

Texas Liberal Arts: Prepare for Change

A Strategic Plan to Increase Impact



OCTOBER 2023

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Introduction

The college of Liberal Arts (COLA) is UT Austin's intellectual hub for cutting-edge scholarship and teaching in the humanities, social sciences, area studies, and languages. We study the elements that make us human, the challenges and lessons of human frailty, and the possibilities for human progress. Our scholars ask how, as humans, we can contribute to social progress, learn from past struggles, and enable people across the state, the nation, and the globe to better understand each other and flourish.

With this human focus at our core, we believe that recruiting and supporting the world's best faculty, staff, and students and working purposefully to maintain and strengthen a culture of growth for all is fundamental to our mission. The complexity of the human condition we study, and our corresponding breadth, means that we pursue and promote disciplinary-based and interdisciplinary endeavors within the college and connect with UT partners across campus in a multitude of ways. With more than 40% of COLA's semester credit hours benefitting students in other colleges, we also provide essential support for learning and scholarship across the Forty Acres.

In departments like classics, history, anthropology, and religious studies, our students gain a fundamental understanding of past civilizations. They learn to analyze complex texts, interpret material and documentary evidence, and embrace the perspectives of other places and times. In psychology, economics, and sociology, students develop theoretical and quantitative skills for understanding the structures, decisions, and institutions that shape and constrain our society and our behaviors. In our area studies and language departments and programs, students explore the culture, literature, politics, and languages of every region of the globe, opening doors for them to lead lives of global citizenship. Our popular interdisciplinary majors and programs bring together these various elements from across the humanities and social sciences to prepare students to face the world's most pressing challenges, and to do so while developing their capacities for leadership and teamwork.

The foundation to this teaching is the world-class expertise and scholarship of our faculty, who are constantly innovating their teaching approaches while they push forward the boundaries of knowledge in their disciplines. Our strategic plan, developed in collaboration with university and college stakeholders, seeks to strengthen, integrate, and deepen both parts of this balance between creating knowledge and directly serving students. By cultivating a dynamic research and teaching home for our scholars and providing a world-class education for our students, we empower our graduates and scholars to go forth and change the world.

In COLA, we study the very elements that make us human, the challenges and lessons of human frailty, and the possibilities for human progress.

Ann Huff Stevens, Dean, College of Liberal Arts



Overview of Strategic Goals and Related Initiatives

Four overarching goals will guide our efforts to increase our impact on the lives of UT students, the state, and beyond over the next 10 years.

GOAL: OFFER OUTSTANDING EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Provide top flight student experiences through curriculum, experiences, and support.

Initiatives and areas of investment

- Map and expand diverse opportunities for COLA undergraduates to participate in faculty-led and independent research, experiential learning, and community engagement opportunities.
- Expand and update COLA's formal student mentoring programming, including the Foundation Scholars Program.
- Make UT Austin a national leader in the production of outstanding and diverse Ph.D. recipients who will become thought leaders in the humanities, social sciences, and area studies in and beyond academia.
- Conduct systematic review and updates of the curriculum with the dual goals of reflecting frontiers of knowledge and responding to student and societal needs and interests. Include opportunities to acquire data and coding literacy, digital skills, global perspectives, interdisciplinary problem solving skills, and experiential learning.
- Continue to further develop, implement, and celebrate a uniquely liberal arts approach to career preparation and coaching for COLA students.

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



Education



Experiences

GOAL: CONNECT TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE STATE

Strengthen and celebrate connections between scholarship and teaching in the college of Liberal Arts, the Austin community, and the state.

Initiatives and areas of investment

- Highlight and support ongoing community-based experiential and service learning in Plan II Honors, Jewish Studies, Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, Sustainability Studies, Urban Studies, and beyond.
- Develop the Texas Community Research Incubator to support and highlight faculty research that involves the insights and participation of community members to solve community-level challenges.
- Strengthen and expand COLA's Urban Studies major to reflect the resources and learning opportunities in the dynamic city of Austin.
- Make better use of faculty expertise within groups like the Texas
 Behavioral Science and Policy Institute to address challenges within
 the Forty Acres.

GOAL: ATTRACT, RETAIN, AND INVEST IN PEOPLE

Attract and retain the best students, faculty, and staff by building a community of support, growth, and inclusion for all.



Initiatives and areas of investment

- Continue and expand broad leadership training opportunities for COLA staff, including the Staff Leadership Academy.
- Develop and provide structured training in leadership and management for academic leaders.
- Continue the implementation and expansion of a formal faculty mentoring program.
- Develop clear expectations, roles, and advancement paths for professional-track faculty.
- Provide continual, routine access to training in key elements of finance,
 HR, and other critical areas.
- Systematically consider and articulate growth opportunities for all major job titles (e.g. for advisors and professional-track faculty).

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



Experiences



Place



Education

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



People

GOAL: ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR AND VISIBILITY OF FACULTY RESEARCH ON CRITICAL ISSUES

Provide top-flight research infrastructure and support for cutting-edge scholarship across the college.

