



**FITCHBURG STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

# NECHE Self-Study

## Draft Narrative

October 4, 2021

## Standard One: Mission and Purpose

### Description

The current mission statement was approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2009, and updated to reflect university status in fall 2010:

Fitchburg State University is committed to excellence in teaching and learning and blends liberal arts and sciences and professional programs within a small college environment. Our comprehensive public university prepares students to lead, serve, and succeed by fostering lifelong learning and civic and global responsibility. A Fitchburg State education extends beyond our classrooms to include residential, professional, and co-curricular opportunities. As a community resource, we provide leadership and support for the economic, environmental, social, and cultural needs of North Central Massachusetts and the Commonwealth.

The mission statement informs the Fitchburg State vision and core values. The FSU mission also aligns with the DHE mission statement.

### Appraisal

The mission statement and vision statement are both available online and in printed publications. The university does not have an official established timeline for review of the mission statement. Historically, the mission statement is typically reviewed in evaluating the 5-year strategic plan but a formal cycle should be incorporated where it is the main focus. It was decided not to have an official review of the mission statement in the 2020-2025 planning process. However, the mission was at the core of the work of the strategic plan.

In the widely distributed February 2021 NECHE Accreditation Survey, the majority of the FSU community are aware of the mission, vision, and values. Familiarity with the university's mission statement was high (Staff and Administrators were 99% Familiar or Somewhat Familiar N=97; Faculty & Librarians 96% Familiar or Somewhat Familiar N=102; and Students 81% Familiar or Somewhat Familiar N=401). Similarly, most respondents Strongly Agree or Agree the university is fulfilling its mission (Staff and Administrators 95%; Faculty & Librarians 86%; and Students 85%). The mission statement remains appropriate and relevant with a large percentage of respondents as well (Staff and Administrators 91%; Faculty & Librarians 88%; and Students 89%). Although the mission statement has not recently gone through a review process, it still resonates with the campus community.

The vision statement calls for the university to create a culture of diversity. Significant efforts have been made to reflect the cultural diversity of the university's student body to surrounding regional demographic changes. According to the 2020 Institutional Factbook, 69% (down from 82% in 2010) of the day undergraduate student population is white, 26.3% are minoritized (up from 8.4% in 2010) of which 12.5% (up from 5.7% in 2010) are Hispanic and 10.5% are Black. The percentage of Hispanic and Black students has changed appreciably since the last NEASC visit. 85% of the faculty population is white (down from 93% in 2010).

There is a long history of engagement between the community and the university, giving us a solid base to deepen relationships and add new ones in the furtherance of the region's

community and economic development. Since its establishment in 2008, the Douglas and Isabelle Crocker Center for Civic Engagement has enhanced collaboration between FSU and the community by engaging students through civic-learning and community-based research and internships. In September 2015, the Center's efforts were expanded to include activities focused on community investment and establishing meaningful partnerships between the university and local citizens and organizations.

A coalition of agencies is working to revitalize a key section of Fitchburg with the ReImagine North of Main project, and FSU is playing a key role. Through the Crocker Center, students and faculty are helping reinvigorate the diverse and densely populated neighborhoods north of Main Street. Leaders of the ReImagine group include representatives from City Hall, the university, the Fitchburg Public Schools, NewVue Communities and the Montachusett Opportunity Council. They share a dedication to improving the quality of life in the neighborhood, focusing on public safety, economic development and entrepreneurship, education, housing, health and community engagement. The end result of the effort will be a reimagined North of Main neighborhood where people want to live, work, play and invest.

### **Projection**

University leadership, led by the AVP Institutional Research and Planning, will create a review cycle for the Mission, Vision, and Core Values, which will pass through governance by May 2022 and include a review of the Mission Statement no later than May 2024, in advance of the next Strategic Plan.

## **Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation**

Fitchburg State University is continuously engaged in planning and evaluation efforts and places a high emphasis on improving institutional effectiveness through data-informed decision-making. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP), created in 2015 and led by the Assistant Vice President of IRP (AVIRP), centralizes and provides oversight to the assessment, institutional research and strategic planning activities of the university.

### **Planning**

#### **Description**

The university followed the initiatives of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and recently created and enacted the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. The current strategic plan was written with a commitment to academic excellence and education justice, and towards creating a student-ready university. Overall, these strategic plans provide a guide for decision-making and a structure to evaluate the effectiveness of the university's performance.

The process for the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan was launched at a campus-wide Development Day on September 3, 2019 during which the Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education (DHE) highlighted the importance of addressing the DHE's Equity Agenda as part of Fitchburg State's plan and the President stressed his administration's commitment to an open, inclusive process. The planning process, led by the AVPIRP and an external consultant with experience in public university planning, featured five theme committees and a steering committee, involving 92 members of the campus community. The process included the development of numerous planning assumptions that reflected the external factors impacting both the institution and higher education in general, both presently and in the future. Demonstrating its commitment to the process, the university adhered to the timeline during the pandemic and created a meaningful and comprehensive strategic plan that was approved by the Board of Higher Education in December of 2020. Upon the approval of the plan, the university launched a new webpage, outlining and celebrating the new plan.

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan has six achievable goals:

- Forge innovative paths to knowledge acquisition, career readiness, social mobility, and lifelong learning;
- Become a model student-ready university and narrow the achievement gap;
- Be an engine of social, economic, civic, and cultural development in our city and region;
- Establish inclusive excellence, innovation, and environmental stewardship as signature strengths;
- Assert our distinctive value proposition and institutional learning outcomes boldly and widely and;
- Steward physical and financial resources responsibly and navigate a path to long-term organizational sustainability.

The Division of Academic Affairs developed an Academic Strategic Plan in alignment with the 2010-2015 Strategic Plan and annually tracked its progress. Due to the academic-centered nature of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, the Division of Academic Affairs utilized the Strategic Plan itself as their strategic planning document. The plan was tracked annually and a summary document was created. All divisions of the University contributed to a comprehensive summary document that was then utilized during the 2020-2025 strategic planning process.

With the approval of the new 2020-25 strategic plan, the development of new comprehensive divisional plans began in Spring 2021. Both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs used their annual reporting system to aggregate and synthesize strategic initiatives planned by the various units within their divisions, resulting in a collaborative and engaged divisional planning process.

Within the Division of Academic Affairs, units complete an assessment of their prior year Action Plan, which clearly connects annual objectives to the strategic plan. For AY20 and AY21, units were also asked to report and reflect on pandemic-related impacts and lessons learned. The Vice President for Academic Affairs uses the annual reporting process to assess unit effectiveness, demonstrate progress toward the strategic plan, set priorities and allocate resources. The Division is currently developing a long-term academic plan. Within the Division of Student Affairs annual goals are focused on both student learning and effectiveness, and are informed by the university mission, strategic plan, institution-wide learning priorities, and division mission as well as departmental missions and priorities. Units also track key performance indicators over time to monitor trends and changes in effectiveness. The Vice President for Student Affairs uses the annual reporting process to assess unit effectiveness, demonstrate progress toward institutional goals, set priorities, allocate resources, and tell the story of unit impact on the student experience. The Division of Student Affairs will be developing a 5-year plan now that the new campus strategic plan is complete.

The university's budget planning process spans twelve months and includes prioritization based upon the current strategic plan. Since FY17, requests for funding beyond the base budget are submitted via the Petition for Strategic Funding Request Form, which maps the funds to the strategic plan. Internal factors, such as anticipated enrollments, as well as external factors, such as state appropriations, are also key elements of the budget planning process, which culminates in a proposal that incorporates multi-year projections. The Board of Trustees verifies that resource allocations are consistent with the mission and strategic plan and that they contribute to the university's long-term financial stability and advance its strategic viability.

The Information Technology Strategic Plan, created in 2009 and updated in 2015, is updated annually and guides project priorities and requests for strategic funding. A new strategic plan will be created in 2022 based upon the university's 2020-2025 strategic plan.

In addition to their 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, the Library produces annual reports, all of which are available on their webpage.

The Office of Admissions produces annual recruitment plans that guide the office's priorities and activities and establish new student enrollment goals for the following year.

The University Foundation board meets four times per year to review fundraising efforts, set policies and approve their budget.

### **Appraisal**

The results of institutional planning are consistently monitored and evaluated in order to measure success of implementation. The university's record of creating and implementing strategic plans on a five-year cycle powerfully illustrates its commitment to long-range planning that prompts actions across the university spectrum. Furthermore, strategic planning has evolved over the years, with the 2010-15 and 2015-20 plans clearly identifying institutional priorities and shared core values that the community believes are the university's foundation.

There is evidence that the majority of faculty and staff are aware of the strategic plan and its role in driving decision-making and resource allocation. In a survey conducted in January of 2021, 82% of faculty and staff respondents reported being familiar or somewhat familiar with the 2020-2025 Strategic plan, versus 74% with the 2015-2020 strategic plan. Given that the 2020-2025 plan was approved by the BHE in December of 2020 and that the campus was operating remotely for the academic year, this level of familiarity with the new plan is positive. Also, the university distributed a brochure to all employees in February of 2021 in order to increase awareness. In the same survey, 69% of faculty/staff respondents either strongly agree or agree that university's strategic plan drives decision making at the campus-wide level and 58% either agree or strongly agree that the university's strategic plan drives decision making at the department level. Finally, 56% of faculty and staff respondents felt that resource allocation either adequately or very well aligned with the strategic plan. It is possible that awareness is related to faculty/staff involvement with the budgeting and planning processes, where strong links to the strategic plan are drawn, as well as to Town Hall meetings, which provide opportunity for strategic plan updates to the campus. The robust set of metrics associated with the 2020-2025 plan will serve as a means to annually update the campus community on the plan's status. Additionally, the stronger connection of the plan to annual reporting that many departments are making will further strengthen faculty and staff awareness moving forward. For example, the June 2021 Academic Affairs Divisional Meeting focused on the Academic Plan's development, providing an opportunity for greater awareness and participation.

In terms of student awareness of the strategic plan, only 41% of respondents reported being familiar or somewhat familiar with the 2020-2025 strategic plan, versus 34% for the 2015-2020 plan. As with faculty/staff, there exists a greater awareness of the new plan versus the old plan, which is positive, but a significant gap in student awareness overall exists. To that end, the University launched a student-designed infographic in the fall of 2021 to increase student awareness of and engagement with the plan.

The creation of the OIRP has facilitated the assessment of our strategic planning efforts. The university tracked 300 completed action items related to the 2015-2020 strategic plan, with 100% of all strategic initiatives being addressed. The 2020-2025 strategic plan contains a comprehensive set of metrics which represents a new level of transparency and accountability for the university. Additionally, the Associate Vice President of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, in conjunction with the Vice President of Student Affairs and the Chief

Information Officer are currently evaluating planning and assessment tools that will allow for holistic university-wide planning and assessment reporting and tracking.

At the divisional level, long term planning, as evidenced by planning documents, is inconsistent. The lack of plans in some areas makes it difficult for the campus community to be informed of the strategic goals within these divisions and how their priorities are aligned with the rest of the campus. For example, the lack of a long-term financial plan makes it difficult for the campus to be fully aware of spending priorities and the rational underpinning of the budget process and spending decisions. The development of the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan provides an opportunity for all divisions to create long-term strategic plans that will clarify priorities, inform resource allocation and provide greater transparency to the campus community.

Annual planning is prevalent across the university and over time has increasingly been tied to the strategic plan. In Spring 2021, the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs utilized the annual reporting process as the basis for creating longer-term divisional strategic plans. Both Technology and Finance and Administration plan to develop strategic plans that support the goals outlined by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. In general, all divisions possess annual plans that guide their priorities and resource allocation.

The university, supported by OIRP, closely monitors registration and enrollment trend data and utilizes that data in short and long-term budget and resource planning. The university has successfully contracted with external consultants (EAB and Academic Partners) in order to reach short and long-term enrollment goals and mitigate expected demographic (and more recently pandemic) related challenges. Most recently, the OIRP administered two surveys in order to measure effectiveness in responding to the pandemic as well as to provide useful information for the university's continued pandemic response planning.

## **Evaluation**

### **Description**

Fitchburg State regularly assesses student learning in accordance with its Program Review Guidelines and associated annual assessment reporting, which together represent a comprehensive seven-year cycle of continuous review and improvement. The Program Review Guidelines, last updated through governance in 2018, is the University's standardized process for academic program review and evaluation that guides departments through the entire self-study process, including learning outcome assessment, data review, external evaluation, and the development of a 5-year action plan. Accredited programs follow the accreditation cycle and process of their accrediting agencies. Effective AY17, the E Series template was incorporated into the academic annual assessment report in an effort to support program review, with the intent to be annually collecting substantive information that would feed into, and ease the creation of, the self-study. The Office of Institutional Research provides support, standardized data sets and oversees the review cycle. The Director of Assessment, a full-time professional position charged with maintaining a culture of assessment, supports and guides departments throughout the seven-year cycle.

The Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs and Students Affairs utilize their comprehensive systems of annual reporting to evaluate their effectiveness, set priorities and allocate resources. All Vice Presidents submit annual reports to the President in June. The President then creates an annual report that is presented to the Board of Trustees in September.

The university is evaluated annually by the DHE via the Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS), which is a public-facing dashboard consisting of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) deemed priorities for state universities. These KPIs include retention and graduation rates, freshmen credit accumulation, completion of gateway courses, undergraduate and graduate enrollments, aggregated as well as seen through the lens of the DHE's Equity Agenda. Many of these measures are included in the comprehensive set of 2020-2025 strategic plan metrics, which serve to elevate the level of evaluation and transparency of the plan.

The DHE contracted with the Parthenon Group in FY21 to conduct a stress test for the State University System. This analysis, which reviewed both historical and projected enrollment and financial data, was designed to measure each university's financial viability in the coming years. Fitchburg State was deemed to be on solid footing and in the top tier amongst peer institutions.

The university's and university affiliates' financial statements are audited annually by an external accounting firm and are reviewed by institutional leadership, the Board of Trustees and the State Comptroller's Office. The University also undergoes reviews and audits by the Quality Assurance Bureau, the State Auditor's Office, and the Board of Higher Education.

The university's Information Security Policy and the Information Technology Disaster Recovery Plan have been approved through legal review and the state, and are affirmed and approved as part of our state, PCI and financial audits.

The Office of Institutional Research annually provides statistics about student retention, graduation rates and other student success data. Students and faculty are often surveyed about their experiences and that information is disseminated to relevant stakeholders. A number of national instruments (National Survey of Student Engagement, Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) College Student Inventory, RNL Mid-Year Student Assessment, RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey) are administered to assess student body engagement and satisfaction. Several data analytic and integration platforms (EAB Navigate, EAB Academic Performance Solutions, and EAB Edify) are utilized to support planning and measure institutional effectiveness. Both undergraduate and graduate students are surveyed upon graduation, and undergraduate alumni are surveyed at one, three and five years post-graduation. Surveys cover such areas as advising, diversity and inclusivity, online learning, adult student experiences, and campus climate, and data are disaggregated by demographic information such as race and ethnicity in support of the equity agenda.

## **Appraisal**

The university utilizes the strategic and annual planning processes to track and evaluate its operational and administrative effectiveness. The aggregation of unit reports into divisional reports and then one institutional report represents a holistic system of evaluation.



Academic departments, through departmental assessment and curriculum committees, recognize the connection between teaching and learning strategies and the evaluation of student outcomes. The program review process includes an annual assessment report, a self-study, an external evaluator, and a five-year action plan. Those academic programs with external accreditation benefit from the rigorous self-study process dictated by their professional association. All components of the program review process are reviewed by the Provost, appropriate dean(s), and the director of assessment and together represent a comprehensive system of evaluation and continuous improvement.

With the creation of the OIRP, the reporting of academic assessment activities has become centralized and more systematic. For the 2020-2021 academic year, 100% of academic departments submitted an annual assessment report, including new sections devoted to strategic planning. Along with non-academic unit annual reports, these reports allow the VPs of Academic Affairs and Students Affairs to assess their divisions' operational effectiveness. The implementation of a university-wide planning and assessment tool will allow for a more holistic and systematic approach to the reporting and evaluation of non-academic activities.

The Office of Institutional Research serves as an integral part of Fitchburg State University. It readily creates and distributes surveys, reviews the data, and quickly returns results to interested parties. The office annually compiles data on student retention and graduation rates, and these studies provide demonstrable evidence of institutional effectiveness. Relevant stakeholders review detailed data by sub-populations to measure progress toward the goals of the strategic plan and the DHE Equity Agenda. The administration of numerous national and institutional surveys, as well as various analytics platforms, provides data related to institutional effectiveness and student experiences, including feedback from former students. Over the past five years, the university has become increasingly data-informed and data-savvy, with the result being an increased demand for data. The recent purchase of EAB's Edify, a data integration and visualization platform, will facilitate data collection and sharing across campus.

Ten years of "clean" financial audits, coupled with the recent FY21 DHE "Stress Test," indicate that the systems of checks and balances serve to keep the university on solid financial footing.

### **Projection**

For divisions without a long-term strategic plan, responsible Vice-Presidents will continue to build from the annual planning efforts to develop long-term plans. Under the leadership of divisional vice-presidents, current long-term plans will be updated to align with the strategic planning cycle. All long-term plans will be reviewed annually, revised as needed and published.

## Standard Three: Organization and Governance

### Governing Board

#### Description

Fitchburg State University is one of six comprehensive State Universities in the Massachusetts higher education system; like its sister institutions, the University's governance procedures and organizational structure are largely mandated by either state law or collective bargaining agreements. The official governing body is the Board of Higher Education (BHE), which is staffed by the state's Department of Higher Education (DHE), led by the Commissioner of Higher Education. The composition and responsibilities of the BHE are enumerated on their website. The BHE is the statutorily created agency in Massachusetts responsible for defining the mission of and coordinating the Commonwealth's system of public higher education and its institutions.

At the local level, Fitchburg State is overseen by eleven voting members of a Board of Trustees. Massachusetts law delineates the roles of the Board of Trustees and the chief operating officers of the state universities. Nine are appointed by the governor and serve terms up to five years; these appointments are renewable one time. A student trustee, elected by the student body, serves a one-year term, and the Alumni Association elects an alumni trustee who serves a five-year term. No trustee may serve more than two consecutive terms. The Board elects its chairperson from among its members.

The duties and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees are defined in the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Chapter 15A, Section 22. This law states that FSU trustees are charged with the fiduciary management of the institution, including determination of fees, establishment of personnel management policy, staff services, and the general business of the institution. They elect the University President with the approval of the Board of Higher Education, adopt an annual plan of financial operation, award degrees in approved fields, and develop the university's mission statement consistent with the mission of the Commonwealth's system of public higher education. The trustees conduct an annual evaluation of the President based on goals they have jointly established with him. This review is forwarded to the BHE, which is the hiring authority for all chief executive officers in the state university system.

The Board of Trustees, operating under Bylaws revised in October 2000, meets at least four times annually; the chairperson, the University president, and five trustees may, through petition, call special meetings. The meetings and minutes are public, and executive sessions are limited to purposes specified in the by-laws. There are five standing Trustee committees: Academic Affairs, Student Life, Administration and Finance, Personnel, and the Executive Cabinet. Trustees complete an annual self-assessment evaluation that evaluates the board's understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and the university's mission and financial health.

Newly appointed board of trustee members are welcomed by FSU's President's office and provided with orientation materials that include general information on the university including our strategic plan, trustee responsibilities, financial items, academics, and human resources.

Beginning in fall 2020, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) established a training curriculum for all public higher education trustees as directed through a bill signed into law by Governor Baker. Topics covered include fraud prevention, open meeting law, state finance, conflict of interest, public records law, procurement, and fiduciary responsibility. The BHE hosts an annual trustee conference to continue to provide professional development.

Trustees are appointed by the state Public Education Nominating Council. Their Criteria to Guide the Appointment of Trustees includes attention to gender and ethnic qualities that seek to balance the board.

## **Appraisal**

Massachusetts law clearly specifies the authority and responsibility of the DHE and the individual campuses; and the university's governance structure, mandated by the collective bargaining agreements, effectively allows for participation by all segments of the Fitchburg State community. Further, while these governance processes have not been locally created, they clearly allow for effective communication across all campus stakeholders.

The Board of Trustees' meeting announcements are posted to the university's website, and all meeting minutes are posted to BoardOnTrack.com. All Board of Trustees meetings are open and include an opportunity for public comment on each agenda.

Through collaboration between the university and the DHE, trustees are provided orientation and continued professional development. This collaboration is facilitated by a position at the state level from the Director of Trustee and Government Relations who also attends Board meetings and is available for consultation. Several board meetings during the year also include presentations by university staff about specific areas and initiatives within the university to continue to increase board members' knowledge and understanding of university operations.

The Board fulfills its duties and responsibilities as outlined by Massachusetts General Law. Regular attention to financial matters, academic program development, policies are visible in Board meeting agendas. Although at the core of all Board agenda items, is the University mission, more explicit attention might be paid to the institution's progress in fulfilling its approved mission as stated in their duties and responsibilities. Additional meeting time through a retreat may allow for such given the Board's full agendas during the academic year. The self-assessment instrument used by trustees was implemented in 2012. Positive results from self-assessments indicate a functioning board. The Board has not yet engaged in an external perspective to assess its effectiveness.

Composition of the Board is managed at the state level with one of the seven supporting attributes of the Criteria to Guide the Appointments stating, "Gender and ethnic qualities that contribute to balance the "face" of the board to resemble that of the college or university and the community." The state has generally paid attention to these criteria.

## **Internal Governance**

### **Description**

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 15a, section 9 clearly defines the authority and responsibilities of the University President who has the responsibility for establishing the structure of the administration. In July 2015, Dr. Richard S. Lapidus was appointed President and increased the number of Vice Presidents from two to four, including a Vice President for Finance and Administration, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, and a Vice President for Institutional Advancement. The roles and responsibilities of each administrator are defined and kept on file, along with the procedures for their selection, in the office of the Human Resources and Payroll Services.

The President is advised by an Executive Cabinet (EC) composed of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Vice-President for Student Affairs, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Chief Information Officer, the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning, Associate Vice President for Human Resources and Payroll Services and Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management. In addition to regular standing meetings with the EC, the President meets each week with the Vice Presidents individually and collectively.

All EC members hold regular meetings with their staff, facilitating communication and information sharing across all campus constituents. Within the Academic Affairs Division, the Dean structure was implemented in 2014, with Deans overseeing 4 Divisions. In the former structure, all academic department chairs reported directly to the Provost. Currently, there are 3 Academic Deans overseeing 4 Schools.

At the beginning of each academic school year, the President hosts two opening addresses, one for classified personal and administrators and the other for faculty, librarians, and administrators. These addresses typically review major past events and forecast those expected in the new academic year. In addition, the President holds campus forums two to three times each year, repeating them twice in one day to accommodate faculty and staff scheduling demands. These forums often include the Vice-Presidents allowing information sharing across the divisions. In addition to President's "open door" policy, he also holds open office hours one day per week so that anyone in the University may share their insights directly with him.

The structure of academic governance at Fitchburg State University, as in the other state universities, is governed by contractual agreement between the DHE and the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA). The duties and responsibilities of department and library program area (LPA) chairpersons are defined by contract; they are elected by department faculty in accordance with procedures established by Article VI of the contract and may serve up to three consecutive three year terms. In addition to meeting with department faculty/librarians, the chairs meet at least monthly with their academic dean. Four times per year, the Vice President for Academic Affairs meets with all deans and department/LPA chairs. The Academic Affairs leadership team meets weekly in different structures with two meetings of all members including one with an academic department/LPA chair representative, one with the Associate Vice-President and deans, and one with deans only.

A separate contractual agreement between the DHE and the MSCA outlines the responsibilities of the university and faculty teaching in the School of Graduate and Continuing Education

(SGOCE). SGOCE programs are part of the overall portfolio of academic programs within the departments. Graduate program chairs and evening undergraduate program managers administer these programs with the majority of these positions held by full-time faculty. Twice per academic year, the Vice-President of Academic Affairs and the Dean of the SGOCE convene meetings that include deans, department chairs, library program area chairs, graduate program chairs and undergraduate program managers.

At the departmental level, governance begins with curriculum committees, which meet to consider new course offerings, program revisions, and new program development. Approved proposals, along with those made by faculty/librarians, students, or administrators and those relating to changes in academic or student life policies are then submitted to the All University Committee (AUC). The AUC is comprised of eight faculty/librarian members elected by their peers, three administrators appointed by the President, and three students selected by the Student Government Association (SGA). Three standing subcommittees—Curriculum, Academic Policies, and Student Affairs—as well as *ad hoc* committees deal with special issues. The Curriculum and Academic Policies committees are composed of 16 faculty/librarian members appointed by the MSCA, three administrators appointed by the President, and three students selected by the SGA; while the Student Affairs committee is comprised of nine students, five administrators, and five faculty/librarian members. The AUC recommends approval or disapproval to the President who has the final authority on each change.

There is a separate, contractually defined governance structure for review of graduate policies and curriculum. Departments with a graduate program also have a graduate curriculum committee, which may recommend changes to graduate curriculum or policies. After review and approval by the departmental graduate curriculum committee, proposals proceed to the department chair. If both the graduate program chair and the department chair approve the changes, they are reviewed by the Graduate Council. The Graduate Council then makes a recommendation of approval or disapproval to the President who has the final authority. The Graduate Council as defined with the MSCA contract, is composed of five faculty members, appointed by the MSCA, three administrators appointed by the President, and one degree seeking graduate student elected by the other Graduate Council members.

Every other year, the graduate program chairs, undergraduate program managers, and SGOCE adjunct faculty meet at the beginning of the academic year. These meetings include a series of professional development workshops, departmental meetings, and updates from the SGOCE Dean, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and President.

The Extended Campus Office oversees all contractual partnerships. Each partner signs a one-year Letter of Agreement (LOA) with the university that is reviewed annually by university leadership, with final approval by the VPAA and VPANF, and uses the NECHE policy on contractual arrangements as the guiding structure of the agreement. The LOA explicitly outlines preparation and delivery of courses and programs, including syllabi review, schedule submission, instructor credentialing, course evaluations, maximum enrollment, and instructional hours, as well as all financial aspects of the partnership, including registration, payment schedules, and costs per credit.

## Appraisal

The President, EC and other campus leaders regularly meet with their staff and faculty. Formal and informal meetings provide adequate pathways to communicate and provide feedback. Within Academic Affairs, agendas for deans and chairs meetings are set in advance with members submitting items of interest allowing the agenda to be developed by the various constituents. Additional formal planning efforts resulting from these meetings are often addressed through subcommittees or in summer planning groups.

The shift to an academic dean structure facilitates more immediate and direct communication between department chairs and deans providing additional support to academic departments.

The All University Committee's (AUC) and Graduate Council's consistent activity attests to the widespread campus participation in governance. Both the [AUC](#) and the [Graduate Council](#) have regularly updated websites to support access to information regarding proposals, decision-making and to facilitate participation in the governance process. In addition both the AUC and the Graduate Council compile a summary document of all proposals and decisions allowing the campus community to easily review all curriculum and policy changes impacting the campus. The [Fitchburg State University Today](#) newsletter provides widespread communication to the entire campus community. Published biweekly, the newsletter includes current events and announcements. Archived newsletters can be found on the university website.

[Student representation to the AUC](#) is the governance voice of the student body. To assist the student members of the AUC and its subcommittees, the [Student Government Association](#) has been holding weekly open meetings, inviting students to express their concerns to their representatives. SGA also holds special interest forums on topics such as parking as well as social events, which encourage students to mingle with university leadership.

The central pillar of the contractual partnership's LOA is the protection of our students, assurance of course rigor, and financial transparency. As such, the LOA outlines available student services, course withdrawal policies, refund policies, student complaint processes, and grading and fair practices policies. In the event that a partnership needs to be terminated the LOA outlines clear processes for students to receive credit from the university and/or the partnering agency to continue to support students for the planned length of the agreed upon program. Partners are required to meet with the Associate Dean of SGOCE, the Academic Department Chair, as well as the appropriate Academic Dean multiple times a year to review student progress, address issues, and plan for upcoming programs.

These formal and informal efforts illustrate the downward and upward flow of communication and the active participation in decision making among all segments of the FSU community.

## Projections

The Board in consultation with the President will finalize a plan to secure an external perspective on board effectiveness to be conducted by the end of spring 2023.

The Board will conduct a review of its by-laws by the end of spring 2022 with a commitment to include an annual retreat as part of its regular meeting schedule.

## Standard 4: The Academic Program

### Overview

Fitchburg State's academic programs are aligned with our mission to prepare students "to lead, serve, and succeed by fostering lifelong learning and civic and global responsibility." Our Institutional Learning Priorities (ILPs) provide a coherent framework for what we want our students to know, be able to do, and value upon graduation, regardless of program of study.

The university has 15 academic departments that offer 34 undergraduate majors, over 50 minors, and 4 undergraduate certificates; 10 of the departments also offer graduate programs. Programs are structured around student learning outcomes, which identify the knowledge, skills, and methods of inquiry to be acquired. These learning goals, along with program requirements, are published in the catalog and on the website. Bachelor degrees offered through the day school, including Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BS), and Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE), are designed to be completed in four years. Bachelor degrees offered through the School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education (SGOCE) are consistent with their day division counterparts, including major requirements, general education requirements, and academic standards for admission and satisfactory progress. While bachelor degrees through SGOCE can be completed within four years, students may progress at a pace that fits family and career responsibilities. Several undergraduate certificates are also available through SGOCE to meet a learner's need for career advancement or change. The Honors Program, approved by the Board of Higher Education as a Commonwealth Honors Program, is open to all eligible students in all undergraduate day programs.

Graduate programs, including Master of Arts, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Education, Master of Science, Master of Business Administration, the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies, as well as a variety of post-baccalaureate and graduate-level certificate programs, are designed to prepare professionals for advancement in their fields and for additional post-graduate work. The institution offers 20 Master's programs, which require between 30 and 60 credits, and two Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS) programs. Each program has minimum standards for admission and retention. Students must complete graduate degrees within six years of starting in the program. Most programs require research appropriate to the discipline and program level. All but two graduate programs require a comprehensive exam, practicum, internship, thesis, capstone, or clinical experience as a final student assessment.

In addition to these degree and certificate programs, the Center for Professional Studies (CPS) supports life-long learning by offering online and face-to-face non-credit professional development options in a variety of professional areas. The CPS also manages the Adult Learners of the Fitchburg Area (ALFA) program, which began as a program for local senior residents and has expanded to include participants from over 20 surrounding communities seeking personal enrichment and other community-based courses. ALFA courses are non-credit bearing, and the learning activities and curriculum are designed and implemented by members of an ALFA board made up of community representatives in collaboration with the CPS.

The university Catalog, the publicly-available central repository and reference point for all undergraduate and graduate academic programs, includes admissions requirements; program objectives, descriptions, and requirements; course descriptions; faculty listings; and academic policies. Program, policy, and curriculum changes that move through governance throughout the year take effect in the following Fall; the catalog is updated annually to incorporate these changes, assuring its consistency and reliability. To ensure that all users of the catalog are referencing the most up-to-date version the catalog is only available electronically. The University website includes additional information about our institution, such as specific student learning outcomes for individual programs and four-year plans of study that provide detailed course sequences for each undergraduate day program. The documents outline program goals and requirements, communicate program expectations to students, and provide a framework for maintaining coherent design of academic degree programs.

