

An aerial photograph of the Wilkes University campus, showing various buildings, trees, and walkways. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is centered and white.

Innovate. Engage. Thrive.

STRATEGIC PLAN
2023 - 2028

Wilkes University

Executive Summary

1. ADVANCE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

- Foster collaborative faculty-staff networks for investigating and advancing innovations in pedagogy and scholarship
- Equip students for transformative growth and success in their curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular pursuits
- Affirm the value and relevance of the traditional liberal arts and sciences while championing new academic programs and delivery models

2. SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

- Expand and support formal and structured pathways for career development
- Establish and integrate a network of student financial support
- Enhance student opportunities for community-engaged leadership
- Prioritize a holistic and inclusive student experience
- Invest and empower all members of the campus community in student retention efforts

3. PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY, ENRICHMENT AND SERVICE

- Strengthen and formalize our commitment to an inclusive and equitable campus climate
- Enhance professional and career development for faculty and staff
- Create an environment of service and engagement both in the classroom and in the community

4. PROMOTE INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Improve access to partnerships
- Expand alternative educational opportunities and programs
- Bolster current enrollment partnerships
- Leverage current programs to benefit both the University and the local community

5. STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

- Create flexible recruitment and retention goals that stabilize and ultimately grow enrollment and that are responsive to emerging demographic challenges
- Prioritize responsiveness to changing student needs
- Strengthen financial position

6. OPTIMIZE INFRASTRUCTURE

- Enhance instructional spaces throughout campus
- Intentionally integrate campus improvements with downtown revitalization
- Initiate a transition to diversified and sustainable energy infrastructure for our campus
- Leverage and integrate shared technologies and systems across campus
- Establish sustainable master planning practices that advance the University mission and align with the development plans of downtown Wilkes-Barre



Advance Academic Excellence

Academic excellence is the guiding, foundational principle that orients and directs all endeavors at the University. Rooted in the best practices of scholarship, it is a fundamentally collaborative process that merges faculty and staff expertise and mentorship with student autonomy and critical inquiry to inspire innovation within and beyond the classroom and to transform lives in measurable ways. Academic excellence at Wilkes is ultimately a regenerative promise, an ongoing commitment to supporting and sustaining the highest standards of faculty, staff and student achievement across a diverse range of agile and accessible academic programs that prepare our graduates to meet the complex, urgent imperatives of our rapidly changing world.

At the heart of the Wilkes academic experience are the mentoring relationships forged among our faculty, staff and students in their shared pursuit of new knowledge. To foster this environment of critical inquiry and discovery, Wilkes must generate the financial resources and support structures essential for collaborative research and professional development.

As an academic leader navigating the profound challenges facing higher education, Wilkes must continue to cultivate traditional programs and their fundamentally essential values while remaining agile and innovating curricular change and transformation that will emerge from those core foundations. Wilkes must also continue its commitment to cost-effective, accessible academic experiences that enable students to develop relevant, value-added competencies and that position our students to achieve success through transferable skills and outcomes.





TO ADVANCE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, WILKES WILL

Foster collaborative faculty-staff networks for investigating and advancing innovations in pedagogy and scholarship

- Establish a Center for Teaching, Learning and Research Excellence.
- Enhance opportunities for faculty scholarship by creating more flexible structures for academic units and programs to adaptively assign and balance research and teaching responsibilities.
- Leverage the academic structure to explore high-impact cross-disciplinary grant opportunities.

Equip students for transformative growth and success in their curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular pursuits

- Increase the mentoring fund to ensure that undergraduate and graduate students have legible, economically viable pathways to pursue collaborative research and scholarship with faculty and staff.
- Strengthen and expand high-impact leadership opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students across academic, service and outreach programs.
- Ensure all undergraduate students expand their academic and pre-professional portfolios by carrying a minor, completing an internship, engaging in collaborative research with faculty or staff, completing a study away experience or by establishing a formal mentoring relationship with one of our Wilkes alumni.

Affirm the value and relevance of the traditional liberal arts and sciences while championing new academic programs and delivery models

- Invest the required resources to revise and reinvigorate the general education curriculum in ways that affirm the value and relevance of the core requirements and establish a clearer, more flexible integration of courses within and beyond the general education structure.
- Encourage and support new programs that leverage existing faculty resources and foster cross-disciplinary curricular development, collaboration and delivery.
- Develop, sustain and assess diverse, innovative degree, certificate and badge offerings across the full range of University programs.