Initiatives and areas of investment

- Establish a university-wide institute, the Institute for Social and Behavioral Research, as a central hub for research development, administration, and collaboration within the social sciences.
- Continue to invest in and expand the Humanities Institute to be the central hub for research development, administration, and collaboration in the humanities.
- Develop and establish a college-wide entity that supports scholarship and pedagogy in area studies and languages.
- Focus and leverage research fellow funding under existing endowments and other sources to support seed funding and interdisciplinary faculty in established and emerging high-impact research areas.

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



Research



People

The college of Liberal Arts' strategic plan, *Prepare for Change*, was developed in coordination and alignment with UT Austin's new strategic plan *Change Starts Here*.

The Five Pillars of UT Austin's Change Starts Here Plan

PEOPLE	PLACE	EXPERIENCES	EDUCATION	RESEARCH
"We will serve more students and aggressively pursue outstanding, high-potential students, faculty, and staff."	"We will embrace and enrich the spirit of Austin and Texas."	"We will deliver exceptional, transformative experiences for students, staff, faculty, and alumni."	"We will transform education through new degrees, interdisciplinary options, innovation in pedagogy, and linkage to our research."	"We will lead the world in research at scale in Energy and Environment, Technology and Society, and Health and Wellbeing."

The Four Goals of COLA's *Prepare For Change* Plan

ATTRACT, RETAIN, AND INVEST IN **PEOPLE**

CONNECT TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE STATE (PLACE)

OFFER OUTSTANDING **EDUCATION** AND STUDENT **EXPERIENCES**

ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR AND VISIBILITY OF FACULTY **RESEARCH** ON CRITICAL ISSUES



Strategic Planning Process

Beginning in fall 2021, against the backdrop of the *Change Starts Here* plan, COLA leadership launched a collaborative, participatory process through which the college examined, strategized, and prioritized how best to move the college closer to its ideal formation as an essential, engaged, and diverse contributor to the university, state, and world.

This process began with a request to department chairs, academic program directors, and research center directors to provide examples of key initiatives in their departments and units that aligned with the university's strategic pillars. Over the course of the spring 2022 semester, the college convened a series of steering committee meetings to which 55 faculty, staff, and student representatives from departments and units across the college were invited to participate. The steering committee launched its work in early March 2022 with a committee-wide conversation on the key elements of COLA's current college identity and our aspirations for that identity over the next 10 years.

In late March 2022, the steering committee began subcommittee work to discuss COLA's aspirations in the areas of research, the student experience, people, education, and graduate studies. Each subcommittee provided a summary report to the dean, who then reviewed the aspirations and suggested strategies over the course of summer 2022. In fall 2022, building off the college-wide collaborative work during the 2021–2022 academic year, the COLA leadership team collaborated on a concrete plan with prioritized initiatives, aligning them with the pillars of the university strategic plan, presented throughout this document.

The priorities and initiatives described below are important areas for investment and development and represent a fraction of the multitude of activities that will contribute to our success and support our broad goals over the coming decade. Initiatives listed include those that are ongoing, those with plans to expand, and those that are aspirational and still in planning stages.

Fall 2021

Strategic planning process launches

March 2022

Steering committee launches with community-wide conversation

Spring and Summer 2022

Subcommittees meet and produce recommendations

Fall 2022

COLA leadership team produces draft plan

Spring and Summer 2023

Plan is reviewed, revised, and finalized

Fall 2023

Plan is disseminated

GOAL: Offer Outstanding Education and Student Experiences

Provide top flight student experiences through curriculum, experiences, and support.

Priorities

- 1.1. Create and expand programs to actively involve undergraduates in collaborative and independent research in order to launch them into a broad array of career pathways.
- 1.2. Develop and launch a data science initiative that provides
 opportunities for skill-building in data sciences and digital skills that tie
 directly into existing scholarship and learning in COLA.
- 1.3. Provide support for the whole student, including mentoring and mental health support, in partnership with university investments in these areas.
- 1.4. Provide robust career support to COLA students at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Our goal is to offer a foundational liberal arts education that teaches students to learn, grapple with complexity, communicate, think critically, and engage with fundamental scholarly works of literature, scholarship, and analysis produced across a variety of eras and cultures. To this foundation, we add modern approaches to digital and data literacy as a natural extension of our research-intensive environment and co-curricular career preparation and support.

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



Education



Experiences



People



Research

PRIORITY 1.1.

Create and expand programs to actively involve undergraduates in collaborative and independent research in order to launch them into a broad array of career pathways.

Initiative 1.1.a. Undergraduate Engagement Initiative

COLA's Office of Student Services, Office of Research and Graduate Studies, and Public Affairs team will partner to improve the visibility and accessibility of undergraduate research, community service, and experiential learning. This partnership will produce and update information architecture that will serve as a central information point in the college for students to learn about and apply to such activities.

