

Veritas Society 2017/2018 Strategic Plan

Introduction

In November, 2017, Veritas Society President, Marilyn Schorin, proposed that the Society examine its current practices and consider ideas that will guide us for the next few years. Although the Society has revised its Bylaws and Policies several times over its 22-year history, it has not critically examined its practices with a strategic lens for about 20 years. (The report by Betts Meehan, which examined Veritas activities, is undated).

In addition, the appointment of a new President of Bellarmine University, Susan M. Donovan, PhD, heralds a new era for the University. Dr. Donovan initiated a strategic planning process for the University as a whole. Dr. Donovan's appointment and the overarching strategic planning provide the impetus for the Veritas Society to examine its own activities and role in the University community.

The Work Plan

The Board of Directors was divided into three work groups, with all Board members serving on at least one work group. Veritas members who do not serve on the Board of Directors were invited to participate in the work groups, as their talents and interests permitted. Linda Bailey, the University Liaison to the Board and Marilyn Schorin, Veritas President, served as *ad hoc* members on all work groups.

Work Groups (aka Committees)

The three work groups (also called committees) consisted of (a) governance, (b) curriculum, and (c) membership and finance. Dividing the work into three buckets was somewhat arbitrary, as each group's work intersected with the others. Governance of the society depended on whether the Society retains an academic focus or branches into service or community action. Similarly, the curriculum was charged with determining whether to retain the current six-week term (with a 3-week summer term) or to adopt a more flexible approach to course length. All of these questions are moot if there is no way to maintain and sustain an active membership.

Members of the **Governance** work group included Bud Spalding (chair), Jerry Hubbs, Ron Gordon, Deloris White, Nancy Walker, Leslie Ellis, and Mary Moll.

The **Curriculum** work group included Mary Moll (chair), Kitty Darst, Pat Oliver, Panzi Panzera, and Dennis Wiseman.

The **Membership/Finance** work group included Jerry Hubbs (chair), Fred Nett, and Sandra Cherry.

The mandate for all groups was to consider how Veritas could best be positioned for the next 5 years. They were asked to be expansive in their ideas, reaching beyond the original mandate for Veritas Society. Recognizing that it is difficult to envision improvements when the program is functioning, committees were nonetheless asked to consider alternatives to what is working at present.

Ideas to be considered by the governance committee included:

- Is the current charter still appropriate?
- Should we replace the charter with a mission statement and objectives?
- Do we have the right number of representatives on the Board of Directors?
- Is the Board term appropriate?
- Should we add term limits for the Board?
- Should Board officers be elected by the Board (the current practice) or by the membership?
- Do we continue to require all board members to serve on a committee?
- Should the Bellarmine representative be granted a vote?

Ideas considered by the Membership and Finance committee included:

- Do we need to establish a ceiling (maximum enrollment) on membership? If so, what would that be and how would it be determined?
- Is it appropriate that we cut back on actively recruiting new members?
- Can we offer additional benefits of membership? If so, what might we consider?
- Should we revise our policy that members must take classes and not simply sign up for the benefits of membership?
- Are the fees for membership, courses, and Lunch and Learn appropriately priced?
- Can we benchmark our prices and benefits against other Senior Learning programs?
- What are the appropriate uses of our funds?
- Should our accounts at the University be audited?

Ideas considered by the Curriculum committee included:

- Should we examine the premise that all courses last six weeks? Perhaps we could offer some shorter courses?
- Do we have the right categories for courses?
- Should we expand to include some how-to courses, such as language or technology instruction?
- Should we look into distance/online learning opportunities?
- Is the Curriculum committee structured appropriately? The burden on the chairperson is very intensive and time-consuming.
- Do we have the right number of field trips?
- Can we recruit new faculty?
- Does the lack of remuneration hinder our ability to recruit quality faculty?

Work Group Research and Activities

Each work group met several times during the year. The chairs of each work group often attended the meetings of the other work groups. That level of involvement propelled the discussions forward. The Membership/Finance group surveyed a number of Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLI) around the country.

Some of the questions they addressed were the following:

1. What is the current enrollment of the program?
2. Is the program self-sustaining?
3. What is the cost of membership? The cost per course?
4. How many courses are offered? What is the duration of each course?
5. Is there paid staff or faculty?
6. Does a Board of Directors govern them?
7. In addition to courses, what activities are sponsored by the LLI?
8. Does the program offer additional benefits? (Compare to the Veritas Program, which offers free parking, use of the University library, and use of the University fitness center.)

It was not a simple matter to find a contact for each program, as many do not have full-time staff. Yet, when Veritas members were able to speak with someone directly, they gleaned valuable information that helped evaluate and frame the thinking in this exercise.

A summary of information from some of the schools is presented below.

