Shaping Austin College's Future Together

Strategic Planning 2026 – 2027

Transformational Relationships
Purposeful Futures

A community-wide conversation about who we are, what we value, and where we want Austin College to go next.



Why This Moment Matters

What Endures.

What Comes Next.

Every generation of Austin College has been called to imagine what comes next.

Today, we have the opportunity to build on nearly 180 years of excellence while preparing students for a rapidly changing world.

From Where We Are to Who We Will Become



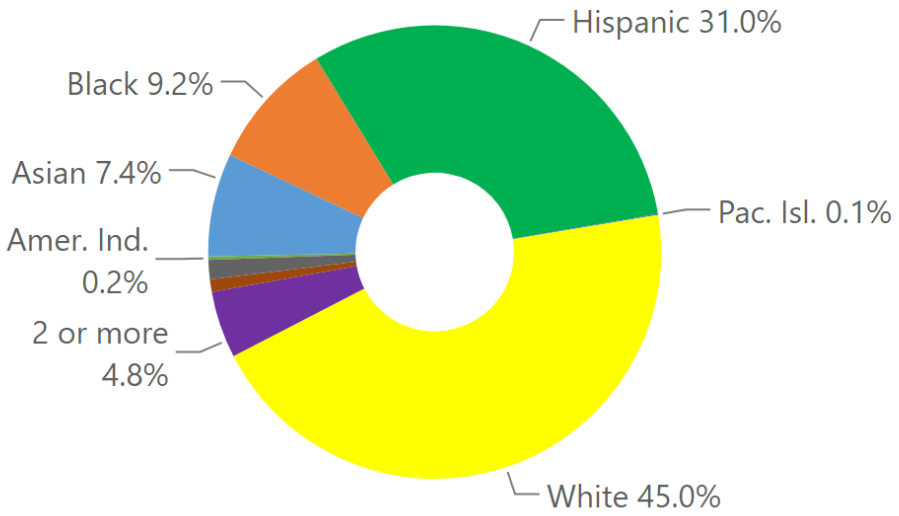
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND FINANCIAL CONTEXT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

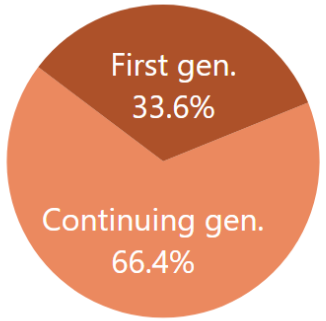
Our Strategic Challenge

All Students
Fall 2026

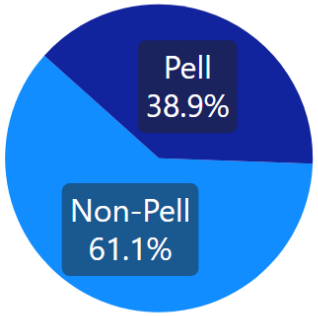
Fall 2026 Student Attributes







UGs only



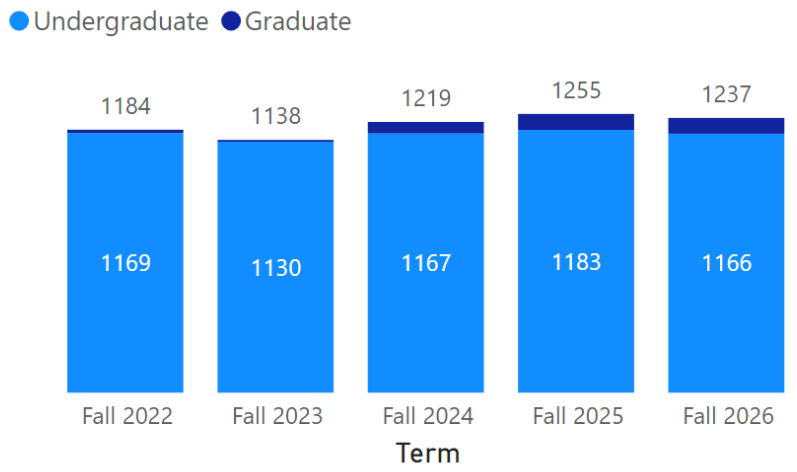
1237

Headcount

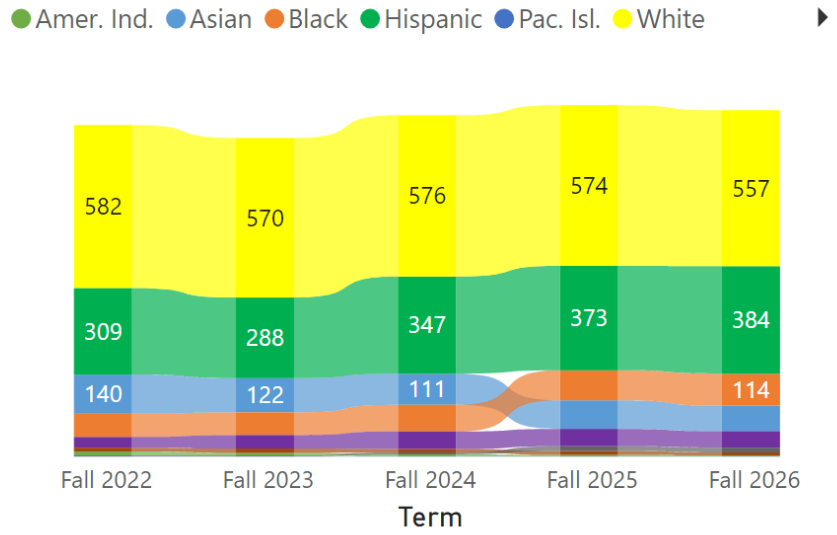
Level	FT	PT	Total
Undergraduate	**1159**	**7**	**1166**
Graduate	**71**		**71**
MAT	6		**6**
MMS	65		**65**
Total	**1230**	**7**	**1237**

AUSTIN COLLEGE

Historical Trends



By Race/Ethnicity



Source: Internal census files. Sep. 14, 2026

Enrollment & Student Persistence Fall to Fall

Strong Outcomes. Uneven Momentum.

- **1,237 students**
  - 406 new students (346 FTIC , 29 transfers, 31 graduate students)
- **66.4% four-year graduation -** second-highest rate in ten years
- **77.4% first-year retention -** second-lowest rate since 2011
- **Retention of Sophomores was our lowest since Covid**

Retention Rates in Last Year's Class

- **72% male retention -** rate only above the 2020 class
- **82% female retention -** second-lowest since 2013
- **68% retention for Hispanic students & 81% for Asian students -** lowest since 2013

Our challenge is not simply to enroll a changing student body—
but to create the conditions in which every student can *flourish, finish, & thrive*.

