



John D. Keenan, *President*

August 15, 2023

Dr. Lawrence Schall
President
New England Commission of Higher Education
301 Edgewater Place, Suite 210
Wakefield, MA 01880

Dear President Schall,


I write today in response to instruction provided to Salem State University (SSU) by NECHE in its letter dated November 29, 2021, which reported the commission's September 24, 2021 vote to continue Salem State in accreditation. The letter further indicated that the institution be asked to submit a report by August 15, 2023 for consideration in Fall 2023, that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. ensuring the effectiveness of the institution's shared governance processes, with emphasis on engaging the community, including faculty, in the development and implementation of the next strategic plan;
2. continuing to build a culture of assessment with evidence that results are used to improve student learning outcomes;
3. achieving its goals to increase enrollment and retention;
4. strengthening the institution's financial position.

I am pleased to report that in each of these four areas, Salem State has made documented progress, and is committed to continual improvement in each as we move toward submitting our interim (fifth-year) report by January 15, 2026.

We have made progress, but we continue to honor the importance of "continual improvement." As we meet the moment, we are mindful of the strength of our new strategic plan to enable us to face the challenges ahead together, to achieve the progress yet to come. I look forward to providing the Commission with updates to these four areas as part of our upcoming five-year interim report.

Sincerely,


John D. Keenan (Aug 14, 2023 15:41 EDT)

John D. Keenan
President

Salem State University

2023 Report



Submitted to:
New England Commission of Higher Education
August 15, 2023



Salem State University
Progress Report to NECHE
August 15, 2023

Contents

Introduction

1. Ensuring the effectiveness of the institution's shared governance processes, with emphasis on engaging the community, including faculty, in the development and implementation of the next strategic plan.

2. Continuing to build a culture of assessment with evidence that results are used to improve student learning outcomes.

a. Program Reviews and Accreditations.

b. Campus-wide Assessments.

c. Student learning assessment.

d. White Paper on Assessment.

i. General Education Assessment.

ii. Post-Graduation Employment Outcomes.

Table 1: Employment and Earning Outcomes

iii. Preparing for HSI Status.

iv. Supporting the Development of a New Strategic Plan.

Additional Internal and External Supports in Aid of Assessment.

3. Achieving [university] goals to increase enrollment and retention.

Figure 1: Enrollment Headcounts, fall to fall, 2020-2022

Figure 2: Credit Hours, fall to fall, 2020-2022

Figure 3: Second Year Retention: First Time Full Time New First-Year Students

a. Meeting students where they are.

b. Engagement as a predictor for persistence.

ci. Outreach to Foster Engagement in Service of Persistence.

ii. Navigate and Early Intervention.

iii. Additional Efforts for Persistence.

d. Affordability and Access.

Table 2: Viking Completion Grant Outcomes

4. Strengthening the institution's financial position.

Appendix A: Continual Improvement in the McKeown School of Education (an exemplar)

Salem State University is meeting the moment.

With ideas becoming action and efforts yielding results, the university continues to improve, evolve, adapt, and achieve. A cautious optimism is growing, tempered by a respect for the difficult path forward and buoyed by successfully emerging from the pandemic. In the last two years at Salem State shared governance effectiveness was advanced through the completion of our new strategic plan. The impact of an emerging culture of assessment is being felt across the curriculum. While persistent progress in achieving the university's enrollment and retention goals continues, the institution also strengthened its financial position. The future is bright:

- A [new strategic plan](#), approved by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (MA BHE) on May 9, 2023, is in its first months of implementation
- General education curriculum assessment is gathering momentum
- Designation as a Hispanic/Minority Serving Institution (HSI-MSI) status is drawing closer,
- "[SSU BOLD](#): A Campus Modernization and Unification Project" is entering the schematic design phase, and
- A \$75 million comprehensive campaign entitled "[Meet the Moment](#)"™ has been launched.

Grateful for the thorough review and constructive guidance garnered through our most recent decennial comprehensive reevaluation, Salem State University has made important strides in living out its commitment to continual improvement. This report is presented to the Commission as a response to the November 2021 "continued in accreditation" letter, offering an update on the institution's progress and success in four areas identified: shared governance in creating and implementing the new strategic plan, continuing to build a more robust culture of assessment, increasing enrollment and retention, and strengthening the university's financial position.

1. Ensuring the effectiveness of the institution's shared governance processes, with emphasis on engaging the community, including faculty, in the development and implementation of the next strategic plan.

Since Salem State's most recent ten-year comprehensive evaluation, the administration has worked collaboratively with the Salem Chapter of the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA/Salem Chapter) on several initiatives of mutual importance, including repair of the fractured relationship reported by the comprehensive evaluation's visiting team. Central to these efforts has been ongoing engagement with MSCA/Salem Chapter leadership by the President (monthly meetings) and the Provost (bi-weekly meetings). During this same period, standing shared-governance committees as described in the statewide MSCA collective bargaining agreement have continued to meet regularly. As measured in terms of the number of proposals submitted to the shared governance process, the volume of shared governance work has remained steady during the most recent two years: 154 proposals during academic year 2021-22 and 162 proposals during academic year 2022-23. Highlights include the development of a new Combined BS in Spanish and Criminal Justice; approval of a new type of

academic credential, a seal; approval of our first two seals: one in public policy and the second in global engagement; establishment of a clearly articulated definition of “credit hour,” including adding this information to the official syllabus template; and – of particular importance – collaborating on the development of a new strategic plan for 2023-28, “Meet the Moment,” which earned approval from the MA BHE on May 9, 2023, and has since been launched.

Although Salem State’s shared governance remains active and productive, several challenges persist; as such, the adverse impact on campus morale (experienced by the NECHE comprehensive review team during its virtual site visit in April 2021) lingers. Faculty have maintained work-to-rule status during four of the last six years. The Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) voted to enter work-to-rule status across the Commonwealth primarily due to contract funding. After resolving these concerns with the state government and the state universities, the MSCA chapter voted to end work-to-rule in the fall of 2019.

When the pandemic struck, conflict between the university administration and Salem State’s MSCA chapter re-emerged. The university took steps to cut costs and preserve faculty and staff positions by imposing short-term furloughs for all employees, leading to strained labor relations with the MSCA. Although the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations upheld the legality of the institution’s implementation of furloughs, the campus MSCA chapter voted to enter work-to-rule (WTR) again in March of 2021. This status is on-going. Disagreements over past decisions, as well as “Covid exhaustion,” remain as a backdrop impacting morale and the sense of community on campus.

Efforts to resolve the work-to-rule impasse have been unsuccessful to date. Management and the MSCA chapter spent much of AY2021-22 discussing mediation models through which we the two sides might resolve the issues that were sustaining the decision to remain in WTR. Unfortunately, none of the models proposed by management were accepted by the MSCA chapter; nor did the MSCA chapter put forth any recommendations to consider. The academic year ended without a commitment to mediation or to end WTR.

The MSCA surveyed members on WTR during AY2022-23 and reported that members expressed a variety of opinions about how to move forward. The President and Provost continue to meet monthly with MSCA chapter leadership. These meetings provide opportunities for the MSCA leaders to informally raise issues and to periodically discuss the work-to-rule status. While we remain in Work to Rule, the President is very much encouraged by recent negotiations with union leadership and he anticipates having a favorable outcome soon. The university will certainly update NECHE if/when this status changes.

Work to rule notwithstanding, the faculty and the administration did have an opportunity to rebuild relationship through the vehicle of the most recent strategic planning process, which began in the fall of 2022. The strategic planning committee was designed for broad based support, with 10 MSCA members (3 from the College of Arts and Sciences; 2 from the Maguire Meservey College of Health and Human services; 2 from the Bertolon School of Business; 2

from the McKeown School of Education; and 1 at large); 9 administrators (including members of the Association of Professional Administrators and non-unit employees); 2 students; 2 members from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); and 3 non-voting support members. Leadership of the strategic planning committee was intentionally collaborative in the form of two co-chairs, one faculty member and one administrator. From its inception, the planning process was iterative, responsive, and transparent, with each stage of the document shared for campus feedback to inform the development of the plan.

Communication with the university community at all stages of the plan's development was paramount to the committee. SPC leadership also regularly updated the campus community via email and on the university's intranet, so that all were aware of the milestones of the plan's development and how they could get involved. Engagement opportunities included 12 in-person and remote open forums with students, parents, faculty, staff, and alumni as well as four online surveys at various stages of the plan's development to gather feedback from campus constituencies and volunteer boards. Monthly meetings were held with the MSCA leadership and communication with the All-University Committee (AUC) was open and collaborative throughout.

The completed plan has since been vetted by multiple campus stake holding entities, including the All-University Committee, the chief standing committee of the MSCA collective bargaining agreement; the President's Executive Council; and the Salem State University Board of Trustees. This plan reflects five years of institutional goals, guiding the university through 2028. On May 9, 2023, SSU's strategic plan was unanimously approved by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education.

While collaboration on the strategic plan was not able to fully repair community issues, the plan sets the stage for future collaborative progress as it envisions desired outcomes with accountability built into the plan through establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure success. The SPC sought to breakdown silos on campus by sharing responsibility for goals across divisions. For example, student success and life readiness, initially one of the specific goals, was centered in the plan with the rest of the goals framed to point toward it, anchoring the plan.

Emerging from the pandemic, the university administration sought to engage the campus community informally through coffee social hours and the return of traditional in-person events such as the holiday party, academic affairs socials, ice cream socials, and retirement luncheon with mixed results. Anecdotal evidence suggests that faculty are more invested locally, attending school-specific events more often, and engaging informally more at the school and college level. Leadership transitions in most schools and colleges appear to be contributing to healthier relationships between the respective deans and faculty than at the institutional level.

