

# Stockton University Strategic Plan 2025 - Choosing Our Path

## Introduction

Over the last five decades, Stockton has grown in significant ways. What began as a college of 1,000 undergraduate students housed in one building on the Atlantic City boardwalk, has developed into a university of nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students operating in multiple locations throughout southern New Jersey.

While the size and scale of operations have expanded, foundational aspects of what constitutes a Stockton education remain the same. Stockton's ultimate goal is to graduate students who are well-rounded citizens, prepared not only to embark on advanced study or employment after graduation, but also to appreciate and value lifelong learning, political engagement, and civic and social responsibility.

The University achieves this mission of liberal arts education through its commitment to an interdisciplinary curriculum rooted in our General Studies program, and incorporated into every major. The University also encourages and supports opportunities for students to apply learning through structured internship programs, presentations at scholarly conferences, service learning, international field study, and community engagement, and offers one-on-one research initiatives with faculty, in order to attract and retain scholar-teachers working at the forefront of their respective fields and developing innovative pedagogical practices.

Such efforts face challenges as higher education confronts a period of unprecedented change. Foremost among these are rising costs during an era of dwindling public funding. While research shows the value of a college degree is higher than ever before, rising tuition costs have made that investment difficult, and even prohibitive, for too many potential students. There are also local considerations. The population seeking a higher education is transforming, as are their expectations about what a degree is and how it is offered, and the number of high school graduates in New Jersey has declined, a trend exacerbated by the fact that more and more students seek their education out of state. Taken together, this means the demographic base Stockton serves is shifting in number and kind, while regional competition has grown, suggesting that the University needs to attend to new questions and concerns of an evolving student population.

At Stockton, we believe an excellent education must be accessible to those who want and need it, and this commitment shapes the areas of focus that follow in our new strategic plan, which emphasizes inclusiveness, diversity, innovative teaching and learning, effective enrollment strategies, and fiscal stability. We also place at the center of our plan the people—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and board members—who comprise the Stockton community, and we emphasize the shared governance process that we use to guide our actions collectively. By renewing our commitment to these principles, and making them explicit, we will shape Stockton's future for the next five years and beyond.

## **Planning Process:**

In May 2017, Stockton University launched its new mission, vision, and values statements. These institutional priorities, prepared by a shared governance task force, reviewed, edited, and endorsed by the campus community, and approved by the Board of Trustees, help to define the University's future aspirations.

The next step was to create a new strategic plan and to identify areas of focus for the next five years. In fall 2017, an evaluation committee reviewed submissions from a nationwide call for proposals from strategic planning consultants. On the committee's recommendation, we selected DumontJanks, a leading national firm from Boston, MA, to help guide the process, and early in 2018 convened the Strategic Planning Steering Committee.

This group included 40 faculty, staff, students, and administrators, and was charged with utilizing the University's mission, vision, guiding principle, and values statements to develop a new strategic plan that sets long-range priorities to support student, academic, and facility goals, and reflected our financial position and long-range opportunities and priorities.

Between February and May 2018, the Steering Committee worked with DumontJanks to facilitate several on-campus visits and tele-conferences, review dozens of documents, reports and surveys, and meet with hundreds of University stakeholders in individual, small-group, and open forums.

Revisions continued over the summer and early fall of 2018, and were shared with the President's Cabinet, Board of Trustees, and Stockton community. An electronic feedback form collected additional feedback, as did multiple open forums—twenty in all—coordinated by the Office of the Provost, held over the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019.

Overall, online or in person, we connected with more than 700 campus members from across the Stockton community. What follows is a revised version of the plan which incorporates their contributions.

## Executive Summary

Strategic planning is essential to ensure that we remain faithful to our University's mission, goals, and practices, while meeting the needs of the people and communities we serve. While external variables will influence new challenges and opportunities, they do not change our fundamental purpose or identity as a liberal arts institution.

