

# LEARNING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PLAN

## AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*Fall 2012*

### **I. Introduction**

This plan articulates our goals as a school and creates a set of strategies to guide our curricular and programmatic decisions over the next several years. By design, the plan is aspirational. Winsor aspires to offer a world-class education, one that “prepares young women to pursue their aspirations and contribute to the world.” To fulfill this mission in the 21st century requires us to evolve with the times and to improve our practices, our program and our instruction continually. The school’s Trustees affirmed the plan in June 2012. In doing so, they affirmed the direction that will continue us down the path to being one of the leading schools for girls in the world.

### **II. Rationale**

The world we inhabit is changing rapidly. We know our students will live their adult lives not only in a world defined by sweeping change and a global economy, but one that is unpredictable and in which the pace of change continues to accelerate.

Our work established three main priorities for Winsor moving forward: to reinforce our commitment to student-centered teaching; to reaffirm the excellence of a Winsor education by ensuring the instruction and assessment of 21st-century skills; and to situate Winsor effectively in the global context of education.

### **III. Context**

The work has its roots in a rigorous multi-year professional development process through which faculty and administration have focused on meeting the needs of the 21st-century student. In 2008, the Teaching and Learning Committee was established to foster ongoing teacher collaboration and learning about the best practices in 21st-century instruction. Over the course of four summers, all Winsor faculty learned from some of the world’s leading educational thinkers while attending Harvard’s Project Zero Classroom. Many conferences and speakers informed our work and established our direction.

The strategic work on teaching and learning dovetailed with the equally vital plans for the Winsor campus. In the past five years, the trustees led an assessment of Winsor’s needs through an inclusive master planning process. The building designs that have emerged from that process will support a world-class educational program, fulfill Winsor’s mission and sustain Winsor’s educational excellence and competitive position well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## IV. Scope and Essential Questions

In undertaking this strategic work, we sought to answer essential and emergent questions for 21st-century education: What do Winsor students need to know? What skills will they need as they prepare for higher education and life in global society? What attributes and life skills should Winsor foster? How will we best foster these skills? This process intentionally did not set out to prescribe specific curricular changes. Implementation of the Long-Range Curriculum Plan focused on the course content and graduation requirements had recently been completed. Our curriculum is effectively an organic entity in that it changes, expands and contracts to meet the needs of our students and changing times.

## V. Process

The plan itself is the culmination of an intensive and inclusive yearlong process that involved every Winsor teacher. In spring 2011, faculty committees were created with the charge to address specific questions related to three areas: *Skills and Instruction*, *Global Competencies*, and *Technology*.

Every faculty member either served on a committee or as an “affiliate,” supplementing the committees’ work by visiting schools and conducting research. A steering committee and a trustee ad-hoc committee guided the process. In January 2012, the committees presented their findings to the faculty and the trustee ad-hoc committee. They then synthesized their ideas into recommendations. In the spring, the steering committee merged the recommendations into a plan for presentation to the faculty and the board.

## VI. A Vision of a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Winsor Graduate

The plan presents a detailed vision of a 21st-century Winsor graduate and what she will need to be well prepared to navigate the challenges of an increasingly complex world. Our work generated a set of skills that all Winsor students should develop to ensure their success:

- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Interdisciplinary problem-solving
- Self-assessment/reflective thinking
- Technological adaptability
- Resilience

The following values also emerged as crucial to providing our students with a 21st-century education:

- Student-centered learning
- Digital citizenship
- Global citizenship
- Environmental stewardship
- Service and community-building
- Leadership

## VII. Strategic Goals

### 1. Winsor will commit to student-centered classroom practices and formative assessment.

Student-centered learning develops habits and ways of thinking that foster independent, life-long learning. It is a crucial component of learning how to learn and how to apply learning to contexts outside of the classroom. In student-centered classrooms, students are active participants in their learning and use their own strategies to develop understanding. They pursue knowledge through a variety of means, including technology, and knowledge arises from a variety of sources, not just the teacher. Instruction is more individualized than standardized and accounts for and adapts to different learning styles of students. Students are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated (National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, 1999).

### 2. The school reaffirms the excellence of a Winsor education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by ensuring the instruction and assessment of 21st-century skills across disciplines.

The pace at which our world is changing suggests that we can no longer predict all of the content bases that will prepare our students to engage in the world. Winsor students need to develop skills necessary to adapt to this rapidly changing world, including the ability to solve problems across multiple disciplines, collaborate with others, think creatively, and apply critical thinking skills and strategies to any field of study, even those that do not yet exist. Given the profound shifts in communications and technology in the first decade of the 21st century, we believe that it is crucial that the Winsor graduate both understand the potential of the technology available and use it to solve complex, 21st-century problems. Twenty-first-century skill development should be made transparent and visible alongside disciplinary skills.

### 3. Winsor will encourage its students to be responsible and knowledgeable global citizens.

A critical dimension of academic excellence in the 21st-century is preparation for responsible participation in the global community. The forces of globalization ensure that individuals and communities separated by vast distances and cultural differences are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Distant peoples and events shape local worlds, while at the same time individual and community decisions—made at Winsor, in Boston, or in New England—often have an impact on wider social and ecological environments. In preparing its students to act responsibly in this interconnected and interdependent world, Winsor is committed to ensuring that its students not only understand the nature of globalization, but also appreciate the personal stakes and responsibilities they have as global citizens.

## VIII. Next Steps

To achieve those goals, the faculty will shift its focus to the work of detailed implementation plans. Several important questions beyond the scope of the committees' work will require discussion in the years ahead. Already, the teaching of 21st-century skills and much of the classroom practice we recommend can be found in many places at Winsor—all to the benefit of the girls.