



MISERICORDIA
UNIVERSITY

— STRATEGIC PLAN —
2022 – 2027

MERCY
THRIVES @MU



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MERCY THRIVES @MU
MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN
2022-2027 – A plan for thoughtful action

Summary

Misericordia seeks a fuller expression of its fundamental mission through the execution of the five-year strategic plan, **Mercy Thrives @MU**. After a thorough development process occurring over the past two academic years with the assistance of Credo higher education consultants, the university community and leadership have developed a plan focused on three thematic domains, with an overarching aim to increase enrollment at Misericordia University, supported by an ever-improving student experience. For each of the three themes, we have identified four primary objectives and a series of example initiatives for each of the twelve objectives. Finally, we have identified high-level metrics for each of the objectives which will form the core of an annual assessment of progress on the plan.

The map of the plan, outlined on subsequent pages, provides the themes and objectives that structure the plan.

MERCY THRIVES @MU STRATEGIC PLAN MAP

Theme One: **Learn@MU - ENHANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

<p>Expansive Academic Programs:</p> <p>Generate new and revitalize existing academic programs to produce a more expansive set of offerings that meet the needs of a broader range of students. Expand targeted student markets among traditional undergraduate, part-time, graduate, transfer, and remote learners.</p>	<p>Exemplary Experiential Education:</p> <p>Generate off-campus experiential learning opportunities that enhance the student workforce education.</p>	<p>Transformative Critical Skills Core:</p> <p>Continue the development of a new, integrated core curriculum that includes skills and knowledge in problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, as well as significant encounters with a robust expression of the Mercy Charisms and Identity.</p>	<p>Market-Driven Enrollment Growth:</p> <p>As the demographics of the traditional college-going population change and contract, the university must address enrollment challenges by attracting students from markets that have produced few Misericordia matriculants in the past.</p>
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Theme Two: **Live@MU - ENGAGED STUDENT LIFE**

<p>Vibrant On-Campus Student Life Experiences:</p> <p>Alter, enhance, and rebuild on-campus activities in the wake of COVID-19.</p>	<p>Organically-Linked Student Life and Academics:</p> <p>Develop complementary and integrated curricular and co-curricular opportunities.</p>	<p>Improved Student Satisfaction of the Campus Experience:</p> <p>Design the student on-campus experience to be accommodating, inviting, and participatory.</p>	<p>Thriving Leaders Living Mercy Values:</p> <p>Design a student values-based leadership program addressing, "What does it mean to become alumni of a Mercy-inspired university who are called to serve their communities?"</p>
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Theme Three: **OneMU**

<p>Attainable University Experience for More Diverse Populations:</p> <p>Make the Misericordia experience available and accessible to more students and a more diverse population of students by extending marketing, recruiting, financial support, and educational technology.</p>	<p>Supportive University Environment for All Groups:</p> <p>Enhance on-campus learning settings, designated spaces, and support practices to better serve all student populations and promote informal interactions.</p>	<p>A "Great Place to Work" Culture:</p> <p>Create a trustworthy, caring, and fair work environment for university faculty and staff.</p>	<p>Inclusive and Diverse External Learning Environments:</p> <p>Create off-campus learning settings where students are made aware of diverse perspectives.</p>
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MISSION, CHARISMS, VALUES, AND VISION

MISSION

Our strategic plan draws its inspiration and guiding principles from our mission statement:

Misericordia University, a Catholic liberal arts institution established in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, cultivates a transformational educational experience that promotes intellectual curiosity and critical thinking in a supportive and inclusive community, preparing all students for a life of service and global citizenship.

CHARISMS AND VALUES

This mission statement is deeply rooted in the Charisms given to us by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, explicitly expressed as the Core Values of the university:

As a community, we are committed to integrity and the values of the Sisters of Mercy as the foundation of university life. Our values are:

Mercy Through: Compassion, Love, and Caring

Service Through: Selflessness, Sacrifice, and Action

Justice Through: Fairness, Acceptance, and Advocacy

Hospitality With: Dignity, Respect, and Openness

UNIVERSITY VISION

Misericordia University strives to become a leading institution in the Mercy tradition of higher education. To do so, it will provide a broad range of outstanding baccalaureate and graduate academic programs in the liberal arts and professional fields that are steeped in a personal, student-centered approach to learning

built on the charisms of the Sisters of Mercy. Its studies will be designed to prepare students for advanced educational training and successful careers in service to others. Misericordia will accomplish these educational aims through collaboration, leadership, and integrated presence in its community.

STRATEGIC PLAN VISION

In the next phase of Misericordia's development, we will focus on extending the Misericordia experience to more students and to a more diverse community of students. We will accomplish this by extending the fields of study available at Misericordia, expanding our

recruitment efforts, developing more opportunities for deep engagements on and away from our campus, unifying our campus community, and further solidifying connections with our partners.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In late 2020, the university retained Credo consulting, an experienced higher education consulting group to facilitate our strategic plan. Credo engaged university leadership groups during the spring of 2021 to help the university assess the basis for the plan and the planning process. These groups included the President's Cabinet and the Board of Trustees as well as university internal governance groups. In fall 2021, the newly formed President's Advisory Council (successor to President's Cabinet) as well as the larger University Leadership Collaborative (U-LEAD), attended facilitated sessions to further develop the main theme areas of the plan. In fall 2021, the broader campus community participated

in two other parallel processes, including the brand development and the Mission refresh as well as a large-scale opening meeting exercise involving all faculty and staff. All three of these efforts helped to inform the strategic plan and the basis for our work.

