

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

2023 PROGRESS REPORT

MISSION AND VISION

The University of Akron is a leading public urban research university with an unsurpassed commitment to community engagement with a great American legacy city, Akron.

- We will be an opportunity university for all learners.
- We will be known as a willing and constructive partner of business, government and the non-profit sector.
- We will be an institution of innovation willing to invest in unique approaches that increase opportunity for students and reduce costs.
- We will be a diverse, equitable and inclusive university.
- We will sponsor an array of superb academic programs relevant to the future.
- We will make and keep promises to our students, ourselves and this community.

Progress is organized around the five promise areas.

I. WE PROMISE TO ENSURE THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY BY:

A. Developing a budget model that incentivizes enrollment growth across the University, including those that involve interdisciplinary collaborations.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Greater Transparency: Higher levels of budget transparency were achieved through simplified reporting, consistent terminology, and training.
- Collaborative Strategic Planning: The budget transitioned from a highly centralized model to a distributed all-funds model to enhance shared decision making and strategic investment.
- Improved Communications: Implemented midyear budget review meetings with deans and non-academic units to review budget and discuss strategic initiatives for the remainder of the year.
- Increased Shared Governance: The UC Budget and Finance Committee and the Faculty Senate Academic Investment Committee (AIC) are integrated into the budget process.
- Digital Finance Practice: Made significant progress toward an increasingly digital platform with the implementation of Workday, which enables key university constituents to enter and access data to inform planning and decision making.

Key Contact Area: [Finance and Administration](#)

B. Organizing faculty and staff efforts to promote increases in retention and progression.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Strengthened Student Pathways: Realigned student pathways with the student success center and increased exploratory advising opportunities as recommended by an advising taskforce.
- Expanded Learning Communities: Building a common experience among students with nearly [40 learning communities](#).
- First Year Experience (FYE): The FYE taskforce launched in Fall 2022. Five subcommittees are working in the following areas: (I) revisions to the Akron Experience course, (II) Learning Communities, (III) Transfer Student Experience, (IV) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and (V) Academic Support Services.
- High Impact Practices: In June 2023, UA participated in the AAC&U Strengthening High Impact Practices Institute with a focus on increasing student participation and embedding equity in the Akron Experience Course and Learning Communities.

Key Contact Area: [Student Success Center](#)

C. Increasing faculty and staff interactions with current and prospective students both on and off campus.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Enhanced Communication with Students: A strategic communication campaign including direct mail, email, text messaging, personalized messaging and messages from campus leaders targeted students at every step of the enrollment process to achieve continual engagement, invite students to campus events and encourage next steps in the enrollment process.
- Confirmation Campaign: Efforts to increase confirmations include individual visits, daily information sessions and campus tours, an email drip campaign to encourage confirmations and college engagement with admitted students.
- Reaching Prospective Students: UA purchased the Slate CRM system to increase the efficiency of reaching prospective and current students. Full implementation to be achieved 2023-2024.
- UA Libraries Reaches Students: University Libraries staff and faculty participated in orientations and visit days. University Libraries formed and fully staffed a UL User Experience and Engagement unit to identify and act on opportunities for user-centered design across the libraries.

Key Contact Area: [University Communications and Marketing](#) & [University Admissions](#)

D. Increasing regional yield and rebuilding non-resident (both international and out-of-state domestic) enrollments.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Hired a new Vice Provost for Enrollment Management: [Dr. Stephen McKellips](#) provides leadership while engaging in innovative approaches to enrollment management and decision-making in the areas of admissions, recruitment, financial aid services and enrollment.
- Expanding Regional Awareness: A general awareness marketing campaign was launched in Cincinnati, Columbus and Pittsburgh.
- Engaging International Agents: Developed strategies and built relationships to increase interest and applications from around the world.
- Expanding Institutional Efficiencies: Evaluated student-serving services that expand student access and opportunities, improve student communication channels and reduce processing costs simultaneously.
- Recalibrated Financial Aid Offerings: Financial aid offerings were adjusted to phase out the Akron Guarantee Scholarship, re-establish the Presidential Scholarship and provide the Zips Affordability Scholarship. Relatedly, current financial aid system(s) are being optimized to maximize impact.