## **Assuring Academic Quality**

### **Description**

Fitchburg State has an effective system of academic oversight that has a clearly defined structure and allows input from administrators, department chairs, faculty, students, and, where appropriate, outside evaluators. Academic quality is ensured through collaboration between faculty and administrators to oversee, evaluate, and update programs and curricula, including the development of new programs. The Division of Academic Affairs provides leadership and organizational support for student learning and faculty development and, in collaboration with faculty, is responsible for academic oversight and assuring academic program quality. Academic Affairs is led by a Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA), supported by a leadership team consisting of three academic deans, a Dean of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education, a Dean of the Library, an Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, an Assistant Dean for Retention & Student Success, and an Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning. The university has established Schools (Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, and Health and Natural Sciences) that each represent a group of connected academic departments and programs. Each academic department is managed by a Department Chair, who reports to their respective Dean, who in turn reports to the Provost/VPAA. Department Chairs play a critical role in maintaining academic standards by leading the department curriculum development and review process, ensuring curricular standards are met, and overseeing course schedules and faculty evaluation.

The university established the School of Graduate Online and Continuing Education (SGOCE), formerly the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education, in Fall 2019. Programs offered through SGOCE are managed by a program chair that serves as a liaison between SGOCE and the Academic Department. SGOCE is housed within the office of Academic Affairs and has a dean who is responsible for overseeing the operations of the school, with academic departments responsible for ensuring the academic quality of all credit-based degree programs in their areas, including graduate and undergraduate programs offered through SGOCE. Degree specializations originate in the appropriate academic department. If there is no corresponding academic department, as is the case with some graduate certificate programs, designated graduate curriculum committees perform the appropriate functions.



There has been a gradual increase in online and hybrid course enrollment among day school students with registrations increasing by 45% from 2015-2019; 2020 data was not included as most courses moved to an online or remote modality due to the pandemic. Two of the five undergraduate evening programs in SGOCE transitioned to 100% online programs, and one created an online program pathway in addition to maintaining a campus-based program option. To support online undergraduate programs, many online general education courses were developed to ensure that all students can complete general education requirements.

Graduate programs have significantly shifted from evening face-to-face courses to online over the last 10 years. As of Fall 2020, eight of the 14 Masters Programs were offered online (four with campus-based and online program options) and nine of 11 graduate certificates are offered online only. The number of students enrolled in fully online programs increased over twelve-fold, from 140 students in Fall 2014 to 1722 students in Fall 2020.

Matters that pertain to the institution's undergraduate day, evening and online academic programs, such as program creation, modification, or deletion; course creation or deletion; and the core curriculum start within an academic department. Each department has undergraduate curriculum committees made up of faculty and students within the department; departments that have graduate programs also have graduate curriculum committees or designated faculty responsible for faculty curriculum reviews. Once changes are approved at the departmental level, they are brought to the All University Committee (AUC), as set forth in the MSCA contract [Article VII], which then assigns those proposals to the standing sub-committees (Curriculum, Academic Policy, and Student Affairs). Each of these sub-committees has a fixed number of members drawn from faculty, librarians, students, and administrators, per the contract. Graduate curricula and policy changes are brought to the Graduate Council. AUC and Graduate Council actions must be approved by the President. New programs of study must also be approved by the Board of Trustees and the Board of Higher Education. The [AUC](#) and [Graduate Council](#) websites contain overviews of processes and archives of approved actions.

To help ensure students complete their degree in the allotted time, department and program chairs, in conjunction with Academic Affairs, build and maintain course schedules based on curricular requirements, the results of program review, student needs, and faculty availability. Cancellation of courses must adhere to governance policies and procedures.

The Director of Assessment is responsible for strengthening university assessment culture by guiding collaborative planning, systemic implementation, and analysis of collected data to make informed decisions that enhance student learning experiences and the institution's operations. Assessment of student learning outcomes, part of the program assessment process, is coordinated by the Director of Assessment and conducted by academic departments annually.

Each academic unit (Department, Division, School) submits an annual assessment report, which includes a reflection on how their accomplishments and challenges for the year align with the goals and action plans that were established the previous year. The academic units then complete an action plan and updated goals for the following year. The process is outlined on the [Assessment webpage](#). Undergraduate and graduate programs, including the General Education program, undergo a more comprehensive review every seven years, unless they have

professional-program accreditation reviews on a different cycle. The program review process includes a departmental, faculty prepared self-study that addresses various areas of the program, including effectiveness of curriculum, analysis of student enrollment data, analysis of student success data collected as a part of a program's Outcomes Assessment Plan, and appraisal of the department's personnel and resources. The review process also includes a visit by and report from an external evaluator. Programs must prepare a response to the external evaluator's report to Academic Affairs as part of their review cycle, providing updates and clarifications based on external reviewer comments and their own plans for program improvement. Department Chairs meet with their Dean and the Provost to review the external report and discuss action items. Departments then prepare an action plan based on the department self-study and the external report. This process assures that academic planning and evaluation are aligned with efforts to enhance the institutional mission and program objectives.

For programs seeking external accreditation, the accreditation process replaces the program review process, though it includes the same elements, including external evaluation. Several of the university's programs are state and/or nationally accredited or reviewed, including Business Administration, Computer Science, Education, Human Services, Nursing, School Counseling, and Technology Education. Accrediting agencies, in addition to NECHE, include: Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET); Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education; The Council for Standards in Human Service Education, and the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE). In addition, the Criminal Justice program is Quinn Bill-certified by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, making CJ graduates eligible for the Policy Career Incentive Pay Program (PCIPP), as the Quinn Bill is formally known.

In addition to the standard university review process, extended campus programs have additional layers of review. Extended campus programs, partnerships in which the university has engaged in a contractual arrangement to deliver credit-bearing courses and programs, also include a bi-annual meeting with each partner and an annual contract review and approval process, which ensures that students taking classes off-site with partner organizations have adequate access to facilities, learning management systems, and required learning activities at each location. The university ensures extended campus students have access to resources such as the library, IT support, and the writing and tutor centers to assist students. Clear descriptions of the resources available for students are shared with students and are available on the university website. In order to ensure that the academic quality standards of our extended campus partnership programs are the same as our on-campus programs, the university requires that partners who offer degree programs meet with the Associate Dean of SGOCE, the Academic Department Chair, as well as the appropriate Academic Dean multiple times a year to review student progress, address issues, and plan for upcoming programs. The university also reviews each course schedule, syllabus, and instructor credentials using the same guidelines as on-campus courses. This ensures that our partner agencies follow university syllabi, grading, academic integrity policies, and contact hour guidelines. Each syllabus is reviewed using a comprehensive 28-point rubric that is shared with the partner organization. All partner instructors are evaluated the first time they teach and then subsequently every three times thereafter by a university program chair or their designee.

When program requirements are changed or if programs are eliminated, the institution makes arrangements with enrolled students so as not to disrupt their path to completion. Students complete degree requirements according to their year of entry, so modifications to curricula do not interfere with degree completion. One example is the recent General Education program changes: communication about the changes has been shared with students, faculty, and staff, and the General Education Program Area Chair shares regular email updates with faculty and academic advisors so they will be prepared to assist current students navigating the old General Education program and new students who fall under the new requirements. If a program were to be eliminated, the university would follow the plan consistent with NECHE and DHE policy.

Results of program review provide a rationale for program related budget requests. Departmental Budget requests are made annually in February of the preceding fiscal year to the VPAA and the Office of Financial Services in the form of program base budgets as well as one-time Strategic Funding Requests. Final budget recommendations are made by the Executive Cabinet. The President submits the budget for approval to the Trustees. Similarly, department chairs annually submit recommendations for full-time faculty positions to the VPAA, who then presents these recommendations to the President for approval so that the positions can be advertised nationally each fall. Budget requests for specific program needs in SGOCE, such as supplies or travel funds, are made through the program chairs to the SGOCE Dean or the Associate Dean for extended campus and CPS programs. Final decisions on SGOCE budget requests are determined through the annual budget approval process.

Students completing an FSU degree demonstrate collegiate-level skills in the English language. Undergraduate students submit a 300-word essay as part of their admissions requirements and must have completed a minimum of four English classes in high school, among other foundational courses, prior to admission. Incoming students with a high school GPA above 2.7 are enrolled into a college-level writing course, Writing I, in their first semester. Students with a high school GPA below 2.7 must complete a writing placement test and are then enrolled in Writing I or Basic Writing depending on their test score. Undergraduate students are required to complete 12-15 credits of foundational general education courses in their first year, including Writing I and Writing II. At both the undergraduate and graduate level, international applicants from countries that are not English-speaking are required to complete the TOEFL exam or another approved Language Proficiency exam such as Duolingo prior to admission. Minimum required English Language scores for admission are posted on the [website](#).

FSU has recently developed programs to support students whose first language is not English. The Heritage Language Program focuses on the promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The goal is to create a continuum of support for students for whom English is not a first language through strategies that celebrate their multilingualism, leverage their cultural assets to further their academic success while enriching the campus community, and provide a social network to promote a sense of belonging. Key components include a Multilingual Scholars peer mentor program to provide co-curricular support for English Language Learners (ELL) and heritage language speakers; a Multilingual Scholars Seminar to provide credit-bearing support in academic writing, reading, listening, and speaking as well as specific assignment support; implementation of a process by which students with seals of bi-

literacy will receive college credits; and a multidisciplinary certificate in "Spanish for the Professions" that can be linked with any major to build a pathway for students with the bi-literacy seal and other heritage language speakers.

### **Appraisal**

In 2021, the university adopted Institutional Learning Priorities (ILPs), which identify broad curricular and co-curricular student learning objectives that align with the university's vision. The ILPs were developed by a campus team composed of constituents from Academic and Student Affairs, and refined through feedback from the campus community. The Provost for Academic Affairs and Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs sponsored a proposal that was passed through governance in AY2021, formalizing the ILPs. Academic departments have begun the process of examining how their program curricula align with the ILPs.

There has been a dramatic increase in online course programs over the last several years. To support the increase in online course offerings, the university updated the former Distance Learning Director position to a Director of Digital Learning position, which now has more responsibility for aligning university practices with best teaching practices. The Director of Digital Learning also oversees the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, which the university received approval to join in 2018. A new Instructional Technologist position has also been added to develop and facilitate training activities for faculty and students and assist with online course review processes. In addition, 1.5 new staff positions were added over the last four years in SGOCE to provide frontline support to the increasing number of online students.

To ensure academic quality in online courses, the existing comprehensive course development and review process was expanded by a chair workgroup that included the Provost and AVP of Academic Affairs, faculty members, department chairs, deans, and the director of digital learning. FSU also developed a faculty training module focused on online learning standards and practices that all faculty are automatically enrolled in. Each new online course is reviewed by Digital Learning and the academic department before students gain access to the course site. Thereafter, the course is reviewed every six times that it is taught per the process in the MSCA Division of Graduate and Continuing Education (DGCE) contract. As with face-to-face courses, students have the opportunity to complete evaluations for online courses.

### **Undergraduate Degree Programs**

#### **Description**

Undergraduate degree programs at Fitchburg State are designed to provide students with an introduction to broad areas of human knowledge through their general education requirements, and in-depth mastery of at least one field of study through their major. Through the General Education program, students demonstrate competence in English communication skills, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking across a range of disciplines.

In accordance with its mission, FSU provides a diverse program array to prepare students for a wide range of academic and professional pursuits after graduation. Students completing an undergraduate program are expected to choose a major course of study before the end of their

sophomore year, though they are encouraged to do so sooner. The major consists of a minimum of 33 semester hours of coursework. Students must also complete 51 semester hours of coursework to satisfy general education requirements, and an overall minimum of 120 semester hours of coursework for graduation. Students must maintain a minimum GPA of 2.0 in their major and overall in order to complete their undergraduate degree. Some programs require a higher GPA for continuation in the program, for internship work, and for graduation.

Degree requirements are integrated into the major, with 10 of FSU's 34 undergraduate majors offering both BA and BS degrees. Most majors offering both degrees distinguish the BA from the BS by the addition of world language competency at the Intermediate II level. All programs and program requirements are listed in the Undergraduate Catalog. Over the past 10 years, FSU has awarded 7987 Bachelor degrees, of which 7462 were B.S., 128 B.A. and 397 B.S.E.

### **Appraisal**

The university is committed to providing students exposure to broad learning and an opportunity to develop knowledge related to personal and social responsibility – in addition to skills for professional success. While all majors require at least 33 credits of coursework in the program, credit totals vary widely by program, with some majors, particularly those with external accreditation, offering fewer opportunities for student electives. For example, the Nursing program requires 62 credits in the department and 34 credits from cognate departments, some of which satisfy general education requirements. With an additional 18 credits required to complete the General Education program, Nursing students have only six credits of free electives. Similarly, students completing initial licensure in Education are restricted to only one free elective credit. Some majors without external accreditation or licensure – for example Engineering Technology/Electronics and Construction Management have no room beyond the required courses for free electives. The combined major and general education requirements of several other programs do leave room for more exploration by students (11 free electives in English Studies/ Literature, 8 free electives in Economics and in History, 7 free electives in Sociology, and 6 free electives in Communications Media/Film and Video, as examples). Given that not all majors provide this free elective space for students to pursue knowledge and understanding, the institution should evaluate its academic portfolio with an eye to ensuring that all students have sufficient access for this exploration.

BA degrees represent a small percentage of the baccalaureate degrees conferred by Fitchburg State (2% over 10 years). In 9 of the 10 majors offering both the BA and BS, the curriculum for the degrees are identical, with the only distinction being the requirement for up to 12 language credits for the BA. This structure has created a disincentive for students to pursue the BA. Only the Biology program has changed its curriculum to differentiate BS and BA degrees internally, both in terms of the classes required and the total number of credits (fewer for the BA).

It is important that the university come to a greater consensus and intentionality about the degrees it confers. A Chairs' Working group was formed in AY19 to examine the BA/BS disparity and make recommendations for increasing the number of BA degrees awarded. Among the group's recommendations was to develop institutional definitions of the two degrees, to make clearer to students the respective benefits of a degree that focuses more on the humanities

(BA) and a degree that tends to emphasize science and math (BS) for their long-term goals. The group also recommended collaboration with Admissions to make the definitions of both degrees plain to incoming students, to help them choose which degree best suits their academic and professional objectives. Ultimately, since degree requirements reside in the major, the issue raises the question of curricular revision (as the Biology program has done) to create definitional alignment among and intentionality regarding our degree programs.

## **General Education**

### **Description**

The General Education program, known as the Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) program until its name change in Spring 2021, underwent significant revision as the result of six years of outcomes assessments and a 2014-15 program review. Recommendations from the program review were taken up by the LAS Council in 2015-16, which then designed a revised curriculum during 2016-18. Feedback from the campus community throughout the review and revision process informed the new curriculum, which was approved by the All University Committee (AUC) and the President in May 2019. The new program, implemented for all incoming students beginning Fall 2021, requires 51 credits in General Education coursework; up to nine credits may be used for both General Education and the major curriculum.

The 51-credit General Education program is a coherent set of courses aligned with Institutional Learning Priorities. Implemented in Fall 2021, the curriculum is designed for students to acquire a set of core competencies, gain exposure to a broad range of disciplinary knowledge, and develop critical reasoning and analytical skills that prepare them for success in the world of work and as informed members of society, regardless of major. Students begin with a 5-course sequence ("Foundation," 15 credits) in their first year. These foundational courses provide essential knowledge and skills related to Reading, Writing, Information Literacy, Quantitative Reasoning, World Languages, Speaking, and Listening. In the broadest portion of the curriculum ("Exploration," 27 credits), students engage in a range of disciplinary ways of knowing through courses that explore diverse perspectives, civic learning, ethical reasoning, logical thinking, personal wellness, as well as inquiry and analysis in various fields of study. In the final portion of the program ("Integration," 9 credits) students bring all their General Education learning together in integrative courses that include hands-on, high-impact learning opportunities (internships, study abroad, civic engagement, student/faculty research, or creative projects). Alternatively, students may conclude the General Education program by completing a minor or a second major in a different discipline, to give them a second area of in-depth learning.

Students enrolled in our state-approved Commonwealth Honors Program satisfy a portion of the General Education program by taking at least six honors courses, two semesters of a language, and two semesters of Honors Thesis (30-31 credits total).

### **Appraisal**

The new General Education program addresses areas for improvement identified during the General Education program review, including the need for a required First Year Seminar; better alignment between learning outcomes and course requirements; expanding high impact

practices including interdisciplinary learning opportunities; and designing a curriculum through which students would logically progress from introductory to more advanced coursework.

An implementation group was formed in 2019 to guide the process of implementing the new curriculum, including coding the campus degree audit system. As part of the implementation, a General Education Subcommittee of the AUC Curriculum Committee was formed through governance in AY20 to evaluate and make recommendations to the full Curriculum Committee on General Education course proposals. In its second year of operation and in anticipation of the fall 2021 launch of the new curriculum, the subcommittee recommended approval of 623 General Education course designations. In addition, it developed learning outcome guidance documents and provided context for the larger group's consideration of individual proposals.

In Spring 2021, the President approved a Program Area for General Education to serve as the centralized locus for general education as a distinct yet interconnected university program. The Program Area facilitates the implementation, delivery, and assessment of the General Education curriculum and builds relationships with departments and offices across campus in order to amplify the purpose and value of liberal arts and sciences education for all students and university stakeholders. Programmatic modifications to the General Education curriculum are proposed through the AUC governance process, with departments maintaining control over developing and scheduling General Education courses, and governance committees maintaining control over approving individual courses for General Education designations.

## **The Major or Concentration**

### **Description**

While the General Education program provides undergraduates a substantive introduction to the broad areas of human knowledge, the required major ensures in-depth study in at least one disciplinary or interdisciplinary area based on specific learning outcomes. Students also have the opportunity to pursue knowledge and understanding through free electives; the number of free electives available to a student varies with their chosen program of study. Students can track their progress in meeting the requirements for graduation in a variety of ways, including through the program requirements listed in the catalog, the sequence of courses provided in the four-year plans of study, the individualized web-based degree evaluation available online through Degreeworks, and through meetings with their academic advisors.

All undergraduate students are required to complete 33-62 semester hours in their major, as outlined in the catalog and by degree audit records. Each major is designed around a set of learning outcomes, published on the department's website, and provides the opportunity for students to develop knowledge and skills specific to the area of study through intentionally sequenced courses within the major. Departmental curriculum committees, composed of faculty and students, regularly review the appropriateness of program requirements as well as units' success in preparing students for fields of study. Programs are required to assess learning outcomes annually, and reflect on these outcome data and curricula in their self-studies.

Departments may seek approval through AUC governance to designate up to nine credits of a major curriculum for General Education credit. In order for AUC committees to recommend

approval of major courses for this “MAJ” General Education designation, a department must demonstrate that its major course’s learning outcomes are aligned with the respective learning outcomes of the 51-credit General Education program. Such overlap of learning outcomes demonstrates the relationship between general education and major curricula.

FSU was awarded a 2020 Davis Educational Foundation Grant to integrate career competencies into program curricula and expand internship opportunities, particularly for majors from traditional liberal arts and sciences disciplines. The Career Services and Advising Center (CSAS) has begun collaborating with faculty from 11 academic departments to develop core career competencies and map those competencies to disciplinary and general education curricula. Staff from CSAS are also working to create a comprehensive internship and employer relations model to support students in building skills for the world of work.

### **Appraisal**

The Strategic Plan’s Goal One highlights our commitment to provide experiential learning opportunities to all undergraduates. Beyond our education licensure programs, 13 academic programs require students to complete an internship, practicum, or capstone experience, while 10 programs offer the opportunity to complete an independent research project or internship as a major elective. Professional programs such as Communications Media, Education, Human Services, and Nursing align curriculum content with practical experience through a required internship or similar culminating experience. The new General Education program also requires students to complete at least one integrative high impact practice.

The undergraduate curriculum has experienced several additions in majors and concentrations in the past five years. In addition to the changes to the General Education program described previously, new programs include a Cybersecurity concentration within the Computer Information Systems major and Technical Theater concentration within the Communications Media program (2017); an Environmental Public Health major in the Earth and Geographic Science Department, an Educational Studies major in the Education department, and a Strength and Conditioning concentration in the Exercise and Sports Science Department (2018); and a Biochemistry concentration within the Chemistry major (2019). The addition of such programs supports Goal One of the Strategic Plan to offer new programs in high demand areas, particularly tied to the workforce. Areas for new program development are informed by national data provided by Gray Associates and EAB to evaluate student demand, competition, job opportunities, and other environmental and market factors.

While all majors are structured intentionally for students to progress from introductory through advanced levels of learning, the course numbering system is not uniform across programs. While higher numbers (i.e. 4000) can relate to more advanced courses in given majors, they do not always do so, which can cause confusion for students that may impact course enrollment.

### **Graduate Programs**

#### **Description**



The School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education (SGOCE), formerly the division of Graduate and Continuing Education (GCE), offers 14 Masters level degrees (not including concentrations), 11 graduate certificates, and two Certificates of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS) with seven concentration options. The university also offers graduate programs in Education in cooperation with 32 Extended Campus partners. FSU contracted with an Online Program Management (OPM) provider, Academic Partnerships, in summer 2017 to help with the outreach and promotion of three online accelerated graduate programs. These accelerated programs, which offer seven-week online and face-to-face courses, include the MBA, the M.Ed. in Curriculum and Teaching, and the M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Management. Enrollment in these programs now represents 59% of all graduate enrollments in SGOCE.

Through SGOCE, FSU strives to provide quality graduate programming to students that is responsive and accessible to workforce and community needs and delivers quality services to support students, faculty and community members. Graduate programs are designed to provide students with advanced knowledge and skills in their professional field of study beyond the level of a bachelor's degree. Those graduate programs that have an undergraduate program in the same field build on the knowledge and competencies required at the undergraduate level; for example the M.A. in Applied Communication Studies builds on the B.S. in Communication Studies, moving beyond introductory courses and developing communication skills to application of those skills in the field and applying theory to application.

Academic departments are responsible for overseeing graduate program curriculum and setting standards for graduate-level learning in their program. Each graduate program is managed by a program chair hired through SGOCE in collaboration with the academic department responsible for the graduate program. The program chair is responsible for coordinating faculty hiring and faculty assignments and working with the academic department to qualify faculty in accordance with departmental guidelines. All graduate faculty are given a rank based on the qualifications defined in the DGCE faculty contract, which specifies required professional and academic experience for each rank. The program chair also serves as the primary advisor for students in the program. Larger graduate programs may have additional academic advisors managed by the program chairs. All departments have a graduate curriculum committee or a designated group of faculty for conducting curriculum reviews. The role of the department chair in relation to graduate programs varies somewhat depending on the school, but overall the department chair is responsible for overseeing the graduate program(s) within their department, which includes leading program review processes with the program chair, managing the program learning outcomes to insure alignment with related undergraduate programs, overseeing faculty hiring processes across the department, and maintaining academic assessment processes and departmental accreditation standards across programs where relevant.

Program learning outcomes with possible career pathways are developed and managed by the academic department and are reviewed during the designated program review process and cycle with the program chair and related academic department faculty/administrators. Program learning outcomes are listed in the university catalog and on each program website. Graduate programs at Fitchburg State prepare graduates for professional career. All programs include elements of applied learning that vary by program, but might include class assignments that

embed workplace activities or projects, practica, field experience, and internships. While all graduate programs encourage contributions to scholarly research and several programs offer a thesis option for a student's capstone experience, there are limited opportunities for University sponsored research for graduate students beyond their program requirements.

Graduate admission requirements ensure that students admitted to graduate degree programs are qualified for advanced academic study. Minimum admission requirements for all graduate programs include a professional resume, a personal statement, and an official transcript from the baccalaureate degree granting institution showing the date of graduation. Transcripts must be from regionally accredited institutions. Additional requirements for specific programs might include a writing sample, one or more references, an RN license for the nursing program, or passing MTEL test scores for the licensure-based education programs. International student admission also requires submission of scores from a University approved English Proficiency exam that demonstrate the applicant has met the minimum score requirement. Details of the requirements for international applicants are posted on the admissions website. Admission requirements for each program are posted in the university catalog. Academic departments work with SGOCE and the admissions office to review and determine admission standards as well as manage the review of applications and confirmation of admission decisions.

Evaluation of the student experience takes place through a survey distributed to all students upon graduation, a bi-annual survey focused on perceptions of adult and graduate students, and course evaluations that take place each academic term. Survey data is used by academic departments and SGOCE for program and service assessment.

In addition to the creation of more online options, three 4+1 programs have been added to support strategic plans to meet the needs of students and the community. One of these programs is the Criminal Justice 4+1 graduate program that began in the Summer 2017. The M.S. in Criminal Justice 4+1 program is unique as it requires students admitted into the undergraduate police academy track to complete their four-year program, then complete their police academy training on campus as part of their graduate requirements. Students finish the program with a completed academy credential and then move into the remainder of their online graduate program, which they can complete within one year. The Education and Business Administration departments also implemented 4+1 program options in 2020 allowing for qualified undergraduate students to move into a Master's program within their discipline. In addition to the three graduate online accelerated (seven-week courses) programs, the university also has six other seven-week accelerated hybrid or online program graduate options. Examples include the Applied Communication Studies Program, offered 100% online, and the Educational Leadership and Management Program, a hybrid program with some technology enhanced courses that include some campus-based meetings.

To officially close a graduate program, a request must first go through the academic department, then the Graduate Council, and finally the President. When programs are closed, the university stops accepting applicants for the program, communicates the change to any current applicants and prospective students, and notifies all current students in the program. The program chair develops a teach-out plan with each current student to make sure they can complete the program in which they started, or to assist them to change programs if they

prefer. The decision to close a program is carefully reviewed with consideration of program demand, potential enrollment options, faculty and university support, and financial viability.

FSU closed several programs that had lower enrollments or no longer met student needs, including the MEd Education Technology in 2017, the MAT Earth Science in 2016, the Graduate Fine Arts Director Certificate in 2018, and the Not-for Profit Leadership Certificate in 2019.

## **Appraisal**

Graduate education at FSU has shifted over the last 10 years from campus-based to more online programs. This shift was part of an initiative in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan to develop new, flexible curricular modes to serve the needs of a changing student population in an effort to strengthen academic programs and meet student and workforce demand for more online options. Projected demographic shifts in the Northeast over the next 10 years show an expected decline in traditional-age college students. Increasing the number of graduate and adult programs that attract non-traditional students is therefore one of the strategies FSU implemented to maintain enrollment and continue to serve the education needs of the region. This continues to be a strategic initiative for 2020-2025 as well.

Part of this shift has involved creating more online courses and technology-enhanced classes within existing programs and also creating new online programs or moving some face-to-face programs to an online-only modality. Technology-enhanced classes include some face-to-face and some online or synchronous online components within a course. Another part of the shift included establishing the contract with Academic Partnerships in 2017 to help expand enrollment in key online programs through marketing and promotional support.

The results of these changes can be seen in the number of online courses offered between 2015 and 2019. The number of graduate online courses offered increased 71% between Fall 2015 (68 sections) and Fall 2019 (116 sections). Fall 2020 was not included as most courses moved to an online or remote modality due to the pandemic. In regards to online, prior to Fall 2017 FSU had approximately five 100% online graduate program options and as of Spring 2021 we had 22, including 11 graduate certificate options. In addition to more credit based programs moving online, the Center for Professional Studies has also added more online options for professional development and in 2019 partnered with Mindedge, an education company that partners with colleges and Universities to offer non-credit professional programming to add approximately 100 online program options across a variety of fields. The ALFA organization, offering education enrichment opportunities for adult residents in the community also moved to 100% online programming during the pandemic and will continue to offer some online and some face-to-face programming in the future.

In an effort to increase access for graduate students and better align admission practices with professionally-focused program outcomes, the SGOCE eliminated GRE/GMAT scores as part of the admission requirements for all graduate programs with the approval of the Graduate Council. This decision was part of larger university discussions around admission requirements. It was determined that the GRE/GMAT scores were not the best indicators of success for our graduate programs as many students are working professionals who may have been out of

school for a time but could succeed in the programs due to work experience regardless of GRE scores. In addition to that change, various service processes were updated including the establishment of application, registration, and billing deadlines specific to the online accelerated programs in the Academic Partnership contract.

Overall, FSU has done well increasing the number of online programs and the number of students enrolling in graduate programs. One area for continued work is further assessments to learn about student experiences. It will be important to watch student satisfaction and retention with the rapid growth online to monitor any differences and respond accordingly. Finally, another area of future focus will be increasing the number of research opportunities available for graduate students which will include seeking out research grants, providing graduate students with training opportunities to learn about grant writing, seeking out and encouraging participation at professional conferences within a student's discipline and field of practice, and seeking out additional opportunities to support graduate faculty research.

## **Transfer credit**

### **Description**

In Fall 2020, 287 transfer students were enrolled at FSU; 173 were full-time and 255 reported living off-campus. The university's policy on transfer admission, which is consistent with the NECHE Transfer and Award of Academic Credit Policy, can be found on the website and the undergraduate and graduate catalogs. Undergraduate transfer credit is granted for courses completed at regionally accredited colleges and universities for which the student received a 1.7 or better and which correspond to ones offered at FSU. Courses that do not fit the degree program may be counted as fulfilling free electives for the four year curriculum. Lower-level undergraduate transfer equivalencies are determined by the registrar while upper-level undergraduate ones are determined by departments. No graduation credit is awarded for pre-collegiate-level or remedial work designed to prepare students for collegiate study.

A maximum of 75 credits may be transferred from two-year institutions and 90 total credits may be transferred, in most cases from four-year institutions. However, in order to reduce barriers for students pursuing their Bachelor's in Nursing degree, the university will allow RN to BSN students to transfer 88 credits from two-year institutions. At least 50% of any major or certificate program must be earned at FSU, and students must complete at least two courses at FSU for any earned minor. This ensures that students meet their chosen program of study's learning outcomes. Graduate students may transfer in up to six credits from another regionally accredited university or equivalent with permission from the program chair. Courses must have been completed within six years of degree completion and have not been previously counted toward an earned master's degree. Courses must also have a minimum 3.00 GPA to transfer.

The university participates in MassTransfer, a collaboration led by the Massachusetts DHE between community colleges, state universities, and the University of Massachusetts. FSU works with state partners to create a seamless transfer process for students. MassTransfer drives the strategic planning efforts around transfer enrollment in areas such as creating statewide foundational course equivalencies and transfer pathways to help transfer students

successfully complete bachelor's degrees by maximizing the transfer of credits taken at community colleges or other state institutions. Institutions that are part of MassTransfer participate in the Commonwealth Commitment. Commonwealth Commitment is very restrictive and only a few students benefit from the program's 10% rebate or frozen tuition and fee rate. All MassTransfer agreements are posted on the MassTransfer web site with a link on the university website. Course by course articulation agreements with state community colleges are posted on the Registrar and Admissions websites. Department chairs oversee the viability of course transfers and substitutions.

FSU has developed guaranteed admission agreements with the RN-BS in Nursing program for students at 4 regional community colleges. We also have a guaranteed admission 4+1 program in place at Mount Wachusett Community College for the both our day and online accelerated Bachelors of Business Administration programs.

### **Appraisal**

In response to increasing demand for workers within health science professions, FSU created a career pathway built around a seamless transition from RN-BS Nursing programs. The university established guaranteed admission agreements for the RN-BS in Nursing program with several community colleges. This program allows students to be pre-admitted into a Bachelors program upon admission to their Associates program, with the understanding that they will successfully complete their Associates degree and move directly into the Bachelors program. Students admitted through the guaranteed admission process receive pre-advising into the program. The agreement with Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) has been the most successful to date: the first cohort started with approximately 60 students that planned to complete their degree at MWCC and move directly into FSU's program. Two years later, after completing their associate's degree, approximately 25 students started their RN-BS Nursing program at FSU. There were fewer than 10 students from the other institutions with which we have the same agreement. In addition to the RN-BS Nursing program, FSU has a guaranteed admission program in Business Administration with MWCC. These agreements are listed on the website.

