

St. John's University Strategic Priorities – An Action Plan

Preamble

Since its founding in 1870, St. John's University has provided a diverse student body with access to a high quality education grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition and Vincentian ethos.

As we approach our 150th anniversary, there is much to celebrate, but, as Dr. Conrado "Bobby" Gempesaw said at his investiture in October 2014, "a great university is never content with the way things are; it seeks to be better." The Strategic Priorities Working Group, a diverse group of faculty and administrators, was charged by Dr. Gempesaw with developing a shared framework for addressing the university's strategic priorities and converting those priorities into an action plan.

This plan, which is designed to further our mission as a Catholic, Vincentian, Metropolitan, and Global University, is a living document that directs our actions to four priorities. The first, and most important, is ensuring student success, with a particular focus on retention, persistence, graduation, career success, and life-long engagement. The other three priorities are the pillars that support student success. We will recruit, retain, and recognize the best faculty, staff, and administrators. We will enhance our teaching and learning environment. And we will expand our global and community partnerships.

We best achieve the goal of student success through a culture of shared ownership and a structure of shared responsibility. In short, student success is the primary responsibility of every member of the St. John's community. This plan is designed to convert that goal into action by empowering academic and administrative leaders, ensuring rigorous review and assessment of outcomes, ensuring academic excellence across all colleges and programs, and promoting a culture of accountability.

This plan and our actions under it are designed to enhance our commitment to St. John's University's mission. We will continue to promote an educational environment steeped in the Catholic intellectual tradition, the Vincentian commitment to serving those in need, and where respect, compassion, truthfulness, and opportunity are guiding principles. We will also work to fully integrate our mission in our academic programs through a reinvigorated core curriculum, the implementation of high impact educational practices, and an expansion of our global and community partnerships.

Four action steps have been identified for each strategic priority. These action steps resulted from an intensive ten-month process of input and feedback involving hundreds of members of the university community. The completed university-wide plan reflects the broad-based and inclusive process through which it was developed. At its heart is a commitment to shared ownership and shared responsibility that will promote academic excellence, advance our mission, ensure student success, and make certain that, in the words of Dr. Gempesaw, "when we reach our 150th anniversary in 2020, St. John's will be an even stronger and better university than it is today."

– The Strategic Priorities Working Group

Strategic Priority 1: Ensure student success

1. Enrollment Management:

Pursue a dynamic enrollment strategy sensitive to nuances of the primary and secondary markets, our mission, and other key variables consistent with efforts to increase the retention, persistence, graduation rates, and overall academic achievement of our students, as well as the strategic goals of each college. Expand partnerships with local schools, especially Catholic elementary and high schools. Optimize articulation agreements with local community colleges to facilitate transfer student enrollment. Leverage existing relationships with guidance counselors, administrators, and students at these schools, and actively cultivate new ones, through robust recruitment, on-campus events, and faculty participation. Expand partnerships with universities and organizations world-wide to increase the number of international students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. Develop college-specific graduate enrollment strategies designed to increase enrollment, quality, and recognition for distinctive programs.

2. Advisement, Mentoring, and Career Development:

Reorganize undergraduate advisement, including associated technologies and data management, with more functions located in individual colleges/schools, significant faculty involvement, and integration with career development. Identify a senior administrator responsible for coordinating university-wide student success initiatives and for ensuring robust assessment of student outcomes and accountability for college-specific initiatives. Strengthen graduate student academic and career advisement and professional success. Develop a university-wide mentorship program involving faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and student peer leaders.

3. Core Curriculum:

Present to the Board of Trustees in fall 2016 a revitalized undergraduate core curriculum that is flexible, cohesive, integrated with our mission, and consistent with University learning goals and outcomes. The new core should reflect best practices for integrative general education, including exposure to high-impact practices and assessment of learning outcomes. The core should include a first-year seminar that develops students' intellectual and practical competencies and introduces them to the St. John's mission. The new core should be structured so that students can readily double major, double degree, minor, take courses from any college, or transfer into St. John's without negative impact on retention and graduation.

4. High-Impact Educational Practices:

In addition to the first-year seminar, ensure that high-impact practices – including undergraduate research, academic service-learning, internships, capstone courses, field experiences, honors program, university academic scholars, and other signature experiences – are embedded throughout each student's education. Redesign curricular pathways to be rich in problem-based learning and culminate in applied projects for all undergraduate students. Assess the rate of adaptation of high-impact practices and the degree to which they promote student success.