Key Contact Area: [Enrollment Management](#) & [University Communications and Marketing](#)

E. Sharpening our storytelling of the Akron Experience—what students, faculty, alumni, and the community gain from their interaction with The University of Akron.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Building [Student Storytelling](#): UA Students were featured on Season 6 of the TV series, The College Tour, and were invited to share a day in the life of a Zip through takeovers of the UA social media channels.
- Empowering [Zip Ambassadors](#): UCM developed materials to empower Zips to become strong ambassadors of UA, helping academic areas provide better presentations to prospective students, tell their stories, and engage with prospective students.
- Developing UA Envisioning Workshop: Over 65 campus members have participated in a workshop to foster creative thinking and community building around the strategic plan, aspirations, and key results.
- Sharing our story: UA continued the Good News with Gary podcast and published three issues of The University of Akron Magazine to tell the stories of students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors.
- Community Connections: EX[L] launched the [Akron Community Engaged Scholars program](#) for faculty who demonstrate a commitment to public impact.

Key Contact Area: [University Communications and Marketing](#)

II. WE PROMISE TO PROVIDE FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND AN ARRAY OF SUPERB ACADEMIC PROGRAMS BY:

A. Aligning the student and academic affairs offices to increase and improve collaborations that better serve the support and advising needs of all learners, traditional and non-traditional.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Implementing [Student Software](#): With Faculty Senate endorsement, the University purchased a student-centered degree audit system (Stellic) that will enhance scheduling, advising and communication with students. Curriculum sequences are being collected for all majors to support students in their degree progression.
- Removing Barriers for Students: Several actions were taken to support students including endorsing a test optional policy that allows admission without ACT/SAT scores, use of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) portfolios for credit, the use Dantes Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) for alternative credit, and modification of the transient credit policy to remove barriers for students seeking credit.

Key Contact Area: [Office of Academic Affairs](#)

B. Improving course delivery, academic success, student learning, student well-being and student satisfaction.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Doing More for Students: ZipAssist fully launched the Campus Cupboard, brought nap pods to campus, launched the RooStore, and transformed the Fir Hill lot into a campus garden.
- Student Well-Being: ZipAssist partnered with RADical Hope Foundation for staff-led peer-to-peer mental health conversations and established oasis spaces (branded “re:center”) with funding by the Women in Philanthropy Committee.
- Expanding Course Feedback: Midterm course feedback surveys were implemented in all 15-week courses to allow mid-course adjustments.
- Increasing Textbook Affordability: UA remains committed to the [Affordable Learning Initiative](#) which has saved students over \$1.3 million and has impacted over 10,000 students. In addition, Faculty Senate adopted a textbook auto-adoption policy that will provide students information on textbooks at the time of registration. Textbook assistance programs were aligned between ZipAssist, Salvation Army of Summit Co., Undergraduate Student Government, and the Office of Multicultural Development.
- Space for Commuter Students: University Libraries and ZipAssist co-created a Commuter Lounge and Kitchen in Bierce Library.
- Working Together: ZipAssist placed a MetroNaps pod in Bierce Library, collaborated with University Libraries for a campus cupboard location with a free bookshelf in the Bierce café, and University Libraries contributed to the Little Free Library in the Campus Community Garden.
- Improving Teaching: The Institute for Teaching and Learning offered professional development for faculty to support effective and inclusive teaching.
- The Persistence Project: A campus-wide faculty initiative that builds support and student belonging in first- and second-year courses.

Key Contact Area: [Institute for Teaching and Learning & Online Learning Services](#)

C. Continuing to invest in and grow fully online programs aligned to student interest and market demand.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Expanding [UAKRON ONLINE](#): As of Summer 2023, UA has 22 online degree programs and 9 online certificates.
- Assessing Online Learning: To improve online offerings, 657 students across colleges were given a Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL) to identify strengths and opportunities.
- Augmenting Recruiting and Awareness: A lead generator is being piloted to increase enrollment in online programs.
- Online Partnerships: Partnerships with TREMCO and Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections provided job training programs.
- Supporting Online: Online Learning Services (OLS) provided support across campus for revamping online courses, developing hi-flex courses, and professional development and training courses.

- Ensuring Online Quality: The [UAkron Online Promise](#) initiative has supported 32 faculty in committing to quality in 51 online courses.

Key Contact Area: [Online Learning Services](#)

D. Enhancing support of high-demand programs along with the development and support of alternative, innovative pathways to learning and degree completion.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Named a new Vice Provost for Student Pathways: [Dr. Fedearia Nicholson-Sweval](#) was named Vice Provost for Student Pathways, a position focused on pathways into higher education for high school students and returning adults while increasing the diversity of the student body.
- Formalized Articulation Agreements: Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have been renewed with many community college partners and new MOU's have been established with community colleges, four-year institutions, and local businesses to create academic pathways for all types of learners.
- Pathways: New pathways have been created with high demand programs and high school programs.
- Meeting to Serve Students: Community Counselor update meetings have been returned to in-person to assist with the promotion of transfer students.