Goal one in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan focused on improving academic programs and several strategies included action items for improving transfer student processes, increasing access, building more transfer pathways, and improving community partnerships. The strategic plan reflected the MassTransfer goals for expanding access for transfer students statewide through collaborative and seamless partnerships. We have statewide MassTransfer Pathways for 19 different disciplines and over 250 transfer agreements with individual colleges. While participation in the MassTransfer collaboration has been beneficial for students and for the institutions involved, the Commonwealth Commitment is very restrictive so a small number of students benefit from the program's 10% rebate or frozen tuition and fee rate. To increase access and decrease student cost, in 2018 FSU approved a change in the number of credits accepted from transfer students, increasing from 60 to 75 credits from 2-year institutions and from 75 to 90 from 4-year institutions, decreasing the minimum residency requirement for undergraduate students from 45 to 30 credits. In addition, we made our RN to BSN program more transfer friendly by increasing the maximum number of credits to 88 in 2016.

Also, in 2021 FSU approved a policy creating a more transparent process for the transfer of general education courses, providing more options for granting full-credit of general education courses completed elsewhere. A transfer student taskforce was created in Fall 2020 to help identify and address additional barriers and service challenges for transfer students. This taskforce will complete a report with recommendations for service and support structures for both online and campus-based transfer students to begin implementation in 2021-2022.

## **Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit**

### **Description**

The university's degrees and other credentials are consistent with the NECHE Policy on Credit and Degrees and align with best practices of American institutions of higher education. The academic departments are responsible for overseeing program and degree changes and naming practices as well as content, program length, and program level. Curricular changes proposed by academic departments must be approved through the governance process, which helps to ensure consistency with industry and higher education standards. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning assists with approving and finalizing the Classification of Instructional Programs codes assigned to all degree programs to ensure alignment with national standards. A minimum of 120 credits is required for a Bachelor's degree, and a Master's degree requires a minimum of 30 credits. The Bachelor's degree credential requires that no more than 50% of the credits within a student's major can be transferred and students must complete a minimum of 30 credits at FSU. Graduate students can transfer a maximum number of six credits, so they must complete a minimum of 24 credits in their degree program.

All degree requirements are posted in the catalog and on the website. To assist students in completing their degree requirements and provide students with the opportunity to see which courses are being offered in upcoming terms, the university has a live seats list that publishes a one-year calendar showing all course offerings and their associated attributes. Four-year plans of study, which outline course sequences for each undergraduate day program, are published on the website to assist students in academic planning and completing their degree within four years. A two-year course rotation for each SGOCE program is made available on the website to assist students in planning for the completion of their program. An online degree evaluation resource, Degreeworks, outlines which courses are needed for each program, and displays courses a student has successfully completed and requirements they still need to complete. Graduate and undergraduate students are able to track their degree progress in real time using Degreeworks, which connects individual student records to degree paths in the catalog.

FSU maintains authority and administrative oversight for the academic elements of all courses that receive institutional credit. This is true across all modalities and locations in which credit-based courses are offered. The university is responsible for approving, reviewing, and assessing course content, reviewing competencies and course outcomes and how they link to program outcomes, and working with departments to oversee the approval of instructors. The university sets admissions criteria, manages the admission review process, and oversees registration, retention, and evaluation of prior learning credits and transfer credits.

FSU also has 32 Extended Campus/contractual partnerships that are managed within SGOCE. The related academic department is responsible for managing the academic curriculum, which is overseen by the Extended Campus Office along with the Associate Dean of SGOCE, the Academic Deans, and the Department Chairs. Extended Campus programs that offer degrees are managed by an FSU graduate program chair, who also advises the off-campus students. The program chair oversees the curriculum review process on behalf of the related FSU academic department. All curriculum changes must be approved by the academic department and the Graduate Council and/or AUC. An SGOCE representative in collaboration with a representative from the academic department meets at least twice a year with the degree-granting partners and at least once a year with the non-degree granting partners to review program data, discuss challenges, and plan for continuous improvements. Each academic year, the Extended Campus partners sign a detailed contract with the university, which obligates them to follow the same procedures and policies, share the same standards for review and approval of programs, courses, and faculty, and have the same curriculum as their on-campus iterations. The Extended Campus Handbook details these policies and procedures.

University procedures ensure that Extended Campus faculty hiring, course, program, and syllabus approval adhere to or exceed university standards. Accordingly, multiple levels of review exist for these programs. An SGOCE representative, the program chairs, and appropriate deans meet with the agencies offering degree programs each year to review processes, curricula, and other pertinent issues. Agency teacher licensure programs are reviewed by the state every seven years, and all previously approved course syllabi are reviewed every three years. FSU program chairs and appropriate deans participate in the syllabi reviews.

Dual enrollment and Early College students are held to the same academic standards as our traditional undergraduate students. FSU works with internal and external partners to ensure these students receive academic support and advising appropriate to their special program status. Our new Early College Program requires the same standards to which all students must adhere. Courses are taught by either full- or part-time university faculty. In the case that courses are taught at a high school setting or by high school teachers, instructors are vetted and approved for hire as adjunct faculty by the academic department chair and dean.

The institution requires that all programs and courses offered for concentrated time periods or online maintain, and require, the same academic outcomes and rigor as those offered during more traditional time periods and modalities. All courses, regardless of location or delivery format including online, must meet the same requirements as campus-based courses.

Learning outcomes for all graduate and undergraduate programs are created by the academic department and posted on the university website. The academic department is responsible for ensuring that course requirements are appropriate for the level of credit assigned for the courses and that the course content is appropriate to the field of study. Experiences for which credit is awarded such as study abroad, internships, independent study, and service learning must include academic components that relate to the program offering the experience.

Placement testing is required for incoming freshmen with a GPA below 2.7 and for some transfer students in order to assure that they have the appropriate preparation for entry-level

English and mathematics courses. No credit toward graduation is awarded for pre-collegiate-level or remedial work designed to prepare the student for collegiate study.

The Admissions Office, Academic Departments, AUC, and the Graduate Council are responsible for overseeing and reviewing continuation, termination, and re-admissions policies. These policies are published in the university catalog along with policies related to academic standing.

Online students must meet the same entrance and retention criteria as those in on-campus programs, and are afforded the same access to services and the library as on-campus students. Academic support can be accessed by students from a distance at [www.fitchburgstate.edu/distance](http://www.fitchburgstate.edu/distance). To protect academic integrity, all FSU students must create a student account at the time of course registration or at the time of admission. All students receive a unique student ID number and a unique FSU email address and Falcon Key, which are used to register for courses and gain access to email, Blackboard, and Degreeworks. Security standards for course access are overseen by the Chief Information and Security Officers.

FSU offers a number of ways to help students advance in their academic programs such as establishing and maintaining articulation agreements with community colleges, offering dual enrollment, and awarding credit through prior learning assessment (PLA), Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), College Level Examination Program (CLEP) testing and military experience. Other experiences for which credit is awarded such as study abroad, internships, independent study, and service learning must include academic components related to the program offering the experience.

FSU does not offer competency-based programs but does have a credit for prior learning through portfolio assessment (PLA) option, which allows undergraduate students to earn up to 30 credits through portfolio assessment. Students must demonstrate prior work or life experience in order to qualify for PLA credit and all credits earned must be aligned with courses offered at the university except for Occupational Education students who can earn up to 12 credits for prior education related to their occupational field of practice. All students earning PLA credit must demonstrate Bachelor's-level learning and articulate how their experience relates to course outcomes as applicable. Students cannot use PLA in place of the minimum 30 residency credits required for all undergraduate students.

Every member of the university community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. Students repeatedly encounter the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#), which is included in each course syllabus as well as the university catalog. The Academic Integrity Policy is also located in the [Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Process Handbook](#) and the [Student Handbook](#). An [Academic Participation and Honesty online tutorial](#) created by the library and embedded in the First Year Experience (FYE) includes an overview of the Academic Integrity Policy, citation styles, and tips on avoiding plagiarism. In addition, international graduate and undergraduate students participate in an academic integrity workshop run by the library as part of their onboarding process. New faculty participate in academic integrity professional development sessions as part of the New Faculty Academy. Academic Integrity topics such as plagiarism are discussed through the Center for Teaching and Learning and other faculty professional development platforms. Some degree programs, particularly ones that lead



to professional certifications such as Nursing, Education, Human Services, Criminal Justice, and the Police program, have additional academic and professional integrity standards. [Information on reporting an academic violation](#) is available on the university's website.

## **Appraisal**

The combination of an emerging younger workforce and immigrant influx in our region has created an increase in first-generation college seekers and non-traditional adult learners, and has amplified barriers to success due to systemic/historic inequities for these populations. In response FSU has added the Early College Program to assist first-generation college seekers, has updated programming for non-traditional Bachelors-seeking students, and is working to identify unique programming needs to address systemic inequities, through professional development for faculty in designing and updating curriculum to address inequities, assessing and understanding academic resource and service gaps related to access, and working with the local community and employers to identify and create professional development and other programming related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The Center for Professional Studies has created a number of non-credit courses focused on DEI for a variety of audiences. The process of determining how to update and assess our curriculum and service through a DEI lens has started, but more work is needed to help clarify action plans and assess outcomes.

Navigate, the Student Success Advising Platform, was implemented across campus beginning in the 2017-2018 academic year as the Student Success Collaborative and has contributed to improving communication to students about upcoming deadlines, encouraging student registration, and making it easy for students to sign-up for advising appointments that will assist in their choice of future courses and meet their graduation timeline goals. The Navigate system was also made available to all graduate students in summer 2021.

In order to acknowledge and reward the fact that many of our students bring with them a range of knowledge and experience, we updated the Credit for Prior Learning through Portfolio Assessment Process in Fall 2021, including changing the name from Life Experience Credit Award Program (LECAP) to Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). Undergraduate students can earn up to 30 credits through PLA. To ensure academic rigor regarding PLA credits, students must match prior experience with an existing course, acquire approval from their advisor and department to earn the credit through PLA, and demonstrate through a portfolio process how their prior experience matches the learning outcomes of the course(s) for which they are seeking credit. Information about the PLA process is available in the catalog and on the website.

FSU also received State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) approval in 2018 which requires an annual review and renewal. SARA approval requires institutions to meet national standards for online programming and service acknowledging that online programs meet the same level of quality as face-to-face courses and programs. For online courses, in addition to being reviewed and approved by department and/or program chairs, they must be reviewed and approved by the digital learning coordinator and the appropriate academic dean. The developmental and approval process is [detailed here](#).

## **Projections**

The Academic Deans will collaborate with academic departments to increase the number of BA degrees awarded on campus, such as curricular redesigns that differentiate the BA from the BS beyond the language requirement. This work will begin in AY22; an evaluation plan will be developed by the end of AY23 to determine the effectiveness of these strategies.

Academic departments will undertake an evaluation of program course numbers beginning in AY23 to ensure numbers are consistently applied to indicate lower and upper level courses.

SGOCE will work with graduate chairs to identify strategies to increase opportunities for graduate level research and scholarship. A multi-year plan and timeline for this work will be developed during AY22, with the goal of implementing the first phase of the plan in Fall 2022.

The admissions transfer office in collaboration with the General Education program area will establish a process to evaluate the new General Education Block Transfer Pathways on a bi-annual basis and implement this process prior to fall 2022.

The SGOCE Dean will explore strategies to increase student awareness of and utilization of the credit for prior learning through portfolio assessment and CLEP exam options between fall 2021-spring 2023.

## **Standard 5: Students**

### **Description**

In Fall 2020, Fitchburg State University enrolled 6,728 students. There were 2,828 full-time undergraduates, 984 part-time undergraduates, 539 full-time graduate students, and 2,513 part-time graduate students. FSU does not offer any PhD programs. There are 13 programs that are 100% online with 2,251 students enrolled in 2020. There are 4 programs that are partially online (50-99%) with 542 students enrolled in 2020. In AY2020, there were 138 international students. Approximately 3% of students receive instruction through FSU's other instructional locations. In Fall 2019, 1,379 students resided in residence halls, 44% of the full-time undergraduate population.

### **Admissions**

FSU describes the students it seeks to serve within its mission statement, vision, and values (which is prominently displayed in the About Fitchburg State section of our website). FSU is committed to providing a high-quality educational experience that is also inclusive, integrated, and equitable. Our vision is founded on the principles of social mobility and economic prosperity for all. The 2020-2025 strategic plan includes the goal of "forging innovative paths to knowledge acquisition, career readiness, social mobility, and lifelong learning." The undergraduate population includes students traditionally underserved in higher education, including first-generation, low-income, and non-traditional students. The undergraduate population represents primarily the Massachusetts Community, with 92% residing in state.

The university enrolls significant numbers of nontraditional students. In 2020, 45.5% of the undergraduate population identified as 1st-generation, 20.6% of the undergraduate students were 25 years old or older, 41.3% of undergraduate students received Pell grant assistance, and 30% of newly enrolled students were transfer students. FSU offers 2 dual enrollment programs, with 136 students enrolled in 2020. As of May 2020, 394 undergraduate students had enrolled in disability services which accounts for 12.5% of the undergraduate population.

In Fall 2020, 53.6% of undergraduate students identified as female (and 46.4% identified as male). 65.9% of graduate students identified as female (and 34.1% identify as male). FSU began collecting non-binary gender information in Fall 2017. In Fall 2021, 1.7% of undergraduate and 0.6% of graduates students identify as one of the following: Trans Man, Trans Woman, demigender, genderqueer, or questioning.

In Fall 2020, 69% of undergraduate students identified as white, 12.4% of students identified as Hispanic or LatinX, 10.5% identified as Black or African-American, and 3.1% identified as Asian. 73.9% of graduate students identified as white, 6.4% identified as Hispanic or LatinX, 7.9% identified as Black or African-American, and 3.4% identified as Asian.

The organization of enrollment management has shifted over the last ten years. A former dean of enrollment position was eliminated in 2015 resulting in the admissions and registrar offices moving under the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the student accounts and financial offices moving under the Vice-President for Administration and Finance. In 2021, a new

position of Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management (AVPEM) was created to better coordinate admissions, financial aid, and marketing with a primary focus on undergraduate enrollment. The AVPEM is a vital member of the senior leadership team, bringing a strategic vision, tactical skill set, and active engagement to the development, coordination, and implementation of a university-wide enrollment management process that addresses recruitment, enrollment, and graduation of students, disbursing financial assistance and scholarships, and marketing FSU to local, regional, and international constituents.

The mission of the Office of Admissions is to provide information about academic program offerings, academic services, and experiential opportunities to prospective students. The Office of Admissions has a recruitment plan that includes strategies to enroll a variety of student populations: first-year, honors, transfer, local, students of color, student-athletes, international, students with disabilities, out-of-state students, and Summer Bridge students.

All undergraduate students are admitted based on admission standards set by the DHE. FSU admits students who, based on high school GPA (and/or college GPA for transfer students), standardized test scores, and involvement in activities in high school and the community, demonstrate a potential for success in the programs to which they are admitted. To maintain their desired enrollment and ensure success in their program, the Nursing department has higher admission standards than the DHE's. The Communication Media and Criminal Justice programs also had higher standards in the past 10 years, but recently brought them in line with current DHE standards. Students participating in FSU's Summer Bridge Program are able to meet DHE's standards after successfully completing the program. FSU also participates in the DHE's test optional pilot program through which applicants can opt to not submit SAT/ACT scores and to have their high school GPA be the main basis for admission.

Graduate, online, and continuing education admissions has moved from the Office of Admissions to the School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education (SGOCE). The purpose of this move was to align graduate admissions decision making and communication to the recruitment and enrollment work taking place in the SGOCE. However, the Office of Admissions still handles all frontline support for both the graduate and undergraduate programs.

Graduate students are evaluated and admitted based on a variety of admission standards that may be specific to the program to which they're applying. Admission consideration is strongly based on performance in their undergraduate degree program, their overall cumulative undergraduate GPA, and their work experience. Along with that, consideration is given to those with strong letters of recommendation, a strong statement of purpose and writing sample, and successful passing of Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (for Education only). These requirements vary by graduate program and application materials receive holistic review when required. Some programs may also evaluate candidates for fit and aptitude in teaching preparation programs as well as counseling programs. The graduate application review process varies by program. The program chair reviews applications for some programs and for others a staff member may review applications based on criteria set by departments. Standardized tests such as the GRE and GMAT are not required for admission into any graduate programs.

FSU's recruitment strategies are centered on core values of accessibility and affordability. The university evaluates success (via such metrics as retention and graduation rates) of all sub-populations to ensure that all populations are successful and this information is used to inform admissions. For example, our Nursing, Communications Media, Criminal Justice, and Summer Bridge programs all have adjusted admission guidelines to balance success and student access.

FSU accepts 86.9-88.4% of first-year undergraduate applications. Of these accepted applications, 25.1-26.3% of applicants enroll. Transfer students are accepted at a slightly higher rate (91.2-94.8%) and are significantly more likely to enroll (60.3-68.7%). Graduate students are also accepted at a higher rate (93.2-98.4%) and are also more likely to enroll (71.3-71.5%).

Admission and retention policies and procedures are consistent with the university's mission and purpose, are available to all students and prospective students, and are clearly stated in the catalog and digital publications. The admissions office participates in undergraduate and graduate college fairs, high school visits, on-campus visits, academic program information sessions, and panels for school guidance counselors. The SGOCE participates in graduate fairs, virtual information sessions, open houses, and workforce development events. SGOCE also visits community colleges, local employers, and community agencies. In addition, the SGOCE collaborates with admissions on international recruitment planning. The SGOCE and the Office of Admissions collaborate on recruitment activities such as transfer student outreach and marketing plans to streamline initiatives, messaging and branding.

FSU employs several methods to assess student readiness for collegiate study; one is placement testing. First-year students with a high school GPA of less than 2.7 (recalculated) or starting a major that requires precalculus are required to take Accuplacer placement tests (Writeplacer, QAS, AAF). Graduate students entering the Masters of Computer Science program take the Accuplacer Computer Science tests (C and Java). Language placement exams are administered through WebCAPE. Remote testing is available and students can retake placement tests once.

The College Student Inventory (CSI) is administered to entering first-years prior to Fall enrollment. The Mid-Year Student Assessment (MYSA) is administered to the same population mid-year. Both identify readiness and need for supports on both the individual and aggregate level. Students are connected to the supports they need and aggregate data can be used for assessment and planning. In Fall 2020 FSU added custom questions to both the CSI and MYSA related to the pandemic, specific to technology and financial need. Data on the risk-level of the first-year class and which supports are most needed is shared at the start of term. This data is also filtered by race/ethnicity and gender. CSI advisor reports are loaded into SSC Navigate so that advisors and FYE faculty have access to this information.

Admitted students receive a number of supports. Incoming first-time and new transfer students take a First Year Experience Seminar (FYE). The goals of the course are to prepare students for a successful college career by developing habits of mind, reading, and information literacy skills. Each section is arranged thematically to tailor the content of the course to the student's chosen major, but the learning outcomes are the same for each section.

FSU also provides additional support to undergraduate Latino males through the PIF (Performance Incentive Fund) Hispanic Male Mentoring Program. This program is funded by the DHE and primarily focuses on the first year. Faculty and peer mentors (with Spanish language skills) work with incoming Latino students to provide proactive guidance to college life.

The Academic Coaching & Tutoring Center offers individualized workshops and in-class support for key student success skills such as time management, motivation, and concentration. The Student Success Collaborative (SSC) can also be used to make academic coaching appointments. The university has 20 peer mentors that provide services to both FYE and non-FYE students. In the Fall semester, peer mentors attend class alongside new students enrolled in the FYE seminars, offering advice, workshops, and office hours. In the Spring semester, peer mentors lead a variety of activities to help students learn about campus resources, participate in campus social events, and develop study strategies. These services primarily serve undergraduate students, but writing support is available to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Each semester there is an official 3-week advising period, but advisors maintain contact with advisees all year long. Students report to advisors through the SSC. Faculty are encouraged to submit enrollment census and deficient mid-semester grades each semester to alert advisors and academic coaches. Alerts can also be generated for academic coach referral, tutor referral, financial aid referral, and attendance issues.

The Career Service & Advising Center provides a number of support services including career and academic advising, graduate school advising, mock interviews, interview room, career assessment, alumni job shadowing programs, and a number of workshops and events.

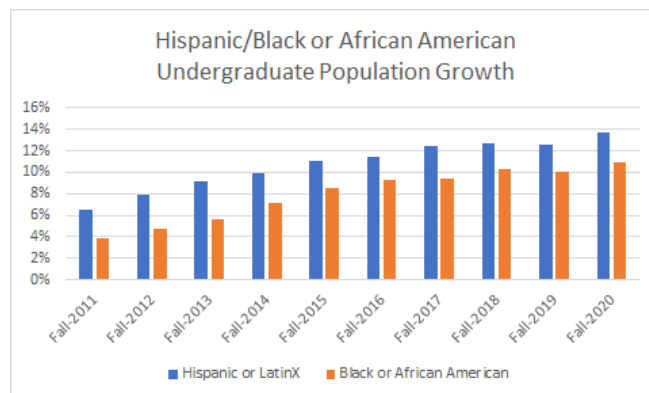
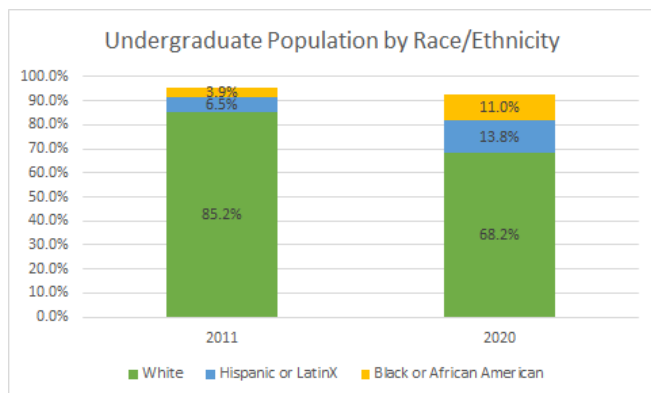
### **Appraisal**

FSU's total undergraduate population has declined 8.8% since 2011. The majority of this decline is due to decreased numbers of full-time undergraduates which has declined by 20.5% (3558 in 2011 to 2828 in 2020). Over this same time period, the part-time undergraduate population has actually grown by 35% (725 in 2011 to 984 in 2020).

The population of traditionally underserved undergraduate students at FSU has increased over the past 10 years. In 2011, 85.2% of students identified as white compared to 68.2% in 2020. The quickest growing populations have been the Hispanic or LatinX population which has increased from 6.5% to 13.8% and the Black or African American population which has grown from 3.9% to 11%. FSU embraces these changing demographics. The 2020-2025 strategic plan includes goals of doubling the undergraduate enrollment of LatinX students (to 25%). To accomplish this diversity goal, admissions is shifting to a new outreach-focused recruitment model. This includes forming partnerships with Community Based Organizations, meeting with faith-based leaders and community influencers, and outreach to precollege programs. In addition, natural changes in the local demographics will likely contribute to the diversification of the undergraduate population. With this adjustment in demographic representation, the

institution will focus on developing new initiatives to support a larger anticipated Black African American and LatinX student population.

Despite the recent change to FSU transfer policies, the number of new transfer students in the



day school has decreased by approximately 20% since 2011, aligning with a regional decline of students at community colleges. The number of transfer students enrolling in online undergraduate programs through SGOCE, on the other hand, has increased. The RN-BS in Nursing program that was relaunched in 2017 now has over 200 students, and the online undergraduate business program has seen more than 10% increase in enrollment between 2018-2020. To address the day school's declining transfer enrollment, the transfer center has developed outreach initiatives including personalized outreach to community colleges transfer coordinators and monthly transfer days at the university during which students can have their transcripts evaluated and admission decisions made immediately for qualifying students. A new online orientation has been developed to better assist new students in the onboarding process.

SGOCE has also transitioned the orientation process for all new graduate students to an online platform and beginning in the fall 2021 semester, SGOCE will offer the orientation 3 times a year at the beginning of each semester fall, spring and summer. The orientation is recorded and shared with all students that are not able to participate in the online synchronous sessions.

FSU's graduate student population has grown steadily over the last 10 years. From 2011 to 2019 the number of graduate students increased 38% (2,497 to 3,455). The undergraduate population has not changed drastically in the same period of time (4,283 in 2011 and 4,062 in 2019). However, the proportion of part-time undergraduate students has increased slightly from 16.9% in 2011 (725 students) to 22.2% in 2019 (904 students). The 2020-2025 strategic plan has a goal of increasing the enrollment of graduate students by 15% and increasing online enrollment by 20%. These populations have a graduation rate of 85-89%.

The population of traditionally underserved graduate students has not grown as quickly (77.7% identify as white). The strategic plan has a goal of increasing LatinX enrollment from 5 to 8.5%.

In order to meet the needs of our diverse admitted students, FSU offers a number of programs and supports. One important initiative is the PIF Hispanic Male Mentoring Program. The

program specifically targets Latino freshmen by providing faculty and peer mentoring support. Another program that is particularly successful is the TRIO Student Support Services program (formerly known as Expanding Horizons) which serves first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities (160 students per year). Students in this program attend pre-semester orientation programs that assist new students in adjusting to university life.

The First Year Experience seminar is designed to build academic skills and prepare students to succeed in a college environment and is another example of FSU's efforts to support our admitted students as a student-ready campus. Starting in Fall 2021, all incoming first-time and transfer students will take the course (in their first year). The course was piloted in Fall 2018, Fall 2019, and Fall 2020 (with 86, 162, and 178 students enrolled respectively). The student populations that participated in the pilot were participants of the PIF Hispanic male mentoring program, pre-majors, and education majors.

The university has also adopted several software systems in order to provide additional support to at-risk student populations. The tools used by faculty to conduct academic advising have improved markedly since the last self-study. In 2014, the university adopted a degree audit system called DegreeWorks. In 2015, the university partnered with EAB to implement a new predictive analytics and advising platform, the Student Success Collaborative (SSC). The SSC allows faculty advisors to see risk factors like rates of D, F, or W grades, as well as courses failed and retaken. It is also used each semester to collect data related to attendance, deficient midterm grades, and non-registration status. It also enables student referrals to support services and assists faculty advisors in scheduling course registration advising. SSC was utilized in Spring 2020 and Spring 2021 to gather information related to possible "walk-aways" resulting from the transition to remote learning due to the COVID pandemic. 163 students were identified with attendance issues in Spring 2020 and 345 students in Spring 2021. In 2019-2020 the system recorded 14,105 appointments scheduled for 3,053 students. The full-time faculty utilization rate of the SSC placement was 79% in 2019-2020. Graduate students were added to SSC in the summer of 2021 to improve communication with students, and gain some of the same service benefits available to our undergraduate students such as attendance tracking.

## **Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences**

### **Description**

From admission to graduation and beyond, FSU aspires to provide accessible, evidence-based programming and services to provide all students the opportunity for educational achievement. Our robust slate of student services and co-curricular experiences supports students' academic, social, career, civic, and wellness needs. The Division of Academic Affairs provides academic and career support in addition to a Student Success Task Force and a Transfer Student Success Task Force. The Division of Student Affairs coordinates varied student support services, and the Divisions of Finance & Administration and Technology and the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library ensure student opportunity and success through a variety of student-facing services.

FSU's student services are guided by the university's mission of preparing students to lead, serve, and succeed. Offices in Student Affairs—including Athletics & Recreation, the Center for



Diversity and Inclusiveness, Counseling, Disability Services, Community Health Connections, Housing & Residential Services, Student Conduct, Student Development, TRIO SSS, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math & Science, and the University Police Department—promote diversity, cultural richness, and belonging as students grow intellectually, build leadership skills, and create strong relationships. Student support offices within Academic Affairs—including the Academic Coaching and Tutoring Center, Career Services and Advising, International Education, the Crocker Center for Civic Engagement, and the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library—do the same.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion**

In providing services, FSU adheres to principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness is a hub of campus DEI programming, and CDI provides opportunities for acceptance, understanding, and celebration by sponsoring/ supporting an average of 30 events annually and supporting identity-based organizations such as Black Student Union, Gay Straight Alliance, Latin American Association, and World Integrated Nations. These principles are also exemplified by the campus-wide Leading for Change committee, individual student-serving departmental efforts, and student-led initiatives.

- CDI created a “First Generation Student Programming Committee” to develop an understanding of the barriers impacting students and develop programs
- CDI provides strategic oversight and collaboration with staff and faculty on integrating institution-wide Heritage Month Programming.
- CDI Facilitates dialogues on prevalent issues locally, nationally, and globally through the “Courageous Conversations” (formally titled “Inclusive Conversations”) initiative
- CDI provides a physical resource library for community members to explore and develop a greater understanding of identity through literature
- CDI serves as a physical affinity space for Black, LatinX, Asian Diaspora, Native American, Multiracial, multicultural students and allies
- CDI both sponsors and collaborates to bring prominent key note speakers on issues impacting minoritized student populations
- CDI is often called upon as a resource for social justice conversations, trainings, and workshops
- CDI assists in the integration of a divisional racial equity assessment for departments at Fitchburg State University

### **Health & Wellness**

FSU has multiple student services dedicated to physical and psychological wellness, as well as programs oriented toward the wellness needs of targeted groups. Additionally, professional and student staff receive training to support intervention in mental health crises.

- All incoming undergraduate students must complete the online *Haven: Understanding Sexual Assault* active bystander training and participate in a facilitated discussion of the film *Escalation*, which addresses interpersonal/relationship violence and sexual assault.
- Community Health Connections partners with Fitchburg State to provide student health services at two locations near campus.

- Free Flu Vaccination Clinic and COVID-19 Testing are available on-campus.
- Counseling Services provides prevention-oriented programming, high-quality treatment services, and referral for psychological difficulties that impact students' capacity to fully benefit from their education. In an inclusive space, counselors provide services focused on wellness, growth, and self-advocacy, in order to enhance students' success. All counseling services were made available online during the pandemic, and remote services continue to be an option for students during this time.
- Disability Services supports a large number of students with mental health disabilities who receive academic and programmatic accommodations and supports.
- FAVE (Fitchburg Anti-Violence Education) is a campus-wide effort to prevent interpersonal violence, relationship violence, and sexual assault, and to empower those affected by violence, through educational programming and trainings and promoting support services for survivors.
- QPR suicide prevention training is available to staff and student staff through Counseling Services.
- Awareness and support-based programming includes ribbon campaigns to create awareness around domestic violence, disordered eating, and other topics; events to dispel rape myths and victim-blaming; Take Back the Night to uplift survivor voices, and collaborations with community partners such as Pathways for Change.

### **Academic & Student Support Services**

Academic, advising, and career support and guidance are available to all FSU students through dedicated offices, as well as well-publicized faculty advising and office hours, which provide individualized faculty support of student achievement.

- The Academic Coaching and Tutoring (ACT) Center offers CRLA-certified drop-in and appointment-based academic support for all students. The ACT Center sees approximately 5,000 appointments per academic year and has expanded peer mentoring to serve all incoming first-year, transfer students, and graduate and online students. Professional academic coaches offer appointments to support student success skills, as well as individually supporting all students on academic probation and academic warning.
- The Career Services & Advising (CSA) Center offers academic advising to students who have not yet declared a major and support in exploring and selecting a major. CSA also offers career guidance, including Career Fairs, internship planning, and job search support, and in recent years has established a Career Success Certificate, adopted an online recruiting portal and created a resume book to connect undergraduate and graduate students and employers, and coordinated its first online Career Fair.