This will be paired with the expansion of faculty-based research opportunities for students. The college will better support and highlight such efforts, with additional financial support to expand student involvement.

Initiative 1.1.b. Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP)

In fall 2022, the college revised and expanded its URAP program, using a cohort model to scale up participation. The fall component, designed as an entry-level research immersion, assigns students to a faculty-led research team within COLA. Students also take a shared course that exposes them to an array of research perspectives and methods. In the spring, students follow up on the research experience through optional participation in an independent project with a faculty advisor. The goal is to give students an entrée into research, scaffold their development as researchers, and better facilitate matching between faculty projects and students. Many existing programs, including Innovations for Peace and Development, the Global Disinformation Lab, and the Population Research Center, are leaders in undergraduate research involvement and will continue to be important partners in this effort.

"Our goal is to preserve the robust curricular offerings in traditional liberal arts disciplines, but also to recognize the modern technological sophistication of both faculty and students now working and studying in these disciplines."

Ann Huff Stevens

Dean of the college of Liberal Arts

PRIORITY 1.2.

Develop and launch a data science initiative that provides opportunities for skill-building in data sciences and digital skills that tie directly into existing scholarship and learning in COLA.



Initiative 1.2.a. Curricular foundations for students

COLA will organize a set of courses to serve as "programming and data skills primers" for liberal arts students. These will be workshops or one-credit courses that teach students foundational programming skills and software needed to engage in substantive/applied coursework. These primers will feed into certification programs (e.g., minor, certificates, badges, portfolios) that signal data science skills to employers and prepare students for additional data science or coding-related coursework or projects within their COLA majors.

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Initiative 1.2.b. Data and digital skills within majors

The introductory coding exposure described above will provide an entry point into data science and digital tracks currently being developed throughout COLA. Careers and graduate study in digital humanities, gaming, and archival and information processing will increasingly require students to learn digital methods and will require faculty and departments to incorporate these skills into courses, majors, and tracks. COLA will provide support for faculty to review their offerings and develop new opportunities to build this segment of our curriculum.



A still from Ghosts Over the Water, an educational game produced by JapanLab undergraduates in collaboration with undergraduates from Yale University. The game incorporates over 130,000 words of meticulously researched text and lasts for around 10 hours.

HIGHLIGHT: JAPANLAB

A collaboration between the Department of History and the Department of Asian Studies, JapanLab draws together faculty, students, recent graduates, and leading professionals in the games industry to reimagine Japanese Studies at The University of Texas at Austin and in the process to establish a template that can be replicated at other institutions across the country.

The project consists of three key components:

- JapanLab: Teams of students work together in a collaborative space to produce high-quality digital content, including educational video games. They generate a steady pipeline of digital content in Japanese history, literature, and language that can be used by teachers across the world.
- Digital Skills Courses: Introduced across the curriculum, these classes combine instruction in digital technologies and artificial languages (HTML, R, Python) with a critical digital humanities perspective and a focus on Japanese-language specific challenges.
- Digital Humanities Courses: These courses combine digital dexterities with wide-ranging academic content in Japanese history, literature, film, and politics. They incorporate a suite of scaffolded assignments that serve to advance critical skills and provide a pathway into JapanLab.

JapanLab works across multiple levels both inside the university and beyond. For undergraduate students, the project aims to create a suite of new courses and experiences that integrate traditional academic content with digital skills. For graduate students, JapanLab provides digital humanities training across a range of areas. For educators outside the university, the project produces fully functional educational video games built around key topics in Japanese history, language, and literature.

Initiative 1.2.c. Bachelor of Science in Behavioral and Social Data Science

The college is developing a new B.S. degree within the psychology department that will offer training at the intersection of data analytics, human behavior, and social science. The degree is being conceived as a model to allow existing liberal arts disciplines to add tracks that further develop data and digital skills specific to and used within those disciplines. We anticipate the psychology track to be available for students entering with the 2024–26 catalogue, with other fields joining after that. Students who successfully complete these programs will pair fundamental theoretical and analytical training in liberal arts disciplines with a modern technical toolkit.

Initiative 1.2.d. Coding support for students

To meet growing coding support needs for students in the liberal arts and beyond, we envision a new COLA Coding Support Center. It will be modeled on the University Writing Center, with drop-in services for students needing help with coding or programming for any social, behavioral, or humanist project drawing on data sciences. It will be staffed largely by graduate research assistants. The Humanities Institute and the Population Research Center will jointly contribute to its formation and development.



Initiative 1.2.e. Social and behavioral science data hub

Housed within the Population Research Center, this hub will support faculty in the application of statistical and survey methodology in a manner consistent with best practices for reproducible science, focusing on research development for grant proposals and advising on and assisting with post-award data collection and analyses. Support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, either through workshops or individual mentoring, will also be a part of the mission.

"It's really a reenvisioning of what an education in psychology can be and how we assess it."

David Schnyer
Professor and Chair of the
Department of Psychology

PRIORITY 1.3.

