

VISION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE:

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ADDENDUM AND SUMMARY – OCTOBER 2021



Salem State University (SSU) strives to be a welcoming campus that is authentically student-centered and fully student-ready. We continually seek ways that allow us to better meet our students' needs and help them be successful in reaching their professional and personal goals while also meeting the needs of society, both in our region and beyond. The Vision for a Sustainable Future is a planning document intended to support growth; to invest in student success; close opportunity gaps by 2030; prepare the university to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI); and achieve financial vitality.

The direction for this vision stemmed from the work and recommendations from the Sustainable Path Forward Task Force (SPFTF) and campus feedback on the SPFTF recommendations. While the original work and resulting document was intended to identify cost savings during a trying financial time, the vision and its direction continue to evolve as our financial position improved. Benefiting from the historic public funding received and the prudent management of last year's budget, we've had the opportunity to recalibrate. Using input obtained through challenging and meaningful community discussions, the best course of action for our students and campus is clear for the years ahead. We will continue to adapt to changing times, with continued engagement with all in the campus community, and through the development of the next strategic plan.

The Community Feedback Addendum and Summary of the Vision for a Sustainable Future incorporates valued campus input from students, faculty, staff, and alumni obtained through open campus meetings, the online survey and direct communications to university leadership, including the MSCA poll. The feedback received from the initial report provided university leadership with a better understanding of the student and employee experience. The input was thoughtfully reviewed, considered, and incorporated as appropriate into this addendum by the President's Executive Council to set a renewed path forward for the university. This evolution of the initial report allows us to better focus our efforts and resources on student success and growth so that SSU may thrive as a place of opportunity for generations to come.

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) review and the Vision Community Feedback Addendum, as well as the soon to be released New Undergraduate Experience (NUE) recommendations from the Department of Higher Education, are intended to provide guidance to the development of the next strategic plan, which will take place largely over the 2021-2022 academic year.

Academic Vision

SSU shall continue to expand its impact and influence as one of the Commonwealth's premier teaching universities, staying committed to its state mandate¹ to offer academic programs that integrate liberal arts and sciences programs with professional education and a special emphasis on teaching and lifelong learning; and promoting a campus life that fosters intellectual, social and ethical development. We must ensure that future generations of students will have the opportunity to build the knowledge, skills, abilities, and confidence they need to be resilient life-long learners, effective community leaders and valuable contributors to a regional economy that continues to become more globally prominent. We are committed to developing and supporting high-quality academic programs and innovative educational experiences that equip our graduates to thrive in an

¹ Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. About the Public Higher Education System. February 2021.
<https://www.mass.edu/system/aboutsystem.asp>

evolving workforce and to navigate confidently in an increasingly complex and global society. We must work together to rethink the academic enterprise, embracing a future that is rooted but not bound by our past.

Considerations in this area include:

- Coming to consensus on respective roles and responsibilities of shared governance and the constructive implementation of the same.
- Prioritizing academic initiatives that serve the economic, social and cultural interests and needs of the region.
- Providing all SSU students the benefits of a liberal arts education through the General Education curriculum.
- Focusing financial and human resources on efforts that give precedence to achieving, documenting, and assessing student learning outcomes, both in- and outside the classroom.
- Prioritizing strengths, partnerships and innovations that will make SSU the university of choice for students in our region and beyond.

Evolution of Academic Programs

SSU has evolved from its origins as a Normal School to the comprehensive regional university it is today. In that evolution, courses of study were adjusted to meet societal needs, demands and innovation with the common understanding that, regardless of a student's chosen area of specialization, a grounding in the liberal arts and sciences is vital. Over the most recent decade, the SSU student body has experienced several changes. Since 2010, the number of students enrolled has significantly declined; the diversity of students' lived experiences has grown; the need for students to work to cover college-related costs has intensified; and matters of identity and well-being have become increasingly complex. As often affirmed by Commissioner Carlos Santiago of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, higher education must move away from a model that presumes the existence of "college-ready students" and toward a framework that prioritizes a need for "student-ready colleges."