As a public regional University, Stockton's mission is to serve the needs of southern New Jersey. This founding tenet is captured by the Stockton Idea: to make available to state college students at state college prices the kind of interdisciplinary and individualized liberal arts education usually reserved for students at exclusive private liberal arts colleges. Combined with our guiding principle of "students first," these concepts became the well-spring of the new University mission, vision, and values enacted in 2017.

While we are committed to our founding ideals, we recognize that Stockton is operating in a dramatically different context than when the University was founded:

- The demographic makeup of the state is changing, and future students are likely to be older and more diverse.
- The state college-bound population is shrinking, as more than half of New Jersey high school students who pursue higher education choose to enroll in an out-of-state institution.
- The economy in southern New Jersey continues to face challenges; the value of higher education is being questioned; and the state's political and economic landscapes are changeable.

### Prioritizing a State Education

New Jersey's demographic projections suggest urgent action is needed to ensure the state's future economic vitality. This is particularly true for southern New Jersey. Overall, the state's population is projected to grow only 4.5% from 2014 to 2024; the rate for southern New Jersey is lower still, at 2.9%, and even this minimal growth is largely within the region's older population.<sup>1</sup> Projections for the high-school aged population show a statewide *decrease* of 1.6% (the high-school cohort projection is essentially flat for southern New Jersey).<sup>2</sup> Finally,

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<sup>1</sup> Stockton University, Office of Institutional Research (2018). Impact Analysis Report. Changes in New Jersey Demographics, K-12 Schools and Postsecondary Enrollment and Potential Impact on Stockton's Enrollment Management Efforts. Figure 10. (Original source: New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

56% of New Jersey high school seniors who enroll in college upon graduation currently leave the state to pursue higher education.<sup>3</sup>

New Jersey's economic future depends on reversing this trend, and Stockton's growth is a key part of the state's strategy to provide compelling public higher education opportunities for its citizens. While Stockton alone cannot resolve the outmigration of New Jersey students, we are committed to strengthening our academic offerings and responsibly growing our enrollments in an intentional fashion to encourage more students to choose to study in their home state.

### **Committing to Diversity**

While New Jersey's high-school population is shrinking, its ethnic makeup is expanding, and will continue to do so in appreciable ways. Specifically, the state's growth rates for those self-identifying as White is low at 1.7%, while the growth rates for historically underrepresented peoples are much higher: African-Americans at 7%, Hispanics at 15.8%, and Asians at 17.2%.<sup>4</sup> Within the high-school aged population, these trends are more pronounced: White and African-American populations are both projected to decline (by 8.6% and 10.1% respectively) while the Hispanic and Asian populations will dramatically increase (by 47.4% and 33.3%).<sup>5</sup>

These changing demographics mean New Jersey's institutions of higher education must provide a high-quality undergraduate education to greater numbers of racial minorities, international immigrant populations, traditionally-underserved and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and non-traditional (older) students. At Stockton, these groups have historically been small: only 30% of Stockton students identify as racial minorities, compared to an average of 55% at New Jersey's four-year public higher education institutions. And only 13% of Stockton's undergraduates are 25 or older (compared to an average of 21% for New Jersey's four-year public higher education institutions and a nationwide average of 19%).<sup>6</sup> The need to serve an increasingly diverse population requires Stockton to rethink how and where it recruits applicants (students, faculty, and staff), and how it supports them after they arrive on campus.

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<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (2018). Table 309.30. Residence and migration of all first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates in 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions who graduated from high school in the previous 12 months, by state or jurisdiction: Fall 2016. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_309.30.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_309.30.asp?current=yes)

<sup>4</sup> Stockton University, Office of Institutional Research (2018). Impact Analysis Report. Changes in New Jersey Demographics, K-12 Schools and Postsecondary Enrollment and Potential Impact on Stockton's Enrollment Management Efforts. Figure 8. (Original source: New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., figure 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Figure 12. (Original source: New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education.)

## **Anchoring Our Education**

In 2016, the University participated in an historic Declaration of Commitment which launched an initiative to design and implement scalable and systematic change to communities across New Jersey. For Stockton this meant a concerted commitment to Atlantic City as an Anchor Institution.