Key Contact Area: [Degree Pathways](#)

III. WE PROMISE TO INCREASE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION BY:

A. Reducing, with the goal of eventually eliminating, disparities in educational outcomes.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Expanded Peer Mentoring: Through our Office of Multicultural Development, UA offers a [Peer Mentoring Program](#) that mentors students through their first academic year with a focus on campus engagement.
- Specialized Learning Communities: UA offers specialized Learning Communities, including the [Diverse Male and PASSAGE Learning Communities](#), which continue to serve marginalized and underrepresented groups.
- Promoting [Inclusive Excellence in STEM Education](#): As part of the HHMI Learning Community Cluster 3, UA committed to enhancing student belonging and inclusion in introductory STEM classes.

Key Contact Area: [Office of Inclusion and Equity](#)

B. Recruiting a more diverse student body that is representative of Akron and our region.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Offered Diversity Recruitment Day: The Office of Inclusion & Equity has partnered with the Office of Admissions to offer Diversity Recruitment Day and to institute monthly meetings.
- Supporting Transfer Students: Three committees and one working group are (I) supporting financial literacy of transfer students, (II) developing additional transparent information on transfer pathways and costs, (III) collaborating with community college partners, (IV) improving transfer student onboarding and creating additional pathways, and (V) expanding articulation agreements with other colleges and universities.
- Enhanced Scholarship Opportunities: Through the Office of Multicultural Development, UA continues to award scholarships to historically underrepresented students and promote the Goodyear Driving Opportunity Scholars Program.
- Building Strategic Partnerships: UA is engaged in strategic partnerships with local organizations and non-profits including Upward Bound, the Akron Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, and I Promise Scholarship Night.
- Underrepresented Male Students: The Office of Multicultural Development revitalized and expanded the Black, Brown, and Beyond Male Academy (BBBMA), offering underrepresented male high school students yearlong programming and support to prepare and excel in college.
- Helping students ADVANCE: The Office of Multicultural Development sustained the ADVANCE JumpStart New Student Orientation program, facilitating the smooth integration of diverse and historically underrepresented students into the UA campus community. Through interactions with current students, mentors, faculty, and administrators, participants gained valuable insights to tackle challenges commonly faced during the first-year experience.

Key Contact Area: [Academic Achievement Programs](#)

C. Increasing the number of faculty and staff job applicants from marginalized populations.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Increased Campus Collaboration: Implemented monthly meetings to leverage the expertise in Human Resources and the Office of Inclusion and Equity towards greater awareness around diversity hiring.
- Enhanced Training: Developed Inclusive Excellence training for deans and department chairs.
- Fair Hiring Practices: Human Resources conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the University's job classification system and job catalog. By eliminating overly restrictive job requirements and emphasizing transferable skills, unnecessary barriers were removed, leading to a wider and more diverse pool of applicants.
- Opportunities to Advance: Newly established job profiles include clear pathways for career advancement, creating an environment that encourages individuals from marginalized groups to pursue opportunities and professional growth at UA.
- Search Committee Training: Developed and provided Inclusive Excellence training for all faculty search committees within the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences focused on building applicant pools from marginalized populations.
- Increased Minority Faculty: New faculty hired for FY 23 and FY 24 in Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences increased by more than 50% underrepresented minority faculty.

Key Contact Area: [Office of Inclusion and Equity](#)

D. Providing high-quality programs that will involve faculty, students, contract professionals and staff, both majority and minority, in deliberative and reflective conversations about how to advance diversity, equity and inclusion at The University of Akron.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Named a new Chief Diversity Officer: [Dr. Sheldon Wrice](#) was named Vice President of Inclusion and Equity and Chief Diversity Officer in April 2021.
- Developed a [Social Justice Task Force](#): A social justice task force was convened in 2020 and released a final report with recommendations to the UA community in March 2021. Out of this work, a DEI Advisory Council was established with broad representation across campus.
- Created a [Diversity Roadmap](#): The DEI Advisory Council launched a Diversity Roadmap strategic plan for the University meetly monthly to implement the goals and strategic actions.
- Increased Diversity Programming: The [Office of Inclusion and Equity](#) continues to provide an annual slate of high-impact diversity programming for the University and greater Akron community. Featured events include [Rethinking Race](#), Diversity Dialogues, and the [Black, Brown & Beyond Male Summit](#).
- Integrated Approach to Equity and Inclusion: University Libraries and the Office of Equity and Inclusion partnered with the Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio for a series of workshops to support an integrated approach to racial equity and inclusion at UA.
- DEI in the Library: The University Libraries Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion group plans, creates, and executes monthly displays that focus on DEI topics, authors, characters, etc. Displays are located on the first floor of Bierce Library by the main entrance and online via a LibGuide: <https://libguides.uakron.edu/c.php?g=1244152>.
- Inclusive Excellence Faculty Training: Working collaboratively with the Institute for Teaching and Learning, and in conjunction with the Office of Inclusion and Equity, developed and provided an Inclusive Excellence in Teaching workshop and learning community for 30 Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences faculty who revised their undergraduate courses to incorporate inclusive teaching practices.
- Social Justice Fund: OIE received an anonymous \$1 million estate gift for the [Social Justice Fund](#) housed in the Office of Multicultural Development.
- Honors Colloquia: OIE collaborated with the Honors College to offer Rethinking Race through Courageous Conversations – Spring 2023 and Courageous Conversations Promoting Inclusive Excellence – Summer 2023.
- McClain Gallery Opening: Renovations of the Dr. Shirla McClain Gallery were completed with a grand opening in September 2023.