School/Group	Membership Fee	Class Fee	Subsidized	Retained Earnings	t Scholar ships	Mmbrship required for all programs	Members	Locations	Courses
LSU	\$50 semester	\$35-\$55 per class							
Miami Ohio	\$115 semester	as many classes as you want	no	?	no	no	500 ?	5	55
Harvard	\$900 year	3 courses	no	no	no	yes	500	1	120
Cincinnati	\$225 year	\$5 per course	Osher	no	no	yes	1900	4	250
Eckard College	\$59 semester	\$20-\$30 per course	Osher	no	no	yes	1200	2	300
Arizona State	\$20 each semester	\$12-\$36 per course	Osher/Fund Rais	no	no	yes	1000 ?	5	300
Auburn	\$25 membership year	\$200/yr unlimited courses/\$115/semester	Osher	no	no	yes	900	3	40
Duke	\$35 semester	\$70-\$90 per course	Osher	no	no	yes	2100	5 +	130
Baylor	\$50 semester	\$20 course	staff provided	yes	undergra	yes	200	3 off campus	12
Bellarmino	\$40 per semester	\$10 per course	no	yes	no	yes	400	1	42

Each committee prepared a written report of its deliberations and conclusions. All reports are shown below. It is notable that members of the committee expressed overall satisfaction with the mission and operation of the program. Nonetheless, the Board of Directors demonstrated a commitment to continuous evaluation and improvement.

VERITAS SOCIETY LONG-RANGE PLANNING, 2017-18: GOVERNANCE

Committee: Chair Bud Spalding, Leslie Ellis, Ron Gordon, Nancy Walker, Deloris White, Linda Bailey, Abigail Walsh, Vic Peo, President Marilyn Schorin

The Veritas Society was established in 1995 by charter under Bellarmine College (later University) to function as a facilitator of lifelong learning for seniors in the Louisville KY area. Its purpose was declared to be to provide opportunities for intellectual growth, cultural enrichment, and lasting fellowship, by offering non-credit courses, seminars and discussion groups, study-related field trips, and various social activities, as a pleasant and enjoyable learning experience. The charter recognized that Veritas, having a “unique identity and purpose,” was to operate under its own formal bylaws, policies, and budgets.

Bylaws established that the Veritas Society’s activities should be overseen by a non-compensated Board of Directors, to be elected by the membership to two-year terms, without term limits, with officers of president, vice president, and secretary. The Board was to consist of up to 18 members, one of which was to be a voting Bellarmine College (later University) representative (subsequently identified as the Veritas-Bellarmino Liaison). Bylaws further set forth standing committees to organize and carry out Veritas activities: curriculum, administration and finance, membership, promotion, and special events.

Bylaws also acknowledged that Veritas exists “at the pleasure of Bellarmine College (later University),” and that “authority to terminate the Society rests solely with the College (later University).”

At President Marilyn Schorin’s instigation as she began her 2017-19 presidential term, discussions were undertaken by a Committee appointed by her (see membership above) to review the origins and history and development of the Veritas Society’s governance, to assess its appropriateness presently, and to consider its appropriateness for the indefinite future (say, five years). The discussions took place at two meetings of the Committee, on November 2, 2017, and January 17, 2018, and were augmented by an exchange of written responses to several questions generated by President Schorin and subsequent communications.

The Committee generally agreed that the founding charter continues to be appropriate, and likely will remain so, particularly in light of Veritas’ ongoing relationship with Bellarmine. There was considerable (but not complete) agreement also that something like a mission statement, with comparable succinctness, might be useful in reminding Veritas members and others of who we are and what we do. Accordingly, the Committee is drafting a rewording of the “Who We Are” and “What We Do” sections of the long-unchanged third page of each term’s course catalog, in an effort to improve communications, the draft to be distributed on or before the Board’s scheduled May 18, 2018, retreat.

There was general Committee agreement that the Board continues to function as originally intended, but also expressed was growing awareness that the Board's work is not well understood by most members, this again highlighting the need for improved communications, which might include more open Board meetings, clearer descriptions of Board members' duties as candidates are sought for Board elections, etc.

Discussions reflected concern about members' varying understandings and expectations of the Veritas Society, some seeing Veritas only as offering courses, others availing themselves of Lunch and Learn and field trips and interest groups, and perhaps a too-limited number seeing it for its full socialization possibilities as well as for its course offerings. As discussions advanced, there developed a shared sense that getting more members more involved in Veritas activities is a proper and reasonable goal for the future, and that more information and better communication of that information will be required, along with periodic review and appraisal of those renewed efforts.

The appropriateness of two-year terms for Board members was generally agreed upon, although three-year terms as employed by some organizations were given attention also. Factors favoring the two-year term included the advanced ages of Veritas members, with the implications of uncertain needs for medical attention; and the hope that better information about the nature of a Board position; as well as new-Board-member orientation sessions will reduce job-learning time and make the two-year term productive. Term limits were not supported by most of the Committee, who generally cited the value of experience. Some recalled a Board study several years ago when the number of longer-serving Directors became a concern, but by the time the study was completed, half the Board were newcomers – approximately the situation in 2018.

