

**FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC PLAN
2021-2025
3/8/22**

Purpose

The 2020-2025 campus **Strategic Plan** recognizes Fitchburg State as a public university that fosters an equitable society by working toward the principle of education justice and being a student-ready campus.

Education justice is a commitment to equity. It is the belief that access to a quality education is a vehicle for providing students with equity of opportunity. This means a commitment to ensuring that all resources associated with the educational process are available not only to all students, but especially to those students who have been historically denied equitable access. It is also a commitment to an education that is transformational for the individual and society as a whole, since it is committed to empowering students to overcome economic, social, and cultural inequities.

Our commitment to being a student-ready campus is a commitment to focusing on creating an institution that values student success. It shifts the focus from student preparedness to institutional preparedness for what our entering students will need. The institution will change and be ready to educate the students that we have.

Source: [Fitchburg State Strategic Plan](#)

Fitchburg State also serves as an anchor institution, which requires that we foster scholarship through community-engaged research and creative activity to address challenging problems and opportunities in our human community. As an anchor institution, we must partner and collaborate for the common good, to catalyze the economic and social vitality of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the globe.

As a companion to the campus Strategic Plan, the **Academic Plan** provides a broad vision to leverage our existing academic strengths while articulating our commitment to ongoing improvement. Aligned with the priorities of the university's mission and vision, the Academic Plan dedicates the units of the Academic Affairs Division to assessing existing academic programs, evaluating student and community needs, and identifying opportunities for new and revised academic offerings and support for student success.

In establishing these goals, the Academic Plan aligns with the following imperatives of the 2020-2025 campus Strategic Plan:

- **Quality:** Fitchburg State's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning, and in all aspects of the university's programming and operations, is paramount and must not be compromised.
- **Identity:** Fitchburg State must assert a distinctive identity and clear value proposition in order to thrive in the increasingly-competitive higher education arena.
- **Equity:** Fitchburg State must provide all members of its community equitable access to opportunity and must therefore eliminate barriers to the recruitment, retention, participation, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically-excluded or under-represented populations.

- **Inclusivity:** Every member of the Fitchburg State student body, faculty, and staff must feel respected, heard, affirmed, supported, and valued, and the commitment to inclusivity should be reflected not only in individual attitudes and behaviors, but also in pedagogies, policies, procedures, and physical spaces across the university.
- **Accountability:** Members of the Fitchburg State community must be responsible for their actions and hold each other accountable for upholding common values, supporting shared goals, and maintaining public trust.

Source: [Fitchburg State Strategic Plan](#)

Process

The Academic Plan was created through a collective process anchored in department and unit-driven annual plans completed in June 2021.

Departments and Academic Affairs units worked with the campus Strategic Plan, the Institutional Learning Priorities, internal program review action plans and goals, and relevant data to develop their 2021 annual plans. Synthesized through a campus-wide lens, the Academic Plan is structured into four parts: **Curriculum & Scholarship; Student Academic Success; Community; Structure & Operations.**

Through a collaborative campus effort in the 2021-2022 academic year, comments from the campus community were received through multiple vehicles, including an anonymous faculty and staff survey, open fora of the entire faculty and by School, meetings with department chairs, with SGOCE chairs, Academic Affairs staff, and solicited and unsolicited email responses from the campus community, all of which have been used to guide revisions reflected in the current version. The plan will go through the campus governance process in Spring 2022.

The Academic Plan provides a set of broadly defined goals critical to the evolution of our university. In addition to highlighting common themes from the goals noted in individual unit plans, the process has involved looking into the future to emergent issues and opportunities, to strategize about possibilities for new avenues of discovery, teaching, and partnership. The plan also calls for revisiting existing academic programs to evaluate student and community needs through the lenses of sustainability and stewardship, to identify opportunities for revised academic offerings and student support services.

The Academic Plan is a dynamic plan that delineates pathways within which academic units can proceed and progress. It recognizes the importance of balancing the growth and improvement of our existing academic activities with the creation of new trajectories for learning. The ideas contained in the plan are meant to guide our work, focus our priorities, and inspire us to move forward in the directions laid out in our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

CURRICULUM & SCHOLARSHIP

To accomplish a balance of academic growth and stewardship, the planning process has sought to identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration across divisions to better support academic excellence in teaching, learning, and knowledge-creation.

New Academic Offerings

To focus on continuous improvement, a university must continually rethink its academic portfolio to remain relevant in the constantly-changing climate of knowledge, and to position itself to generate and disseminate new knowledge. In this context, the Academic Plan identifies the following criteria to help guide new academic programming over the next five years:

- Alignment with the campus Strategic Plan
- Maintaining excellence while strengthening the balance of academic disciplines and programs
- Regional, community, and student demand and impact
- Resource impact

Through the lens of these criteria, five general areas with the potential for program development emerged from the departmental plans that informed this Academic Plan.