There were also two substantial developments that yielded opportunities for the administration and faculty to cooperate and collaborate in advancing shared goals. In the

Spring of 2022, a faculty teach-in about the cost of funding public higher education led to a request from faculty for the university to support the Fair Share Amendment pending on the November ballot in the Commonwealth. Members of the university administration worked with faculty to support the effort and to raise the issue among the Council of Presidents who also endorsed the referendum. President Keenan, who currently serves as chair of the MA State University Council of Presidents, spoke in support of Fair Share at the MA BHE's February 14 meeting.

As a comprehensive university, Salem State has long debated how to distinguish itself among higher education institutions in Massachusetts. Organically growing from the strategic planning discussions, a concept began to emerge to champion civic engagement as a distinctive feature of the university. In 2022, thirty faculty wrote to the President to urge Salem State to identify itself as the Commonwealth's 'Civic Engagement University.' As one of only a handful of Massachusetts institutions to have earned the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, the moniker is apt and a source of pride for the university. Focus groups through the strategic planning process confirmed broad support for embracing this identity. The university leadership enthusiastically endorsed the idea, and the President now regularly promotes the title in speeches and presentations. One of the goals envisioned by the strategic plan is that Salem State will be recognized with this distinction in the next five years. With the passage of the Fair Share Amendment and frequently identifying the institution as committed to civic engagement, management and faculty have found more common ground to support.

The university is well positioned to make additional progress in matters of shared governance relationships, creating the necessary time and opportunities to engage with one another on substantive matters of mutual interest. For example, as Salem State prepares to become the Commonwealth's first public four-year Hispanic Serving/Minority Serving Institution (HSI/MSI), faculty initiated reading groups among staff and faculty during the last two years. Several faculty members also participated in each of the six committees in the university's HSI working group, formed in Spring 2023 to develop a roadmap to prepare for HSI/MSI status. This new status along with the goals of the strategic plan: academic excellence and active learning; civic engagement and public good; justice, diversity, equity and inclusion; environmental stewardship and climate action; campus community and culture; operational excellence and infrastructure; financial vitality and sustainability; and the over-arching student success and life readiness goal; provide rich, fertile prospects to advance collaboration, generate new synergies, and further foster shared community.

2. Continuing to build a culture of assessment with evidence that results are used to improve student learning outcomes. Continual improvement requires determined effort and sustained progress to be successful. The university is actively engaged in confronting substantive issues to support and advance teaching and learning, institutional planning, decision-making, policy, and practice; rooted in evidence and inquiry. These continual improvement efforts include reflective study through disciplinary reviews and accreditations, and campus-wide assessments; straight-forward assessments of student learning, general education curriculum, post-graduate

employment; and forward-looking projects, such as preparing for HSI/MSI status and supporting the new strategic plan.

2a. Program Reviews and Accreditations. The university's schedule of accreditations and program reviews continues with each department and/or program reviewed every five years, or as determined by the respective accrediting body. Since 2021, disciplinary accreditations were successfully achieved for the McKeown School of Education (continued regulatory approval by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, DESE), the School of Nursing (CCNE accreditation), Computer Science (ABET accreditation); Theatre and Speech Communication (NAST accreditation), and Music (NASM accreditation). In addition, the Bertolon School of Business (AACSB accreditation), Art + Design (NASAD accreditation) submitted progress reports, while Occupational Therapy (ACOTE accreditation) and Chemistry (ACS accreditation) submitted their periodic reports to their respective accrediting bodies. In Spring 2023, each academic department affirmed and/or revised their learning outcomes, using the NECHE E Series document as the basis for the review. This initiative was undertaken to maintain a current listing of learning outcomes, promote periodic reviews, and lay the foundation for the next NECHE review.

In AY2021-23, program reviews were conducted by World Languages and Cultures; Politics, Policy, and International Relations (delayed due to pandemic); Sport and Movement Science (SMS); Media and Communication; and Geography and Sustainability (GPH; delayed due to pandemic). Some of the accreditation and/or program reviews resulted in recommendations to revise or streamline curriculum. Several reviews demonstrated the need for more faculty lines. Among these departments, SMS; GPH; Computer Science; and Theatre and Speech Communication have recently completed searches for new full-time faculty to begin employment on September 1, 2023. Moreover, twenty (20) AY2023-24 searches for full-time faculty were authorized by the President and Provost for new faculty members to begin employment on September 1, 2024. Among the searches approved are faculty for Politics, Policy, and International Relations, Sport and Movement Science, and Media and Communication – each of which targets concerns raised in the program review report and is aligned with the goals of the new strategic plan.

One example of a major change implemented following accreditations and program reviews reflects commentary provided to the McKeown School of Education (MSOE) by the MA DESE during the most recent regulatory review. So that all teacher licensure programs might be more clearly aligned with the authority vested in the MSOE as a “license sponsoring organization,” the Master of Teaching (MAT) degree programs were repositioned in the academic affairs organizational chart: while previously programs assigned to the corresponding disciplinary department in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) with secondary reference to the MSOE, the MAT programs now reside in the MSOE as a coherent cluster with secondary reference to the corresponding CAS department. This action was undertaken to ensure more direct contact between licensure-seeking students and the licensing entity, the McKeown School. This change established a clear line of authority for these programs to the McKeown School, regardless of

disciplinary content. For additional information regarding the McKeown School's response to DESE's 2021 report, see Appendix A.

2b. Campus-wide Assessments. The university conducts a schedule of assessment efforts to collect data periodically on student experiences, discuss trends and results, and foster continuous improvement and accountability. Among the efforts conducted since Spring 2021 were the following: VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) assessment of critical thinking among Commonwealth Honors students; NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) administered to first-year and seniors in 2022; SSI (Student Satisfaction Index) and ACHA (American College Health Association) administered to all students in 2023; and two homegrown surveys of graduating seniors and graduate students, conducted annually. Findings from these data collection efforts were shared at multiple forums of university leadership and faculty department chairs and summaries are posted on the campus intranet. In addition, university fact books are published annually on the website reporting longitudinal data on admissions, enrollment, employment, and retention and completion data.

Benchmark data from several specific survey items are incorporated into the new strategic plan as metrics to measure success in achieving our goals. For example, measures of student engagement, sense of belonging, and student satisfaction from the NSSE and SSI are metrics for the overarching Student Success Strategic Imperative in the plan. Furthermore, satisfaction from the SSI, Senior Survey, and Grad Student Exit Survey are incorporated to track progress on service indicators included in the Campus Community and Culture goal. SSU's results from the NSSE Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity module is used as a baseline measure for the Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goal. Additionally, the ACHA results were used to create social norming campaigns to educate students about peer health practices, resources available, and potential outcomes. While incremental progress is being made to use results to inform decision-making, the university needs to devote more resources to systematically using assessment findings to 'close the loop' in practice as we create a broader culture of assessment. To this end, we are in the process of hiring a full-time assessment coordinator with responsibility to manage day-to-day assessment activities, including an accountability mechanism that will better ensure that assessment results drive appropriate change in practice, procedure, and policy.

2c. Student learning assessment. The assessment of student learning continues to be an evolving work in progress. Assessment activities continue and proliferate, deepening our understanding, and spurring additional investigations and inquiry at all levels of the university. Nationally available tools, such as VALUE and NSSE have been employed at the institutional level. At the unit level, examples from Nursing, Social Work, and the Commonwealth Honors Program illustrate thoughtful assessments initiated at the departmental level. While individual faculty participate through their own scholarship, departmental initiatives, and/or institutional assessments, such as VALUE.

Salem State continues to use the VALUE Initiative developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as an authentic, campus-based approach to assessment. The

VALUE rubrics describe benchmarks for assessing more than a dozen learning outcomes. Applying these rubrics to student artifacts is a direct method of assessment of student learning. Through the VALUE Scoring Collaborative, institutions submit anonymous student artifacts to be scored by higher education experts using the respective rubrics.

VALUE was incorporated into a program level assessment of senior theses done from the university's Commonwealth Honors Program in AY2020-21 and AY2021-22. The Honors Program is a high-touch, cohort-based program with a culminating thesis designed to demonstrate the student's full scope of learning throughout their undergraduate career. Two forms of assessment were employed: student reflections on their thesis experience were gathered through a survey; and the VALUE rubric for critical thinking was applied to the senior theses.

The survey examined factors impacting students' experiences in completing the thesis, including faculty supervision, academic preparedness, commitment, and self-appraisal. For example, high correlations were found between student preparation and commitment. These findings provided the institution and the program director with data about each of these factors and the correlational analyses of the respective relationship to inform the work of guiding students in completing these academic achievements.

The VALUE analysis indicated that 78.6% of seniors scored at one of the two higher levels of the critical thinking rubric. The Commonwealth Honors seniors' results were compared with other artifacts in the VALUE repository, and with artifacts from the general Salem State student population during that period. Students who completed Commonwealth Honors theses demonstrated greater learning in critical thinking than both students nationally and Salem State students who were not enrolled in the Honors Program. Honors students scored almost twice as high on the top two rubric levels than either of group of their peers.

These findings strengthened the Honors Program faculty's resolve to support and expand the undergraduate thesis experience and find programmatic ways for students in departments with fewer faculty to serve as advisors to have the same high-impact experience. While not every department has enough faculty to mentor all the students that want the chance, the program will be drawn from successful honors programs models elsewhere to ensure that this happens. The Honors Program will also be using this information as further evidence for donor support as part of the ongoing capital campaign.

To expand efforts with VALUE, the university pursued and was awarded a two-year, \$200K Open Educational Resources and Integrative Learning grant from the Davis Educational Foundation and AAC&U in Summer 2021. The grant's goals are to promote greater use of OER and to assess integrative learning through the VALUE rubric on this topic. The university collected additional artifacts from faculty using OER and assignments in which students could demonstrate integrative learning. Results from these analyses are not yet available as the university has encountered significant delays in accessing and receiving results from the VALUE scoring collaborative.

While the rubrics provide a robust tool for the direct assessment of student learning outcomes, the timeliness of analyses through AAC&U raise some concerns. The university is at a crossroad of sorts for future assessment of student learning outcomes. Due to lengthy delays in getting VALUE results returned, the options under consideration are building capacity within the institution to apply VALUE rubrics to artifacts on our own, and/or identifying other means to measure student learning outcomes.

