

Strategic Planning // Act 1

Harvest of Insights

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***** This document serves as a first attempt to group insights and ideas together. This list does not represent what will be in the final strategic plan – but aims to illustrate one potential structuring of ideas. Subsequent workshops with faculty and staff (Oct 7 and 28) will attempt to further clarify, articulate, and organize these insights into a final plan that everyone feels excited around.***

Sept 20 - 26, 2025

University Park, PA

Overview of Act 1 Process

Over the course of 3 days, we hosted 3 sessions with ~100 people in attendance (a mix of alumni, faculty, and staff).

The primary goal of these sessions was to identify a potential direction for future goals, mission, and vision of the college. The workshops included three facilitated activities with the following guiding questions:



What do we need to navigate in the decade ahead?

What are we building towards?

What moonshots will boldly define our future?

From these gatherings, 15 key insights emerged. These emerged through a series of small group discussions, largely guided by the following prompts:

- If the College fully lived into its purpose and potential — what would be happening 10 years from now that would make you proud to say you were part of it?
- What's a challenge or opportunity where you believe this College is uniquely positioned to lead?

From these insights, 5 moonshot ideas rose to the top based upon participant's collective excitement and their indicated potential for impact. These moonshot ideas attempt to combine the key insights into distinct goals in which the college might develop a plan around.



Navigating the Decade Ahead

As participants looked to the future, faculty and staff were encouraged to identify both enablers and barriers that A&A must navigate in the decade ahead. Internally, strengths include a strong sense of community, shared values, and the energy of faculty, staff, and students, as well as trust and appreciation across the College. At the same time, persistent challenges such as silos, leadership turnover, resource strains, and morale issues were seen as hindering progress.

Externally, community engagement and interdisciplinary creativity stand out as unique assets, while political and financial pressures, demographic shifts, and the undervaluing of the arts present significant headwinds.

Together, these dynamics point to the need for collaboration, innovation, and clarity of identity to move forward with confidence.



Internal – Help

- **Community & Unity** – “Community & care by the whole”; “All working equally (Teamwork)”
- **Culture & Values** – “Focusing creativity in everyday”; “Collective value creativity + wellbeing”
- **Faculty, Staff, and Student Strengths** – “Student energy + fresh energy”; “Strength in real diversity”
- **Support & Appreciation** – “Flexibility / trust / work-life balance”; “Trusted to do our job”

Internal – Hinder

- **Silos & Hierarchy** – “Silo’d organization”; “Lack of collaboration / integration”
- **Leadership Gaps** – “Lack of transparent leadership”; “Leadership turnover”; “Lack of vision”
- **Resource & Staffing Strains** – “Staffing resources”; “Not replacing staff”; “People can’t do their jobs”
- **Culture & Morale Challenges** – “Fear of retaliation”; “We are stodgy”; “Unreasonable deadlines”
- **Processes & Bureaucracy** – “Processes + systems”; “Changing process”; “HR reclassification process”

External – Help

- **Community Engagement** – “Community engagement”; “Protective for unique community support”
- **Interdisciplinary Creativity** – “Inherent creativity”; “Collaboration leads into interdisciplinary”

External – Hinder

- **Political & Financial Climate** – “Political / social environment”; “Funding (ext)”; “Unions \$\$\$”
- **Visibility & Value of Arts** – “Devaluing of arts”; “Visibility + connection”
- **Enrollment & Demographics** – “Demographic cliff”; “Volatility, no presence at scale”

