (study abroad, institutional relationships, conferences, etc).

3.2. Through engagement of students, faculty, and the community, ABAC will expand the use of internships, cooperative study programs, and undergraduate research as a means to enhance the educational experience and to support economic development.

3.2.1. Develop college-level guidelines, or minimum standards, for use of internships, cooperative study, and undergraduate research (See 1.1.5).

3.2.2. Review and revise area B of the core, if necessary, to support experiential learning through internships, cooperative education, and undergraduate research.

3.2.3. Where appropriate, and required, the College will make available private resources to support internships and undergraduate research.

3.3. ABAC will use its diverse academic and business resources, talents, and expertise to the benefit of all ABAC students by providing campus “work and learn” opportunities. ABAC’s unique and diverse campus environment will give students both traditional and non-traditional exposure to a variety of career disciplines and skill sets.

3.3.1. The College will evaluate and revise the way it allocates lump sum labor, Federal Work Study, and private resources in a manner that will provide incentive for budget managers to employ ABAC students.
3.3.2. The College will provide a real or virtual clearinghouse to provide managers (internal employers) and students with information about on-campus employment opportunities.

3.3.3. The College will develop a simple set of learning outcomes and expectations for students and on-campus employers to insure that learning occurs simultaneously with work.

3.4. ABAC will aggressively engage with industry partners; national, state, and local community leaders; other academic institutions; and ABAC alumni, to develop and maintain reciprocal relationships that are mutually beneficial to ABAC and its partners and to economic development.

4. **Strategic Initiative 4** – Infuse technology into all aspects of the College’s academic and operational programs. Faculty, staff, students, and guests will be provided access to appropriate technology to support their needs.

4.1. Implement a student technology requirement.
4.2. Deploy infrastructure to support a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) environment.
4.3. Pursue grant support and philanthropic gifts to support technology.
4.4. Include technology in the curriculum.
4.5. Develop a college-wide data center that will acquire, transform, and warehouse data in a robust, quality-controlled and secure environment.
4.6. Use technology to create and operate a continuous process improvement program.

5. **Strategic Initiative 5** - Maintain affordability for higher education by increasing and diversifying non-state revenues, which will leverage greater public support for the College.

5.1. Decrease dependence on state appropriations and tuition.
5.1.1. Creatively pursue new sources of revenue (grants, private funding, and strategic partnerships).
5.1.2. Develop a comprehensive fundraising plan.
5.1.3. Engage alumni, friends, and community to assist in raising money.
5.2. Create, encourage, and foster a culture of philanthropy.
5.2.1. Develop an annual internal campaign that focuses primarily on participation.
5.2.2. Ensure accountability among school leadership (Deans) by including philanthropic effort as an element in Deans’ performance evaluation.
5.2.3. Develop an educational program for internal and external audiences that explains the need for private funds and includes “impact” stories from donors and recipients.
5.3. Encourage grantsmanship among leadership and faculty.
5.3.1. Provide faculty incentive by creating policy to allow for 2 months of summer pay at an equal, or higher, monthly rate for 10-month faculty to be funded from grants.
5.3.2. Include grantsmanship as an element in Deans’ performance evaluation.
5.3.3. Create a culture of grantsmanship as part of faculty scholarship, not additional effort to be undertaken as a result of release time.
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