Faculty consent to allow course assignments to be used as artifacts for analysis through VALUE, typically with additional compensation for participation. The controls established for the current learning management system, Canvas, ensure course integrity and academic freedom. However, such protections make systematic access to course outcomes and artifacts siloed. Assessment of student learning outcomes could be enhanced through broader access to Canvas assignments and devoting more institutional resources to the assessment of these artifacts. In the meantime, progress in assessing student learning continues in pockets throughout the university, led by a coalition of the willing and able through individual faculty and departmental efforts and the support of institutional partners.

Assessment figures prominently in the scholarship of some SSU faculty. For example, Social Work faculty conducted an analysis of academic outcomes by race and ethnicity among graduate and undergraduate Social Work students over a two-year period documenting an intentional anti-racist, equity-minded practice that educators can replicate to examine the assessment of teaching and learning. In a subsequent journal article from the project, the authors described using population percentage comparisons/disproportionality analysis to assess the potential presence of disproportionality in the classroom. Their findings included recommendations for both teaching and assessment practices, including interventions that equity-minded practitioners can apply.

The School of Nursing uses an ATI Comprehensive Exam to assess student learning outcomes among senior students at the beginning of their last semester. The tool assesses their knowledge of the nursing content for all specialty areas and provides faculty with individual and group reports that identify content that students have not yet mastered. The professor then adapts the Nursing 420 Preparation for Professional Licensure course to include the identified content that students did not master into the course. The School also provides supplemental instruction based on students' scores on this exam. These efforts have proven effective in addressing students' needs in learning to master the content for the exam, as the mean score for the group and individual students typically increases from the first exam administration to the second one at the end of the term.

Student learning and engagement is also assessed through periodic administration of NSSE, which was last conducted in Spring, 2022. More students reported positive outcomes across several measures compared with the last time the survey was administered in 2019. For example, 77% of students evaluated their overall experience as 'excellent' or 'good' with both seniors (+2%) and first-year students (+1%) reporting slightly more positive affirmations in

2022. Similarly, 76% said they would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ choose Salem State if they started over again, with more seniors (+6%) and first years (+3%) endorsing their choice again than in 2019. Higher percentages of seniors also reported that their SSU experience contributed ‘very much’ or ‘quite a bit’ to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in 9 of 10 outcomes (e.g., writing effectively, speaking clearly, and understanding people of other backgrounds) than in 2019; with the same result (84%) reported by seniors on ‘thinking critically’ in both years.

NSSE results also indicate that SSU students are not participating in high-impact practices (HIP) as much as students at regional public universities, but the breadth of students accessing these opportunities extends across demographic categories. The breadth of access finding has significant implications for the diverse student populations served by Salem State. Participating in HIPs has demonstrated a positive association with student learning and retention for all students, but historically underserved students tend to benefit more from such engagement. As a result, the strategic plan utilizes the number and percentage of students by demographic group to monitor success in engaging more students in high-impact practices while continuing to promote broad-based access.

2d. White Paper on Assessment. Following the NECHE comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2021, the projections proposed by the self-study and all areas cited by the visiting team were compiled, reviewed, and prioritized for future action. The Provost charged a small group within academic affairs to author a white paper on the assessment of student learning to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis. Four areas of focus were identified as priorities: (a) general education assessment, (b) post-graduate employment and outcomes, (c) preparing for HSI status, and (d) supporting the development of the strategic plan.

2d.i. General Education Assessment. One of the primary projections that emerged from the self-study for the NECHE comprehensive evaluation was the goal to comprehensively assess the general education curriculum. Although this new curriculum was developed over a decade ago, Gen Ed assessment activities have not kept pace. In AY2022-23, Academic Affairs initiated a major review of the curriculum, one that has helped to enhance a more comprehensive culture of assessment by directly engaging faculty from every school and college.

Initial steps included conducting focus groups and surveys to gather current data on student experiences; reviewing historical data and background on the current Gen Ed to provide context; understanding retention and completion trends among current students; learning from experts about best practices in Gen Ed; and contextualizing the process within SSU’s new strategic plan and HSI roadmap, as well as DHE’s Equity Framework and New Undergraduate Experience plan. The university invested in sending a team to AAC&U’s Institute on General Education and Assessment (IGEA) to prepare for the Gen Ed review. IGEA features an interactive curriculum, pragmatic strategies, access to current research, while pairing campuses with faculty mentors to advance their on-going efforts. Salem State was teamed with Dr. José Moreno, Associate Professor of Latino Education and Policy Studies from California State University, Long Beach, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

Utilizing a collaborative SharePoint site, a group of 25 faculty are working this summer to develop recommendations. Six working groups have been established: storytelling and communication; Gen Ed outcomes; vertical model; Gen Ed governance, oversight, and management; HSI status; and First-Year Seminar. The Gen Ed Working Group adopted Dr. Moreno's MEIGE (Making Excellence Inclusive + General Education) framework for this work, to center equity and SSU's emerging HSI status in the Gen Ed review. Outcomes from the project will include a SVOR (strengths, vulnerabilities, opportunities, and risks) analysis by the faculty and next steps.

In further support of these gen ed assessment efforts, a Faculty Fellow position on assessment was revived to continue the positive culture-building work recently completed by providing faculty leadership to the initiative. The assessment Faculty Fellow shall also consult with the Provost, Vice Provost, and Director of the Center for Teaching Innovation on strategies to sustain the recent momentum on and engagement in assessment activities.

2d.ii. Post-Graduation Employment Outcomes.

Progress in tracking graduates' employment outcomes has improved but continues to prove challenging. We are pleased to report that US News and World Report ranked Salem State #28 in social mobility—highest among Massachusetts state universities for the last two years. Despite this accolade, collecting and reporting employment and earnings data from students has historically been a shortcoming in institutional assessment efforts. Since 2018, the university implemented two instruments to collect data from graduating seniors and graduate students, respectively. This data provided a snapshot near the time of graduation, but the picture was incomplete, as the job search story was unfinished for most graduates. For example, in 2022, 40% of respondents had secured a full-time or part-time position, while in 2023, 42% of seniors had accepted a position. Yet, the university had not developed a method to capture student employment outcomes through the first post-graduate destination.

The Bertolon School of Business expanded their efforts to collect outcomes data recently. The school piloted a detailed first destination survey in 2022 to collect data from new graduates at the time of their graduation, three months later, and six months later. This data is being gathered to support the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation. While the five percent response rate was too low to be instructive, the effort was reported to AACSB with an explanation that the university will build on this foundational survey to increase the response rate in the future.

This year, the Salem State University Foundation, Inc. and the Salem State University Alumni Association merged to become a unified board. The newly formed organization, the Salem State University Alumni Association and Foundation, Inc. (AA&F), will continue to promote pride in the university and inspire philanthropy to invest in student success. This increased collaboration between leadership volunteers who lead the fundraising and engagement efforts of the university will strengthen our efforts to further advance the university and may provide opportunities to strengthen the quality and quantity of post-graduate outcomes collected in the future.

Knowing how critical post-graduate employment is for students and families, the Department of Higher Education (DHE), in conjunction with other state agencies, is unveiling a new resource that we anticipate will meet this need more comprehensively. The DHE Employment and Earnings dashboard is in a pilot phase currently, but it will make available salary and employment data from recent graduates. The initial model displays data from 2010-21, which can be disaggregated by major/program, location, demographic group, and state university. While the available reporting is three years old it is much more robust than any other data available. A critical benefit is the validity of this resource, as it will share data as reported to state agencies rather than self-reported information. As the chart below indicates, this dashboard illustrates longitudinal student outcomes in employment, post-graduate education, earnings, salary ranges, and wage growth over time, enabling the university to demonstrate and track outcomes among recent graduates. This data is also reported for graduate students.

Table 1: Employment and Earning Outcomes – Undergraduate Cohort 2016

Years After Graduation →	SSU 2016 Undergraduates				
	1	2	3	4	5
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
# of Graduates	2,356	2,356	2,356	2,356	2,356
% Employed in MA	68%	66%	65%	66%	68%
% Pursuing Higher Ed Only	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%
% Employed in MA & Pursuing High Ed	18%	18%	18%	14%	11%
% Employed FT in MA	47%	49%	51%	51%	54%
FT Mean Wage	\$43,094	\$46,923	\$50,436	\$61,913	\$65,798
25th Percentile FT Wage	\$30,798	\$33,426	\$34,937	\$43,760	\$45,364
Median FT Wage	\$38,626	\$42,943	\$46,660	\$56,477	\$60,057
75th Percentile FT Wage	\$50,940	\$55,569	\$60,428	\$72,609	\$78,064

2d.iii. Preparing for HSI Status. In 2017, SSU conducted our first Campus Climate Study. The university is preparing to initiate our next climate study, with changes in student, faculty, and staff populations over time, and as a new VP for Diversity and Inclusion beginning this year. One of the past co-chairs of the previous Climate Study Working Group is compiling a report to describe what was learned before and the related initiatives taken, in order to inform what to assess in the next study.

In 2022, Salem State renewed its participation in the [Racial Equity and Justice Institute](#) (REJI). This voluntary collaboration of regional institutions represented by campus teams meets monthly. On each campus, team members complete a curriculum that together with the regional professional development workshops is intended to deepen commitment, enhance abilities, and focus efforts to close racial educational equity gaps.

The Salem State team chose to focus on disaggregating data for classes in which there are high numbers of successful or unsuccessful students. A dozen faculty and staff met monthly to collect and examine data. The work is on-going, examining disproportionalities by race, ethnicity, and gender in academic standing for D and F grades; W grades; and A and B grades; by department and general education category. The outcomes anticipated are to publicize the gains; create a sustainable structure for change and on-going work. Extending into next year, the REJI group plans to share out the disaggregated data to departments; develop a checklist of what departments should look for when examining their data; a toolkit for ways to address inequities. Additionally, the impact of the HSI-MSI working group is detailed in the next section about meeting enrollment and retention goals.