In addition, the educational and professional aspirations of SSU students have shifted over time, as evidenced by enrollment patterns in student-selected majors and data on degrees conferred. Through shared governance, we must work together to set a course that will align our instructional resources with student interests, while also continuing to offer our students a broad portfolio of liberal arts and science degree options and exposing them to concepts and ideas they have yet to experience. Considerations in this area include:

- Defining a shared understanding of, and agreement on, relevant variables and metrics to measure success that accurately represents the work of each academic department with updated definitions and formulas that capture the work of faculty in terms of full-time enrollments (FTEs) not simply in terms of programmatic costs.
- Identifying, with faculty, areas for interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity growth that meet student interests and needs.
- Exploring consortial offerings that will allow us to pursue innovative intra- and inter-institutional teaching and learning collaborations, further enriching options for our students.

Experiential and Engaged Learning

A hallmark of the SSU experience is learning by doing, not only in the classroom, laboratory or studio but also in the community. While experiential and engaged learning takes on different forms, this active-learning approach

addresses the needs and aspirations of students by affording them valuable opportunities to apply what they have learned; to synthesize their understanding of critical approaches and methodologies; to evaluate how they might address issues of concern to them and their communities; and, perhaps most importantly, to create meaning and value for themselves and others. We must work to ensure that all SSU students are able to avail themselves of these opportunities. Considerations in this area include:

- Establishing practices that emphasize the importance of such activities, with an eye toward ensuring that every student has at least one meaningful, transformational high engagement learning experience outside of the classroom.
- Improving the institution's infrastructure and financial support for internships through the collaboration between faculty, student success offices, such as career services, and institutional advancement.
- Adjusting current policies and practices in response to cultural, financial or structural barriers that might otherwise inhibit student participation.

Program Delivery

As we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, SSU must respond to changing student behaviors, attitudes and outlooks regarding course delivery formats (modalities) through which they prefer to learn, while being mindful that our students present a wide range of wants and needs. For example, we must consider how to reconcile the institution's long-standing reputation for delivering a human scale, "high touch" educational experience with evolving socio-cultural expectations regarding flexibility and customization in course delivery. Exploring, supporting and successfully adopting the full range of course delivery options will empower students and faculty as they negotiate a balance between the flexibility offered by online modalities and the connection that comes with in-person interactions. Considerations in this area include:

- Assessing our current state and capacities for program delivery, followed by establishing course delivery goals that are aspirational and reasonable (for both faculty and students).
- Finding a balance between faculty's and students' collective expertise, experience, confidence, and satisfaction with online learning and the future we envision.
- Investing in infrastructure and training required to attain program delivery goals, so students and faculty are set up for success in both physical and virtual learning spaces.
- Providing students greater flexibility as they choose to pursue their education in spaces, times and contexts that optimally integrate their studies into their other responsibilities.
- Providing faculty opportunities for professional development in new modalities to allow them flexibility and support in meeting the students where they are.
- Creating strategic course rotations within each department to:
 - Reduce the number of low-enrolled sections
 - Eliminate enrollment "bottlenecks," which can force a student to put off a course and extend time to graduation
 - Provide greater predictability for students and advisers as they collaborate on establishing a multi-year plan toward degree completion
- Improving stewardship of existing teaching spaces, making more efficient use of classrooms, seminar rooms, laboratories, and studios, especially as faculty increasingly adopt hybrid modalities, thereby opening the door for new class meeting patterns
- Establishing course enrollment caps that:
 - Serve the teaching practices necessary for students to meet published course objectives

- Better align with available resources for instruction
- Provide for a more equitable distribution of workload among faculty within and across departments, mindful of the varying contexts in which departments operate

Enrollment: Recruit, Retain, Recover, Stabilize, Grow

SSU has faced steep enrollment declines over the past few years, with retention challenges playing a major role in that decline. While recent census data provides potential opportunities for growth through the Gateway communities we serve, the future landscape for prospective students promises fewer college-going high school graduates in the northeast and fierce competition for SSU. The university must pursue strategies that both generate new enrollments and retain students, with retention being the top priority moving forward. Every member of the SSU community bears responsibility for retention. Considerations in this area include:

- Working with faculty to create a shared language to promote academic programs and student experiences, focusing on attributes that are unique and beneficial to the student.
- Increasing enrollment that specifically identifies and attracts students who have either stepped away from their studies or who might not have otherwise considered SSU.
- Creating distinctive, high-demand programs that offer flexible participation and opportunities for scaffolded credentialing.
- Creating greater interest around the university's academic programs through strategic recruitment and marketing initiatives with the goal of increasing the number of applications and encouraging accepted students to make SSU their first choice.
- Enhancing our efforts and continuing to implement our research-backed recruitment with targeted in- and out-of-state application generation techniques, broadened marketing strategies, and strategic use of institutional financial aid.
- Advancing our commitment to preparing students to engage successfully in global contexts by adopting processes and policies that serve the interests and needs of international students coming to Salem State and Salem State students seeking to study abroad.
- Becoming a student-ready institution that is prepared to offer support and resources that enable students to easily navigate their educational journey, have positive and meaningful experiences, and ultimately, graduate.
- Building support structures that provide guidance and resources during the pivotal moments in a student's journey.
- Instituting a university-wide service philosophy in support of our students and colleagues.
- Improving the transfer experience by working with faculty to address concerns with the acceptance of transfer credits and credit for prior learning.
- Ensuring transparent, seamless and user-friendly financial aid processes, including outreach on completing the FAFSA and building awareness on grant and scholarship opportunities to increase student access to financial support.

Student Success

Our campus community must embrace a universal design that lifts all students on our campus and better prepares us to truly be a "student-ready" university, building a cohesive student success model that attracts

students and improves retention. We must be more flexible and meet our students where they are, providing them the supports they need to succeed. A student's sense of belonging begins during the recruitment process and continues over their four years at SSU. Our efforts on student success will be aided by collaborations that are both internal and external to the university. Considerations in this area include:

- Replacing student-deficit narratives and creating policies, procedures and approaches that lead to student success and improve the student experience.
- Taking advantage of the data and technologies leveraged throughout the pandemic to improve student outcomes moving forward.
- Creating an environment where students feel welcomed, supported and included on our campus.
- Enhancing the student experience through programming, including but not limited to, civic engagement, student life, academic support programs, and residence life.
- Providing professional development and training to faculty and staff to empower all SSU employees to assist in the retention of students.

Viking Success Collaborative

Our campus culture must center around student success. The Viking Success Collaborative (VSC) was established to embrace the institutional flexibility and collaboration that is required to ensure students feel academically welcome and supported throughout their entire journey to graduation. The VSC will partner with the newly formed Division for Student Success to strategically engage the campus in projects recognizing existing services, reflecting on best practices, and encouraging programmatic cohesiveness that will serve the broadest cross-section of our student population. Most importantly, the VSC was designed as an inclusive model encouraging all members of the community to reflect on two critical questions: What are the characteristics of failing students; and what can I do to improve outcomes for students who have not been experiencing academic success? Membership in the VSC is not static. Flexible groups will be engaged throughout the year to gather information and amplify practices that will benefit from expansion. All VSC projects will be predicated on the concept that student support should be clearly defined, systemic and consistent from the start of a student's SSU experience through degree completion. To this end, the VSC will engage leadership, faculty and staff from across the university to remove barriers that traditionally impede student-success centered work.

Considerations in this area include:

- Structuring mentoring and advising services to improve the feeling of community and minimize the number of students falling through the mentoring/advising safety net.
- Critically evaluating student failure (including by gender and race) to identify and remediate barriers to success.
- Enhancing student support functions to eliminate confusion around the business of being a student and minimize duplication of services and invisible barriers that may impact our students.
- Exploring the necessary technology and automation to streamline operations for students and staff so that we can proactively and reactively address the needs of students in an efficient and meaningful way.
- Defining shared goals across campus that will benefit and support our students during their time at SSU.
- Explore coaching/mentoring programs to ensure that all students make a connection with an SSU faculty and/or staff member.

