



Pinnacle 2028

Shaping Our Tomorrow

A Strategic Plan for Wheeling University

2025 – 2028

Wheeling University

Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028

Table of Contents

Members of Strategic Planning Task Force	3
Introduction	4
Mission Statement	5
Market Realities	6
Strategic Initiative One	7
Strategic Initiative Two	11
Strategic Initiative Three	15
Strategic Initiative Four	17
Summary and Conclusion	19

Members of the Strategic Planning Task Force

Ms. Jennifer Board, *Vice President for Enrollment Management*

Mr. Chad Carter, *Board of Trustees Member*

Mr. William Elder, *Chief Financial Officer*

Fr. David Griffin, *Campus Ministry*

Dr. Kristine Grubler, *Faculty Council Chair*

Ms. Carrie Hanna, *Director of Athletics*

Mr. Michael Kochka, *Dean of Students*

Ms. Kelly Klubert, *Vice President for Advancement*

Ms. Keala McCurry, *Student Representative*

Mr. Michael Pree, *Director of Facilities*

Dr. Dianna Vargo, *President*

Introduction

Wheeling University developed this strategic plan with collaboration from faculty, staff, administration, students, and the Board of Trustees. This plan provides a blueprint that will guide the University over the next five years. As we embark on this journey, our commitment to excellence in education, the development of leaders following Catholic values of faith, peace, and justice, and service to our community and region remains steadfast. This plan represents our collective vision to foster a dynamic academic environment that prepares students to thrive in a rapidly evolving world and strengthens our partnerships with other educational institutions, local and regional industry, the City of Wheeling, and the state of West Virginia. This plan charts a course that ensures sustainable growth and transformative impact for generations to come.

This strategic plan positions Wheeling University to compete successfully in the world of higher education by increasing enrollment and expanding the impact of the institution on the region. With the formulation of this Strategic Plan, the University reaffirms its role in providing high-quality higher education to men and women in the Catholic tradition.

UNIVERSITY MISSION

Life. The Catholic traditions of educational excellence and service to others guide all of the programs at Wheeling University. By integrating learning, research and economic development with classical knowledge and Christian revelation, the University seeks to foster competence, creativity, and innovation throughout and beyond the campus community. Graduates of the University enter the world of work with socially responsible goals, a lifelong appetite for learning and the desire to make our universe a better place.

Leadership. To model the Catholic concern for regional and global neighbors, the University welcomes people of all creeds, races, and nationalities to share in the intelligent pursuit of excellence. The University promotes close student-faculty contacts and encourages students to develop their full potential for leadership. Through a grounding in the liberal arts and, above all, example of Jesus Christ, the University endeavors to produce intelligent, moral leaders who will champion the Catholic values of faith, peace and justice. Wheeling University envisions a dynamic leadership role for the University in the lives of its students and in the world at large.

Service With and Among Others. In its faculty and students, its research and outreach, the University is national and international. Yet as the only Catholic, campus-based institution of higher learning in West Virginia, Wheeling University also values its distinctive mission to the immediate area, educating local men and women and returning them to enrich their own communities. Wheeling University firmly believes its graduates will enter the professional world prepared to use their God-given talents not solely for personal fulfillment but as men and women in service to others.

Strategic Initiative I: Vibrant Student Educational Experience

Our most important function and responsibility as a university is to provide for the intellectual, social, and spiritual growth of our students. Student development takes place within a broad context of settings extending beyond the classroom to residential and social life, co-curricular activities, athletic competitions, worship, and internships. Wheeling University must build on the strong classroom-oriented and spiritual foundation it has always provided graduates, and significantly enhance opportunities for social development via a student experience that is rich, vibrant, and engaging outside the classroom. We must make the University, and more broadly the local community of Wheeling, WV, a destination location.

Overall Measure: Increase freshman retention by 50 percent by 2028.

RELATED OBJECTIVES AND KEY PROGRAMS

Objective I.1 Increase Student Participation in Co-Curricular Activities

Vital learning takes place outside the classroom. Students benefit from diverse learning experiences in residence halls and by engaging in student government, student clubs, fine and performing arts, community service, athletics, retreats, and worship. It is vital that all students take advantage of the tremendous opportunities that these out-of-classroom programs offer for gaining experience in leadership, career preparation, and more broadly, for success in life—a key aspect of the mission as a Catholic school.