2d.iv. Supporting the Development of a New Strategic Plan. The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) led the campus community through a very collaborative, inclusive, and analytical process. It began with an intensive review and discussion of existing assessments and plans intended to guide the committee's thinking of where Salem State should be in the next five years. This included several university documents such as the previous strategic plan, most recent NECHE assessment, Vision for a Sustainable Future and Community Feedback Addendum, Sustainable Path Forward Task Force Suggestions and Lines of Inquiries, MSCA Growth Plan, and MSCA Liberal Arts and Equity White Paper. The SPC also considered several documents from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) including the New Undergraduate Experience Report, Strategic Plan for Racial Equity, and Student Support and Success Framework. As part of the analysis of the information collected, the SPC identified themes and threads running through and across data sets, key studies and reports, and stakeholder input that reflected commonly held aspirations and shared concerns.

The SPC employed a "4-S" lens, identifying what should be sustained or leveraged; started or explored; strengthened or improved; and stopped or scaled back. The SPC also reviewed the university's mission, vision, and values, ultimately making course corrections aligned with the feedback received from internal and external stakeholders. As a critical dimension of the integrated plan, the SPC also developed an initial set of metrics and key progress indicators that would be used to demonstrate and evaluate progress toward desired outcomes during the strategic plan's implementation. In developing these measures and indicators, the SPC paid close attention to their alignment to the DHE's Strategic Plan for Racial Equity and other known DHE priorities.

Additional Internal and External Supports in Aid of Assessment. The context in which assessment activities are conducted is supported by many internal and external institutional partners. These partners comprise the eco-system of the university's nascent culture of assessment. Such support includes governance committees, state structures, university systems and centers, and campus colleagues and individual faculty.

The University-wide Assessment Committee (UWAC) is the tri-partite committee charged with supporting assessment activities. Since UWAC is not a standing committee of the MSCA contract, it has not met since March 2020 due to the pandemic and work-to-rule. However, in

the span between the statewide MSCA vote to enter work-to-rule and the Salem State chapter's work-to-rule decision, this governance committee did complete its review of a proposal to establish an Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO) framework and forward it to through the governance process. This framework's goals are to serve as a foundation for academic department, general education, and co-curricular learning outcomes, as well as to articulate more clearly the outcomes of a Salem State education. This proposal was previously reviewed and revised twice by academic department chairs. While AUC reviewed the proposal, it did not act, referring it back to the Provost until work-to-rule concerns are resolved.

At the state level, SSU is active in two assessment organizations led by the DHE. Faculty and staff representatives engaged in assessment work on each university, community college, and state university campus meet regularly in these two forums to collaborate, share practices, discuss challenges, and engage in professional development. Advancing a Massachusetts Culture of Assessment (AMCOA) consists of practitioners, while the Assessment Advisory Council is comprised of institutional assessment leaders. AMCOA's purpose is to enhance the assessment of student learning on public campuses and strengthen campuses' assessment capabilities. The Assessment Advisory Council, chaired by the one of the 29 state campus presidents, provides broad oversight of statewide assessment in the Commonwealth.

The expansion of EAB's Navigate continues to provide valuable, actionable data to support students. The ROI from Navigate for students identified as 'at risk' by faculty is an increase by as much as one letter grade when they connect to institutional resources. Navigate uses quick poll functionality to ask students for input or feedback on specific, short-term needs to inform institutional decision-making. For example, quick polls about course modality preferences and students' intent to register for the next semester are instrumental in guiding course delivery decision-making and registration outreach efforts. Additionally, quick polls were used to ask graduating students how to pronounce their name at Commencement ceremonies, providing reassurance that their name would be read correctly. Campus Life and Recreation employed a quick poll to solicit students about the genre of artist for the major Spring concert, affording students a greater voice in determining how thousands of dollars in student fees would be spent. The Center for Civic Engagement also used quick polls to gauge intent to vote and to share resources and information to enable students to register and vote in the gubernatorial and local elections.

The Center for Teaching Innovation (CTI) supports teaching and learning initiatives across the university. This summer, twenty faculty are engaged in a CTI learning community, Course Re-design: Adapting for Transformation (CRAFT). Designing for greater equity in teaching and learning is a major focus of this collaborative effort among faculty fellows, instructional designers, faculty mentors and participating instructors.

CTI is also working with several faculty adapting courses to different modalities. Social Work, for example, is currently adapting their popular MSW curriculum to an online program format. Working with CTI, Social Work instructors use a course blueprint template and backward design to map when and how learning outcomes are introduced, developed, assessed, and met. As

each module is created, learning outcomes are built-in and explicit before subject matter experts create the course content in the university's learning management system.

Initiatives led by CTI also include professional development and resources for faculty and librarians, including instructional designers, faculty fellows, faculty/professional learning communities; global engagement through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL); new faculty orientation workshops; and scholarship of teaching and learning research. CTI is expanding the format of the annual New Faculty Orientation next year. The formerly one-day introductory workshop is being extended to a series of monthly presentations throughout the academic year to provide on-going faculty support, build community among colleagues, and provide instructors with timely resources and information.

Furthermore, four faculty from disparate disciplines offered their expertise in research and analysis to interrogate existing institutional data to inform SSU's persistence efforts. The group formed the Student Persistence Team (SPT) and collaborated on a large-scale analysis of student persistence as a function of demographic, academic and engagement variables based on Salem State data. Among their findings were that data collection and organization serve as a roadblock for actionable future analysis. This observation also emerged from the working group established to prepare Salem State to become a Hispanic Serving Institution. The HSI working group concluded that while the data is available to establish HSI status once necessary benchmarks are reached, "the data is not easily retrievable due to systems challenges." Building infrastructure and modifying systems to make assessment data more accessible, available, and utilized is an area that the institution needs to devote more resources to leverage institutional opportunities, such as the work of the SPT and HSI working group.

A more robust culture of assessment continues to advance beyond Academic Affairs into other institutional areas at Salem State. For example, Admissions relies on Accepted Student Questionnaire data from EAB to guide their work; Finance and Business maintains a position dedicated to continuous improvement; Advancement staff include data and analytics professionals to inform fundraising; and ITS sustains the university's data warehouse. The commitment to include baseline data across 18 areas to measure progress on each of the strategic plan goals is another significant institutional step forward, laying the foundation for future action and accountability.

3. Achieving [university] goals to increase enrollment and retention.

In our effort to meet goals to increase enrollment and retention, we report mixed outcomes. In the face of fierce regional competition for students, especially for undergraduate and transfer students, the institution has attempted to slow what had been declines in headcounts and credit hours; see Figures 1 and 2. As we are several weeks away from the start of the academic year, we cannot provide corresponding data for fall 2023. We are optimistic, however, as we have seen very recent improvements in student retention.

Figure 1: Enrollment Headcounts, fall to fall, 2020 – 2022*

*Fall 2023 data are TBA.

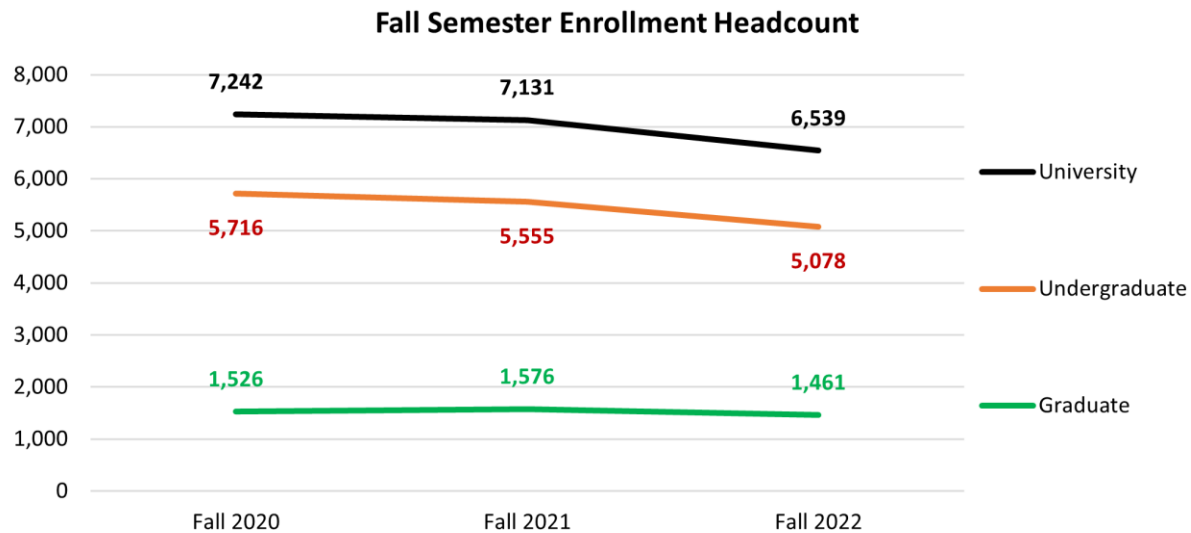
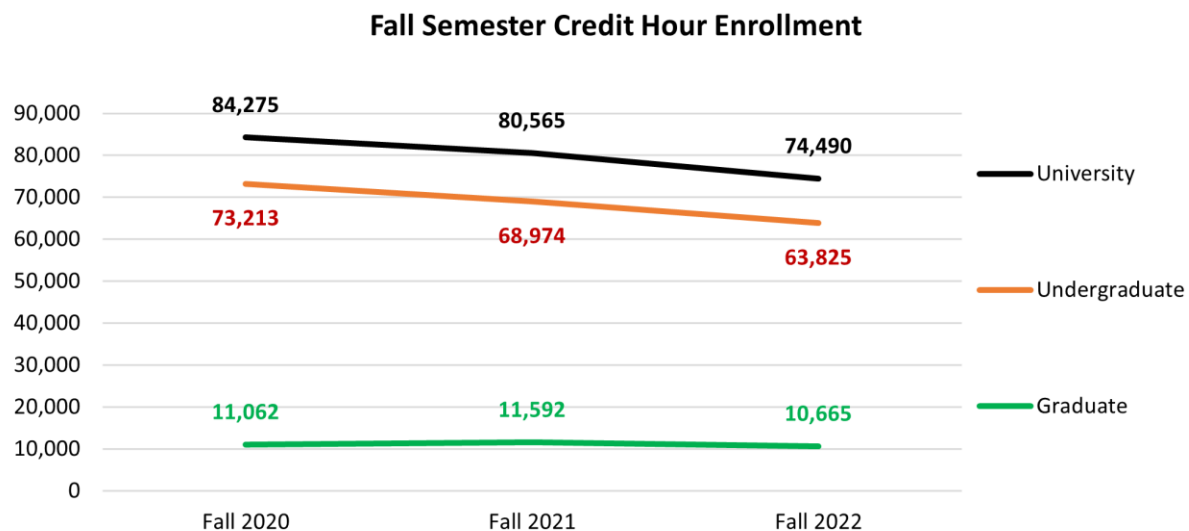


