

Academic Affairs Strategic Plan  
2018-2022

## Vision Statement for 2022

*The University of Evansville is a nationally ranked institution of higher learning. We are known for our world-class study abroad programs and for our emphasis on undergraduate research, in which faculty and students work side-by-side to tackle difficult questions and create new knowledge in their disciplines. Our students are change-makers who work alongside faculty and with our community to tackle important problems and improve the lives of real people. We encourage all of our students to transform their communities, to explore far-flung corners of the world, and to discover things about themselves that they never imagined. We have the resources to support big dreams and bold action by our faculty, our students, and our graduates.*

## Preamble

The University of Evansville is an academically selective, internationally focused institution of higher learning that integrates a distinctive liberal arts education and dynamic professional programs. Any strategic plan must emphasize and expand upon these core elements of our identity as we operate within a rapidly changing educational landscape.

The Academic Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 has been commissioned by the Board of Trustees in anticipation of an institutional strategic planning process that will begin when a new president is in place. It is intended to serve as a starting point for an institutional strategic plan by clarifying academic priorities. At the same time, the academic strategic plan will guide academic decisions and resource allocations in the absence of a university strategic plan, recognizing that a number of academic decisions are too urgent to wait for the institutional plan and too important to be made without a strategic vision.

Given the current fiscal challenges that we face, our strategic vision must include a strategy for bringing our revenues in line with our expenditures. Until we accomplish this, we will be forced into a reactionary mode in our operations. Rather than planning for the future, we will increasingly have to make decisions that allow us to survive in the present. Achieving fiscal stability will require the effort of all areas of the university. The academic

strategic plan addresses these issues by focusing on those areas that can be influenced by academic policy and program creation.

The academic strategic plan focuses on three primary objectives:

**Objective #1:** Highlight the quality and distinctiveness of the University of Evansville's academic programs.

**Objective #2:** Create programs and procedures that increase enrollments and enhance revenues.

**Objective #3:** Work diligently to enhance the effectiveness of academic units.

Each of these objectives has the same ultimate goal of ensuring that the University of Evansville remains a competitive and academically excellent institution far into the future.

## **Objective #1: Highlight the quality and distinctiveness of the University of Evansville's academic programs.**

In order to stand out in a crowded and noisy higher education market, the University of Evansville must highlight its uniqueness. What is different about us? What do we do better than anybody else? What can we offer to students that will improve their lives and their future opportunities? Why should a student come here and not somewhere else? Unless we can give clear, convincing, and compelling answers to these questions, we will not fare well in an increasingly competitive future.

We need, as an institution, to define ourselves to ourselves in a way that will make it possible to define ourselves to potential students, potential employees, our community, and the higher-education world. This will require going beyond the things that nearly all small private colleges talk about, such as small class sizes, personal attention, and faculty excellence. While these are all true of UE, they are true of many other schools as well. They are good descriptors, but they are not distinguishers.

All members of the UE community need to seriously consider the question, "what makes us unique?" And then we need to stamp this uniqueness onto our curriculum in ways that will ensure that all students experience the things that make UE unique.

### **A. National visibility and academic profile**

Current demographic data predicts a sharp decline in freshman enrollments starting in 2027, as children born during and after the "Great Recession," which lowered birthrates substantially, graduate from high school. The impact will be severe, but it will not be equally severe across all regions and sectors. The two things that will protect schools from these demographic trends are 1) a national reputation (as schools in the top 50 of their category will be much less affected by enrollment decline than

other schools) and 2) a national recruiting reach (as some areas of the country—especially the Southwest and Pacific West—will be much less affected by low birth rates because of offsetting patterns of immigration). UE needs to act now to protect our high ranking and increase national recruiting. We also need to increase our ability to reach out to new immigrant populations and the nimbleness with which we create and approve new programs to meet emerging demand. We will take the following steps to improve our reputation for quality and distinctiveness:

- Improve the ways that we gather student outcomes from departments and programs and communicate them through our web page and other advertising.
- Create ways for departments and programs to immediately create and refresh web content that markets their programs to prospective students.
- Streamline the curricular approval process to allow us to respond quickly to educational opportunities.
- Recruit a diverse faculty and staff that will help UE engage with students outside of our traditional demographic profile.
- Identify programs with the ability to recruit nationally and ensure that they have the resources necessary to remain competitive.
- Prioritize funding for professional activities that exposes UE faculty and staff to regional and national audiences.