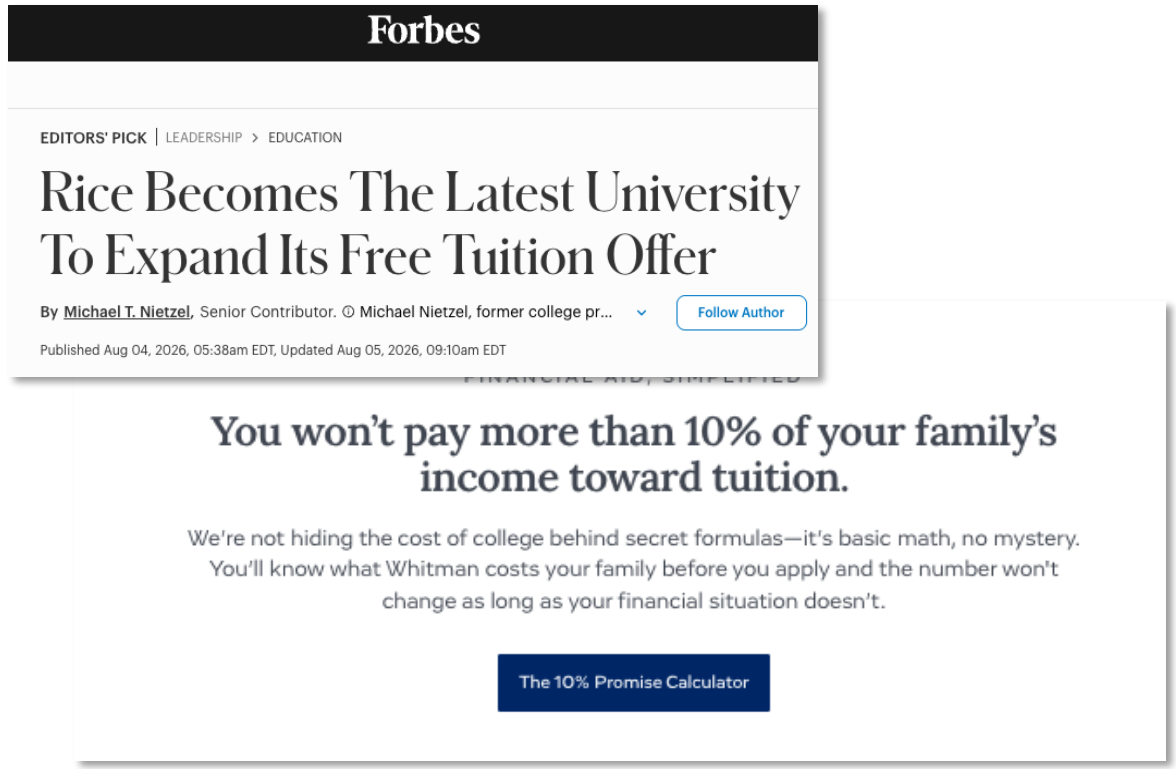
Enrollment Context for Strategic Planning

Texas growth does not guarantee enrollment—or net revenue.

169,000 more Texas high school graduates in 2024 than in 2000; private residential colleges captured almost none of that growth.

A more competitive market

- Tuition Promises/Free-Tuition
- Regional recruiting in Texas from out of market competitors
- Disappearance of international student populations
- Students are applying to more colleges and receiving more offers
- 68.7% of non-enrolling admits choose public institutions
- Career-focused high school pathways, mean students connecting college to career outcomes more important than in past.



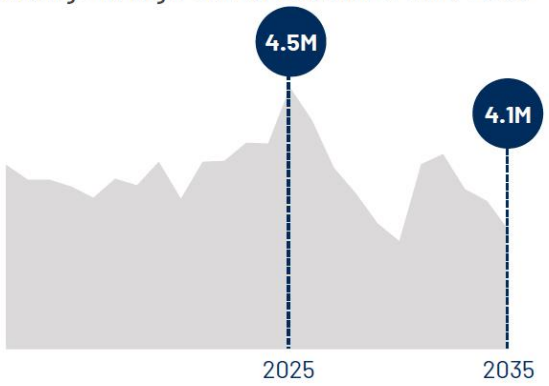
STRATEGIC PRIORITY • Convert interest into enrollment and sustainable net tuition revenue.

Enrollment Context for Strategic Planning

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169,000 more Texas high school graduates in 2024 than in 2000; private residential colleges captured almost none of that growth.

Change in High School Graduates 2019-2035



Change in College-Bound Students 2025-2035

-9.9%

Change in College-Bound Students by Region 2025-2035

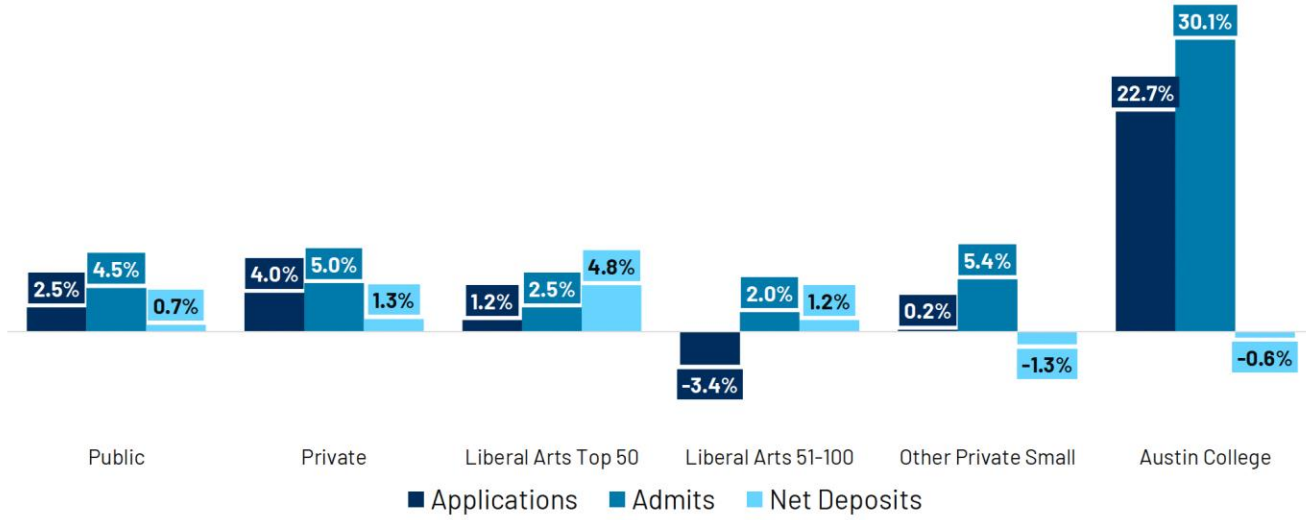
NEW ENGLAND
-12.2%

NEW YORK
-8.2%

TEXAS
+7.7%

CALIFORNIA
+14.3%

Year-Over-Year Change in Volume by Funnel Stage and Cohort
As of September 9, 2026



STRATEGIC PRIORITY • Convert interest into enrollment and sustainable net tuition revenue.