Provide support for the whole student, including mentoring and mental health support, in partnership with university investments.

Initiative 1.3.a. Expanded academic support and mentoring for FSP students

Students in the one-year Foundation Scholars Program (FSP) have overwhelmingly asked for additional support services and community beyond their first year. Expansion of the academic transitional program will begin with an elective second year of support in fall 2024. The long-term goal is to make FSP a full-support, freshman-year-to-graduation, high-touch, scholarly enrichment and success program for the large and growing population of the college's first generation students. We will expand structural support for scholarly excellence and achievement, including the addition of a writing coach, civic engagement and leadership opportunities, and greater integration with the college's research cohorts and experiential learning opportunities.

Initiative 1.3.b. Wellness and support center for COLA students

In 2019, the Humanitas initiative was developed to offer wellness-centered programming to COLA students. The high level of student response led to the creation of a new student wellness coordinator staff position. This person is responsible for creating wellness-centered events and programming and serving as liaison to the multitude of wellness resources across campus. In step with other colleges, we now have plans to refit a space in Jester Dormitory for use as a multi-purpose wellness center. Future needs will include long-term funding for mental health and student support staff positions.

Initiative 1.3.c. Improved community spaces for COLA students

The offices of Public Affairs, Student Affairs, and Facilities are collaborating on a number of space and interior design projects intended to foster a greater sense of COLA community and to more effectively highlight central COLA spaces. Early projects include a reimagining of the use and deployment of furniture in the Dies Center, a pilot of a "little free library" system in COLA buildings and the "Liberal Arts Futures" poster series in the main first floor hallways of RLP.

Initiative 1.3.d. Create mentoring infrastructure and community for COLA graduate students

COLA will build on the extant mentoring/thematic graduate fellowship program, which is overseen by the COLA fellowship committee, by organizing a series of professional socialization, research, and teaching workshops for each cohort of fellows and their mentors across the year, working to create more of a community among fellows and to more strongly connect them to COLA. We will also build a network of COLA graduate program alumni who are willing to connect and serve as mentors for current doctoral students. Finally, we aim to invest in better mentoring for mentors with workshops to improve and refresh faculty practices around mentoring graduate students.

PRIORITY 1.4.

Provide robust career support to COLA students at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Initiative 1.4.a. Early career engagement outreach for first- and second-year students

To better integrate career planning and preparation into the overall experience of a College of Liberal Arts education, we will increase meaningful touchpoints between our COLA Career Advisors and new undergraduate students at orientation and in their first few semesters, aimed at creating a culture of career preparation from the start of students' academic career. We will also increase our focus on demystifying the skills needed for networking; applying for internships and jobs; and marketing one's skills, interests, and area of study.

Initiative 1.4.b. Increasing and elevating employer relationships

Students in college should begin making connections, while in school, to the kinds of employers for whom they hope to eventually work. To that end, we will continue to enhance partnerships with existing and new employers to highlight the diverse range of career opportunities for undergraduate students. We will increase employer-sponsored engagement through hosted education and networking events for students to learn about different organizations, explore job opportunities, and receive career readiness training. And we will continue to collaborate with the development team to identify and cultivate key employer relationships.

Initiative 1.4.c. Translating majors into careers and opportunities

There are simple and powerful ways for liberal arts students to describe their education in a way that compels potential employers. Students, however, don't always have these strategies at hand. To assist them, we will create practical, clear, and empowering communication guides for students to

"Our goal is to help students, as early as possible in their time here on campus, think about and plan for the career journey that best aligns with their passions, values, ambitions, and intellectual interests."

Patty Prado
Executive Director
of Career Initiatives

GOAL: OFFER OUTSTANDING EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES

confidently speak about the value of their major and liberal arts experiences. We will also embed training in using career readiness language into academic and student support programming, and will promote career events and opportunities for students to practice sharing their stories and effectively translating their fit for professional opportunities.

Initiative 1.4.d. Career exploration workshops for early graduate students

In recognition of the uncertainties and anxieties of the academic job market, we will provide early and ongoing support for graduate students in thinking through and planning their future career paths in both academic and non-academic domains. This will include COLA-sponsored workshops and events with COLA alumni, requiring regular reporting of job placements for all graduating doctoral students, and partnering with departments to facilitate in-depth planning activities.

Initiative 1.4.e. Expanding skills in graduate study

In addition to supporting our graduate students in thinking about their futures, we need to help them acquire the skills that will provide them entry to future careers. To that end, we will expand our efforts to assist graduate students in accessing campus resources to better prepare for a broad range of career opportunities. We will appoint a task force from across the college to identify new badges, certificates, and portfolios that signal specific skill sets to academic and non-academic employers. And we will continue to partner with Career Services and Texas Career Engagement to offer a series of practical training workshops for graduate students pursuing academic and non-academic career opportunities.

GOAL: Connect to the Community and State

Strengthen and encourage connections between faculty scholarship, student experiences, the greater Austin community, and the state.