Measure: Achieve 75 percent participation in co-curricular activities among undergraduate students by 2028.

I.1-1. Co-curricular learning outcomes and transcripts.

Out-of-classroom learning is a significant part of the student development. While Wheeling University already provides a wide variety of co-curricular opportunities to students, we have not been active in tracking these experiences and their outcomes and ensuring that all students actively participate.

While past focus has been on residential students, we must also ensure that commuter students have opportunities for co-curricular involvement.

I.1-2. Fine and performing arts.

Vocal and instrumental music, theatrical arts and visual arts are a foundational aspect of Catholic liberal arts education that spans the continuum from the general knowledge and appreciation expected of all students, to the active participation by many in organized activities such as choir and drama, progressing to the career choice of fewer still via a direct field of study at Wheeling University.

The University intends to revitalize existing programs and develop new opportunities for fine and performing arts, both co-curricular and curricular. We are establishing connections with local community partners such as the *Capitol Theatre* in Wheeling, *Oglebay Institute*, and the *Wheeling Symphony* to provide unmatched opportunities for students. Prospective students value the arts and Wheeling University will be a beacon for them in the Ohio Valley.

I.1-3. Faith development.

Wheeling University was founded to provide a Catholic education for young men and women in West Virginia and the Appalachian region. That mission is as strong today as it was in 1954 when the University was founded, and although some circumstances have changed over the years, hope for the future that education provides and fidelity to the mission remain at the core of the University. The Catholic tradition of higher education places great significance on students' spiritual and religious development.

The office of Campus Ministry at Wheeling University will expand its programs by partnering with other institutions; and continuing to work collaboratively with the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, to help students of all backgrounds integrate their faith, learning, and experiences through worship, reflection, and service. Campus Ministry programs will continue to encourage students to recognize and respond to the call of God in their own lives; support students in their ongoing spiritual and religious formation; and challenge them, in response to God's call, to commit themselves to lives of service with and among others. Students will have the ability to take courses to earn a Pastoral Ministry Certificate.

Objective I.2 Leader in Experiential Service-Learning Opportunities

Wheeling University aims to be a leader among liberal arts and comprehensive colleges in providing Experiential Service Learning, such as internships and career opportunities, for students so that they can take active and vital roles in their communities. In the ongoing national dialog about the value of higher education, career placement is rightly assuming ever-increasing importance as an educational outcome, and it is therefore vital to provide students with advantaged avenues to meaningful employment.

Measure: By 2028, within six months of graduation, 92 percent of students seeking employment will be employed or accepted into graduate school.

I.2-1. Experiential service learning.

Exciting career-oriented internships, community service, and field experiences must be an integral part of a Wheeling University education, and we must do everything possible to assist our graduates in finding meaningful career opportunities.

Internships and/or community service will be integrated into the curriculum for all graduating students.

Relationships will be solidified with local firms, national employers, service organizations, and ministries that have internship needs. A campus-wide protocol for internships will be established, setting forth credit hours, grading requirements, pay, field supervision, and outcomes assessment.

Additionally, Wheeling University plans to supercharge its career placement services for graduating students, alumni, and employers, matching job opportunities and providing ongoing career advice and transition assistance. Outcomes will be tracked with the goal of achieving 92 percent placement of graduating students seeking employment in the workforce or pursuing graduate school. These tools and services will also be made available to alumni, allowing us to assist with job transitions later in their careers to maintain engagement and foster higher giving participation rates.

Objective I.3 University Campus / Wheeling Community Revitalization

Wheeling University's campus, facilities, and the local community are central to providing a rich and vibrant student experience. The growth envisioned in this strategic plan necessitates revitalization of existing facilities and new development, providing opportunities for collaboration with the Wheeling community as we create a new plan for the University. New development need not be limited to our current campus. By partnering with local government officials, businesses, and community organizations, we can create a thriving environment that enriches the residential and intellectual lives of students, faculty, staff, and members of the community, so that, in the words of the Appalachian bishops, "God's sacred Appalachia would remain a precious and beautiful home."

I.3-1. Campus plan and implementation.

To further the initiatives of this strategic plan, a comprehensive space utilization and capital improvements plan will be conducted. The University cannot provide an outstanding student experience without adequate facilities for living and learning. A careful review of current space utilization along with intentional planning will allow the University to optimize the use of our campus while enhancing student and employee productivity, comfort, and overall organizational efficiency.

