



Southern Connecticut
State University

LEADING THE WAY

SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

2023-2028 Strategic Action Plan



LEADING THE WAY

2023-2028 Strategic Action Plan

PREFACE – PRAGMATIC VISION	3
MISSION	3
COMMITMENT TO AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITY	4
FIVE-YEARS AND BEYOND	4
PRIORITY 1 – ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, PERSISTENCE, AND DEGREE COMPLETION SUCCESS	5
10,200 enrolled students at Southern	5
25% increase in transfer students from CT State Community College	7
25% of Early College students will matriculate at Southern	7
80% retention rate of first-time, first-year students	8
100% increase in out-of-state and international students	8
60% 6-year graduation rate for first-time, first-year students	9
60% 3-year graduation rate for transfer students	9
PRIORITY 2 – CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS	10
\$14 million in external grants and contracts annual productivity	10
15% increase in graduate assistantships	10
25% increase in undergraduate and graduate student creative and scholarly products	11
50% increase in collaborative undergraduate/graduate degree programs	11
100% increase in degree-linked programs (2+2) at CT State Community College	11
50% increase in students who participate in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus media, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	11
PRIORITY 3 – JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND EXCELLENCE	12
\$15 million in annual student financial support	12
10% increase in representation of faculty and staff who reflect the diversity of our students and community we serve	12
15% growth in faculty and staff affinity groups/experiences and peer-mentoring programs	13
15% growth in curricular and pedagogical opportunities for inclusive teaching and learning	13
PRIORITY 4 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	14
60% of students will have engaged in internships, research, work-based learning experiences, and/or community-based service learning by the time they graduate	14
Combined 25% <i>Increase and strengthen partnerships with K-16 schools, other educational institutions, and regional organizations including partnerships with employers and industry</i>	15
Launch SCSU’s first comprehensive campaign in alignment with funding priorities	15

PREFACE – PRAGMATIC VISION

Southern Connecticut State University looks to the future with a renewed sense of commitment to elevating educational attainment in its region and the state, confronting the most pressing issues on the planet by engaging in innovative research, and providing highly trained professionals for Connecticut’s workforce. Elevating students beyond their current socio-economic status is at the heart of Southern’s academic mission.

Southern approaches the future with pragmatic vision – balancing the realities of an historic downward enrollment trend and current fiscal constraints with optimism and innovation to engage new and previously underserved

learner communities, retain talented faculty and staff, and ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

To that end, the Southern community recognizes time is of the essence and has developed its strategic plan with a two-fold purpose: 1) A 5-year planning horizon to focus the institution on strategies and actions that will have immediate and sustainable impacts on recruitment, retention, persistence, and completion, and equity; and 2) Broader aspirational goals and strategies will have Southern focus on the future as the longer term horizon becomes clearer and as advances are made on the immediate goals of stabilizing and growing enrollment.

MISSION

Southern Connecticut State University provides exemplary graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and professional disciplines. As an intentionally diverse and comprehensive university, Southern is committed to academic excellence, access, social justice, and service for the public good.



COMMITMENT TO AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITY

Southern is committed to transformational change by empowering all members to center diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice in all that we do – creating a Southern community where all members feel included, feel like they belong as their most authentic selves, and feel equipped and supported to realize their fullest potential.

This commitment to inclusive excellence is realized by fostering creative opportunities for students, staff, and faculty, and alumni to learn and engage with one another in such ways as: building greater capacity for respect, reflection and understanding of DEI; practicing cultural humility; deepening equity-mindedness; dialoguing around critical topics that promote the intellectual growth and intergroup understanding essential for success

in the classroom, the university campus, surrounding communities, and society at large.

Our students' success will require all community members to approach all initiatives outlined in this document using an inclusive and equitable approach, working closely with the Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

As a result, Southern will be poised to be the regional leader in delivering on the promise of higher education by creating a diverse, inclusive, and just university willing to engage in institutional transformation where **humanity, belonging, wellbeing, community, and system change** are priorities in all that we do.

FIVE-YEARS AND BEYOND

Southern will lead the way through its four Strategic Priorities:

1. Enrollment, Retention, Persistence, and Degree Completion Success
2. Cultivating a Community of Scholars
3. Justice, Equity, and Excellence
4. Community Engagement

A Fluid Plan – Our five-year strategic plan represents our goals and aspirations based on what we know and can forecast today. This document, however, represents a dynamic plan that must be responsive to changes in time, resources, and circumstances. The President's Leadership Team is committed to reviewing our action plan annually to

monitor progress. As circumstances warrant, the PLT will bring proposed changes to campus for consideration and collaborative discussion implementing shifts in strategic initiatives as appropriate.

Southern will establish a "Strategic Initiative and Innovation Fund", either by internal reallocation of existing monies, or by securing new monies, or both. This fund will be used as an instrument to assist with resources necessary to implement strategic action items.



Priority 1

ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, PERSISTENCE, AND DEGREE COMPLETION SUCCESS

Southern aims to achieve enrollment growth by improving recruitment, retention, and graduation rates, particularly by more effectively serving non-traditional, lower income, first generation and minoritized communities, and by reducing opportunity gaps.