Key Contact Area: [Office of Inclusion and Equity](#)

IV. WE PROMISE TO NURTURE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION BY:

A. Revitalizing the Office of Research Administration and the operations of the University of Akron Research Foundation, including hiring permanent leadership.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Hired New Leadership: [Dr. Suzanne Bausch](#) named Vice President for Research and Business Engagement and Dean of the Graduate School.

Key Contact Area: [Office of Research Administration](#)

B. Incentivize faculty to secure external support for their research and increase Facilities and Administration revenue to the General Fund

PROGRESS 2023:

- Expanded Grant Opportunities: FY22 grant awards increased 38% over FY21.
- Increased personnel: The Office of Research Administration expanded to support faculty in pre-award (two new hires) and post-award (one new hire) stages.

Key Contact Area: [Research at the University of Akron](#)

C. Identify and adjust policies and practices that hinder faculty in their scholarly and innovation pursuits.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Innovation Opportunities: Reintroduced “three-party” agreements with UA, UARF and outside entities to increase efficiency of innovation pursuits.
- Foster Entrepreneurship: Expanded entrepreneurship through the I-Corps program to build programs for early entrepreneurs and attract students.

Key Contact Area: [University of Akron Research Foundation](#)

IV. WE PROMISE TO NURTURE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION BY:

A. Investing in a single, one-stop professional and continuing education office that consolidates and improves support for all non-credit initiatives.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Launched and Branded the Continuing and Professional Education unit: <https://uakron.edu/learn/>
- Improved [non-credit programming](#): Developed an MOU for colleges and departments to offer targeted training, programs and partnerships with other colleges and programs to increase offerings.
- Established UA-Coursera Partnership: This partnership, established Summer 2022, will increase capacity in industry-recognized credentialing with the launch of the UA Extended Campus on Coursera ([UAX on Coursera](#)).
- Workforce Development: Enrollment for online, contract training, and open enrollment reached 2,913 with twenty-nine contract training and open enrollment customers.

Key Contact Area: [Online, Continuing and Professional Education](#)

B. Partnering with local/regional business, government and non-profit enterprises in ways that serve their needs, provide experiential learning, service-learning, and applied research opportunities for students and create outcomes that matter locally and globally.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Renewing Carnegie Classification as a Community Engaged Campus: Developed a cross-institution Carnegie Working Group to undertake a detailed self-study and work toward building infrastructure to align with best practices in community engagement in preparation for the 2025 Reclassification Application.

- Learning from other Urban, Anchor Institutions: Rejoined the [Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities](#) to share resources and ideas.
- Storytelling and Community Engagement: Implemented the [Collaboratory](#) system to map, assess, and build awareness of ongoing community engagement activities.
- Building Curricular Connections: Developed a Certificate in Applied Community Engagement, with foundational course content co-created between UA and the community through a summer institute with local non-profit leaders.
- Community Commitment: Adopted an institutional definition of community engagement through the shared governance process.
- Implemented [Amazon Career Choice](#): Offers full- or part-time Amazon employees the opportunity to take classes at UA to aid in career advancement.

Key Contact Area: [EX\[L\] Center for Experiential Learning](#)

C. Reconnecting and growing our cultural corridor in the surrounding region through the arts, especially through revitalized programming and community use of E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall and connecting with downtown via our AkronArts plan.

PROGRESS 2023:

- Enriching AkronArts: The AkronArts plan was launched in 2021.
- Downtown Revitalization: The Knight Foundation announced a \$20M grant to the University of Akron to reimagine the Polsky building and rename it for the Knight Foundation.
- Vision for the Future: Jason Segedy, former Director of Planning and Urban Development for the city of Akron, joined the UA Office of the President in the role of Project Manager for the Knight Creative Project.

Key Contact Area: [AkronArts Initiative](#), [Office of the President](#)