All of this requires a sense of our responsibility to the environment such that our campus can play a leading role "in a region that can be marked by sustainable communities dedicated to a culture of life."

I.3-2. Strengthening Wheeling.

Universities typically serve as "anchor tenants" for communities, and this is certainly true of the Wheeling/ Wheeling University relationship. Our futures are interlinked; Wheeling University needs a vibrant Wheeling, and likewise, the city cannot flourish without a healthy Wheeling University. So, we must be an effective leader and partner in the ongoing transformation of Wheeling.

The University, through external funding sources and private/public partnerships, will continue to explore opportunities to partner with other organizations to rejuvenate and showcase a revitalized Wheeling.

Strategic Initiative II: Five Successful Areas of Study

While our University has been known to the world for many years, we have continued to operate internally with the structure of a small, Catholic college. This present initiative marks a major step in our transformation, with the revitalization of five areas of study: Business, Education, Health and Allied Sciences, Humanities, and STEM. The revitalization of these areas maximizes the educational value, professional relevance, and academic expansion of our programs through enhanced operations and marketing tailored precisely to the needs of our students and the achievement of exceptional student learning outcomes. Donors will have the opportunity to support educational areas of preference with meaningful gifts, further enhancing our capabilities. Ultimately these factors will drive enrollment growth, support self-funding educational operations, and significantly raise the internal performance and external recognition of the University as a whole.

Overall Measure: Increase overall enrollment by 65 percent by 2028.

RELATED OBJECTIVES AND KEY PROGRAMS

Objective II.1 Expand and Diversify Academic Programs

Our initial objective is to plan, fund, and launch new educational offerings, delivery methods, and pricing. Identifying prospective funding donors for each area will be among our highest priorities.

II.1-1. Develop and implement additional undergraduate and graduate degree opportunities.

Market analysis will be performed to determine academic programs that are in demand and align with the mission of Wheeling University. A financial review that establishes planned spending and enrollment metrics of each proposed program will be conducted as part of the development and approval process.

When investigating new programs, attention will be given to adult education/degree completion programs, graduate degree programs including additional doctorate opportunities, and partnerships with other educational institutions, local industry, and government.

II.1-2. Support existing programs with growth potential.

Through the regular program review process, academic offerings will be examined for growth potential through additional delivery modalities, expansion into graduate level, and/or other opportunities.

II.1-3 Develop degree pathways to facilitate transfer recruitment.

The University will make a concerted effort to increase the recruitment of transfer students. Whether from two-year institutions or other four-year universities, the design of clear degree pathways will assist in the recruitment and ease of transfer for a separate and significant market of students.

II. 1-4 Revitalization of student support services.

To assist all students in achieving their best, a focus will be placed on support services including tutoring, disability services, and mental and physical health. University departments will collaborate to provide a learning and living environment conducive to student success and well-being.

Objective II.2 Recognized for Our Service to the Appalachian Region

A distinctive and vital aspect of the Wheeling University mission is the University's commitment to the Appalachian region, whereby we embrace our human reality to help make the world a more fitting place in which to live. From our Appalachian Institute to our experiential service learning, our development of professionally-trained students, and our scholarly research on subjects of importance to the region, we intend to increase the scope and prominence of our impact.

II.2-1. Appalachian Institute ("AI") expansion.

Inspired by the call for action at the local level made in the 1975 publication *This Land Is Home to Me: A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia* by the Catholic Bishops of the region, the AI's mission is to work toward safer, healthier, and stronger communities in the central Appalachian region by addressing contemporary issues like energy choice, water quality, and public health. The University looks to revitalize the Appalachian Institute service trips which have waned in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. By working with local and regional schools, parishes, and other community partners, the University will initiate mission trips, identify alumni of the AI immersion program to serve as a resource for advocacy, and seek additional sources of revenue to support the program.

II.2-2. Targeting experiential and service learning to help the Appalachian Region.

This goal builds on the strength of the Appalachian Institute and many of our programs in which our students regularly engage in service activities to help the poor, neglected, under-served, and deserving individuals and communities in the region. Service learning will be incorporated into all academic programs and will be augmented by activities planned through Student Affairs so that all students will have access to service opportunities.

