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*Dual-majors,
language fluency.
500 students,
in a real place.
40 professors,
productive inquiry.
\$5000 tuition.*

*"[Students] should not
play life, or study it
merely, while the
community supports
them at this expensive
game, but earnestly live it
from beginning to end."
- H.D. Thoreau*

Our Mission

To found an innovative private college that enables all of its students to be skilled workers, intelligent critics, and bi-lingual citizens, who graduate without debt, ready to take on our communities' greatest problems.

The Problem We're Addressing

According to the U.S. Treasury, student debt will soon surpass \$1 trillion. College costs are rising more than any industry, even health care (College Board, Washington Post). To cut costs, colleges eliminate programs, increase class sizes, and move courses online. As students spend more and more to attend college, less is spent on their instruction (Delta Cost Project). These woes and reports of poor student outcomes (Academically Adrift, Arum/Roksa) show that "we need a new model" (The Atlantic).

Our Idea

The Saxifrage School model seeks to address the urgent cost crisis facing higher education in a way that refocuses on the basic purposes of the university and re-engages students with real problems in real places. We believe that costs can be decreased, while retaining the best of the College ideal *and* reducing class sizes.

I. The Neighborhood is the Campus

Classes will meet in under-utilized community spaces: churches, cafes, bars, non-profits, corporate meeting rooms, museums, etc. The campus, although "nomadic", will be easily walkable and geographically proximate. Instead of building our own expensive buildings, we will support pre-existing infrastructure by partnering with the community. By keeping classes small, and utilizing new, highly-portable technologies, we can set up class wherever good space is found. This neighborhood campus model eliminates the artificial insularity found on many college campuses and can reduce "brain drain" by encouraging students to remain after graduation.

II. \$5000 Yearly Tuition

By financially supporting our campus partners rather than maintaining our own buildings, there are tremendous cost savings. This, and a simplified administrative model, allows us to lower real tuition costs to \$5000/year (plus a \$1500 administrative cost). Even with this low amount, the School's budget more than breaks even and can operate self-sufficiently after start-up funding is secured.

III. A Program in Productive Inquiry

We will offer an accredited four-year, dual-major college program where all of our 500 students major in both a technical skill (Computer Science, Building Design & Construction, or Organic Agriculture) and an academic study (Philosophy, Art, Literature, Health, Politics, and Math). In addition to their Major Skill and Major Study, all students (as well as all staff) will take part in the all-college Spanish language program for the duration of their time at the college. The program is focused on *productive inquiry*: an integrated study where students learn to produce a thing of value *and* question the value of that made thing. The program seeks to reconcile theory and practice by extending the liberal arts to include trade skills.

"Learn to make what is valuable and to question the value of what is made."



“Beside every effort of making, which is necessarily narrow, there must be an effort of judgment, of criticism, which must be as broad as possible. ...These two problems, how to make and how to judge, are the business of education”

- Wendell Berry

In order to be a relevant new model, the College must do three things simultaneously: be of great quality, offer low-cost tuition, and be financially sustainable without charity or subsidy

Simplified yearly operating budget (Year 4, with all 500 students):

OPERATING COSTS	DESCRIPTION	EXPENSES
Professor Compensation	40 Professors x \$55,000	\$ (2,200,000)
Administrative Compensation	10 Positions x \$43,500 (average)	\$ (435,000)
Administrative Costs	Lease 2 small buildings, insurance, audit, supplies, marketing, partner support, etc.	\$ (400,000)
Educational Resources	Equipment, supplies, teaching tools	\$ (500,000)
	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ (3,535,000)

OPERATING INCOME	DESCRIPTION	INCOME
Student Tuition	500 Students x \$5000	\$ 2,500,000
Administrative Fee	500 Students x \$1500	\$ 750,000
Resource Fee	500 Students x \$1000	\$ 500,000
Application Fees	1500 Applications x \$50	\$ 75,000
	TOTAL INCOME	\$ 3,825,000
	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ (3,535,000)
	NET SURPLUS	\$ 290,000



THE CAMPUS

At the heart of the Saxifrage School model is an innovative, yet simple concept for re-thinking the college campus. Rather than owning and operating the traditional, expensive infrastructure, the School's neighborhood will be the campus. We call it a "nomad campus": students will study, eat, sleep and attend classes in pre-existing spaces within a walkable geography in a small City neighborhood. While it is nothing fancy, this radical campus structure elegantly addresses a number of issues.