- The Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library is an essential resource providing digital catalogs, journals, databases, instruction, and information literacy. Students access individual support through research appointments, an online Chat service providing direct communication to librarians, and the Personal Librarian Program for first-year and transfer students during their first year. The Outreach Librarian for Student Success supports students through events and programming.
- The Douglas and Isabelle Crocker Center for Civic Engagement increases student success by engaging students in high-impact practices and learning opportunities through community-based internships, research, and civic learning projects.
- Summer Bridge is a conditional admittance program with intensive academic and mentoring support, to promote academic success.
- The Disability Services Office provides accommodations for all Fitchburg State students, allowing equal access to all university programs and services. Currently 358 students are registered with a disability, the categories of which have been expanded from 3 to 7 in order to better serve individual needs. The DSO provides testing accommodations in their Testing Center.
- TRIO SSS helps students who are first-generation, lower-income and/or have a disability to excel at FSU, offering 160 undergraduates advising, individual support plans, peer mentoring, and financial aid and academic counseling.

## **Student Life Services**

FSU offers programs to meet both residential and commuter students' needs. In addition to coordinating housing and parking, Housing and Residential Services offers walk-in academic support services, life skill management, Residential Learning Communities to foster a sense of belonging, and professional and leadership skills through the Residence Hall Association. Commuter Affairs offers services and programs to help commuters feel more connected to FSU.

Undergraduate transfer students who choose to live on campus have a community location in Mara Village; when capacity there is reached, transfer students are paired as roommates and placed in other upper-class residence halls. Collective placement of transfer students supports specialized programming, creating a social network to explore campus clubs and organizations.

FSU offers robust opportunities for student involvement, providing meaningful leadership experiences through co-curricular activities, participation in campus organizations and governance, volunteer and work experiences. The Office of Student Development provides student development opportunities through numerous extra- and co-curricular activities, including student employment, community service initiatives, commuter programs, and cultural programs. Other key areas offering co-curricular opportunities are Housing & Residential Services, Athletics and Recreation, the Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness, and the Library.

Campus clubs and the Student Government Association (SGA) offer leadership opportunities, as do community volunteer opportunities. Membership in the 75 currently active campus clubs, 3 sororities, and 3 fraternities is open to all students. The SGA empowers the Student Body and

represents their issues by participating in campus-wide committees and governing the committees responsible for student affairs, activities, and clubs. SGA representatives serve on 24 university committees, including the university's five major governance committees.

Leadership opportunities are also available as undergraduate employment. The Hammond Campus Center employs 45-50 students in leadership roles, and students also work as Orientation Leaders, Resident Assistants, Athletic Home Game Management, Recreation Center Attendants, Intramural Officials, Peer Leaders, Campus Center Managers, Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness Program Assistants, Tutors, and Peer Mentors. Paid employment makes leadership roles accessible to all students, including those who must work to afford college.

The Department of Athletics and Recreation provides high quality athletic and recreation programs that challenge students and support their academic endeavors, extending education beyond the classroom, fostering student engagement, leadership and development, and a lifelong commitment to health and wellness. Undergraduate Athletes, like all students, must meet our admission standards in order to be accepted, and Financial Aid follows all NCAA regulations for a D3 school. Athlete eligibility requirements, published in the student athlete handbook and academic catalog, are the same as progress requirements for all students. The average department GPA is usually between 2.9 and 3.0, and we place many student-athletes on MASCAC all-academic teams and on the National Student Athlete Honor Society.

All student services and opportunities are well-promoted to students and prospective students through orientations, open houses, the Student Handbook and catalog, an introductory Blackboard course for all students, the university website, the OSD resource guide, and regular online and in-class outreach by most student-serving offices.

Admissions hosts open houses throughout the year, attended by all student-serving offices. New student orientations introduce students to support services, as does the summer-long, online "Falcon Connections" program, led by Peer Leaders. Some student-serving offices—International Education, Disability Services, TRIO SSS, Office of International Education, SGOCE—host additional open houses and orientations for targeted students.

### **Case Management**

The Community Assessment and Risk Evaluation (CARE) Team is a multidisciplinary team that works to ensure and meet the needs of all students by addressing their safety, welfare, and academic success. The CARE Team functions as a student safety net, and receives reports of behaviors and other concerns, working to address them through a comprehensive case management approach that is in the best interest of the student and the campus community.

The Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT) ensures students, faculty, and staff affected by bias or bias-related incidents have access to appropriate resources and assists FSU in its response in situations that may impact the overall campus climate around DEI. The team reviews and responds to incidents in an educational, non-confrontational, non-punitive manner.

### **Policies & Procedures**

Policies on student rights and responsibilities, including student conduct and grievance procedures, are also well publicized, clearly stated, readily available, and consistently administered. The Student Handbook, the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Process Handbook, and all other policies are available on the FSU website.

Individuals responsible for student services are qualified by formal training and work experience. All new hires complete a standardized HR training, including: Conflict of Interest, Diversity: Inclusion in the Modern Workplace, Preventing Harassment & Discrimination, Managing Bias, Data Security and Privacy, and more. Employees receive regular check-ins for the first year, then yearly appraisals from managers.

The Office of Financial Aid assists students who, without financial assistance, would be unable to attend college. They administer Federal, State, and Institutional need-based aid, as well as work study, and in 2019-2020 we awarded \$43 million in financial aid to our students. The office informs students about their rights and responsibilities as financial aid recipients through our website and self-service module, print documents, and electronic communications.

The office utilizes the university's student information system's auto-packager to award equitably to all students. Academic Works allows students to apply for scholarships offered by the foundation and by other supporters of the University. Web4 not only lists their awards and allows them to actively accept their loans, it also shows them missing items needed to complete their file. Dynamic forms have been implemented to allow students to electronically submit missing forms, and Google Meets have been used to help students virtually.

FSU regularly provides students with clear and timely pre-borrowing information about cost, debt, and repayment. Students and families are given information about their rights and responsibilities as borrowers. Students must actively accept their loans, complete Entrance Counseling, and sign a Master Promissory Note in order to pay into their accounts.

The Student Accounts Office works with students and their families in understanding their charges, having their financial aid applied to their account, and issuing any refunds they may have due to excess payments to their account. The office is part of the Enrollment Management team, who all sit on the Student Success Task Force.

FSU has publicly available policies regarding the kinds of information that will be included in the permanent academic record of students as well as policies regarding the retention, safety and security, and disposal of records. The University's Retention Standards are based on the Massachusetts Retention Schedule and follow state standards for protection as well as modeling our Security Plans and Policies to comply with NIST standards.

The Office of the Registrar manages FERPA forms. The Office of Student Accounts allows for Authorized Users to be created on the Bill Payment Site. Student Affairs has a new position to manage health records in conjunction with dedicated RN's/PA's at our local Health Care facility.

## **Appraisal**

Since 2012, a Student Success unit has been created to promote retention and review policy through a retention and equity lens. Tutoring and academic coaching have been expanded, and

a peer mentoring program has been created. Career support services have been expanded and a campus-wide initiative is mapping core career competencies with curricular learning objectives. Summer Bridge has changed from a low-cost to a no-cost program and has expanded to include residential and online attendance options. The inclusion of an online option, which expands Summer Bridge's accessibility to students who cannot live on or commute to campus during the summer, will remain a feature of the program. The new Outreach Librarian for Student Success coordinates programs and services aimed at improving student engagement, retention, and success. According to the 2020 Climate Survey, 75% of students Strongly Agree/Agree that FSU is committed to their success (up from 70% in 2018), 90% of students Strongly Agree/Agree that they have the opportunity to succeed at FSU (slightly down from 92% in 2018), and 86% of students Strongly Agree/Agree that FSU provides the support students need to succeed academically (slightly up from 84% in 2018.)

FSU's student-serving offices have more actively centered assessment in planning since 2012. The Student Affairs Assessment Team launched in AY2018-19 to prioritize assessment, hold student affairs departments accountable, and plan collaborative efforts. In Academic Affairs, each non-teaching department has an annual Unit Action Plan, designed to tie goals, objectives, and expected outcomes to the strategic plan. Counseling Services also collects data to understand the needs and goals of students served (including residential status, matriculation status, degree of study, and clinical concerns), which directs current and future programming.

There is an increased expectation for student affairs services to be intentional with developing students outside the classroom, while supporting the in-classroom experience. The Office of Student Development is in the process of adopting a co-curricular model for all students that has measurable learning outcomes and supports Institutional Learning Priorities.

The Athletic Department has expressed their concerns with adequately supporting student athletes academically. As the majority of the coaching staff is part-time, with 4 full-time coaches, it is difficult for coaches to provide academic monitoring, study hall, and advising services for student-athletes. However, coaches are an important source of information regarding student academic progress and may be critical in connecting student athletes that need support with the appropriate resources. The university should explore mechanisms to better connect the student athletes with existing student support services.

Focus groups during summer orientation (2016-2019) assessed students' experiences, including their engagement with student services and their understanding of the content covered in orientation, and the largely positive results have directed programming decisions. Financial Aid. Student orientation has consequently expanded, redeveloping from half-day to overnight summer sessions and blending the themes of academic and student life. In 2019, 99% of new students participated in orientation, providing high exposure to student services. Students reported feeling better prepared for the transition. In the Fall 2018 evaluation, 90.6% of students reported understanding the importance of belonging and engaging in their educational experience. During orientation, Financial Aid and Student Accounts hold information sessions on paying for college and financial literacy, and they are working with the First-Year Experience group to create an experiential piece that would include financial literacy.

During COVID-19, student engagement is down by 50% or more in all extra- and co-curricular areas. Student engagement in campus services is also diminished, as on most campuses. Expanded online services, increased outreach, and use of new platforms for programming are among the strategies departments are using to increase engagement. The COVID response survey indicated that mental health, financial, and technology services were most utilized.

Years of exploring how to expand health services and provide students with a wider range of expertise led FSU to eliminate its on-campus health clinic and partner with Community Health Connections, a federally qualified health center with two locations close to campus. CHC has a sliding fee discount program and students access services using their student health insurance. CHC offers dentistry, optometry, behavioral health, and podiatry—and evening and weekend hours—that the university was not previously able to provide. This change allowed FSU to meet increasing demand for a broader array of services but met with initial resistance from some students, faculty, and staff. In particular, students expressed concerns around access and not having Health Services on campus. It is unclear if these concerns still exist, and more information is needed about the level of student satisfaction with the new health center.

In line with the strategic plan, FSU's goal is providing services which show a commitment to education justice and providing equity of opportunities to students. One strategy is redeveloping the Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness, including a new Director position, to respond both to student requests for additional support and the campus-wide need for leadership around critical dialogue, student advocacy, and strong DEI programming.

The Leading for Change committee coordinated the university's climate surveys, which indicated many students of color don't experience a sense of belonging at FSU. In response to this discrepancy and to increased national attention to racial injustice, several student-serving departments have focused on improving their DEI commitments. Student Affairs created a DEI committee; the ACT Center implemented a diverse Peer Advisory Council to propose equitable policies; CSA hosted a First Generation Alumni Panel; the university implemented a Bias Incident Response Protocol and Team; and Library Services formed an internal Anti-Racism Team to assess services. Most offices also implemented reading groups and staff DEI training.

FSU has recently revised its website to be more geared towards recruitment, and provide a better experience for users on mobile devices. Policies on student rights and responsibilities could be more centrally located for increased ease of access. Financial Aid dynamic forms have been implemented to allow students to electronically submit needed forms, and Student Accounts takes a comprehensive approach to delivering information to students, including both print and electronic communications. Students have 24/7 access to both financial aid and student accounts information, as well as registration details through our self-service module.

FSU students have both electronic and paper options to submit their privacy requests to several offices on campus. Many offices on campus have moved to imaging systems, and this helps with record retention. The university recently purchased dynamic forms software for many offices on campus to aid in streamlining forms on campus and information security.

Although student services programs and offices are open to graduate students, a large percentage do not utilize them. For instance, of the programming provided by career services, 30% is utilized by graduate students. Counseling services reported that 5% of the students seeking mental health services were graduate students. FSU needs to explore additional engagement opportunities for SGOCE students as they represent a growing population.

### **Projections**

The Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management will develop an enrollment plan by Fall 2022 to achieve Fitchburg's strategic enrollment goals.

The Vice President for Student Affairs will form a team in Fall 2022 to introduce a co-curricular model to the division. In Fall 2024, Student Affairs will work with all departments to evaluate the effectiveness of the co-curricular model. This team will establish a set of standards that will be used to assess the effectiveness of the co-curricular model and the data collected will be used to make improvements to this work in Fall 2025.

In Fall 2022, Student Affairs and Institutional Research and Planning will create and administer a student survey to assess the change to Community Health Connections. In Spring 2023 results will be reviewed by senior leadership and action items will be identified for Fall 2023.

In Fall 2022, School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education and Institutional Research & Planning will create and administer a survey to identify the services used and desired by graduate students. In Spring 2023 a team of staff and administrators will assess the responses and develop recommendations keeping in mind fees associated with varied student services.

In Fall 2022 the Senior Director of Athletics and Recreation will form and lead a committee to explore strategies that support student athletes' academic success, including better utilization of existing resources. Committee recommendations will be submitted to the Vice President for Student Affairs in Spring 2023 for review and action.



## Standard Six: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

### Faculty and Academic Staff

#### Description

In line with our mission statement, FSU faculty and academic staff are committed to preparing students to lead, serve, and succeed, by fostering lifelong learning and civic and global responsibility. FSU's structures and processes ensure the quality of instruction and support for student learning through opportunities for faculty growth and development.

When referencing faculty, we are referring to teachers, lecturers, and professors at both the undergraduate and graduate level. FSU has roughly 200 full-time faculty members, teaching across 15 departments (see Standard 6.1 Data First Forms). Each year there are between 80 and 100 adjunct faculty teaching in our undergraduate and graduate programs. There are no teaching assistants, so all courses are taught by either full-time or adjunct faculty. Full-time faculty are included in the collective bargaining agreement between the Board of Higher Education and Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA), while faculty and adjunct faculty teaching for the School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education (SGOCE) are covered by the MSCA Division of Graduate and Continuing Education (DGCE) contract.

Academic staff refers to librarians, advisors (career and advising center and TRIO Support Services Program staff), instructional designers/technology trainers, tutors and tutor center staff, Disability Services staff, and co-requisite course staff supporting students' academics.

The faculty and librarian collective bargaining agreement defines faculty ranks, qualifications, hiring and evaluation processes, and workload; it also details faculty rights including academic freedom. The Faculty Handbook defines faculty expectations and processes to ensure that faculty act responsibly and ethically while observing the established conditions of their employment, consistent with FSU's mission and purpose.

Faculty and librarians may be appointed at any rank for which they are qualified, provided that the position was advertised at that rank. Article 1 of the MSCA contract defines faculty and librarian ranks as well as "full-time," "part-time," "faculty," "librarian," and "tenure." Full-time tenure-track faculty are required to have a doctorate or terminal degree. The faculty body consists of individuals with rankings of Instructor, Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor. Departmental faculty vary between 6 and 23, with Earth and Geographic Sciences having a total of 6 faculty and Communication Media with 23 faculty. These faculty numbers are based on student needs and program size, with specific information found within the data depicting the number of faculty by department. We have seen changes between Fall 2018 and Fall 2020 around gender and diversity, reporting a slight decrease in male faculty and an increase in female faculty. A decrease in white male faculty members has been noted (decrease of 16) while white females have remained the same (see Category of Faculty).

The MSCA contract sets minimum and maximum salary ranges and governs all raises tied to promotion and post-tenure review, while the DGCE contract sets the salary ranges for all faculty working within SGOCE. The VPAA negotiates starting salary with incoming faculty hired through the MSCA contract, taking into consideration a range of factors. Faculty hired to teach in SGOCE

are ranked as Visiting Instructor, Visiting Senior Instructor, Visiting Assistant Professor, Visiting Associate Professor, or Visiting Professor. Once faculty are ranked following the guidelines outlined on pages 17-18 of the DGCE contract, the ranking is used to determine salaries. The Dean for SGOCE assigns ranking based on the MSCA's faculty definitions.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement provides structure in regard to teaching load, service, and scholarship expectations and opportunities. Flexibility and acknowledgement of unique load considerations are also provided through shared governance through opportunities such as cross-departmental/team-teaching course development and assignment of teaching credit in light of both the value placed and the demands of this type of instructional innovation.

Faculty's right to academic freedom is supported by the MSCA contract for our undergraduate programs and the DGCE contract for SGOCE programs. Within MSCA Article V: Academic Freedom and Responsibility and DGCE Article IV: Academic Freedom and Responsibility, specific language outlines the agreement to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom. FSU is committed to ensuring faculty have the academic freedom to pursue their scholarly interests and to implement pedagogical practices that enhance student learning.

All Day faculty are evaluated in accordance with the MSCA contract, Article VIII. The process includes student, peer, and administrative evaluations. Through the MSCA Contract and job descriptions, FSU defines its expectations of all faculty members, including the area of scholarly pursuits. For Day faculty, evaluators review the narrative prepared by the faculty member, describing the faculty member's teaching effectiveness, academic advising, continuing scholarship, other professional activities, and alternative professional activities. The well-defined procedure in the MSCA contract and job description when faculty are hired define scholarly expectations, and the documented evaluation procedures assure faculty are current in the theory, knowledge, skills, and pedagogy of their discipline.

To ensure that faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities, FSU follows the MSCA evaluation process and criteria for our undergraduate programs and the DGCE contract for all SGOCE programs. The MSCA collective bargaining agreement defines the evaluation criteria and process of faculty reappointment, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure review for tenure and tenure-track faculty and librarians. All tenured faculty and librarians not seeking a promotion during the time that the contract is in effect may seek post-tenure review. Processes for the hiring, evaluation, and renewal of adjunct/part-time faculty are also enumerated in the MSCA agreement, with the primary criteria for renewal being teaching effectiveness as evaluated through student surveys and classroom observations. All faculty teaching in SGOCE are considered adjunct faculty and their evaluations follow the DGCE contract, Article IX: Evaluations. Specific criteria are outlined in the DGCE contract and include teaching effectiveness, course advising, and instructional obligations as prescribed in Section A(1) of Article VIII. The evaluation of faculty teaching in SGOCE occurs during the first instructional period of teaching in the program and any sixth subsequent SGOCE course.

Faculty teaching in SGOCE that are considered full-time Day faculty are able to teach up to 5 courses a year above load, preferably 1 course each in the Fall, Spring, Winter, and Summer sessions. Adjunct faculty teaching in SGOCE are able to teach 3 courses per semester.

Full-time faculty teach a 4/4 load. Faculty may be granted release time from teaching for a variety of reasons. Examples include department chair, Coordinator of the Honor's program, CTL, CFS, or Crocker Center, union officer, graduate program chair, SGOCE professor, or performing grant-supported research. Some release time results from course overload paybacks. Reductions in workload not governed by the collective bargaining agreement must be approved by the VPAA. Faculty members may request to add SGOCE classes to their 4-course teaching load, but most choose to receive additional compensation.

All tenure-track positions are filled by nationally advertised searches, with attention given to recruiting for diversity. The recruitment and hiring of new faculty is a shared process which includes faculty members, department chairs, and Academic Affairs. As outlined in Standard 7, the Office of Human Resources collaborates with departments to assess the needs of vacant positions and identify appropriate advertising with a clear lens that is committed to increasing diversity within the faculty and staff ranks. At the completion of a search process, the Search Committee submits its final three candidates, unranked, to the department chairperson or library, who then submits the committee's recommendation and a separate chair recommendation to the dean. The dean makes a recommendation to the VPAA. The VPAA reviews the recommendations and makes a separate one to the President who makes the final decision. The Dean makes the offer, then a letter of appointment is sent.

FSU provides opportunities for professional growth and development, including the MSCA Professional Development fund and Special Projects Grants from Academic Affairs, which are reviewed and recommended by the Center for Faculty Scholarship. Faculty are invited to participate in Development Day three times a year, and the Center for Teaching and Learning provides additional professional development opportunities. The Office of Digital Learning also offers faculty development workshops for adjunct and full-time faculty throughout the year. Development Day provides professional opportunities for full-time faculty to ensure the experiences and data gathering are coordinated, shared, and reviewed for purposes of improving the academic program and student services. In addition, SGOCE offers several workshops and professional development activities specific to online and SGOCE programs.

FSU provides processes, policies, and expectations to ensure faculty act responsibly and ethically, and provides sufficient oversight and controls that, while not intrusive or restrictive, offer impartial avenues for identifying and addressing concerns when they arise. The university monitors and updates these processes, policies, and expectations as state standards or other internal and/or external entities identify needs or concerns.

All faculty are integrated into the department through university-instituted professional development opportunities. The integration process is multifaceted, including opportunities for mentoring and professional development. Academic Affairs coordinates the two-day orientation program for all new MSCA full-time faculty and librarians. The New Faculty and Librarian Academy for full-time faculty, a 2-day faculty orientation for all new MSCA faculty. The Academy follows the 2-day August orientation program and provides additional resources, information, and support during the first year. Through these sessions, new faculty and librarians have the opportunity to foster relationships with colleagues; network with colleagues

from across the university; learn more about resources to support their work; discover new teaching strategies; and find a supportive community of colleagues and mentors. Some of the sessions included are student advising, academic integrity, the evaluation process, active and inclusive teaching and learning strategies. The SGOCE program chair and the academic department oversee the mentoring of new faculty teaching in SGOCE.

FSU has made the continued assessment and enhancement of teaching and learning a priority as demonstrated by funding opportunities afforded to faculty and staff. Approximately 70% of the CTL budget has been earmarked for pedagogical grants: scholarship of teaching and learning, innovation, discussion groups, one-time purchases, etc. The MSCA Professional Development and Retraining fund is in part designed to support activities that “develop new teaching skills and an appropriate facility in the use of media, teaching aids, and other supportive techniques.” Funds are available for focused teaching activities, such as diversity, community engagement, Italian language/culture, Irish culture, digital humanities, etc. The Grant Center provides opportunities for experimentation and research as well.

In order to assure a full understanding of what materials are considered a conflict of interest, faculty are required to complete Conflict of Interest Training mandated by the state, and must disclose when they wish to teach materials from which they may receive monetary gain. Copyright Regulations for course materials are also available.

FSU is committed to the regular evaluation of its academic staff’s efficacy. The majority of staff members are part of the Professional Administrator bargaining unit. Staff members submit a self-evaluation twice per year in November and April. These self-evaluations, in conjunction with performance and goal-setting reviews with direct supervisors, inform an annual evaluative narrative that is drafted and submitted by the administrator’s supervisor in June. The annual report highlights work that is performed, professional development activities, and process improvements/suggestions that provide the supervisor with the ability to address the following competencies: leadership/management, communication/interpersonal skills, responsiveness, teamwork, problem solving/judgement and discretion, and job knowledge.

FSU’s commitment to providing quality of service to students is reflected in its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. Goal 2 calls for FSU to strengthen its identity as a student-ready university and to continue to narrow the achievement gap. Several strategies named to achieve this goal are linked to academic staff’s professional practices. This includes implementing a holistic model of student support services, staff training around equity and inclusiveness, and ensuring all process and support services adequately meet the needs of specific student populations.

In addition to individualized professional development action plans established through annual evaluations, FSU faculty, librarians, and staff are encouraged to participate in institutionally-hosted development opportunities. For example, three annual Development Days are open to all faculty and staff. These programs include topics such as the needs of students from underrepresented populations, assessment, advising, and other student support topics.

## **Appraisal**

The number of full-time faculty (defined as tenure-track faculty or 1-2 year temporary faculty hired full-time with benefits) has been consistent for Fall 2018, 2019, and 2020, ranging between 200 and 206. As noted in our Vision Statement, FSU is dedicated to creating a culture of diversity to meet the needs of the region and enhance the personal and academic lives of the university community. While our numbers representing diverse groups have fluctuated over the past 3 years, overall we have increased our diverse faculty by 4 across campus. Goal 4.1 of our Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 addresses this concern: "Increase the visible diversity of our faculty and staff in order to nurture the commitment to equity and inclusion through the campus community." Although we have not made significant gains increasing the diversity among our staff and faculty, we are committed to examining ways to do so.

The number of part-time faculty has declined from 111 in Fall 2018, to 110 in Fall 2019, to 81 in Fall 2020. This decline in the hiring of part-time faculty is reflective of the decrease in student enrollment over the past year, which has decreased by 9.9%. In contrast, there has been a continued increase in student enrollment (3.7%) within the School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education (SGOCE). This increase mirrored by an accompanying shift in SGOCE faculty numbers (Fall 2018: 75; Fall 2019: 66; Fall 2020: 101) ([Faculty Data](#)).

In order to attract and retain a diverse faculty and academic staff, the university will continue to place emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion. A new position, Director of Student Diversity, Equity and Belonging has recently been filled with duties including providing visionary leadership for the Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness, whose mission is to cultivate a safe space and a sense of belonging for the FSU community through education and partnerships while respecting all cultures, perspectives, and experiences. The Director's work will help support the attraction, recruitment, retention, academic and professional development of minoritized student populations including, but not limited to, students of color, first-generation students, and LGBTQ students. The Director will lead the collaborative effort to provide a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment committed to the success of all of our students and a shared sense of belonging. This position will create programming, educational opportunities, and services that address diversity initiatives and topics affecting the student body and will support and work in partnership with colleagues across student-facing offices.

In conjunction with this new position, FSU has explored the creation of a [Center for Faculty/Staff Equity and Inclusion](#) to address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion across campus. In 2020, a group of faculty and staff began this work and reported results and recommendations at the 2021 January Faculty Professional Development outlining proposed short term and long term goals.

There is a clear process for integrating new Day faculty into the university. However, as enrollment increases in SGOCE programs the need for adjunct faculty also increases in order to maintain quality programs. It is important to note, that SGOCE does not hire full-time graduate faculty; therefore, all integration of new faculty is designed for this adjunct population. In order to ensure a smooth transition for new faculty, new hires in SGOCE are integrated through their program chair and are provided with training opportunities specific to SGOCE and to enhance their understanding of online and adult learning. Although there is a process in place to

integrate faculty into SGOCE, this is an area we are looking to explore in order to provide a clearer and more definitive process that meets the needs of all faculty teaching in SGOCE.

FSU provides a mentoring program for new Day faculty in conjunction with their departmental integration. Departmental supports range from providing a new faculty handbook to assigning seasoned faculty as mentors. All departments indicate that the chair meets with new faculty on a regular basis and/or has an open-door policy to provide ongoing support. Some departments such as Education, Nursing, and Psychology assign specific departmental mentors, while other departments such as Humanities have mentors available for new faculty. New faculty have opportunities for professional development through supported conferences as well as the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The CTL offers a variety of programs for full-time and adjunct faculty and librarians. They include mentorship of incoming faculty & librarians, grants to encourage the use of new technologies or teaching methods, hosting pedagogical and instructional technology workshops, and annual and summer institutes. Several options for travel funding plus other grants through the provost and president's office are available.

There is an inconsistency among departments on how they continue to integrate and onboard new faculty into the department. Further exploration of the varied approaches departments use to integrate new faculty beyond the initial orientation and new faculty academy is needed.

Although specific programs require a number of courses taught by a variety of faculty members to ensure exposure to different academic strengths and viewpoints, not all majors are large enough to have multiple faculty teaching sections of the same course. Within the General Education curriculum multiple course sections are offered with a variety of faculty. An example of this is the first-year writing curriculum, ENGL 1100 Writing I and ENGL 1200 Writing II, taught by both full-time and adjunct faculty and offered in various modalities such as online, hybrid, and face-to-face. The English Studies department has published goals to ensure consistency while encouraging faculty to develop themed sections with individual emphases. The First-Year Experience (FYE) course is offered by departments, ensuring flexibility in topic and focus. However, in order to propose a section of FYE, instructors must incorporate the same program learning outcomes, two of which meet General Education learning outcomes, and participate in focused professional development. For the Fall 2021 semester, 31 FYE sections are offered, taught by both full-time and adjunct faculty. Graduate programs such as the Online Accelerated MBA program have multiple sections for each course that are taught by different instructors.

Starting full-time faculty salaries are set at appropriate levels through the application of the MSCA contract, which specifies minimum and maximum starting salaries. The salary history of full-time faculty between 2012 and 2021 reveals a consistent gender difference, with male faculty (including Instructors) earning \$6958 on average per year more than female faculty. This overall difference ranged from a low of \$4518 (2013-14) to a high of \$10519 (2020-21). The salary gap was most strongly reflected at the Professor level. In contrast, at the Assistant Professor level, the gender pay gap was much smaller, with female faculty often slightly earning more than male colleagues. Therefore this salary difference does not appear to be driven by inequities in the hiring process; it is unclear why salaries show more divergence at the Professor level, although disciplines and years of service are potential variables.

In addition to the close monitoring of our staff representation of diversity, it is important to note that in accordance with Massachusetts Equity Pay Act, HR will conduct a pay-equity study for faculty and staff, to assess whether there is statistical evidence of a gap in salary associated with gender or minority status. This process is expected to cross over the next two fiscal years.

## **Teaching and Learning**

### **Description**

FSU's commitment to teaching and learning is clear from its mission: "Fitchburg State University is committed to excellence in teaching and learning and blends liberal arts and sciences and professional programs within a small college environment." FSU is committed to assessing all academic programs and services, using the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) to gather the data and share information to help improve academic programs and services.

Through discussions between academic departments, the deans, and the Provost, FSU determines the requisite number of faculty for each major to ensure students are instructed by a variety of faculty. Enrollment considerations along with each major's needs and the General Education program are used to determine the number of sections of each course to offer.

FSU continually assesses institutional and program student learning outcomes in order to analyze what and how students are learning. For example, the School of Education uses annual data reports consisting of Candidate Disposition Rubric data, Lesson Plan Rubric data, Teacher Work Sample Rubric data, Teacher Candidate Exit Survey data, ESE Edwin Reports, and CAP Rubric data. The School of Education also used exit survey data from the Graduate Aggregate Moderate Disabilities program to guide the hiring of a new academic advisor for the largest program, Moderate Disabilities Post-Baccalaureate. Given the increase in positive feedback in the 2017-2018 Exit Survey, the academic advisor position was expanded in Fall 2018 to include the Severe Disabilities Post-Baccalaureate program. All supporting data can be found [here](#).

FSU seeks through the governance process to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. In addition, the CTL provides opportunities and support for undergraduate Day and SGOCE programs to engage in experimentation to improve instruction. The mission of the CTL states, "The Center for Teaching and Learning enhances the teaching and learning experiences of all faculty, librarians, and students by sustaining, promoting, and celebrating pedagogical practice, innovation, and excellence." The Vincent J. Mara Excellence in Teaching Award, celebrated at the May Development Day, annually recognizes faculty who have "demonstrated a sustained excellence in teaching, a notable impact on student learning, and a dedication to innovative instruction."

To assure instructional effectiveness, FSU periodically and systemically analyzes results from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, which works with academic and administrative departments to build a strong foundation in assessment by assisting in the development of Assessment Reports, Assessment Plans, and comprehensive Program Reviews.

Our instructional techniques and delivery systems are compatible with, and serve to prepare students for, a global society through curricular innovation and program development, while

creating a culture of diversity and inclusion to meet the needs of the region and enhance the personal and academic lives of the university community.

Faculty provide instruction through a variety of modalities to meet the needs of our students. In a February 2021 survey of faculty (including adjunct and SGOCE), 99% agreed that instructional methods are informed by academic and professional standards and disciplinary expectations. Between 81% and 84% of faculty teaching classes considered to be lecture-based indicated that they included active engagement and discussion. Additionally, 59% of faculty also reported including some experiential learning within their lecture-based classes.

It was also reported that lab/field-based classes included an approach to learning that embedded active engagement, discussion, and experiential learning. 90% of the faculty indicated that they strongly agree or agree that FSU endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning whenever and however courses and programs are offered. Similarly, 86% of the faculty supported the statement “FSU encourages pedagogical experimentation” and 85% indicated that FSU provides adequate support to improve instructional effectiveness.