## **B. Existing programs that contribute to our quality and distinctiveness.**

Perhaps the most obvious distinguishing factor in a UE education is the opportunity to study at our Harlaxton center, which

has consistently been ranked as the #1 study abroad program in the United States. This is already a crucial part of our outreach to potential students, but there are ways to make it an even more important part of more students' education. Two other areas with the potential to provide outstanding and uncommon experiences are the undergraduate research program and our Institute for Global Enterprise, which is spearheading the initiative for UE to become an Ashoka Changemaker Campus. All three of these areas offer opportunities to build signature experiences into our academic programs. We should avail ourselves of these opportunities and of other opportunities to build on the things that we are already doing well.

- Create a summer experience at Harlaxton that is comparable to the experience in the school years and market this to students who cannot attend during a regular semester.
- Carefully schedule courses in high-credit-hour majors. Use summer and online courses to enable more students to participate in a Harlaxton semester (or summer).
- Work the newly acquired Harlaxton land into our programs in unique ways, such as beginning an archeological dig on the site and making it available to students over the summer.
- Pursue the Ashoka Changemaker Campus designation and increase the ways that social innovation is linked to our curriculum at both the graduate and the undergraduate levels.
- Build stronger connections between curricular and co-curricular strategies for encouraging social innovation,

leadership, and career development.

- Fully fund the Institute for Global Enterprise and Change Lab classes through grants and connections to curricular revenue streams.
- Dramatically increase the funds available for student research and make it a signature UE program across the disciplines.
- Build interdisciplinary programs around unique campus opportunities such as:
  - Tin City
  - The Peters-Margadant House
  - The Native Plant Garden
  - The UE Community Garden
  - The ACE Care Clinic
  - The Institute for Banking and Finance
  - The Institute for Public Health
  - The Vectren Conservation Park
  - The Downtown Medical Campus
- Create incentives for academic programs to expand and improve.

### C. Signature Experiences

A general education program at a truly great institution should reflect the things that make that institution truly great. Our current program gives students a solid foundation for a life of learning, and it provides important critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that will benefit them in any career they choose. But it does not have anything in it that provides a signature UE experience—something that no other college or university could provide. It is vital that we reshape the curriculum in a way that

provides such experiences.

- Create a First Year Seminar (FYS) class that does not also serve as a writing instruction class and build a standard, signature experience into this class. This signature experience should be based on UE’s stated mission to “provide students with life-transforming educational experiences that prepare them to engage the world as informed, ethical, and productive citizens.”
- Move writing instruction into dedicated writing courses.
- Consider the revival of a first-year common read, or series of themed readings, that could become the basis for a signature course.
- Include an upper-division version of the FYS class for transfer and re-entry students that will convey the same kinds of information and experience as the freshman-level course.
- Incorporate different hands-on pedagogies into the general education curriculum, such as service-learning and cooperative education.
- Substantially strengthen the use of, and funding for, undergraduate research.

### D. Campus-Wide Visioning and Planning

With the coming presidential transition, UE will have an opportunity to create a new strategic plan. As part of this plan, stakeholders from all parts of the UE community will be asked to come together to discuss what the university values the most.

The Academic Affairs Office will play a large role in this planning process and should ensure that it includes the following areas:

- A discussion of the things that UE does or could potentially do better than any other school.
- Concrete plans to direct more of our institutional resources towards the things that we can do better than anybody else.
- Connections between curricular and co-curricular avenues for student development.
- A timeline for strengthening, with appropriate resources, our most distinguishing characteristics.
- A discussion of the things that we will not do, or will stop doing, either because they are not things that we do well or because they are not closely related to our mission and vision.
- An evaluation of our mission statement and strategic objectives with an eye towards emphasizing what is most distinctive and most important about a UE education.

## **Objective #2: Create programs and procedures that increase enrollments and enhance revenues**

Like most private universities in the country, the University of Evansville has been in a period of declining enrollment since the Recession of 2008. This decline has had a negative impact on the budget, though several revenue streams have mitigated the effect, such as the Intensive English Program and our full-pay agreements with the governments of both Saudi Arabia and Brazil. As these programs have experienced sharp declines in the last two years, we must diversify our current program mix with stable, sustainable offerings to both traditional and non-traditional populations.