Key Insights that Emerged

Insight	Faculty and Staff Perspective	Alumni Perspective
Theme A: Internal Identity, Space + Collaboration		
1. Unified College Identity Participants emphasized the need for a stronger, collective identity across A&A's diverse units.	Faculty and staff focused on breaking down silos and creating a more integrated identity across the College. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Building a unified college identity through collaboration." • "Strengthening identity and legacy." • "Intentionally created synergy across units in the college." 	Alumni tended to frame identity through the College's breadth and diversity of programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Our unique contribution is the diversity of programs."
2. Shared Spaces Physical spaces were repeatedly mentioned as enablers of collaboration, creativity, and wellbeing.	Faculty and staff emphasized new hubs, 24/7 collaboration spaces, and facilities that foster cross-pollination. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Build a shared creative hub." • "Creating space for connection and collaboration." • "Develop new shared creative spaces open 24/7 as hubs for community." 	Alumni framed space as critical to building community and saw A&A's position as unique in this area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The challenge to building community is space – A&A has a unique position to lead."
3. Collaboration Across Disciplines Breaking down silos and fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration was seen as essential for innovation and identity-building.	Faculty and staff stressed fluid collaboration across units and the importance of integration for impact. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Fluid collaboration across units." • "Fostering collaboration across the University and disciplines." • "The impact we'd be celebrated for is creating integration among departments." 	Alumni emphasized A&A's distinctive role in supporting creativity for the rest of Penn State. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Collaboration across disciplines – other colleges rely on us for creativity."
Theme B: External Impact + Visibility		
4. Community Engagement and Public Impact A&A has a unique role in fulfilling Penn State's land-grant mission through direct community engagement, outreach, and cultural presence.	Faculty and staff spoke about outreach as a core strength and responsibility, highlighting existing public-facing venues and programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Direct engagement w/ the public in impactful experiences." • "We are unique in providing outreach opportunities." • "Protective for unique community support." 	Alumni also pointed to community-facing assets, emphasizing the visibility of venues like Palmer and CPA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Community-facing venues (Palmer, CPA, etc.)."
5. Elevating the Arts Across Penn State The arts must be seen as central to Penn State's mission. A&A can raise the profile of arts and design across the University to ensure their value is understood and celebrated.	Faculty and staff looked for validation from leadership, stressing the need for institutional recognition. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Elevating the arts across Penn State." • "The president truly embraces the College of A&A and the work we do." 	Alumni compared arts visibility to athletics, calling for parity in recognition and support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Arts as impactful & appreciated as athletics."

6. Shaping Culture and Meaning for Humanity

Participants described the arts as essential to identity, culture, and humanity — not simply an enrichment, but a force for deeper meaning.

Faculty and staff stressed the arts' role in uplifting humanity and shifting from ego-driven practice toward societal contribution.

- "Uplifting the why for humanity."
- "The arts are essential, not a nice-to-have."
- "Design + performing arts moving from ego-centric to what can it do to help society."

Alumni emphasized the inspirational role of the arts in helping others navigate life's stresses and finding meaning.

- "Others will look to us for inspiration and freedom from their own stresses in life."

7. Building a Reputation for Excellence and Impact

Participants aspire for A&A to be nationally recognized for excellence and impact, with visible alumni, top-ranked programs, and demonstrable outcomes.

Faculty and staff focused on tangible proof of excellence through student work and impact.

- "Tangible products – we see/hear the results of our efforts in the work of our students."

Alumni emphasized rankings, reputation, and recognizable alumni as measures of excellence.

- "Reputation of Excellence."
- "Top 5 program in every program we offer."
- "Universally recognizable alumni."

Theme C: Future of Technology

8. Extending Impact to All Students

A&A is uniquely positioned to reach every Penn State student through arts, design, and cultural experiences — not just those enrolled in the College.

Faculty and staff framed this as an opportunity to expand A&A's reach to all majors, embedding creativity into the broader student experience.

- "Only college that has the ability to offer education + cultural engagement to every student."
- "Extend impact to every PSU student."
- "Opportunities for all Penn State students, not just A&A majors."

Alumni echoed this theme by stressing visibility and recognition of A&A's impact across the entire student body.

- "Known for touching the lives of all students regardless of majors."

9. Creativity, Problem-Solving, and AI

AI emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity. Alumni emphasized bold leadership in AI, while faculty and staff stressed ethics, creativity, and human connection as A&A's unique contribution.

Faculty and staff stressed ethical use of AI and highlighted A&A's role in teaching creativity as a differentiating skill.

- "Ethically considered AI."
- "Lead in creative and appropriate use of AI."
- "Arts focuses more than any college on developing creativity – leads to thinking out of the box."

Alumni called for bold leadership in AI and positioning Penn State at the forefront of prototyping and creativity.

- "PSU #1 in AI Prototyping."
- "Our college could be leaders in the nation when it comes to AI and creativity."

