

Presidential Goals for 2023-28

Background and Context

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Summary—Strategic Goals

1. Keep every student who comes to IUP. (Be an exceptionally student-centered university.)
2. Grow market share in traditional market.
3. Educate other student groups (open new markets).
4. Grow IUP's reputation.
5. Engage the (internal and external) IUP team in realizing the vision.
6. Find alternate revenue streams to support work.
7. Focus resources on the highest priorities to ensure a sustainable, thriving future.

Some of these goals call for the development of specific, quantitative measures. Others will rely on qualitative milestones. Goals 1-4 have direct impact on students and are shown in **crimson**. Goals 6 and 7 are needed to achieve goals 1-4 and are shown in slate. Goal 5 is fundamental to both achieving the other goals and to IUP's future and is shown in black.

The rest of this document provides examples of tactical approaches for each goal. Three appendices summarize the key context for higher education, key context for IUP, and key objectives from my Future of IUP speech from April 19, 2022.

IUP's Strategy¹—Some Examples and Details behind the Goals

1. Keep every student who comes to IUP. (Be an exceptionally student-centered university.)
 - a. Build a best-in-class student support infrastructure.
 - i. Assign a navigator to every student.
 - ii. Use a few advanced, focused technological tools to help assess, track, and alert. Train all on their use and require all to use them.
 - b. Build a new culture of student centeredness in which all employees understand and own their role and act to help keep every student at IUP.
 - c. Identify obstacles to student success and eliminate them without regard to current practice or tradition (real or imagined).²
 - d. Maintain high standards. Provide the support to help students rise to those standards.
2. Grow market share in traditional market—be exceptional at³
 - a. Offering popular, high-quality majors/programs of interest to potential students and to employers, the commonwealth, etc.
 - i. Invest adequate resources in those programs to ensure they are high quality.
 - ii. Eliminate or reduce/repurpose other programs.
 - b. Aligning marketing and recruiting resources.
 - c. Pricing competitively, including optimizing financial aid and discounting.

¹ See my presentation to the University Budget Advisory Committee workshop, April 13, 2023.

² UPC has a list. In fall 2023, a subgroup will begin working collaboratively university-wide to problem-solve.

³ Every other college and university is trying to do this at the same time.

- d. Judiciously expand the sharing of academic programs.
3. Educate other student groups (open new markets).
 - a. (Re)Grow international enrollment—likely in new areas of the world to replace, e.g., China.
 - b. Dual enrollment.
 - c. Re-enrollees (whether to finish traditional degrees or to gain needed knowledge and skills).
 - d. Alternate packaging of existing expertise and programs for new student markets.
 - e. College of medicine.
4. Grow IUP’s reputation.
 - a. College of medicine
 - b. Research university
 - c. Student centered
 - d. Quality at an affordable price
5. Engage the (internal and external) IUP team in realizing the vision.
 - a. Communicate consistent and clear messages, repeatedly, in multiple media and multiple channels.
 - b. Invest in those who choose to be engaged in building the future.
 - c. Minimize the negative impact of those who can’t or won’t be engaged.
 - d. Design and implement new, true shared governance for IUP’s future.
6. Find alternate revenue streams to support work.⁴
 - a. Sponsored research activity
 - b. Philanthropy
 - c. Etc.

In pursuing this broad agenda, IUP must pay careful attention to its employees at all levels. We must make sure that we have the right people on the bus⁵ and that those people receive appropriate professional development, support, and authority to move forward.

IUP Priorities—a Different View

According to the IUP Strategic Plan for 2020-25, there is one fundamental priority:

IUP's Strategic Plan for 2020–25 is designed to transform the culture at IUP to enhance the student experience by fostering exceptional student-centeredness. Transformation will include reordering resources to ensure every student is engaged and can be successful at every point in their journey—transitioning to the university, while enrolled at IUP, and after their time at IUP.⁶

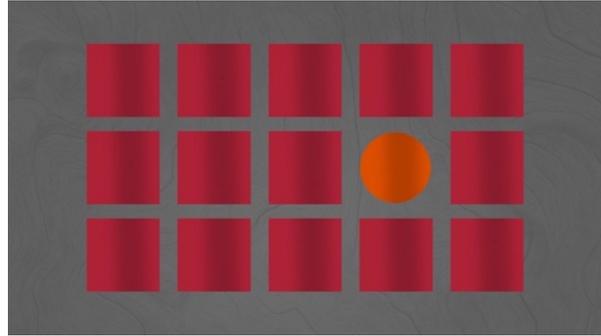
Achieving the priority must start with a fundamental recognition that each of our students comes to us with a different set of goals, needs, and desires. We must find efficient and effective ways

⁴ This requires engagement and results from each IUP college, starting with the dean and including an appropriate and cost-effective support infrastructure, e.g., from the IUP Research Institute or from University Advancement.