Figure 2: Credit Hours, fall to fall, 2020 – 2022*

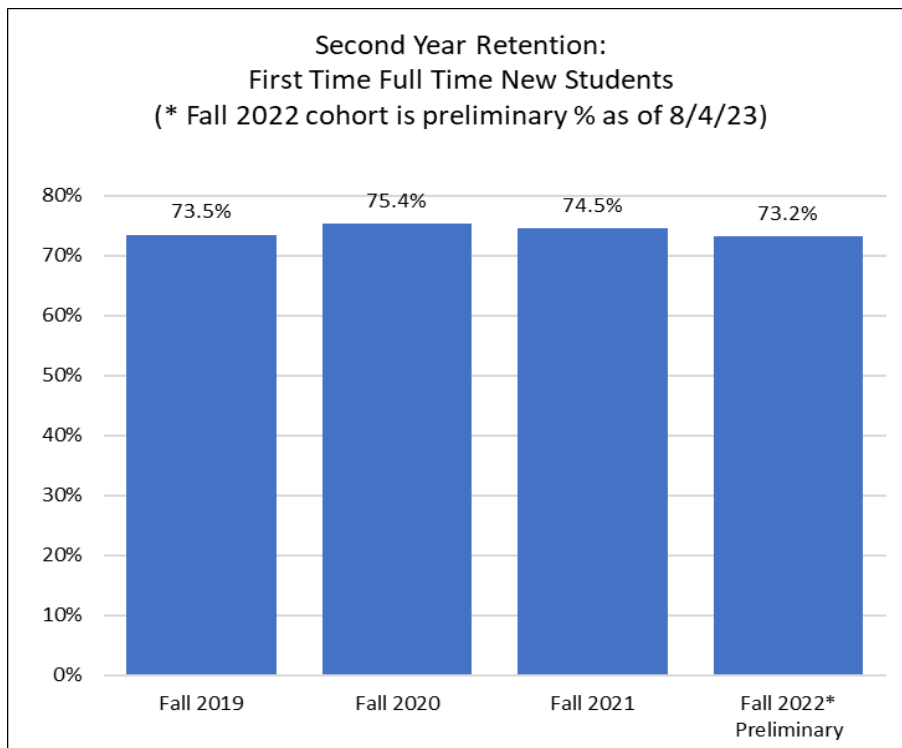
*Fall 2023 data are TBA.



In the last two years, undergraduate retention increased by 1 or 2%, remaining in the mid-70% level, while six-year completion rates remained consistently in the mid-50% range. Trends are stabilizing at these levels after reaching peaks of near 80% retention and near 60% graduation rates before the pandemic. Wide-ranging efforts informed by strategic analyses continue apace across the university to move the needle further on these measures, as described in this section.

Figure 3: First-to-Second Year Retention

First Time Full Time New First-Year Students



Retention and graduation rates for graduate students have been steady, consistently in the low to mid-80% range when calculated at 150% time to degree over six years, based on the prevalence of part-time graduate students. However, due to the varying length of programs, retention and graduation rates among graduate students can be a somewhat ‘apples and oranges’ comparison. On recent exit surveys completed by graduate students at the time of completion, 89% of respondents reported completing in three years or less.

While there are differences in the recruitment and retention strategies for undergraduate versus graduate programs, the common threads are: (a) meeting students where they are in an effort to be a fully “student ready college”; (b) advancing efforts to understand and respond to ways in which student engagement predict persistence; and (c) remaining firm in our commitment to ensuring that Salem State, as a public university, provides an accessible, high-quality opportunity to all the students we serve by making college-going affordable.

3a. Meeting students where they are. Part of our ability to slow this decline has been a renewed commitment and a more thoughtful approach to meeting students where they are. These efforts, though seemingly wide-ranging, are predicated on the need for the institution to recognize the diversity of lived experiences that students bring to the campus, through new HSI-/MSI-facing initiatives, and to explore new ways to reach prospective students (and their families) in contexts that they find familiar, such as high schools through expanded early college programming. The university is sustaining enrollment goals through EAB’s admissions initiatives

(e.g., prospect list buys and marketing support) and the use of tools such as Navigate, financial aid leveraging, persistence awards, completion grants, and an array of First Year Experience initiatives to aid retention efforts. Enhanced communication and outreach to both students and families about deadlines and processes has also increased, especially for filing the FAFSA and State offered grants. Many ideas are experimented with, leading to results-oriented decisions to scale up successful interventions, and to be strategic in allocating scarce resources.

SSU's Graduate School monitors enrollment in undergraduate programs at regional colleges that do not offer a related graduate program, but whose degrees align with Salem State's graduate programs to identify more potential candidates. The increasing state aid anticipated from the passage of the Fair Share Amendment, as well as the university's evolving status as an emerging HSI offer increased potential to aid recruitment and better serve our regional student population. In service to those efforts, Salem State maintains strong partnerships with local community colleges and regional community-based (CBOs) organizations (e.g., Bottom Line, La Vida, One Grad), while also expanding Early College, ReUp, and credit recovery to compete. Recently, SSU signed two memorandums of understanding (MOU) with both North Shore and Northern Essex community colleges (CC): MOU 's for joint admissions to either CC and Salem State; and MOUs for students who transfer from either CC to Salem State to receive a \$3,000 award. The McKeown School of Education is a lead institution for Boston Public School teachers and administrators to enroll in a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS) program.

Affordability, first semester GPA, and engagement with campus resources are consistent drivers of SSU's enrollment and retention, as indicated both by self-reported data from students, as well as based on the comprehensive analysis conducted by SPT faculty. For example, in the 2023 Student Satisfaction Index (SSI) survey, undergraduates ranked as the top factors in their decision to enroll: financial aid; cost; academic reputation; geographic setting; and size of the institution, among nine response options. Graduate students identified 'cost' as the top reason they choose Salem State before 'financial aid,' with each of the other factors cited by undergraduates included among their top reasons. One other difference among graduate students was that they ranked 'personalized attention prior to enrollment' as a higher priority than 'size of the institution,' among their top reasons to enroll.

Given demographic trends, SSU expects to meet the threshold criteria to earn the U.S. Department of Education's designation as an HSI in by the year 2026. SSU's enrollment already qualifies the institution as an *emerging* HSI according to HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities). While relative percentages of most regional demographic sub-groups are flat, the number Latinx students enrolling has been increasing, while White enrollment has been decreasing. In Fall 2021, the Provost initiated a series of open meetings about the HSI designation and a survey of community members about institutional priorities in serving Latinx students. A public canvas site was created to share resources and ideas. Two faculty initiated a reading group focused on the Latinx experience to engage community members. In Spring 2022, key faculty and staff were invited to attend national conferences to learn about best practices for Hispanic and Minority Serving Institutions and to educate the campus community.

In the fall of 2022, the interim VP for diversity and Inclusion partnered with the associate dean of students to start to prepare the campus community to become an HSI. Academic affairs created a new faculty fellowship position dedicated to HSI-MSI initiatives. The campus engaged in additional professional development including participation in national conferences, on campus presentations reaching BOT, PEC, and multiple campus constituencies.

In Spring 2023, another faculty-led reading group emerged, and a working group was formed to prepare for HSI-MSI status. The charge included creating a roadmap document, timeline, and prioritizing recommendations to achieve HSI designation and foster Hispanic- and minority-servingness. Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone (2019) developed the concept of servingness to describe the shift needed to transform from simply enrolling Latinx students to actually serving them; creating a place where all students can thrive. Six sub-groups were formed to study eligibility and applications; community building; engagement and communication; campus culture; curriculum, pedagogy, and research; and academic policies, pathways, and partnerships. The group of over fifty faculty, students, and staff met monthly, while sub-groups met bi-weekly. The working group determined that SSU currently has access to most of the data needed to prepare for the HSI designation.

As we prepare for AY2023-24, a new position of Assistant Vice-President for HSI/MSI Initiatives was created and staffed with a seasoned and respected campus professional to lead the effort. This new position will join the Inclusive Excellence Office, working closely with the new VP for Diversity and Inclusion. As noted above, SSU is preparing to become the first public comprehensive university in MA to achieve the HSI-MSI designation by intentionally increasing enrollment of these historically underserved populations, and putting additional services and supports in place to increase retention and graduation rates for all students. Increased support for resident students is another strategy to meet students where they are and enhance retention. As of July 1, 2023, only full-time professional residence directors will supervise and support the university residence hall community, bringing an end to the practice of utilizing graduate student staff as the most senior live-in staff. Graduate students will continue as paraprofessionals, but upgrading and investing in residence hall professionals will increase the experience level, time available, and primary focus among hall staff.

One of these new hall director positions will work part-time with the student involvement office to co-advise student government and re-build residence hall councils. A full-time community standards position is also being revived to meet the conduct needs as more students return to campus housing. Devoting more resources to student leadership and community standards is initiated to boost the sense of community, advocacy, responsibility, and accountability among students, as well as to create more social and educational activities for students in the halls.