It was agreed that the Board should continue to follow the charter-directed policy of requiring Directors to serve on Veritas' committees, with more attention given to spelling out such committees' work and how members might participate. There was broad agreement that Veritas' longstanding position as an all-volunteer organization (no compensation for Directors, presenters, etc., except for Veritas Society office staff) should be maintained.

A central concern in discussions has been that governance of the Veritas Society is less well understood by members as Veritas has continued to grow; Directors once close to a few dozen members have trouble "taking the pulse of the membership" when the organization numbers 350-400. A growing Veritas need to accommodate to changing circumstances, and to find ways to encourage further member participation, has been an equally recurring theme.

There was full agreement that for sustainable, effective governance, the Board must stay in touch with the membership, and be responsive to member expressions of

both interests and dissatisfactions, employing surveys, regular periodic reviews, and similar measurements.

In summary, the Committee is agreed that to be a fuller, more satisfying Veritas Society, the Board and the organization should continue working toward greater transparency about our various operations, and toward more involvement in Veritas activities by more members.

“Membership organizations” such as the Veritas Society are often said to function on an “80-20 principle” – suggesting that 80 per cent of the work of the organization is done by only 20 per cent of its members. The Committee believes that Veritas should pursue a plan to involve a much higher proportion of our membership in our Society’s operations and activities. Toward that end, perhaps a reasonable five-year goal is to seek active participation by one-third of our members by 2023 – with higher involvement the next goal.

VERITAS CURRICULUM COMMITTEE STRATEGIC PLANNING REPORT – BOARD MEETING APRIL 27, 2018

Chair Mary Moll, Committee members Kitty Darst, Pat Oliver, Panzi Panzera, Dennis Wiseman, Bud Spalding, Marilyn Schorin, Abigail Walsh, Linda Bailey, and Vic Peo.

Veritas' founders' concept of the mix of courses to be offered (topics of Americana, the World, Applied Knowledge, Literature, Arts and Entertainment, and Inner Life) has proved to be sound and appears to be appropriate for the future, with greater sensitivity to the rapidly-changing area of technology. Six-week courses have proved popular, and might well be augmented by shorter-length offerings, as well as longer, multi-part courses. Curriculum growth has recently been constrained by classroom availability, but the possibility of aligning Veritas class length better with Bellarmine University's was favorably considered as a route to offering more courses, thereby attracting more members.

The sustainability of the Committee attracted the most concern, in light of the heavy time demands placed on the Chair. The need for more involvement by more Veritas members in the Committee's necessary procedures and activities (presenter recruitment, course descriptions and catalog preparation, scheduling of courses and course facilitators, etc.) was clearly indicated. Similarly, the Summer Term operation, and those of the Lunch and Learn and Field Trips programs, were identified as successfully running with dedicated leadership but too little involvement by too few members, potentially threatening their longer-term sustainability.

GOALS/ACTION PLANS FOR THE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

1. **To maintain** the core concept of the Veritas society curriculum, while being open to important new areas, (i.e. technology) To this end, review in 24 months as to success, and inclusion of any such areas.
2. **To incorporate** into regular class structure, courses of varied length, i.e., 3-week courses, and to pursue possibility of holding off-campus morning courses, while maintaining close association with Bellarmine University. Success to be reviewed in 24 months.
3. **To identify and develop** the talent for the sustainability of the Curriculum Committee; to increase membership in the Curriculum Committee, to appoint a Co-Chair when possible, and to determine and implement specific duties for members. Plan to be evaluated every 12 months.
4. **To continue** to work with the Veritas Office to centralize some operations and develop a core program of procedures, thereby aiding sustainability of these procedures for future availability. Ongoing, to be reviewed every 12 months.

5. **To search out** ways to increase our visibility, our presence, our value to Bellarmine University.

6. **To promote** our educational program to current and retired Bellarmine instructors, who might be interested in presenting a course, and promote Veritas member involvement in Bellarmine course projects when requested by Bellarmine educators.

7. **To work** with Veritas office to develop opportunities. Ongoing, effectiveness to be reviewed yearly.

SUMMER COURSE SESSION, LUNCH AND LEARN, AND FIELD TRIPS

The Summer Course Session, Lunch and Learn, and Field Trips have all been determined to be very valuable to members and should continue to be offered. **Further discussion and study** will be necessary to determine the best way to guarantee sustainability of these programs.

REPORT OF THE MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

The committee met April 16 with discussion as follows:

Attending were Bud Spalding, Sandra Cherry, Vic Peo, Abigail Walsh, Linda Bailey. Mary Moll, Jerry Hubbs and guest Joan Riggert

Membership:

Present Veritas membership is between 350 and 400 recently peaking at 393 in the Spring 2018 Session.