The campus community had the opportunity to attend facilitated sessions in mid-spring 2022 to suggest actionable items within the plan objectives. At the conclusion of those sessions, the next draft of those objectives and the action items was released broadly for public comment on campus.

DEVELOPING KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

In late spring 2022, the President's Advisory Council held a series of meetings to review the objectives within the three theme areas and develop appropriate performance indicators that will help identify progress on each of those objectives. The robust discussion was inclusive of all the major areas of the university as represented by the deans, vice presidents, human resources, and the chief of staff. For the most part, these indicators, as referenced in the appendix to this document, reflect new, unique measurements

designed to match the objective. These measurements will be tracked across the duration of the plan, and consideration will be given to adding complementary measurements over time if needed to better reflect progress toward the goal. Additionally, dozens of other necessary and relevant metrics will continue to be tracked as needed to ensure we are monitoring the health of the university as well as meeting necessary regulatory and reporting requirements.

STRATEGIC PLAN THEMES

The fundamental goal of the strategic plan for the next five years is to build enrollment at Misericordia University. The university exists in a crowded and increasingly competitive market that is challenged by changing demographics, fewer prospective students, and changing attitudes on the value of higher education. To ensure the ongoing and future health of the university, it is essential to meet that market better and to reach new markets of students.

In addition to our marketing efforts, the best way to ensure robust enrollment is to refresh existing academic programs, develop new programs that meet emerging needs in the job market, ensure quality of all of our offerings, produce a student experience and support system that is second to none, and develop an environment in which all students, faculty, and staff feel wholly integrated into the university community.

Combined, these objectives, will produce an environment that is highly attractive to a wide range of students and will ensure not just the financial viability of the university, but also our ability to advance the Mercy mission at MU and amplify the impact of our Mercy ideals across our communities and the world.

The Misericordia University strategic plan, **Mercy Thrives @MU**, is structured around three themes that define the core of our activity. These three themes, developed over the course of many conversations and through the process described in the previous section, reflect our focus on the student experience at Misericordia, as we prepare our graduates for entry into employment, advanced education, and their lives as Mercy-motivated contributors to their communities.

The three themes are (1) **Learn@MU - Enhanced Academic Excellence**, (2) **Live@MU - Engaged Student Life**, and (3) **OneMU – Collaboration and Inclusion**.

The **Learn@MU** theme reflects our central purpose at the university to educate students in the best possible way and equip them for their future lives. In this coming cycle, our emphasis is on improving the variety and quality of our academic programs, to not only better prepare students for the future, but to attract more students to Misericordia.

The second theme, **Live@MU**, reflects our desire to build the best possible integrated student experience during their time at the university, especially as we recover from the more limited student experience of the pandemic era. One of Misericordia's great strengths is the "thick" experience that students have at MU in which they have many opportunities—both inside and outside the classroom as well as ones that connect those two realms—to support them in all manner of development.

The third theme, **OneMU**, builds on our Mercy-derived impulse to welcome all to our campus and to provide an environment that supports many different kinds of learners and employees. We recognize our connection to those outside the university proper in our community and the world.

LEARN@MU

Enhancing Academic Excellence



The academic experience is at the heart of any university enterprise. It is, after all, the primary reason that the university exists. A university's academic programs fundamentally define what it is and who it is trying to serve. At Misericordia University, we strive to prepare students through their academic programs for participation in professional life and for the pursuit of higher-level education. These academic programs, however, must continually be refreshed and attuned to changes in the world around us. If we are to prepare our students in the best possible ways, not only for their first position, but for lifelong learning

and career advancement, we must always be engaged in the process of self-examination and assessment, informed by trends in our communities, the country, and the world. The [Learn@MU](#) theme of the strategic plan challenges the university community to think creatively about its offerings, to further enhance an already enviable approach to experiential education, to produce the very best core curriculum that produces skills of lifelong import, and to think carefully and creatively about how we present these opportunities to potential students.

I. EXPANSIVE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Generate new and revitalize existing academic programs to produce a more expansive set of offerings that meet the needs of a broader range of students. Expand targeted student markets among traditional undergraduate, part-time, graduate, transfer, and remote learners.

As the demands from employer markets grow, contract, and shift both regionally and nationally, Misericordia must continually evaluate and adjust its offerings to better meet the trends of that market. Prospective students must recognize our set of programs as high-quality preparation for employment and advanced learning that is relevant to their aims as individuals and the potential to advance in their careers. Our programs should produce both depth of expertise in the major area of focus and the breadth that allows our alumni to excel as they advance over a lifetime of work and engage as educated citizens in their communities of activity.