### **A. Programs for Graduate Students**

Most private schools in the United States are experiencing the same demographic challenges: the pool of high school graduates is decreasing, and competition from both state universities and other private schools is increasing. Most schools with our profile (private, religiously affiliated, 2,000-4,000 students) have turned to graduate programs and programs for returning adults to make up for declining enrollments in traditional undergraduate students. This plan is designed to bring the enrollment of students in post-baccalaureate programs to 400 by 2022.

To remain competitive, we need to substantially increase our graduate offerings and decrease our reliance on traditional first-time freshmen. As we move in this direction, we must be careful to preserve the character of our institution by distributing the new graduate programs throughout the university instead of concentrating them all in a single college or professional area. When practical, we should also focus on interdisciplinary programs that use faculty from multiple schools and colleges. Steps we should

take to achieve the goal of increasing our graduate student profile include:

- Create a graduate committee to handle graduate curricular and academic issues.
- Through the graduate committee, develop a faculty-led program for creating new graduate programs that receives proposals from departments and considers such elements as: the demand for a new program, the requirements for starting a program, the academic rigor of a proposed program, and the alignment of a program with UE's mission.
- Secure permission from the Higher Learning Commission for the MS in Leadership degree with initial tracks in Higher Education, Non-Profit Management, and Public Health.
- Increase the national reach of our graduate programs in Public Health, Athletic Training and Health Services Administration.
- Expand the number of tracks in the MS in Leadership to include Social Innovation, Health Management, and Nursing Leadership.
- Create three to five additional graduate programs over the next five years. These programs will have to be vetted carefully and their feasibility studied thoroughly, but the overall mix (with potential programs) should include:
  - One in a Health Care field that would be targeted to a national market (possibilities include Nurse Anesthesia, Optometry, or Speech and Language Pathology).
  - One in a Health Care field that would leverage existing resources (Exercise Physiology, Medical Science).
  - One to two in a science, social science, or engineering field (Neuroscience, Data Science, M.Eng. in Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Social Work, GIS).
  - One to two in either a humanities or fine arts field (possibilities include an MFA in Creative Writing, a Master of Liberal Studies, a Master of Humanities, MA in Art, or a post-baccalaureate degree in Music or Theatre).

## **B. Programs for Transfer and Adult Students**

UE faces similar challenges in developing programs for non-traditional undergraduate students—generally defined as students over 25 years old who are either entering college for the first time or returning to college after an absence to complete a degree. Our peer comparison data shows that we are lagging behind many of our peers in this area, but not nearly as far behind as we lag in graduate students. Nonetheless, this demographic is a large potential growth area for us.

The two largest groups of people in our immediate service area are high school graduates with no college and people who have attended some college but do not have a degree. Together, these populations represent over 55% of our metro area, and all of the national data we have access to suggests that many of these students would be attracted back to college with the right mix of programs.

Furthermore, many of these students have attended and completed programs at local community colleges (Ivy Tech, Vincennes, and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System) and would benefit from strong 2+2 agreements between UE and these systems. The actual student experience at a community college is much closer to the UE experience (small classes, close advising, high-touch environment) than to a large state university. As long as we can remain competitive on price, and develop the programs these students want and need, we

should be able to double our enrollments in these areas to around 250 students, or 10% of our total undergraduate population.

The following steps over the next five years will be essential to achieving this goal:

- Remove structural and curricular barriers for students who want to transfer to UE.
- Secure permission from the Higher Learning Commission to offer two online degree programs, the RN to BSN program and at least one track in the University Studies degree completion program.
- Provide opportunities for UE faculty to develop online courses.
- Examine new areas of teacher certification, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and work with local public and diocesan school districts to provide additional certifications to their instructors.
- Increase our offerings of certificate programs designed to appeal to working adults, especially in areas of business, health care, engineering, and computer technology.
- Explore ways to work with engineers, educators, and health-care professionals to offer Continuing Education Unit (CEU) courses, especially during the summer.
- Leverage existing course capacity by creating more degree-completion programs in areas that are currently underserved by higher education.
- Negotiate specific, 2+2 articulation agreements with local community college systems.