10. Creating a Diverse and Adaptive Learning Environment

Participants highlighted the importance of building adaptive and inclusive learning environments that evolve with cultural and technological change.

Faculty and staff stressed integration of culture, diverse faculty and staff, and agile course structures.

- "Culture integration."
- "A more diverse faculty and staff."
- "Fluid, agile course structure."

Alumni framed diversity as part of A&A's distinctive identity, with a focus on programmatic breadth.

- "Our unique contribution is the diversity of programs."

11. Innovation and Cutting-Edge Practice

Calls for A&A to remain bold and future-focused — leading at the cutting edge of professional and creative practice.

Faculty and staff highlighted the importance of continuous innovation and positioning A&A at the forefront of design and arts practice.

- "We were on the cutting edge in responding to technology in professional practice as a result of AI."
- "Leading with innovation and cutting-edge practice."

Alumni envisioned Penn State as a national leader, urging A&A to claim prominence in arts and design innovation.

- "Establish Penn State as the national leader in arts and design innovation."

Theme D: Student Experience

12. Student-Centered Success

Students must remain at the center of A&A's mission — with expanded enrollment, opportunities, and support systems to help them thrive.

Faculty and staff focused on expanding capacity, supporting students, and valuing creativity and wellbeing.

- "2x student enrollment w/ staffing, space, & material support to accommodate them."
- "Student energy + fresh energy."
- "Collective value creativity + wellbeing."

Alumni emphasized visibility and exposure for student work and the need to connect them to real-world platforms.

- "Promote student work/ talent through docuseries, social media, etc."
- "More exposure opportunities for students (Broadway, internships, partnerships, etc.)."

13. Career Readiness

Participants emphasized the importance of preparing students for sustainable creative careers, including stronger pipelines to internships, residencies, and industry connections.

Faculty and staff framed their role as guiding students to build careers in the arts.

- "Our role would shift toward helping our students learn to build careers within the arts."

Alumni emphasized measurable career outcomes and stronger partnerships to support graduates.

- "Much bigger % (70%) successfully employed in their field of study or a related field."
- "Build partnerships with industries and communities to create internships, residencies, and pipelines."

14. Access and Affordability

Ensuring that students can afford and access an A&A education was consistently raised as a core need.

Faculty and staff highlighted affordability and the need to expand scholarship resources.

- "Ensuring access and affordability."
- "Expanding access and affordability for students."

Alumni emphasized significant increases in scholarship support and broadening access for financially limited students.

- "Scholarship support 5x what it is today."
- "Ability for more kids w/out financial capacity to be able to attend and thrive at Penn State."

15. Inclusivity and Belonging

Ensuring A&A is safe, inclusive, and thriving for all — especially LGBTQ+ students, students of color, students with disabilities, and first-generation students.

Faculty and staff pointed to the need for training and safe spaces that foster belonging.

- "Students deserve safety, access, and understanding."
- "Invest in faculty & staff trainings and safe spaces."

Alumni envisioned A&A being nationally recognized as a premier college for inclusivity and belonging.

- "Premier college for LGBTQ+, people of color, people with disabilities in the state."

Moonshot Ideas

Moonshot 1: Strengthen A&A's Collaborative and Unified Identity by Building Shared Creative Spaces

Across both sessions, the call for facilities and space to connect disciplines was overwhelming. Faculty and staff described the need for a “Shared Creative Hub” to overcome isolation and foster a culture of collaboration. Together, these ideas point toward a moonshot that empowers collaboration through systemic support, making A&A a hub for creativity across Penn State and its communities.

Combined Insights:

- *Insight 1:* Unified College Identity
- *Insight 2:* Shared Spaces
- *Insight 3:* Collaboration Across Disciplines

Examples of what this could look like:

- Build a shared creative hub, complete with a welcome eatery where every discipline connects, passions thrive, and community wellbeing is strengthened.
 - Design community spaces that foster and showcase creative cross-pollination.
 - Develop new shared creative spaces that are open 24/7 as hubs for collaboration, community, and connection — addressing the loneliness and mental health epidemics.
 - Establish Penn State as the first Big Ten university with a dedicated Arts & Design Innovation District, blending student, faculty, and community creativity in one hub.
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Moonshot 2: Make A&A the Cultural Bridge that Engages Community and Elevates Penn State's Regional Impact

Position A&A as the cultural driver of Penn State's land-grant mission — one of the only colleges that directly engages surrounding communities through performances, exhibitions, and design. This moonshot connects student success to public impact, making A&A not just a home for the arts but a force that shapes the culture and wellbeing of the region and beyond. In doing so, we can increase the visibility and impact of the arts.