Example initiatives include:

New and enhanced majors:

As the needs of the world change and as new technologies become available, we must continually assess our program offerings to meet the needs of students and employers. Where do we have opportunities to construct programs, both building on existing strengths and filling gaps that exist or have emerged in our catalog of offerings? As much as an ongoing assessment of these opportunities is necessary, the university community has identified several immediate opportunities for advancing our portfolio of offerings: Finance, Supply Chain/Logistics, Computer Science, Data Science, Economics, Pre-medical/Pre-Health Science, and Pre-Law.

Interdisciplinary programs:

The big problems and challenges that the world faces require multiple approaches and the ability to draw from, and combine, perspectives from different disciplines. As we develop new programs, we will seek to combine the strengths of multiple disciplines and to reach across traditional silos to allow these perspectives to inform students' understanding and their approach to producing interventions and solutions to the critical concerns that animate our desire to learn.

Stackable credentials:

Modern university-level learners are not only interested in full-degree credentials. Smaller programs, including certificates, badges, and other training available in part-time formats that can be stacked at a later time toward a larger credential will be an essential part of Misericordia's catalog of educational products going forward.

Academic Partnerships:

Misericordia cannot be all things to all people, but it can expand its curriculum through selective partnerships that can help us deliver a greater diversity of programs at lower cost. In this plan cycle, we will seek to develop relationships for programs in which part of the curriculum is delivered by MU and part is delivered by a partner. Two common examples are either a "3 years at MU + 2 years with a partner" program that produces both a bachelor's and master's degree upon completion or contemporaneously where most of the curriculum is delivered locally by MU and a select fraction is delivered virtually by a qualified and accredited partner specializing in that field.

Incubator mechanism:

A continuous assessment and development operation must be constructed to generate and evaluate new program ideas, assessing the viability and market for such programs such that new programs have a high probability of success when implemented. Likewise, a robust evaluation of existing programs will ensure ongoing development and adjustment of their developmental trajectory and the sunset of others.

II. EXEMPLARY EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Generate off-campus experiential learning opportunities that enhance the student workforce education.

One of the most important high impact practices in higher education is to embed experiential and service learning into the curriculum. The greatest positive impact occurs when these learning opportunities are merged with classroom learning in an organically integrated manner such that each genuinely complements the other and drives acquisition and integration of learning and practice. In preparing students for the workforce and for further training and education, Misericordia strives to provide ample opportunities for high-quality experiential learning such that every student can access and benefit from these opportunities whether they are participating while the academic term is in session or between sessions. The opportunities also redound to success in retaining students in the local labor force by introducing them to opportunities with local businesses and employers, thereby ensuring that our experiential education opportunities benefit the partners that host them as well.

Example initiatives include:

Internships:

The university will seek expanded opportunities for both paid and unpaid internships by increasing the number of student placements with existing partners and by soliciting new partners in the region. The university will systematically work with existing and potential partners to develop internships that meet the needs of the partner and the student to produce mutually beneficial and thus sustainable internship opportunities.

Practicums and Clinicals:

The availability of clinical training sites and preceptors is a major limiting factor in Misericordia's ability to expand its programs in certain fields, especially in the health sciences and psychology. In the coming cycles, the university must engage its clinical training partners in creative dialogue about how to increase the availability of clinical training through collaborative efforts among health providers, other higher education institutions, government agencies, and foundations interested in filling gaps in the workforce. As COVID has made an difficult situation into a critical one, we must participate and lead in producing positive movement toward a solution.

Student Teaching:

Student teaching and other experiential learning opportunities are critical to addressing the supply of early childhood, primary, and secondary teachers regionally, in Pennsylvania, and nationwide. Misericordia will work to enhance partnerships with local schools, both public and private, to facilitate these important experiences in ways that also help schools address their personnel needs in the coming years.

Hands-On Learning:

In almost every field of study, there are undeveloped and underdeveloped opportunities of community-engaged learning, scholarship, and service. Misericordia will seek to develop and promote coursework, pedagogy, and partnerships that allow students, as part of their classes, to engage in real-world challenges that put their learning to work immediately. Examples include student-run businesses in the College of Business, marketing projects in Mass Communication and Design, GLNS and History internships, Statistical consulting, cooperative research with faculty, and many others.

III. TRANSFORMATIVE CRITICAL SKILLS CORE

Continue the development of a new, integrated core curriculum that includes skills and knowledge in problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, as well as significant encounters with a robust expression of the Mercy Charisms and identity.

A Misericordia University education goes beyond expertise in a single area of study to provide students with tools they can use to navigate the demands of civic participation, family life, and increasing levels of responsibility requiring a broader scope of understanding. A Misericordia education prepares students to be life-long learners who continually engage, question, and analyze the world around them. It does this in part through a robust core curriculum that challenges students and provides a set of essential skills that offer a lifetime of practical value.

During this plan cycle, the university will complete the process of rebuilding the core curriculum as a coherent experience, progressing in sophistication, and culminating in an integrative reflective experience.

The reinvention of the core for the 21st Century will include a deep consideration of the core's learning goals and the articulation of a set of goals of the type that are broadly endorsed by accrediting bodies. These will include oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis, information literacy, and the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives. The design of experiences intended to produce the learning goals may consist of both curricular and co-curricular experiences.