Priorities:

- **2.1** Support participatory research and student learning projects that connect COLA faculty and students with Austin and Texas communities.
- 2.2. Revise and expand academic curricula to create more robust programs through which students can learn about and impact the larger community.

COLA faculty and students frequently engage in research, service learning, and experiential learning within Austin and the state. We plan to invest in and consolidate these efforts, eventually forming the Texas Community Research Incubator. This would provide a structure for ongoing and new initiatives that combine the expertise of UT faculty and students with community partners in Austin and in Texas.

PRIORITY 2.1.

Support participatory research and student learning projects that connect COLA faculty and students with Austin and Texas communities.

Initiative 2.1.a. Support community-based experiential and service learning efforts

The college already has a rich foundation of programs and units that work directly with the community. We will increase support and the promotion of ongoing community-based experiential and service learning efforts in Plan II Honors, Jewish Studies, Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, Sustainability Studies, Urban Studies, and elsewhere in COLA.

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



Place



Experiences



Education

Initiative 2.1.b. Develop the Texas Community Research Incubator

Building on the foundation already established by individual faculty who are doing community-involved research, the college will develop the Texas Community Research Incubator. This centralized hub will support faculty research that involves the insights and participation of community members and works to solve community level challenges.

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Initiative 2.1.c. UT Research for UT

Among the communities that can benefit from the expertise of our faculty is the Forty Acres itself. We will leverage our existing faculty expertise in areas including mental health, disability studies, child and adolescent development, and financial and economic literacy to provide support, education, increased accessibility, and other services to students, staff, and faculty across the university.

PRIORITY 2.2.

Revise and expand academic curricula to create more robust programs through which students can learn about and impact the larger community.

Initiative 2.2.a. Elevate Urban Studies major

As Austin has grown into a major urban center for technology, arts, and more, our curricular offerings should offer opportunities to make use of our local environment. As part of a broader effort to increase the visibility and impact of the Urban Studies major, the major was recently moved from the Department of Geography and the Environment to the Department of American Studies. We will continue to focus more resources and attention on elevating Urban Studies both within the college, as an opportunity for our undergraduates, and externally by facilitating connections to Austin and other communities in Texas. We will also facilitate connections with existing and future domestic study programs in New York, Los Angeles, and potentially other American cities.

"There's a need for thinking about Uvalde as potentially being the first restorative city in Texas. Uvalde has a long history of neglect by the state and federal government. There's a conversation to be had about not just meeting immediate needs, but thinking about what restorative transformation means for a community that is still reeling from the aftermath of this massacre."

Monica Muñoz Martinez Associate Professor of History and co-founder of the Uvalde Project



Zaz Saclarides (left) and Sammy Neville (right), photo courtesy of TPEI

HIGHLIGHT: TEXAS PRISON EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Texas Prison Education Initiative, or TPEI, offers college-credit courses and college prep classes to incarcerated people at two facilities in the greater Austin area. The courses, which span subjects from physics to philosophy, are taught by volunteer instructors and offered at no cost to students. Since it began in 2018, the program has served some 230 students in over 40 classes. But there's still far more demand than the program can meet.

"We have the students complete a placement exam before they sign up for courses, and every semester the prison says, 'Oh, expect about 20 or 30 people to show up,'" says Sarah Brayne, associate professor of sociology and co-founder of TPEI. "This latest time, we had 170 students at the exam. So, there's a very big need."

Working with incarcerated students brings its own, unique challenges — most of TPEI's students don't have access to computers, for example — but it also adds a level of meaning to the program's mission. TPEI isn't just offering college credit; it's also cultivating students' identity as students in an effort to counter the stigmatized identities those students otherwise hold in the criminal legal system.

"One thing for me as a mother that has been really meaningful is working with our students in the women's facility who are mothers," says Brayne. "Of course, you can't be raising your child in your home if you're incarcerated, so they feel that they are failing as mothers. But it's been very meaningful for them to be able to feel pride in the work that they're doing in these classes, in their investment in the future. They say things like, 'Now I can help my kids with their homework,' or 'I was able to send them an essay I wrote.' That's helping them create this destigmatized identity. It's something to be proud of."

Brayne also says there's something particularly special about providing their incarcerated students with a liberal arts education. While many facilities may offer vocational programs, TPEI's focus on the liberal arts sets it apart — and offers students opportunities to better understand themselves and their world.

GOAL: Attract, Retain, and Invest in People

Attract and retain the best students, faculty, and staff by building a community of support, growth, and inclusion for all.

Provide competitive pay, coveted working conditions, and professional development opportunities that build on employees' strengths as leaders and contributors. Provide regular training opportunities and build creative avenues for advancement in employees' current jobs and beyond.

PRIORITY 3.1.

Provide structured opportunities to develop and support staff and faculty leaders and promote professional development.