Combined Insights:

- *Insight 4:* Community Engagement and Public Impact
- *Insight 5:* Elevating the Arts Across Penn State

Examples of what this could look like:

- Transform the area surrounding the Palmer Museum into a nationally recognized arts and culture district, integrating galleries, performance spaces, design labs, and public art.
 - Create a “Campus-to-Community Arts Corridor” — linking Penn State's arts facilities with downtown State College through public art, walkable design, and shared venues.
 - Expand outreach to rural and urban communities across Pennsylvania, tying the College's work more deeply to Penn State's land-grant mission.
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Moonshot 3: Position A&A as a National Leader in Civic Imagination

Energy coalesced around making A&A the place where creative, critical, and systemic thinking fuels problem-solving in policy, culture, and education. This moonshot positions A&A not only as an arts college but as a driver of solutions for society's biggest challenges. Participants imagined a Civic Imagination Lab, national leadership in arts and cultural policy, and Central Pennsylvania as a living classroom. They also saw the need for mechanisms — like a Moonshot Fund and Studio — to resource experimentation and breakthrough ideas.

Combined Insights:

- *Insight 6:* Shaping Culture and Meaning for Humanity
- *Insight 7:* Building a Reputation for Excellence and Impact

Examples of what this could look like:

- Ignite creative, critical, and systems-thinking through arts and design to drive policy, cultural, and educational innovation.
 - Turn the College into Penn State's civic imagination lab, where faculty, students, and communities co-design solutions to democracy's biggest challenges.
 - Establish Penn State as a national leader in arts and cultural policy, influencing legislation and funding priorities in DC.
 - Transform Central Pennsylvania into the country's largest living classroom for sustainable design and creative placemaking.
 - Launch a Moonshot Fund and Studio to resource 100+ student and faculty projects each year, ensuring risk-taking and breakthrough ideas thrive.
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Moonshot 4: Ensure Every Penn State Student Can Harness Creativity and Connection as Foundational Skills in the Age of AI

Participants emphasized the importance of reaching all students — not just those in A&A. This moonshot reflects a desire to move from serving a niche group to impacting the entire Penn State student body, ensuring every graduate leaves with a transformative creative experience.

Combined Insights:

- *Insight 8:* Extending Impact to All Students
- *Insight 9:* Creativity, Problem-Solving, and AI
- *Insight 10:* Creating a Diverse and Adaptive Learning Environment
- *Insight 11:* Innovation and Cutting-Edge Practice

Examples of what this could look like:

- Guarantee every Penn State student — across all majors — a transformative arts or design experience that shapes their identity and wellbeing.
 - Double the size of undergraduate enrollment and build the infrastructure to support it across the Commonwealth.
 - Embed design, creativity, and AI-focused coursework into general education requirements, making creativity a core skill for all Penn State students.
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Moonshot 5: Become the National Model for Inclusive Excellence by Preparing Diverse Students for Future-Ready Creative Careers

A&A can redefine what access and belonging look like in higher education while ensuring that equity translates into opportunity and creative careers. Parents, students, and alumni want to know that this College not only welcomes diverse communities, but also prepares graduates to thrive in meaningful, well-paying, future-ready careers. By centering inclusion and career outcomes together, A&A can become the national model for what inclusive excellence looks like in the arts and design.

Combined Insights:

- *Insight 12: Student-Centered Success*
- *Insight 13: Career Readiness*
- *Insight 14: Access and Affordability*
- *Insight 15: Inclusivity and Belonging*

Examples of what this could look like:

- Be recognized as the premier college for LGBTQ+, students of color, and students with disabilities in the country.
- Lead in recruiting and retaining first-generation and underrepresented students — and connecting them to creative career pathways.
- Build partnerships with industries and communities to create internships, residencies, and pipelines into creative careers.

*** For any moonshot to succeed, we must ensure financial resilience through new revenue streams and partnerships.*