Although overall housing occupancy has been lower than in pre-pandemic years, resident student retention rates were over 1.5% higher than the overall retention rate for first-year students, while the resident rate was 3% higher than among commuters for the last two years. Looking to the Fall semester, preliminary data shows an anticipated increase in retention rates

for this year as well. Also, through the existing partnership with nearby North Shore Community College, Salem State can house over twenty community college students in the university's residence halls.

The collaboration agreement with North Shore generated mutual benefits on several levels, with housing being a substantial one. Through this relationship, community college (CC) students can find affordable, convenient housing; NSCC is better able to retain students with such needs; SSU can increase housing occupancy; and CC students become intimately more familiar with the SSU campus sooner, potentially increasing the likelihood of subsequent transfers. While the pandemic disrupted this new partnership, transfer outcomes over time among those CC students housed at SSU will continue to be studied moving forward.

While housing stability contributes to student success, access to health and wellness resources and services is another key component of the support needed for students to thrive. Last year, Counseling & Health Services was awarded two grants (one state and one federal) to increase services to students through a 24/7 mental health hotline. As a result, students can reach out to crisis-counselors "on call" for urgent needs and up to five free off-campus visits. The grants also funded a self-guided mental health online tool and expanded part-time staff. Counselors triage caller's needs to provide counseling, schedule follow-up appointments, and/or alert University Police to respond in an emergency. The 24/7 mental health support line was heavily utilized, receiving 81 calls with seven of the calls necessitating a safety assessment and high level of care. This new expanded support to students is another means to meet the moment as students emerge from the challenges of the pandemic.

Additionally, considerable progress is being made to hold on to the first-year students who enroll from acceptance through Fall matriculation. University admissions has adopted use of the common application and an application waiver is available to students through December 15 each year to expand access to applicants. Last year, the university was able to cut summer melt in the incoming class by 55%, retaining 78 more students in Summer 2022 than the prior year. Through changes to the orientation program and follow-up during the summer, students are made fully aware of all the resources available to support their transition, including financial aid counseling.

In the past five years, Salem State significantly expanded Early College participation from eight courses for 100 students a year at Salem High School to offering 56 courses annually to over 400 students at Salem, Lynn Classical, and Lynn English high schools. Early College programs are designed to provide access, exposure, and career pathways to higher education for first-generation and BIPOC students, thereby reducing the cost and time to degree for traditionally under-represented students. Over the last five years, Early College students matriculated to Salem State at an 11% greater rate than other pre-college programs, such as dual enrollment.

Salem State also piloted a "Promise Year" program with Lynn Public Schools. This special branch of Early College enables 25 students to remain in public schools for one year after completing the 12th grade with Chapter 70 funding allowing them to attend Salem State full-time in their

13th year of high school. These students are accepted to Salem State, defer admission for one year, with the hope that they will matriculate the following year and earn their SSU degree. Fifteen of the first 25 Promise Year students matriculated to Salem State in the first year of the program. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation featured Salem State's Early College Promise Year program with Lynn Public Schools in a video on their website. Incoming SSU Nursing major Rionah Nanteza tells her story: <https://usprogram.gatesfoundation.org/news-and-insights/articles/a-promising-path-to-college-and-career-in-ma>

Enrollment and retention initiatives from the School of Continuing and Professional Studies include the ReUp and Credit Recovery programs. Salem State partnered with ReUp Education to connect with and assist previous Salem State University students who have earned credits but not a degree yet to complete their studies at Salem State. The program provides coaching to help students transition back for a portion of the fees generated. Since Fall of 2021, this program brought back 50 students and to date 11 of them have graduated.

The strategy of "meeting students where they are" would not be complete without offering similar outreach to those students' parents and family members. To this end, in the summer of 2022, President Keenan initiated a deceptively simple but wonderfully effective practice for all new student orientations: the hosting of a "meet and greet" breakfast for the family and friends attending orientation with their students at which all members of the President's Executive Council and each of school/college deans would move about the room to engage directly with the attendees. The positive feedback from this increased outreach led to plans to invest in a new parent portal being implemented for next year.

The parent portal will encourage and facilitate communication with family/supporters from potential prospect to admissions, matriculation, and through graduation. Research from portal vendor indicates that engagement with this tool is highest among parents/supporters of students of color. Many parents and family members currently join the existing social media channels available to students, seeking to connect with other families and to remain engaged and support their students. Family members routinely contact the Student Navigation Center and Admissions with questions or for more information toward this end. The new portal will enable families access to see their student's bills, grades and/or any other information that their student approved via a FERPA waiver component within the system.

3b. Engagement as a predictor for persistence. In Spring and Fall 2022, four faculty formed a multi-disciplinary team and undertook 'the student persistence project,' responding to the retention and enrollment challenges of the moment. This large-scale analysis of Salem State's student persistence data created a student level data set comprised of 167 variables for 30,484 undergraduate students from the Fall 2010 to Fall 2021 semesters. Using this data, the Student Persistence Team (SPT) constructed a series of statistical models that do well in predicting fall to fall first year student persistence. Student engagement models (SEM) have significantly greater predictive power than their academic and demographic (A&D) counterparts. The statistical models find that a student's GPA at the end of the fall semester, the net cost of

attendance, and number of engagements with campus resources (Qnomy, Mapworks, Navigate) are statistically significant contributors of student persistence.

The initial outcomes of the Persistence Project are encouraging. To move this work forward, the university has invested resources in providing a more robust student data warehouse that includes complete demographic, academic, and student engagement variables, all would provide the institution with a better look into how students experience the university and offer insights as to why students persist. More sophisticated analysis using predictive models identify variables that drive student persistence and flag students who may be at risk of leaving the university. When analyzed in a timely manner, this information could be used to provide students with targeted interventions that could increase the likelihood that they persist. Without this data, decision makers must rely on incomplete information collected through surveys, anecdotal evidence, and existing siloed data sources. More nuanced research requires the construction of data piecemeal which is time consuming, labor intensive and, puts a strain on resources that are already spread thin.

To identify systemic barriers and/or inequities, an ad-hoc group examined courses with higher rates of D, F, or W grades across the institution. A taxonomy of one of four patterns describing the student experience emerged through this investigation. Based on this analysis, all academic departments have identified at least one course to research in their program where higher levels of D, F, or W rates were found to implement change. The Provost is shepherding this initiative forward through his work with academic department chairpersons.

3c-i. Outreach to Foster Engagement in Service of Persistence. The First-Year Experience (FYE) Office continues to provide and expand a wealth of services and supports, as well as targeted interventions to support student enrollment, retention, and completion success. For example, 15 First-to-know seminars engage new students and families before new student orientations are held with need to know, actionable information. Such timely outreach continues through the summer coordinated around key transitions, such as a how to read your bill/pay for college workshop after the first bill is sent out. These constant contact sessions teach students vital how to's, holding their hands to guide them through key processes including, filling out a FAFSA, Admissions follow through, academic accommodations, and signing up for student success coach. Guest speakers introduce new students to campus services and offices. Once enrolled, first-year students can access 250 workshops annually offered through the Student Success Series.

Furthermore, over 140 students attended one of two Student Success Summits, a mid-year intervention launched early in the 2023 spring semester. Designed to support first-year students on academic warning after their first semester, the summit was also open to any other student who wanted to re-focus for the spring. Eighty-eight percent of students agreed that the summit provided them valuable tips and motivation to be successful during the spring semester. The long-term impact of these interventions will take time to assess.

Since cohort-based student coaching has a positive impact on retention, FYE increased coaching resources and services. Through coordination with Advancement and the generous support of a donor contributing half a million dollars to the cause, the university is better able to expand best practices to meet student needs. Coaching program investments are targeted to serve students already connected with CBOs, further leveraging the transitional support the CBOs provide.

Funding from donors is also creating a First-Generation Success Center, staffed with a full-time success coach to provide individualized coaching and resources, such as a student handbook for first-generation students and support for the Tri-Alpha Honor Society for first-gen students. The STEP (Student Transition and Engagement Program) mentoring and coaching program also serving first-generation and Pell Grant-eligible students, as well as the Emerging Scholars program are expanding support for students who are transitioning into their sophomore year.

Helping new students locate a major is critical to their engagement and success. The Explorers program began as a pilot with the goal of creating a cohort-like experience among undeclared students. Academic programming is provided to increase engagement and advance discernment about a major, while peer-to-peer interactions foster a sense of belonging and accountability via a peer mentoring program. Success in the program has led to an 11% growth in students choosing to participate.

FYE also developed an intervention program to help undeclared students get into a major sooner. First-year students who have not yet selected a major by the time they earn 45 credits, will have an academic hold placed on their accounts to bring them in to meet with faculty. Since undeclared students struggle nationally, sometimes earning credits without necessarily progressing toward a degree, the goal of this initiative is to encourage earlier decision-making. Students contract with a faculty member to commit to a plan for a major. Based on these initiatives, Salem State has been named a First-Generation Scholars Institution by NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), providing access to webinars and professional development to support students and staff. Assistant Dean Mathew Chetnik was also recognized nationally with an Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition; one of just ten award recipients nationwide in 2023. This honor recognizes and rewards individuals on the nation's campuses who are involved in high-impact practices for first-year student success.

3c-ii. Navigate and Early Intervention. The university's student success case management system is EAB Navigate. Nearly 12,000 Navigate reports were filed in AY2022-23, with 871 unique students marked as 'at-risk.' Once a report is submitted, students are categorized by risk level. A differential support model is then used to connect students to resources to increase the likelihood of improved academic outcomes and to maximize the impact of limited resources. Students at 'low risk' receive emails about available resources and invitations to schedule an appointment with staff. Those students identified as 'moderate' or 'high risk' receive the initial 'low risk' level of outreach, as well as a campaign invite requiring an appointment with staff, which is followed by phone and text to non-respondents.