The National Anchor Institutions Task Force defines anchor institutions as: *enduring organizations that are rooted in their localities. It is difficult for them to leave their surroundings even in the midst of substantial capital flight. The challenge to a growing movement is to encourage these stable local assets to harness their resources in order to address critical issues such as education, economic opportunity, and health. It is difficult to imagine fragile local economies and widening social disparities changing without leveraging stable institutions, especially amidst a decline in government resources. These dynamics have given rise to the concept of “anchors” as agents of community and economic development.*

## **A Generational Opportunity**

Taken together, these three commitments—to public education, diversity and inclusion, and anchor activity in our communities—form a generational opportunity to take what was an egalitarian ethos of the late 1960s at the founding of Stockton and consider its implications and applications for today’s world.

The University’s founders faced the challenge of defining and implementing the Stockton Idea for a relatively small single-campus college. The task now is to determine how to build upon this idea, making it applicable to a much larger and more diverse student population at a multi-campus university.

This is not something to be undertaken lightly. It requires a highly-consultative, transparent, and data-informed process reflective of the University’s commitment to shared governance. The intent of this strategic plan is therefore to preserve and enhance Stockton’s distinct people-centered, student-focused, interdisciplinary identity in the context of the modern, multi-cultural and interdependent world and the state’s economic and demographic realities.

## Six Areas of Focus

During the next five years, Stockton must identify how we can maintain the essential elements of our mission and identity, while still evolving to ensure we remain responsive to those we serve. To do this, the Strategic Plan addresses six key areas of focus, each of which builds on the institutional commitments articulated in the University's Mission, Vision, and Values statements.

- 1. Inclusive Student Success:** Inclusive student success is the extent to which Stockton recruits, supports, and empowers an increasingly diverse and non-traditional student body, and works to close the equity gaps that exist in higher education. Toward this end, Stockton is committed to providing an affordable high-quality, interdisciplinary education that is grounded in the liberal arts and prepares students for healthy, productive and meaningful lives.
- 2. Diversity and Inclusion:** Stockton is dedicated to building a community that values differences of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, national origin, socio-economic status, affectional or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, age, ability or disability. We accept our responsibility to create and preserve an environment free from prejudice and discrimination, and to take actions that affirm our commitment to inclusivity and diversity.
- 3. Teaching and Learning:** Stockton has achieved remarkable success in terms of student retention and graduation rates because of its personalized approach to teaching and learning. Such efforts should continuously be assessed and refined, and incorporate Stockton's Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). Moreover, we will encourage and support faculty research and pedagogical innovations to ensure that we effectively reach a diverse group of learners and that our degrees remain current and competitive.
- 4. Strategic Enrollment Management:** Stockton has an obligation to support students who arrive in their first year and those that transfer later in their academic career, as well as those who return to school as adult learners. The University has begun the important work of evaluating its recruitment goals and strategies, updating its institutional aid programs, and developing a formal and structured student retention process. This work will continue to be refined over the next five years to ensure that enrollment, persistence, and graduation goals are aligned with institutional capacity. Strategic enrollment management also has an important role in recruiting students that adds to the diversity of the institution.
- 5. Financial Sustainability:** As a public institution, Stockton is a steward of public funds, carefully balancing the fiscal needs of academic programs, capital and facilities, technology infrastructure, human capital, debt and expenses, student programs and services, and operations while keeping tuition affordable. To ensure the ongoing viability of delivering its mission, the University must develop a sustainable financial model that is responsible, fair,

and transparent. This involves consideration of key components including: revenue enhancement, cost containment, multi-year financial planning, and strategic resource allocation.

- 6. Campus Community, Communication, and Shared Governance:** Stockton has always been independent and experimental, and recognizes that its people are the core of its success. The University values shared governance, and is committed to working closely with all campus constituencies to ensure that organizational structures and communication strategies continue to provide opportunities for productive discussion and collaboration. As the University embarks on the next five years, such conversations will support the ongoing dialogue necessary to continuously refine this plan's implementation.