Southern's overall headcount enrollment has declined by 20% since Fall 2012, an erosion that accelerated during Covid-19. Undergraduate headcount has decreased almost 19% over the last decade, while graduate headcount has eroded 24%. As we emerge from the impact of the pandemic and into the reality of long-predicted demographic shifts, as well as new skepticism about the value of higher education, Southern along with the rest of CSCU finds itself in a structural budget deficit. The resolution of this deficit will be multipronged; one of which must be a competitive enrollment plan. Improving the market position of the university and increasing net tuition revenue is critical to the university's long-term stability.

Many define student success on a college campus as progress to degree completion. At Southern, that is a top priority. A college degree offers the opportunity for social mobility for many of our students and their families. They want to know that when they leave Southern with a degree in hand, they will be prepared to obtain highly skilled jobs, compete in the workforce, earn salaries higher than if they had not gotten their degrees, and meaningfully influence the trajectory of their lives. It is irresponsible for us to

welcome students to campus with the intent to earn their degrees and have them leave shy of realizing that goal, especially as they have likely spent limited resources and/or incurred debt to support their enrollment.

Student success is also greater than degree attainment. Each student has a set of goals for their experience that we want to help them realize. These might be academic, social, cultural, career, financial, familial, community, etc. It is through individual and sustained relationships that we come to know our students, understand their experiences, and help them map their journeys to reach (and surpass) their goals.

Collectively, we must create the environments, experiences, and climate that help our students optimize their opportunities for growth and learning, take risks to stretch themselves, challenge their assumptions, and prepare them for productive and contributing lives during their time with us and after they earn their degrees.

Moreover, for today's college students, the path to earning a degree is not a simple one. There are many challenges or barriers that students face as they persist (or don't) from semester to semester. Students need to be seen and understood. We should create a deep and meaningful sense of belonging where students can feel confident that they can enter any space on campus and know that they belong in that space (e.g., classrooms, labs, offices, residence halls, social spaces, etc.).

BY 2028:

10,200 enrolled students at Southern

Receive BOR and legislative permission to produce PhD programs.

Enhance recruitment in targeted ways to support enrollment stability.

- Create a multi-year institutional enrollment model and projections based on recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.

- Establish both budget and stretch recruitment targets.
- Increase recruitment activities aimed at early high school students.
- Apply for Military-Friendly status and develop an active duty and veteran recruitment strategy.
- Partner with CSCU on Complete CT initiative and increase SCSU enrollment of CT residents with some college, no degree as well as stopped out students.
- Increase % of SCSU alumni who have re-enrolled to earn additional credentials.
- Develop new programs or adapt existing programs to better align with workforce demand.
- Expand flexible offerings for non-traditional and part-time graduate students.
- Narrow opportunity gaps for BIPOC students.

Expand data collection methods to better understand which scholars leave and why.

Ensure SCSU remains one of the most affordable higher education options in the region, particularly for low- and middle-income students.

- Structure financial aid awards to make more funds available for new first-year and transfer students at the point of admission.
- Set benchmarks for competitive program pricing.
- Expand financial education programming and increase student participation.
- Expand campus employment based on correlation with improved retention

Increase percentage of students who report a sense of academic belonging in their major.

Increase faculty/staff knowledge and capacity to support students' wellbeing.

- Increase the number of courses that include a well-being component through syllabus statements, verbal references, class activities.
- Develop syllabus statements and course activities to promote wellbeing and refer scholars to campus supports (e.g., accessibility statement).

Expand support to help students meet their basic and academic needs, including food pantry and opportunity center, distribution of emergency funds, secure housing options, affordability of textbooks.

Expand use of and response to Navigate alerts for early identification and intervention of student concerns.

Increase students' sense of belonging.

- Identify and respond to needs of non-traditional and graduate students.
- Improve virtual student service experience.
- Develop policy and process audits to reduce students' difficulties navigating university processes.
- Create stronger affinities for students with shared identities.
- Launch the First Scholars Network initiative focused on first generation students.
- Expand the Men of Color initiative.
- Create the Women of Color Initiative.
- Improve the experience for undocumented students grounded in TheDream.US scholars' program
- Improve the experience of English Language Learner students and families.

Facilitate equitable affordability by strategic investment in financial aid.

- Review pricing to ensure continued competitiveness and to track the impact of any pricing changes.
 - Consider new program pricing in line with market demand, affordability and access.
- Review existing financial aid strategy and look for opportunities to expand financial support; with similar recognition of the costs and equity implications of any given aid strategy.
 - Analyze impact of Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to Student Aid Index (SAI) shift on Pell eligibility and ensure adequate financial support for the neediest students.
- Evaluate the efficacy of completion grants for students with more than 90 credits earned toward a degree.

Become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) by 2025 through a holistic framework that expands support and initiatives targeted to Latinx/e students and establishes an equitable, culturally sustaining learning environment.

Coordinate intervention strategies to identify and support students who are at risk of not completing their degree.

Ensure all advisors use degree maps to provide students with clarity towards a timely graduation.

Expand faculty advisors' knowledge of equity and access to advising support available through professional advising services.