1. Excess Infrastructure and Struggling Owners

By holding classes in underutilized spaces in a specific City neighborhood (churches, bars, museums, non-profits, cafes, etc.) the Saxifrage School will revitalize spaces otherwise unoccupied for long periods of time. We will form mutually beneficial partnerships with the owners of these spaces, helping them to maintain their structures through rental payment, volunteer support or other arrangement. In one researched neighborhood, there are 62 churches in a walkable 1-mile campus area most of which are fully empty during the week; in this same neighborhood, almost every non-profit organization has a large meeting or conference space they rarely use and most of the 20+ bars are closed and empty until 5 pm.

2. Underdeveloped Districts

Each of the neighborhoods we are considering as possible campuses have main-street business districts which are struggling due to little investment and competition from suburban commercial areas. Our campus will add 550+ consumers to the neighborhood who, for reasons of convenience and transit limitations, will be likely to shop at small neighborhood stores. Most importantly, in our model, the college itself will not operate *any* student services that could otherwise be provided by local businesses. Instead of a cafeteria and college coffee shop, we will direct students to local eateries and groceries; instead of a gymnasium, we will connect them with the community center, park system, or YMCA. If a bookstore, or necessary business, does not exist in the neighborhood we will foster its creation by assisting entrepreneurs.

3. Isolated Student Experience

If the college experience is, ostensibly, supposed to prepare students to *live* better after they graduate, then they must *live* in a real place. While many colleges are geographically isolated, even those students at campuses that are *in* cities often graduate having never spent any substantial time in their hometown. While we will do everything possible to enable a smooth transition into life on our campus, we want to challenge our students to become authentic residents in their neighborhood. Our goal is for students to learn how to take care of their own place, negotiate with landlords, and build relationships with their non-college neighbors.

4. Artificial Context

Additionally, the neighborhood campus model gives students a context in which to immediately apply their studies. Rather than studying abstract concepts and prototyping designs in the classroom, students will use the neighborhood as their laboratory. This real-world context offers a high degree of accountability and ensures that students attempt work that is both relevant and feasible.

5. Retaining Graduates

For some time now, Pittsburgh, like most

cities with declining populations, has been trying to find ways to retain its graduates. Our city's student population makes up a very large percentage of the total residency, but, unfortunately, many of them choose to move away after college. It is easy for graduates to move away because, even though they were *technically* residents, they never fully experienced the best parts of the city; they never became a part of a community they could imagine calling *home* after graduation. By living in a real neighborhood and relying on community resources, students can experience the city as authentic residents. Most importantly, they will build invaluable local networks with people outside of the college that will help them find appropriate employment and tie them to the city.

6. Taxation Conflict

Cities and their non-profit university institutions often have a tenuous relationship due to the amount of land owned by universities and the city services they occupy while paying no city taxes. Recently, there was a drawn out conflict between the City of Pittsburgh and its largest higher education institutions over this very issue. While it seems wrong to "tax students", the tax-free operations of large universities are extremely difficult for poor cities, like Pittsburgh, to support. Since the Saxifrage School will own and operate only two buildings (a headquarters and large warehouse), we will not noticeably contribute to the number of tax-free properties. More substantially, instead of operating our own non-profit student services, we will contribute to the income of small businesses (which do pay taxes to the city) and will provide rental income to a number of tax-paying property owners.