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## **Inclusive Student Success:**

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Stockton's liberal arts education pairs rigorous academic training with high-quality co-curricular experiences to equip students not just for their first job, but also for long-term professional success, and a lifetime of learning, growing, and succeeding.

Supporting students' success also means ensuring they have access to the financial resources they need to fully engage in all aspects of the university experience, from appropriate housing to sufficient scholarship funding for qualified students from across New Jersey, to participation in high-impact learning experiences—such as our nationally-recognized service learning and community engagement initiatives, internships, research opportunities with faculty, and study abroad programs. Addressing such issues will only grow in importance over the coming years.

Inclusivity also continues beyond graduation. Sustaining strong relationships with our graduates, and linking them with current students, both strengthens our University network and creates opportunities to continue building and enhancing the Osprey experience.

We will do this by developing strategies and tactics that:

- Offer comprehensive support systems that recognize how a more diverse student body brings a broader range of academic, social, and cultural assets, challenges and needs.
- Work continuously to close the equity gaps in students' access to learning opportunities, research with faculty, academic achievement, degree attainment, and post-graduate opportunities.
- Build enrollment strategies that position Stockton as a first-choice academic home for a diverse, high achieving applicant pool.
- Increase partnership opportunities for, and with, our growing network of talented and dedicated alumni.

## **Diversity and Inclusion:**

*Stockton is dedicated to building a community that values differences of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, national origin, socio-economic status, affectional or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, age, ability or disability. We accept our responsibility to create and preserve an environment that is free from prejudice and discrimination, and to take actions that affirm our commitment to inclusivity and diversity.*

We strive for a campus where all of our students, faculty, and staff know they belong regardless of their race and ethnicity, age, religion, disability, socio-economic status, gender expression, gender and sexual identity, national origin, culture, and ideological beliefs.

To support this vision, Stockton's curriculum and programs should reflect the diversity of our community and the wider world, and embrace inclusive teaching and learning styles. They should also foster a multicultural environment and cultural competence throughout the campus, and promote inclusive conversations concerning the advancement of the University. Finally, recruitment, hiring and administrative practices should place high value on all aspects of diverse identities and experiences.

We will do this by developing strategies and tactics that:

- Focus on recruiting, hiring and retaining a high-quality and increasingly diverse faculty and staff.
- Build enrollment strategies to reach students who have not previously seen Stockton as their academic home.
- Ensure access to sufficient resources so that all students have the opportunity to participate in these foundational elements of Stockton's liberal arts education.
- Restructure institutional aid to better address financial need, thereby spreading available funds across a larger population of financially-disadvantaged students.
- Intentionally create culturally affirming learning opportunities and spaces that foster a sense of belonging, safety and wellness for all students.

## Teaching and Learning:

*Stockton has achieved remarkable success in terms of student retention and graduation rates because of its personalized approach to teaching and learning. Such efforts should continuously be assessed and refined, and incorporate Stockton's Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). Moreover, we will encourage and support faculty research and pedagogical innovations to ensure that we effectively reach a diverse group of learners and that our degrees remain current and competitive.*

Academic rigor is at the heart of a Stockton education. Our faculty members bring both recognition in their respective fields and a strong commitment to teaching, informed by their research, scholarship, and creative endeavors. Faculty and staff also bring innovation to bear as they create and sustain a broad range of high-impact learning experiences.

The culmination of this innovation is Stockton's ability to promote learning that is intellectually challenging and builds critical thinking and workforce skills to last a lifetime. Students develop intellectual curiosity and ethical reasoning competencies in ways that allow them to transition from education to real-world practice.

As Stockton recruits and retains a more diverse student body, it is essential that the University offer a meaningful and creative learning environment that embraces diverse teaching and learning styles. As a result, students will develop the tools to become lifelong learners and fully-engaged citizens.