Enrollment Context for Strategic Planning

Interest Outpaces Conversion

- **Applications +55%; deposits +8% over four years**
- **Net tuition revenue flat, discount rising**
- **Financial aid "negotiation" growing – perceived cost vs. value not aligned**
- **Higher level of student indecision (melt), puts pressure to convert even more deposits**
    - **Melt has grown from 7.2% in 2024 of deposits to over 11% in 2025 and 2026.**

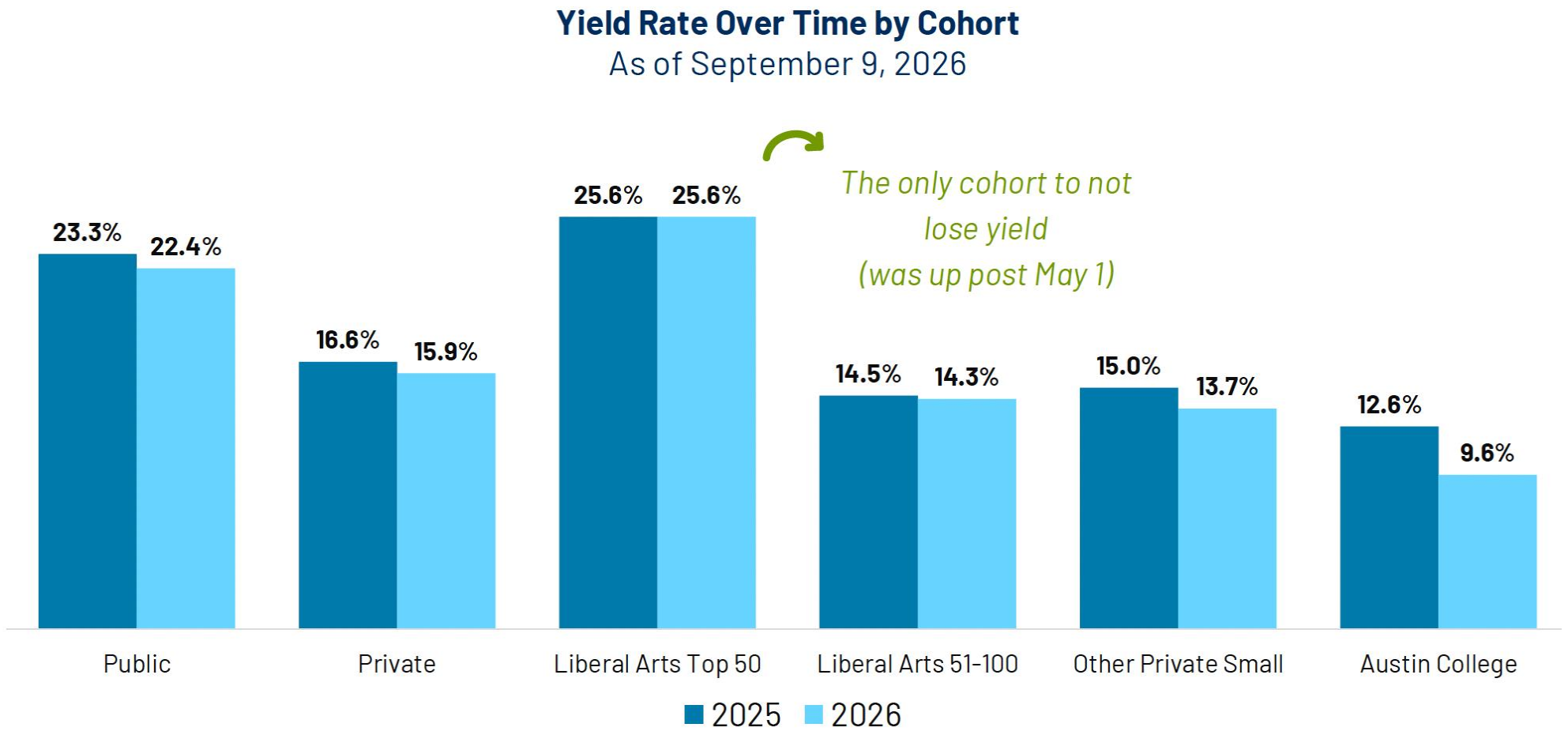
Top Factors when admitted students choose elsewhere:

- *Early Decision Offers, Other 'Dream School'*
- *Institutional Reputation/Prestige*
- *Special Scholarship Programs or Tuition Promises*
- *Specific Dual-Degree/Pre-Professional options or honors programs*
- *Specific majors not offered here (ex: Nursing, Architecture)*
- *Campus Location, Facilities, and Student Life*

STRATEGIC PRIORITY • Convert interest into enrollment and sustainable net tuition revenue.

Enrollment Context for Strategic Planning

Interest Outpaces Conversion



STRATEGIC PRIORITY • Convert interest into enrollment and sustainable net tuition revenue.

Enrollment Context for Strategic Planning

Build on What Works

- Campus visits yield 40%,
  - 75% of the enrolling students from Fall 2026 visited campus
  - Only 26% of non-enrolling students visited
- 80% of the enrolling students said an interaction with Austin College faculty, staff, or students was a key deciding factor
  - 40% of enrolling students first learned about Austin College from a current AC community member or alumni
- Athletes are 40% of the entering class and convert consistently over 60% from admit to deposit.
- Aid is important, and Austin College was first in hand with financial aid offers for many of our admitted students.
  - 46% of enrolled aid applicants are Pell-eligible.
  - 92% of enrolling students filed a FAFSA

OUR REPUTATION IS STRONGER

86.5% Of enrolling students said we were their first choice or in their top few. Up 14% from last year.[1]

PERSONAL INTERACTIONS MATTER

80.4% We convert strongest when students are able to connect with AC Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni when admitted[3]

ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES LEAD

85.3% of surveyed students cited academic opportunities and academic support as key to their decision[5]

AFFORDABILITY & VALUE IS A KEY STRENGTH

75% Of enrolling students said that scholarships and financial aid was important to decision.[7]

STRATEGIC PRIORITY • Convert interest into enrollment and sustainable net tuition revenue.