- New bachelor and master degree programs that leverage key strengths of the university:
 - Interdisciplinary collaboration. Reflecting trends in higher education that highlight the importance of students' ability to think and understand across disciplinary silos, Fitchburg State will support interdisciplinary programs and identify new connections to develop curricular options that foster interdisciplinary learning.
 - Online education. With our demonstrated strength in this area, Fitchburg State will build upon the institution's experience in academic programs that integrate digital modalities in terms of both content and delivery.
 - Accelerated programs. To serve the varied needs of a changing adult student population, Fitchburg State will expand the range of accelerated programming within SOGCE to meet these needs.
- Curricular programs that build upon the skills of multilingual students. Our students are arriving with greater assets in world language and cultural competency. We will explore and develop new approaches that value this knowledge and assist students in translating their linguistic and cultural strengths into university-level competencies.

- Curriculum that reflects the backgrounds and experiences of typically underrepresented and/or minoritized students so that they feel themselves represented in our academic programs.
- An internationalized curriculum, including but not limited to expanding international study-abroad opportunities to develop, among other proficiencies, multilingual skills, respect and tolerance for others, and global awareness. Efforts will focus on traditional international programming, such as faculty-led courses, exchange programs, and international student recruitment. It will also include alternative approaches of infusing the curriculum with global content using remote and other technologies to prepare students as citizens of a globally-connected world.
- Broadened workforce development opportunities. Through the Center for Professional Studies (CPS) and other units, Fitchburg State will leverage the institution's experience and record of excellence in Extended Campus programming to:
 - Deliver technical- and business-related training that responds to the needs and demands of local employers;
 - Continue building educational programs related to diversity and inclusion that support the local community, employers, and alumni.

Academic Program Changes

In addition to generating new programs and degrees, the process of rethinking an academic portfolio necessarily entails assessing existing programs for their resonance in the continually-changing climate of knowledge as well as their applicability for evolving student expectations, demands, and needs. The Academic Plan identifies the following broad directions to help guide program evaluation over the next five years. We will:

- Purposefully complete the implementation of the 2021 General Education curriculum as a critical component of every student's degree, regardless of major. This implementation will include:
 - Continuing to develop a community of practice related to the new General Education program that promotes the importance of a cohesive and intentionally-designed curriculum in the liberal arts and sciences;
 - Developing new course offerings required for all areas of the General Education curriculum, with a focus on high-impact practices;
 - Continuing to support the reading comprehension, writing, and mathematical needs of Fitchburg State students for success in their college-level courses;

- Assessing the General Education curriculum, with specific focus on:
 - Delivery modalities that meet the needs of all student populations;
 - FYE learning outcomes and completion goals;
 - Learning outcomes of the General Education program as a whole.
- Continue our ongoing assessment of student learning. Over the next five years, we will expand our central coordination and support for measuring and improving student achievement for all programs, including those that are not assessed through accreditation.
- Through collaboration of faculty, staff, and administration, develop and implement transparent principles and rubrics for assessing degree programs to
 - Revise academic curricula to align with emerging fields of study and respond to the needs of students;
 - Streamline academic programs to facilitate completion in 120 credits while still offering sufficient flexibility for students to attain breadth and depth of knowledge;
 - Create flexible and innovative degree pathways that leverage lessons learned and technology used from teaching through the pandemic;
 - Shape decisions about program sustainability.
- Continue to strategically position the Library as a critical hub of the institution's academic enterprise, including integration of the library in attaining learning outcomes, offering educational events, programming and workshops, and supporting high-impact practices, such as undergraduate research, FYE, capstone courses and internships/work study experiences in the library.
- Develop and promote a list of elective clusters that resonate with the social consciousness of students and our community around racial and social justice, environmental sustainability, and identity rights.
- Develop academic curriculum and programming that engages with the local community in the social sciences, sciences, professional disciplines, and the arts, including but not limited to instructional and performance spaces within the Theater Block complex.

Scholarship:

Fitchburg State will continue to support a wide range of innovative scholarship, research, and creative practices built upon our existing strengths and traditions in the liberal arts, social sciences, STEM, and the professions.

As a public institution, we are also committed to engaging in scholarship and creative practice that is guided by the potential use of its results in response to state, regional, and world challenges, in addition to identified problems or needs within our local community.

The Academic Plan aims to achieve these goals by:

- Continuing to strengthen the role of the Center for Faculty Scholarship to facilitate, promote, and demonstrate the value of multiple forms of scholarship and celebrate the research and creative contributions of our faculty.
- Building greater connections across disciplines and academic units for faculty research collaborations.
- Continuing to strengthen the role of the Crocker Center to facilitate, promote, and support community-engaged research opportunities for faculty and/or students.
- Strengthening student/faculty collaborative scholarship opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Enhancing collaboration with the Grant Center to support the research endeavors of our faculty.
- Expanding and promoting the role of the Library in supporting faculty scholarship, including the creation and adaption of OER materials and their inclusion in an OER repository.
- Expanding pedagogical scholarship through our Center for Teaching and Learning.

STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Academic Plan includes as its central goal a framework for supporting the success of all our students. Working together to increase students' academic achievement and develop their sense of belonging on campus, as a community we will continue to focus on providing wrap-around support – including development for faculty and staff – to strengthen the university's commitment to student success.