IV. MARKET DRIVEN ENROLLMENT GROWTH AND MAINTENANCE

As the demographics of the traditional college-going population change and contract, the university must address enrollment challenges by attracting students from student markets that have produced few Misericordia matriculants in the past.

As the demographics of the traditional college-going population change and contract, Misericordia cannot rely on its past approaches to student markets and provision of programs. In addition to the expansion of quality academic programs, the enhancement of experiential education, and a revolutionized core for the 21st century, the university must address enrollment challenges by attracting students from student markets that have produced few Misericordia matriculants in the past and optimizing our inflow from markets where we have been successful.

Initiatives include:

Geographic Expansion:

Although Misericordia deeply values its student base from Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) and the surrounding regions in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, it cannot depend on this region as much as in the past. Mainly, this is simply a function of the changing demographics in the region which are producing fewer and fewer traditionally-aged high-school-to-college attendees. We have begun

and will continue to develop and execute a targeted series of campaigns to attract students from a wider geographic range, specifically but not exclusively Western Pennsylvania, New England, Northern Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware using data science through our partnership with MarketView and new marketing efforts mounted by our enrollment and marketing operation.

LEARN@MU:**IV. MARKET DRIVEN ENROLLMENT GROWTH AND MAINTENANCE** Continued**Diverse Populations:**

Despite the overall decline in college-age students in the United States and in our region, there is one population that is growing rapidly: Hispanic/Latinx students. This group will continue to grow, and the number attending college will more than double over the next decade. A substantial majority of Hispanic families identify as Catholic, and we have an extremely well-developed student support culture at Misericordia that can be oriented to supporting these students and their families. Beginning in AY 22-23, Misericordia will produce an effort to not just recruit, but to serve, Hispanic/Latinx students with the aim to become an officially designated “Hispanic Serving Institute” within a decade.

Gender Balance: Misericordia is currently underserving men as a student population, and the number of men attending and graduating college in the U.S. is on a precipitous and dangerous decline. By increasing the number of men attending and persisting through graduation at Misericordia, particularly those who might not have initially intended to pursue higher education, we can be part of the solution to that problem. As we develop new academic programs and activities, we will attempt to recruit more men to the university to achieve a more balanced gender distribution. At the same time, while we are developing programs that are more attractive to men, we will also work hard to ensure that they are equitably available to, and supportive of, women matriculants.

Strategic Financial Aid Deployment: One of the greatest challenges students face when pursuing higher education is paying the bill. How we allocate our available financial aid (both in terms of funded scholarships and discount) can have a tremendous impact on an individual student’s ability to attend Misericordia and persist through to graduation.

These allocations of aid are reviewed every year in preparation for the next admission cycle. During this plan cycle, however, we will work with our financial modelers to develop an even more sophisticated allocation of aid in the hopes of yielding more of our admitted students and supporting them better through their years of study. We will also analyze the possibilities of rebalancing aid to encourage transfer students and on-campus residency. Finally, we will seek to continue to shift aid toward needy students in an effort to optimize the merit/need balance in our overall aid profile. This should include developing mechanisms to financially support high-need students seeking campus residency.

Enhancing Retention: Although Misericordia has a long-standing and stellar record of retaining and graduating students, there are always opportunities to improve. Especially with new data, analytic tools, and tracking mechanisms that have been developed, we may be able to do an even better job of identifying emerging challenges earlier and thus intervene in a more timely way to avoid problems growing and compounding into student attrition. As more data has become available, the university has invested in diagnostic and predictive models helping to identify these emerging challenges. As part of our retention work, we intend to further refine those models and add additional data. Algorithms that identify combinations of circumstances, both from characteristics and risk factors students bring to college and those that emerge throughout their first college year, can help our advisors know when they need to intervene and can further help identify the necessary intervention. These practices can further bolster our culture of commitment to retention and graduation.



While academic experiences represent the initial manifest purpose of pursuing higher education, the developmental learning aspects of the college experience rival academics as critical outcomes of the student experience. Misericordia recognizes and devotes its efforts to the development of the whole person including intellectual, social, spiritual, physical, and psychological dimensions, rooted in the Mercy charisms that invite and encourage students to lives of robust service, hospitality, mercy, and justice. To

achieve these aims, Misericordia will produce a vibrant campus environment in which all types of student engagement with one another, faculty, staff, alumni, student life professionals, and community members encourage relationships that shepherd them on paths of personal discovery and growth. As we attempt to grapple with the emerging normal of a COVID and post-COVID world, we seek to build and re-build opportunities for robust engagement and a deeply enjoyable and valuable campus experience.

I. VIBRANT ON CAMPUS STUDENT LIFE EXPERIENCES

Alter, enhance, and rebuild on-campus activities in the wake of COVID 19.

University campuses at their best produce many opportunities for student participation and leadership that, both by design and fortuitous opportunity, allow students to develop interactions and skills beyond the intellectual aims of their formal classrooms. Misericordia has excelled in producing these opportunities, but special attention is required to alter, enhance, and, in some instances, rebuild these opportunities in the wake of COVID. Misericordia's strength has consistently been attributed to the development of relationships. Co-curricular activities are vehicles that drive the social integration necessary for student persistence.