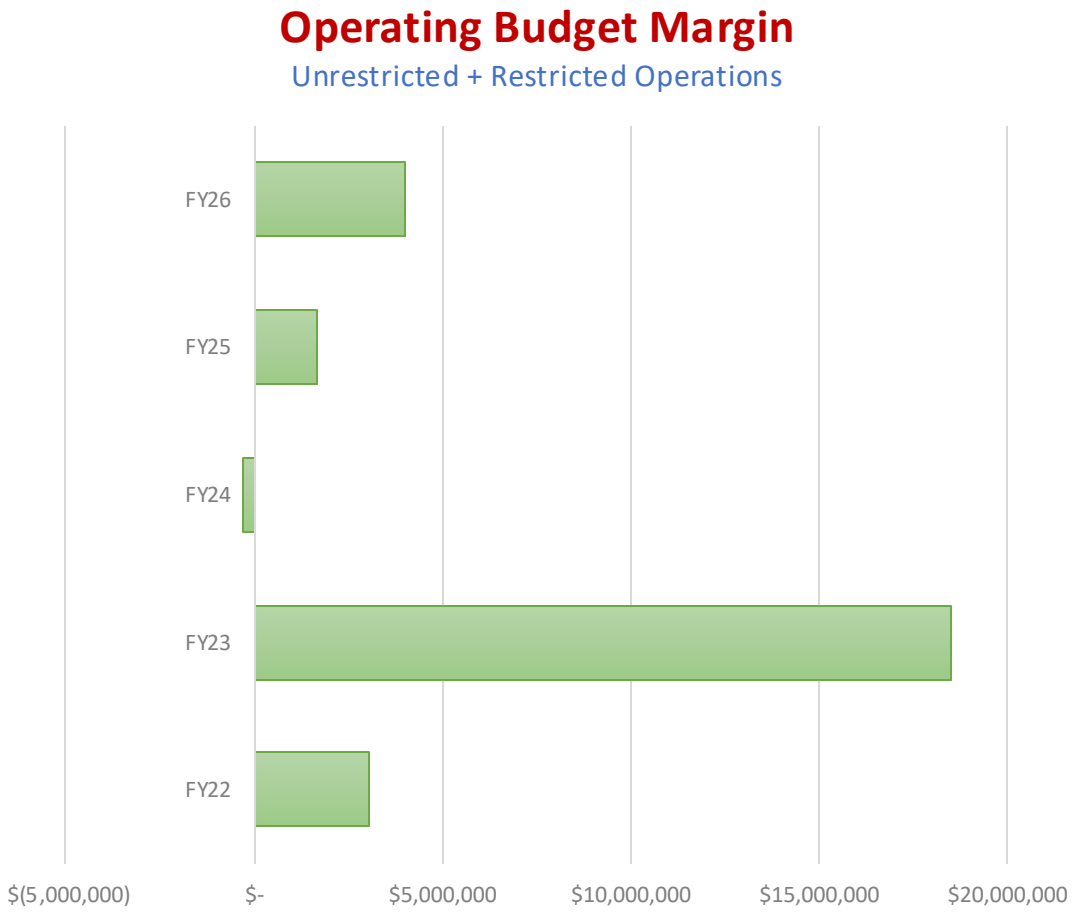
Enrollment Context for Strategic Planning

Sharpen the Growth Strategy

- Get clear about the value of liberal arts and ensure outcomes are a feature across all forms of communication
- Consider how our academic and co-curricular offerings can adapt to meet changing student perceptions and needs
- Expand high-impact visit experiences collaborating with faculty, staff, and current students to reinforce our strengths
- Address financial value and reality of cost comparison in a highly competitive market
- Find ways to leverage the strong personal connections that convert and how that may be scaled

STRATEGIC PRIORITY • Convert interest into enrollment and sustainable net tuition revenue.

Financial Context



5-Year Snapshot

- COVID Relief Funding
- Physician Assistant Start-up Funding
- Historic Estate Gifts
- Unprecedented Stock Market Returns
- Growth in Endowment Distributions

Financial Context

Restricted

BALANCE SHEET	INCOME STATEMENT
Endowment Fair Market Value	**Estate Gifts**
$230.9M	$26M
as of 06.30.26	FY23-24