## C. Programs for Traditional Students

As we grow our offerings for graduate and non-traditional students, it is imperative that we not ignore our bread-and-butter programs for traditional undergraduates. UE has always been an incredibly strong institution for traditional students, and we have recently created new majors in Ethics and Social Change, Data Science, Software Engineering, and Logistics and Supply Chain Management. These programs are designed to attract new students to campus in programs that have high-demand both regionally and nationally. We must continue to innovate in these and other areas, and we must also find ways to deliver our popular programs to new audiences. During the period of this academic strategic plan, we should take the following steps to increase the appeal of our undergraduate program:

- Re-envision the way that we incorporate summer sessions into our curriculum. Consider designating a coordinator of summer programs who can create a more coherent and attractive program that we can market to our own students and to members of the community).
- Work with the Office of Enrollment Management to clarify the role of faculty in the recruitment process— and dedicate institutional resources to encourage faculty to do so.
- Develop more online programs, using the OCICU as a safety net for offering courses to returning adults in specially designated programs.
- Focus on shifting the Harlaxton summer experience from a client-driven approach to a coherent summer term that can be marketed nationally.
- Using our current agreement with the Tindley Academy as a model for providing dual credit courses to advanced

high school students.

- Consider the creation of a May term for study abroad courses, GAP courses, and other experience-based curricula that are not easily offered during the regular school year.
- Increase outreach to secondary and even elementary school students with events on campus and events hosted at local schools.
- Develop additional programs in high-demand areas such as Network Administration, Cybersecurity, Social Innovation, and Agricultural Economics.
- Examine the catalog for under-enrolled programs that may need to be deleted as we increase offerings in high-demand areas.
- Use our Health Science High School Certificate program to create more opportunities for outreach to secondary-school students.

### **Objective #3: Work diligently to enhance the effectiveness of academic units**

In many ways, the instructional faculty and academic support staff have borne the brunt of a decade of institutional austerity. Salaries have been slow to rise, and workloads have increased, even as faculty have become responsible for more and more recruitment and retention. These would be serious challenges for any institution, but they are potentially devastating to a university like UE, whose strong faculty and dedicated staff create the experiences that most distinguish us from our competitors.

Like most institutions, we have also been slow to change policies and procedures that now get in the way of effective operations. Many budget and personnel decisions are made at too high a level, and we have not updated our evaluation and feedback procedures to reflect the actual expectations for many faculty and staff positions. We need to align the way we give feedback to both real expectations and the needs of the university.

#### **A. Morale Issues**

A significant portion of the Academic Strategic Plan is devoted to creating new revenues for the University. As we bring in new revenues, faculty and staff raises must be a top priority. Given the current level of salary compression among the faculty, however, it will be imperative to create an equity model for distributing raises in a way that addresses current inequities. Other issues significantly affecting morale are the lack of a process for merit increases, a haphazard method for assigning course-release, and institution-wide inconsistencies in teaching loads. Addressing these issues will involve taking the following steps:

- Completely revise the faculty workload policy from the ground up, considering the different ways that faculty interact with students (internships, clinical supervision, labs,

etc.) and how they fit into a credit-hour-based load model.

- Examine school and departmental structures and modify as appropriate to distribute workload more evenly.
- Create a more consistent and equitable model for faculty and administrative release time.
- Analyze the summer pay structure to reduce inequities.
- Equalize pay for overloads.
- Work with the Faculty Senate to create a model for placing some portion of future increases into an equity-adjustment model.

## B. Communication and Transparency Issues

Shared governance requires an informed faculty and a transparent administration. UE needs to change in some important ways, but the administration cannot, and should not try to move the institution alone. The role of an academic administration is to create an environment in which positive change can happen. This means creating an environment in which information flows freely and in all directions. Transparency and communication are essential to meaningful institutional transformation. Consequently, the following initiatives will begin immediately, and their continuation will be crucial, to the success of the Academic Strategic Plan.

- Reactivate the Academic Leadership Council in which the EVPAA and the Deans meet periodically with all chairs and program directors.
- Hold faculty-wide meetings after the board meetings in October and February to report on Board actions.
- Make the minutes of the Deans Meetings available to all faculty members.

- Send regular notices from the EVPAA to the faculty that explain current issues facing the university, give updates on important initiatives, and invite faculty comment or feedback.

## C. Evaluation and Feedback Issues

In a classic 1975 management article, “On the Folly of Rewarding A, while Hoping for B,” Steven Kerr argues that an effective organization aligns expectations, feedback, and rewards. In a “fouled-up system,” expectations are either not clear or are not tied in any meaningful way to evaluations, feedback, or compensation. As the nature of higher education changes, and the duties of both staff and faculty become more varied, it is crucial that we avoid becoming “fouled up” by keeping all of these things aligned.