When faculty report a student as 'at-risk' and they include the student's expected letter grade in their progress report, that student will earn an average final grade that is between two-thirds to one full letter grade higher than the anticipated grade reported by the faculty. When students are connected to resources, the impact of intervening is substantial. An on-going challenge is encouraging more faculty of the value of utilizing Navigate to make reports. A source of some tension is balancing the need to respect students' privacy with the genuine interest of those filing reports to learn of the specific outcome.

The effective use of Navigate as a persistence-enhancing tool has become a unifying force across the campus, as it explicitly encourages participation from all and any employees – faculty, staff, administrators – who are in direct contact with students. Among 295 full-time and 419 part-time instructors, 217 faculty filed reports in AY2022-23. In addition to direct outreach and appeals to faculty and staff, one of the approaches to promote increased use of Navigate has been to weave the app into the fabric of the university in traditional and unexpected ways. For example, Navigate campaigns and services have been used for voter registration drives, career fair check-in, commencement photo appointments; while also being used for contacting at-risk students or registration and advising appointments. Using Navigate as a tool to support or communicate departmental, school, or college-specific events or outreach is another method to imbed it into every corner of the university, making it more familiar, accessible, and utilized by the campus community.

Furthermore, expanded capabilities that will transform advising practices are being added, to be delivered via Navigate. These changes will enable actionable data to be gathered for schedule and enrollment planning, thereby increasing student agency in academic planning. Furthermore, the advising functionality will be able to be used as a case management system, establishing faculty/professional advising partnerships across the university. A new online graduate advising module is expected, too.

3c-iii. Additional Efforts for Persistence. Responding to student feedback, the graduate school increased communications in AY2022-23, providing a monthly newsletter and weekly social media posts, largely focused on timely information for student progression. Systematic reminders are in place to text students who have not yet enrolled or to alert students who received a grade of 'incomplete' about the need to follow through.

Satisfaction with the student experience is one indicator of institutional services, programs, and resources. Student satisfaction is among the factors assessed consistently through two instruments: the senior survey, which is completed by graduating students; and the SSI survey is administered to all students periodically. In the 2023 senior survey, while 55.6% of graduating seniors were 'very satisfied' with their Salem State experience, the satisfaction total rose to 93.8% when considering those students who were either 'somewhat satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their experience at the institution. This outcome was a nearly six percent increase in one year, up from 88% among graduates in 2022. Among all current students, the 2023 SSI results were that 70% of undergraduates and 71% of graduate students rate their overall satisfaction

as ‘somewhat satisfied’ or higher, which also reflects increases in satisfaction since the last administration of the SSI in 2020, before the pandemic. Thus, these findings reflect both the student satisfaction gap to be addressed to enhance retention, and positive change over time among the most current respondents.

3d. Affordability and Access. In 2018 The Student Navigation Center (SNC), the university’s one-stop for the business of being a student (financial aid, registrar, student accounts services) the SNC initiated a new service model that assigned a caseload to each of the front-line coaching professionals from among all students. The goal of this model was to continue to provide access to the cross-trained professional service staff while also connecting students with a specific coach to work with them. Yet, this model proved to be unsustainable as the staff could not provide sufficient coaching for their caseload and service the high volume of student demand for generalists. The lessons from this effort, however, informed coaching practices for two initiatives that are positively impacting retention efforts: the Viking Completion and Junior Persistence grants.

Respective private donor contributions established both of these retention and completion grant programs. Although caseload management across all staff was not effective, funding from these donors was used to create two tiers of coaching professionals. One tier continues to focus on the primarily reactive, generalist activities of the one-stop center, while three seasoned professionals were promoted to manage these two new grant programs and provide cohort coaching support for grant recipients. In addition, the new tier serves as a backstop for the first level of staff to escalate more complex situations to the senior staff.

Viking Completion grants target funding to students in need who are within one year of graduating. Ensuring the long-term vitality of this program came in the form of a gift from SSU alumna Kim Gassett-Schiller in the amount of six million dollars (the largest donation ever to a Massachusetts state university at that time), five million of which has been allocate to Viking Completion awards. The average recipient receives \$1,867. More than 900 appointments were held with 427 students in the first three years of the program. Over \$150K has been awarded to date this year with grants still being awarded through August. More than \$200K was awarded in AY2021-22. The completion rate for students across all terms of the program (e.g., spring, fall, or summer) ranged from 94% to 100% of students graduate in each of seven terms. The demonstrated success of the Viking Completion grant program has served as model for a new state program with similar objectives.

Table 2: Viking Completion Grant Outcomes

Viking Completion Grant Outcomes							
Term	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
Graduation Rate	100%	96%	100%	100%	94%	100%	94%

Junior persistence grants support students with 54-89 credits to continue and persevere. This program is in its first year, an application of the same principles of the completion grants with another population. An anonymous donor contributed \$163,206.21 to fund this initiative, with an average grant of \$3,000. Students in this cohort of grant recipients earned more credits and they are being retained at a 3% higher rate than juniors overall in the first year of the program.

While 40% of Salem State students are Pell-eligible, these two grant programs support low-income students, as well as those who may not qualify for Pell grants but still have significant unmet need. Given the proof of concept being born out through these two programs, the potential exists to scale up these programs further to serve more seniors and juniors and/or to apply the same model to support sophomore and first-year student persistence.

The university is also expanding resources and support to meet the needs of the growing housing/food insecure population we serve. In 2023, for example, 151 students were awarded increased institutional aid, including MSCBA (Massachusetts State College Building Authority) housing grants. Over \$270K was awarded to serve these special populations with an average award of \$2369 per student. Additionally, more than \$138K of additional non-MSCBA grants were awarded to housing/food insecure students, with an average award of \$2889 per student. These additional supports for some of our most vulnerable students helps them close the gap to continue their education.

Similarly, the Viking OER & Textbook Affordability Initiative makes college more affordable for students by substantially reducing their educational expenses. In AY 2021-22, Salem State reported 416 sections with no-cost materials, with 7,377 students enrolled, for an average savings (defined by MA Department of Higher Education) of \$117 per student; saving students \$863,109 in total. Low-cost courses are defined as costing students less than \$50. During the same period, there were 363 low-cost sections, with 6,024 students enrolled, for an average savings (defined by MA Department of Higher Education) of \$77 per student; saving students \$463,848 in total.

Modifications to systems also contribute to student retention by reducing costs and increasing collections. For example, when students do not either waive or enroll in health insurance in a timely manner, their inaction can interrupt their ability to progress unexpectedly. The communication strategy for health insurance eligibility was enhanced to reduce the financial barrier of this requirement. Automating third party functionality in receiving payments by Student Accounts enabled school districts and other third parties to make tuition and program payments seamlessly. Financial Aid automations improved direct service to students and with the resulting time freed up by these efficiencies, staff are now able to spend more time on manual processes, resulting in Mass Grant and Mass Grant plus aid delivered to more students.

Flexibility and creativity in problem-solving can make the difference in students persevering. The Credit Recovery Program is one such innovative example. The program serves a dual purpose for the university: to increase the number of students enrolled and to enable students who experience a setback to get themselves back on track. Students who earned a W, D, or F

are invited to re-take that course (if offered) during the summer at a 50% discount. The opportunity is a win-win for students who can save money, stay on track, and replace a non-passing grade with a passing one.

In the first two summers of the Credit Recovery program, 150 students accepted the invitation to re-take a course at half-price, with 62% and 80% respectively earning passing grades. In the program's second year, student success coaches were also deployed to support these students. More importantly, 98% of these students were retained at a cost of \$36.6K in Summer 2021, while 89% were continued in the fall at a loss of \$45.3K in discounted revenue. Both retention rates were higher than among peers in their class and students overall.

One final initiative in service to achieving enrollment and retention goals deserves mention. In a recent decision taken by the Salem State University Board of Trustees, at the recommendation of the university leadership, academic fees for the impending AY2023-24 will not increase, a decision that the institution could confidently take given recent improvements in its financial position.

4. Strengthening the institution's financial position.

Strengthening the university's financial position is being accomplished through addressing enrollment trends, effectively managing resources, diversifying revenues through a renewed summer conference operation, transforming the campus through Project BOLD, and targeted fundraising and support. Meeting the university's goals for retention and graduation is the best way to strengthen the institution's financial position. Implementation of the new strategic plan will also contribute in several ways, which collectively will also solidify and bolster the university's reputation in the marketplace.

The Salem State FY24 provisional all funds budget was approved by the Board of Trustees in June of 2023. This budget includes Managed Revenues of \$179.3M, Managed Expenses of \$182.1M, and the use of reserves of \$2.9M. While there are always uncertainties accompanying the budget, the FY24 variables are substantial. The combination of different opinions about how to allocate the new Fair Share Amendment tax revenues, collective bargaining negotiations, and inflationary strains have created a fluid context for the state's budget process and associated union negotiations. As Governor Healey approved the budget only recently (Wednesday, August 9, 2023), we remain confident in our provisional budget approved in June. Without question, our financial position today is the strongest it has been during President Keenan's tenure as president.

The state's Fair Share program has the potential to change the amount and method of distributing funding for higher education. The Board of Higher Education's recent study of strategic financing advanced a framework and principles which provided initial guidance to the Commonwealth about how it should support higher education and our students. With as much as \$500M in new funding potentially available for public higher education in some models, the lion's share is expected to go toward student financial aid. Together with institutional and gift aid, this should assist with recruitment and retention, helping to stabilize enrollment. In

addition, however, the institution may see direct allocations or grant opportunities targeted toward equity, dual or early enrollment, mental health support, capital renewal, and other priorities mutually shared between the state and the university.

Salem State increased financial aid to undergraduates by 50%, providing approximately \$8M in aid in the past five years. In FY23, 62% of undergraduate students received institutional financial support with Viking grants of over \$2.6M awarded to students, in addition to the completion awards granted. Moreover, over 210 additional donor-provided scholarships are awarded to students each year. During the pandemic, the university benefitted from the Massachusetts State College Building Authority having restructured residence hall debt and from governmental Covid-19 relief funding based on revenue shortfalls. As students emerge from the pandemic, residential life (housing occupancy) and associated net dining revenues have rebounded, albeit more slowly than expected.