Not only does the university strive to enhance the quality of teaching and learning through faculty support and assessment, full-time faculty are evaluated on their Teaching Effectiveness through observations for reappointment, tenure, and promotion evaluations. For our adjunct faculty teaching in SGOCE the DGCE Contract includes specific evaluative criteria in the area of Teaching Effectiveness to assure high-quality learning experiences for all students.

In addition to the full-time faculty’s primary focus on instruction, with scholarship and research as secondary to our commitment to inclusive excellence in teaching and learning, faculty members also serve on departmental, university, and professional society committees. The committee structure on campus reflects the variety of faculty appointments. The 8 faculty members on the AUC are elected by the faculty at large. Additionally, there are two dozen other committees on campus which are appointed by the MSCA. To that end, self-nominations are sought. A review of the committee appointments from the last several years shows a broad distribution of representation from all ranks and disciplines.

FSU places a great deal of emphasis upon academic advising for both the undergraduate Day programs and SGOCE programs. Each Day student is assigned an academic advisor within their major. Students who have yet to declare a major are assigned a professional academic advisor through the Career Services and Advising Center. In order to maintain quality advising that goes beyond academic planning, the CTL has been restructured, with academic advising as a main pillar of its mission. Thus, the CTL has created a committee to explore additional advising support and training for all Day faculty. For many SGOCE programs, chairs are responsible for providing advising for enrolled students. However, for larger programs, such as the online MBA program, a tiered approach has been implemented providing additional academic staff to support students. In the School of Education, some of the larger licensure programs (Moderate Disabilities and Severe Disabilities) have additional academic staff that focus on advising.

Faculty members embrace their contractual and mission-driven obligation to develop professionally and stay current in their fields. The MSCA contract defines continuing scholarship



as contributions in any of the following categories: contributions to the content of the discipline, participation in or contributions to professional organizations and societies, research as demonstrated by published or unpublished work, and artistic and other creative activities. All faculty choose at least one as well as one area under professional activities: public or community service and contributions to the growth and development of the university community. Adjunct faculty teaching for SGOCE do not have a contractual obligation to develop professionally; however when faculty are hired careful attention is given not only to the qualifications and degrees, but to experiences, research, and ability to stay current in the field.

While primarily a teaching institution, FSU is also committed to supporting the research, scholarship, and creative activities of its faculty and students. All faculty members receive Professional Development funds annually through the MSCA contract. The university provides additional funding and support through its Special Projects Grants. Each year, faculty can apply for grants, course reductions, student research assistants, and travel funds.

### **Appraisal**

FSU has taken a number of significant steps to create a culture of assessment on campus, and to use the data to make improvements in teaching and learning. Since we already have created clear ILPs for our undergraduates, FSU launched in January 2021 a new graduating student survey for graduate students that collects information on learning outcomes common to all graduate students. For undergraduate students, with the adoption of the new General Education curriculum, the General Education Program Area will be developing new assessment plans to ensure that the learning outcomes are being met.

In conjunction with university-wide assessment, many departments have assessment committees which meet monthly to advance learning outcomes assessment. Each assessment committee is typically composed of 4-8 members. Tasks taken on by assessment committees include conducting direct and indirect assessment, curriculum mapping, assessment reporting, and assessment planning. Those departments that do not have their own assessment committee do have an assessment liaison/coordinator who is a member of the UARC and works with the department and its curriculum committee to facilitate departmental assessment.

In working to build a campus assessment culture, FSU seeks to ensure that data is used to improve the quality of instruction and provision of services. When asked if they agree that they use assessment to improve and inform student learning, 85% of faculty have reported that they strongly agree with the statement. Since its last visit, the University continues to take steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching and Learning Hours are scheduled on the Academic Calendar for the third Tuesday of every month during the academic year. The intention is that no other meetings should be scheduled at that time, to provide opportunities for faculty to engage in activities to enrich their teaching techniques. In addition to this, 3 Faculty Development Days are scheduled per year, at least one of which is primarily pedagogy focused. In the past 5 years, the university has focused on topics such as: inclusive teaching, culturally-responsive teaching, assessment and grading practices, and online teaching.

FSU is also committed to innovative teaching. Strategic Plan Goal 4 states that FSU will seek to: “Inspire faculty and staff to be involved and experiment, knowing their efforts will be supported through mentorship, guidance, and support.” Support is provided to faculty in course redesign to meet students’ ever-changing needs. Since 2015 the CTL has offered a summer workshop on course redesign. Given that the CTL’s mission and the criteria for selection for the Mara teaching award both emphasize innovation, there is a broad understanding that pedagogical experimentation is encouraged on campus and in promotion and tenure materials.

Further evidence of pedagogical innovation comes from the 2019 creation of a First Year Experience (FYE) course. Beginning in Fall 2021, all students will be enrolled in an FYE seminar designed to prepare them for a successful college career. The course develops students’ habits of mind, reading, and information literacy skills in a small-class setting. Through the course, students become engaged thinkers, learners, and members of the university community. As with all of our courses, FYE has specific objectives measured by assignments within the course.

The university has also promoted the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) to reduce the cost of and increase access to materials for students. A committee of faculty, librarians, and academic staff is working to promote the use of such resources on campus.

Academic Advising is another area where the university has been innovative and proactive. FSU uses DegreeWorks to facilitate monitoring each student’s academic progress, and to ensure they are meeting all of the requirements for their major, minor(s), and the General Education program. DegreeWorks not only shows what requirements a student must still fulfill, but also the different courses that could meet that requirement. Along with DegreeWorks, FSU has adopted the Student Success Collaborative, which enables advisors to identify at-risk students, monitor their progress, and easily communicate with them.

In order to better coordinate academic and professional advising, various offices were combined to create two Centers, Career Services and Advising (CSA) and Academic Coaching and Tutoring (ACT). Students who have yet to declare a major are assigned a professional academic advisor through CSA. These students are provided career guidance in conjunction with advising to identify a major that fits their personal and career goals. In addition, Academic Coaches are available for all students through ACT, as well as Peer Mentors which support students through the FYE seminar and work with transfer students as well. In addition, the CTL restructuring resulted in additional staffing to provide advising support for faculty, organize specialized programming, and highlight campus initiatives related to advising.

Academic Affairs and Student Affairs work collectively to ensure that all students are able to succeed, prioritizing identification and outreach to support students that are challenged to persist. These students are identified through various metrics including results of the CSI. ACT and CSA provide tailored support to address individual students’ needs. Students can self-select to take advantage of these services, or the staff from these offices facilitate outreach based on alerts from faculty and staff through the SSC system. Undergraduate and graduate students in the SGOCE have a faculty advisor and are provided with the information and advising they need. The University uses NSSE to assess advising on a regular basis.

FSU has made a significant effort to increase the promotion of scholarship, research, and creative activities since 2012. The university has enhanced its commitment to both facilitating and promoting faculty research and scholarship. In 2012, an annual publication, *A Community of Scholars*, was launched, showcasing faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities.

In Fall 2017, the Provost announced the creation of the Center for Faculty Scholarship (CFS). The CFS has initiated a number of programs to facilitate and promote faculty research and scholarship. Each Spring, the CFS organizes a Faculty Research Colloquium with a panel of 4 presenters on a common theme, as well as a guest speaker on a related topic. In addition, the CFS organizes panels by faculty or staff on a range of topics related to research and scholarship. Each month, the CFS sponsors a talk by a faculty member in its FSU Speakers Series. In order to promote faculty scholarship, the CFS publishes a newsletter 4 times a year highlighting faculty from across the University and informing them of upcoming events. The CFS, in conjunction with the Library, also organizes book launches for faculty publications, and maintains a website to serve as “go-to” spot for faculty seeking assistance with their research.

The Provost’s office has worked to increase funding for research and scholarship. In recent years, new faculty have been provided with a research start-up fund. In addition, the Provost has increased funds for Special Projects Grants, from just over \$25,000 in 2016 to close to \$44,000 in 2019. Faculty can apply for mini-grants, course reductions, travel grants, or funding for a student research assistant. The Provost and the CFS have worked together to restructure these grants and increase their funding. The Provost has also worked with the Crocker Center for Civic Engagement to create opportunities for Community Engaged Scholarship. As faculty have continued to express a desire for more opportunities to support scholarship and research, continued attention to available and potential grant monies as well as increased opportunities for course reductions should be explored, particularly for junior faculty.

FSU has also worked to enhance student research. Faculty can apply for funding for a student research assistant from the Special Projects Grants. In addition, the CFS has funded two faculty-student research projects each of the past two springs. FSU also has an annual undergraduate research conference where students have the opportunity to present work related to course research, creative work in the visual and performing arts, study abroad trips, community service, and more. Each year, STEM faculty host a research fair where faculty present a poster about their research and invite students to work with them. Such opportunities need to be expanded across the different Schools. Finally, as part of the new General Education curriculum, one of the High Impact Practices emphasized is faculty-student research projects. In the past, there was some administrative resistance to approving independent studies, but with the adoption of the new curriculum, these experiences will need to be supported.

## **Projections**

The academic deans will work with academic departments to develop strategies associated with our Strategic Goal 4.1 of increasing diversity in faculty and academic staff with support from and collaboration with Human Resources. Deans will report their recommendations and implement the plans for recruitment in AY2022-2023.

Academic Affairs will explore continued strategies for supporting non-tenured faculty as they build their teaching, scholarly, artistic and creative activities portfolio with attention to time and resources. Recommendations will be developed for review by 2024.

During the 2022/2023 academic year, the academic Deans will collaborate with each of the Schools to explore the possibility of a more standardized department onboarding program.

## STANDARD 7: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

### HUMAN RESOURCES

As of Fall 2020, Fitchburg State University employed 200 full-time faculty and 341 full-time staff and administrators, 182 part-time Day and SGOCE adjunct faculty, and 55 part-time contracted staff. The Office of Human Resources and Payroll Services assists hiring managers to assess the needs of vacant positions and identify appropriate, diverse advertising. HR reviews staffing to address the divisional representation of underrepresented groups. Professional and faculty positions require advanced degrees. Employees who are hired are compensated appropriately and consistent with federal, state, collective bargaining and employment guidelines. HR has prepared hiring materials for each union group for adherence to policy and collective bargaining requirements. HR is committed to increasing diversity within the faculty and staff ranks, and have included in the hiring guide the importance of diversity and inclusion when assessing candidates. All search committee members are trained on the search process.

FSU offers regionally competitive salaries with salary analysis conducted for each position using an array of sources. The university participates annually in the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources salary surveys. Benchmarking data for compensation analyses was purchased for administrators and faculty. The AFSCME collective bargaining agreement has a defined salary table. FSU also offers a generous benefits package through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and a range of holiday, personal, vacation and sick accruals. Key benefits include health insurance, life insurance, long-term disability insurance, retirement plans, flexible spending accounts, dental plans, and tuition remission. The collective bargaining agreements provide for additional leave entitlements. Employees are onboarded electronically and are required to complete online modules including training on diversity, harassment, bias, security, and a biannual ethics training per state guidelines.

Employees are evaluated per specific guidelines as defined in each of the collective bargaining agreements. There are four recognized unions at FSU: Association for Professional Administrators; American Federation of State, Municipal, and County Employees; Massachusetts Teachers Association/NEA/Massachusetts State College Association; and Massachusetts Teachers Association/NEA Massachusetts State College Association/Division of Graduate and Continuing Education. The four contracts and related Human Resources policies and training information are available on the HR website.

FSU has a well-established, comprehensive grievance system in place to hear issues and complaints raised by employees and/or their union representatives. HR investigates all grievance allegations, including allegations of discrimination. HR administers the Massachusetts State Universities Affirmative Action Plan, and the collective bargaining agreements outline the grievance process and procedures. HR addresses grievances in collaboration with the Provost as it relates to the faculty contract. The Title IX Director reports to HR and has administrative oversight of all Title IX claims. The Director also serves on our Community Assessment and Risk Evaluation Team, Bias Incident Response Team, Title IX State University committee, Clery Compliance Team, Conduct Case Management and Emergency Response Team.

Professional development opportunities are available to all faculty members and staff. HR provides a variety of programs ranging from professional topics for supervisors, technical support, communication, diversity and inclusion, and health and wellness. More specific professional development opportunities are provided to faculty and staff through divisions and departments. The Strategic Plan Goals 4.3 and 4.4 pertain to professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to encourage innovation and experimentation with new technologies. This has been especially important with the transition to online during COVID.

The Strategic Plan Goal 2.3 states: “Provide faculty and staff training around equity and inclusiveness both in and out of the classroom.” Some programs provided are Unconscious Bias, Fostering Inclusion, and Spaces We Create: The Practice and Language of Inclusion in the Workplace. Leading for Change is a voluntary collaboration of New England institutions committed to identifying student and employee diversity best practices through uniform and transparent use of data, institutional benchmarks, and reflective practice. The Leading for Change group conducted a Campus Climate Survey in 2018 and the results show that faculty and staff of color felt like they belonged here (85% agreed or strongly agreed) and were satisfied with their experiences at FSU (90% agreed or strongly agreed). In 2020, when the survey was repeated while fully remote during the pandemic, 74% of faculty/staff indicated very satisfied/satisfied and 70% strongly agreed/agreed that they belong.

## **Appraisal**

The HR department is committed to addressing changing priorities to meet organizational needs, and to continue to build a more diverse constituency. Using technology to improve processes and create greater efficiencies remains a focus with recent examples including implementation of the Interview Exchange Module for job announcements and onboarding all employees, dynamic forms and Banner HR electronic workflow, and Xtender Imaging Software.

The current controls to track positions for funding and approval are manual. FSU uses Ellucian/Banner for our data across campus. HR has utilized a small section of this system to assist with feeding data to other departments but has not utilized the full module available. Implementing the full Banner HR module will greatly assist with processes related to hiring, position management, and faculty data tracking. HR and Finance have begun implementing this module, to be completed in FY22, which will result in a more efficient system providing access to data that will facilitate strategic hiring and other personnel and budgeting decisions.

The hiring process for part-time contracted employees needs to better align with the benefitted employment processes; this would result in a more efficient model of hiring all employment groups. In addition, we do not have a documented compensation model for part-time employee rates for managers to review when hiring hourly staff.

HR reviews and assesses a position vacancy when it occurs; the classification is reviewed to determine whether the position as outlined meets the current needs of the department and university. The data is then provided to the executive leadership group to assess personnel needs. Managers need to be able to conduct an assessment and review their staffing needs

prior to submitting a position replacement. The staffing review should include exploring other strategies to fill position vacancy gaps beyond replacement.

Strategic Plan Goal 4.1 states, “increase the visible diversity of our faculty and staff in order to nurture the commitment to equity and inclusion throughout the campus community.” HR has continually emphasized the importance of diversity and equity in the hiring process. Search committees are trained prior to accessing the applications, with HR playing an active role in reviewing applicants and selecting candidates to ensure qualified candidates meet our community’s diversity goals. It remains critical that continued recruitment and hiring practices and strategies are developed to recruit a diverse pool of candidates.

HR continues to assess programming to engage staff on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as well as traditional professional programs, including wellness and finances, strategies of working with peers, and more. HR will continue its leadership as part of the Leading for Change Committee to offer professional development programming for faculty and staff regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion at the university and departmental levels. Programming to build communities within employee groups could be developed to better engage our staff.

Policies are not reviewed according to a university required timetable or schedule. However, HR annually reviews employee-related policies to ensure compliance to state and contractual requirements. The review would benefit from applying the Massachusetts Equity Agenda Policy and Program Audit lens to ensure inclusive language and removal of unintended barriers.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

### **Description**

FSU continues to experience positive results from operations and the university’s financial position remains strong. Over the past 10 years the operating activity has produced a surplus with the exception of FY20 in which a loss was experienced primarily due to the pandemic. Since 2010 net assets have increased from \$67 million to \$122 million in 2020. Strong financial leadership has allowed the institution to balance current operating needs with long-range planning and investment that will ensure the university’s long-term viability.

### **Revenues and Expenses**

FSU receives funds annually as appropriated by the state legislature and approved by the governor. Over the last decade, the amount of funds appropriated to the university has remained relatively stable, representing approximately 32% of the university’s total revenue.

As a consequence of level state funding, non-appropriated funds (often referred to as trust funds) now provide a significant portion of the revenue used to support our students’ educational needs. Massachusetts General Laws give statutory authority to the Board of Higher Education and institutional Boards of Trustees to establish and administer local trust funds for campus projects, programs, and activities. The most significant trust fund revenues are tuition and fees which represent nearly half of the total revenue at \$50.5 million in FY20. The tuition and fees generated by SGOCE make up 31% of total tuition and fees generated. Tuition and fees are evaluated annually by the Board of Trustees to ensure adequate funding while striving to

remain affordable and accessible. Affordability is a core institutional value highlighted in the Strategic Plan. After six years of significant fee increases (FY10-16) to bridge the gap between reduced appropriations, increased costs, and unfunded collective bargaining costs, the past six years (FY17-22) the university has held fee increases between 0%-2% annually.

Additional revenue streams include federal, state, and private grants which comprise around 8% of total revenue. In FY20 FSU received \$4.1 million in one-time federal grants as a result of the CARES Act with the anticipation of \$18.6 million forthcoming. These funds were and will be primarily used for direct payment to students and to offset lost revenue, refunds, and direct COVID expenses. Auxiliary services, comprising dining and residence halls, have been a steady source of revenue representing approximately 14% of the total revenue. However the anticipated decline in undergraduate enrollment was reflected when FY19 residence hall occupancy fell to 80%. That decline has accelerated as a result of COVID as the FY22 occupancy is projected to be at 60%. The forced closure of the residence halls in Spring 2020 due to the pandemic resulted in over \$2.5 million in housing and dining refunds. In turn, the Residence Hall Trust Fund Balance fell below the bond covenants' required 5% reserve for the first time.

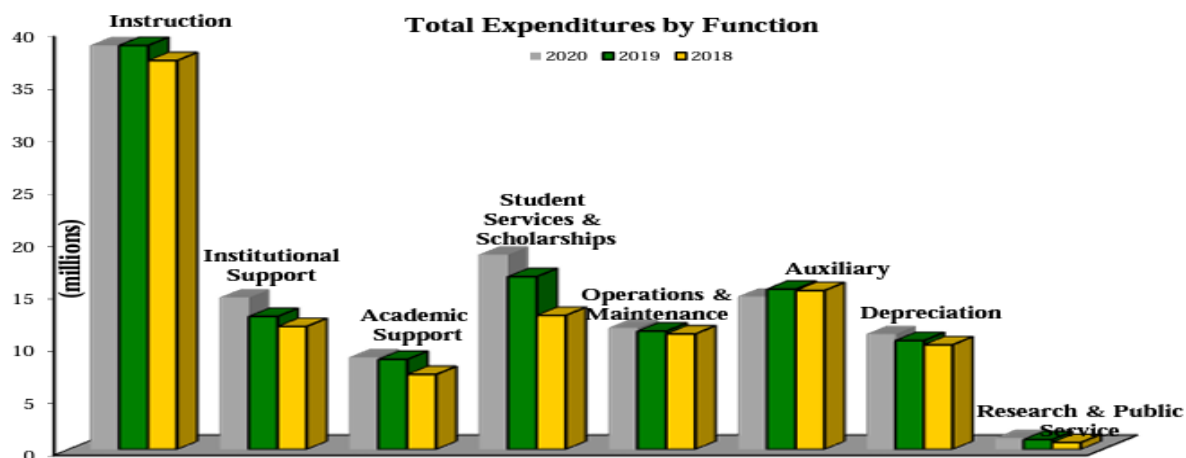
FSU receives additional support from fundraising. Money raised and grants received depending on the source, purpose, and donor intention are deposited either temporarily or in perpetuity with the University or with the Fitchburg State University Foundation, Inc. The Foundation was established in 1978 to raise and manage private gifts. The Foundation is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation as defined by the IRS and is governed by an independent Board of Directors. Fundraising programs seek gifts and grants for operating activities, capital initiatives, scholarship support, visiting artists and lecturers, equipment, student and faculty travel and experiential learning opportunities, teaching grants and faculty research. Fundraising follows the Donor Bill of Rights adopted by the Association of Fundraising Professionals and along with the Foundation's Gift Acceptance Policy, Spending Policy, and Investment Policy.

The Foundation's endowment includes permanently and temporarily restricted funds, professionally invested by 3 independent fiduciary firms and overseen by the Board of Directors. As of June 30, 2020, the Foundation held net assets or fund balances of \$26,596,233, and the FSU Foundation Supporting Organization had \$2,730,591 in net assets. The Foundation Supporting Organization, Inc. was established in 1999 to acquire and hold property on behalf of the University. The Supporting Organization is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation as defined by the IRS and is governed by an independent Board of Directors.

Total expenditures have grown from approximately \$75 million in FY12 to approximately \$119 million in FY20. As reported in the 2020 audited financial statements, instructional expenses continue to comprise the largest component of the operating budget at 37% of education and general expenses and 33% of total operating expenses. Faculty payroll and related benefits represent approximately 89% of all instructional expenses. Other direct expenses for academic support and student services represent approximately 23% of education and general expenses and 20% of total expenses. Indirect expenditures related to the daily operation of the institution and physical plant represent approximately 22% of total expenses. Auxiliary operations represent approximately 12% of total expenses. Auxiliary revenue and expenditures



are primarily from the residence halls. The expenditures are separately budgeted and funded from the auxiliary revenue and typically have little impact on other expenditure categories.



### Student Financial Aid

FSU is committed to providing opportunities for students of varying socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue an affordable, quality education, and recognizes the role that financial aid can play in closing societal differences in education, achievement, and opportunity. In Fall 2020, 75% of students received financial aid, with the average student receiving \$9,765 in grants or scholarships and \$3,758 in student or parent loans. Federal, state and institutional grants and scholarships make up 86% of the aid awarded and 14% is in the form of student and parent loans. The average federal student loan debt for students at graduation in 2019 was \$26,543, which remained fairly consistent over the past 5 years. In 2020 FSU committed \$2.9 million in local institutional aid, a 15% increase in commitment to student financial aid.

FSU is committed to providing students the information and guidance they need to navigate the financial aid process. The Financial Aid Office maintains Title IV compliance through regular training and active participation in The National Association of Financial Aid Administrators. The director of financial aid, in consultation with the VPFA, oversees financial aid and maintains regular communications with relevant departments and with state and federal governments.

### Sufficient and Qualified Finance Staff

The finance staff are highly qualified, consisting of multiple support personnel with backgrounds in relevant fields and senior leadership that each have over a quarter century of experience. The department is led by a Vice President of Finance and Administration who has over 30 years in public higher education and 11 years as the FSU Chief Financial Officer. The finance leadership team consists of an Associate Vice President, with over 28 years of public higher ed experience; Comptroller, a Certified Public Accountant with 25 years of higher ed experience; and Assistant Vice President of Financial Analysis and Planning with 19 years of higher ed experience. There are also 12 support personnel that all have multiple years of higher ed finance experience with most having an accounting, business, or finance degree.

## Budget Process (Multi-year Planning)

The budget planning process begins in late Fall for the next fiscal year and continues throughout the Spring. Starting in the Fall the Budget Office updates projected budgets based on anticipated enrollment revenue using a financial model to account for a number of different factors. This is reviewed by the Executive Cabinet and President to determine an overall strategy and parameters for the upcoming budget cycle. For the past 5 years the focus has been on reallocating existing resources, rather than assuming revenue growth. Presidential forums are held throughout the year where budget updates are provided to the community along with dialogue about proposed strategies and parameters. Starting in early Spring campus-wide workshops and training sessions are offered for those new to the process. Budget templates are then sent to each department. The Deans and divisional leads meet with their staff to discuss budget priorities as they relate to the strategic plan and the annual budget goals. Each department then develops their departmental budget in consultation with their divisional lead and enters their base budget into the budget module. During this process departments may also submit requests for strategic funding which are submitted to the Budget Office with explanations for the requests. The strategic requests are then aggregated for an initial review by the Vice Presidents followed by a review and approval process with the President.

This culminates in a draft budget proposal which incorporates multi-year projections along with any suggested fee increases which are reviewed at the executive level. The President then submits a balanced budget to the Board of Trustees detailing expected revenues and expenditures based on expected enrollment, multi-year analysis and forecasting, proposed tuition and fee rates, and impact of financial aid on net price discount rate. The budget proposals are then presented by the President and CFO to the Board of Trustee Committee of Administration and Finance for their review with a recommendation to the full Board. The full Board votes to approve the final budget and any use of reserves along with any fee increases. Through this process the Trustees verify that resource allocations are consistent with the mission and strategic plan and that they contribute to FSU's long-term financial stability and advance its strategic viability. Trustees retain appropriate autonomy in all budget and financial matters, and review the audited financial statements and all interim financial reports.

The institution's budget process is closely aligned with the Commonwealth's budget timeline in which the Governor submits a budget to the legislature in mid-January. The House and Senate then release their budgets later in the spring with the goal of having an approved budget prior to the start of the new fiscal year. The amount appropriated to the University is dependent on many factors but is ultimately a function of the Commonwealth's fiscal health. In economic downturns FSU has had to realign its resources in response to legislative actions. Budget rescissions are rare with the last one happening FY09. The university received ARRA stabilization funds in FY10 and FY11 to help offset the decrease. When such cuts happen the university's goal is to maintain access to public higher education and preserve the quality of our academic programs and services to our students. In 2011, the Board of Higher Education, in collaboration with the universities, updated the comprehensive budget formula used for new funding, which is used to determine total resource requirements and the allocation of new

funding, excluding collective bargaining cost, to the individual institutions. This formula funding mechanism is used when adequate funding is appropriated to the DHE to trigger the formula.

### **Systems and Control**

Throughout the fiscal year budget activity is regularly monitored. Budget reports are available through a variety of electronic platforms allowing departments and management to monitor budget activity and trends. Budget transfers are generally approved by the CFO with the exception of transfers of \$50,000 or more which are approved by the President. Quarterly Financial Statements and other relevant information are provided to the Board of Trustees.

Appropriate mechanisms have been incorporated throughout the financial processes to ensure proper controls and oversight that prevent such things as negative spending or unauthorized use of funds. Examples of these mechanisms include automated workflow processes requiring varied levels of approval and compliance reviews, such as with procurement and accounts payable, as well as payment authorizations, which require approval by persons with increasing levels of authority depending on the payment amount. The systems, including Banner, are used to maintain separation of duties based on annually reviewed permissions and to establish and automate these processes so that steps and authorizations are not bypassed.

FSU's and its affiliates' financial statements have been prepared using the "economic resources measurement focus" and the accrual basis of accounting in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, as prescribed by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). They are audited annually by the external accounting firm Cohn Reznick and reviewed by institutional leadership, the Board of Trustees, and the State Comptroller's Office. In addition, Cohn Reznick provides significant disclosures to the Board of Trustees along with in-depth discussions via its finance committee rather than through institutional leadership. The university has had a "clean" audit, unmodified opinion, for the past 10 years. During 2014-2016 there was one reportable finding each year regarding Federal Work Study, which has been corrected with no findings since. The annual audits are stored in the FSU archives, housed in the library and published on the university website. The university also undergoes reviews and audits by the Quality Assurance Bureau, the State Auditor's Office, and the DHE. FSU follows all applicable institutional, federal and state statutes, guidelines and policies. In addition, the Foundation follows all prudent and legal guidelines promulgated by applicable authoritative bodies in accordance with the Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act.

### **Appraisal**

The past 10 years are a tale of two financial periods. FY11-FY15 reflected a period of continued enrollment growth and the previous administrations' focus on playing "catch-up" from years of lack of investment into facilities and personnel. During this period the university substantially increased its debt burden as it undertook a multi-year renovation of the Campus Center and Library. Long-term debt increased from \$26M in FY11 to \$62M in FY15 but has remained relatively flat since that time. It also experienced significant increases in student fees during this time to support debt but also because of partially unfunded collective bargaining increases. The second period, FY16 to present, begins to reflect the changing demographics of declining

traditional-aged undergraduates. The current administration's response is to continue to invest in the university, but without incurring significant new long-term debt and with a focus on reallocation of resources and right-sizing the university in anticipation of continued enrollment challenges. Under President Lapidus' leadership the university has begun the practice of reviewing every position opening at the senior cabinet level to determine the need for the position, reallocation, or elimination of the position. Prior to COVID FSU had been experiencing a steady 2%-3% Return on Net Assets since FY16 with a 10-year average Return on Net Assets of 9.4%. During this time net assets increased from \$67M in 2010 to \$122M in 2020 and the university has consistently maintained approximately \$49M in unrestricted reserves.

In sum, Fitchburg State University is in a relatively strong financial position, but it must work to maintain this position. The commitment to this effort is seen in the Strategic Plan's Goal Six: "Steward physical and financial resources responsibly and navigate a path to long-term organization sustainability." To help support leadership in evaluating the tough decisions facing the institution and to support the development of the long-term financial plan, the university recently implemented the Educational Advisory Board's Academic Performance Solutions (APS) and is currently implementing Edify. APS helps enable data-based decisions by analyzing, visualizing, and benchmarking data across the institution and against peer institutions. We have leveraged this data to standardize faculty line requests, letting us evaluate requests based on demonstrated need rather than precedent, and analyze course enrollment data to plan course offerings based on demand. Edify is a higher education data management solution that unifies and organizes data assets across campus into a single centralized platform to support real-time decision making with a 360-degree view of students, faculty, and operations.

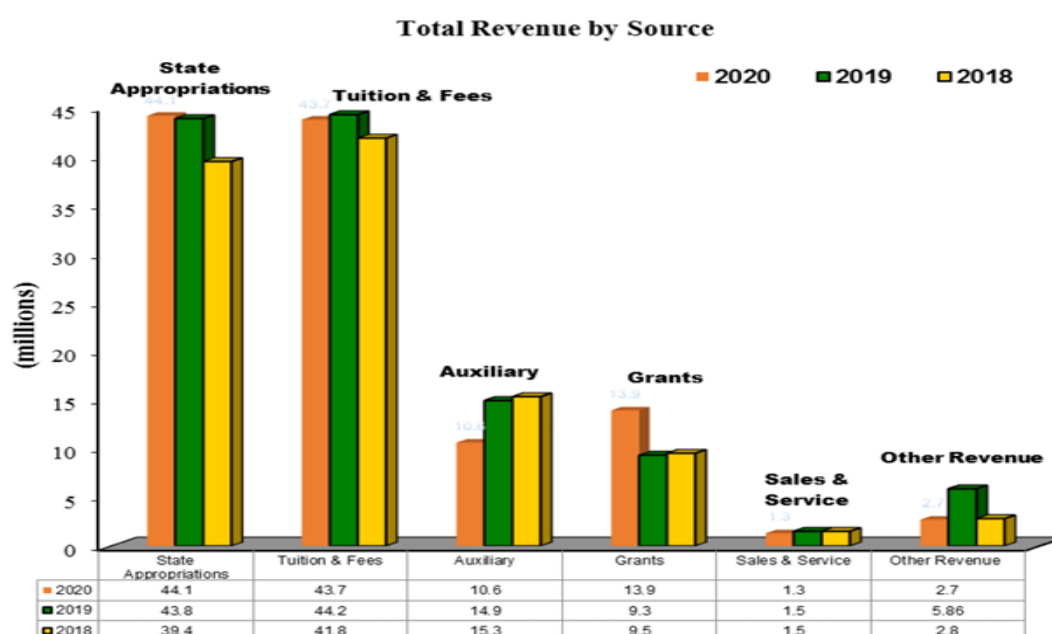
## **Revenues**

Consistent with most public universities, FSU's state appropriation has grown in absolute dollars over time, but it has not kept up with increases in collective bargaining cost, fringe benefits, technology, and inflation costs. Revenue from state appropriations have grown from \$21.9M in FY11 to \$32.5M in FY20 which is approximately 36% of the total revenue. This percentage has remained stable and the university does not expect any significant changes in this pattern of state funding. Therefore the university will continue to pursue growth in other revenue streams along with right-sizing cost-containment strategies.

