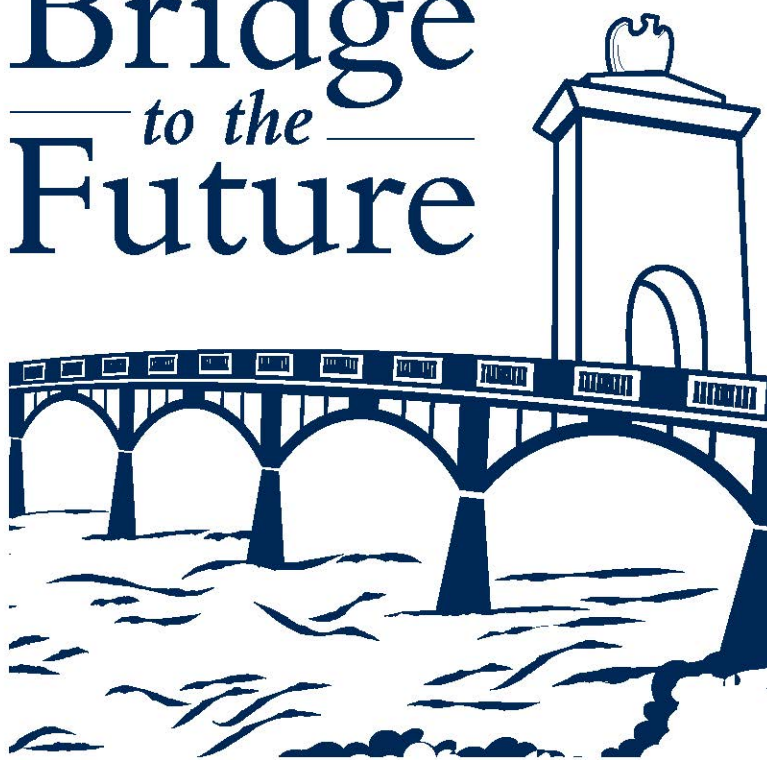


Bridge
to the
Future



2021 to 2023 Strategic Plan

Wilkes University

Bridge to the Future: **2021 to 2023 Strategic Plan for Wilkes University**

I. Introduction

While the end of one strategic plan is typically followed by a comprehensive planning cycle that includes an extensive exploration of the current environment, the *Bridge to the Future* Strategic Plan is designed to serve as a ‘bridge’ from the relative stability of the last plan to a yet unknown future.

This plan is built on the successes and lessons of the *Gateway to the Future* Strategic Plan and introduces key strategic objectives essential for Wilkes to thrive in the post-pandemic world. It is only two years in duration and is limited in scope, encouraging us to focus our energy and resources on the most crucial issues facing Wilkes University.

Most importantly, the *Bridge to the Future* is grounded in our currently reality. It is likely that throughout the two years of this plan, Wilkes will continue to experience serious challenges as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue to prioritize the health and safety of our campus community above all else. This overarching commitment to the wellbeing of our people underscores each of the six goals of the *Bridge to the Future* Strategic Plan that follow.

II. Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Foster Institutional Efficiency, Agility and a Culture of Entrepreneurship

The events of the past year have proven that organizations must respond quickly and efficiently to rapidly changing circumstances in order to remain viable. We must foster a culture that encourages continual enhancement of institutional efficiency, promotes agility and cultivates entrepreneurialism. As a University community, we need to celebrate risk takers (and learn from occasional failures), challenge traditional ideas, support those who push the boundaries, welcome dissenting ideas and embrace robust discussions.

This goal is the bedrock of the whole Strategic Plan. All potential initiatives should be judged by the degree to which they will enhance efficiency, promote agility and encourage entrepreneurial solutions to the challenges we confront.

Our organizational structure needs to facilitate a more rapid deployment of our limited resources to opportunities for growth and new initiatives. The University Restructuring Task Force will play a critical role in reshaping our administrative structures.

The academic portfolio review process will enable us to focus our resources more strategically on high performing programs. The strength of our traditional academic disciplines has formed the foundation upon which all of our programs have been built. However, it has also created rigidities and silos that do not always serve our best interest. The further development of inter-disciplinary programs will also ensure we are preparing our students for the careers of the future.

Examples of Initiatives to Support Goal 1:

1. Create a *New Initiatives Fund* that will be used to provide seed funds for innovative ideas that will generate additional revenue and/or enhance the student experience, ultimately improving recruitment and retention.
2. Direct resources to high-growth and stable-growth academic programs. Programs that are unable to maintain student demand will be wound-down and ultimately discontinued.
3. Reshape our administrative structures to enhance efficiency, promote flexible work units and focus our limited resources on our key strategic objectives.
4. Develop new partnerships with business and community organizations to ensure our programs meet the needs of the workforce, now and in the future.
5. Recognize and celebrate risk-taking and cultivate entrepreneurial and innovative endeavors.

Goal 2: Foster Excellence in Programs that Serve our Students and Research Mission

In the hyper-competitive landscape of higher education, it is essential that we continuously enhance our academic programs along with our extra- and co-curricular activities. The Wilkes undergraduate residential experience involves a broad array of programs, events and experiences. We aim to challenge our students, expand their horizons and ultimately transform their lives.