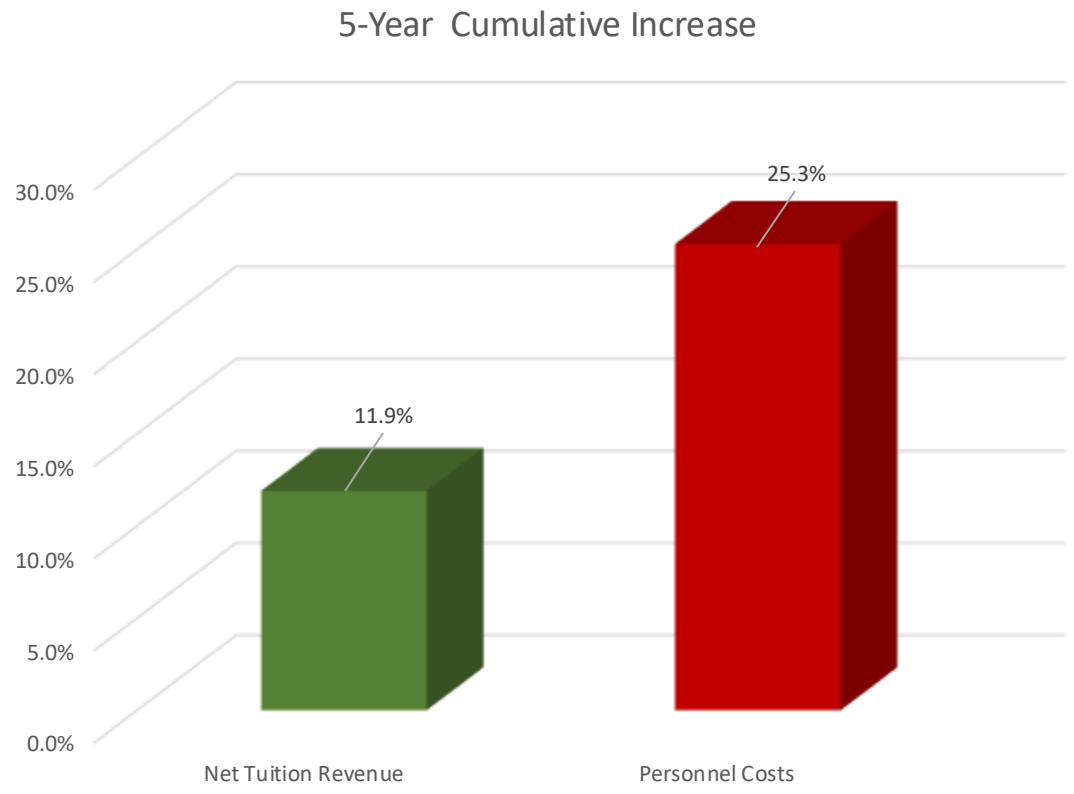
Financial Context

Unrestricted

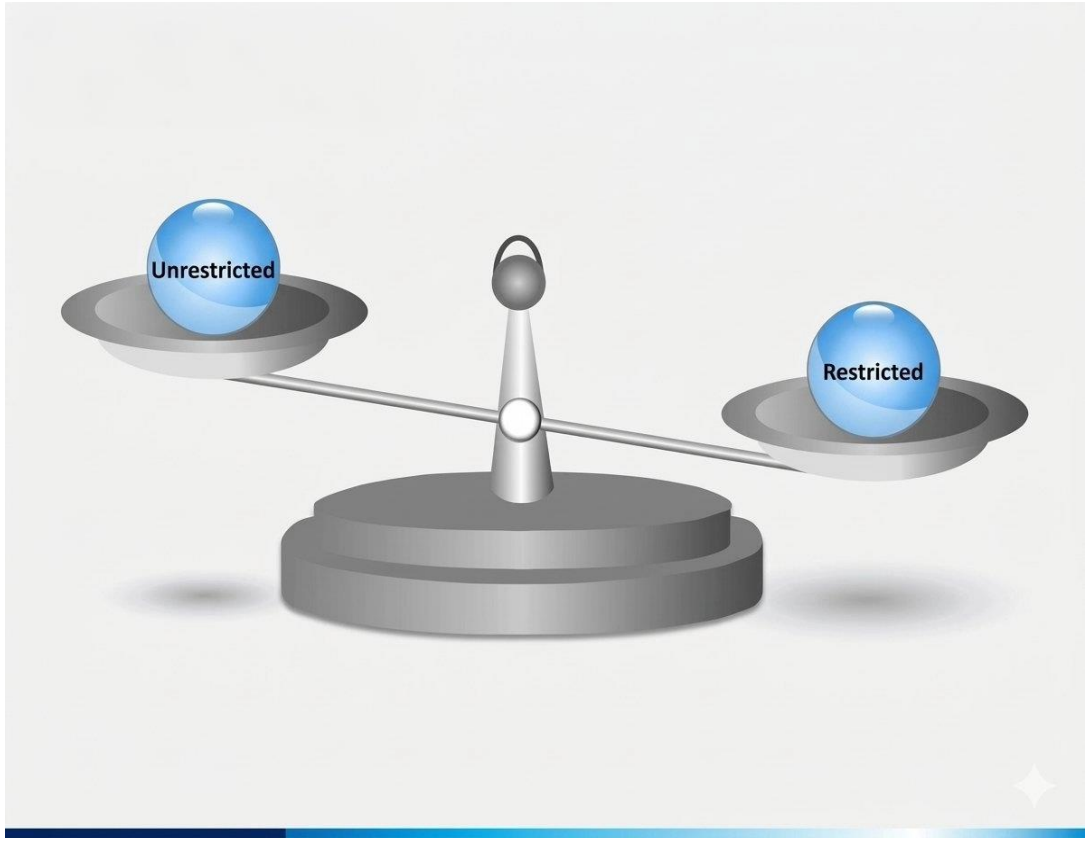
5-Year Snapshot

- Favorable margin reported 4 out of the last 5 years
- COVID Relief Funding supported results in FY22 and FY23
- FY25 and FY26 included favorable margins from the PA program
- Significant support from Unrestricted Endowment Distributions (+61%) and Release of Restricted Resources (+116%)
- Growth in Personnel Costs more than doubled the growth in Net Tuition Revenue

Unrestricted Tentpoles



Financial Context



Unrestricted Levers

- Salary and benefits increases
- Deferred maintenance
- Inflationary increases in departmental expenses

Strategic Imperative: **Improve alignment between net tuition revenue and unrestricted personnel costs to ensure the institution's long-term financial sustainability.**

WHAT FORCES MUST WE NAVIGATE?

THE CURRENT CLIMATE

Eight national indicators point toward a more distinctive, student-centered, career-connected, technologically adaptive, and financially resilient college.

The evidence impacting the moment

Selected national indicators—and what they signal for Austin College

RECENT GRADS UNDEREMPLOYED

42% Working in jobs that typically do not require a bachelor's degree. [1]

BELONGING

52% Students reporting levels of high loneliness in 2024-25 Healthy Minds Study. [2]

EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

85% of U.S. college students report using generative AI for coursework. [3]

AFFORDABILITY & ROI

$45K Average published tuition and fees at private nonprofit colleges in 2025–26. [4]

ALTERNATIVE CREDENTIALS

96% of surveyed employers say microcredentials strengthen a candidate's application. [5]

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

–13% Projected decline in U.S. high school graduates from the 2025 peak through 2041. [6]

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

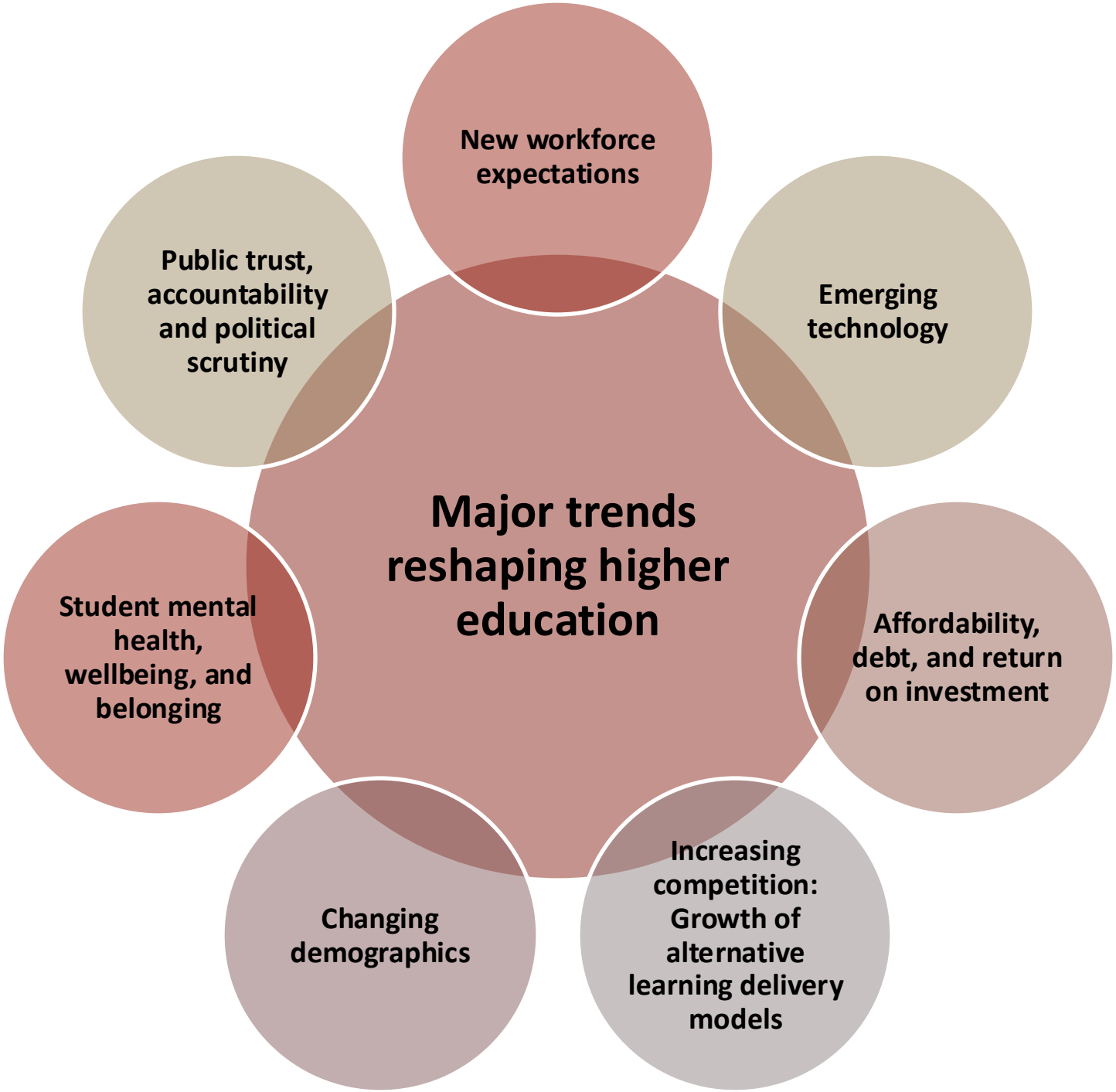
37% screened positive for moderate-to-severe depression in the 2024–25 Healthy Minds Study. [7]

PUBLIC TRUST

38% of U.S. adults express high confidence in higher education—down from 57% in 2015. [8]

Sources: 1 Austin College; 2 NACE Job Outlook 2026 Spring Update; 3 Inside Higher Ed Student Voice (2025); 4 College Board, Trends in College Pricing 2025; 5 Coursera Micro-Credentials Impact Report 2025; 6 WICHE, Knocking at the College Door; 7 Healthy Minds Study 2024–25; 8 Gallup/Lumina (2026).