Non-appropriated funds (often referred to as trust funds) have become FSU's primary funding source. Tuition and fees are the primary source of revenue to fund the institution's operations. Despite our increased reliance on tuition and fee revenue, tuition has remained flat (by statute), which means the burden has fallen on student fees. This has been particularly true when increases in state appropriations have not kept pace with collective bargaining costs, which are bargained at the state level. The lack of full funding for the collective bargaining agreements results in more payroll expenses shifting to the local trust fund accounts. In turn, the university must cover the associated fringe benefit cost which is currently set at 39.5%.

Auxiliary services, comprising dining and residence halls, have been a steady source of revenue representing 13% of the total revenue, growing from \$12 million in 2010 to \$15 million in 2019. However the decline in enrollment was beginning to be seen when residence hall occupancy fell

to 80% in 2019, although the housing trust fund balance was still over \$2 million prior to the forced closure in Spring 2020 due to the pandemic. This forced closure resulted in student refunds of \$2.5 million in housing and dining fees, most of which were offset by the federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HERFF) funding. However, the difference along with operating losses from the continued declining occupancy levels resulted in the housing trust fund falling below the required 5% Residence Hall Trust Fund Balance requirement. In future fiscal years, FSU will have to subsidize the Residence Hall Trust Fund to meet the obligatory 5% balance requirement. Occupancy continues to be a challenge with Spring 2021 occupancy dipping to 40% as result of COVID restrictions and students primarily taking courses online. At this time it is too early to determine the final impact on the Residence Hall Trust Fund Balance pending final deployment of the additional rounds of HERFF funding, but the University is anticipating housing to have an operating loss of \$1.8M in FY22 based on anticipated 60% occupancy. These ongoing occupancy challenges and the lack of adequate residence hall trust reserves pose a significant challenge to the university's long-term financial health.



The FSU Foundation provides numerous benefits but its primary purpose is fundraising to support the university. Fundraising priorities align with the University's newly adopted Strategic Plan focusing on financial aid, student experiential learning opportunities and travel, faculty development, and equipment and facilities upgrades. Specific to facilities upgrades, fundraising will contribute to a major capital project to restore and retrofit a 1927 theater in the Fitchburg Historic district, to create a 1,200-seat Performing Arts Center with a 250-seat applied learning laboratory/black box theater, gallery, restaurant and retail space, which provides opportunities for students and a bridge between campus and the larger community.

The Strategic Plan Goal 6 points to the outcome "Alumni engagement with FSU and their participation in annual giving will be at an all-time high, thanks in part to the establishment of a culture of philanthropy at FSU and thanks also to an investment-worthy case for support." However, there was a decrease in the amount raised by the Alumni and Advancement Office

from FY18 to FY19. Additionally, while the amount raised by the Annual Fund increased from FY19 to FY20, the participation rate among FSU alumni decreased during this time. In order to address this decline in participation and create action items that will lead to increased participation and philanthropy, FSU has taken on multiple new initiatives, including the Theatre Block project, that may help to establish a culture of philanthropy at the university, and these kinds of visible campus and community improvements may raise the case for future support. It is worth noting that the Foundation plays a limited role in overall university finances, and FSU is not overly reliant on it as a revenue source; rather, it speaks to the connectedness of our alumni, and alumni support can illustrate their connection to FSU post-graduation.

## **Budget Process**

The process for FY21 began the same but because of the pandemic and its unknowns (ability to reopen, enrollment impacts, and state budgets) it was necessary for the Executive Cabinet to re-evaluate the budget in order to get a local operating budget to the Board of Trustees prior to the start of the new fiscal year. Post-COVID FSU was initially looking at a \$16 million revenue gap. The state universities working collectively with Massachusetts State College Building Authority were able to restructure the debt, saving FSU approximately \$7 million in FY21. This still left a \$9.3 million gap that needed to be addressed in order to submit a balanced budget to the Board of Trustees. The Executive Cabinet identified expenditures that would not impact the quality of education: travel, catering, and clothing, collectively, were reduced by \$620,455. A hiring freeze was also proposed with the goal of saving \$2 million along with a proposed furlough estimated to save \$1.6 million. Ultimately furloughs were not implemented after Fall enrollment numbers were better than projected. Given the sudden impact caused by the pandemic it was determined to balance the budget by using \$4.4 million of university reserves rather than take more severe cuts to the academic programs. This would give more time to evaluate the pandemic's long-term impact on enrollment along with state or federal support.

Prior to the pandemic FSU had already begun to undertake efforts to right-size the budget to available resources. Divisions were asked in 2017, 2019, and 2020 to submit aggregated department budgets that were 5% lower or level-funded. This process started in FY16 under President Lapidus' leadership. This included FSU offering a Retirement Incentive Plan in 2016 that resulted in \$321,578 annual salary savings. This plan was different from previous Early Retirement Plans that had been offered through the Commonwealth as it was funded by the university. As personnel represent the single largest expense to the budget another early retirement was offered in Spring 2021. 20 individuals participated in the program with an estimated savings of \$872,554. Working with the Division of Capital Assets and Maintenance Management FSU started implementation of an Advanced Energy Project in 2012. The project evaluated energy conservation measures (ECM) that would not only upgrade older mechanical systems and reduce energy consumption but also at the same time help reduce the university's carbon footprint. The project was implemented in FY17 and included 24 ECMs estimated to produce energy savings of 1 million KWH per year resulting in average savings of \$404,660 annually in utility costs. This also supports the Strategic Plan's goal to establish environmental stewardship as a signature strength. Another example of FSU taking a longer-term view with budgeting and finances was its effort to provide dedicated resources to a 5-year plan for

technology upgrades and maintenance. With technology becoming an ever more critical backbone of operations across all sectors (academic, administrative, student engagement), there was increasing recognition of the necessity to sustainably fund this function.

The university continues to strive to make the budget and the budget process more transparent. The budgeting process has provided opportunities for input at various stages but a significant improvement was achieved with the implementation of the Dean structure within Academic Affairs in 2015. Then in 2019 in collaboration with Academic Affairs the finance department implemented Academic Performance Solutions (APS) which allows academic deans and department chairs to access key academic performance metrics that they can use during the budgeting process and their annual department reviews. This structure not only allows for even more opportunities for input but it has provided the support for the departments to consider their budget implications on a more macro level. Most recently regarding the FY21 budget, the Chief Financial Officer did a series of town-hall style presentations entitled “What does the Future Look Like?” This presentation attempted to connect the budget and fiscal health of the institution to enrollments. This will be an ongoing series to provide a greater understanding of the institution’s budgeting process and fiscal health but more importantly how it connects to the work of departments across campus.

## **Enrollment**

Given that tuition and fees are the most significant source of revenue and are directly impacted by enrollment, FSU is taking active measures to forecast, plan, and monitor enrollment information to inform budget and financial operations. There has been a significant effort from financial and leadership teams to connect these items into a cohesive approach.

Similar to national trends, FSU has been experiencing a decline in undergraduate enrollment. Fall Day enrollment has declined 16% (from 3,440 in Fall 2015 to 2,860 in Fall 2020). Day enrollment is primarily composed of traditional-aged high school students and local community college transfer students, which have decreased -12% and -19% respectively this past year.

In an effort to increase out-of-state enrollment FSU implemented the Falcon Scholarship in 2017, giving out approximately \$300,000 annually. While undergraduate enrollment has declined the last 4 years, out-of-state tuition has remained relatively stable during that period (\$1.4 million in FY17 and \$1.2 million in FY20) which has significant financial benefit since the university, per state statute, is allowed to retain out-of-state tuition. These funds are retained in a Commonwealth fund that covers the cost of fringe benefits for employees funded through this account. Therefore, the value of retained out-of-state tuition continues to increase as the fringe benefit rate continues to increase, from 36.27% in FY18 to 39.5% in FY21. So for every dollar retained in this account it is worth nearly \$1.40 at this time.

During the past 10 years the focus on merit versus need-based aid has shifted several times due to transitions in Admissions leadership. With the recent enrollment management engagement with the Education Advisory Board, FSU reevaluated the aid packaging policies to ensure they align with our long-term enrollment objectives. As part of that review, the university decided to

redeploy resources of \$600,000 that had been allocated to a deposit incentive during the pandemic to support on-campus residency in response to our low occupancy levels.

Between 2012 and 2021, there has been turnover in the Director of Admissions, as well as other admissions and enrollment positions. During this time period, 7 administrators held the Director of Admissions position, 4 permanent and 3 interim. The Dean of Enrollment Management position was eliminated in 2015 as part of a restructuring plan that created the Office Institutional Research and Planning. This has resulted in an inconsistent focus or strategy to undergraduate enrollment particularly for the past 5 years. In recent years the Director of Admissions sets annual recruitment goals, but there is no strategic enrollment plan to guide the yearly recruitment plan, which has also resulted in a disconnect between the budgeting process and recruitment process at times. This has been amplified during these challenging times of COVID and the projected continued decline in traditional high school students.

These undergraduate enrollment challenges facing the university are particularly problematic as the Day undergraduate division still generates nearly half of entire tuition and fee revenue and much of the staffing model is supported by the Day undergraduate division.

These challenges were only amplified by the pandemic. So in July 2020 FSU engaged EAB Enrollment Services to conduct a review of our current Admissions operations resulting in a number of recommendations, including development of a strategic enrollment plan, optimizing financial aid, and hiring of a senior-level Enrollment Management Officer. In June 2021, an Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management with extensive experience in enrollment management in public higher education was hired. The goal is to unify Enrollment Management with a focused, intentional strategy to address the undergraduate enrollment challenges facing the university. FSU also employed EAB Enrollment Services to assist with recruitment of the Fall 2021 class. The Senior Application Campaign resulted in an increase in applications for Fall 2021 (increased by 54%, with the number of admitted students up 10%). Unfortunately the university's efforts to yield these applicants do not appear to be fruitful, as the number of deposited students is down 6% from last year as of July 6, 2021.

FSU's School of Graduate and Continuing Education continues to experience growth primarily related to the new accelerated online degree programs. With a few minor exceptions, growth within SGOCE is related to the expansion of fully online degrees. In 2017, the university increased the number of programs offered in an online accelerated 7-week format, beyond the MBA program, when they commenced a partnership with Academic Partnerships to provide marketing, recruitment and retention support. These additional pathways to access higher education along with the partnership support resulted in increased enrollment and institutional revenues. The initial partnership portfolio included degrees in Business, Nursing, and Education, which generated 10,776 credit hours in AY17-18 and has grown to 39,438 credit hours in AY20-21. In FY21 these programs generated \$10.8 in total revenue (up from \$3.88 million in FY18), contributing \$3.5 million to the university budget. Conversely, enrollments within the Center for Professional Studies have been declining for the past 3 years resulting in a loss of approximately \$115,000 annually. In an effort to counter this trend, the Center for Professional Studies entered into a partnership in 2019 with MindEdge to expand non-credit workforce development courses, but due to COVID has not yet seen this new partnership's full potential.



### **Sufficient and Qualified Finance Staff**

Historically there had been little turnover within the Finance staff but in the past 5 years a number of key positions have turned over, mainly due to retirements. While the university has been fortunate to replace those individuals, all of whom come with significant experience in the area of higher education finance, this has resulted in a significant loss of institutional knowledge. This has placed a strain on the department's day-to-day operations. However, staff continue to provide strong financial leadership and thorough financial reporting and account controls as witnessed by the continuance of clean external audits.

In response to the continual increase in financial reporting, the need for more data driven decision making, and more transparency, in 2019 the finance department was approved to add a new position, AVP of Financial Analysis and Planning. This has helped to improve multi-year planning and analysis and to develop more transparent financial and budget reporting.

Acknowledging the significant turnover of staff at all levels of the university during the past 5-year period, one item that continues to be a challenge is to adequately keep updated and re-communicate the policies and procedures that are part of maintaining a strong financial operation. Maintaining these policies and communicating these materials in a clear, transparent, and understandable way for the campus community is essential to ensuring ongoing compliance with internal and external expectations. While much of this is in routine practice, having points of clear reference easily accessible will help to reinforce and provide continued support to the University's successful financial operations.

### **INFORMATION, PHYSICAL and TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

#### **Library Description**

An essential hub for scholarship and learning at Fitchburg State University, the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library is where people, information, and ideas converge to support student academic success, faculty research and teaching, and community engagement. The library's goal is to create an environment that fosters intellectual curiosity and the social, cultural, and professional development of students, faculty, and staff.

A new, modernized library was opened in Spring 2016, with 4 floors plus an Archives and Special Collections space. The Library is open 89 hours/week during the academic year (67 hours/week during COVID-19). Its facility includes seating for 596 with small tables, large tables, comfortable lounge chairs, group study rooms, a media production room, an instructional classroom with 36 computers, an information commons with 61 computers, printers, and a KIC scanner. The library strives to be a welcoming place by offering an atmosphere conducive to study and research, and meets the needs for quiet and collaborative spaces for students. The Center for Teaching and Learning is located in the Library.

The library provides access to a wide range of resources, including (as of March 2021) over 840,000 books and eBooks, 25,000 streaming videos, 28,000 streaming music files, 117,000 online and print journals, and 179 databases. To facilitate discovery of the collections, in summer 2016 the Library initiated SUMMON, an online discovery service that searches across

all library collections, and in summer 2019 redesigned its website. The library employs 8 librarians (including the Library Dean) who hold a minimum of a Master's degree in library science, 6 para-professionals, and 6 part-time staff members.

Librarians teach key information literacy skills that enable users to effectively find, manage, critically evaluate, and use information. Librarians also lead open education efforts and were recently awarded a consortium grant focused on diversity, equity and inclusion in OER creation in alignment with the Strategic Plan's goal to be a student-ready university and narrow the achievement gap. The Library develops and holds programming for the university and the local community. Research Help service is offered 60 hours/week by Fitchburg State librarians during the academic year in person, by phone, email, and chat, and beginning in July 2021 a 24/7/365 online research help service was added. Interlibrary loan, document delivery, and reserves are also offered. The Archives and Special Collections collect and maintain administrative records and historical materials that document the activities of the university and the surrounding community. These are available to faculty, staff, students, and the public for scholarly research. The Archives and Special Collections currently houses 1600 linear feet of physical records and has 20 digital collections containing over 14,000 items.

The Library's strategic plan guides the collective efforts of the library staff.

### **Facilities Description**

Fitchburg State University's campus hosts 59 serviceable buildings with close to 1,000,000 gross square footage of academic, 450,000 of residential, and office space on more than 280 acres of land. The majority of campus sits on North Street in Fitchburg, with additional acreage on John Fitch Highway adjacent to campus, Main Street, and property in Lancaster, MA.

FSU's Capital Planning and Maintenance Department provides support for the day to day operations of facilities and manages buildings owned by Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the university foundation. The department utilizes SchoolDude work order tracking system to ensure a seamless response to student, facility, and staff needs across campus. All systems, including boilers, elevators, sprinklers, are inspected annually for safety and compliance.

All campus spaces are built and maintained following current building code guidelines. Any new construction is LEED certified and recycled materials are utilized when available. All projects on campus are coordinated with the Division of Capital Asset Management or the Mass State University Building Authority for planning, coordination, and construction on campus projects.

The sciences on campus saw a revitalization in the creation of the Antonucci Science Center. Ground broke in 2010 on the creation of the science center Irvine Wing, a new space consisting of over 27,000 square feet of state-of-the-art science laboratories for continual learning and research resulting in Silver LEED certification. The existing Condiak wing was also renovated thoroughly with updated labs, classrooms, and offices modernizing the entire complex by 2015.

Renovation began in 2011 on Hammond Hall and work was completed in 2016 after a full renovation of the building interior resulting in a Silver LEED certification and a newly created glass wall entryway to the building, opening the university to the surrounding city. The project

included a complete rebuild of the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library, updated HVAC systems, creation of extensive student meeting space including a game room and hub for gathering and dining, and a newly installed art gallery featuring works of local artisans and student projects.

In 2018, the university's new ideaLab opened on Fitchburg's Main Street, after a significant overhaul of the existing space. The \$3.5M project renovated 7,800 square feet and was featured by American School & University magazine for outstanding design in interior renovation. The lab features state of the art studio space for students in the Game Design program as well as meeting locations utilized by state officials as well as the university. Work on the existing historic theatre and storefront renovation is in the design and fundraising phase.

The McKay C renovation and lobby addition, a \$3.5M project, included creating a new lobby entryway and building an Education department suite in the existing space. The construction allowed the building to be removed from the standing McKay elementary school by eliminating a connecting walking bridge between the two.

Residential spaces have seen construction renovations including new lobby, common spaces, and study areas throughout Aubuchon Hall and Russell Towers, new vestibules and roofs in Townhouses, along with significant landscaping updates. Simonds Hall was purchased in 2017, a 150-bed apartment-style residence hall, allowing for greater diversity in housing options.

In 2018 the university participated in an Accelerated Energy Project (AEP), a \$9M project to update energy efficiencies across campus including updating lighting, chillers, and water systems to aid in reducing utilities.

FSU was the recipient of the 2020 Leading by Example Award from the Commonwealth of MA for outstanding public sector energy and environmental efforts in the Public Entity-Higher Education category. This honor was received specifically due to recent LEED certification of buildings, the Accelerated Energy Project, renovations in Holmes dining hall resulting in a more energy efficient dishwasher, and electric car charging stations put in over the last few years.

### **Information Technology Description**

FSU's Information Technology Department provides centralized support for all information technology services. Through a focused approach using a LEAN IT methodology, services have been greatly expanded, improved, and enhanced over the past decade.

All appropriate classroom spaces are mediated, with a common setup consisting of a podium, Windows 10 computer with camera and microphone, DVD, speakers, projector, and laptop connection. Most rooms also have a document camera and some have Smartboards as well.

The core network system was replaced seven years ago and is scheduled to be replaced in summer 2021. The wireless system was updated and expanded in 2016 and covers all areas of campus, including most green spaces (this included replacing all edge switches as well).

The walk-up helpdesk is open 6 days/week for onsite support for students, faculty, and staff. Students receive free labor and warranty support for their computers and free loaner laptops if systems cannot be immediately repaired. The Technology department contracts (with other

state schools) with a vendor to provide basic call center services 24/7/365, including the ability to remotely control a problematic computer. The helpdesk also has a large supply of wifi hotspots and Chromebooks that can be loaned free-of-charge to students in need.

All full-time faculty have university-owned laptops that are refreshed on a 3-year cycle. Desktop systems, used by some staff and in labs, are replaced on a 4-year cycle. There are 36 computer labs on campus that students use for general computing or software requirements.

In 2019, FSU moved to Google Enterprise for Education, replacing the main email system and matching the student system. The inclusion of shared documents, chat, video conferencing, and electronic whiteboards has revolutionized the way the campus communicates and collaborates.

In January 2020, the main phone system was replaced with a Voice-over-IP Avaya hosted solution. Since the main phone switch and voicemail systems are no longer on campus, moves, adds, and changes are simplified and allow for home use as well.

In recent years, the university has shifted most Technology equipment spending to come from a Technology Fee paid by students. As such, it has increased from \$65 per semester in 2012 to \$250 in 2020 for undergraduate day students. A comprehensive refresh plan was developed for finance in 2016 that forecasts major system refresh timeframes and estimates future costs.

In March of 2019, a dedicated Technology trainer was added to the staff, who assists users with utilizing any services and systems provided. IT personnel are encouraged to attend training programs, and the department offers training to new users, training-upon-request, and free classes to faculty, staff, and students on a variety of technology topics throughout the year.

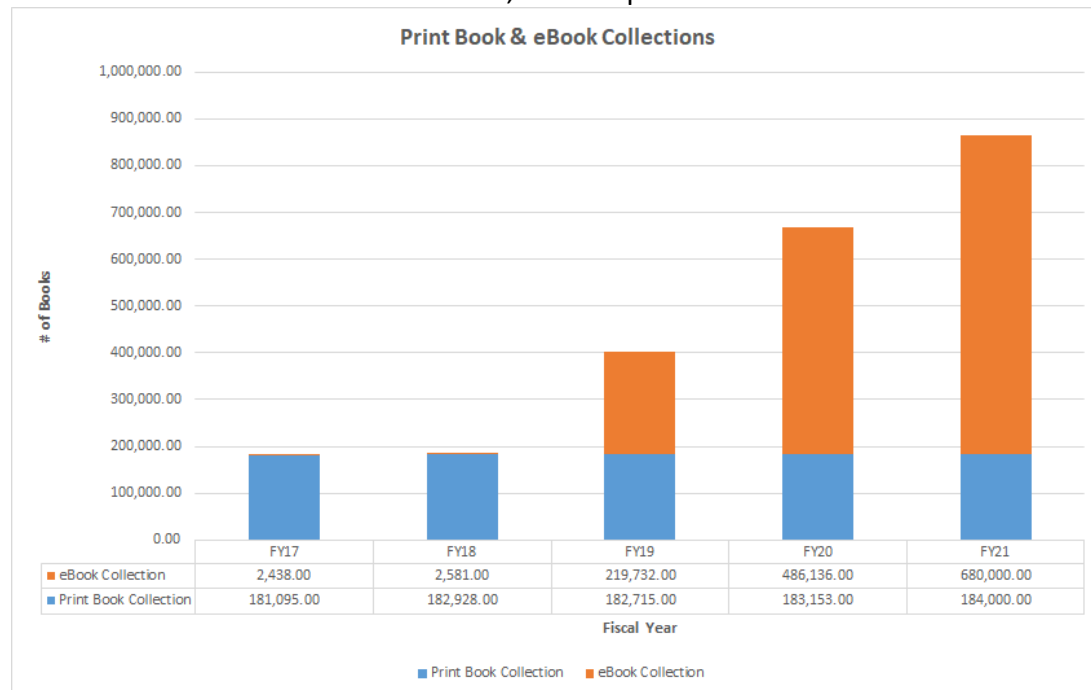
The IT department has made a number of changes to support the university's operations and academic programs. In 2015, FSU contracted with Blackbelt Help to provide 24/7/365 phone support for all faculty, staff, and students, and IT meets with the call center manager monthly to ensure quality is maintained. In 2017, our Blackboard LMS system was migrated to a hosted, SAAS offering which can dynamically scale as needed. In 2018, the purchase of Dynamic Forms was completed, allowing for electronic approval and workflow of electronic documents on campus, replacing traditional paper systems. In 2019, an additional internet circuit using disparate pathways was configured to enhance our redundancy for connections with the outside world and bandwidth was increased appropriately. In late 2019, the university converted from a Microsoft email solution to G Suite Enterprise for Education (G Suite usage statistics) for all faculty and staff (students were already on this platform), enhancing their ability to share documents, video conference, and remote work. In early 2020, the phone and voicemail system was replaced with a cloud offering from Avaya, which enabled soft-client and cellular app capabilities which were critical during the initial Covid response. In addition, all single-use phones were provided with a panic button which sends an alert to campus police.

The refresh plan developed with the Finance department ensures technology replacements on campus are planned and funded years in advance. The strategic plan forecasts IT's direction and provides information on upcoming projects and updates for existing projects.

## **Appraisal**

## Library Appraisal

The library provides high-quality learning tools and information content to support teaching, learning, and research activities. Significant improvements have been made to the book collection, including increasing the number of ebooks to over 680,000, up from less than 2,000 5 years ago. The ebook collection is now 3.7 times the print book collection. This was particularly important during COVID as it allowed online access to scholarly books and other materials in support of remote learning. Usage reflects an even greater trend towards ebooks, with annual ebook check-outs over 19,000 and print book checkouts less than 3000.



Through the library's electronic databases and journal subscriptions, over 135,000 articles were accessed in AY20-21, Usage of the library's online streaming academic film collection has increased as well with over 7,000 viewings of film in AY20-21. In the past 3 years, the library has instituted a technology lending library in order to support equitable access to technology equipment. In AY19-20 this collection had over 1,000 checkouts and usage is expected to increase. More information about collections and usage are available in the [annual reports](#).

The library's information literacy program offers research classes taught in-person and through an embedded librarian program. In FY20 librarians taught 245 classes (177 in-person and 68 embedded) reaching over 4,700 students. New information literacy learning outcomes were developed in FY20 aligned with ACRL's new Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education. As the new General Education program calls for the development of information literacy as a critical skill, the library has started creating a comprehensive information literacy instruction program. The library does not yet have an assessment plan for measuring student learning of information literacy nor for measuring the impact of the usage of library resources and services on learning. However, the 2021 Survey of Satisfaction in library resources and

services reveals high levels of satisfaction by faculty and students, with particularly high levels of satisfaction with the books and databases provided and with research help and instruction.

Librarians answered over 1,500 research questions in person or through email or virtual assistance during AY20-21, a 50% increase in two years. The Library created over 300 online research guides, including guides created specifically for courses, subject areas, and citation help. The guides were accessed over 185,000 times in AY20-21, up over 200% in 2 years.

The library utilizes the SUMMON discovery system allowing students and faculty the ability to search all of the library's resources from one search box from the library's newly designed (2018) website. Off-campus access to materials is made available through the use of EZProxy, now hosted off-site to improve access. The catalog system is Voyager, a legacy system that does not support the easy integration of electronic resources. Library staff are currently evaluating new library catalog systems with implementation expected in July 2022.

Led by the library, significant progress has been made in developing faculty understanding of open resources and pedagogy. Supported by a 2020 Davis Foundation grant and Academic Affairs, 16 faculty members adopted OER course materials, 3 created OER for courses, and 17 participated in an Open Education Community of Practice. Students are included in the process; a Fall 2020 #TextbookBroke event was held by FSU's student government. The Strategic Plan has the Goal "OER will be a resource readily available to faculty and students alike."

The library has focused considerable efforts in advancing DEI initiatives, including creating a DEI plan, a Children's Literature collection analysis using a DEI lens, internal intercultural competency training, and a University DEI guide. The Association of College and Research Libraries featured this DEI work in a 2021 Spotlight Series: Practices of Equity & Social Justice.

### **Facilities Appraisal**

FSU has made tremendous strides in renovating current buildings over the past 10 years by working towards goals in the Capital Planning Master Plan. The infrastructure of the institution needs significant maintenance to keep pace with demands and avoid future concerns about building mechanicals. The majority of projects outlined in the master plan have concluded and additional long term planning is needed for proper upkeep of the university's physical assets.

The most recent Gordian Sightlines analysis, finalized in March 2021 with FY2020 data, shows recent renovations and property acquisition has lowered the campus building age, which assists in reductions for upkeep to old infrastructure. Due to these renovations, many buildings on campus need little structural work and focus can remain on older areas of the institution. Campus buildings with a low Net Asset Value (NAV) have a higher need for renovation.

In order to be a steward of the university's physical resources, as referenced in the Strategic Plan Goal 6, Capital Planning and Maintenance has had a number of building renovation projects in recent years, increasing the NAV significantly and extending the life of the facilities. There are a number of buildings with lower NAV percentages that should be addressed in the near future in order to continue to function efficiently and sustainably.

The campus is in the midst of upgrading systems across the university based on recommendations from the Sightlines analysis. The past decade of capital projects have focused on upgrading old buildings and systems. Sightlines has recommended additional project investment in building mechanicals, an area the institution is continuing to work towards in planned and ongoing infrastructure projects. By upgrading systems and putting a focus on deferred maintenance, the university can become more proactive regarding facilities needs.

Winter 2020 started a campus-wide \$25M electrical infrastructure project, fully funded by DCAM, to create a more reliable system and bring it up to modern standards. Existing structures were built in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century from a company no longer in business, resulting in significant difficulty in replacing components. This extensive campus-wide project will result in updated electrical systems including the main switch gear, transformers, and wiring. The project will provide new emergency backup electrical systems involving 5 new generators and an electrical loop system which will ensure power will remain continuous to all buildings even in an outage emergency. Through this project, the university has been able to advocate for natural resources by replacing landscaping and trees that were removed during installation.

The university's newly completed ideaLab on Main Street is only one component of an anticipated overhaul of the entire Theatre Block. Significant work is needed to rebuild the theatre, storefronts, and mechanical systems that have been vacant for quite some time.

The Department of Environmental Health and Safety is charged with ensuring compliance regarding environmental regulations as it relates to construction, chemical safety in academic buildings, and appropriate safety measures for maintenance staff. The department provides guidance for best safety practices and is responsible for securely removing hazardous materials.

During the pandemic, Capital Planning adjusted expectations for cleaning and disinfecting priorities, focusing on high-touch areas and restroom facilities. Much of the department's cleaning equipment was older; the university prioritized purchasing additional Kivac and Clorox 360 systems to aid in the disinfecting process. Disinfectant was distributed across campus to ensure faculty, students, and staff were able to maintain their personal working space.

The maintenance and operation of the university's buildings follow all codes, safety and accessibility requirements, and guidelines. All academic properties have installed elevator or lift accessibility and each renovation project updates systems and accessibility to meet today's standards. The custodial crew uses green products on campus to further assist in environmental initiatives on campus. Annual inspections of systems occur to ensure compliance.

### **Information Technology Appraisal**

FSU classrooms typically include a podium system, projector, and DVD player, and many include a document camera. Blackboard and Google Classroom are both hosted systems in a scalable environment to limit performance issues. Each fiscal year, \$100,000 is dedicated to upgrading classroom equipment and an additional \$100,000 to upgrading computer labs. As CPM does physical space upgrades, the classrooms and labs are upgraded via that budget process as well.

Currently the 26 members of the IT staff maintain systems and also assist faculty, staff and students. Robert Half metrics ([How Many Help Desk Tier 1 Personnel Do You Need?](#)) suggest that the current level of staffing is enough only to support faculty and staff, with insufficient staff to help students (we provide full support for students, including free labor on hardware repairs). However, the use of an outsourced call center and a large number of student workers helps offset the number of full-time employees needed to support daily operations ([Call Center Metrics](#)) and provide support to our student population. The call center allows for 365x24x7 support as well, providing help when users need it, not just when the physical helpdesk is open.

The transition to Google applications and services was critically important to support the university's ability to remotely teach and operate during the pandemic ([Google usage charts](#)). It provided everyone at FSU with a simple and native way to video conference, share and collaborate on documents, create and share forms, and provided unlimited online storage capabilities ([Google Applications metrics with explanations](#)). The move to Google apps has allowed faculty and staff to utilize Chromebooks in many instances as well, which has reduced costs for loaner systems. FSU has further partnered with Google as a beta site for new applications and technologies and provides necessary feedback on their new offerings.

The university's Covid-19 response revealed some key areas for improvement. The transition to remote work for faculty and staff revealed that many faculty, staff, and students do not have a basic understanding of how computers work. While IT's full-time trainer has done extensive work with users on specific applications, the lack of a core understanding of computer concepts made support more difficult once they left campus to work from home. Also, the transition of most of the campus to remote work highlighted that many staff have desktop computers and no way to easily bring equipment home. Decisions about systems have, in the past, focused more on cost reduction than flexibility and this has caused enormous support issues. With the transition to Google and utilizing low-cost Chromebooks, FSU may be able to provide mobility and reduced cost at the same time. The approval of a new Strategic Plan dictates that a new IT Strategic Plan in support and alignment with university goals needs to be created as well.

IT general and security policies were updated as part of a collective state-wide effort begun in 2015. These policies are available to everyone at [Technology Policies & Planning](#) and the Acceptable Use Policy (and links to all policies) is also highlighted in the [student handbook](#). Our [Information Security Policy](#) (confidential) and the [Information Technology Disaster Recovery Plan](#) (confidential) are updated annually and kept confidential due to their contents. These policies have been approved through legal review and are affirmed and approved as part of our state, PCI, and financial audits. The [Information Technology Strategic Plan](#) provides guidance for the department and the campus on strategic initiatives and directions that IT is prioritizing but needs to be updated to reflect support for the new FSU Strategic Plan.

