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Send comments to: upc@uwec.edu

2025 University Plan for Distinction

We acknowledge that the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire occupies the sacred and ancestral lands of Indigenous Peoples. We honor the land of the Ojibwe and Dakota Nations.

Executive Summary

As we look ahead to 2025, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire faces both challenge and opportunity. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has created an environment of uncertainty and change that will impact higher education for years. State funding continues to erode and by 2025 the number of traditional-age college students is set to plummet throughout the Midwest.

At the same time, our university faces the opportunity to shape our future from a position of strength. We have made prudent financial decisions and will continue to partner with donors and friends to provide the rich academic experience that defines learning on our three campuses. We can attract more future Blugolds by identifying those distinctive programs and experiences that will set us apart and make us more successful in the years to come.

To be a university of distinction, able to attract and retain students, faculty and staff, we must focus our efforts on what will add value, advance our reputation and enable us to provide a unique learning experience for all our students.

This five-year strategic plan does not replace what we already do well: provide rigorous, student-focus learning; community engagement; experiential learning; international study; and access and support for students from all backgrounds. It does not seek to limit what we already do now, but instead outlines our priorities for the next five years so that faculty, staff and administrators can make wise decisions about how to invest our resources, time and creativity.

Our plan sets five university goals that will enable us to be distinctive by 2025:

Our Vision Goals for Distinction
Live our Commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
Lead Innovation in Health Sciences and Human Wellbeing
Integrate Undergraduate Research in Every Program

Our Aspirational Goal
Expand Sustainability and Climate Action Initiatives

Our Enduring Commitment
Invest in Faculty and Staff

2025 University Plan for Distinction

UW-Eau Claire has always been an innovative leader committed to excellence in all we do. That will not change – now or in 2025. This plan does not seek to reinvent all that we already do well on our three campuses: rigorous, student-focus learning; community engagement; experiential learning; international study; and access and support for students from all backgrounds.

This plan is a five-year guide with a renewed focus on that which will truly distinguish us in the years to come, as we seek to recruit new students, attract talented faculty and staff, and serve a more diverse and changing world. It does not seek to limit what we already do now, but instead outlines our priorities for the next five years so that faculty, staff and administrators can make wise decisions about how to invest our resources, time and creativity.

Our Mission
We foster in one another creativity, critical insight, empathy and intellectual courage, the hallmarks of a transformative liberal education and the foundation for active citizenship and lifelong inquiry.

Our Values
Leadership • Equity, Diversity & Inclusiveness • Innovation & Continuous Improvement
Stewardship and Sustainability

We are rooted in our mission and values. Our purpose inspires us to work as a learning community dedicated to preparing graduates for lives of purpose and meaning. Our values drive our priorities and actions, drawing on our heritage of leadership in providing excellence in all we do and being careful fiscal stewards of our public trust.

Our Vision Goals for Distinction
Live our Commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
Lead Innovation in Health Sciences and Human Wellbeing
Integrate Undergraduate Research in Every Program

Our three vision goals will enable us to thrive. The three areas of focus through 2025 will enable us to attract talented faculty and staff and enhance our ability to recruit and retain students:

1. Live our commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
2. Lead innovation in health sciences and human wellbeing
3. Integrate undergraduate research in every program

These priorities advance student learning and provide distinction to our University. They are inter-related, supporting and enriching each other. They are the markers for how to shape a strong institution for a future where growing needs in social justice, holistic healthcare and research will require graduates prepared for new careers, anti-oppressive change and active citizenship.

Our Aspirational Goal

Expand Sustainability and Climate Action Initiatives

We aspire to expand our commitment to sustainability and climate action. As Wisconsin's most beautiful campus we affirm the value of sustainability in regard to our natural and built environments as well as through our attention to equity and human wellbeing.

Our Enduring Commitment

Invest in Faculty and Staff

Our enduring commitment is to support our faculty and staff. Our most precious resource is our faculty and staff. Providing the resources, time and opportunities for innovation will support our priorities and commitment to financial sustainability.

On the pages that follow we outline a range of action strategies that will enable our university to reach our 2025 goals for distinction.