Objective II.3 **Funded Aspirations to be one of the Highest Among U.S. Catholic Universities in Alumni Giving Participation**

Achieving Wheeling University's high aspirations will require the generous support and investments of external benefactors, foundations, corporations, and alumni. The new areas of study and facilities outlined in our plan provide many outstanding opportunities for donors to become engaged with us in their personal areas of interest as we transform the University. One vitally important constituency is our alumni, whom we plan to re-engage in our new vision through their financial support at participation ranking among the highest of all other Catholic Colleges and Universities in the U.S.

Measure: Increase alumni giving participation by 70 percent by 2028.

II.3-1. Individual donor identification and cultivation program.

Without donors who have substantial giving capacity and care deeply about the University, funding for major projects will be unsuccessful. This program identifies potential donors with the capacity to make meaningful gifts and engages the donors in a dialog about how they might make an impact in the implementation of a campus plan and other strategic programs. We envision a rolling database of approximately 50 major donors with a large capacity to give, from which we might receive four to six major gifts per year.

II.3-2. Capital campaign.

We must lay significant preparatory groundwork before a major campaign can be announced publicly. Additional support for the advancement will be obtained through staff hiring and alumni volunteers.

II.3-3. Alumni giving participation.

Part of the groundwork for a successful capital campaign involves increasing alumni giving percentage. Increasing the institution's percent participation will require a high level of organization, technology, creativity, and effort to re-engage alumni in the life of the University. We plan a new, comprehensive alumni program involving an engagement suite of tools, systems, and procedures to regularly identify alumni aspirations and to allow one-to-one communication that engages alumni with the University by affinity for future donation solicitation. This type of affinity programming engages alumni in special interest areas such as academic majors, campus activities, or professional associations, and will be essential in any future comprehensive capital campaign.

II.3-4. Foundation solicitation.

Major gifts are available from foundations and corporations where there is a strong correlation between their stated missions and Wheeling University's aspirations, but they require a high level of organization and effort to identify and bring to fruition. We must build systems and procedures to regularly identify appropriate funding sources and establish relationships with existing sources to streamline future donations.

Strategic Initiative III: Global Awareness of Wheeling University

Wheeling University is part of a global community in which communication, commerce, and travel are becoming more interconnected with each passing day. We are committed to widening our focus in recognition of the new opportunities and imperatives this requires of us and our graduates in the early 21st Century.

Currently, our campus-based student population originates from more than 15 countries outside the U.S. Over time under this important initiative there will be a growing awareness among prospective students, families, and educators worldwide that Wheeling University is among the leaders in providing a global experience and education.

Overall Measure: Maintain international student enrollment of more than 10 percent of total enrollment by 2028.

RELATED OBJECTIVES AND KEY PROGRAMS

Objective III.1 Globalized Student Experience

We seek to provide a campus community infused with global interconnectedness by offering plentiful opportunities to learn about the world and experience cultural and religious differences through on-campus interaction with students from other countries. The curriculum will take advantage of our increasingly global nature to promote understanding of the world from an international perspective.

III.1-1. Diverse cultural exchanges between all students.

A globalized campus best prepares students to live, work, and serve in a global society. Programming and new student organizations will be developed to bring diverse student perspectives to local students' experiences in a common environment that respects all faith traditions. These activities will assist in the exploration and appreciation of the differences among students and help them to reflect with others on how their shared experiences change how they interact with the world. It promotes global curricular innovation, strengthens study abroad opportunities, initiates more global exchange partnerships, supports programs that value all faith traditions, and forges stronger bonds with Wheeling University alumni living overseas.

III.1-2. English Language Institute ("ELI") revitalization.

Wheeling University intends to restore the ELI, a language school offering an immersive experience in English language instruction. Many international students will not be native English speakers, and Wheeling University provides a supportive environment that allows each individual to gain language fluency quickly and hopefully, matriculate in a degree program.

Objective III.2 Worldwide Catholic High School Awareness

There are over 1,200 Catholic high schools around the world, providing the Institution with a ready-made conduit for inviting international prospects to a Wheeling University education.

III.2-1. Global recruiting program development.

This program establishes a global recruiting effort building relationships with and awareness among these Catholic high schools and commencing relationships with international contracting agents and alumni to bring international prospects to Wheeling University.

