



Academic Excellence

We empower one another to develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in life and make a positive difference in the world by leveraging our institution's academic strengths.

[Full Recommendation](#)

Academic Excellence

Seven cross-campus working groups composed of over 200 faculty, staff, students, and community members were formed to address our institutional key priorities—Academic Excellence, Community Building, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Research and Creative Scholarship, Internationalization, Sustainability and Well-being.

Numerous campus engagement activities were conducted by the seven key priority working groups during spring 2022, with over 450 registrations across the 18 themed listening sessions that centered around the seven priorities. In addition, over 350 student survey responses were received that answered specific priority questions from a student lens. Next, the working groups began analyzing data and incorporating community feedback as they worked toward identifying, developing, and recommending achievable, metric-based goals that centered around these seven key priorities.

The Academic Excellence working group was charged with identifying opportunities for enhancing WMU's academic programs, teaching and learning methods, curricular offerings, and examining how to maintain, develop and uplift the reputation of our programs.

After a multiple-step review process, the following is their submitted recommendation, which includes possible strategies and metrics that were essential in informing the goals and objectives. Further, they serve as a starting point for prioritization and refinement of institutional initiatives as the strategic plan moves into implementation. In addition, if available, the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspiration and Results (SOAR) summary reports, as well spring 2022 process reports, are attached as unedited appendices to provide further clarity and context.

Finally, this work could not have been completed without our dedicated community members who shared their time, expertise and commitment to improving our institution as they built these recommendations. Working group contributors are recognized in full at the end of this document.

Recommendation

Context: The intentional engagement of our students in research and creative scholarship, our national and international reputation as a first-choice research institution, and the social mobility of our graduates are measures of inclusive academic excellence.

Academic excellence is achieved by WMU students, staff, and faculty working together to create inclusive learning environments that produce exceptional public impact scholarship and inspire outstanding academic achievement for all students.

Goal: We empower one another to develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in life and make a positive difference in the world by leveraging our institution's academic strengths.

Academic Excellence Objective 1: Ensure the academic success of all learners by actively responding to student demographic shifts and cultivating holistic support systems that meet their contemporary needs.

Objective 1 Sample Strategies:

- Develop financial aid strategies that facilitate timely progression from matriculation to graduation for all admitted undergraduate and graduate students.
- Offer courses at times and in modalities that are responsive to pedagogical best practices and changing student needs.
- Better coordinate the actions taken by admissions, advising and student support services to ensure the academic success of diverse undergraduate and graduate students from application to graduation.
- Provide affordable, high-quality, on-campus childcare for students with family caregiving responsibilities.
- Encourage enthusiastic collaboration across all colleges to build integrated, outcomes-based academic support programs for undergraduates.
- Ensure that inclusive, quality mental health and well-being support is readily available to and easily accessible for all students.
- Develop a process to collect and respond to student feedback regarding the effectiveness of student support systems.
- Promote ongoing professional development for academic advisors and student support staff.
- Encourage adoption of open educational resources and affordable textbook programs that permit no-cost access for students

Objective 1 Sample Metrics:

- Increased FTIAC 2nd year retention and 6-year graduate rates with decreased equity gaps.
- Decreased time to degree for transfer and graduate students with decreased equity gaps.
- Decreased DEWI rates in introductory courses with decreased equity gaps.
- Increased scholarship aid for undergraduate students.
- Increased graduate teaching and research assistantships.
- External recognition of exceptional instructors and innovative student support programs and personnel.
- Improved student scores reported on NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement).
- Increased community-wide adoption of WMU academic and non-academic student concern forms.
- Creation of a childcare facility and/or program.
- Decreased debt for students
- Decreased DEWI rates and equity gaps in introductory courses.
- Decreased time to degree for undergraduate and graduate students with decreased equity gaps.
- Increased degree completion with decreased equity gaps for undergraduate and graduate students.

Academic Excellence Objective 2: Engage every student in experiential education to foster lifelong learning, deepen their understanding through application, increase connections between WMU and the broader community, and prepare for meaningful, long-lasting careers.

Objective 2 Sample Strategies:

- Provide robust financial resources that make experiential learning accessible for all undergraduate and graduate students.
- Make experiential learning opportunities more visible and accessible to students.
- Increase opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to engage in public impact research and creative scholarship.
- Develop course based undergraduate research offerings.
- Establish, continuously cultivate and strengthen connections between WMU and local and regional organizations.
- Prepare and nominate students for external awards and recognition.
- Intentionally prepare graduate students for career diversity.

Objective 2 Sample Metrics:

- Increased number and diversity of students engaging in study abroad.
- Increased financial support for students to participate in study abroad.
- Increased number and diversity of students engaging in service-learning, internships, externships, clinicals and practicums.
- Increased number and diversity of undergraduate students completing honors theses and engaging in faculty-mentored undergraduate research and creative scholarship.
- Increased number of student co-authors on peer-reviewed publications.
- Increased external and internal financial support for graduate students to pursue research and creative scholarship.
- Increased number and diversity of students winning external awards and recognition.
- Development of an Office of Undergraduate Research

Academic Excellence Objective 3: Cultivate creative, interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to develop and disseminate new knowledge that positively impacts current and future generations.

Objective 3 Sample Strategies:

- Develop a plan to create an Innovation Center that incubates interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship, teaching and learning.
- Use cluster hires of faculty to enhance interdisciplinary research and teaching.
- Expand interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate curricula and scholarship.
- Develop mechanisms to encourage networking and sharing of faculty expertise.
- Enhance support for internal and external interdisciplinary faculty fellowships and grants.
- Develop a postdoctoral and/or visiting scholars program focused on interdisciplinary work.
- Incentivize curricular collaboration across academic units.

Objective 3 Sample Metrics:

- Creation of an Innovation Center.
- Increased number of interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Increased number of externally and internally funded interdisciplinary grants and fellowships.
- Increased number of faculty engaging in collaborative research projects and creative works.
- Increased number of postdoctoral and visiting scholars engaged in interdisciplinary research and creative activities.

Academic Excellence Objective 4: Recruit, retain and support the success of diverse faculty and staff, empowering them to inspire and prepare the next generation of learners and disseminate knowledge that positively impacts our communities, from local to global.

Objective 4 Sample Strategies:

- Provide training and support structures for faculty and staff search processes that support diversity, equity and inclusion goals, using demonstrated best practices in higher education.
- Institutionalize a formal faculty mentoring program.
- Assess inequities in tenure and promotion processes and actively remove barriers to promotion for women and underrepresented minorities.
- Incentivize ongoing faculty participation in instructional and pedagogical professional development.
- Support work/life balance by providing support to faculty and staff for family and caregiving responsibilities.
- Provide formal training to equip faculty and staff with the skills needed to successfully teach, advise and mentor diverse undergraduate and graduate students.
- Discover and pursue program- and department-level improvements that lead to student success.

Objective 4 Sample Metrics:

- Increased diversity of new faculty and staff candidate pools, finalist pools and hires.
- Increased retention, promotion and success of diverse faculty and staff.
- Improvements in FSSE (Faculty Survey of Student Engagement) and staff engagement survey responses regarding climate and satisfaction.
- Decreased DEWI rates and equity gaps in introductory courses.
- Decreased time to degree for undergraduate and graduate students with decreased equity gaps.
- Increased degree completion with decreased equity gaps for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Increased instructor participation in instructional and pedagogical professional development opportunities.
- Increased number of departments engaged in evidence-based instructional and program assessment practices and improvements.

Academic Excellence
Working Group Membership

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