Preparation for Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Designation

Grounded in our commitment to the current student population and the demographic trends of our region, SSU will actively begin the process and preparation to become an HSI. Developing our university into an HSI must be centered around the voices and experiences of our existing Hispanic and Latinx faculty, staff, and, most importantly, students along with their families and communities. Considerations in this area include:

- Forming a cross-campus collaboration of faculty, staff, students, and community partners to determine the best path forward to be HSI-Ready.
- Developing the requisite structures and policies based on best practices that prepare SSU to better serve, recruit and retain Hispanic and Latinx students, faculty and staff, including translation services to make programs and information accessible without relying on Spanish-speaking employees who have other responsibilities.
- Exploring collaborations with our community college partners, many of which already hold the HSI designation, to learn from and expand upon what students are already experiencing prior to enrolling at SSU.
- Provide cost effective professional development opportunities to faculty and staff who wish to take Spanish to support our bilingual students.

Erase Opportunity Gaps by 2030

SSU will seek to erase opportunity gaps for our students by 2030 by uniting our campus community and adjusting campus processes and technology to improve the experience and supports for our Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) student population. The focus is on removing systemic barriers and improving our campus culture and systems. Originally intended to be supported through our participation in EAB's Moon Shot for Equity, we determined that we have existing expertise and resources on our campus to accomplish this work. We will achieve the elimination of opportunity gaps by bringing our expertise and resources together to create a holistic model that puts student success at the core and addresses leadership; access and enrollment; academic policy and practice; and student support and belongingness. Considerations in this area include:

- Aligning efforts with the Vikings Success Collaborative to continue improving the campus climate
- Implementing policies and practices to
 - Eliminate systemic racism and non-inclusionary policies and practices on our campus
 - Build confidence and sense of belonging of BIPOC students
 - Improve recruitment and retention of BIPOC students
 - Improve transfer pathways and degree completion programs
 - Provide proactive advising
- Provide professional development and training to faculty and staff related to implicit bias and other racial related adversities that may negatively impact BIPOC students.

Administrative Efficiencies

The university needs to continuously evaluate how we operate the administrative functions of the university in addition to how we maintain, secure and prepare spaces and resources. Through a continuous improvement approach, our workforce must strive to be effective, efficient, professional, collaborative, cordial, and flexible.

Employees and units must be accountable for the attainment of goals and objectives aligned with the priorities of an equitable and welcoming, student-ready university.

Human Resources

The university needs to continue to align its workforce with strategies that focus on meeting the needs and interests of our students and the region we serve and correct the structural deficit that has impacted the campus for many years. Considerations in this area include:

- Repairing trust and improving campus morale throughout the SSU community.
- Ensuring all employees have the same sense of belonging as our students where they feel welcomed, supported and included on our campus.
- Aligning workforce with programmatic and student needs, university priorities and overall goals.
- Setting clear, attainable and accountable goals for the workforce.
- Taking advantage of technology and other resources to streamline processes and improve workflow.
- Providing professional development and training opportunities to ensure employees grow their skills to meet changing needs.
- Utilizing our financial resources efficiently and effectively, ensuring that there are sufficient personnel to carry out the work.
- Improving efforts to recruit and retain BIPOC faculty, staff and administrators.

Work Environment

The university has learned a great deal over the past year and a half with the majority of our employees working from home. Moving forward, certain functions and departments will remain predominantly remote, allowing for a consolidation and optimization of campus space. Changes in work arrangements will be established jointly with administration, faculty, staff, and students and in accordance with collective bargaining agreements; bearing in mind how to best serve students through this paradigm shift. Considerations in this area include:

- Developing a remote/hybrid work policy in accordance to collective bargaining agreements that considers:
 - Response time from and access to offices and departments which are permanently remote
 - Costs and savings to employees working remotely
 - Defining what a hybrid work model means at SSU
 - Intentional strategies and tactics to promote engagement appropriate to building connections between remote and on-campus employees
- Ensuring access to programming and support for both on campus and remote employees.