THE CURRENT CLIMATE



What We Can Build On

Strengths
What we can build on

- Nationally recognized liberal arts reputation
- Member, Colleges That Change Lives
- Small classes, 11:1 student-faculty ratio
- 100% experiential learning requirement
- Strong faculty mentoring culture
- Diverse student body
- Strategic location in North Texas

Opportunities
Where can we create advantage

- Growth of the North Texas technology corridor
- Employer partnerships (semiconductor, tech, non-profit) for internships and hiring pipelines
- Potential to become a regional cultural hub
- Program growth in data science, business analytics, engineering, and allied health
- Appeal to students seeking personalized education and career preparation
- Expanded nonprofit and corporate partnerships across DFW and Sherman
- Auxiliary revenue, diversification of income

What We Must Overcome

Weaknesses
What currently constrains us

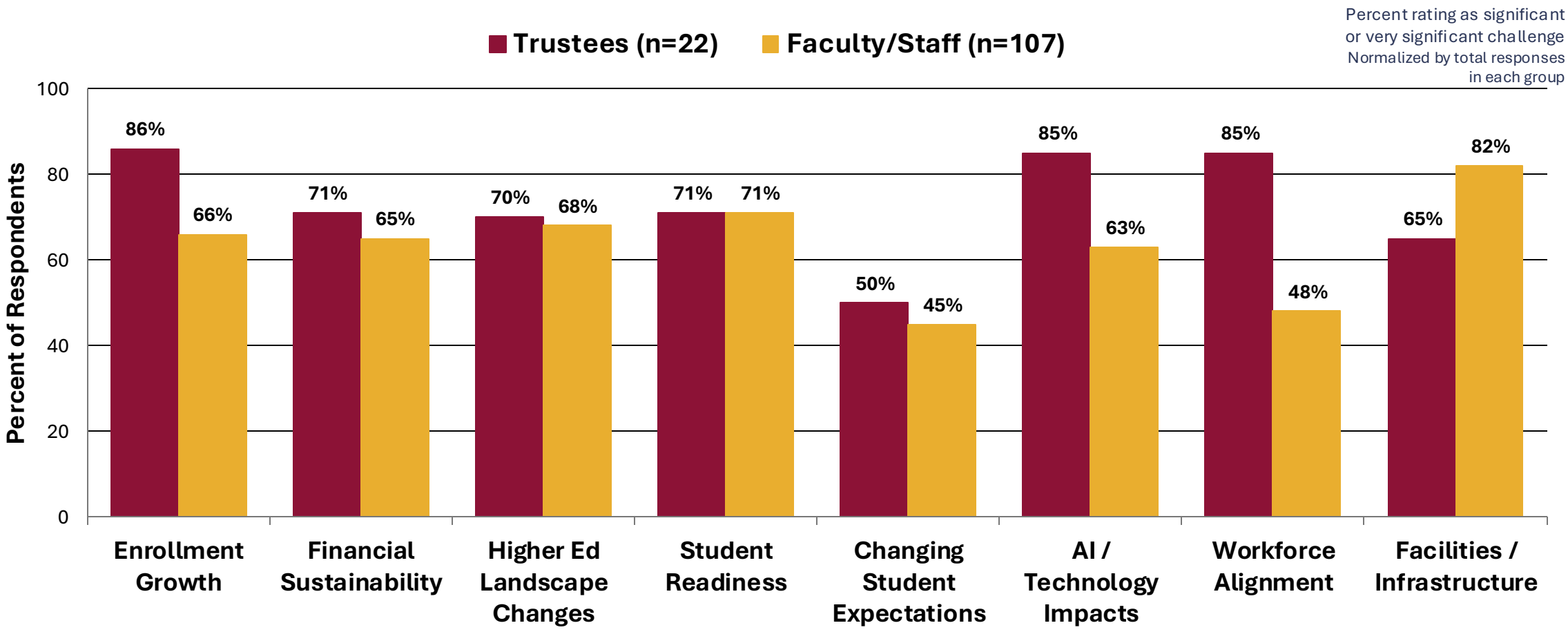
- Limited national brand recognition vs. liberal arts peers
- Small enrollment base (~1,200 students)
- Tuition-dependent business model
- High tuition discount rate, typical of small privates
- Intense competition for students, limited financial aid dollars
- Relatively weak retention of students

Threats
Forces we must actively manage

- National decline in college-age population
- Rising competition from out-of-state, public, & online institutions
- Rising student price sensitivity and concerns about ROI
- Declining confidence in the value of higher education
- Demographic and economic volatility affecting enrollment
- Increasing operational and labor costs
- Accreditor and federal compliance requirements
- Deferred maintenance on 1M sq ft of facilities

Challenge Landscape

Trustees and faculty/staff identify a converging set of pressures:
enrollment, finances, facilities, student readiness, technology, and workforce alignment.



These shared challenges highlight areas where strategic investments and collaborative solutions can have the greatest impact.

Our Strategic Challenge

***Leverage** the extraordinary growth occurring around us to strengthen what is distinctive about Austin College (e.g., personalized relationships, liberal arts learning, and experiential education) while more intentionally connecting those strengths to student success, careers, community partnerships, and new revenue sources.*

How do we translate Austin College's historic strengths into value that students, families, employers, and the region can see and experience?

WHO WE ARE

Mission Alignment Remains Strong: We Don't Need to Become Someone Else

Our Community is not asking Austin College to reinvent itself







Build on our Strengths	Increase our Visibility	Prepare students for the future

Stakeholder Quotes

Trustees

Relationships and Transformation

"Austin College is excellent in taking bright, often somewhat introverted students and exposing them to the world through trusted faculty and administrative relationships and helping them open doors they did not know even existed."

Purpose and Excellence

"Academic excellence and preparing students for purposeful lives."

Faculty/Staff

On What Makes Austin College Distinctive

"Commitment to undergraduate education. It truly separates us."
"High-impact undergraduate education from day one of a student's tenure at AC."

On the Power of Human Connection

"Many of our challenges—mental health, loneliness, retention—could be addressed with a renewed commitment to human connection and a shared curiosity about the human experience."

Students

On Relationships with Faculty

"The relationship I get to have with my professors."
"I like the small class size and focus on you as a student from all of the professors. If you are struggling, they want to help you."
"Close-knit feel, being able to form relationships with professors at an academically reputable institution."

On What Makes Austin College Special

"One thing that makes Austin College stand out to me is their distinctive focus on individual success."

