Summary of Great Commitment Re-articulation Work (2016)

by The Strategic Planning Council

In 1969 the Great Commitments were formally adopted by the Berea College General Faculty and Trustees as the defining statement of institutional identity and mission. Since then, the Great Commitments have been revisited and revised – both marginally and significantly - on several occasions, the last being in 1993. Because the Great Commitments constitute a living document reflective of changing times and national events, it is appropriate that faculty, staff, and students revisit the wording from time to time.

In 2014 the Strategic Planning Council (SPC), led the College community in conversations meant to deepen understanding of the Great Commitments. The “Our Berea: Exploring the Commitments” initiative charged eight “Great Committees” to consider institutional goals, new initiatives, and internal and external communication strategies that would support engagement for each Commitment. As a result of this process, five of the committees suggested re-articulations of their respective Commitments. Because the document is meant to be viewed as a whole, it was decided that considering possible changes to the wording to any single Commitment meant that all eight should be open to revision.

To that end, in January of 2016 the Strategic Planning Council asked the General Faculty Assembly (GFA) for feedback and support regarding re-articulation planning. GFA members passed the following motion, “We move that SPC serve as the lead committee to bring together the suggestions of the Great Committees on the re-articulation of the Great Commitments, and further, invite regular input from other members of the campus community (by attending open forums and SPC meetings).” In March 2016 the SPC hosted three forums to gain community feedback regarding possible re-articulation language. Prompted by forum feedback, in April 2016, the SPC sent out a survey requesting additional thoughts and ideas. The response rate was as follows: Students – 14%, Staff – 34.6%, Faculty – 79.7%.

During the summer of 2016, an ad-hoc committee comprised of a diverse group of administrators, faculty, staff, and students met regularly to further analyze survey data and make recommendations for follow-up about possible re-articulation. The ad-hoc committee members reviewed the final reports of the Great Committees, the
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Re-articulation Forum feedback, and responses from the campus-wide survey. Taking these various resources into account, the group proposed re-articulated language for seven of the eight Great Commitments. These were brought forward to the Strategic Planning Council during the fall of 2016. The SPC reviewed the re-wording recommendations and offered a number of follow up suggestions. In October of 2016, another re-articulation draft was sent to staff and faculty for final feedback. After review of the latest feedback, the SPC voted to present a penultimate Great Commitment re-articulation proposal to the General Faculty Assembly at the January 2017 meeting.

At this time, the Strategic Planning Council asks the General Faculty Assembly to consider recommending the proposed re-articulations to the Board of Trustees. Should the GFA choose to move this proposal forward, the Board, which has been briefed and consulted throughout this process, will vote on whether or not to make the considered changes.

**Current Proposal for Great Commitment Re-articulations**

**The Great Commitments of Berea College**

(Preamble is currently unchanged)

*Berea College, founded by ardent abolitionists and radical reformers, continues today as an educational institution still firmly rooted in its historic purpose “to promote the cause of Christ.” Adherence to the College’s spiritual foundation, “God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth” (Acts 17:26) shapes the College’s culture and programs so that students and staff alike can work toward both personal goals and a vision of a world shaped by Christian values, such as the power of love over hate, human dignity and equality, and peace with justice. This environment frees persons to be active learners, workers, and servers as members of the academic community and as citizens of the world. The Berea experience nurtures intellectual, physical, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual potentials and with those the power to make meaningful commitments and translate them into action.*

*To achieve this purpose, Berea College commits itself:*

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1 Text of the Great Commitments as written in the 1993 articulation is italicized in this document. Recommended changes are in bold.
To provide an educational opportunity primarily for students from Appalachia, black and white, who have great promise and limited economic resources.

To provide an educational opportunity for students of all races, primarily from Appalachia, who have great promise and limited economic resources.

To provide an education of high quality with a liberal arts foundation and outlook.

To offer a high-quality liberal arts education that engages students as they pursue their personal, academic, and professional goals.

To stimulate understanding of the Christian faith and its many expressions and to emphasize the Christian ethic and the motive of service to others.

To stimulate understanding of the Christian faith and its many expressions and to emphasize the Christian ethic and the motive of service to others.

To provide for all students through the labor program experiences for learning and serving in community, and to demonstrate that labor, mental and manual, has dignity as well as utility.

To promote learning and serving in community through the student Labor Program, honoring the dignity and utility of all work, mental and manual, and taking pride in work well done.

To assert the kinship of all people and to provide interracial education with a particular emphasis on understanding and equality among blacks and whites.

To assert the kinship of all people and to provide interracial education with a particular emphasis on understanding and equality among blacks and whites as a foundation for building community among all peoples of the earth.
To create a democratic community dedicated to education and equality for women and men.

To create a democratic community dedicated to education and gender equality.

To maintain a residential campus and to encourage in all members of the community a way of life characterized by plain living, pride in labor well done, zest for learning, high personal standards, and concern for the welfare of others.

To maintain a residential campus that encourages in all community members a way of life characterized by mindful and sustainable living, health and wellness, zest for learning, high personal standards, and a concern for the welfare of others.

To serve the Appalachian region primarily through education but also by other appropriate services.

To engage Appalachian communities, families, and students in partnership for mutual learning, growth, and service.