Losses and gains have kept membership levels constant . Gains are made by word of mouth and wide distribution of Veritas catalogs. No need to make any changes for growth with existing classroom limitations. There were some empty seats in the Spring but a large classroom accommodated larger numbers for one popular class. Veritas could grow in numbers with more classrooms but this is not possible with present Bellarmine enrollment at a very high level.

No changes are recommended in membership at this time.

Finance:

The goal would be to use retained earnings to renovate a classroom for exclusive Veritas use like the arrangement in P-109. However, with recent growth in Bellarmine enrollment, there are no extra classrooms available at this time.

Joan Riggert of the Bellarmine Development Department presented options for naming a small classroom in Horrigan Hall with no guarantee for our use, and also various ways to fund student aid. The next best use for our retained earnings if a classroom is not available, is to fund an undergraduate scholarship through the Bellarmine Heritage Society for a needy student. This would take about half of our available funds, reducing the possibility of securing a classroom if one were to become available in the near future. Negotiations will continue into the next year with Bellarmine Facilities Management for a classroom or possibly some arrangement that could be made for the use of another large classroom for the most popular courses which quickly fill up.

Also discussed was the pricing of membership and course fees as compared with other Lifelong Learning Institutes around the country. Veritas is one of the lowest cost programs. No changes are recommended in this area as we continue to add retained earnings each year.

No recommendations for changes in finance at this time.

Jerry Hubbs, Chair.

BOARD MEETING TO FINALIZE STRATEGIC PLAN

In May 2018, Veritas held a final meeting to review the reports and determine what actions would be appropriate. The entire board attended along with Linda Bailey, the University Liaison, and Abigail Walsh, assistant to the program and a number of interested Veritas members. Dr. Sean Ryan, Vice President of Continuing Education at Bellarmine University, also attended the meeting. He reported on the status of Bellarmine University's Strategic Planning initiative and encouraged the Veritas activity.

We learned at the outset of the meeting that our financial projections were inaccurate. As the University had recently changed their financial accounting, new figures became available for the Veritas program. Salary figures had previously been absent and our financial reports had shown continuous surpluses. The new figures showed that the program ran a \$9,000 deficit in 2018 and would continue to run a deficit unless compensatory action was taken. Although the University agreed to cover the 2017/18 deficit, they would not do so in the future.

This new information changed the substance of the Finance Committee report and created the necessity for a future meeting to deal with the revised financial projections.

Nonetheless, numerous suggestions were offered and discussed.

With regard to governance, the Board recommended updating the job descriptions of board and committee members. The Board envisions this change leading to better-informed Board members. The Board also envisions an opportunity for involvement of members in various activities, which will lead to a more representative Board.

The Board:

- Discussed using both the website and newsletter to encourage more volunteers.
- Advocates more board meetings
- Encouraged improving communication to the membership with the goal of increasing member engagement via (a) website, (b) catalog page 3, (c) end-of-term survey, (d) announcement during class – a “Public Service Announcement” of sorts

The Board discussed, but rejected, term limits for Board members. Nonetheless, the Board is concerned about a loss of talent, but no specific suggestions were offered.

The Board discussed the timing of election of officers, as the two year term may not coincide with their term on the Board.

The Board recommends that procedural instructions for all committees, particularly the Curriculum Committee, be housed in the Veritas office.

The Board expressed concern, but did not create specific recommendations for increasing the sustainability of various committees, most notably the Curriculum and Production committees.

The Board discussed the possibility of an 'adjunct' board, composed of members who were defeated in the Board election.

With regard to curriculum, the Board recommended that the curriculum committee divide the workload into various subcommittees, such as recruitment of new presenters and an operational subcommittee, which would edit course descriptions. They also recommended considering short courses, such as new 3-week courses, which could run concurrently during the fall or spring term. They discussed, but drew no conclusions about pricing for short courses.

With regard to membership and finance, the Board discussed the possibility of adding classes at non-campus facilities, such as the Passport Center, Masonic Homes, the Thrive Center, or the Bellarmine building on Newburg Road. These suggestions are possibilities for the future, but the current governance and operational structure does not support a major expansion at this time. Other ideas for potential future expansion include the addition of Monday and Wednesday morning classes and a lower age for membership (50 years).

All agreed that increasing the diversity of membership is a priority, but no specific suggestions were adopted.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Board voted to work toward increased participation in the non-class operations of the Veritas Society, using open board meetings, announcements in The Veritas Weekly, articles in the Veritas Voice, and increasing opportunities for member engagement.

The Board voted to reinstate the Bylaws committee to update job descriptions and procedures.

The Board voted to monitor and encourage modest growth in membership.

The Board voted to hold another meeting to examine cost proposals to restore financial solvency.