Initiative 3.1.a. Faculty leadership training

The long-term health of the college depends on not just waiting around for leadership to emerge. It requires instead that we train and support current leadership and also cultivate future leaders. We will sustain and expand support and training for faculty leaders — including chairs, deans, and directors — in order to foster excellence and continuity in all of our programs. We will also develop and expand structured opportunities for potential future leaders to engage in planning for the college and developing new programming, including a series of training workshops and discussion sections to be delivered each fall semester for incoming faculty chairs and directors. Sessions will be led by the dean, associate deans, and key senior staff in the college and will include reviews of critical information on college policies, endowment appointments and usage, finance, HR, student programs, and leadership development.

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



People



HIGHLIGHT: STAFF LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The COLA Staff Leadership Academy was established in 2021 as a way for the college to invest in the personal and professional development of its staff. Led by COLA's chief of staff, its director of human resources, and its executive director of career initiatives, the nine-month program runs each academic year from September through May.

The program has one three-hour live session per month as well as weekly one-hour group sessions, with meetings taking place in-person at various locations on campus or virtually as necessary. The total time commitment per month is approximately 10 hours, consisting of live sessions, practice group meetings, and individual study. All monthly sessions and practice groups are held during work hours and considered work time.

The application process is competitive, with up to 15 staff members selected to enroll in the program each year. All full-time COLA staff members who have worked for the college for a minimum of six months at the time of application are eligible to apply. Applicants do not need to have prior managerial or formal leadership experience, only a desire to learn and a commitment to enhance and grow in their leadership and career.

The final three months of the program are spent developing an individual leadership project that addresses a need or challenge in the participants' work. This phase is designed to put leadership skills into action. The program concludes in May with a finale event where staff members present their leadership projects to their cohort.

The Staff Leadership Academy has been a great opportunity to develop my understanding of the leadership skills that help an organization thrive. The curriculum stresses the value of connecting with colleagues and employees with honesty and openness in order to foster an environment where every individual's contribution to a collaborative project can be heard and appreciated without fear or shame. We have been encouraged to confront work-life challenges with curiosity and grit, using setbacks as opportunities for innovation and growth.

Ben Fest,
Administrative Associate,
Department of Philosophy

Initiative 3.1.b. Staff professional development and leadership training

In order to support staff in their roles, grow their skills, and cultivate their leadership, we will sustain and expand support, professional development, and leadership training for staff through dedicated programs both internal and external to the college.

Initiative 3.1.c. Advisor Career Paths Project

In order to address current student needs while retaining gifted and dedicated advising professionals, we have launched a process to better understand desired career paths for advisors and explore whether some essential positions in the college can be reconfigured to allow for additional responsibilities and ultimately an additional career step for these valued staff members. Early ideas from this process include a mentorship academy led by advisors to train students as peer advisors; longer-term FIG and TRIG (Transfer-Year Interest Group) communities that could actively continue to support the students in their classes throughout their time at UT; and the formalization of the important role that advisors play in college admissions and outreach efforts.

Initiative 3.1.d. Professional-Track Faculty (PTF) Development Initiative

Under the leadership of the Professional Track Faculty Advisory Committee (PFAC), we will develop clear expectations and pathways for promotion and advancement for teaching faculty. The college will develop additional opportunities to engage PTF in the college mission, including curricular review, new course development, peer teaching observation and advice, standardized workload policies and expectations, and student engagement. The goal is both to retain PTF and to support improved compensation and career development for this critical segment of the COLA faculty.

GOAL: Enhance Support for and Visibility of Faculty Research on Critical Issues

Provide top-flight research infrastructure and support for cutting-edge scholarship across the college.

Priorities:

- **4.1.** Consolidate and invest in research support for social science, humanities, and area and language studies scholarship.
- 4.2. Continue efforts to support the independent and collaborative research activities of Ph.D. students.
- **4.3.** Develop and support COLA team scholarship to maximize the impact of research in UT's priority areas and in emerging areas unique to COLA.

Every faculty member in the college should be able to elevate their scholarship, secure external resources or recognition, and establish intellectual leadership in their areas of study. Our focus is on providing support efficiently and flexibly, allowing for interdisciplinary activities, and ensuring staff cross-training and back-up.

PRIORITY 4.1.

Consolidate and invest in research support for social science, humanities, and area and language studies scholarship.

UT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:



People



Research



Place

Initiative 4.1.a. Establish COLA Institute for Social and Behavioral Research

This institute will become the primary site for social science research development and administration in COLA, supporting the research activities of individual faculty and students as well as of organized research units that identify with the social and behavioral sciences. This unit will play a research-venture capital role, providing early support and seed funding to projects expected to garner major support from federal, foundation, and philanthropic funders. The institute will serve as the central institutional administrative home for existing or new research centers, institutes, and initiatives. The institute's core staff will serve all faculty and graduate students conducting social science research independently or through organized research units, partially funded by COLA using indirect cost return funds.

b

Initiative 4.1.b. Invest in and expand the Humanities Institute

In parallel with the new COLA Institute for Social and Behavioral Sciences, the Humanities Institute will continue to grow into the primary site for research development and administration in COLA, supporting the research activities of individual faculty and students as well as organized research units that identify with the general category of humanities scholarship.