Our goals and strategies provide guidelines for how administrators, our divisions and colleges, and our faculty and staff can contribute to creating the strong and vibrant institution of the future.

2025 University Plan for Distinction

Live Our Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The EDI 2025 Strategic Plan provides the campus with a detailed guide for specific, strategic goals and actions that will enable UW-Eau Claire to be a regional and national leader in cultivating an equitable and inclusive university. This goal is foremost because it is central to our vision for what a university of the future must be in order to create a vibrant learning community and to serve our state and nation.

Our dedication to EDI is both a value and a priority as we acknowledge that we have much to do to fulfill this goal. This will require dedication to change, investment in professional development, collaborations across the university and with our region, and support for new initiatives. This first priority will challenge all of us to examine ourselves and our institutions to truly “live our commitment.”

Action Strategies

Launch the Center for Racial and Restorative Justice

- Create the Center for Racial and Restorative Justice to support collaborative undergraduate research on EDI, provide educational opportunities through a speakers series and provide national leadership in support of racial justice.
- Identify ways to engage faculty, staff and students in the work of the Center.

Recruit and Retain a Diverse Student Body

- Expand efforts to recruit and retain diverse students by creating scholarships and engagement opportunities, especially in the health sciences.
- Expand holistic admissions policies.
- Expand EDI training for all students.
- Develop and expand student employment opportunities on campus.

Dismantle Racist Structures and Practices

- Implement a Restorative Justice program, communicating both its purpose and value to the campus and community.
- Identify and eliminate barriers to student success and opportunity, especially in regard to retention, graduation and participation in high-impact practices.
- Examine and eliminate racist policies and practices.
- Encourage a culture of reporting and responding to hate and bias incidents in support of a more inclusive campus culture.

Collaborate with Community EDI Efforts

- Lead and support community efforts to create a more inclusive and diverse regional community.

Lead Innovation in Health Science and Human Wellbeing

UW-Eau Claire already has one of the best arrays of science and health sciences programs in the UW System. By renewing our focus on our health science programs we can shine a bright light on a truly distinguished asset.

At the same time, the future of the health sciences is enriched when paired with the arts, humanities and social sciences that nurture human wellbeing. Every one of our four colleges currently offers programs that prepare graduates to improve human wellbeing. By envisioning new cross-disciplinary initiatives and programs that integrate the health sciences with disciplines that speak powerfully to the human spirit, we can claim a distinctive programmatic niche.

This vision must not be limited to change in the classroom. Human wellbeing requires our commitment to EDI. It demands our attention to sustainability and climate action that affects not only our natural and built environment but also issues of equity, community and culture. Uniting the sciences with the humanities, arts and social sciences in new, intentional collaborations will set us apart, attract new students and faculty, prepare Blugolds for a stronger future, and transform our region.

Action Strategies

Bring Together the Health Sciences, Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

- Engage faculty and shared governance in creating opportunities that will facilitate, support and encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations in the health sciences and the arts, humanities and social sciences. This may include new teaching arrangements, explorations of remote learning, and the development of new, cross-disciplinary certificates and programs.
- Partner with the Center for Racial and Restorative Justice to enable research into equitable health and human wellbeing.
- Support programming at UWEC-Barron County in health sciences and human wellbeing.

Construct the Science and Health Sciences Building

- Shepherd the building of the Science and Health Sciences Building as a home for collaborative study and research.
- Integrate the Mayo Clinic collaboration through both physical and programmatic collaborations in the new building.
- Assure sustainable and carbon-free solutions to assure the building meets or exceeds sustainability benchmarks.

Enlarge Collaborations and Connections

- Foster new relationships with state and national organizations that can provide funding and collaboration opportunities in a range of disciplines.
- Expand community and healthcare partnerships with UWEC-Barron County and its region to enhance student learning, internships and economic development.

Integrate Undergraduate Research in Every Program

Rigorous, transformative learning is a hallmark of all three UW-Eau Claire campuses. Our university is known for its high impact practices and for our leadership in study abroad, service learning, experiential learning and internships, and for undergraduate research. That will not change.