We will do this by developing strategies and tactics that:

- Enhance information about study skills, time management, and adaptation to campus life through a variety of venues, such as Welcome Week, FRST courses, freshman/transfer seminars, and other initiatives, to start students on the right academic footing.
- Embrace new academic programs and approaches that enhance teaching and learning, respond to changing social and economic conditions, and prepare students for emerging fields.
- Reinforce our Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) with students and encourage faculty to align curricular and co-curricular activities to create a well-rounded education, relevant to a changing world.
- Support faculty research about, and participation in, professional development opportunities that strengthen the classroom experience, including effective pedagogical approaches for a particular program and its core courses.

## Strategic Enrollment Management:

*Stockton has an obligation to support students who arrive in their first year and those that transfer later in their academic career, as well as those who return to school as adult learners. The University has begun the important work of evaluating its recruitment goals and strategies, updating its institutional aid programs, and developing a formal and structured student retention process. This work will continue to be refined over the next five years to ensure that enrollment, persistence, and graduation goals are aligned with institutional capacity. Strategic enrollment management also has an important role in recruiting students that adds to the diversity of the institution.*

Since its last strategic plan, Stockton has grown in many respects—physically, geographically, demographically, and academically. Consequently, the University has been developing a comprehensive enrollment management plan that responds to our responsibility as a public institution, our role as an anchor institution, and our financial realities. In support of these objectives, Stockton will take a considered and measured approach to establishing enrollment goals in the context of inclusive student success.

Enrollment objectives should be considered at the institutional, school, and program level to ensure goals are realistic and are both manageable and sustainable through our support structures.

We will do this by developing strategies and tactics that:

- Develop enrollment and retention strategies at the institutional, school and program level that account for our mission, market demand, cost, and capacity.
- Continue to strengthen the University's data analytics efforts regarding recruitment, persistence, and graduation, as well as enrollment, placement testing, housing, and financial aid projections.
- Recognize and support the inherent value and contributions of faculty in their courses (program, at-some-distance, G, service, and curricular subscripts), as well as activities outside of the classroom, such as preceptorial advising and internship supervision.
- Strengthen partnerships with high schools and community colleges through programs such as our Dual-Credit and Transfer Pathways programs.

## Financial Sustainability:

*As a public institution, Stockton is a steward of public funds, carefully balancing the fiscal needs of academic programs, capital and facilities, technology infrastructure, human capital, debt and expenses, student programs and services, and operations while keeping tuition affordable. To ensure the ongoing viability of delivering its mission, the University must develop a sustainable financial model that is responsible, fair, and transparent. This involves consideration of key components including: revenue enhancement, cost containment, multi-year financial planning, and strategic resource allocation.*

Clear goals, timelines and accountability measures will shape how new resources of revenue are sought. A financial plan should not be the driver of University strategy; rather, the purpose of this area of focus is to support the strategic plan's other initiatives by providing valuable information about the financial implications of decisions. By so doing, the University will be in a stronger position to make realistic, mission-driven decisions.

Efforts must include continued advocacy for increased statewide support, pursuit of alternative revenue sources, and, where appropriate, leveraging public-private partnerships. At the same time, the University must also explore every possible internal action to ensure its financial health.

We will do this by developing strategies and tactics that:

- Coordinate efforts between strategic, academic, and financial planning, including the determination of enrollment strategies specific to academic programs and the financial impact of particular pedagogic strategies.
- Implement a University-wide, zero-based budgeting exercise for non-salary expenditures to ensure optimal resource allocations (in alignment with our strategic plan), particularly with respect to discretionary expenses, and an accurate understanding of program costs.
- Coordinate with key stakeholders to institute appropriate space- and time-management practices, a capital investment strategy, and an accompanying campus master plan update that aligns with the University's academic and student life goals, and describes new facility needs and appropriate reinvestment in existing facilities, along with information technology and infrastructure.
- Create strategies to enhance the University's financial ratios and ensure the integrity of the University's credit rating.
- Leverage capital and intellectual assets to optimize revenue-generating operations.
- Reallocate existing resources towards uses that strengthen operations, revenue, FTE enrollment, and the University brand.
- Maintain and routinely test a multi-year financial planning model.