Who We Are, Our Greatest Strengths

Students are known

Relationships transform lives

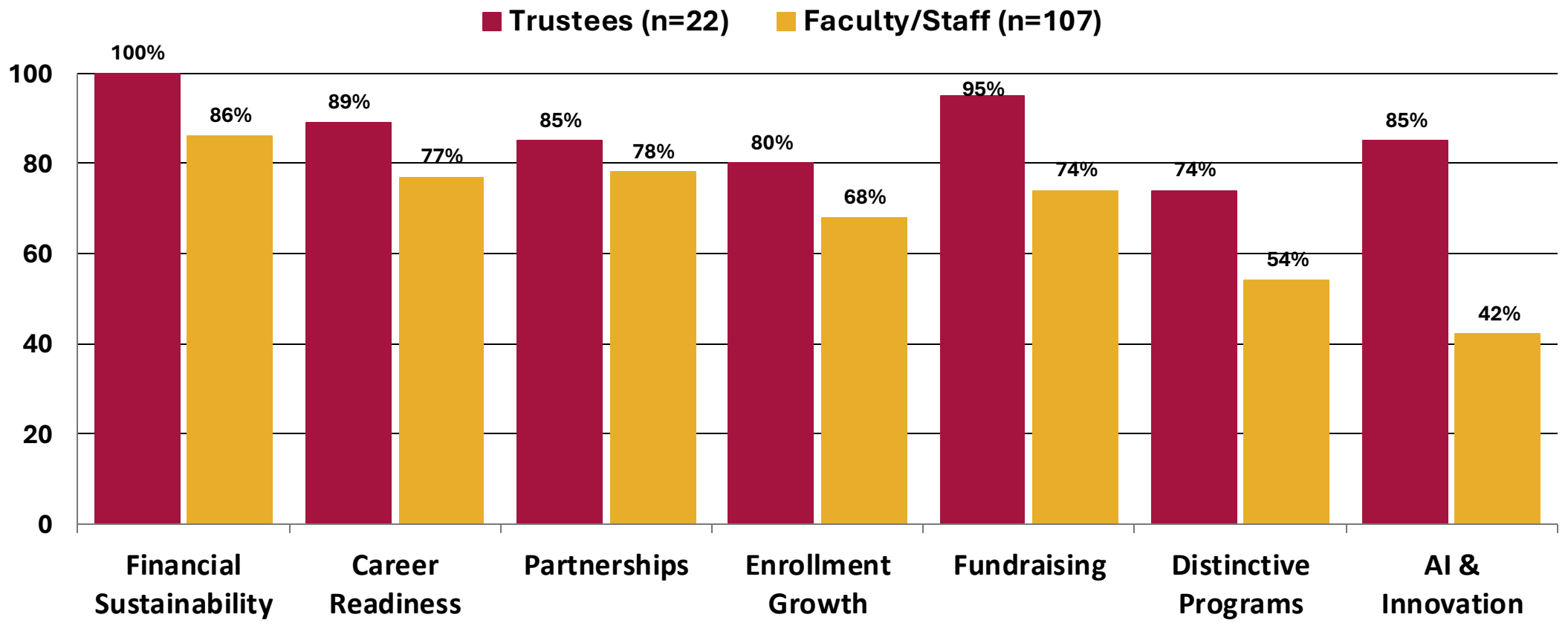
Faculty and staff are accessible & supportive

WHAT WE CARE ABOUT

Shared Strategic Priorities

Trustees and faculty/staff show broad alignment around sustainability, student outcomes, and partnerships.

Percent rating high or very high priority



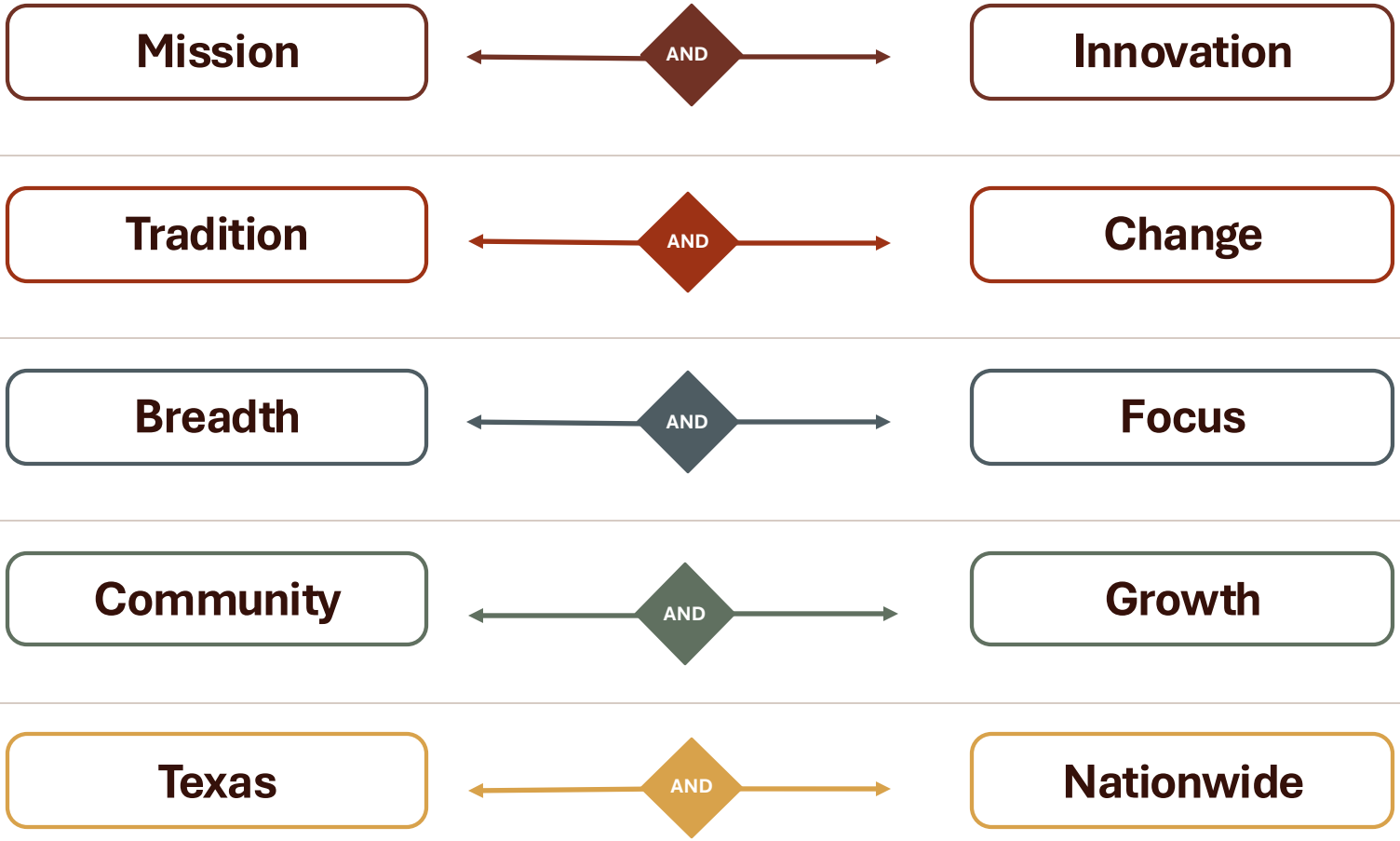
Source: Austin College strategic planning surveys. Percentages normalized by group response counts.