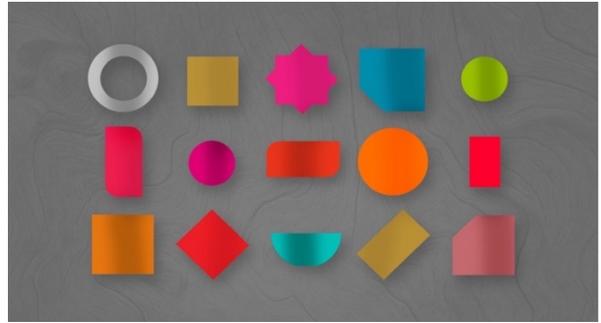
⁵ To borrow from Good to Great by Jim Collins.

⁶ <https://www.iup.edu/about/strategic-plan/index.html>

to engage and support each of them as individuals. I used a field of tulips⁷ and more abstract images⁸ to illustrate this idea. Our student body is no longer this (if it ever was):



It is this:



We must use all the best technological and other tools to assess each student’s goals and preparation. We must then design a curricular/cocurricular/extracurricular path for each student and provide the guidance and support each needs to be engaged and successful at every step. This means reordering our resources to be exceptionally student centered. It means maintaining IUP’s high standards for excellence while giving students the support they need to rise to those standards.

There will be difficult decisions to make as IUP works in this direction. We must stop doing some things: small, unsustainable academic programs; service functions that may help the community or that are nice to have but that aren’t central to the student experience; and old processes that are comfortable to us but that are barriers to our students. We must rethink and remove the boundaries between academic disciplines and between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and other areas of the university. This is difficult work, but it can also be exciting, groundbreaking, and energizing as we design a new university for the future, building on IUP’s many strengths and great tradition.

⁷ The Future of IUP, April 19, 2022. <https://www.iup.edu/president/speeches/future-of-iup-april-19-2022.html>

⁸ Opening of the 2023-24 Academic Year, August 25, 2023. <https://www.iup.edu/president/speeches/opening-of-the-academic-year-2023-24.html>

APPENDICES AND BACKGROUND

Appendix 1: Today's Context for Higher Education⁹

From a strategic perspective appropriate to a triennial review, I see several key themes (or perhaps challenges) that we must consider. Like it or not, we are in a period of significant disruption of our social norms and expectations. We must work within that reality to design and build higher education for the future—making IUP an institution that will prepare future generations of leaders to navigate that reality and, hopefully, make the world a better place. The challenges the world presents are daunting, but I strongly believe that higher education is the key foundation from which solutions will come. I'm pleased to note that IUP has been taking, and continues to take, important steps to move forward productively in this environment.

Divisiveness and Dysfunction

It is dangerous to draw broad conclusions about overall conditions while in the middle of a storm. However, US society is divided into competing factions, the likes of which we haven't seen in some time. The global society also seems remarkably divided. The hope that communication technology would bring us to a better understanding of our shared humanity has not been achieved. Rather, largely anonymous social media has brought out the worst in some people, and the voices of reasoned, civilized discussion, mutual respect, and moderation have been drowned out by the shouts of the extreme. Name calling, vilification, and dehumanization seem to be the new standard. Amid the shouting, many of our social institutions struggle to function and meet basic needs. This is certainly not the first time the world has faced these challenges, but the technology that once gave hope seems to be an amplifier.

In a time when our population is more diverse than ever, colleges and universities must step up and help our students (and perhaps ourselves) learn how to engage with respect, argue their cases with reason, and disagree with civility. It is our job to teach our students how to think for themselves and how to live in community, whether or not we agree with their opinions.

Disengagement, Withdrawal, Isolation

During the last decade, we observed an increasing tendency for many students to be less connected with their peers, less likely to engage in extracurricular activities (which augment and enrich the learning that happens in formal coursework), and less inclined to build a college community for themselves. This tendency played a significant role in decreasing retention and persistence rates. Staff and faculty worked hard to drag students out of their suites to participate, to encourage them to not go home every weekend, and to help them recognize the benefits of study groups. The enforced isolation of the pandemic pushed many students (and faculty and staff) over the edge, turning a trend into something of a crisis.

