

# Envisioning Fitchburg State University in Five Years

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*The draft narrative below is intended to convey in one document the common concerns and convergent hopes of the FSU community, as unearthed during extensive outreach to faculty, librarians, administration, staff, students, alumni, and trustees in the early phase of the strategic planning process; and it is designed to express those concerns and hopes (relating to virtually all aspects of the University's operations) in language that suggests desired outcomes—i.e., the changes and improvements FSU stakeholders hope the next five-year strategic plan will lead to. Serving as the roadmap to the envisioned (hoped-for) future state, the goals and strategies of the next strategic plan will be designed to help FSU reach this destination. During the plan's implementation period, the University's leadership could (will) regularly assess progress toward the specific desired outcomes anticipated in this aspirational picture of FSU in 2025. The "vision" or envisioned future state described below is not intended to articulate a brand identity or positioning strategy or value proposition that would be used or useful in a marketing context; however, the anticipated changes (desired outcomes) described here and in this way could help prospective donors interested in helping FSU become a stronger institution imagine (picture) how their investment in FSU now could help FSU become better, different or stronger in five years.*

In five years, Fitchburg State will be a thriving academic community clearly differentiated from its peers. FSU will be a regional public university where one finds strong academic programs that are distinctive, interdisciplinary, and applied; a diverse and inclusive campus population that is committed to the principles of opportunity and equity; and a steward of place that is viewed and valued as a resource and partner beyond campus. FSU's profile and reputation will have been elevated in large measure due to the innovative, effective ways it has adapted to changing, challenging times to offer higher education and lifelong learning opportunities that remain relevant, accessible, and transformational.

During the past five years, FSU has added a number of unique undergraduate programs, substantially strengthened its fully online graduate offerings, and adopted a new liberal arts and sciences (LA&S) curriculum and first-year experience. In the period ahead, FSU will need to sustain and expand on the work that has been started in a purposeful manner, insisting on excellence and relevance across all program offerings.

FSU's dedication to integrating high-quality professional programs with strong liberal arts and sciences studies will continue to set both the University and its graduates apart. To meet the needs of an evolving economy and workforce, FSU will be offering degrees in new areas and fields that are in high demand; and new, flexible curricular models will be meeting the needs of a changing student population. Evident throughout the curriculum by 2025 will be an underlying commitment to applying knowledge to authentic problem solving and a commitment to making the connection between theory and practice. Experiential learning opportunities, a signature aspect of the FSU academic program, will be available to all students, and this learning by doing will extend classroom learning to real-life settings, preparing FSU graduates to be career-ready, civically engaged learners and leaders.

While remaining resolutely faithful to its mission as a regional comprehensive institution, in the period ahead FSU will build on its leadership in the delivery of graduate and online programs. Increasingly FSU also will be a university where adults already in the workforce seek and find an array of competency-based certificate programs, adult completion programs, and other opportunities that advance lifelong-learning goals and/or support economic-development objectives.

In addition to offering students a variety of delivery methods and educational pathways, FSU's faculty will be employing new instruction modalities appropriate for new times, and the faculty will be collaborating extensively across programs through team teaching, learning communities, and interdisciplinary course development. Innovative, inclusive pedagogy, assessment, and support will help ensure FSU is able to serve the needs of a student body whose backgrounds and needs have evolved and pose new challenges. The University will be fully "transfer-friendly" and much more supportive of veterans who choose to enroll. FSU will have substantially increased its enrollment of students from under-represented groups, better reflecting the demographics of the Commonwealth, and the infrastructure will be in place to allow FSU to transition to Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designation as the Latinx population of the city of Fitchburg and the region grows.

With distinctive programming and a reputation for student success and career-ready graduates serving as magnets for enrollment, FSU will have generated increased gravitational pull as a destination. FSU's reputation for distinctiveness will derive from word-of-mouth from students and alumni serving as ambassadors and champions, effective public

relations, and strategic marketing and promotion efforts. The University will be casting a far wider net for recruiting incoming students, having recognized that the shrinking local population is insufficient to sustain the University over the long term. FSU's multi-year enrollment and retention goals will reflect both a commitment to and sustained annual progress toward closing the achievement gap to improve educational and life outcomes for traditionally under-represented student populations. Members of the campus community will understand that every person and all offices on campus have a role to play in achieving the University's recruitment and retention goals.

In response to significant changes in the student body (increases in first-generation students, traditionally under-represented students, diagnosed mental health issues, and self-identified learning challenges), FSU will be applying new techniques and technologies to support these students and improve student outcomes. FSU will have implemented a comprehensive, coordinated model of student support services that employs a case management approach. These efforts, coupled with training for faculty and staff, will have contributed to FSU's improved retention and graduation rates not only for under-represented student groups but for all undergraduates. FSU will be meeting students where they are, and students of all backgrounds and wide-ranging interests will feel a strong sense of belonging in FSU's tight-knit, inclusive community of caring.

FSU's working relationship with the city and region will remain strong and collaborative. The university will continue to consider itself a resource to Fitchburg and provide assistance when and where it can, and the importance of this commitment will be better understood and appreciated by both the campus community and the broader community at large. FSU will be a major engine in the social, economic, and cultural development of the City of Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts. Faculty and student work around community and civic engagement, and specifically the Crocker Center and ideaLab, will remain important components of this effort.

By 2025 FSU will be an employer of choice for staff and faculty because of the palpably strong sense of community on campus, a unifying commitment to student success, and a willingness to adapt employment practices to address 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce realities. To better reflect and serve the growing diversity of FSU's student body, the diversity and multicultural competencies within the faculty and staff will have increased. Faculty and staff will feel valued and supported—with professional development opportunities and adequate tools, including technology, to ensure they can be effective in their roles. Faculty and staff will value, respect and feel empathy for each other in their respective roles, understanding that neither faculty nor staff can be successful without the contributions and support of the other. Reflecting awareness that a happy, healthy workplace environment is a key to positive morale and employee retention, FSU will be promoting a culture of wellness on campus.

Willingness and ability to embrace and adapt to change will be more apparent throughout the organization. FSU will be a university where people feel inspired to be involved, take risks, and experiment, knowing that their efforts will be supported through mentorship, guidance, and abundant support. Face-to-face dialogue and collaborative decision making will be the norm. Input and information will be shared and valued across all campus constituencies—faculty, staff and students. With a well-established culture of assessment, members of the FSU community will model a sense of shared accountability for progress.

Members of the FSU community also will consider themselves stewards of the environment and will work together to make FSU a greener campus that embraces environmentally sustainable practices. Upgrading existing campus buildings will have been the top priority for spending limited capital budgets so that facilities on campus are both attractive and conducive to the teaching, learning, scholarship, work, and community building that occur in them.

By 2025 FSU will have a financially sustainable business model. Operations and decision making at FSU will have been streamlined, resulting in greater efficiencies and cost savings. Funding sources will have grown and diversified, making it possible for FSU to maintain affordable tuition and fees as well as a robust budget for financial aid and scholarships so that FSU students graduate with the least amount of debt possible. All members of the campus community will regard financial sustainability as part of their responsibility. 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.

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