

# **Introduction – Long-Range Plan**

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Effective long-range plans are strategic. They describe organizations’ vision, mission and values. While they chart a bold course, they are flexible. They include goals that are aspirational and inspiring, but also achievable. Perhaps most importantly, the best long-range plans are calls to action, focusing on implementation and accountability.

Built on the foundation of the Visioning Committee’s work and report in 2014-15, Missouri State’s long-range plan for 2016-21 outlines the vision, strategic priorities, University goals, and key performance indicators in each of the six key areas that will drive decisions for the next five years: Academic Profile, Student Experience, Diversity, Globalization, Infrastructure, and Funding. The course has been charted. Now the work begins.

## **Missouri State’s Unique Character**

Since its founding in 1905 as Normal School Number Four to provide for the education of teachers, Missouri State has held service to the citizens of Missouri to be one of its highest values. Moreover, excellent teaching has been a priority for the institution and contributes to the unique character of what is now Missouri State University. Another hallmark of the institution is its student centeredness, manifested in the accessibility of faculty and staff to students. We take pride in this defining characteristic of the University—that its faculty and staff work with students, individually and collectively, to help them achieve their academic and life goals.

In 1995, Missouri State's statewide mission in public affairs was approved and signed into law. The mission asks students, faculty and staff to consider what they learn in the context of their role as citizens—to think of themselves as citizen biologists, citizen artists, citizen accountants, and so forth. The mission has been developed in subsequent years and encompasses three pillars of public affairs: ethical leadership, cultural competence and community engagement. Faculty and staff have worked intentionally over the last two decades to integrate the mission within the normal fabric of university curricular and co-curricular activities. The goal has been to help students understand that their actions never happen in a vacuum; thus, they have an obligation to consider how their actions affect the society at large.

These characteristics—Missouri state's founding as an institution designed to serve the needs of the state, its student-centered focus on excellent teaching, and its commitment to serving the public good through its public affairs mission—constitute the heart of the institution and will be preserved in the long-range plan.

## **Challenges to Higher Education**

Higher education in the United States faces challenges as daunting as any time in history. These challenges will influence the institution's strategic priorities for the foreseeable future.

First among these is increased competition at all levels: for students, for faculty and staff, and for resources. For example, the very technology that increases Missouri State's ability to serve citizens beyond its state borders via online programs also provides other universities' access to Missouri students, and so forth. Competition will intensify in coming years.

Demographic changes will influence how the university operates. Missouri State—along with other institutions—will find itself educating students who have not traditionally considered themselves college-bound students. For example, in any given year, between 35-40 percent of incoming students are first-generation students, neither of whose parents has completed a four-year degree. These students—talented and qualified academically—may lack the background that gives non-first-generation students a boost in navigating college waters. It is imperative that we not lose this talent, which means that the institution must have a viable plan for helping ensure the success of all its students.

Among the most influential changes affecting higher education has been the decreasing support for higher education at the state level. Thirty years ago, nearly three-fourths of the University's financial support came from the state, with student tuition and private support constituting the remainder. Those numbers are now reversed—the state provides about one-third of the university's support. This has created considerable financial burdens for students and their families, who have had to close the funding gap, often by assuming heavy student loan debt. It also has forced universities to rely on private support from a variety of contributors. Therefore, we must keep affordability in mind as we develop the strategic plan.

Finally, societal attitudes about the value of a college education contribute to the climate in which this strategic plan is being developed. In recent years, some have questioned the value of a college education—this despite the data showing consistently that those with college degrees make more money (and pay more taxes) over a lifetime of work, are less likely to be unemployed

or underemployed, and are less subject to the vagaries of the workplace. In addition, a college education has increasingly become viewed as a private good rather than a public good that benefits all of society. Viewing a college education as a private good provides justification for asking students and their families to pay for this “commodity.” We somehow have lost the notion that a college education represents an investment not only in the individual receiving the education but in the society in which that education will be utilized. Colleges and universities find themselves, increasingly, having to justify their programs, activities, and in some cases their very existence.

All of these factors and a host of others—including the rapid changes in technology—are challenges that must be taken into account as we develop Missouri State University’s strategic plan.

### **Student Success is the Top Priority**

Student success is at the center of the long-range plan and is the reason for the programs, initiatives, and so forth, developed as part of this plan.

While what constitutes success will be defined individually by each student, a *sine qua non* is that Missouri State University seeks to develop broadly educated persons. As the University’s general education’s statement emphasizes, regardless of what major a student has selected or individually designed, “a University should do more than simply prepare a student for a specific job or career.” Students can expect to change jobs or careers from three to seven times in their lifetimes and it has been estimated that one-quarter of college graduates work in careers different

from what they studied in college. Students need to be able to ask good questions, develop solutions to problems, and make generalizations—in short, to *think*. They also must be able to work collaboratively to solve problems. In addition, whatever the student's ultimate degree, the liberal arts provide the foundation on which the student's education rests.

When students graduate, they must be prepared with the skills to enter the job market. They must also—by virtue of their liberal arts and sciences foundation—be able to adapt to changes in the job market and be prepared to change jobs or even careers as individual interests and societal changes shape their paths.

Student success also involves the ability to engage appropriately with each of the three pillars of public affairs. Graduates must be able to take their positions as leaders, in their communities, nationally, and globally. They must be able to interact with others whose upbringing, values, culture and so forth may be markedly different from one's own. Finally, they must be willing to contribute their skills, knowledge and experiences to benefit their communities and the broader society.