Support Student Success

At Wilkes we honor our partnership with students by providing exemplary student support through flexibility and an individualized approach toward mentorship that promotes both personal and professional development. The success of a Wilkes student begins with the student's wellbeing. Wilkes will focus on the mental, physical and emotional health of our students to achieve an environment conducive to learning and thriving. We will strive to educate the full student by focusing on individual success through academics, service, co-curricular opportunities and personal growth.

Ensuring student success requires Wilkes to reinforce the importance of all campus constituencies being dedicated to student retention and persistence toward graduation, as all departments and divisions play an instrumental role in strengthening student retention and graduation rates.

Fostering student success also means preparing our graduates to become active contributors to the global community. Service and global community engagement position students to enact core Wilkes values while developing critical leadership skills that will not only shape their career and personal stories, but also effect change in the wider world. Recognizing these interconnections, Wilkes will continue to celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion as a campus community and offer educational and enrichment opportunities for students to develop their cultural awareness and to ensure their capacity for global citizenship.

TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS, WILKES WILL

Expand and support formal and structured pathways for career development

- Establish a comprehensive personal and professional development program integrated throughout the Wilkes student experience.
- Provide students with formal opportunities to actively engage in career and professional development toward career readiness and employment.

Establish and integrate a network of student financial support

- Support our undergraduate students' transition into academic coursework by covering the cost of textbooks through the "Colonels are Covered" initiative.
- Create a financial literacy and support program for students and families to help students successfully initiate, sustain and complete their course of study while meeting the financial demands of and beyond their Wilkes education.

Enhance student opportunities for community-engaged leadership

- Invest in and develop systematic, structured and integrated educational opportunities for global community engagement and international experiences.
- Empower students to develop and practice awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion within and beyond the campus community.
- Expand opportunities for community engagement through the Bonner Leader Program.



Prioritize a holistic and inclusive student experience

- Establish a network of care to address the evolving and interconnected academic, social and wellness needs of our students.
- Invigorate the student-athlete experience by optimizing the shift to the Landmark Athletic Conference.
- Promote school spirit and a sense of belonging by providing full-campus social and civic events.

Invest and empower all members of the campus community in student retention efforts

- Develop and formalize improved communication networks, data sharing and processes across departments and divisions.
- Institute a new student support services structure to develop more intentional collaborative pathways for student success and engagement.
- Routinely establish, communicate and assess student retention and graduation metrics and measure success against annual goals.

Prioritize Community, Enrichment and Service

The members of the Wilkes community are our greatest strength and our most valuable resource. Recognizing the profound ways our students, faculty, staff and alumni serve the University mission, Wilkes must in turn cultivate a diverse, inclusive and empowering environment for professional development, personal growth and community engagement for all campus constituents. Supporting our people will require investing dedicated resources to ensure competitive compensation and benefits, to promote enriching career and alumni experiences and to foster student opportunities for leadership and mentorship.

Creating and sustaining a diverse, inclusive campus climate requires an intentional reimagining of student recruitment efforts coupled with a clear commitment to recruiting, retaining and supporting faculty and staff who directly reflect and embody the values of diversity, equity and inclusiveness. For a culture of diversity and inclusion to thrive among students, faculty and staff, it must also be reflected at the highest levels of leadership at the University.

Reinvigorating a culture of Wilkes pride is achieved through collaborative work toward common goals, the celebration of individual and group successes and a recommitment to our defining values. Affirming our collective responsibility to and investment in shared governance and collaborative decision making in service of our University mission unites and invigorates our community.



TO PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY, ENRICHMENT AND SERVICE, WILKES WILL

Strengthen and formalize our commitment to an inclusive and equitable campus climate

- Hire a Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer.
- Develop intentional recruitment efforts that draw students from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations to our campus.
- Employ hiring practices that attract applicants from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations to our campus.
- Support and resource retention efforts that focus on an inclusive and equitable campus culture.
- Provide comprehensive campus and regional orientation programs to promote successful and sustained transition and inclusion into the community.
- Practice transparency in reporting up-to-date demographic data and metrics related to student, faculty and staff recruitment and retention.