## **Campus Community, Communication, and Shared Governance:**

*Stockton has always been independent and experimental and recognizes that our people are the core of its success. The University values shared governance, and is committed to working closely with all campus constituencies to ensure that organizational structures and communication strategies continue to provide opportunities for productive discussion and collaboration. As the University embarks on the next five years, such conversations will support the ongoing dialogue necessary to continuously refine this plan's implementation.*

Stockton has embraced, from the outset, our mission as a public institution dedicated to the service of southern New Jersey and all its residents. We have been able to grow over the last five decades because our community is resilient, and we value original thinking.

Nor is this growth simply responsive; it is—and will continue to be—proactive and strategic. Multiple entities work to marshal this energy, including the Student Senate, Faculty Senate, Faculty and Staff Unions, Provost's Council, Foundation Board, President's Cabinet, and Board Members. Together, we will hold true to our mission, and shape what we become.

We will do this by developing strategies and tactics that:

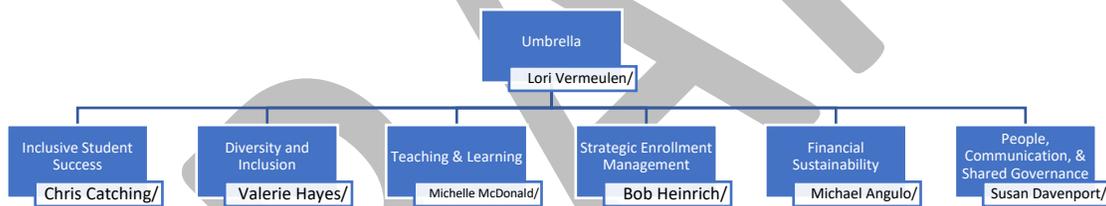
- Collectively evaluate our academic and administrative structures to ensure we are as efficient and effective as possible.
- Renew our commitment to shared governance and transparency.
- Regularly share institutional updates and collaboratively assess our strategic planning process.
- Empower our staff, alongside our faculty, students, and administration—to share in the governance of our institution.
- Embrace vigorous conversation in an atmosphere of collegiality and respect.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND NEXT STEPS:

Planning for implementation, like the strategic planning process, relies on input from across the Stockton campus, including from faculty, staff, students, Cabinet, Board of Trustees members, community representatives, donors, and alumni. This ensures that the processes adopted to mobilize our areas of focus are developed collaboratively and are embraced institutionally.

The Office of the Provost and the Faculty Senate will establish six working groups, one for each area of focus. These will be co-chaired by either a faculty member or professional staff member, and a member of Cabinet. Each working group will also include an advocate for diversity and inclusion, who, along with other members representing their campus constituencies, are charged with drafting measurable strategies and tactics to track Stockton's progress.

Draft ideas will be vetted through an umbrella committee of all working group chairs, to ensure consistency and coordination across areas of focus, and regularly presented to the university Cabinet for approval, as well as to the Faculty and Student Senates and other constituencies for ongoing input. This is an evolving process; new insights will inevitably arise, as may new opportunities and challenges, over the next five years.



### Next Steps:

**May-June 2019:** The Office of the Provost has scheduled six Learning Sessions to study relevant external issues related to each area of focus. These will be co-hosted by the Provost, the Cabinet co-chair of each working group, and a member of the faculty or staff identified by the Faculty Senate. All campus members are invited to attend.

**July-August 2019:** The Office of the Provost will appoint members to the working groups, with consultation of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, the Faculty Senate, and the Cabinet.

**September 2019:** The Strategic Plan will be presented at Stockton's Faculty Assembly and Board of Trustees meeting. Co-chairs will announce the working group membership each of their six areas of focus.

**September-December 2019:** Working groups will meet regularly over the fall semester to propose strategies and tactics that operationalize strategic planning goals.

**January 2020:** The Implementation Plan will be finalized and presented to the campus community.

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