Objective III.3 Institutional Support Programs Assists Communities in Our Region and Beyond

Utilize institutional support to improve quality of life not just in Appalachia, but globally. Wheeling University seeks to live up to its calling as a Catholic university: “to be a social force, to be aware of its social reality, to shed university intelligence upon that reality and to use university influence to transform it.” Diversify our institutional support programs beyond dependence on public funding to include private, corporate, and foundation sources, and further integrate these programs into the broader operations of the University.

Measure: Achieve a pipeline of awarded grants of at least \$1.2 million by 2028.

III.3-1. Revitalize institutional support.

The University must develop a structure that facilitates the transition from non-competitive grants and earmarks gained through congressional offices to one that supports faculty and staff in submitting competitive proposals to agencies, organizations, corporations, and foundations. A revitalized program will nurture the development of grant writing skills and diversify the types of grants and sources of grant funds that will complement traditional Wheeling University programs and provide benefits such as additional opportunities for students.

Success in the competitive grants arena, with the proper public relations efforts, will enhance our reputation and standing in the region and around the world, and add substantial growth and value to the Wheeling University brand. Support for grant writing efforts in terms of additional staff or partnerships with other entities will be examined.

Strategic Initiative IV: **Operational Excellence**

Operational excellence is a philosophy of continuous improvement throughout an organization that focuses on customer needs and the optimization of processes. It emphasizes teamwork, problem-solving, employee empowerment, and judicious use of technology in pursuit of efficiency and quality outcomes. While it originated in manufacturing, it is extremely applicable in the service-oriented environment of higher education. Wheeling University has opportunities to improve processes and enhance outcomes for students, families, and other members of the University community. This initiative begins a process of operational improvement that will increase customer satisfaction, build employee engagement, and reduce costs.

Overall Measure: Achieve educational operations with a surplus by 2028.

RELATED OBJECTIVES AND KEY PROGRAMS

Objective IV.1 Operationally Excellent in All That We Do

We will inculcate a philosophy of operational excellence throughout the Institution, empowering administrators, staff, and faculty to strive for continuous improvement in meeting student and employee needs and providing the highest level of service and desired outcomes for our customers.

IV.1-1. Technology roadmap.

Wheeling University requires a fully- functioning technology infrastructure to support its planned growth. This effort will evaluate the management and operating systems at Wheeling University for future educational, research, and administrative needs, and explore new technologies and solutions. Crisis planning will occur to allow for continued operations of the University should technology breakdowns be experienced. We must adapt from traditional face-to-face instruction to hybrid and fully online instruction. Training, support, and supervision will be provided to faculty and staff to ensure that hybrid and fully online courses are of the highest quality for students.

IV.1-2. Growth methodology.

As enrollment grows, tuition revenue and contribution will also rise. We must be judicious about reinvesting in the Institution and planning for controlled growth of operating expenses to support our strategic portfolio. This program will develop the financial models and establish the appropriate ratios for growth within each of the new areas of study, such that we invest wisely.

Objective IV.2 Our People Know They Are the Reason We Are Successful

Our faculty, staff, and administrators are our greatest asset. We intend for all to be completely engaged in their jobs and feel appropriately rewarded for their contributions that allow us to be successful. We will nurture a culture of performance, respect, and cooperation in the Catholic tradition of *cura personalis* (care and respect for each person).

Measure: Surveys will be utilized to define a baseline for employee satisfaction and opportunities for growth.

IV.2-1. Collaborative, innovative, and empowered workplace.

Members of the University community need to understand expectations for success and have the opportunity to be rewarded for achieving it. A successful workplace provides a structured means of establishing expectations (i.e. goals), evaluating performance, rewarding it (with bonuses or other means), and guiding people to grow and develop in their roles. Further, cascading goals provide the means to operationalize the strategic plan. Our employees accept a culture of innovation and resourcefulness to continually improve and operate within its means. We are focused on financial sustainability to offer fulfilling employment to those in the region.

Leadership's focus will be on results and creating a sense of teamwork. The University will intentionally take steps to promote high employee satisfaction, morale, and a work-life balance which are keys to success.

Summary and Conclusion

During this planning process, the Task Force has recognized the need for Wheeling University to be adaptable and resilient in the face of a changing higher education landscape. This strategic plan provides a process of charting a course based on long-term goals associated with short-term plans. The plan provides a blueprint for the University to align the financial, human, and physical resources necessary to attain the identified initiatives. By clarifying the long-term priorities, this strategy will give clarity and consistency to the strategic decisions of the faculty, staff, and administration.