Northwestern Global Strategic Plan
White Paper Series

The Northwestern global strategic planning process builds upon important campus-wide planning conversations about Northwestern’s global direction over the last ten years. For the current process, over 200 Northwestern University stakeholders have been engaged in conversations that will form the basis of the strategic plan:

- **Global Mapping Project (Fall 2018)** – Northwestern Buffett staff conducted a thorough analysis of the University’s current global programming and collaborations, working with partners in each of the schools to understand Northwestern’s global footprint.

- **Northwestern Strategic Plan Contact Groups and White Paper Series (Spring 2019 – Ongoing)** – The planning process is structured around a set of priority areas, which are addressed by committees of faculty, administration, student and alumni leaders:
  
  - Impactful Global Research
  - Strategic Global Partnerships
  - Multilingualism
  - Global Learning
  - Role of Northwestern Buffett
  - Infrastructure and Logistics
  - International Faculty, Students and Scholars
  - Role of Information Technologies
  - Alumni Engagement
  - Data Analytics
  - Global Reputation

The findings of these groups are defined in white papers drafted by the groups’ co-conveners. Key ideas from these groups and the white papers they author will be further synthesized into the Northwestern Global Strategic Plan and its implementation.

The full strategic plan will be shared with the Board of Trustees at its March 2020 meeting.

*Please direct comments about the Northwestern Global Strategic Plan and the preliminary findings as described in the White Paper Series to Meghan Ozaroski at m-ozaroski@northwestern.edu.*
Northwestern Global Strategic Plan White Paper Series: Information Technology
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Key Questions:
• How can Northwestern further its global engagement in the areas of learning, teaching and research through innovative IT solutions?
• What are the barriers and potential solutions to fostering global partnerships?

Northwestern University’s Global Strategy centers on multifaceted collaboration with global partners both inside and outside of the academy. Information technology is critical to this ambition. Indeed, our focus on collaboration as the lynchpin of our global strategy is made possible through technical advancements that make meaningful research collaboration, distance teaching, and online community engagement across distances feasible. Barriers of space, language and culture have been overcome through advancements in technology that is also more accessible and affordable both for Northwestern and its global partners.

Principles of the Global Strategy, as it relates to the use of technology:

Technology cannot replace in-person collaboration. But it can greatly enhance global partnerships
Technology will never displace face to face conversation, the experience of spending extended time in another country, the perspective or depth of relationship that is made possible by language skills, or even the experience of sharing a meal with colleagues. Technology-enabled accessibility should be seen as an enhancement to—not a replacement for—other efforts to make opportunities for global engagement available to all. But technology can play a role in sparking new research and teaching collaborations, and in lending longevity and sustainability to partnerships between face to face engagements. Faculty, students, and other partners can learn best practices and develop habits that will enable them to be more effective in person, virtually, and how to balance these settings to build and maintain relationships.

Technology can expand networks and grow relationships even when physical travel is constrained
In the future, Northwestern scholars and their collaborators around the world may face increasing difficulties of mobility. Regulatory restrictions on outbound or inbound circulation may impede the ability of the best minds to come together to solve global problems. In this geopolitical environment, technology that supports collaboration in teaching and research at a distance will allow the work and partnership to continue, and will ensure that a breadth of points of view are represented on our campuses, even as additional barriers to physical travel may mount.

Technology can bring Northwestern’s three campuses closer together
There are significant opportunities for greater engagement across Northwestern’s three campuses—Evanston, Chicago and Doha. The distance between these campuses—and related outlays of time and money required to bring students and researchers together—is the number one barrier to cross-campus engagement. Investments in, and socialization of, new collaborative tools have the potential to dramatically increase cross-campus engagement of all kinds. Technology can support a culture and habit of equity—one that enables people to be engaged, valued, heard and contribute regardless of whether they are in the room or on another campus.
Technology can improve the accessibility of global experiences
Global teaching, learning, research, and engagement activities can be made broadly accessible through distance technology. Technology can support engagement between students and scholars who, because of limitations of time or financial resources, barriers of citizenship, or physical or mental health conditions, are not able to travel to the location where the best collaborators on a given topic reside. Technology can help overcome barriers of time zones, visa restrictions, and language. This enhanced accessibility will be a key part of Northwestern’s increased globalization.