Initiatives include:

Athletics:

Athletic participation is a key element of the student culture at Misericordia, and we proudly tout our athletic teams and coaching as a national example of "athletics done right." In this strategic plan period, we will focus on further improving that athletic experience among our existing teams with an emphasis on recruiting the best and retaining them through to graduation. Given the success of the athletics program, we will enhance rosters with room for growth, consider additional varsity sports, consider JV programs where appropriate, introduce strategically selected club sports, and further develop intramural opportunities.

Activities:

Participation in student clubs and organization is one of the most important leadership development tools available at colleges and universities. Misericordia boasts a large number of student-run organizations. We seek to develop additional opportunities and revitalize others (with special consideration for virtual and non-traditional learners) that link students to service opportunities and cultural experiences reflecting the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy: Immigration, Racism, Earth, Women, and Nonviolence.

Academic Sports:

Just as athletic participation is an important component of students' lives before and while they are students at MU, so too are academic competitions like Mock Trial, Debate, Moot Court, Speech, Quiz Bowl, Case Competitions, Computer Science competitions, and Business Plan Competitions, among others. Misericordia seeks to develop a robust program of academic sports allowing students to compete and succeed at the regional and national level in these high-

impact activities which guide both intellectual and social development, and are an immensely supportive companion to producing the aims of the core curriculum.

Mission, Ministry, and Service:

Personal development is critically important for preparing students for participation in all aspects of life after college. Spiritual development, leadership development, and fostering a passion for service and social justice are a part of the Misericordia experience. During this plan, we will work with the Office of Mission, Ministry, and Service and the Sisters of Mercy to re-engage its pre-COVID programming and develop new experiences and opportunities for students, with an aim to engage a larger portion of the student body in spiritual reflection, leadership, personal development, and service through diverse array of activities.

Music Ensembles:

Music plays an important role in the history of Misericordia University and although it has waned considerably over recent decades, it still stands to be a potentially powerful asset to the quality of campus life and as a magnet to attract students to the university. Just as athletics and academic sports are often central to high school students' experiences and are activities that they wish to pursue during their university years, so too is participation in instrumental ensembles, choral ensembles, and musical theater. While Misericordia is not in a position that would allow us to produce a full academic music program, we can develop a robust set of opportunities for musical performance ranging from music lessons (some are already in place) to pep bands to chamber music to enhanced theater productions. During the plan period, we will design and begin executing a progressive plan to create ensembles and recruit students into them via our admissions processes.

II. ORGANICALLY-LINKED STUDENT LIFE AND ACADEMICS

Develop complementary and integrated curricular and co-curricular opportunities.

Great moments of learning and development occur when colleges and universities produce synergistic experiences that connect curricular and co-curricular experiences. Those kinds of experiences are deeply embedded in the ethos of Misericordia University and already present in many of the initiatives already described in other aspects of this strategic plan. Nevertheless, our mission of creating whole-person education and engagement demands that we take that integrated educational aim as an explicit and intentional effort. In this plan period, we will continue to further develop creative opportunities for students to experience that hybrid space.

Initiatives include:

Hybrid-Crossover Activities:

Linkages between academic programs and career search skills are one such hybrid activity. Utilizing capstone courses to build in collaboration and partnerships with career services to include resumé review and mock interview enhance the academic and student life connection. We aspire to further develop these opportunities across all academic departments.

First-Year Experience (FYE) linked with Mission/Social Justice:

The first year of college presents a challenging adjustment for students and an extended orientation to those challenges and the resources available to address them is an essential part of the Misericordia experience. In the plan period, we will revise FYE to incorporate more directly the Mission/Social Justice/Critical Concerns that animate our approach to education, seeking to engage students more fully in that aspect of the Misericordia educational experience in preparation for their work at and after college.

Holistic Advising:

One hallmark of a Misericordia student experience is advising that is not limited to concerns with navigating coursework to degree completion, but rather extends into all aspects of the student experience. This broader approach to advising is a key element in Misericordia's enviable record of retaining and graduating its student body.

Career Services:

Students who are most successful in their time at college and in their initial career steps after college have not treated career services as merely a placement experience of the senior year. Rather, optimal career preparation is an ongoing set of activities throughout the college years, exemplified through the Guaranteed Placement Program. We will evaluate the effectiveness and reach of that program with an eye toward inviting more students into a sustained career development process starting in the first year and guiding them through a developmental set of activities during the course of their academic programs.

III. IMPROVED STUDENT SATISFACTION OF THE CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

Design the student on-campus experience to be accommodating, inviting, and participatory.

Hospitality is a key guiding principle embedded in the Mercy Charisms and experience of Mercy higher education. Our aim should always be to develop and practice our work in a way that welcomes others into our environment, makes them feel comfortable and at-home, and includes their voices in our decisions about how to achieve that welcoming and inclusive feel.

