

2021-24

FORWARD SUPERIOR

Strategic Plan



Message from the Chancellor



UW-Superior is a vibrant student-centered institution of higher learning which is committed to an outstanding and engaged student experience and fostering a diverse and inclusive living and learning and working environment. Our university is a quarter of the way into its second century, and guided by this new strategic plan, Forward Superior, these foundations will be strengthened for a new and even more dynamic future.

At a time when higher education has faced scrutiny for its cost and relevancy amid financial pressures and new forms of competition, UW-Superior has continued to offer innovative programming, maintained its fiscal position, and has retained a liberal arts foundation while focused on engaged student learning, applied research, and community impact. As a result, there are many assets upon which to build.

At its heart, Forward Superior is fundamentally about students and their success. Forward Superior commits to further elevating a culture of care, engaged student learning and inclusion. These three pillars will enable us to leverage and advance on present strengths to secure the future.

The strategic planning process for Forward Superior has been an extraordinarily thoughtful, intentional, and collaborative two-year effort. When the Strategic Planning Core Team was charged with the endeavor, there were several priorities made clear for the development of this plan: A highly inclusive and transparent process, numerous opportunities for feedback from the entire UW-Superior community (including faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners), realistic goals and accountability, and a focus on what our university will need to do and be to thrive in the years to come. The 23-member Strategic Planning Core Team, its work supplemented by the talent and efforts of Institutional Research, has led the community-based creation of this living document.

The plan began with a realistic and extensive self-analysis and external environmental scanning. The Strategic Planning Core Team took a hard look at student matriculation and retention trends, fiscal realities as state support continues shrinking, and college attainment rates nationally, in Wisconsin and neighboring states. The team also looked at the pending demographic cliff of traditional-age students and the increasing pressure on the value proposition of a four-year degree. Higher education consultants Keeling & Associates helped the university extend and formalize the research by asking key questions about our current institutional identity and possible directions for the future. The Strategic Planning Core Team then sought input and vetted ideas and drafts from constituents via numerous surveys, town halls, and discussion forums. As feedback was analyzed, the team stayed committed to developing a plan that put students at the center. Every strategy and action item was first vetted and assessed through the lens of how might this change serve our students and their needs best?

Thus, Forward Superior directly addresses many of the challenges facing higher education institutions today. Facing these realities head on is necessary as we ensure fiscal viability and enrollment stability. By focusing on the student experience, we ensure our future. The pillars are a strong and sustainable foundation upon which to leverage our strengths and focus on areas with the greatest potential impact for the long run. They also maximize our ability to meet the unpredictable changes in our landscape. UW-Superior's educational experience will continue to be distinctive, providing outstanding, supportive, and engaged education in a more intimate setting than can be found at larger institutions, regardless of learning modality, thereby providing students with greater opportunities for relationship building and leadership experiences and growth.

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Forward Superior also reflects the recent impact on our society and learning environments triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. With only our ability to control our actions and responses to something we could not otherwise control, the pandemic asked much of us. It was both a moment of disruption and a transformative opportunity. What it proved to us is that we are capable of rapid changes and complex problem solving together. We were nimble, creative, and able to evolve rapidly in our actions as the pandemic unfolded. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the already occurring changes that were underway in the higher education landscape, such as the growth in online learning. It is with gratitude to the entire campus that we responded in a superior manner and learned much about each other and our students in the process – good things upon which we can build an exciting future. We will need to continue to empower our community to keep the very best of these experiences as we face a challenging future in higher education.

We have created Forward Superior as a three-year plan, knowing that that the higher education landscape has accelerated in pace and rate of change. The three-year window puts laser focus on the fundamentals that will empower us to continue to be nimble and responsive and to meet the shifting demographics that we see in our students and in society.

We agree to be held accountable for each element of the plan. There are “primary accountability” assignments for each action step as we recognize that if nobody is specifically accountable, then nobody is accountable. Assignments of primary accountability, therefore, may single out a position or office, but we acknowledge that little or none of the work gets done without the collaborative input and spirit of all involved. There also remain initiatives that are everybody's responsibility (such as creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, recruiting and retaining students, and being ambassadors for the university in visible and positive ways). Thus, Forward Superior reflects our commitment that Together We Are Superior: That we achieve when we are working together, making our organizational units more proactively open and collaborative as we focus on our issues and challenges, building on our strengths, and serving our region. There is much to be done, and we acknowledge our ongoing dependence on the support and dedication of so many to continue to achieve our goals.

Forward Superior is a living document, which means that the plan's specifics may need to expand or contract to be responsive to rapidly changing dynamics. The pillars are the guideposts to focus us even though the tactics may change. The pillars must remain at the center of our work to ensure we build on our strengths and guide us in the future as we may need to adapt and adjust the plan to encounter changing realities and parameters.

It should be recognized that Forward Superior will operate while embedded in two values that endure without explicitly being named in the plan itself – both are at the heart of the Wisconsin Idea under which we were formed.