Campus Infrastructure

The university needs a campus infrastructure that provides the quality academic environments our students need to succeed and the university needs to compete with other institutions. There are areas where we can reduce expenses related to campus infrastructure, especially in light of remote/hybrid work opportunities. However, strategic investments must be made within the constraints of the Commonwealth's processes for capital investment in public higher education with the goal of improving our facilities while minimizing the university's contribution wherever possible. Considerations in this area include:

- Optimizing university space to minimize leasing, utility and maintenance costs.

- Implementing opportunities for shared spaces, rotating work schedules, and remote work to reduce the need for office space throughout campus.
- Considering the need for spaces that allow for sensitive discussions with students and colleagues, particularly around advising and student concerns.
- Exploring options to renegotiate leases or sublease spaces we no longer need.
- Pursuing SSU BOLD through the next round of DCAMM's Major Capital Request Process due December 23, 2021.
- Continuing to pursue sustainable projects and improvements to university facilities and practices.
- Evaluating and streamlining technology software and resources to ensure efficient continued operations of university functions with the necessary staff supports of such resources.
- Creating a more streamlined structure for booking internal and external events.

Marketing and Communications

As the university's brand strategists and chief storytellers, marketing and communications (MC) increases awareness of SSU through thoughtful and proactive branding, positioning and outreach tactics to highlight the transformational aspects of a Salem State education. As suggested by many over the years, SSU needs to devote more resources to promoting the wonderful opportunities available on our campus. As a regional institution, most people in Essex County have some sort of connection to the university. We must make sure they think positively of us—if they don't already. In addition, with the potential of new program modalities to promote, the time is now to introduce new audiences to the Salem State experience. Considerations in this area include:

- Utilizing effective digital and social media methods to best position the university within our market.
- Continuing to work with campus constituencies to place stories in local, regional and national publications and platforms.
- Engaging the SSU community to share good news and positive stories about SSU within their circles and on social media.
- Making data-driven decisions through marketability studies prior to a new program being developed.
- Launching campaigns based on focus groups consisting of students, faculty, staff, and market testing to build brand awareness.
- Considering the addition of "SSU as the Civic Engagement Public University" as part of our branding campaigns.

Fundraising

Our ambitious fundraising goal for the next campaign was determined through an intensive external feasibility study funded by the Salem State University Foundation. The study concluded that we have extraordinary potential for private philanthropic support. Considerations in this area include:

- Re-staffing institutional advancement to reach more donors and maximize the giving potential from thousands of currently unmanaged, major gift prospects—individuals or organizations identified to have a potential to donate \$50,000 or more.
- Engaging the entire Salem State community in the fundraising effort by highlighting student, faculty, staff, donor, and alumni success stories; further illustrating the positive benefits of an SSU education and the import role philanthropy plays in the university's long-term financial vitality.
- Investing in opportunities which link donors' interests with university needs and priorities.
- Building on the reputation of and pride in the university.

Advocacy

SSU has a long history of advocacy for our students and public higher education. This work occurs from many facets of our campus including the Board of Trustees, Council of State University Presidents, university leadership, Center for Civic Engagement, students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Together we have had much success, but we must work together as a campus community to advocate for the resources our students need to succeed. Considerations in this area include:

- Defining a set of shared advocacy items that we can collectively support across campus and the state university system.
- Coming together as a campus on shared advocacy items through events like the Teach-In, joint communications, and meetings with elected officials.

Financial Impacts

To be sustainable financially, revenues must equal or exceed expenses, fixing the structural budget imbalance and providing reasonable financial reserves. In addition to historic federal relief and stable state operational support, efforts taken last year provide us with more time to best offset the significant deficits that were originally anticipated for the near future. We must use this time to work to grow revenues through enrollment, retention, housing, dining, and conferences while reducing expenses through a variety of methods.

Considerations in this area include:

- Maximizing enrollment, retention and related revenue through university-wide efforts.
- Ensuring that our public higher education is affordable to students, using a combination of pricing, financial aid strategies and funding.
- Pursuing additional funds through advocacy, grants, fundraising, and conference services to offset expenses.
- Continuing to identify and implement cost saving opportunities.
- Working collaboratively and effectively to avoid involuntary faculty and staff reductions.