7. The Cost of College

As tuition costs have risen to staggering heights, statistics show that most of this increase is not due to increased costs of instruction. Rather, things like operating costs and building expenses are causing costs to rise, as students graduate with more and more debt. By operating the "nomad campus" model, the Saxifrage School will be able to eliminate the majority of building costs and offer a yearly tuition price of \$5000.



WHY?

We understand that the most important question to ask as we continue our work is “why are we doing this?”; why are we proposing a new kind of college? We do this because...

1. Over the past 40 years, college has become far **too expensive**. Costs have tripled in real dollars since 1970. It must be made affordable and financially sustainable without relying on government subsidy or constant charity. Student debt is now more than \$1,000,000,000,000.

2. While costs have increased, **instruction has decreased** both in quality and quantity. Each year fewer teachers teach more students, and less and less of students' tuition dollars go towards their instruction. Moving forward, we must find a path that re-focuses on the purpose of the University which simultaneously improves cost and academic quality.

3. Despite the great expense of time and money, many students graduate from college with **generic degrees** that do not adequately prepare them to find work or address real-world problems. In order for this substantial investment to be worthwhile, students must graduate with an identifiably valuable set of hard skills and immediately employable credentials.

4. While many schools are successful in preparing students for specific post-college employment, they do so at **the expense of the humanities**. Science, technical, and professional programs are too often supported with money taken from the budgets of the liberal arts. Moving forward, schools and students must recognize that *both* sides of learning are essential for raising up creative and capable graduates.

5. For too long the world has looked down upon the **poor language skills** of U.S. college graduates. In Europe, there is a larger percentage of people who speak *three languages* than there are second-language speakers in the U.S. While grade schools must do their part as well, colleges must require more than preliminary study and re-structure the academic community to better serve the ends of second-language instruction.

6. In their well-intentioned efforts to provide students with excellent resources, most **colleges have become isolated** from their surrounding communities. The insular campus hinders students' ability to prepare for post-graduate life and inhibits them from practicing their work in a genuine context. In addition to academic and technical skills, graduates need to grow as authentic residents in a real community. Moreover, colleges' economic capabilities could be used to improve resources for the entire community, rather than just the student population.

7. While students are paying more and more for their education, it isn't because of teachers' salaries. Many **professors are poorly compensated** for their work, often cobbling together adjunct positions from 2 or 3 universities in order to pay the bills. This commodification of teachers reduces the quality of the college experience for professor and student alike. In addition to poor compensation, nearly all teachers are asked to teach more and more classes to

growing numbers of students. All of this serves to drastically diminish quality, especially important teacher-student interactions outside of class time. In order to excel and be truly challenged to learn, students need professors to be much more than conveyers of lectures, they need critics and mentors. We believe that colleges can achieve smaller class sizes and employ more full-time professors without breaking the bank.

8. In response to financial woes, for many colleges, **higher education is moving online**. In addition to universities expanding their offerings of cheaper, budget-conscious online courses, some students are giving up on the old model entirely by utilizing free, open-source learning tools. While the new technology certainly offers a lot of excellent ways to improve the model and reduce costs, it does not mean we should wholly do away with the old. Although it has lost its focus in recent decades, the in-person college model has extraordinary value that must be enhanced by these new resources, not replaced. The traditional University has some key values that online courses cannot adequately offer: motivation, accountability, criticism, tangible resources, a real context for work and study, and an academic community of experts and peers.

9. Regardless of recent trends, the culture of higher education—and society in general—has been entrenched in a **culture of dualism** that too often divides theory and practice into separate disciplines to the detriment of students. The traditional separation of blue and white collar work, of the sciences and the humanities, of the ivory tower and the trade school no longer apply. To be wholly educated, graduates must learn skills both hard and soft; Pursue a *Major Skill* and a *Major Study*, not as two separate programs but as an integrated practice where they can both learn to make a thing of value and question the value of that thing. Where they can learn to see problems, and then solve them.