Initiatives include:

Student policies, procedures, practices, rules, and requirements review:

During the planning period, student life will structure and execute a review of policies and practices around student life to ensure a welcoming and comfortable environment. The review will focus on analyzing best practices and gathering feedback from our student body across its many diverse components. Focus groups will be utilized with a desired result of balancing health and safety concerns with independent decision-making and accountability.

Student Representation on University Committees:

We will examine committees (both standing and ad hoc) across the university to ensure adequate representation of students. This practice not only brings critical student insights to bear on our decision making, but also produces yet another opportunity for student leadership development.

IV. THRIVING LEADERS LIVING MERCY VALUES

Design a student values-based leadership program that addresses the question: What does it mean to become alumni of a Mercy-inspired university who are called to serve their communities?

Initiatives include:

Mercy Leaders Program:

Through the further development of a strong student leadership program, we seek to provide personal and professional experiences to expand the scope of our leaders. Programs such as the Mercy Leadership Program provide the backbone of imbedding leadership skills with the Mercy-inspired call to live a life of service for the common good.

Student Government Association:

As the official voice of the student body, we will further develop their understanding of representation, cultivating a responsibility for active involvement in student life at Misericordia University and to boldly pursue academic and life goals inspired by the Charisms of mercy, service, justice and hospitality.

Diversity Leadership Conference:

To address our goal to prepare students to be culturally competent in the workforce, we will offer a diversity conference, wherein students will enhance critical skills that prepare them for a global workforce, develop skills relevant to cultural competency, and recognize/ dismantle systemic barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Misericordia University is a caring community of faculty, staff, and students working toward a common mission and identity while also being committed to care and respect for each member of our community. The way we work together, care for one another, and act in the interest of the collective good defines who we are as a university and the approach we take toward educating and developing our students. Our [OneMU](#) theme rests on the foundation of the Religious Sisters of Mercy

charism of hospitality and drives our commitment to genuine inclusion of diversity of all kinds. Across students, alumni, staff, faculty, administrators, members of our board, and the surrounding community, we recognize the common bond that brings us together to work for the common good of the university and of the wider communities the university inhabits. Great emphasis will be placed on collaboration, interpersonal skills, and connected knowledge across disciplines.



I. ATTAINABLE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE FOR MORE DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Make the Misericordia experience available and accessible to a more diverse student population by extending marketing, recruiting, financial support, and educational technology.

Misericordia has proven to offer an exemplary experience for all students and has a strong record of supporting students who have been historically marginalized by various challenges to their experience of higher education. Because of the caring, wrap-around experience of a Misericordia education, students from relatively privileged backgrounds and those impacted by systemic deficits in academic readiness, geographical location, and deep financial well-being can all succeed at Misericordia. Our aim, as we move through the planning period, is to extend that environment and educational experience to more students and to increase the overall diversity of our student body such that our differences contribute to a robust learning and living environment and address the systemic concerns and barriers in higher education to better serve under-represented communities at Misericordia. **In particular, we will seek to include more students representing:**

Racial and Ethnic Diversity, with a special emphasis on the growing population of Hispanic/Latinx students and gender balance. (See Page 10)

Students of Non-Traditional Age:

These students have different educational aims and needs for student support services. As the population of traditionally-aged college students continues to decline in the upcoming years, more attention to the needs of this under-served population, including the development, modality shifts, and marketing of academic programs more attractive and friendly to the adult learner will produce a mutually beneficial effect on enrollment and student achievement in this population. Specific programs to establish and enhance will be informed by market study.

Remote Learners:

Although Misericordia’s hallmark is a thick in-person educational experience, students can also benefit from remote learning modalities. This includes traditionally residential students who may take some part of their curriculum via virtual and possibly asynchronous means as well as students who do not have the opportunity to uproot and relocate to our campus for the time required to complete a degree. Development and enhancement of academic programs, both full-time and part-time and at both the undergraduate and graduate level which are focused on this population, are essential to the effort and will continue to be developed.

Alternative Learners:

Misericordia University has long recognized the potential among students with learning differences. Its Alternative Learners Program, founded in 1979, has provided support to many students along the way to their degree. In this plan period, Misericordia will develop methods and structures to expand this program and its support services, including financial supports as warranted, to attract a larger community of these students to our university.

Food Insecure and Those Requiring Emergency Financial Support:

Produce additional support for students in financial crisis, and regularize the availability of funds to support these needs. We plan to implement assessments to ascertain needs and initiatives to increase hospitality and service efforts to combat these barriers for student persistence.

II. SUPPORTIVE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL GROUPS

Enhance on-campus learning settings, spaces for gathering, and support practices to better serve all student populations and promote informal interactions.

Mercy inclusion efforts do not stop with recruitment. Diversity of all kinds enhances the learning environment by bringing different perspectives and experiences to bear on our understanding of course material and the world around us. But equitable approaches to a diverse array of students and producing a truly welcoming and inclusive environment require a concerted effort of self-examination, understanding of student, faculty, and staff experience, and change to produce an environment that is a magnet for all. Multifaceted, flexible spaces will be considered as key components to all new and renovated building projects.