The information security team uses numerous systems, including a SIEM system monitored by Cygiant, dual web-application firewalls, Cisco Umbrella DNS endpoint security, and Google security products to ensure data security for our campus, as well as reports through our NextGen Checkpoint firewall. Through the use of network restrictions and these products, the university has not had a single DMCA violation in 12 years.



## Projections

Human Resources & Payroll Services will develop a compensation model for part time contractors for FY22 to maintain pay equity and align with cost of living adjustments.

Human Resources, in collaboration with the university's Leading for Change HR subcommittee, will review its current recruitment process (job description language, placement of position announcements, outreach) to identify additional strategies to attract diverse candidates for university positions. This work will begin FY22.

Human Resources is working to establish campus groups of staff and faculty in relation to shared characteristics, interests, or life experiences. This work will begin FY22.

Working with the Massachusetts State College Building Authority, the University will develop a long-term occupancy and space usage plan by 2024.

By end of FY2025, the finance staff will create and implement a long-term sustainable budget that is aligned with strategic plan priorities and anticipated enrollments.

The finance department will complete a thorough review and updating of all financial policies and procedures by January 2023.

The library will create in FY22 a scalable, sustainable, and technology-enhanced information literacy library instruction program that achieves stated student learning outcomes for the undergraduate and graduate student populations and aligns with the Association of College and Research Libraries' Framework. An assessment plan for measuring the student learning outcome of information literacy and the impact of the usage of library resources and services will be developed with implementation in FY23.

In order to further the goal of making OER more readily available to students, the Open and Affordable Education Committee, led by the library, will adopt and implement an OER Assessment Plan in 2021. This plan will set baselines for multiple key performance indicators and track these indicators over a 5-year period.

The Capital Planning and Maintenance management team will create an updated departmental Master Plan with long-term departmental priorities, projects, and strategic initiatives and goals before July 2025 in conjunction with the Vice President of Administration & Finance. The Master Plan will take Gordian Sightlines Benchmarking and Sustainability reporting into consideration to coordinate projects that focus on older Net Asset Value buildings.

In 2021, begin a series of general technology trainings for the campus to provide faculty and staff a baseline of knowledge on how computers and systems work securely; they will be viewable by on-campus and remote personnel.

Beginning in 2021, continuously examine existing systems and applications for remote-work capabilities and take a "mobility-first" outlook when replacing or procuring systems to allow for easier transitions to work-from-home while controlling costs.

## Standard 8: Educational Effectiveness

### Description

Fitchburg State University continues to build a significant culture of assessment both in and out of the classroom that provides clear opportunities to measure the success of all students in all modalities and all locations. This progress can be seen clearly in changes that have been made to the program review process, the General Education program, the expansion and assessment of co-curricular programs, and our ongoing strength in learning outcomes assessment. These measures of student success help us understand recent graduates' achievements as a result of their education. These measures have also been integrated into the strategic planning process and aligned to the mission and values of the university. The Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP), University Assessment Research Committee (UARC), and Student Affairs Assessment Team all work in collaboration with other units to collect and analyze data throughout the year, driving the process of evidence-based improvements that support student success. This information is also used to inform the public. Program and institutional learning outcomes are published on the university website, in addition to annual reports and assessments.

### Curricular Assessment

Under Academic Affairs, curricular assessment takes place for the undergraduate and graduate programs and the General Education curriculum. Each academic department has a designated assessment liaison. This individual either works with an assessment committee or with the department as a whole. Assessment liaisons from every department, along with the AVP of OIRP, Director of Assessment and one academic dean, comprise the University Assessment and Research Committee (UARC), collaboratively reviewing and making recommendations for assessment processes across departments.

UARC was established in 2017 to sustain and improve the institution's academic programming, accreditation requirements, and overall performance, through a systematic approach to assessing student learning outcomes, student success measures, and institutional performance measures. Every program is required to submit an Annual Assessment Report. In this report, each program lists their Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) assessed during the last year. In addition, each program must also submit an annual update to their Programmatic Assessment Plan, including all SLOs and how they will be assessed in the years ahead. Programmatic Assessment Plans include a curriculum map for required courses detailing their role in introducing, broadening, fulfilling, and assessing each of the SLOs. These documents are reviewed by the Director of Assessment and UARC, and each program receives annual feedback on the reports including the extent to which the SLOs represent verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete the program. These Annual Reports are posted on the website for public review.

The Programmatic Assessment Plan requires that programs establish quantitative benchmarks for each of their measures of student learning, and the Annual Assessment Report provides a structured format for reporting the use of this data and related benchmarks to understand

learning outcomes. Furthermore, the perspectives afforded by the feedback from the UARC and Director of Assessment serve to enrich the process of understanding student learning. The Annual Assessment Report for every academic program provides valuable data for use in the 7-year Program Review cycle. Program Review provides an opportunity to aggregate and reflect on measures of student learning and student success over a longer period. External perspectives on this data are afforded by the external reviewers that provide feedback on each self-study. The action plan, developed based on both the department's self-study and an external evaluator's recommendations, provides a critical mechanism to help ensure that data on student learning and success is used to make concrete changes to improve educational effectiveness. The identification of resources needed is an important data point of this process that can then be used as part of the department's larger resource allocation plan. The five years following the development of the Action Plan are used to implement changes and assess the curriculum in a comprehensive and thoughtful manner. Annual Assessment Reports can then be used to monitor progress on student learning and success metrics, while serving as the foundation for the next self-study. Self-studies and annual reports are posted to the website.

Graduate program assessment is the responsibility of the academic department in the same way it is responsible for its undergraduate programs and reviews of graduate programs are conducted on the same timeline and in concert with the undergraduate program reviews.

Programs that fall under external accreditation submit an Annual Assessment Report in addition to following the review cycle and guidelines established by their professional accrediting agency. Undergraduate programs with external accreditation currently include Human Services, Nursing, Business, Computer Information Systems, Computer Science, and Education. At the graduate level, all Education and Business programs, which represent 89% of our degree-seeking enrollment, are externally accredited.

Academic programs offered through our Extended Campus Partners fall under the assessment and secondary accreditation processes of the School of Education. Additionally, a Letter of Agreement (LOA) between the partner and FSU exists for each academic program and regular standing meetings are held six or more times per year, allowing for further evaluation by the Graduate Chair and Dean of the associated departments. Extended campus locations where only standalone professional development courses are offered have scheduled evaluative meetings once or twice per year depending on the number of course offerings.

### **General Education**

One of the most ambitious and comprehensive efforts in the past ten years to utilize data to improve educational effectiveness involved the program review and revision of the General Education curriculum. The General Education curriculum was last revised in 2007. Ongoing assessment of the old curriculum's learning objectives took place as soon as the curriculum was implemented, beginning in summer 2008 and continuing through 2014. The process of assessing, reviewing, and refining learning outcomes related to the original objectives was supported by both a Davis Foundation grant and an AAC&U and Lumina grant.

These efforts were also informed by the NEASC accreditation process, a 2011 FSU academic plan that called for a review of reading, writing, critical analysis, and logical thinking across the curriculum, a possible service learning requirement, integration of Information Literacy across the curriculum, and Massachusetts Board of Higher Education efforts to promote Civic Learning, Critical Thinking, Quantitative Reasoning, and Written Communication as part of the Vision Project. This history was used in developing the new General Education requirements.

Another important goal of the revised General Education curriculum was to improve student success and retention. A significant component of the General Education redesign is the addition of an FYE seminar to aid students in the transition to college. There has also been ongoing reflection based on student feedback and the community of practice which resulted in the number of FYE learning outcomes being reduced from six to three.

### **Co-Curricular Assessment**

A particularly important change in the past ten years has been an increased emphasis on assessment and evaluation in FSU's co-curricular programs. In 2017, a new Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) was hired. One of her major initiatives was to begin a much more intentional emphasis on priority and goal setting along with assessments of how we are meeting those priorities and goals. In 2017-18, the VPSA laid the groundwork for examining vision and mission. 2018-19 brought an introduction to the process of assessment: defining terms, doing a year of workshops for skill development, and creating visionary priorities and outcomes as well as key performance indicators. 2019-20 was the first year that Student Affairs departments began setting and assessing annual goals and key performance indicators. Even through COVID, the division made progress on their 2019-20 and 2020-21 annual goals and key performance indicators. Each year, the departments must have at least one student learning-focused goal and at least one effectiveness-focused goal. One major area of emphasis is supporting the university's vision for education justice and being a student-ready campus.

Assessment in Student Affairs is led by its VP and a division-wide assessment team, composed of staff members at all levels in the division. The team is made up of those with expertise in assessment, as well as relative newcomers, to provide a variety of perspectives on this work. Additionally, the leads from the division's twelve departments meet monthly for professional development on assessment and to report on progress in assessment initiatives. These entities engage in a full cycle of assessment including planning, using direct and indirect measures to gather data, analyzing data, and reviewing that data to propose and implement improvements.

Actual and projected student enrollment trend data, coupled with FSU's commitment to accessibility and student success, has guided decision making across the university. In 2017, FSU joined the Leading for Change Higher Education Consortium, a voluntary collaboration of higher education institutions in Massachusetts and New England committed to identifying student and employee diversity best practices through uniform and transparent use of data, institutional benchmarks and reflective practice. Through the consortium, FSU implemented the Campus Climate Survey in 2018 and 2020, from which we found that our students across demographics feel welcome on campus although a sense of belonging is stronger among white students. As a result, the Provost and Vice President for Student Affairs conducted a 2020 listening tour of FSU

identity-based student clubs and organizations. This led to changes at the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, including hiring the first 12-month Director and changing the role of student workers to becoming peer educators on DEI topics. Students also guide programming and support identity-based student organizations within the role's new parameters. Additionally, out of the data collected in the Campus Climate Survey and the listening tour came the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan's focus on Education Justice.

In 2019-20 and 2020-21, Housing and Residential Services have had a goal that student staff learn to engage in dialogue on DEI. After being trained in DEI as part of the onboarding process, staff members engage in discussions related to DEI in one-on-one meetings with supervisors and their yearly evaluation. Specifically, the student staff articulate what DEI means to them, how they impact DEI within their department role, and DEI areas of strength and challenge. The student staff reflect on the extent to which "I can engage in a discussion on diversity and inclusion" and also about specific topic areas: language/terminology use, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual identity, sexual violence, religion, political views. Plans for assessing these goals are ongoing, though they were delayed by the pandemic.

### **Institutional Assessment**

In 2021, the university adopted Institutional Learning Priorities (ILPs), which identify broad curricular and co-curricular student learning objectives that align with the university's vision. Academic and co-curricular departments have begun the process of examining how their program curricula align with these ILPs.

The university has participated in the VALUE Institute (previously known as the Multi-State Collaborative) since 2016, collecting artifacts using Critical Thinking and Written Communication rubrics. Student artifacts submitted to the VALUE Institute were scored by at least two scorers and the results were analyzed and reported back to FSU. FSU also received a report on state-wide aggregate results for comparison purposes.

FSU also asks individual programs to indicate in their Annual Assessment Reports the alignment between program learning outcomes and the ILPs. In this way, both the academic and co-curricular program-level assessment efforts can be aggregated, providing data that the UARC can use to make institutional recommendations about the assessment process and the ILPs.

### **Assessment Tools**

The OIRP utilizes several in-house, recurring surveys to collect data on student learning, satisfaction and post-graduation outcomes. Since 2008, OIRP has issued a Graduating Student Feedback Survey to support the program review process by, for example, collecting data on student learning outcomes. This survey has recently been revised into two separate surveys for undergraduate students and graduate students. In 2017, the University launched an Alumni Student Survey to collect post-graduation and learning outcomes data. The alumni survey is sent to undergraduate alumni at 1-, 3-, and 5-years post-graduation and is used as part of the program review process. The campus climate survey, administered in 2017, 2018, and 2020, has informed multiple student success initiatives across campus, including the Reimagining the First Year project, DEI work, and the strategic planning process.

In addition to these recurring surveys, many ad-hoc surveys are employed in order to measure institutional effectiveness. For example, the NEASC/NECHE survey was launched in December 2010 and January 2021 as part of the self-study process. Separate COVID-19 response surveys were administered to students, staff, and faculty in May 2020 to assess how the university was responding to the pandemic, to measure the pandemic's impact on student learning, and to inform planning for Fall 2020. Additionally, Student Affairs conducts numerous surveys and focus groups to measure the effectiveness of its programming and make improvements.

The OIRP also administers several national survey instruments that allow for benchmarking and peer comparisons. These include the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) administered every two years since 2006, the College Student Inventory (CSI) annually since 2005, the Mid-Year Student Assessment (MYSA) annually since 2017, and the Adult Student Priorities Survey (ASPS) biannually since 2018. The National College Health Assessment is administered every other year. These data inform the work of Counseling Services, Student Conduct/Case Management, and Housing & Residential Services. We have also participated for three years with the #RealCollegeSurvey with the Hope Center at Temple University, examining students' experiences with food and housing insecurity. These data are shared with the Community Assessment and Risk Evaluation (CARE) Team, our food and necessities pantry The Falcon Bazaar, and others designing services for these students. At the graduate level, the ASPS is conducted biannually to measure service gaps and address them in the SGOCE strategic plan.

Several software tools also support university practices. The Tk20 application is a comprehensive planning, data gathering, and reporting system designed for managing assessment activities. While uses of Tk20 vary widely from program to program, one powerful tool has been the ability of faculty to conduct rubric-based assessment of artifacts including portfolios. Other technological tools utilized by the campus focus more heavily on providing student success data. Implemented in the fall of 2014, Navigate is a "big data" initiative that analyzes the past decade of student performance at our institution in order to provide predictive analytics related to courses and student attributes. Through tailored reports, departments are able to assess key trends and insights in student performance and identify opportunities for targeted initiatives, curricular change, or enhanced resources. It also provides a comprehensive advising platform that applies historical data analytics to current students in order to provide advisors with detailed insights, including predicted risk, for their advisees. Additionally, Navigate is used each semester to collect data related to attendance, deficient midterm grades and non-registration status. It also allows faculty to issue referrals related to attendance, academic coaching, tutoring and financial aid. Navigate was also used during the spring of 2020 to gather information related to possible walk-aways resulting from the transition to fully remote learning. Most recently, the University adopted the EAB Academic Performance Solutions (APS) platform, which provides access to key metrics across student, HR, and finance data, to department chairs, deans and other senior leadership. APS also provides departmental peer benchmarks, comparing our data to peers and aspirational peers, as well as structured analytics to support academic planning and budgeting.

The OIRP provides reports, data, and data analysis to its campus constituents in an effort to sustain a culture of data-informed decision-making and to support the measurement of

educational effectiveness. Student success data are published on the OIRP website via the University Factbook, Common Data Set and Student Achievement Measures. The OIRP works with various offices across campus to ensure that data is collected and stored in a way that facilitates the availability of student success data for all populations, modalities and locations. To that end, FSU is currently implementing Edify, a data integration and visualization platform, which will facilitate data collection and sharing across campus.

## **Appraisal**

### **Curricular Assessment**

Overall, the combined efforts of the faculty, UARC, OIRP staff and Academic Affairs have helped insure a transparent, inclusive, and effective data collection and reflection process, highlighted by the Annual Assessment Reports. In AY21, 100% of academic departments submitted an annual assessment report. The process has been successful because it has yielded changes to the curriculum which have increased student success. The current program review guidelines, as approved through university governance, provides a clear path for all programs to be regularly reviewed and assessed. This seven-year cycle ensures that the curriculum offered to all students, in all locations and modalities, is being assessed and improved as needed.

For example, the Human Services Program assessed the program learning outcome “Students will be able to assess, analyze, and synthesize empirical research from a Human Services primary source” using papers from a research methods class. The attached [Table](#) shows results of those who achieved the proficient rating of 3 on a 4-point rubric. Between the 2018 and 2019 data collections, the class had gone back to using Open Educational Resources (OER) with suggested texts for those who preferred a book. More case studies were infused to help apply the material. Between 2018 and 2019, students achieved a high proficiency rating, ranging between a low of 83% and a high of 95%. In Spring 2021, this rating dropped to 47%, which is likely due to the impact of COVID-19 and the switch to remote learning.

Political Science uses TK20 to assess program learning outcomes in a portfolio submitted by 4<sup>th</sup> year students. They have regularly improved this assessment process, producing changes that sometimes require further revision, but ultimately yield valuable data. During 2018-2019, no data was available because of limitations that led to inter-rater reliability questions. These limitations were addressed and data collection ensued in 2019-2020 with clearer guidelines for students on what was expected in the portfolios. Their target for proficiency was 100%. The outcomes ranged from 82% to 86% in Fall 2019. In Fall 2020, three of the four outcomes achieved 100% efficiency, while political methodology was at 96.8%. See [Table](#) for details.

Within the Accelerated Online MBA program, the Capstone Integrated Business Case was used to measure several of the department’s Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), with the objective that at least 70% of graduating students should achieve a 4 or higher (out of a possible 6) on the rating scale for each ILO. For this assessment, 262 graduating students submitted artifacts in May 2019. The range of all 262 graduating students was 5.10 to 5.30, and the overall mean rating on each evaluation criterion was 5.23. Because this fell well within the target range, no action was taken. The same data was collected in 2021 and again showed at least 70% of the 44

MBA students who submitted artifacts achieved a 4 or higher for each ILO. The rubric will be shared between full-time and adjunct faculty who will teach the course in the future.

Data from SSC Navigate has assisted in program reviews. Several examples of how this tool has been leveraged to increase undergraduate student learning follow. With the addition of graduate students to the platform, SGOCE plans to leverage data to improve retention, persistence, and graduation rates for graduate, online, and adult learners.

Based on SSC data, the Biology and Chemistry and Exercise Science departments discovered that students in these majors who perform poorly in lower-level classes (earned a 1.0 or lower in BIOL 1800 General Biology I or BIOL 1900 General Biology II; earned a D or F in Introduction to Exercise and Sports Science or Anatomy and Physiology I) are statistically unlikely to complete the program. In response, the Biology and Chemistry department required a minimum grade of 2.0 in each course and allowed students two attempts each. The Exercise Science department set minimum grade requirements in these two critical courses in order for students to progress to other courses in the major. Both departments have also updated advising protocols to provide additional support to students struggling with these classes and to encourage students who do not pass on the first attempt to explore alternative major options.

Integrating student learning data with SSC data in the Program Review process also leads to improvements in instruction and student learning. In 2018-19, the Psychological Sciences program review led to new internship requirements to increase student preparedness. This was based on gaps in knowledge students demonstrated when they had failing grades in Psychological Science courses before completing the internship. Therefore, a prerequisite was added that requires students to repeat any failed courses prior to the internship. The program review also led to the development of a Cultural Psychology course to be offered in 2021-22.

After the 2018-19 Communications Media program review the program implemented several changes to support student learning, including participation in an Assessment Plan Workshop in May 2019 that produced updated program mission, goals, and student learning objectives. Each of the concentrations is now in the process of updating their learning outcomes to align with the department's new outcomes. The program also addressed the strategic plan's emphasis on helping transfer students complete degrees by creating a Graphic Design MassTransfer Pathway which allows transfer students to complete their degree in four semesters at FSU.

The Program Review process is also an important step in the larger planning and resource allocation process, allowing departments to integrate assessment findings into the university-wide budget request process. Resource allocation is often linked to initiatives that support student success by, for example, making sure students have access to tools or resources they need for future careers. The past two Communications Media program reviews have noted that department facilities are overdue for an upgrade. There was a tentative plan to renovate these areas in 2015, but the renovation was put on hold. It is not always clear to programs why some budget outlays are funded and others are not. Therefore, in order to better close the loop on this review process, programs would benefit from increased transparency as to why some recommendations in the program review are funded and others are not. Such transparency would facilitate better long-term planning in the review process.



An example of the program review process impacting budgeting is the 2019 Exercise Science comprehensive program review, which led to the following purchases to improve learning: Education Recognized Program application to the National Strength and Conditioning Association for the Strength and Conditioning concentration (\$500); Purchase of motion analysis equipment for teaching and research (\$20,656); Membership fee for National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (\$175); Equipment to support the Strength and Conditioning program (\$5,870).

For programs with licensing examinations, data from those exams is reviewed both annually and as part of program review, and the results are used to inform curricular and program revisions. Two programs require the passage of licensing exams: Nursing and Education. These programs and their accreditors define the appropriate level of licensure passage rates.

FSU Nursing students have a first-time passing rate for NCLEX (which they take after completing the program) of 95%. The Nursing program uses both curricular and program-wide interventions to maintain high passing rates on the NCLEX. Over the last three years our NCLEX passing rate has increased by at least 2%. Nursing students within the program are assessed using the HESI exam to evaluate potential program areas of emphasis in preparation for the NCLEX exam. The HESI is used as an external measure to evaluate student achievement.

The School of Education offers both undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to achieve learning outcomes, pass the MTELS, and graduate in all locations and all modalities including online, hybrid, the onsite undergraduate programs, and the fully online graduate programs, as well as extended campus locations such as the partnership with Catherine Lahey Brine. Published pass rates for the MTELS continue to be at 100%, as this is a requirement for program completers. However, the MTEL pass rate from the previous 3 years fluctuated between 53.1%-58.7% when including those who haven't completed the program.

Previously, MTEL prep workshops had been implemented through the Center for Professional Studies. Due to low enrollment and inconsistent attendance, the Education program made MTEL prep a co-requisite for undergraduate courses. With MTEL prep workshops being co-requisites, they can track students' satisfactory or unsatisfactory grades and first-time passage rates after the workshop. Now the majority of MTEL prep workshops are online or hybrid, making it more accessible for students' schedules. Curriculum changes within the Education department, as well as this emphasis on MTEL preparation, increased advising support, and participation in the FYE seminar have all been implemented to lead to an increase in MTEL pass rate for Education majors in alignment with FSU's commitment to education justice.

Based on MTEL passing rate data, the Mathematics department collaborated with the Education department to design content area courses to support student learning of required subject matter knowledge for these exams. Current assessment data for these courses demonstrates a disparity of success rates related to race and ethnicity. Therefore, under the guidance of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Mathematics Department is proposing alternative pathways for students to demonstrate subject matter knowledge to support all of our students seeking teacher licensure.

Each program has clearly established learning outcomes that are clearly communicated to students. In conjunction with its student-centric website redesign, the University implemented a consistent system of publishing program learning outcomes, which was adopted by all undergraduate programs and is in the process of being implemented by graduate programs.

### **General Education**

To facilitate the approval of learning outcome designations for the new General Education curriculum and to oversee curriculum revisions in response to learning outcomes assessment and student success data, FSU has established a standing General Education Subcommittee of the AUC Curriculum Committee. FSU also created a General Education Program Area Chair charged with creating a proposal to assess the General Education curriculum, which was approved in August 2021. The proposal calls for the creation of a General Education Ambassador and Assessment Program, composed of faculty, that will provide a sustainable five-year cycle of assessment. The proposal will pass through governance in AY22 with an implementation date of AY23. Program review will occur in AY28. The Program Area also supports faculty in developing and refining courses in response to assessment data.

One element of the new General Education curriculum that has already begun to be implemented is the FYE seminar, developed based on the longer history of General Education assessment. Currently, the FYE consists only of the seminar (the co-curricular parts have not been developed yet) so the learning outcomes for the course are the learning outcomes for the program. The assessment materials for the outcomes are still being developed, based on the AAC&U rubrics for information literacy and reading and the reading apprenticeship model used in the three years of pilot courses. These are also learning outcomes for the broader General Education curriculum that will feed into assessment in later courses.

One of the main goals of the FYE is retention, and in Fall 2019 the retention rate was 2% higher for students enrolled in FYE than for those who are not, and 4% higher for Latinx male students, the group with the highest achievement difference on campus. Narrowing and eventually eliminating the achievement gap is a priority for FSU as well as the DHE, so these results are promising. The FYE program has also implemented a peer mentoring program for students in the FYE course. 93.1% of FYE students who accessed peer mentoring outside the classroom were retained (compared with 74.2% of FYE students who did not interact with peer mentors outside of the classroom and 82.1% of non-FYE students). 84% of freshmen who completed the Mid-Year Student Assessment (MYSA) Strongly Agreed or Agreed that the FYE was helpful.

### **Co-Curricular Assessment**

The current Student Affairs assessment process was implemented in 2019-20, and continues into 2020-21 and beyond. Though affected by COVID, the division continued the process and made progress on most goals, objectives, and key performance indicators. Below are some examples of student learning goals and results, as well as measures related to student success.

Housing and Residential Services provides opportunities for student staff to learn and practice the ability to engage in dialogue on diversity and inclusion. The student staff have reported a high level of “I can completely engage” consistently across all categories of diversity presented,

except for sexual violence. The results will impact future training and in-services to take the next professional development steps. The student staff also were asked to “Define what diversity means to you.” The skill to verbally communicate their intentions and engage their diverse residential community will be supported by the understanding of these baseline terms. Finally, staff were asked to identify at minimum two diversity areas of strength and two areas of challenge. The data from these survey questions guided the Housing and Residential Services Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 student staff training and the results were shared with the student staff.

TRIO Student Support Services peer mentors (TRIO Student Support Squad) gained research skills enabling them to lead one of the First Four Weeks curriculum, demonstrating effective research skills and familiarity with curriculum development, rollout, and assessment. Squad members submitted an activity outline that meets the learning objectives of their assigned “week” during the First Four Weeks in spring semester. Additionally, they demonstrated their understanding of how to assess student learning by suggesting an assessment method through which comprehension of their assigned activity could be measured.

As part of the federal grant, every year TRIO SSS students learn about financial literacy. In 2020-21, pre-and post-test results showed that students were more knowledgeable about how to read credit card statements, check credit scores, and establish credit.

The Office of Student Development conducted the second round of a Belonging Study in 2020-21 comparing students who are actively engaged with those who are not. The data continues to demonstrate that students who are involved report a deep sense of belonging.

- Sense of belonging dropped for involved students in 2021, likely due to COVID and the lack of in-person involvement.
- Involved students reported in 2019 and 2021 that they believe their values and attitudes aligned with others.
- Students who are uninvolved and report feeling like they belong attribute their belonging to their professors and/or faculty advisors.
- Uninvolved students reported in 2020 that they feel less connected to others values and attitudes, which is the same as in 2019.
- The 2021 study showed a smaller percentage of involved students reporting that Fitchburg State is committed to diversity compared to the 2019 study. However, the opposite was true for the uninvolved students. The theory is that involved students have a heightened sense of reality due to the current events. The uninvolved students overwhelmingly reported that they believe Fitchburg State is committed to diversity which has contributed to the number of DEI emails they have received this past year.
- Counseling Services, Office of Student Development, and Advising, Coaching, and Tutoring Center are identified as the top three services that students turn to.
- These data have been shared with Jason Smith to incorporate into the training of academic advisors/faculty. It is clear that our uninvolved students rely on faculty and academic advisors as a critical connection to Fitchburg State University.

In 2019-20, the Athletics and Recreation Department focused on promoting good sportsmanship behavior for student-athletes. Team leaders and athletes participated in pre- and post-tests around a speaker. Team leaders gave their team a higher sportsmanship ranking in the “before” survey compared to after the presentation when they filled out the “after” survey. Almost all teams, with the exception of a few, ranked their teams 1-2 points lower than what they filled out originally. The student-athletes developed a more complex understanding of sportsmanship as they consistently reduced their scores in the after survey.

One of Counseling Services’ annual goals in 2020-21 was to increase the intentional implementation of treatment plans, goals, and progress made by their clients. A pilot program asked new clients to complete assessments (PAQ) during their intake process and again after the 5th session of clinical intervention. Student patients who were given the PAQ at intake and also at the start of a new semester were able to reflect on the mitigation of their symptoms. They were also able to be more collaborative and intentional with treatment planning. By administering the PAQ a second time and engaging in a dialogue with their counselor, students were able to demonstrate learning of coping strategies that have assisted in their progress.

Three Student Affairs Departments reviewed policies, procedures, and practices with an equity lens in order to support the university’s efforts at education justice and being a student-ready campus: Dean of Students (Code of Conduct), Office of Student Development, and University Police. In 2021-22, Counseling Services, Housing & Residential Services, and Athletics & Recreation will conduct equity reviews.

The Dean of Students is working in conjunction with Institutional Research to examine student conduct data and academic standing data disaggregated by race and ethnicity. In addition, Housing & Residential Services is doing the same thing for residence hall policy violations.

Staff in many student affairs departments intentionally pursued training and development related to the Equity Agenda to support the vision of education justice and a student-ready campus. For example, the Counseling Services’ Associate Director was trained as a facilitator of the *21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge*, and led the staff in this important project over several weeks in April 2021. The Office of Student Development professional staff completed Harvard’s Implicit Bias Inventory and is working with the Intercultural Development Inventory, including creating individual Intercultural Development Plans.

The University Police Department (UPD) is close to completing the review and revision of policies and procedures necessary to become accredited through the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA). Accreditation supports student success by providing greater accountability and competency in daily operations. Officers and staff know what the policies and procedures are, how to perform them, and that they are accountable to them. A new set of standards was released in 2021, and we need to benchmark against those and make any updates. We anticipate that the UPD will be fully IACLEA-accredited by June 30, 2022. UPD is also aligning their policies and procedures with the Council for the Advancement of Standards and with the Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) in Massachusetts. Finally, they have reviewed their policies and procedures with an equity lens.

## **Institutional Assessment**

One approach to learning outcomes assessment that supports both General Education assessment and Institutional Learning Priorities (ILPs) has been the campus participation in the VALUE Institute. This involves collecting artifacts of student work from students who have completed at least 90 credits. These samples are then uploaded by OIRP staff into the VALUE Institute repository, where a national team of scorers assess the artifacts. Participation in the VALUE Institute also provides opportunities for FSU faculty be trained to be national scorers; in 2018-19 twelve FSU faculty and staff participated. Additionally, our participation provides an opportunity to benchmark FSU's learning outcomes assessments results against both national standards and peer institutions via a state-wide consortium. In the 2018-19 cycle, 88 artifacts were submitted for scoring to the VALUE Institute for the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric.

When comparing our 2018-19 results with overall state-wide findings from participating institutions, our artifacts scored slightly higher than the average for 4-year institutions. We had fewer numbers of students whose scores fell in the benchmark category. Our students typically fell in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> milestones on each of the 5 areas scored: conclusion, student position, influence of context & assumptions, evidence, and explanation of issues. These findings will be compared to 2019-20 findings to determine possible effects of COVID-19 and remote learning.

The AUC's recent approval of the Institutional Learning Priorities (ILPs) sets the stage for these statements of learning to be aligned with assessment strategies. Following the alignment of assessment strategies to the ILPs for the undergraduate level would be reviewing them in combination with Graduate Program learning outcome statements to determine if FSU is ready to begin work on an Institutional Assessment Plan. FSU has a number of identifiable populations of students on campus, online, and at several extended campus locations for which robust data exists. Several academic programs involve discipline-based licensure and/or accreditation, which provides strong data as well. In our Center for Professional Studies, which offers continuing education credits in various disciplines, some graduate and undergraduate credit-bearing courses, content for lifelong learning, content for businesses and local organizations, and one-shot workshops, the assessment is dependent on the type of content offered and the preferences of the instructors. Programs offered in conjunction with extended campus partners are included as part of departments' program and curriculum review.

The Student Success Task Force has embarked on a comprehensive and inclusive process to define student success for the university which will include qualitative and quantitative measures. A benchmark process evaluated how similar institutions define student success and a literature review analyzed best practices for assessing student success. A qualitative survey was administered in Spring 2021 to glean student, faculty, and staff perceptions of student success. In 2021-22, focus groups will be facilitated to learn more about perceptions and experiences of faculty, staff, and students around student success. The data from these efforts will be analyzed to craft an institutional definition for student success, with implementation in Fall 2022.