Generational and Demographic Changes

Today's student body is more diverse (in many, many senses) and smaller than in the past. The preparation, expectations, and needs of students and their families are, in many ways, different from what was true for our generations. These differences will continue to grow, and IUP must

⁹ Excerpted from my self-review, prepared in July 2022 for my 2019-21 triennial review. Omitted are some no-longer-relevant comments about IUP's progress in the areas mentioned.

adapt and change in response. The goal of providing students with a high-quality education at a reasonable cost has not changed, but now we must achieve the change I spoke about at some length in my April 19, 2022, Future of IUP speech.¹⁰ I won't repeat it here. The topic and the work are of fundamental importance and must be at the center of our thinking as we continue the transition from being student friendly to being truly student centered.

Eroding Public Confidence in Higher Education

This is a complex, multifaceted trend. Here I highlight several key components that I think are relevant and at least partially within our control.

First, we must talk about cost and the return on investment we provide. A university degree (or two) is one of the largest investments a family (or an individual) will make in its lifetime. The cost of attendance and affordability matter now more than ever. It may be comforting to us to blame governments' disinvestment in the public good of higher education, or to explain that our university's student debt load is at the national average, or that our graduation rate is better than those of our peers. But families (individuals) want to know how we will help their student (them) to be successful and to live better lives.

Most families (individuals) start with a concern about getting a good job. For the current generations, that concern is the strongest it's been in some time.

At IUP we have good results to talk about, and we have some areas that need improvement. Throughout, we must take an honest look at what we are and are not accomplishing. Where we need to improve, we must talk about the perhaps unfinished work we are doing to improve. We need to be much more aggressive in shamelessly bragging about what we are getting right. And we need to not be afraid to talk about preparing students for careers in areas that will benefit them, our communities, our state, and our world. It is our job, and it's been IUP's job since 1875. Acknowledging this reality will not turn us into a technical high school.

While public university spending has always raised questions with elected officials and business leaders, in recent years those questions have become more strident and pointed, if not any more well-informed. The overall erosion of public trust in higher education makes it easier for some individuals to make higher education spending their cause célèbre. Universities and university leadership must spend even more time explaining their business model and demonstrating that public and student dollars are being spent with care to achieve desired outcomes at a reasonable price. However, the response to the challenge must be more than an enhanced communication campaign. Students and their families are paying more (and a higher percentage of the total cost) for college than ever before. Universities must change their business models and structures to reduce costs and focus their efforts on their fundamental mission. As state and federal investment declines, they must find other partners and investors to keep the cost to students low while maintaining high-quality educational programs.

Enrollment, Sustainability, Affordability

Overall, the last three years have demonstrated and exacerbated the bottom-line challenges to the higher education sector. Except for the most prestigious and well-funded (by the government or

¹⁰ <https://www.iup.edu/president/speeches/future-of-iup-april-19-2022.html>

by their endowments) universities, most universities have faced declining or flat enrollments, increasing costs, and declining revenue. Contrary to the words of doomsayers, there have been only a few college and university mergers and closures over the last few years. Federal COVID-relief funds helped buffer the impact of the bottom-line trend, and institutions of higher education have proven surprisingly resilient. Nonetheless, financial health continues to decline at many universities and colleges. With the continued decline of traditional college-aged students in most areas of the country and with families' limited ability to pay higher costs, aggressive management of university finances to an extent unseen in recent decades has become a fundamental requirement.

Reducing costs to match revenue while maintaining academic quality, reasonable breadth of program offerings, and lower costs for students and their families is a delicate balancing act. Changes must happen quickly, but there is a real danger of ill-considered changes leading to a downward spiral from which there is no escape.

IUP is certainly no stranger to these challenges, situated in a region with a declining and aging population and in a state that, until very recently, provided less support for public higher education than almost any other state in the country. Passing costs to students with tuition increases and myriad fees provided a false sense of financial stability while accelerating enrollment decline beyond demographics. The pandemic, global conditions, and national policies and rhetoric rapidly reduced IUP's strong and growing international student population, further accelerating enrollment decline. IUP's institutional culture resisted change to an extent notable even in the change-resistant industry of higher education. The university took pride in its tradition of shared governance, but in some ways that shared governance was a veneer. The university community often fell short of coming to grips with the realities of issues, expecting the administration to fix all problems while being unsatisfied with any solutions undertaken. The administration often shied away from asking for substantive input from the university community, assuming that the input would not be thoughtful or valuable and wishing to avoid the unpleasantness. ("Let's call this a process and not a policy, because if it's a policy it has to go to the University Senate," was a common statement.)