But our priority focus on EDI and health & human wellbeing, and our continuing commitment to sustainability provide additional opportunities to enlarge our undergraduate research effort. We are already national leaders. By supporting our 2025 priorities, undergraduate research will assure greater student learning and direct, practical opportunities to focus our efforts. By integrating undergraduate research into every academic program we can truly make this a sustainable feature of the UW-Eau Claire education.

Action Strategies

Integrate Undergraduate Research as a Signature of Every Academic Program

- Expand on our national leadership in undergraduate research by integrating a research experience into every program and into the UWEC-Barron County experience. This may include research as a capstone experience or programmatic emphasis across the degree.
- Prioritize undergraduate research that advances knowledge in EDI, sustainability and health & human wellbeing.

Collaborate on Undergraduate Research

- Leverage the NCUR 2023 conference to attract and retain students and expand our reputation for collaborative undergraduate research, especially in support of the health sciences and human wellbeing.
- Explore new collaborations with community partners to support research opportunities for faculty and students.

Expand Sustainability and Climate Action Initiatives

A commitment to sustainability means, in the words of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development [report](#), that we make decisions that “[meet] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Our definition lies at the intersection of three components: equity, economy and the environment. As an institution of higher education, we express our value of stewardship and sustainability not only through our natural and built environments, but also through our attention to the curricular and societal needs of our students and to our relationships with each other. Sustainability is, by definition, a commitment to human wellbeing and to equity, in perfect alignment with our 2025 plan priorities.

UW-Eau Claire is a signatory to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, which pursues climate neutrality by 2050. This is truly an act of visioning, one that will require the support of our faculty, staff and students on all our campuses to actualize. Our campus community is well positioned to integrate sustainability into our teaching, our learning and our decision making.

Action Strategies

Implement Carbon-free and Carbon-reduced Systems in the Built Environment

- Adopt a Sustainability and Climate Action plan.
- Aligned with the Facilities Master Plan and as feasible, employ carbon-free heating and cooling systems and upgrade utility infrastructure to highly efficient non-fossil fuel solutions.
- Establish and implement energy efficiency standards for all new and renovated buildings. Invest in deep energy retrofits of existing buildings that include high-efficiency systems and automatic controls for heating, cooling and lightings.
- Seek third-party certification for new buildings to assure they meet or exceed sustainability benchmarks.
- Partner with food service providers to offer more local food options, and enhance energy efficiency around food.

Expand Sustainability-based Learning and Skill Development for Students

- Integrate sustainability into experiential learning opportunities and undergraduate research across disciplines.
- Engage faculty, staff and students in developing actionable initiatives that support carbon neutrality.
- Link curriculum to land and water management of our campus communities, in collaboration with Facilities staff.

Increase Community Collaborations

- Increase partnerships with external organizations to support learning, internship and research opportunities that advance sustainability and climate action goals.

Invest in Faculty and Staff

Action Strategies

Expand EDI professional development for faculty and staff

- Expand efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff. This includes development of career pathways for diverse individuals.
- Create training and professional development programs for all employees and to support diverse and emerging leaders. Create programs to enable supervisors and chairs to effectively mentor and support diverse faculty and staff,
- Provide support for department-level EDI plan development.

Invest in Curricular and Program Development and Change

- Provide financial support for curricular development that integrates EDI, sustainability and undergraduate research throughout the curriculum, and in particular to those programs that unite the health sciences and human wellbeing.
- Provide financial resources and support to explore extramural funding for new collaborations across the sciences, arts, humanities and social sciences. Examples include neuroscience, public health and biomedical engineering, already launched.
- Explore donor and alumni support for collaborations that expand teaching, research and service opportunities to advance the health sciences and human wellbeing.
- Provide time and financial support for development of cross-disciplinary collaborations in support of the health sciences & human wellbeing vision. This will require creation of new funding models across colleges and divisions.

Support Integration of Undergraduate Research

- Provide time and financial support for all departments to integrate undergraduate research into each degree program.
- Expand opportunities for undergraduate research at the UWEC-Barron County campus.
- Support faculty in the development of research opportunities that address the needs of diverse students and non-traditional students.