The Academic Plan emphasizes student success that results in increased retention, persistence, deep learning, graduation, and positive post-graduation outcomes. We will focus on three general academic areas to support these goals:

1. Access and Inclusivity: Fitchburg State will expand inclusive pedagogy training for faculty and staff, high-quality advising, and multilingual recognition and support through the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Centers for Academic Coaching and Tutoring and Career Services and Advising, and the Library. These academic collaborations will support new degree programs and graduate and undergraduate students by:
 - Strengthening relationships with high schools and community colleges in order to expand early college and transfer pathways;
 - Continuing to develop, refine, and leverage the Honors, Summer Bridge, and Heritage Language programs, together with OER and experiential learning opportunities, to increase equity and access to our academic portfolio;
 - Conducting policy audits across campus units with the goal of removing barriers to success for undergraduate and graduate students by reviewing and revising existing policies and practices;
 - Promoting the CTL as the pedagogical locus of our community of teacher/scholars committed to inclusive teaching and advising at the undergraduate and graduate levels;
 - Establishing an educational learning community that supports diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence;
 - Strengthening the quality and equity of advising;
 - Continuing to support and encourage engagement with faculty development and grant-supported pedagogical innovation related to diverse perspectives and inclusive pedagogies;
 - Developing and maintaining practices to enhance access and inclusivity in online learning environments and with digital technology in the classroom.

2. Innovative support mechanisms: We will expand and highlight the innovative approaches and designs of the Academic Coaching and Tutoring Center as an academic support commons that integrates academic support for all students by:
- Assessing and strengthening academic support for SGOCE students;
 - Diversifying academic support delivery methods in order to meet students where they are;
 - Leveraging proactive care plans, advising, and the FYE seminar to increase support to students;
 - Transforming the CTL into a virtual and physical space where faculty can gather, collaborate, and learn;
 - Creating a forum for sharing and disseminating information related to student success and academic program marketing/student recruitment, including alignment with campus recruiting and marketing plans;
 - Supporting adjunct faculty through flexible and accessible professional development opportunities, an updated onboarding process, and improved communication;
 - Continuing the work of the Transfer Student Taskforce to identify and assess service and process gap areas and develop strategies to address through collaboration with faculty and staff.
3. Career-Connected Learning: Our efforts will expand the availability of high- impact practices and applied learning opportunities (including internships, research, study abroad, and community-engaged learning) for all students by:
- Continuing to transform the Center for Career and Academic Advising as the nexus for integrating academics and career opportunities, including but not limited to:
 - Improving the clarity of major pathways and supporting the creation of a career-connected curriculum;
 - Continuing to expand career core competencies and pathways as well as experiential learning opportunities for students.

In conjunction with these priorities, Academic Affairs will continue to identify focused actions for improving the retention and post-graduation success of our students.

COMMUNITY

As a steward of place, Fitchburg State commits to affirming and enhancing partnerships between the University and the surrounding community. Academic units will support the greater goals of community and economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and student learning through collaboration with neighborhood residents, community organizations, business owners, faith-based leaders, and/or civic leaders by:

- Working with the Corporate Engagement Group and the Center for Professional Studies to continue building partnerships with local agencies to increase opportunities for:
 - Students to have access to quality field experiences and internships.
 - Workforce development grants, professional development programs, and graduate and continuing education options for the regional workforce.
 - Becoming an Age-Friendly Campus, including fostering the work with Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area (ALFA) and other community members to define and grow into a center for life-long learning.
- Continuing to position the Crocker Center as a critical liaison in Academic Affairs' efforts to create a campus culture of civic engagement, by employing the Center's assets to expand the institution's civic engagement portfolio.
- Working with the broader campus community to strengthen the institution's role as a steward of:
 - Community arts and culture, by developing partnerships and programming in conjunction with but not limited to the downtown Theater Block, including music, theater and dance productions, poetry readings, lectures, student performances, art exhibits, and other cultural events, including those that foster understanding and bridging of cultural difference.
 - Community diversity, equity, and inclusion, by developing programming and other resources that enable us to work together to understand and combat the realities of systemic racism.
 - The environment, by making Fitchburg State a greener campus that embraces and develops the idea of environmental justice.

STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

The university's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning in and outside of the classroom, as well as its commitment to serving as a good steward of place, requires efficient and effective use of assessment data, better communication and coordination. With these outcomes in mind, the Division of Academic Affairs as a whole will:

- Continue to strategically position the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) as the critical hub for creating a campus culture of assessment and data-informed decision-making. The OIRP will serve as a facilitator and partner with corresponding campus offices and units in:
 - The annual assessment process.
 - The development of a General Education assessment plan.
 - The development of consistent assessment of graduate programs.
 - The development of library program assessment.
 - The increased use of Student Success Collaborative (SSC) Navigate.
 - The expansion of Academic Performance Solutions (APS) in Academic Affairs' decision-making.
- Academic Affairs will continue to improve the coordination of internal partnerships and communication to achieve the outcomes outlined in this plan.

Annual Reporting

Progress toward the goals articulated in this Academic Plan will be measured through the annual reporting process, and a summary document reflecting our progress will be shared with the campus community. As part of this process, the Academic Plan will be reviewed and updated, as needed, to reflect changing priorities, opportunities, and challenges.