The first value is our commitment to our community and to the formation and sustainment of strategic partnerships. We were created as a university to serve our communities; it is written into our mission statement. The prior strategic plan, Superior Visions 2020, had a distinct focus on growing our capacity to connect to our communities through the formation of the Link Center (formerly the Center for Community Engaged Learning) and the pursuit of public recognition for our efforts by achieving Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. The Link Center and our outreach across the university has proved many times to be central to the building and reinforcement of key partnerships with both profit and non-profit entities that distinguish our institution and enable us to assist and be supported in return. Our continued institutional commitment to partnerships and engagement is central, not only to our mission, but critical as we pursue future excellence.

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The second value is our commitment to applied research and grants. This value is represented in the Wisconsin Idea as the means by which the university breaks down barriers to better the lives of its citizens. In our celebrated research centers including the Lake Superior Research Institute, the Transportation and Logistics Research Center, the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Great Lakes Maritime Research Institute, and in the myriad of examples of academic unit-based, individual faculty-driven research, there lies great accomplishment and future. Our productivity, innovation and ability to leverage our work for the good of others are part of our identity and strength. At UW-Superior, student engagement in research opportunities and mentorship such as the Center for Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity, the Summer Undergraduate Research Program, the McNair Scholars Program, and other research opportunities also transform the learning experience for students. We remain committed to high-quality research and accompanying opportunities for faculty and students alike, to assist our communities and advance our fields.

In conclusion, Forward Superior is about our future, one which brings the world-class talent and commitment of its staff and faculty to engage our students in a transformative learning experience resulting in student success. I extend a deep thank you to the untiring members of our Strategic Planning Core Team and to our internal and external employees and friends who help shape the ideas embodied in the plan and help us clarify and refine our intentions presented here. Thank you for all of those who love UW-Superior and believe that we play a critical role in engaging our students and helping them realize their potential as well as helping us shape and contribute to our communities for the better.

Together We Are Superior.

Benji M. Wacht



Goal #1 Culture of Engaged Learning

UW-Superior will provide distinctive and high-quality academic experiences that respond to the needs of students and the region.

The Culture of Engaged Learning is rooted in UW-Superior’s strong tradition of distinctive and high-quality academic experiences to ensure student success in learning and life. This goal and its objectives are designed to ensure student success and serve the needs of the region. The academic experience at UW-Superior is the primary mission of the university. The objectives and action steps each represent either a clear enhancement on an existing practice that could be raised to the next level of excellence or a concrete opportunity for change that can help the institution to be more academically distinctive and enhance our student learning experience. Several action steps outlined in this goal will be conducted in partnership with shared governance by obtaining advice and consultation as the plan proceeds.

- 1.1 Ensure experiential learning opportunities are provided to students in all classes.**
- 1.2 Ensure students have consistent access to exemplary teaching across the learning environment, including on campus and online.**
- 1.3 Curate a vibrant and healthy array of academic programs and experiences that prepare students for varied and diverse professional and educational opportunities that reflect the needs of the region and beyond.**
- 1.4 Ensure that academic advising strengthens the student experience, removes barriers, and helps students achieve their educational goals.**
- 1.5 Re-envision the University Studies curriculum and structure to enhance value to students and their future.**



Goal #2: Culture of Care

UW Superior will help all students succeed and thrive through an integrated campus culture of care that embraces every student.

The Culture of Care reflects the heart and soul of UW-Superior. We value our students’ holistic development as human beings and learners. Every student at UW-Superior is essential for the fulfillment of our mission. This goal reflects a fundamental commitment to provide every student a deep, rich, caring and supportive culture within which they can learn, grow and thrive. To achieve this goal and its objectives, UW-Superior must create an intentional and responsive network of services to promote student well-being, health, access and care. Everyone regardless of title, department or division needs to engage in the work to build and evolve our culture of care. Several action steps outlined in this goal will be conducted in partnership with shared governance by obtaining advice and consultation as the plan proceeds.

- 2.1 Further develop and sustain a university-wide commitment to and shared responsibility for promoting students’ well-being and mental health.**
- 2.2 Ensure that all online and on campus students have equitable access to resources and services that are essential to their personal and academic success.**
- 2.3 Strengthen individualized outreach and increase awareness of resources and support services that respond to the unique needs of students.**



Goal #3: Culture of Inclusion

UW-Superior will educate and empower the university community to identify, acknowledge, and address the barriers to diversity and inclusion that hinder the success of students and employees.

The Culture of Inclusion represents our commitment to creating an environment within which all students and employees have a sense of belonging and can succeed. This goal will chart the course for how we can have honest dialogues and self-examinations, and take concrete actions to support and further diversity and inclusion while improving our university climate. We have barriers individually, institutionally and systemically that must be named, challenged and dismantled so that our students and employees are successful. We are dedicated to helping to close the gap on educational achievement that exists. We are dedicated to helping employees succeed as valued members of our university community, with the recognition that all of us contribute toward the success of our students in distinct and valuable ways. Several action steps outlined in this goal will be conducted in partnership with shared governance by obtaining advice and consultation as the plan proceeds.

- 3.1 Build on current efforts to significantly reduce the attainment gap for underrepresented minority, first generation, Pell eligible, non-traditional aged, and veteran students or any other population of students that has a demonstrable attainment gap.**
- 3.2 Cultivate personal and collective accountability for sustaining a diverse, inclusive, and supportive university climate so that all students and employees can thrive.**