Initiatives include:

Equity and Inclusion initiatives:

During the academic year 21-22, the University successfully completed a climate survey intended to help us understand students, faculty, and a staff experiences of Misericordia, particularly with respect to issue related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Pending analysis of the data collected, AVP Kas Williams and VP Amy Lahart will construct an annual action plan to address concerns raised in the survey. The action plan will also identify metrics to track the specific impact of the tactics identified in the action plan.

Special Spaces:

Establish a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center (TRHT) in collaboration with American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). This infrastructure will allow the TRHT Center to focus on racial healing while the supporting committee engages and educates the community through programming and assessment as a means to inform institutional policies and procedures, respond to acute incidents, and expand the Center's capacity through collaboration.

Onboarding Orientation and Ongoing In-Service Training:

Both employees and students need to have onboarding experiences that challenge them to think more broadly about DEI efforts and their place in a diverse environment—both at MU but also in preparation for a life after college. We will construct and refresh training beginning specifically with search committees. This will include tracking and assessment of the diverse applicant pools and experiences. Learning opportunities for faculty, staff, administrators, and students, such as the Diversity Certificate Program, will assist in signaling the central importance of DEI work, grounded in the Charisms of the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

ONEMU

III. A "GREAT PLACE TO WORK" CULTURE

Create a trustworthy, caring, and fair work environment for university faculty and staff.

The values of Misericordia must be expressed not just in our approach to students and our aims for the outcomes of their education, but also for the way the staff, administrators, and faculty do their work and treat one another. Our MU community should embody respect, caring, and mutual support in all that we do. Misericordia should be known outside the campus and experienced by our staff as a great place to work. While our values call us to act in these ways, doing so also redounds to the benefit of our students and the university enterprise as it allows us to recruit and retain the very best staff and faculty.

Initiatives include:

Appreciation of Efforts:

As COVID has placed incredible pressures on students and employees across the world of higher education, we all realize that so many of our faculty and staff have contributed monumental efforts to ensuring the success of students and the university. During this plan period, the university will examine its practices for recognizing and rewarding these efforts—and in particular exceptional performances that inspire us in meeting the objectives of our mission.

Work/Life Balance:

The workforce in many departments across the university was downsized during the pandemic, which created increased workloads and caused many employees to find it difficult to take care of their personal wellbeing. Progressive work arrangements will be explored that improve the quality of life for our employees.

Teamwork:

Create an environment where employees embody collaboration and use critical thinking skills to identify potential solutions in their daily work processes. Empower established employee leadership groups to provide activities in the workplace that are intended to enhance the collegial environment and working relationships across campus divisions.

Enhancing the team-based approach to decision making will improve information sharing and gathering while refreshing and creating transparent communication practices throughout existing structured groups. These transparent processes will lead to trustworthy relationships among the campus community as we confront the challenges of the future.

Opportunities to Advance:

Compared to larger institutions, small universities have limited opportunities for employees to progressively advance in their careers. It is inevitable, therefore, that some staff will leave the university to pursue career advancement. Nevertheless, we will work with employees to understand how they can experience new challenges, advance in responsibilities, and when possible, have the opportunity to move ahead to a new position within the university. As an institution of higher learning, we recognize the inherent need to be stimulated in new ways, to learn, to grow, and to progress and are committed to finding ways for the members of our community to do so and to stay with us for longer periods.

Competitive Compensation and Benefits:

Misericordia is committed to providing market-based compensation to its employees. During the plan period, we will examine our methods and data sources used in benchmarking salaries and benefits. We will conduct benchmarking studies of salaries and total compensation for both faculty and staff, and we will maintain a competitive salary and benefit package that fits within the financial capabilities of the university.

IV. INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE EXTERNAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Create off-campus learning settings where students are made aware of diverse perspectives.

All participants in our campus community have had limitations in their encounters with people different from us. As part of our own growth as human beings and our ability to understand others, we will invest in and encourage experiences that develop our connection to others different from us. Rooted in the Charism of Service, participation in these environments produces valuable perspective-taking, empathy, and learning. (See also Page 8, Learn@MU, Exemplary Experiential Education)

Initiatives include:

Study-Away Opportunities:

As part of our COVID recovery process, we will develop and re-develop study abroad (international) and domestic (e.g., Washington Semester) study away programs. We will carefully consider costs, home school tuition models, and study abroad scholarships to allow the greatest possible access to these programs. We will also consider opportunities of varying length including full semesters, summer term, as well as winter and spring breaks. Special consideration of the possibilities for service learning and research experiences will be made.

Service and Service-Learning Opportunities:

Develop and re-develop local opportunities to serve in the spirit of the Charism of Service and integrate these opportunities into course learning in a community engaged service-learning paradigm.



APPENDIX

Implementation and Key Performance Indicators

IMPLEMENTATION

A strategic plan is unlikely to succeed without a clear implementation plan. Execution of a strategic plan requires dedication and discipline guided by measurable outcomes.