Initiative 4.1.c. Develop new entity to support scholarship and pedagogy in area studies and languages

COLA provides a global perspective on the liberal arts through the teaching of languages, history, culture, and politics across a dozen departments and several key centers. We aim to better highlight activities in both teaching and research across these fields by developing an institute for language and area studies teaching and scholarship. This will also provide a framework to consolidate efforts currently undertaken by the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning, the Texas Language Center, and our academic departments. It will also provide ongoing, efficient support for COLA's many Title VI and related centers that are primarily funded with federal grant dollars.

"Research is at the core of the college of Liberal Arts, and our research has huge and diverse impacts. From understanding the pathways to brain health in old age to asking how literature and music informs and affects societal change to telling us how smart use of economic incentives improves lives, our researchers are both analyzing and changing how we live and who we are."

Ann Huff Stevens Dean of the college of Liberal Arts



HIGHLIGHT: BRAZILPOD

It is not a stretch to say that Orlando Kelm, associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese, is one of the most popular teachers of Brazilian Portuguese in the world. This is thanks to Brazilpod, a collection of podcasts, videos, transcripts, and blogs on Brazilian Portuguese that Kelm and his colleagues have been producing over the past two decades.

The site and its materials have now garnered millions of views from around the world, reaching so far and wide that Kelm was once stopped on a bus in Brazil when his voice was recognized by a fellow passenger who was a listener.

Each element of Brazilpod has a specific focus. The podcast Língua da Gente ("language of the people"), for instance, focuses on learning everyday Portuguese from short audio clips of dialogue accompanied by a line-by-line English translation, analysis of the pronunciation, and any vocabulary or cultural context relevant to the clip. Tá Falado is designed with the Spanish speaker in mind, presenting Portuguese conversations that are repeated in Spanish to compare the two languages and bridge the acquisition of one language from proficiency with the other. Slice of Life, a collection of audio lessons that teach English to speakers of Portuguese, was developed in part because Kelm was getting feedback from listeners at various state departments and embassies that they wanted such a resource.

"Year in, year out, his podcasts are the most downloaded of all of the podcasts we produce," says Mike Heidenreich, director of studio operations for Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services (LAITS), which produces the Brazilpod podcasts. "It's amazing to look at the range of countries all over the world."

Kelm and his colleagues see their materials not as replacements for traditional textbooks but as complements to them, with an emphasis on what it's like to actually use Brazilian Portuguese in regular life.

"The difficulty of any language instruction is portraying a real exchange," said Kelm. "It was and is important for us to give students a rich opportunity for analysis to see how real Brazilian Portuguese speakers say this or how they convey that idea. Insights from those lessons have immediate effect in the real world."

Initiative 4.1.d. Provide cutting-edge technical support for faculty in the social sciences, public history, digital humanities, and more.

The college will work closely with Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services (LAITS) to provide the necessary software, web, and data infrastructures to enable faculty with greater technical needs to pursue and advance their scholarship. LAITS provides support including digital audio and video production, websites, networks and servers, academic computer resources, and leading-edge classroom technology.

PRIORITY 4.2.

Continue efforts to support the independent and collaborative research activities of Ph.D. students to highlight their role as a critical element in UT's research impact.

Initiative 4.2.a. Prioritize fundraising for graduate student-initiated research, research travel, and summer funding, with the goal of raising the average graduate stipend in COLA to \$28,000 over the next five years.

The college is committed to providing the funding structure necessary to attract top-notch graduate students. To this end, we are prioritizing fundraising for graduate student-initiated research, research travel, and summer funding, with the goal of raising the average graduate stipend in COLA to \$28,000 over the next five years.

PRIORITY 4.3.

Develop and support COLA team scholarship to maximize the impact of research in UT's priority areas and in emerging areas unique to COLA.

The articulation of three priority research areas in the UT Strategic Plan shined a light on exciting research being conducted by individual faculty across the college, helping to identify key points of development and investment for COLA faculty to offer transformative contributions and leadership to university-wide strategic research efforts. Specifically, key themes of current COLA faculty research within each UT priority area will

serve as the foundation for active team-building and major project launch through centralized COLA support. These investment areas offer such exciting potential because each targets bold ideas; will connect faculty across multiple disciplinary lines, methodological traditions, departments, and centers (including bridging humanities, social sciences, and languages); is positioned to attract external funding and attention; offers concrete opportunities to incorporate student involvement; and can serve the public good of Texas. We also note COLA-specific areas that share these features and provide examples of bold, emerging areas of inquiry.

Initiative 4.3.a. Leverage existing and newly developed funding, grant development and active team-building to accelerate COLA research in UT priority areas.