Technology can drive equity in partnerships
Our aim is to create equitable partnerships around the world, under conditions of global inequality. Resource sharing may be necessary in some cases to ensure that collaborators on both sides of a strategic partnership are able to work on a level playing field with compatible technological tools. For partners who experience financial constraints, the ability to rely on technology, rather than travel, will help to make full participation in the network a reality.

Technology can support inclusion and innovation
Through improved distance learning and teaching support, Northwestern faculty will be able to design and implement new forms of transnational co-instruction. Instructors will be able to amplify the voices of local researchers, instructors, students, and practitioners abroad, such that those global partners are able to represent themselves and their perspectives directly in the Northwestern University classroom. We envision extensive shared courses and distance learning across Northwestern’s campuses and with Northwestern’s global partners, in an environment in which international collaborations support more inclusive and diverse course content and new innovative forms of teaching and learning.

Technology can help overcome language barriers
In the next five years, significant technological advances will be made in translation software. Northwestern must be prepared to be a leader in the development and deployment of these technologies in the teaching and research enterprise. There are significant opportunities for collaboration with the private sector in this area.

Technology can help reduce carbon emissions
In its Strategic Sustainability Plan, Northwestern committed to reducing the environmental impact of student and scholar travel on the Evanston and Chicago campuses through provision and support of environmentally efficient modes of transportation. For Northwestern’s international collaboration and collaboration across campuses, air and car travel are key contributors to carbon emissions. Northwestern can make a contribution to slowing climate change by replacing a number in person meetings, and the accompanying transportation burdens, with virtual meetings. Through technology that enhances virtual collaboration and makes remote meetings habitual, we can reduce individual travel, and therefore reduce the carbon footprint of the University.

Budgetary Implications
If a previous generation’s globalization commitments depended upon investments in bricks and mortar around the world, this generation’s globalization ambitions will be realized through investments in technology and the support to enable both faculty and students to take full advantage of these resources. The funding model for information technology will greatly impact the outcome of the University’s expanded globalization efforts. Will access to new tools be available to all members of the Northwestern community, and will the availability of these tools encourage cross-campus collaboration, or will technological investments be funded by individual schools with the implication that resources will
be restricted to faculty within a particular school? Will resources also be accessible to Northwestern’s strategic partners abroad? Better strategic coordination can help us to achieve even greater ambitions.

**Next Steps**
Recognizing that University investments in technology should align with the University’s mission and global strategy, we suggest providing greater incentives for our faculty to experiment with research, teaching and engagement technologies that challenge cultural norms and foster innovation in learning, teaching and research. As an example, the University might consider providing an innovation fund for faculty that promotes the development of new interdisciplinary courses taught with one or more of our global partners during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Advancements in how courses are designed to support both synchronous and asynchronous learning, while emphasizing inclusive teaching, would also provide faculty development opportunities that do not exist today. Other areas of investment include new technologies for research collaboration and multilingual communication, new digital platforms for idea incubation, and new campus spaces for multi-location synchronous learning that ultimately will enable Northwestern students and scholars to innovate in ways that far exceed the ambitions of any strategic plan.

**Conclusions**
Technology is one part of the Northwestern Global Strategic Plan, and it plays an essential role in accelerating Northwestern’s globalization. Investments in new technologies, training, and in the staff necessary to ensure a visionary approach and a widespread, cultural adoption will fuel the globalization effort in multivalent ways, from innovation to access, equity, and inclusion.

By understanding both the barriers to globalization and the possible solutions presented through IT, Northwestern will be able to strategically engage with the world in new ways. Through new investments in emerging technologies, better utilization of existing technologies, and resource sharing with our partners around the world, and through the development of best practices for meaningful virtual engagement, Northwestern students and scholars will fundamentally change our expectations about who we work with, where we work, and how we collaborate in order to generate and disseminate the best new knowledge and address the critical global challenges of our time.

**IT Contact Group Information:**
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