

Montserrat College of Art 2020-2023 Strategic Plan

The creation of this plan comes at a unique time — at the beginning of Montserrat’s 50th anniversary. It is an ideal time for the college to celebrate the past, especially those things that helped lead to our successful, exciting present. At its center, this Strategic Plan is a time for us to think about the future.

The diversity of people and ideas coming to college is growing. The interests students bring to Montserrat—and the skills needed in the world they live in—are changing very rapidly, and our students are learning as much from the world around them as they do in class. In recent years, creativity as an economic driver has become more widely recognized; recent data from the Barr Foundation shows that, collectively, people in New England working in the Creative Economy earn more than \$17 billion per year and more than \$386 billion nationally. Creative problem-solving is now considered a vital skill and is sought by employers in nearly every industry. Today’s changing workplace supports the innovative work that has been happening at art colleges for decades.

Montserrat is one of only five stand-alone independent art colleges with an enrollment under 400 and the only one of those outside of an urban area. This plan reflects the community’s desire for the college to fully embrace our differentiators: our agility and willingness to embrace change; our ability to recognize, support and celebrate the creative aspirations of each individual student; and the passion and dedication that faculty, staff, alumni, and students bring to our campus each day. Rather than striving to emulate our competitors, we should take risks and build on our ability to know each individual and the type of work they do, to connect people across disciplines and media, and to connect our creative students with the thriving creative economy of the North Shore and beyond. This plan builds on those things that only a school of this size and scale and place can accomplish.

The goals articulated in the Strategic Plan will serve as the framework from which annual tactical plans will be constructed by staff and faculty, as they relate to their specific areas of purview. Working to achieve these goals will ultimately make Montserrat an even better place to learn and work, and a better hub of creativity.

New Territories in Art and Design Education

The goals, needs, skills, and aspirations of Montserrat students are changing—and will continue to change—alongside evolving technology and education models. Preparing our increasingly interdisciplinary and entrepreneurial students (40% of recent grads indicate they have worked in their own business within 5 years of graduation) for careers that are more collaborative, require more self-reliance, and need people who are able to adapt to and understand new technologies will mean charting new territories in our academic frontier.

While Montserrat began as a fine arts institution and continues to offer fine arts training, the trend in the past decade has been for more students to declare concentrations in visual communication and design fields; 75% of the class of 2020 has declared Illustration, Animation, or Graphic Design as concentrations. The fine arts will always play a central role in our Foundation program and remain a vital part of our educational DNA. As we develop more areas of study in technology-driven fields, we will have to ensure that we have the right faculty and vision to stay relevant within fine arts, craft, and design. Our size gives us the unique benefit of more cross-departmental relationships, closer classroom geography, and allows us to see how these all overlap and inform each other. For Montserrat “New Territories in Art in Design Education,” will be as much about *how* we teach and learn as it will be about *what* we teach and learn.

1. With the recognition that makers are increasingly more transdisciplinary and transmedia, we will create an academic structure that is more relevant to the makers of the future. Begin a process to break down the barriers that separate the college’s academic areas by 1.) moving away from concentrations as our internal organizing principle and 2.) removing the distinctions between fine art-making, design, and craft within our curriculum and our studio spaces.
2. Expand the college’s curricular and degree offerings by developing new areas of academic focus related to the intersection of art, design, storytelling, and technology to prepare our graduates for careers of the future; increase external opportunities for students in both our undergraduate and auxiliary programs. As we begin to hire the third-generation of full-time faculty, this goal will require that their skills match the needs of the new curriculum.
3. Increase opportunities for students to exercise individual agency and collaboration in and out of the classroom; acknowledge and celebrate self-advocacy as a graduation outcome.

Diversity, Inclusion and Expansion

Montserrat students represent an incredible mix of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, diversity in gender identities and presentation, variety in their individual pathways to college, as well as diversity in family education backgrounds. This diversity in all its forms is an educational asset that fills our classrooms, studio spaces, and residence halls with an extraordinary breadth of life experiences, perspectives, and means of expression. As we look to the future, a commitment to expanded diversity in our internal community — staff, faculty, students, and board of trustees — is vital. The impending drop-off in high school and college-aged individuals in our immediate geographic region will require a more intentional expansion into new recruitment territories both domestically and abroad; Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire will all see declines ranging from 3% to 14% in overall high school graduates over the next decade. At the same time, the demographic make-up of those graduates becomes increasing non-white. Montserrat’s continued commitment to diversity and inclusion will necessitate new kinds of supports to ensure the success of all of our community members.

1. Through a combination of curated artists and designers in residence, guest lecturers and critics, workshops and gallery programs, begin to build a broader diversity footprint.
2. Continue to grow Montserrat's overall enrollment by expanding recruitment efforts in new domestic and international markets, and ensure Montserrat's on-campus resources, exhibitions, clubs, and activities better support and represent all forms of diversity in view of our evolving student body; provide the required support to evaluate the needs and success of minoritized students.
3. Implement a recruiting and hiring action plan for expanding the diversity among our faculty, staff, and trustees that takes into consideration the demographics of our immediate region, the cost of relocation to Beverly, and the need to expand the worldviews of our community.
4. Support faculty in assessing issues of representation and inclusion within their curricula.