Invest in Faculty and Staff

- Create a leadership position to oversee institutional sustainability efforts, serving as a resource for academic, financial, environmental and experiential initiatives. This position will oversee the development and implementation of a sustainability strategic plan, aligned with the University and facilities plans, as well as collaborate with the Student Office of Sustainability and a Sustainability Advisory Council.
- Engage and support non-instructional staff in contributing to learning and life experiences that engage students in health sciences, sustainability and EDI research.

Appendix: Our Planning Process

“What we have the audacity to envision, we have the power to make reality.”

– Lauren Becker, Director, Student Office of Sustainability

In the fall of 2019, faculty, staff and students began our strategic planning for our 2020-2025 University Strategic Plan. We faced significant challenges: shifting enrollment with demographic changes pointing to potential decreases after 2025. Continued disinvestment by the state legislature. We also benefited from new opportunities: Growing philanthropic support, collaborations for new buildings and programming, and partnerships in the sciences and healthcare.

So we began our planning, in the spirit of collaboration that distinguishes our university, by gathering in groups small and large, exchanging ideas, reflecting on our past achievements, acknowledging areas for improvement, and looking ahead to the next five years of our more than 100-year history. Literally hundreds of faculty, staff and students responded to an online survey with detailed comments and suggestions. We all agreed that our new plan would need incremental, not major changes, to prepare UW-Eau Claire for 2025.

And then the coronavirus pandemic hit.

We spent the spring and summer transforming classes to remote learning and creating a plan that has allowed us to return to in-person instruction in the fall. The challenge of living and learning in a pandemic—with no clear end in sight—demands all our time and energy. How then can we ask the campus community to focus on planning for 2025 when our current crisis demands our full attention?

Why Plan Now – in a Pandemic?

The University Planning Committee answered that question by returning to our mission and values—the foundational documents on which all our planning rests. No matter the world in which we function, our mission remains even more critical: “We foster in one another creativity, critical insight, empathy and intellectual courage, the hallmarks of a transformative liberal education and the foundation for active citizenship and lifelong inquiry.”

The post-COVID-19 changes in our world and in higher education will require the innovative leadership, transformative learning and inclusive commitment that UW-Eau Claire aspires to embody. This is rewarding and purposeful work. Work that we can and must do together, now.

We know that large challenges lie ahead, beyond the pandemic. If we are to meet the enrollment challenges that will impact our financial health, we must find ways to distinguish ourselves from our peer institutions. Increasing competition will require creative new ways to reach students throughout the state and beyond. The ability to collectively imagine a vibrant and distinctive future for our University will be essential to thriving in 2025 and beyond.

New Vision Discussions

Over the summer of 2020 Chancellor Schmidt engaged faculty and staff in discussions about what can truly set our university apart in coming years. He challenged the entire campus to identify the strengths that distinguish us and the areas of focus that can propel UW-Eau Claire ahead in the next five years.

The conversations were wide-ranging, but consistently came back to several key strengths: our leadership in the sciences and health sciences, the excellence of our liberal arts learning, our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, our national reputation for undergraduate research, and the resources of our partnerships with our communities. From these ideas came the notion of bringing together the health sciences and human well-being in new ways, in conjunction with a continuing vision for EDI.

As these conversations were underway, two additional planning teams were created to address specific needs for direction in EDI – equity, diversity and inclusion—and in sustainability and climate action. Together, they engaged hundreds of faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members through discussions and surveys to develop additional ideas for 2025.

Collaborative Planning for Fall and Spring 2020

And so, the University Planning Committee, and the EDI and sustainability planning teams collaborated to engage the campus community in discussions about UW-Eau Claire’s future. Three interlocking plans will be developed that will, in turn, form the basis for an academic plan later in the spring. All will be anchored in a unified vision for a distinctive future for UW-Eau Claire.

Members of the University Planning Committee

Ann Aschenbrenner, Nursing
MJ Brukardt, Chancellor’s Office
Grace Crickette, Administration and Finance
Billy Felz, Enrollment Management
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