In evaluating the use of traditional student success data, FSU has emphasized improving equity and inclusion on campus. In its 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, FSU set strategic priorities of

increasing recruitment of transfer students, Latinx students, international students, and out of state students. The plan defined measures of student success in terms of the retention and graduation rates of Latinx students. Retention rates have dropped for Latinx students as well as other underserved minoritized groups and remain below the campus average. Graduation rates of Latinx students also remain below the campus average and did not fulfill the stated goal of halving the achievement gap. The university has set a target of achieving retention rates of 75% for Latinx students and 77% for African American students. In addition, FSU set targets of 6-year graduation rates of 55% and 69% for Latinx and African American students respectively. The university also implemented Spring 2018 and Fall 2020 campus climate surveys to provide institutional data on the experiences of underrepresented students. As a result of the 2018 data, the Department of Biology and Chemistry has launched a program using peer-led focus groups and data collection to evaluate potential barriers for BIPOC students in STEM.

In addition to institutional data about student learning, the university collects data on student rates of retention, progression, transfer, graduation, and loan repayment to evaluate educational effectiveness. In the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, FSU identified a goal of reaching and maintaining a retention rate of 80%. This rate has improved over the past 3 years, moving from 73% in 2019 to 74% in 2020 and 77% in 2021. The retention rate for Master's Programs was 89% in 2018, 86% in 2019, and 91% in 2020; the Master's graduation rate was 89% in 2018 and 2019, and 85% in 2020. FSU has additional data on retention rates for distance education graduate students. These are 91% in 2018, 86% in 2019, and 90% in 2020. These online programs are just beginning to generate graduation rate data, with the first year of available data showing a graduation rate of 86% for 2020. Rates are trending in positive directions.

In the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, the university set a goal to increase the 6-year graduation rate by 5%. The 6-year graduation rate increased from 53.1% in 2015 to 61% in 2019, then fell to 58% in 2020 and remained at 58% in 2021. The university has set a goal of achieving a 62% 6-year graduation rate as part of its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

In terms of overall student success outcomes, FSU did not reach the goal of 80% retention. Recent data shows that the retention rate from first-year to sophomore Fall semester was 73% in 2019 and 74% in 2020. FSU has reiterated the goal of achieving a retention rate of 80% in its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

The university did not set a specific target for transfer enrollment in its 2015-2020 strategic plan. In spite of an increase in the yield of transfer students, over the past few years overall transfer enrollment has declined. In the new Strategic Plan, FSU set a goal of maintaining its incoming Fall transfer enrollment at 366.

In 2018, the Assistant to the Provost and the Dean of Students conducted a study in which they reviewed ten years of data about academic standing. In this study, they found that those who went on academic probation (those who had a G.P.A. under 2.0) had a 4% chance of graduation, while those who had a 2.0-2.5 GPA had a 35% chance. These results were acted on by following up with a new academic standing entitled Academic Warning which captured students with a G.P.A. of 2.0-2.2. This designation means that a student is still in good standing but is close to landing on probation. Students in this category are required to meet with a coach

from ACT to determine need for services. On average 150 students per semester fall into this category, providing opportunities for them to have greater contact with university resources.

FSU monitors and publishes its default and loan repayment rates. With a cohort default rate below the national average, the institution regularly publishes average student loan debt upon graduation and loan repayment estimates.

Most of the measures of student success cited above are specific to undergraduate student populations. The Strategic Plans have not focused in the same manner on defining and setting appropriate levels of achievement for these measures in graduate programs. In some cases, such as transfer rates, these measures would not be appropriate for graduate students. However, the graduate programs could benefit from many of the measures of student success.

Retention, persistence, and graduation rates are very strong for the graduate population. The SGOCE, with dedicated retention and student success staff, has for many years conducted targeted outreach to both registered and stop-out students in an effort to improve persistence rates and provide personalized advising services. The SGOCE staff plan to leverage SSC Navigate to better understand the success rates of graduate students by program, modality and location. The implementation of the Edify data integration platform will further facilitate this work.

In January 2021 a survey was conducted in which FSU faculty and staff were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “The University develops and uses data, evidence, and information to improve educational effectiveness.” 78% Strongly Agreed/Agreed with this statement. This demonstrates a commitment to, and awareness of, a culture of data-informed decision-making that the University can continue to build upon.

### **Assessment Tools**

Internally developed surveys such as the alumni and graduating student surveys include open-response questions that collect qualitative data, for the purposes of sharing that data in the strategic planning process or disaggregated by program for assessment and program review purposes. Not all of these data collection methods go the further step to analyze open-ended responses and widely share this analysis. However, other mechanisms are in place to get the qualitative perspective such as including alumni, industry and/or community advisory committees feedback to inform the program review process and student learning. These inclusions of student experiences and learning should continue to be emulated across campus. In addition the campus has purchased NVivo software to aid in the analysis of qualitative data.

Looking beyond campus, current data on job placement outside of accredited programs is limited. More information is needed to inform career development across the university. FSU has a long history of sending out surveys to its graduating students, both undergraduate and graduate. During the last year these surveys have been revised into two distinct surveys: a Graduation Survey for Undergraduate Students focusing on student participation in high-impact experiential learning and career progress and future plans; and a Graduation Survey for Graduate Students separately seeking to measure attainment of learning outcomes and career progress and future plans. Included in this new survey is a measurement of further student success learning outcomes that students are expected to have achieved, including civic

participation and global awareness. Because these surveys have so recently been introduced, it is not yet possible to make accurate appraisals about trends in these other measures of student success or to know whether there will be increased response rates to the surveys.

Although we have been collecting graduating student data since 2008, and have recently added alumni data in 2017, response rates fail to support meaningful post-graduation outcomes analysis at the program level. The DHE has made forays into providing this data to the state universities in recognition of both the challenges and importance of collecting this data. However, to date, a solution has not been provided. Individual academic departments have had some success with response rates using their own surveys, but this approach does not support the aggregation of data at the institutional level. In AY19-20, a university-wide group attempted to make inroads into this issue, but the pandemic delayed meaningful progress. The OIRP is currently attempting to increase response rates with the assistance of the academic departments and the Registrar. When launching the 2020 Alumni survey, 8-10 departments sent them out from their department email addresses rather than having them come from the OIRP email address, with some improvement on responses for those departments (about 20% difference). However, programs with small number of graduates may still struggle with meaningful results even when aggregated over multiple years.

Campus-wide data on our graduates illustrates the need to make interventions that can help support employment of our graduates and promote ongoing connections to the university. While graduating students reported that FSU prepared them well or very well for a variety of professional and personal skills in 2016, 2019 and 2020 (ranging from 79-85% of respondents depending on the question), a much smaller percentage of students reported being currently employed or having a job offer in their current program of study (43-61% depending on the year of reporting). Most concerning, but understandable given the circumstances of classes forced to move online and cancelled graduation ceremonies in Spring 2020, is the precipitous drop from 84% of students in 2019 reporting they are likely to stay connected to the campus after completing their degree to only 49% in 2020. Please see [Table](#) for more detailed data.

The survey of 1st, 3rd and 5th year alumni paints a more promising picture of employment and graduate school enrollment than the graduating student survey. The recent graduating student surveys reported how many students had already been accepted into a graduate program, and this number was relatively low in both 2019 and 2020 (8 and 12% respectively). In contrast, the Data First forms indicate how many students actually completed a graduate program within 8 years of graduation. This data indicates 27% for 2019, 23% for 2020, and 20% for 2021, consistent with data from 1st, 3rd and 5th year alumni on the alumni survey. See [Table](#).

While employment rates in a field related to their degree (61-79%) and career satisfaction (67-82%) are relatively favorable amongst 1st, 3rd, and 5th year alumni, the institution is taking efforts to try to improve the rate at which students have a clear pathway to secure employment or graduate study in an area related to their field of study. The university has committed to embedding career competencies into the curriculum and has secured a Davis Foundation grant of \$200,000 to fund curriculum work, faculty professional development, and the addition of an Associate Director of Internship Development and Employer Relations within the Career



Services and Advising Center. This provides just one more concrete example of the manner in which the institution is continuing to reflect on and use data to inform campus priorities.

Utilization of Tk20 is inconsistent and overall, the tool is not viewed as user-friendly or useful. The University, led by the AVP OIRP, CIO and VP for Student Affairs, is currently reviewing alternative tools that can support holistic, campus-wide assessment and planning.

FSU has an ongoing commitment to data collection and use to improve educational effectiveness across campus. In addition to ongoing program and department assessment, new Institutional Learning Priorities were developed and recently passed through governance, as was the new General Education curriculum. The campus will now work to align them with assessment strategies, allowing them to be better incorporated in future strategic planning. Data has been strategically used to guide executive leadership during the pandemic, advance equity and inclusiveness, and navigate issues of enrollment and retention. FSU's implementation of Edify, which unifies and organizes data assets across campus into a single centralized visualization platform to support real-time decision making, is evidence of a clear commitment to data-informed planning. These efforts demonstrate our continued commitment to our mission and strategic plan, to serve all students and achieve education justice.

### **Projections**

The General Education Program Area will implement an Assessment Plan by AY23.

Led by the VP of Student Affairs, SA departments will implement a review process in FY23 similar to academic department program review. Nationally-benchmarked standards such as those published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards will provide the foundation.

OIRP will collaborate with the Office of Alumni and Development, Department Chairs, Registrar and Career Services to implement strategies to increase response rates on both the Alumni and Graduating Students Surveys in order to provide more robust data to departments by AY23.

## Standard 9: Integrity, Transparency and Public Disclosure

### Integrity

#### Description

FSU is committed to maintaining high ethical standards and meeting its responsibilities to while upholding integrity for its students, prospective students, and other audiences. These values exemplify the process of creating the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. Integrity underscores a theme highlighted in several university academic publications, all available on the university website.

Prominent among this documentation, the university catalog provides comprehensive, updated course descriptions and program listings, including links to academic policies and procedures. The university's academic integrity policy illustrates for students the requirement to submit work honestly without falsifying results or plagiarizing. This policy also defines the adjudicatory process when an alleged violation occurs and the sanctions applied if an allegation is proven.

The faculty handbook provides syllabi guidelines for both undergraduate and graduate courses with specific information regarding the inclusion of a statement about the university's academic integrity policy. These guidelines also provide important information about the inclusion of statements regarding the services available to students with disabilities. Syllabus templates are publicly available online for faculty from our extended campus programs. A digital course review rubric is used to evaluate courses that are designed to be offered in an online format.

Academic freedom remains central to institutional integrity. The university values the opportunities provided to faculty and students as they teach, study, and conduct research. Academic freedom is defined and outlined in faculty collective bargaining agreements which are followed by administration. These agreements are also posted online for public view.

To further those objectives, the university maintains a Center for Teaching and Learning and a Center for Faculty Scholarship, each of which hosts programs every academic year designed to celebrate faculty achievements and inspire meaningful dialogue across disciplines.

Students further benefit from the university's commitment to "providing a campus environment where the ideas, values, perspectives and contributions of all students are respected" (per the catalog). A significant mechanism for this work is the annual Undergraduate Conference on Research and Creative Practice, where students are encouraged to create original work under the sponsorship of a faculty mentor and share it at an annual conference open to the campus and wider community. Classes are canceled the day of the conference to encourage attendance and participation at this celebration of student achievement. Students are also provided with opportunities to participate in key decision-making committees, such as the All University Committee (AUC), on campus.

Beyond the classroom, FSU also fosters an inclusive atmosphere. The university recognizes the importance of athletics to the university experience. Its student-athletes compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division III, and the athletic department is committed to providing high-quality athletic and recreation programs that challenge our students to achieve their potential and support their academic endeavors. Athletics extend education

beyond the classrooms and foster student engagement, leadership, and development. Our inclusive programs positively impact the physical, social, and emotional well-being of all participants and encourage a lifelong commitment to health and wellness.

FSU also has committees and policies governing responsible conduct in human subject research, animal care and use, and biosafety. Information and policies are posted online.

While these research opportunities are public, the institution takes student privacy seriously and abides by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Within the university website, the registrar's page includes information detailing FERPA's definitions and exemptions, along with mechanisms to seek redress if students believe their FERPA rights have been violated. The Registrar sends an email to all students annually reminding them that their educational records are protected and that sharing of such information without their consent is restricted. Information on FERPA is also included in the faculty handbook.

Additionally, the majority of employees, members of collective bargaining units, gain protections under contracts, posted online and available publicly. The university's Human Resources and Payroll Services Department page includes links to those documents, along with the institution's comprehensive Equal Opportunity Plan. This plan outlines expectations, as well as policies and processes governing Title IX violations, along with anti-discrimination and harassment complaint procedures. The plan, shared with Massachusetts' other state universities, is drafted in consultation with legal counsel. This updated document changes according to state and federal guidelines, and the campus community is notified annually of its rights and responsibilities. Information on how to file complaints is detailed online.

The university is supported by a professional police department whose responsibilities include compliance with the Clery Act. The HR page also includes a comprehensive list of policies affecting employees, with a thorough review of those expectations occurring as part of each new hire's onboarding process. The institution ensures that all employees receive adequate and regular training for adherence to state and federal laws, including the hiring of staff to oversee specific areas, such as the Title IX coordinator, with all relevant training documented.

New undergraduate and transfer students receive annual training, including during orientation, about sexual assault and harassment, which defines the community's expectations of conduct.

As one of the 9 state universities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, FSU is granted the authority to award degrees by the DHE. FSU demonstrates honesty and integrity in its relationship to the DHE through regular communication from the university's liaison to NECHE.

Overall, FSU expects that all members of its community, including administrators, faculty and staff, students, and members of the Board of Trustees, act with integrity in the responsible and ethical pursuit of the university's mission.

### **Appraisal**

FSU has appropriate infrastructure to maintain ethical standards. Employees are trained to comply with the state's conflict of interest law as required by the Ethics Commission. This involves an online module completed every 2 years, with completion tracked by HR.

Faculty and students are also made aware of their ethical expectations and obligations. For example, faculty must disclose authorship of assigned books in courses. The academic integrity policy is widely available and the faculty handbook outlines ethical standards and guidelines.

Students are expected to understand and apply standards of academic integrity described in the student handbook and referenced in course syllabi. Additionally, the library has created an Academic Participation and Honesty online tutorial which is embedded in First Year Experience courses, and the library offers workshops for international graduate and undergraduate students in this area when they arrive on campus. Furthermore, professional development opportunities are provided through the Center for Teaching and Learning and during training for new faculty. The website also provides information on how to report violations of the policy.

The university is required to follow federal regulatory guidelines when engaging in activities involving human participants, vertebrates, and biosafety. Since 2012, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has been revised and the Institutional Animal Care and Use (IACUC) and Biosafety Committees established. In 2015 a comprehensive approach to compliance was adopted. Key changes include assigning oversight for the 3 committees to the Dean of Health and Natural Sciences, establishing an MSCA process for nominating and appointing members to the 3 committees, and requiring training for all regulated activities using the online CITI training.

The institution does well at understanding and protecting privacy. Full-time employees, contractors, and faculty receive training in expectations around privacy and procedures remain strong and effective. The IT Department has clear policies and guidelines regarding information security and acceptable use, which are regularly updated and disseminated.

It is a strength that FSU has allocated resources to compliance-related matters such as Title IX and the Clery Act. This includes creating a full-time Title IX Coordinator as well as funding to provide guidance on the creation of the Clery-mandated annual security report. This is especially important as federal guidelines around Title IX/Clery have changed considerably and non-compliance with these expectations would put the institution at considerable risk.

One strength for policy availability stems from the HR website. A comprehensive list of policies for employees located there provides valuable information. The website, catalog, and handbooks also contain university-wide and academic policies as well as policies for student organizations. However, policies and processes can be difficult to find because they exist in several locations across the university's website and publications. Having a centralized, searchable web page that lists all policies could make it easier to locate important information.

Another strength is the regular updates to policies that have a connection to external regulatory oversight and updates. One example is the Equal Opportunity Plan, which was revised in 2020 as a result of updated federal Title IX regulations.

That said, it is difficult to verify when other internal policies have been updated. This does not apply to all internal policies. For example, the Student Code of Conduct has been updated recently and will be available on the website. Furthermore, by virtue of the process that occurs for the university catalog and handbooks, policies are informally reviewed on an annual basis. However, there is not a standardized cycle or formal review process for updating university

policies that are not anchored by external regulatory oversight. At the undergraduate level, the Student Success Task Force has been working on a proposal to establish a periodic review cycle for academic policies. Likewise, a similar proposal is in process at the graduate level, with a plan for submission to Graduate Council by Spring, 2022.

There is value in establishing a standardized schedule for policy review and updates not only for academic policies, but also more globally across campus. Once policies are formally reviewed and updated, we can design a process for updating all relevant websites and publications.

Having a published directory of policies and a standard, well-published calendar for formal policy review and updates will foster a more coordinated approach to compliance issues across the university. This will allow us to maximize student success and minimize risk for the university and its community members.

FSU sponsors a wide variety of events and regularly partners with the community. When requests occur to sponsor events, they are vetted by the appropriate divisional or departmental leader to ensure that the proposed event is consistent with the university mission. Once events are approved, they are referred to our centralized Events Management office (which was created since our last self-study) for support and oversight. Additionally, the library maintains specific policies regarding displays and exhibits at the university.

One additional strength with respect to integrity is the established guidelines, procedures, and policies for setting up and maintaining formal partnerships with companies and organizations who provide quality education at extended campuses to constituents engaged in professional development and/or formal study at FSU. The Extended Campus Office, consisting of the Associate Dean of SGOCE and an administrative assistant, oversees 31 contractual partnerships.

Each partner signs a one-year letter of agreement (LOA), which is aligned with NECHE's policy on contractual arrangements, in order to garner approval from the university. The LOA, which is submitted annually for review and approval for continuation, details the partner's responsibilities and the university's expectations. The LOA explicitly outlines preparation and delivery of courses and programs, including schedule submission, instructor credentialing, course evaluations, maximum enrollment, and instructional hours, as well as all financial aspects of the partnership, including registration, payment schedules, and costs per credit.

The central pillars of the LOA are protection of our students, assurance of course rigor and integrity, and financial transparency. The LOA also outlines available student services, course withdrawal policies, student complaint processes, and grading and fair practices policies. In the event that a partnership needs to be terminated, the LOA outlines clear processes for students to receive credit from the university and/or the partnering agency to continue to support students for the program's planned length. Partners are required to meet with the Associate Dean of SGOCE, the department chair, as well as the appropriate Dean multiple times a year to review student progress, address issues, and plan for upcoming programs.

Clear complaint resolution procedures exist on the website and within institutional policy. University staff are appropriately trained and due process is followed when complaints are filed. Since the last self-study, due to a significant expansion of distance learning opportunities,

the university sought approval to join the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) in 2018, and subsequently became the first public institution in Massachusetts to do so. This ensured a mechanism to process student complaints, regardless of location.

FSU has clarified its values around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). The creation of a position focused on diversity in admissions strengthened the campus, and the university continued its work with the Leading for Change initiative, conducting regular climate surveys of the campus community. These programs have led to learning opportunities and intentional dialogue around identity-related issues. There is a clear focus on meeting DEI needs, including the creation of a new Director post in its Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. A new DEI webpage has launched, and the university will also use a newly created tool to audit our policies and procedures through an equity lens. The institution encourages student-led identity-based organizations and the process for those wishing to start such groups is made clear.

Finally, as part of the self-study process, a survey was administered to campus constituencies, including undergraduate and graduate students, full- and part-time undergraduate and graduate faculty, librarians, and staff and administrators. The survey included an item about integrity, and responses were consistent across groups. The vast majority of students (92%), faculty and librarians (82%) and staff and administrators (88%) agreed that the university conveyed accurate, relevant information with integrity.

## **Transparency and Public Disclosure**

### **Description**

FSU employs systems and procedures to ensure it is transparent with its audiences and provides timely and accurate disclosure of information in the public interest.

The university's commitment to transparent communication with its audiences particularly emphasizes prospective students and families, as well as faculty, staff, alumni, and the community. This includes annually updated information on tuition and fees, with prominent declarations of the university's mission, vision and values, its academic programs, admissions and financial aid processes, extended campus offerings, and affiliations with other institutions.

Importantly, FSU's various accreditations enable clear online demonstration of the university's qualifications and performance criteria. The university's Strategic Plan, and the process undertaken to develop it, are posted on the university website for all interested audiences. The university also provides a directory of the information covered under the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 on the university's Notice of Availability webpage.

The university catalogs, both undergraduate and graduate, outline academic policies and procedures. Annual amendments to the online catalog ensure accuracy. Links to several years' prior editions exist for students to reference, so that those who begin their courses of study may follow their original track even if curricular changes occur.

FSU also publishes the courses available for an entire academic year, including winter and summer semesters, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. 2-year course rotations are available on the undergraduate and graduate program websites.

FSU publishes information about the membership of the Board of Trustees as well the administrative structure of the university. With respect to faculty, the university publishes profiles about continuing full-time and permanent part-time faculty on the website and in the catalog, including information about departmental affiliations, courses taught (both undergraduate and graduate), degrees held, and sabbaticals or leaves of absence.

FSU remains transparent in sharing information on how to contact employees through an online directory, inclusive of job titles, and in posting financial data for audited reports. HR provides public-facing information regarding employment opportunities and processes for employment on its webpages. Information regarding complaints is online as well.

The university website was completely redesigned in 2020, with the resulting upgrade designed to be a more user-friendly interface that will work more effectively with mobile devices. Among the heavily-visited pages on the new site is the university's online COVID-19 resource and information hub, which has been regularly updated since the beginning of the pandemic. The page includes all communications to date about the virus and the campus response, as well as links to a dashboard with regularly-updated information on testing results.

In addition to providing detailed information about academic offerings, the website contains information about our student population and campus setting, co-curricular activities, the library and technology services, and the range of support services available to students.

The research achievements of university faculty are also celebrated each year with the Community of Scholars publication created each year by the Academic Affairs Department.

The registrar's page includes links and information for numerous forms, policies, and procedures covering a wide range of areas of interest to students and families. The Office of Student Affairs publishes information about the student conduct process, including how to file appeals. All of this information is public-facing and accessible.

There is a significant amount of data and documentation for public review on the webpage for the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. These pages, organized by undergraduate and graduate programs, include program reviews and responses, accreditation reports and responses, graduate and alumni surveys, assessment plans, and action reports. Information about learning outcomes for undergraduate programs can be found on the webpages of each academic program. Institutional Research also shares information on retention and graduation rates, along with information on students who have transferred to other institutions.

University Police regularly post updated activity logs monthly, with data over sixty days, and work with relevant campus offices to disseminate emergency notifications as needed. The police department aims to provide transparency about campus crime, policies, and statistics through their responsibility for Clery Act compliance.

FSU complies with Massachusetts open records laws. Its designated primary records access officer helps the university process dozens of records requests annually. These requests fulfill requirements with the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office. University Police also process numerous requests for public information, similarly logged and reported.

FSU shares its institutional story through a variety of print and digital publications, including the alumni magazine Contact (published each summer and winter), as well as the Fitchburg State University Today newsletter (published every two weeks). The university also maintains a number of social media accounts. These include accounts for administrative and academic offices, student clubs and organizations, athletic teams, and alumni groups.

## **Appraisal**

Institutionally, the university promotes intentional and transparent strategic planning. The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan followed this same process and produced a document highlighting consistency with the university's mission and values.

Links for students, faculty and staff, and other groups on the university's main webpage make it possible to direct those in search of particular types of information, while restricting access to student data to those with appropriate log-in credentials within the university.

In the campus survey conducted during the self-study process, constituencies were surveyed about the ability to find information about the university's policies and procedures online, in the catalog, or in campus publications. Overall, students reported higher levels of agreement with respect to finding information on the website (85%) compared to faculty and librarians (60%) or staff and administrators (58%). This trend continued with respect to finding information about university costs on the website, with students reporting higher levels of agreement (87%) as compared to faculty and librarians (50%) or staff and administrators (71%).

The differences between students and the other groups of respondents are interesting. It is possible that our new website has been effective at meeting its intended goal of providing clear information to prospective students and their families. With this in mind, additional mechanisms of providing accessible information to internal constituencies should be explored.

This analysis is consistent with qualitative comments that were provided in response to the open-ended question about the ease of accessing information on the website and in other university communications. Many student respondents reported that the website was easy to navigate. Others indicated that the website and print communications could be streamlined in different ways (e.g., simplify website links, prioritize information of importance in the catalog, separate information for graduate students and undergraduate students, develop a single login system to access all resources). Among faculty, librarians, staff, and administrators, comments extended to include requests for a separate location for internal information and inquiries about creating centralized, searchable locations for policies and procedures. All of these comments, along with others about visual presentation and navigation, have been forwarded to the web design team for review as they continue to work on the new website layout.

In another survey item, students overwhelmingly (85%) agreed that they could find information on goals for education and success on the website, more so than faculty and librarians (54%) or staff and administrators (58%). The numbers were lower across all constituencies for being able to find education and success goals in other campus publications. Again, students' reported ease in finding information on the website may be due to the website's efficacy in meeting the needs of prospective students and families. It is also possible that students are looking for



different types of information about educational goals and success in meeting them. Faculty and librarians, as well as staff and administrators, may be looking for information about program learning outcomes or specific types of data to evaluate success.

It is important to note that the students who responded to the campus survey represented 2 different subpopulations of the FSU community. About 40% (158) of the sample was graduate students, with 69% of them completing their coursework fully online. About 60% (241) of the sample was undergraduate students across all grade levels, with 70% of them completing most of their coursework in-person. Interestingly, the responses of these two groups were consistent across all of the aforementioned questions. This consistency speaks to the efficacy of the website in meeting the needs of a broad range of student populations.

The university's new website provides rich, interactive content for visitors and is friendly for mobile visitors. A partner site was developed when the university aligned with Academic Partnerships to help recruit and support students in 100% online graduate programs, for which FSU manages the curriculum. That site is being visually updated to better resemble FSU's new digital representation, and complies with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

With the transformed website, how content is managed is also being changed, with such control centralized in Marketing and Integrated Communications. The intent of this centralization aims to promote quality control and uniformity of voice and strategy on the site. This remains in keeping with industry best practices.

The office maintaining the site created an online form for content updates, hundreds of which were processed within the first two months of the launch. Feedback from users has been largely positive with respect to the new "ticketing" system for content updates. However, ensuring the accuracy of each piece of content presents difficulties because broken links or misinformation may not always get corrected until an individual notices an error.

Regarding catalogs, past editions remain easily accessed through the website and the library's archives, with an option in each section of the catalog to access a "print-friendly" page for that specific section. The catalogs provide anyone reading or reviewing the catalog's main page and its multiple sub-pages with dozens of links across many sub-categories, with clearly written and articulated policies, guidelines, contact information, and substantive explanations.

The catalogs itemize all of the university's key academic requirements, in addition to substantial overviews for conduct, university policies, facilities available, admissions determinants, costs and fees, aid, graduation requirements, accreditation, and personnel.

Information about FSU's core values, mission, and vision is easily found. Each program's learning objectives are documented as well as those for the Gen Ed and Honors Programs.

There is a clear updating and editing process for the undergraduate and graduate catalogs. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) and SGOCE oversee this process. Each spring, OIRP invites content experts to begin updates. Edits are made to a working catalog and proofed multiple times. End users and content owners are asked to review and make final edits during the summer before the catalog is published at the start of the academic year. Curricular

edits for the catalogs are made directly by OIRP and SGOCE after these changes are approved by the President (following approval through governance in the AUC or Graduate Council).

Additionally, with respect to course offerings, the academic Deans work with the chairs of academic programs to ensure that courses not being offered in a timely fashion are eliminated from the course catalog via the shared governance process.

For both the website and the catalog, accuracy and consistency underline the work of many offices, with an ongoing goal of ensuring consistency across the website and catalog.

Information about the cost of an FSU education is important to students and families. The website provides detailed cost information for both undergraduate and graduate degrees. The Student Accounts webpages also contain considerable information about cost management, including details about tuition refunds, loans, ePayment mechanisms, and financial problem-solving. The majority of students in our survey reported easily finding cost information on the website. That said, some of the survey's qualitative comments indicated that webpages with information about cost and financial aid could be more user-friendly. Additionally, important information about the typical length of study and average amounts borrowed from a variety of loan sources was documented in the Common Data Set but not found on the Student Accounts webpages. Information about cohort default and loan repayment rates could not be located. Including this information on the Student Accounts webpages would help students and families as they plan financially for college and have important conversations about enrollment (e.g., number of courses to take each semester to stay "on track") and student loan debt.

There is a considerable amount of data on the FSU website and in university publications. There have been tremendous gains in transparency and public disclosure with respect to data over the past several years. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) has been created since our last self-study. The OIRP broadly disseminates such data, a true achievement.

Additionally, when student or program accomplishments appear in university digital and print publications, they are supported with links and references to the appropriate sources. Information about accrediting agencies is easily located on departmental/program webpages.

Learning objectives from the university catalog emphasize each academic program's benefits. Program learning outcomes are listed on the webpages for all undergraduate majors, and are in the process of being added to graduate program webpages. That said, variation exists in the content presented on departmental webpages with respect to learning outcomes and students' achievements and success. Accredited programs tend to have more specific information on their webpages (for example, Human Services' Student Achievement Indicators). Links to pass rates for licensure exams in Nursing and Education are published on departmental webpages.

Overall, multiple and rich sources of important data on the Assessment and Institutional Research and Planning pages exist. The institutional level data on the OIRP website benefits from the context provided by the descriptions of the data source. For example, the nature of the data contained in the Common Data Set, the Institutional Factbook, and the Student Achievement Measure provide ample descriptions. Likewise, the Institutional Factbook remains easy to digest given its formatting and the nature of the information contained.

It is more challenging to find and interpret the data on Assessment pages. There are multiple sources listed without a “road map” for what is contained within each source. Some data sources provide small sample sizes (e.g., the graduating surveys), making data interpretation difficult. The formatting of the survey data also leads to difficulties in interpreting the information. The University Assessment Review Committee (UARC) conducted a review of Assessment pages in Spring 2021, and changes will be completed during summer 2021.

A challenge also exists with respect to the social media accounts related to the university. Social media accounts exist for both the university and departments, as well as for affinity groups. Only the university accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.) are actively populated and managed by Marketing & Integrated Communications (M&IC).

To maximize consistency and accuracy on the website and on social media pages, M&IC provides templates, training, and social media publishing guidelines. Department and affinity groups are advised to have new accounts reviewed and approved by M&IC. That being said, significant variability exists with respect to the content portrayed across different accounts.

Overall, FSU’s practices seek to maximize transparency and timely public disclosures.

### **Projections**

The President will convene a committee with representatives from all major divisions, including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Finance and Administration, to develop a master calendar for policy review and updates by Spring 2023.

Marketing and Integrated Communications will create an online policies directory by 2024.

The President will convene a committee by fall 2022 with representatives from all major divisions, including Information Technology and Marketing and Integrated Communications, to explore ways to serve internal users’ information needs. This might take the form of a credentialed “portal” or some other type of non-public interface.

The offices of Academic Affairs and Marketing and Integrated Communications will develop a process to ensure the university catalog and website are in alignment by fall 2022.

By fall 2022, the offices of Financial Aid and Student Accounts will publish on the Student Accounts webpages key metrics related to cost and student loan debt, specifically typical length of study, average debt upon graduation, and student loan default and repayment rates.

By fall 2022, Marketing and Integrated Communications will begin annual reviews with university offices that maintain branded social media accounts in order to ensure that the content is consistent with website and print publications.