Enhance professional and career development for faculty and staff

- Provide campus-wide training for a safe and equitable work environment.
- Develop a collaborative process for faculty and staff mentoring and succession planning.
- Review annual evaluation processes to ensure assessment of and growth through individual competency-based goals.
- Encourage and fund external career development opportunities.
- Offer flexible and remote work arrangements that benefit both our employees and our University.
- Celebrate faculty, staff, student and alumni accomplishments to spread awareness of Wilkes's impact and inspire engagement and connection by sharing stories.

Create an environment of service and engagement both in the classroom and in the community

- Reinvigorate our Office for Civic Engagement
- Reinstate a two-day orientation for incoming first-year students, with one day being dedicated to campus-wide community engagement.
- Formalize shared service-learning experiences such as First Year Foundations and extend them into sophomore year programs.
- Enhance student engagement by intentionally developing student activities based on the needs of our current students.

Promote Innovation and Partnerships

Wilkes is committed to fostering a culture of innovation and creativity while strengthening and developing partnerships that support the University's mission. Institutional innovation thrives through nimble thinking, creativity and calculated risk taking. Short-term and long-term achievements must be grounded in program relevancy, campus vibrancy and resource availability. Wilkes's continued success as a leading educational institution will be increasingly linked to complex, interdependent partnerships with the local, regional and global community—and across a range of industries. We will highlight our academic achievements and establish ourselves as an intellectual capital in northeast Pennsylvania.

Wilkes's success is due in part to purposeful partnerships that benefit both the University and the community. The University values its partnerships with downtown Wilkes-Barre and King's College and is committed to cultivating those partnerships to improve the city and the University. The University should also strengthen its relationships with partners in the region and maximize development opportunities. New opportunities and academic programs should be evaluated through an accelerated process that allocates resources, establishes a clear timeframe for measured success and recognizes when an idea has failed in order to redirect resources as necessary. As enrollment demographics shift, Wilkes must explore alternative revenue opportunities that are both grounded in the University's mission and supportive of the University's growth.

TO PROMOTE INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIPS, WILKES WILL

Improve access to partnerships

- Leverage current personnel and offices to develop a clear pathway for internal and external parties to explore new partnerships and fully utilize current collaborations.
- Utilize existing advisory boards to establish corporate and industry projects that both support new research and allow prototype testing of emerging University innovations.

Expand alternative educational opportunities and programs

- Engage and establish programs for retirees including classes, lectures and exhibits and opportunities to participate in campus events.
- Grow accelerated degree completion programs.
- Pilot competency-based programs as well as modular and alternative-semester delivery.
- Develop and invest in international partnerships that provide study away experiences for students, faculty and staff.

Bolster current enrollment partnerships

- Enrich the Upward Bound experience by providing students quality career and research exploration opportunities with Wilkes faculty, staff and students.
- Strengthen the Young Scholars program through improved partnerships with local school districts and increased on-campus student support.
- Strengthen articulation agreements with community colleges.

Leverage current programs to benefit both the University and the local community

- Expand English language learners programs to support the growing English language learner population.
- Provide personal and professional development program offerings to area businesses.



Strengthen Financial Resilience

Financial vibrancy is essential for the University's success. To improve its financial strength, Wilkes must establish long-term sustained budgetary and financial planning practices to become more adaptive and responsive to challenges in the higher education sector and to the needs of our students. Wilkes's commitment to these guiding principles is founded in sound financial stewardship that ensures the sustainability of our institution and the accessibility of a Wilkes education.

As demographic changes are anticipated to affect Wilkes's ability to enroll undergraduate students from the Northeast region of the United States, Wilkes must stabilize enrollment by diversifying its student recruitment strategies and identifying and targeting regions with enhanced recruitment potential. Recruitment strategies will include growing international enrollment, expanding undergraduate and graduate programs and investing in adult-learner programs and degree-completion opportunities. To ease the burden of tuition increases on students, Wilkes must seek to leverage alternative, non-tuition revenue streams and external funding opportunities. To secure its future, Wilkes must establish directed, best-practice pathways to improve its bond rating and grow its endowment.