Strategic Tensions

The plan should not avoid tensions; it should organize choices around them.

Balancing “both/and” choices

Each pair names a recurring decision point: preserve what matters while adapting to what comes next.



Where do we need to choose and where must we hold both at once?

THE PROCESS

What should never change?

What strengths should we build on?

What needs to evolve?

What should Austin College look like in 2032?

Strategic Planning Timeline

Summer/Fall 2026	Late Fall 2026 & January 2027	Spring 2027	Summer 2027	Fall 2027
Community & "Getting to Know You" Surveys, Listening Sessions (Rebecca) & Community Input Forums	Working Groups develop draft strategic initiatives	Refine plan, community review, and finalize draft	Board review and approval Develop implementation framework, outcomes, & KPIs	Implementation

Four Strategic Priority Areas

Student Flourishing

- How can we ensure every student is prepared, supported, and empowered to thrive from enrollment through graduation?
- How can we create a distinctive student experience that strengthens a student's sense of connection & belonging while reducing isolation for all students?

Purposeful Learning

- How can we embrace innovation and emerging opportunities while remaining true to our mission and values?
- How do we prepare graduates for meaningful careers, lifelong learning, and lives of purpose?

Distinctive Impact

- How do we become a college that is widely recognized and the first choice for students seeking a transformative liberal arts education?
- How do we deepen our impact beyond campus?

Sustainable Strength

- How can we strengthen Austin College's financial resilience and strategically invest in its long-term success?

Transformational Relationships
Purposeful Futures

Student Flourishing

Prompts to identify shared priorities, gaps, and opportunities.

- **What does it mean for a student to be academically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially ready to succeed? (*Cura personalis*: care for the whole person)**
- **Where do students encounter the greatest barriers to success and belonging?**
- **What experiences or supports should every Austin College student have?**
- **What would make the Austin College student experience more distinctive?**

What changes would most strengthen students' ability to thrive, belong, and graduate?

Purposeful Learning

Prompts to identify shared priorities, gaps, and opportunities.

- **What should every Austin College graduate know, be able to do, and be prepared to navigate in a changing world?**
- **What is most distinctive about an Austin College liberal arts education—and what should we preserve or should evolve?**
- **How should learning at Austin College respond to AI, emerging technologies, workforce expectations, and societal/global challenges?**
- **How can we better connect liberal arts learning with career exploration, applied experiences, graduate study, employment, service, and lives of purpose?**

What one or two changes would most strengthen purposeful learning at Austin College?

Distinctive Impact

Prompts to identify shared priorities, gaps, and opportunities.

- **What makes Austin College genuinely distinctive, and where are we already making a meaningful difference?**
- **Which community needs, partnerships, and regional opportunities best align with our mission, strengths, and student learning?**
- **How can we more clearly communicate Austin College's distinctive value to prospective students, families, partners, and the broader regional community and beyond?**
- **What most limits our ability to deepen impact, strengthen visibility, and support sustainable enrollment growth?**

What defining strengths or areas of impact should Austin College become more widely known for?

Sustainable Strength

Prompts to identify shared priorities, gaps, and opportunities.

- **Where are the strongest opportunities for responsible growth in enrollment, programs, partnerships, or revenue?**
- **What investments are most important to Austin College's long-term vitality and competitiveness?**
- **Where could new programs, credentials, partnerships, or audiences align with our mission and emerging needs?**
- **What tradeoffs or difficult choices may be necessary to achieve long-term sustainability?**

Where should Austin College make its more important strategic investments over the next three to five years?

Community Input Forums
(bring your laptop and your lunch)

Conversations around each Strategic Priority Area

WHEN

Tuesdays & Thursdays
11:00 AM – 12:20 PM

SESSION DATES

Sep. 15, Launch – Nation Theatre
Listening Sessions: Sep. 22, 29, Oct. 1, 8,

8 Campus Communities

Faculty and staff are assigned to a community; each community explores all four pillars

FORMAT

What resonates?
What is missing?
What opportunities should we pursue?

Strategic Priority Area Input Forum Rotation

4 sessions over 4 weeks
11:00 AM–12:20 PM

Eight faculty/staff groups stay in assigned locations; pillar teams rotate weekly.

Date	Group #1 AD 204	Group #2 AD 206	Group #3 HC 114	Group #4 HC 210	Group #5 HC 211	Group #6 HC 212	Group #7 HC 213	Group #8 AD 209
Sept. 22	Student Flourishing A	Student Flourishing B	Purposeful Learning A	Purposeful Learning B	Distinctive Impact A	Distinctive Impact B	Sustainable Strength A	Sustainable Strength B
Sept. 29	Purposeful Learning A	Purposeful Learning B	Distinctive Impact A	Distinctive Impact B	Sustainable Strength A	Sustainable Strength B	Student Flourishing A	Student Flourishing B
Oct. 1	Distinctive Impact A	Distinctive Impact B	Sustainable Strength A	Sustainable Strength B	Student Flourishing A	Student Flourishing B	Purposeful Learning A	Purposeful Learning B
Oct. 8	Sustainable Strength A	Sustainable Strength B	Student Flourishing A	Student Flourishing B	Purposeful Learning A	Purposeful Learning B	Distinctive Impact A	Distinctive Impact B

Rotation logic | Each priority area is offered in two rooms per session. By the end of Oct. 8, every group has discussed all four areas.

Student Flourishing

Purposeful Learning

Distinctive Impact

Sustainable Strength

From Listening to Action:

Working Group Charge

- **Synthesize Feedback**
  - Review community input forum themes, survey findings, institutional data, and relevant external trends.
- **Refine the Strategic Objectives**
  - Clarify the objective, define its intended impact, and identify any important gaps.
- **Develop Strategic Initiatives**
  - Recommend 3–5 focused, actionable initiatives that advance the objective.
- **Assess Feasibility and Resources**
  - Identify anticipated costs, staffing needs, partnerships, technology, and other resource implications.
- **Establish Measures of Success**
  - Propose clear outcomes, annual benchmarks, and indicators of progress.
- **Identify Accountability and Timing**
  - Recommend responsible offices or groups and distinguish near-term priorities from longer-term investments.
- **Prepare Draft Plan for Review**

Success in 2032

Imagine . . .

- **Every student is known, supported, and empowered to flourish.**
- **Every student is shaped by meaningful mentoring and transformative learning experiences that prepare them for a purposeful future.**
- **Austin College is known regionally and nationally for its relationship-centered liberal arts education whose graduates are career-ready, purpose-driven, and prepared to make a difference.**
- **The College is financially strong and positioned to thrive for generations to come.**





Transformative Relationships Purposeful Futures

A relationship-centered liberal arts college preparing adaptable, ethical, career-ready graduates for meaningful lives.