Community Involvement

Educational research clearly shows that students more engaged in their overall college life are more likely to be successful — higher grades and better retention and graduation rates. These lead to better post-graduation outcomes. The same notion is true for faculty and staff; more engagement leads to more success and satisfaction at work. An institutional commitment to community involvement—both internal and external—will establish a deeper culture of service and support at Montserrat: service to one another as colleagues and fellow creatives; support of our students as mentors and professional resources; and service to our greater creative community as cultural leaders.

1. Create the time, space, and institutional culture for Montserrat's internal community to come together on a more regular basis to meaningfully engage with one another and celebrate the creativity that attracted all of us — faculty, staff, alumni and students — to Montserrat as our place of work and learning.
2. Develop and implement a system of outreach, programming, and support for our alumni that keeps them connected to and integrated with our community and provides continued professional development in a clear and accessible way. Begin to build a culture of alumni giving through both mentorship and/or financial gifts.
3. Extend Montserrat's external outreach by becoming the leading cultural hub of the North Shore, more effectively connecting faculty and students to our external creative partners, and forming new partnerships and donor relationships both nationally and internationally that will enhance our visibility and provide new pathways toward financial stability. We know that nationally, the arts generate more than \$800 billion per year and that a focus on external connections will help everyone.

Prioritizing People

Montserrat's size is one of our clear differentiators (*Small by Design*) and one of our greatest strengths as an institution. It allows us to build close bonds with one another and recognize the power of each individual to effect change. It also means that each individual plays an important role in the college's overall success. Our small scale does not exclude us from external market pressures, however, and it is necessary to re-assess and fortify existing compensation and support structures for both faculty and staff. To meet the demands of a competitive educational market and to encourage long-term retention of new faculty and staff, Montserrat is committed to supporting ongoing professional development and participation in research, scholarship and creative practice.

1. Reassess the models currently in place for compensation that take into account job performance, service to the college, and the market; improve those models over the next three years.
2. Commit to fostering the lifelong learning of students, staff, faculty, and alumni by developing a more robust system for academic advisement and mentorship, increasing professional development offerings college-wide, and providing continued academic opportunities to alumni.
3. Ensure that there is adequate personnel in each staffing area to meet operational goals and to achieve an improved work-life balance across the board; develop a system of contingency and succession planning, and cross-training.

Montserrat Footprint

As we find ourselves immersed in Montserrat's studios, classrooms, galleries, and offices each day, we're reminded of what makes our campus unique: we're intertwined with a burgeoning downtown arts district; we embrace both interdisciplinarity and multifunctionality in the layout of our studios and classrooms; and we've invested significantly in new technology in recent years, evidenced by the debut and use of the Digital Fabrication Lab. As we consider what tomorrow's students will need from our spaces in the context of their curricular interests, housing needs, and social interactivity — as well as how we present ourselves to our immediate community and to the broader world — it becomes clear that we need to invest in concrete goals related to assessing, expanding, and better caring for our physical and virtual footprints.

1. Currently, 51% of housing and 61% of academic and administrative spaces are owned by the college. To ensure Montserrat's ability to grow and expand as real estate prices climb, we will assess the college's long-term and short-term use of properties with the goal of owning more and having more leases under long-term contracts.
2. Launch our first comprehensive campaign to support endowment growth, institutional financial aid, and physical needs of the campus.
3. Showcase our institutional identity, our dedication to student and staff morale, our understanding of design, and our commitment to strong curb-appeal through our facilities.

4. Create common gathering spaces for social community engagement (staff, faculty, students, and outside partners), as well as open studios for communal making after-hours that are open to students, staff, and faculty, with the intention of building a stronger studio culture at Montserrat.
5. Create a more sophisticated and contemporary virtual footprint for the college by expanding our video and live streaming presence to 1.) enhance the internal academic experience of our students and 2.) tell our stories more effectively to our external audiences.

Proactive Planning

Our small staff and faculty accomplish an extraordinary amount each day, but the nature of our workflow means that we risk prioritizing the most immediate needs of our respective areas to the detriment of the long view. By committing to carving out the time and space for more proactive planning across all areas of Montserrat — from course grids to budgets — we will be better equipped to face the future challenges and opportunities that await us with greater intention and consensus.

1. Set a multi-year budget, grant-funded project wishlist, college events calendar, and course grid in which we proactively schedule, prioritize expenditures, and set priorities. Set a “hard” one-year plan, plus a rolling three-year plan to this end.
2. Optimize data collection, record-keeping, and interpersonal communication through a college-wide audit of how the various stakeholders use databases, emails, social media, video, digital signage, and meetings, with the goal of increasing overall efficiency and improving communication flow.
3. Establish an institutional culture of using data-driven assessments at regular intervals to improve current programs, operations, and future planning.