Strategic Priority 2: Recruit, recognize, and retain the best faculty, staff, and administrators

1. Responsibility-Centered Leadership:

Prepare individual plans for each academic and administrative unit, including for each satellite campus, indicating how each unit will contribute to the University-wide strategic plan. Assess the unit plans on an annual basis to ensure that targets are met. Train and develop academic and administrative leadership to advance an ownership culture. Facilitate collaboration between members of the faculty and the administration to advance student success initiatives. Recognizing the high cost of education and importance of student success, develop a revenue sharing system, based on appropriate targets, that creates incentives for individual academic and administrative units to increase revenue; to strategically manage expenses; and to enhance retention, persistence to graduation, career advisement and professional success, fundraising, and faculty productivity and engagement.

2. Recruitment:

Ensure that faculty hiring and administrative staffing is consistent with institutional and unit strategic priorities, particularly with respect to student success. Fill faculty positions through national and international searches to recruit the best candidates in alignment with disciplinary hiring season. Develop a faculty mentoring and development process for junior faculty. Fill key administrator positions through a combination of national and international searches and by promoting the best personnel from within. Develop processes for identifying and cultivating internal talent for administrative positions. Emphasize mission in hiring and develop more robust mission orientation and development program.

3. Employee Performance, Evaluation, and Compensation:

Measure and manage the quality of individual staff, administrator, and faculty performance to promote a culture of shared ownership and accountability. Reexamine the Partnership for Performance (PFP) process and instrument to ensure close alignment of compensation with performance and facilitate individual growth and advancement. Reexamine the faculty evaluation, compensation, and support structure, including that provided for in the collective bargaining agreement, to more closely align compensation and scholarly support with performance and provide additional opportunities for individual growth and advancement.

4. Scholarly Productivity and Faculty Engagement:

Enhance faculty scholarly and creative activity and engagement to advance excellence in teaching, research, and service. Through fundraising initiatives, create more endowed chairs and professorships to recruit, recognize, and retain the best faculty.

Strategic Priority 3: Enhance the teaching and learning environment

1. Integrated Technology Solutions for Teaching, Learning, and Student Success Pipeline:
Develop and employ integrated technology solutions that support and enhance recruitment, advisement, retention, persistence, graduation, career advisement and professional success and alumni engagement. Employ digital technology effectively to engage, advise, and mentor students, and to improve learning outcomes. Train administrators, faculty, and staff to make effective use of technology solutions to ensure student success.

2. Faculty Development:
Develop and employ a comprehensive approach to faculty development and training to encourage pedagogy that engages students, enhances student learning, incorporates high-impact practices, and makes effective use of technology in curriculum delivery as appropriate.

3. Facilities Planning:
Form a new university-wide representative group to identify the critical priorities of facilities needs and report its findings to the Provost and Vice President for Business Affairs. The group will develop a long-term, comprehensive master space plan in alignment with the University's strategic priority to ensure student success. The group will also develop appropriate standards of condition, accessibility, and appearance for all classrooms and learning spaces.

4. Technology Planning and Infrastructure:
Form a new university-wide representative group to identify critical technology priorities and needs and to report its findings to the Provost and the Vice President for Business Affairs. The group will meet formally to make recommendations of how technology will be utilized to enhance the teaching and learning environment and to promote student success.

Strategic Priority 4: Expand global and community partnerships

1. Institutional Advancement:

Launch a major capital campaign to celebrate the University's 150th year anniversary, with the goal of creating new funding sources for the University's strategic priorities. The capital campaign must have as a priority providing resources to financially support students and enhance student success. Increase coordination between Institutional Advancement and the academic units, including by co-locating major gift officers and alumni relations personnel in each college and involving deans and academic leaders directly in fundraising efforts and the setting of fundraising strategy. Increase coordination between Alumni Relations, Career Services, Office of University Mission, and the academic units to strengthen ties to the alumni network and grow student opportunities for mentoring, experiential learning, and employment.

2. Academic and Community Partnerships:

Foster relationships with global and domestic academic and community institutions to create partnerships that capitalize on St. John's strongest programs and supplement areas of strategic need. Expand academic partnerships with global institutions to increase the number of visiting scholars at St. John's and to increase the number of St. John's faculty members teaching and studying abroad. Develop new study-abroad programs in other regions such as in Asia and South America to augment existing St. John's facility locations in Europe.

3. Student Support Services:

Develop best practice support services for all students, recognizing the diverse needs of our domestic and international students, consistent with our mission as a Metropolitan and Global University. Ensure that our global and community support services appropriately embrace the diversity of our students and foster success at all levels.

4. Public Relations:

Enhance the St. John's identity through a public relations strategy that engages the University community with a sense of pride and ownership, showcasing student-faculty-employee achievements, athletics, and mission; and with a strong regional external component.

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