Appendix 2: Summary of IUP's Context¹¹

The changes in external conditions for higher education, especially for public higher education in western Pennsylvania, are the most challenging that any of us have seen in our careers.¹² The harsh reality of these changes required, and continues to require, a deep reexamination of IUP's mission, values, structure, and operations. Incredibly difficult and painful decisions have been and will be necessary to ensure a vital IUP for the future.

What follows is a restatement of many strategic themes that form a growing, changing vision for IUP's future. There is nothing new here, but it seems that a restatement of these ideas, all in one place, might be of value in framing and driving further discussions and actions.

External Conditions

1. Pennsylvania per-student funding for public higher education is among the lowest in the US. This is true despite recent, historic increases in state appropriations for the State System of Higher Education (SSHE).
2. Pennsylvania has a large number of postsecondary institutions, especially on a per-capita basis. This makes competition for students very intense.
3. Pennsylvania provides a higher percentage of state support for higher education to private institutions than any other state provides.¹³ This makes private institutions more resilient to financial pressures than one might expect.
4. The SSHE cost per unit of labor is higher than in many other states. This makes it more difficult for low-enrolled programs (and entire universities) to be financially sustainable.
5. IUP's core market, traditional undergraduate students graduating from high school in western Pennsylvania, is declining rapidly and will continue to do so for the next 5 to 10 years. This is true for other nearby markets, e.g., in most of the rest of Pennsylvania and nearby states.
6. A lower percentage of college-eligible high school graduates are choosing to attend college after graduation. This is likely due to both a decline in confidence in the return on investment from a college degree and the impact of the pandemic.
7. Competition for students has become increasingly fierce—in Pennsylvania and beyond.
8. IUP's secondary markets have also been challenged, although not always for the same reasons. International student enrollment has declined significantly, for example, because of political actions and rhetoric, changing international relations, growth in local options for higher education, and the pandemic.
9. IUP's student attrition is not far from the norm for similar institutions but is much higher than the best of IUP's comparators.

¹¹ Excerpted (and updated) from “A Few Thoughts on the New, Redesigned IUP,” a draft white paper I wrote on July 7, 2023.

¹² Although perhaps not the most challenging in IUP's nearly 150-year history.

¹³ https://shef.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/SHEEO_SHEF_FY20_IB_Private_Funding.pdf

Appendix 3: Tactics and Next Steps from My April 19, 2022, Future of IUP Speech

High-Level Tactics:

1. Stop doing things that aren't essential to our mission or that are duplicative. And stop doing "stupid" stuff—the University Planning Council has a list.
2. Invest the resources we have in you—in support of the change initiatives that must be undertaken and in providing the needed time, professional development, and training.
3. Work without regard to department, office, college, and division boundaries—putting what the students need ahead of the needs of your unit or my unit.
4. Continue to refresh, or develop new, academic programs that make sense for the future—and invest in those programs.
5. Deploy a few carefully selected technological tools, investing to do them right. They will help simplify business processes, leverage our efforts and resources, and triage problems to allow us to focus on the most critical issues.
6. Continue to reduce and modernize our physical plant, with a focus on serving our students.
7. Continue the good work in carefully reducing our expenses and keeping them under control so we can reinvest in the most important things.

Next Steps (in April 2022):

1. We will sunset the myriad committees that now exist to further student success, retention, and recruitment; restructure the university; and so on. We will start anew, building on the good, collaborative work of those previous committees, with just a few university-wide committees and task forces—focused on the five impact areas of the strategic plan.
2. You all have permission to stop doing stupid stuff.
3. The University Planning Council will step up its work to build IUP's future.
4. We will deploy and invest in several initiatives and summer academies for faculty and staff working on key areas. For example, groups will focus on
 - a. Enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - b. Standing up the tool set for course planning, degree check and advising, and early warning
 - c. Developing a revised Liberal Studies curriculum
 - d. Defining the role of the University College and related student support structures
 - e. Improving student affordability
5. We will return to a focus on meeting our mission in changing times and on the strategic plan, letting those drive our financial decisions, instead of the other way around. We had to focus on the finances for the last couple of years, and we must still pay attention to them, but it's time to put our core mission and our students at the center of all of our decision making.
6. We will welcome our permanent provost as the next step in building the new academic leadership team.