To ensure progress on the objectives in the plan, Misericordia University will undertake a structured implementation process. Each year, units in the university will produce an annual action plan in which interim steps that advance initiatives toward the larger goals of the plan will be outlined for that implementation cycle. At the end of the year, university and unit leaders will report on the progress toward those goals and how each has specifically contributed to the objectives and themes of the strategic plan. In addition, the university will track high-level metrics associated with each of the plan themes and objectives, and will report those metrics (relative to expected progress) to the Board of Trustees, the university leadership, and the entire university community.

In this way, we can be sure that we are making progress on goals and can take remedial action when progress is not meeting expected standards. Furthermore, the annual review cycle will allow the University to adjust goals. Some goals may be achieved early and therefore more aggressive targets should be set, and second, the external context of the university's activity can change thereby requiring a reassessment of the goals and objectives.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Although the university tracks scores of metrics related to its financial, academic, and internal processes, especially with respect to issues important to our various accreditors, the strategic plan will be linked to a set of performance indicators that closely reflect the 12 objectives. When progress on these metrics meets established standards, the university can have great confidence that it is indeed achieving the goals of the strategic plan. In what follows, 2-5 indicators for each of the objectives are identified, baselines are identified where appropriate, and targets for improvement are identified when possible. This suite of indicators provides an important annual report card for the strategic plan and will be reviewed by university leadership and the Board of Trustees at the close of each annual reporting cycle in preparation for the summer planning exercise that will establish the following year's action plan.

[See the selected indicators on the next page:](#)

APPENDIX

Implementation and Key Performance Indicators

Theme One: **Learn@MU - ENHANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE****Expansive Academic Programs**

- Increase the number of new academic programs/ majors considered and introduced through 2027: Undergraduate, Graduate, and other (including certificates and stackable credentials). (Goal: +12 academic programs with ½ of these targeted to non-traditional markets.)
- Evaluate existing academic programs and determine which are not currently financially viable. Refresh or pivot all programs that are not currently meeting that standard.

Exemplary Experiential Education

- Achieve a 30% increase in available internships.
- Increase available service-learning courses to 15 per semester.
- Achieve a 30% increase the number of high-impact experiences, as defined by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These include internships, study away, service learning, and undergraduate student research among others. 100% of MU undergraduate students should experience at least one high-impact experience before graduation; 80% should experience more than one.

Transformative Critical Skills Core

- Adopt and fully implement a core curriculum revision.
- Using items from the NSSE and RNL surveys, assess student perception that each learning objective identified in the Core Curriculum has been achieved (to be constructed and implemented when the first students complete the new core).

Market-Driven Enrollment Growth and Maintenance

- Increase by 30% the number of undergraduate students from outside our traditional catchment area (100 miles).
- Double the overall diversity of the student body (from 12% to 24%).
- Increase the full-time undergraduate student population by 25% over Fall 2021.
- Increase the part-time (undergraduate and graduate) student population by 25% over Fall 2021.
- Improve retention rate 1% point per year as part of the Moving the Needle project.

APPENDIX

Implementation and Key Performance Indicators

Theme Two: **Live@MU - ENGAGED STUDENT LIFE**

Vibrant On-Campus Student Life Experiences

- Increase number of Athletic teams (3 Men; 3 Women).
- Develop a robust set of non-varsity athletic opportunities (club sports, intramurals).
- Develop at least three Music/Dance ensembles housed in Fine Arts.

Organically-linked Student Life and Academics

- Develop at least three academic competition team/programs (debate, case competitions, mock trial, etc.).
- Establish and populate Honors Living/Learning Community with 40 students.
- First-Year Experience explicitly linked with Mission/Social Justice/Critical Concerns.

Improved Student Satisfaction with Campus Experience

- Improve the student satisfaction of the overall Misericordia experience based on NSSE survey items (2021 % of students rating overall experience as “excellent” or “good”: 1st year students: 93%/ 4th year students: 86%; would attend Misericordia again: 1st year students: 84%/ 4th year students: 73%).
- Increase residential occupancy rate of undergraduate students (Goal: full occupancy).

Thriving Leaders Living Mercy Values

- Establish student leadership program with goal of 100 participants per year.
- Increase Mercy Associate numbers to 50 ongoing participants.
- Establish Mission/Mercy onboarding experience and periodic refresh opportunities.

Theme Three: **OneMU - COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION**

Attainable University Experience for More Diverse Populations

- Increase the percentage of undergraduate students receiving Pell grants to 25% or higher.
- Increase the percentage of first-generation college student (Baseline: 2020-21: 24%)
- Continue to adjust Need/Merit aid balance toward need.
- Increase scholarship giving to support these efforts to 20% over current 3-year average.

Supportive University Environment for All Groups

- Improve the climate satisfaction level of undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty and staff based on the HEDS Diversity & Equity Campus Climate Survey (Baseline: Spring 2019: HEDS: “generally satisfied” campus response).
- Produce an annual DEI action plan.

A “Great Place to Work” Culture

- Set and meet compensation goals (total compensation: salary and benefits).
- Increase general faculty and staff satisfaction on surveys.
- Produce succession plans in each area.

Inclusive and Diverse Learning Environments

- Re-establish/increase study abroad/away opportunities (5 opportunities available)
- Increase the number of students studying abroad/away to 10% of graduating students.



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