Examples of active research areas in COLA include:

Energy and the Environment

- What are the critical interactions between climate change and society?
- Can we better model and understand the energy industry, its impact, and the societal responses, in the context of climate change and the Texas economy?
- Can the analysis of common resource pools be expanded and quantified to enhance our understanding of the Texas-based energy industry?

Health and Wellbeing

- How do environmental, physical, and social factors affect the trajectory of brain health over the life-cycle?
- How can we incorporate understanding of disparities in health and wellbeing across national and Texas populations to improve human health and aging?
- Can modern neuroimaging and advances in psychological science contribute to diagnosis and treatment of traumatic brain injuries, agingrelated dementia, and more?
- What are the consequences of changing public policies on reproductive and sexual health?

Technology and Society

- How will humans react to the introduction of robots, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality, and how do these reactions inform and alter the path of emerging technology?
- How can technology be used to develop analytical approaches to identify disinformation?
- How do both humans and technology itself contribute to or prevent the spread of disinformation?
- When do emerging technologies become systems of surveillance?

Initiative 4.3.b. We will use COLA research support structures to identify, launch and support emerging research areas originated by COLA faculty.

Current examples include:

Initiative for Law. Societies, and Justice

This COLA faculty-led group has been a focal point for building strength and generation external grant around the study of incarceration, prison education, judicial discretion, policing, civil rights and more.

Initiative for Digital Humanities

This recently established initiative provides resources and coordination for a number of digital humanities projects in areas including gaming and virtual reality, artificial intelligence, creation, collection and use of digital archives for research, and more.

Emerging work on population change, wellbeing, and growth

This is another emerging area of strength that leverages the expertise of our faculty, including borderlands scholars, human migration experts across a number of departments, and researchers with the newly established Population Wellbeing Institute and the Population Research Center.

We conclude this plan with some examples of preliminary and emerging research areas. The overarching goal is to facilitate faculty contributions in these, and more, critical areas of inquiry, and more broadly to pro-actively support COLA faculty as they establish and build their intellectual leadership on a wide range of topics to the benefit of the college, the university, Texas, and the world.



Russian state media claimed a massive increase in Ukrainians fleeing into Russia after the onset of war, but GDIL analyses, relying on satellite imagery from the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), suggested that civilian and commercial traffic largely decreased at the border.

HIGHLIGHT: THE GLOBAL DISINFORMATION LAB

The Global Disinformation Lab (GDIL) was established in 2020 at The University of Texas at Austin to encourage collaborative interdisciplinary academic research on the global circulation of a broad spectrum of information, misinformation, and disinformation via digital media.

Its faculty and student affiliates are committed to promoting a deeper understanding of national and regional contexts in which such information is generated as well as the ways in which it is harvested, circulated, and weaponized. The hope is that such research will generate policy recommendations and possible solutions to the looming problems of what many have called the "post-truth" world.

GDIL projects currently include:

- The Global Disinformation Policy Database (GDPD): A comprehensive resource of global laws and policies related to disinformation and misinformation that can be utilized by academic researchers, policymakers, journalists, and civil society organizations.
- Tearline: A collaboration with the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) to produce intelligence reports using the U.S. government's <u>Maxar's G-EGD</u> platform to view the latest high-resolution satellite imagery.
- Bearclaws: An effort to document and analyze Russia's targeted killing program.
- Bellwether: Dedicated to identifying areas, both geographically and demographically, likely to be susceptible to targeted election-focused disinformation campaigns within the next 12–24 months.
- Barn Owl: Investigating if disinformation sites can be correctly identified from a group of misinformation and neutral sites through a combination of search engine optimization (SEO) signals.

Every one of the current GDIL projects involves undergraduate and graduate student researchers, and many are partnerships with other research groups on and off campus.

Toward the Future

This strategic plan, *Texas Liberal Arts: Prepare for Change*, is many things. It is an assessment of where we are and where we'd like to go. It is a statement of our values. It is a commitment to prioritizing some goals over others. It is the product of the input of a broad cross section of stakeholders in the college. And it is a work in progress, and one that's destined to be revised as we confront the challenges and opportunities that await us.

When we say that the college of Liberal Arts is a place to "prepare for change," we mean that on many levels. We want our students to be ready to change themselves through their educational and experiential endeavors in the college. We want our faculty to follow the exciting paths that their training, expertise, and scholarly creativity take them down. And we want to send students and knowledge out into the world, prepared to change the world.

This also means that this strategic plan itself must be a living document, open to revision and reprioritization in light of what comes next. We will return to it at regular intervals and candidly take stock of whether we've achieved the goals we set for ourselves and whether the priorities that made sense in the fall of 2023 still make sense in the semesters and years to follow.

Please join us in this endeavor to build on the already extraordinary depth and breadth of the college of Liberal Arts. Generations of students and faculty have come here to learn, teach, lead, and grow. We embark on this plan in order to sustain and strengthen the college so that generations yet to come will have the same opportunity. We look forward to working with you to achieve that.