TO STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL RESILIENCE, WILKES WILL

Create flexible recruitment and retention goals that stabilize and ultimately grow enrollment and that are responsive to emerging demographic challenges

- Develop an agile enrollment management plan for both domestic and international students.
- Increase matriculation of Upward Bound students by offering competitive scholarship opportunities.
- Improve the matriculation rate of students from the Young Scholars program.
- Reevaluate athletic recruitment plans to leverage membership in the Landmark Athletic Conference.
- Explore new undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Enhance recruitment to include adult learners and degree-completion students.
- Restore first-year student retention to 77% by the end of the plan.
- Increase six-year graduation rate to 63% by the end of the plan.

Prioritize responsiveness to changing student needs

- Invest in student support resources to provide enhanced services to meet the needs of both domestic and international students.
- Evaluate residency requirements and meal plan options that better align with student expectations while maintaining the same level of revenue for the University.
- Manage the student financial burden of tuition increases to confirm annual comparability to the marketplace.

Strengthen financial position

- Improve net tuition revenue by not exceeding 10% of budgeted resources toward the first-year discount rate.
- Increase non-tuition revenue and reduce tuition dependency to 81%.
- Prioritize an innovative comprehensive campaign to generate increases in donor funds.

Optimize Infrastructure

As Wilkes adapts to demographic shifts in traditional undergraduate enrollment and changes in campus utilization, the focus on infrastructure becomes less about building new facilities and more about making strategic investments in and ensuring sustainable maintenance and optimal utilization of our buildings, technology, systems and other assets. All aspects of our infrastructure – physical, technological and networked – should support and improve how our students learn and how our faculty and staff teach and work to achieve this central goal Wilkes must ensure that our campus spaces, systems and processes are adaptive, efficient, effective and accessible for all.

Wilkes is committed to maintaining and improving its physical infrastructure through enhancement projects that enable us to fully realize the value of our distinctive buildings while improving our campus and the surrounding community. Wilkes must ensure that campus systems and processes are appropriately resourced, dynamically integrated and effectively operationalized to best serve the changing needs of students, faculty and staff. Understanding that the strength of our infrastructure is fundamentally connected to our city, Wilkes must establish sustainable master planning practices that align with the development plans of downtown Wilkes-Barre. To reaffirm our commitment to downtown revitalization, Wilkes will pursue mission-driven investments to City improvements and develop a communication plan that highlights the community-wide benefits of each investment.

TO OPTIMIZE INFRASTRUCTURE, WILKES WILL

Enhance instructional spaces throughout campus

- Renovate the Dorothy Dickson Darte Center to maximize public accessibility through alignment with ADA standards and to expand instructional, staging and event capacity.
- Reimagine Farley Library as the hub for networked research, learning, academic support and information access on campus.
- Analyze our current space-utilization data to ensure optimal allocation of capital investments in classroom, laboratory, research, office and learning-support facilities.

Intentionally integrate campus improvements with Downtown revitalization

- Complete the River Street project, mitigating traffic flow and improving pedestrian access and safety from South Street to Ross Street.
- Explore collaborative partnerships for economic and community development that advance the revitalization of and enhance safety in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

Initiate a transition to diversified and sustainable energy infrastructure for our campus

- Establish solar and wind energy projects at Stark Learning Center, the Henry Student Center and the corner of South and Ross Streets.
- Plan integration of electric vehicle charging stations throughout campus.

Leverage and integrate shared technologies and systems across campus

- Identify opportunities to centralize, consolidate, and better utilize existing systems.
- Prioritize resources for the maintenance and strategic upgrading of all hardware, software, subscription services, networks and systems that are central to fulfilling the University mission.
- Provide training to campus units on accessibility and cybersecurity to ensure our forward-thinking approach is both secure and accessible for all.

Establish sustainable master planning practices that advance the University mission and align with the development plans of downtown Wilkes-Barre

- Improve our master planning process and committee structure to maximize participation and representation across our organizational structure and across the community of downtown Wilkes-Barre.
- Formalize a collaborative communication structure with King's College, the Diamond City Partnership, the City of Wilkes-Barre and other community partners that establishes ongoing dialogue on planning for individual projects and prioritizes partnership opportunities for achieving mutually beneficial goals.
- Leverage under-utilized residence halls as a mission-centered source of revenue and an opportunity for community partnership and engagement in service.



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