We must continue to support technology that enhances the student experience and enables us to offer programming through a variety of modalities. As a national doctoral University, we will support the ongoing development of our research culture through fostering collaboration and recognition of research excellence.

Examples of Initiatives to Support Goal 2:

1. Complete the Academic Portfolio Review and begin implementation of the necessary changes to our academic offerings.
2. Provide additional resources to enhance the virtual delivery of high-quality curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Resources may include additional instructional design staff, more comprehensive faculty development and new technology solutions.
3. Develop new approaches to encourage faculty/student scholarship and research.

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4. Retain, and when possible obtain, the highest accreditation standards for our major programs.
5. Begin the process of examining the general education curriculum. Research models from institutions that have solid retention rates and high graduate placement rates, as well as innovative programs that have attracted high quality students.

Goal 3: Empower our People

It will always be true that our people are Wilkes University's most important asset. We must remain committed to recruiting, retaining and developing outstanding faculty and staff. We will reinforce a culture of accountability, enhance recognition for excellence, continue our emphasis on health and safety and strive to ensure that employees feel Wilkes is a great workplace.

Examples of Initiatives to Support Goal 3:

1. Reinstate the University's contribution to retirement funds and return to previous salary rates.
2. Ensure there is 100% compliance with annual faculty and staff performance reviews and establish performance metrics in line with these strategic goals.
3. Conduct annual 360-degree reviews of senior leadership.
4. Enhance the programs that recognize excellence, including increasing the payment associated with the five President's Awards for Excellence from \$500 to \$1,000.
5. Conduct an annual survey of employee sentiment, which will be used as a tool to assist in the development of policies and practices that ensure Wilkes is a great place to work.
6. Continue the University's commitment to benchmark every full-time position, ensuring that we offer equal pay for equal work.
7. Prepare and position campus for a more diverse student body.

Goal 4: Recruit, Retain and Graduate Undergraduate and Graduate Students

The heart of our mission is attracting and graduating undergraduate and graduate students. The market has never been more competitive, so we must maintain the necessary infrastructure to attract and recruit qualified students, provide an exceptional array of academic programs and create a living and learning environment in which students can thrive. Over the two years of this plan, our primary goal will be to stabilize undergraduate enrollment and grow graduate enrollment.

Examples of Initiatives to Support Goal 4:

1. Work with our partner, *Keypath*, to provide the resources necessary to support the growth of our graduate nursing programs.
2. Explore the possibilities for additional partnership opportunities with *Keypath*.

3. Provide the necessary resources to support initiatives that improve our four-year and six-year graduate rates and our first-time, first-year student retention.
4. Continue to refine our extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.
5. Expand the number of comprehensive articulation agreements with two-year colleges in Pennsylvania.
6. Explore the opportunities to expand and refine our honors program to attract additional highly qualified students, without adding substantially to the cost of the program.
7. Expand the range of classes taught remotely that can be offered over the winter break and during summer.
8. Continue a tuition and financial aid strategy that ensures a Wilkes education is affordable and attainable.
9. Develop academic, career and student life programming that offers great educational return on investment and positions Wilkes for future success in the market.

Goal 5: Improve our Financial Strength

There will never be a time during which we can lose focus on improving our financial strength. We will establish realistic and achievable financial goals, constrain expenditures and actively pursue opportunities to generate additional revenue. This will allow us to return to a balanced budget and ultimately promote growth.

Examples of Initiatives to Support Goal 5:

1. Balance the budget for FY 2022 by growing revenue and maintaining strict control of expenses.
2. Empower budget managers to reshape their budgets to better align with strategic objectives, while holding them accountable for spending.
3. Work towards a zero-based budgeting model.
4. Work with *Keypath* to determine graduate programs that have the greatest potential for dramatic growth.
5. Approve a four-year capital budget that allows us to maintain our campus infrastructure, but allows us to strengthen our financial resources and cash flow.

Goal 6: Strengthen Connection to our Alumni and Build our Advancement Capacity

We will improve the systems and increase the human resources dedicated to engaging our alumni and moving engaged individuals to motivated financial supporters. We will ensure we have the capacity to conduct a successful comprehensive campaign - a key element of the next planning cycle.

Over recent years, we have made few investments in our fundraising, stewardship and alumni relations operations. Enhanced alumni engagement through mentoring, internships and job placement deepens the vital connections to Wilkes.

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For an institution of our size, we have a modest endowment and we will continue to experience increasing demand for financial support for our students.

Examples of Initiatives to Support Goal 6:

1. Invest in technical solutions to better understand donor interest and make data-driven decisions.
2. Staff the unit adequately to support the data-driven results identified above and create donor-specific appeals.
3. Invest in systems that enhance the alumni and donor experience in virtual environments.
4. Implement solutions that connect alumni to campus programming, mentoring and for the benefit of student development.
5. Ensure resource allocation over the next two years that supports the preparation of a new campaign in FY23.

III. Closing

The goals and supporting initiatives outlined in the *Bridge to the Future* plan will guide our decision-making over the next two years, and provide a framework upon which the next plan can be built. Upon the completion of *Bridge to the Future*, the University will return to the more traditional approach to the strategic planning process. The “other side” of the *Bridge to the Future – 2023* – holds realities yet unknown due to uncertainties in the external environment; however, careful and collaborative planning will ensure that Wilkes will be positioned for future prosperity.