The university also to make progress on "Project BOLD," a multi-faceted, integrated initiative to relieve SSU of deferred maintenance needs of South Campus by generating additional investment funds from the sale of the South Campus property, build a new wet lab building attached to Meier Hall, and to completely renovate the currently vacant Horace Mann elementary school building. This project will improve the quality and student experience of science and health related programs as well as the attractiveness of the university, which we expect will boost enrollment. In the Spring of 2022, the Commonwealth announced the contribution of \$30M to help fund this transformational capital project, originally budgeted at \$84.3 million but now estimated at over \$100 million. In its recently released Capital Investment Plan (CIP), the Healy-Driscoll administration added another \$15 million to support Project BOLD. Most of the university's contributions to BOLD are in the form of accumulated cash and investment balances, along with proceeds from sale of South Campus, some debt, and continued philanthropy. Completion of this project in 2026 will also allow us to consolidate the campus footprint in a way that supports SSU's commitment to sustainability and strengthens the sense of community.

The Commonwealth's commitment to sustainability has continued with the Healey administration. Based on an SSU study from two years ago, DCAMM (Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance) identified Salem State as one of the leading institutions for major decarbonization funding and strategy development and implementation. The Healey administration's first Capital Investment Plan carries \$56.7 million for decarbonization infrastructure and projects at Salem State. Critical maintenance funding from the Commonwealth used to be allocated primarily on an emergency basis, but the Commonwealth has moved to a reliable funding model that comes in five-year tranches and requires a match by the university. For FY24 – FY28, for critical maintenance purposes, SSU will receive \$7.36 million from the state and contribute (at least) \$3.99 million. A renewed analysis of facility condition assessment is being undertaken under the auspices of DCAMM and will inform future projects to be funded by the critical maintenance funding. This long cycle of assessment, planning, and sustained funding is a much-welcomed resource to maintain infrastructure rather than waiting for an emergency to make repairs.

The priorities for the current comprehensive campaign, “Meet the Moment”™, are improving access to a Salem State education by keeping the costs of education attainable; prioritizing student success—academic, personal, and professional; unifying our campus through SSU BOLD by creating leading-edge facilities; and evolving to meet the needs of our community through unrestricted resources when a challenge or opportunity arises ([Areas of Support | Salem State University](#)). There has been a noticeable increase in private support since 2020. Following the success of the institution’s first comprehensive campaign, which generated \$26.5M through 2016, a goal of twice that amount seemed ambitious for this next campaign. Yet, it soon became evident during the campaign’s quiet phase that the university could set its fundraising sights even higher. Thus, the Meet the Moment™ campaign goal is \$75M, the largest philanthropic endeavor in the history of Massachusetts’ nine state universities. As of June 30, 2023 we have reached 54 percent of that goal, raising over \$40M which includes two gifts that broke records as the largest cash gifts to a Massachusetts state university: a \$10 million gift to the McKeown School of Education from Cummings Foundation in August 2022 to strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline; and a \$6 million gift from Kim Gassett-Schiller ’83, ’18H and Philip Schiller in 2021 to create Viking Completion Grants, which have helped 156 juniors and seniors overcome their final financial hurdle to earning their degree.

The pandemic shined a light on regional and generational inequities, particularly for our student demographic. Supporting social mobility, first responders and front-line public servants has become much more of a priority. Members of our community on- and off-campus know that the future of our region, from the opportunities we offer to the vitality of the workforce and its civic leaders, relies on a strong Salem State. The need to support students directly through financial assistance remains paramount, but with a greater sense of urgency and capacity, more donors are partnering with us to be the catalyst for systems change through transformational support. Some corporations and foundations that historically invested more often in private educational institutions are dedicating more time and resources to supporting public education. As Salem State turns out the next generation of teachers, nurses, social workers, entrepreneurs, as well as liberal arts graduates, this shift is increasingly benefiting the university and North Shore communities. Over 90% of SSU students live within 50 miles of campus and over 80% of university alums settle in the Commonwealth, joining the local tax revenue base.

For example, the private family foundation Accelerate the Future selected Salem State given the students we serve and the reputable School of Social Work to establish a scholarship for Master of Social Work (MSW) students aimed at increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of practitioners in community-based organizations throughout the Commonwealth. By covering 20 students’ entire cost of education, the scholarships significantly minimized debt and encouraged the future practitioners to work in the public system. In addition to expanding access and opportunity, the hypothesis that led to their project is that students of color with an MSW will be more likely to remain working with individuals who identify with historically marginalized populations and in underserved communities rather than moving into private practice, thereby multiplying the community impact of their investment in education.

To meet these developing opportunities and the consistent needs of students, our frontline fundraisers participated in 10-months of intensive professional development to equip them with a unified donor engagement protocol which enables them to raise major, principal, and planned gifts more efficiently and effectively. Partnering with donors and prospective donors by exploring their passions allows fundraisers to match the donors' focus to the university's priorities. These partnerships are both meaningful to the patron and impactful for the beneficiaries at the university. Advancement also invested nearly two years of the campaign's quiet phase collaborating with university faculty and colleagues that have high levels of student contact and are most acutely aware of the needs that students face across campus. For example, both the Viking Completion Grants and the Junior Persistence Grants evolved from the Enrollment Management team articulating common financial barriers they see students encounter when they are close to earning their degree. Through this open communication with Advancement, donors for both initiatives were cultivated and subsequent grants have since helped hundreds of students bridge that gap in only two years.

The record-setting \$10 million investment in the McKeown School of Education by the Cummings Foundation is another example of matching a donor's goals to university priorities to foster long-term community success. Through this investment, the McKeown School will greatly expand programs and initiatives aimed at diversifying the educator pipeline, a priority for the Commonwealth and the gateway communities that we serve. These programs include: expanding the cohort-based Educator-Scholars of Color initiative; creating a center for professional learning aimed at retaining teachers and school leaders, including support for developing anti-racist and equity-focused instructional and leadership practices; preparing educators to meet student needs beyond PreK-12 education, such as early childhood literacy; and supporting pathways to licensure for hundreds of emergency-licensed teachers in the region; among other efforts. This extraordinary collaboration between faculty and staff will continue to strategically build on our academic strengths and provide support where students need it most.

Consequently, Salem State is building long-term capacity to sustain and grow successful programs over time. Through Meet the Moment™, which was publicly announced in May 2023, the university is establishing a healthy balance of spendable and endowed funds, with \$18.5M in endowed gifts raised thus far in the campaign.

Meeting the moment is the signature goal not only for the comprehensive campaign, but also for how the university will strive and thrive. As each moment is met a new one emerges and becomes our next priority. Becoming is a process, not an end. As the university transforms into a closer, more contemporary community through Project Bold, it also expands its reach through breadth and depth of the new strategic plan goals. While we seek to become the Commonwealth's Civic Engagement University, we also embrace servingness with all of the hopes and benefits it portends for students. Thus, the work to engage our community, improve our outcomes, achieve our goals, and strengthen our university continues, becoming our next moment.

Appendix A: Continual Improvement in the McKeown School of Education

The [DESE 2021 report](#) acknowledged MSOE's use of data to drive continuous improvements and provided guidance on how to strengthen the school to continue to improve student outcomes, through a reorganization and clearly defined operational procedures to provide a more cohesive oversight of Education Preparation Programs (EPPs). Based on this data, each year a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) between the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and the McKeown School of Education has been implemented and reviewed. Another [MOU](#) between the College of Arts and Sciences and the MSOE is underway and will be implemented this coming year. These MOUs lay out the academic affairs' organizational charts so that faculty and staff know how to address both NECHE and DESE standards.

All students in the McKeown School licensure programs are assessed on [programmatic assessments](#) at each of the three stages in the program (after introductory coursework, during the methods and pre-practicum coursework, and while they are in practicum). Faculty and staff analyze each programmatic assessment to identify where coursework may need to be strengthened or changed. The [most recent data](#) from these assessments students can identify the content and skills of a lesson, and our introductory coursework does a thorough job of addressing this. The introductory courses, however, need to do a better job of teaching how to recognize and respond to students who have misconceptions and provide scaffolds to support multilingual students' academic and social language development.

The stage two programmatic assessment showed that candidates could again identify content and skills within the lesson they taught and analyze their instructional moves noting what worked well and what they would change. The area for improvement in the methods courses' centers on the analysis of student work. This area builds off the area of improvement seen in the introductory programmatic assessment since the analysis of student work would drive a teacher's next steps in lesson planning.

The programmatic assessment that occurs during practicum courses indicates the SSU coursework needs to do a better job at preparing students to share professional dialogue with parents and stakeholders. SSU is using this data to infuse professionalism across McKeown School courses and coupling this effort with encouraging students to attend the professionalism workshops that the School of Graduate Studies hosts throughout the year. Another area where data are continually collected are the pre-practicum and practicum field experiences. The feedback that candidates receive is reviewed in relation to each of DESE's seven essential element areas. The MSOE's most recent [program supervisor data](#) indicates that SSU faculty and staff need to work with supervisors to provide more actionable feedback to SSU students.

Students' learning outcomes improve when field supervisors provide more actionable feedback. McKeown School faculty and administrators identified specific supervisors that will need coaching in this area to better support SSU students. Some of the coaching on actionable feedback began by providing [examples of effective and ineffective feedback](#). SSU also needs to

do a better job of coaching the field supervisors to provide refinement areas directly related to DESE's seven essential elements. Again, SSU identified two supervisors to use their oral and written feedback as models for others to learn from. One other area for improvement in observations is to have field supervisors move away from scripting what the SSU candidate did in their observation and instead focus on the engagement and learning among the pre-K to grade 12 students. This cycle of assessment is currently undertaken as student performance, field supervisors' feedback to guide student performance, and faculty teaching are evaluated based on the MSCA contract.