- Revise both staff and faculty evaluations to align with current expectations, including work that supports recruiting, admissions, and program development.
- Create task force to study the current staff evaluation process and recommend improvements.
- Work with faculty senate to revise process for faculty evaluations by deans and department chairs.
- Work with the faculty senate to create transparent opportunities for merit increases.
- Provide more opportunities for 360° feedback of supervisors by employees.
- Give budget managers more authority to make financial decisions.
- Give individual academic units greater authority to develop innovative solutions for continuous improvement.

# Timeline for Implementation of Academic Plan

## Spring 2018

- (1B) Complete all requirements for designation as Ashoka Changemaker Campus
- (1B) Launch Institute for Public Health
- (1C) Develop proposals for pilot composition and FYS courses
- (2A) Submit proposal for Master of Science in Leadership to the Higher Learning Commission
- (2A) Begin graduate committee as a subcommittee of the University Curriculum Committee
- (2B) Create lists of possible 2+2 agreements to pursue with community college partners
- (2B) Submit proposal for online/distance education to the Higher Learning Commission
- (2C) Work with the Office of Admissions to clarify and incentivize faculty participation in the recruitment process

## Summer 2018

- (1B) Launch new summer term at Harlaxton

## Fall 2018

- (1B) Start rebranding the Institute for Global Enterprise to reflect and take advantage of the Ashoka designation
- (1C) Launch pilot programs for composition/FYS and collect data

- 1D) Begin University Strategic Planning Process, including discussions of unique aspects of a UE education within our stated mission statement
- (2A) Launch the MA in Leadership program
- (2A) Through the Graduate Committee, develop process for vetting potential programs and send first call for proposals
- (2B) Begin faculty training for online courses at Fall Conference
- (2B) Conduct an audit of university policies related to transfer students and change where appropriate
- (2B) Launch fully online RN to BSN program
- (2C) Develop recommendations for new certificate programs and CEU courses to offer as part of the summer program
- (2C) Launch Logistics and Supply Chain Management program
- (3A) Begin developing new faculty workload and equity policies
- (3C) Task relevant governance units (Senate Fiscal Affairs Committee and Staff and Administrator's Assembly) to study merit pay and staff evaluation processes

## Spring 2019

- (1D) Submit university strategic plan with a mechanism for aligning resources with plan priorities
- (1C) Approve composition/FYS model that incorporates a unique, common experience for all new students
- (1C) Examine ways to incorporate Changemaking into both the graduate and the undergraduate curriculum
- (1C) Submit budget request to increase undergraduate research funding by at least \$100,000/year

- (2A) Through the Graduate Committee, vet proposals for new graduate programs to submit to the curriculum committee and the Board of Trustees
- (2B) Submit budget request for stipends to support online course development
- (3A) Develop recommendations for release-time restructuring
- (3A) Submit workload, equity, and merit policies to Faculty Senate for approval
- (3C) Implement 360° evaluation process

### **Fall 2019**

- (1C) Launch new composition/FYS program
- (1C) Propose curriculum additions (i.e. major, minor, track within major, graduate track) based on Changmaking/Ashoka activities
- (2A) Evaluate success of the Master of Science in Leadership program and consider adding new tracks
- (2A) Submit approvals for 2-3 new graduate programs to the Higher Learning Commission
- (2B) Rework articulation and 2+2 agreements to incorporate new freshman experience
- (2C) Develop recommendations for a new, comprehensive summer-school program; appoint Director of Summer Programs who will coordinate both course offerings and outreach programs to elementary/secondary students
- (2C) Create task force to make recommendation on possible May term
- (3A) Implement new workload, merit, and equity policies
- (3A) Implement new release time guidelines

### **Spring 2020**

- (1C) Submit budget request to increase undergraduate research funding by an additional \$100,000 a year.
- (2C) Appoint new director of Summer Programs
- (2C) Implement May Term recommendations

### **Summer 2019**

- (2C) Launch new, comprehensive summer-school program with Director of Summer Programs

### **Fall 2020**

- (2A) Launch 2-3 new graduate programs
- (2A) Submit second call for graduate program proposals to the Graduate Committee
- (2B) Systematically review articulation and 2+2 agreements and renew/revise as necessary

### **Spring 2021**

- (1C) Submit budget request to increase undergraduate research funding by yet another additional \$100,000 a year
- (2A) Review and vet new graduate programs for the HLC.