Invest in success coaching to ensure sustainability of program beyond end of federal Strengthening Institutions Program grant.

Identify shared language that is used across academic departments to help students understand the connections between course learning and post-graduation goals.

Embed major and career development, including professional competencies such as NACE 8, into major

introductory courses, student involvement and leadership experiences, and on-campus student employment.

Increase student efficacy with academic planning and course registration.

- Develop or enhance program completion advising resources (such as website information, clear academic maps for both “native” and transfer students) for all majors.
- Develop faculty advising resources (including mentoring programs for new faculty advisors) to facilitate a culturally responsive, holistic and developmental understanding of students’ participation in their own academic planning journey.
- Increase student and faculty use of software designed to enhance the retention and persistence of our scholars (e.g., Banner, Navigate, Schedule Planner, Symplicity, Accommodate).

Develop consistent tracking and communication of student career, earnings, graduate study, and other outcomes.

Expand the Exploratory program to attract students otherwise reluctant to invest in college

25% increase in transfer students from CT State Community College

Enhance flexibility of transfer policies through LEP alignment, Safe Courses initiative and AACRAO best practices.

Develop dual admission program with CT State.

Strengthen CT State partnership by expanding SCSU

staff office hours and establishing dedicated SCSU office space for pre-transfer advising and recruitment at feeder campuses.

Increase transfer merit scholarship opportunities to increase transfer yield.

25% of Early College students will matriculate at Southern

Increase high school Early College partners to 100, including schools outside of the state of CT.

Increase Early College student affinity with SCSU through participation in campus activities and programming designed for them.

Move beyond enrichment in Early College program by incorporating college readiness and career exploration.

80% retention rate of first-time, first-year students

Create more intentional program cohorts and affinity groups for incoming students.

Identify academic programs most effective at engaging their first-year students and expand this to additional majors.

Assess students' first-year experience and alignment with current best practices for the first-year experience.

Increase percentage of students who meet expected learning objectives in writing/literacy upon completion of first-year English courses.

- Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the specific areas where first-year students are struggling with writing (e.g., analyzing data on student performance in writing courses, conducting surveys and focus groups with faculty and students, reviewing course syllabi and assignments).
- Expand targeted writing support services to students that might also include summer writing experience.

Increase percentage of students who meet expected learning objectives in quantitative upon completion of first-year Math courses.

- Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the specific areas where first-year students are struggling with introductory and intermediate quantitative reasoning (specifically MAT 100/100P), with consideration for timeliness to degree.

- Expand targeted quantitative reasoning support services to students, including growing summer opportunities for an early start in math.
- Use evidence-based strategies for instruction that are responsive to Southern's first-year students' learning needs to lower D, F, W rates in MAT 100/100P.
- Explore ways to enhance quantitative reasoning instruction across relevant non-math, first-year courses.

Engage all first-year students in exploration of their major choices and options.

Assign all first-year students an Advising Specialist as their first-year advisor.

Provide all students with an intentional onboarding experience to their academic major upon declaration.

Develop learning objectives for all "intro to major and careers" (100-level) courses that intentionally introduce students to that major area and possible career and industry opportunities.

Develop a clear and robust "hand off" of assigned advisor in the last month of the 2nd semester to major assigned advisor.

Required well-being modules will be introduced through INQ to increase student skill development to manage/ reduce stress, enhance coping skills and support self-care utilizing.

100% increase in out-of-state and international students

Create additional international opportunities for degree focused international programs.

Consider and activate relevant partnerships that support international programming and degrees.

60% 6-year graduation rate for first-time, first-year students

Review curricular barriers towards degree completion, including pre- and co-requisites, course scheduling and sequencing, and other relevant data that create impediments towards timely degree completion.

Create tools for modeling and projection to offer UG financial aid packages that are renewable for four years.

Assess the effectiveness of introductory math outcomes and related support services to determine whether they are helping students meet expected learning objectives.

Conduct a comprehensive data analysis to identify the factors that are contributing to lower graduation rates for first time-in-college students (e.g., analyze data on student demographics, academic progress, achievement gaps, and institutional policies and practices that may be hindering student success).

Ensure that the Academic Maps for programs remain accurate and relevant for first time-in-college students, matching course availability to demand for timely completion.

Embed “academic planning curriculum” in the INQ curriculum and support Peer Mentors in understanding this curriculum.

Launch the Explore Program for every student to make an informed and meaningful major decision.

Ensure a set of activities for each academic department to engage students upon declaration of their major(s).

60% 3-year graduation rate for transfer students

Assess demand and need for wrap-around services for non-traditional learners, including modality of services and extended hours.

Enhance the seamless transition for transfer students from the point of application through their first semester, including streamlining transfer credit evaluation process.

Conduct a transfer student needs assessment to identify the specific needs and challenges facing transfer students at the university.

Ensure that the Academic Maps for programs remain accurate and relevant for transfer students.

Provide additional financial support for transfer students to help them cover the costs of tuition, fees, and other expenses associated with attending the university.

Identify a set of activities within each academic department that engages new transfer students (transfer with more than 30 credits) who have declared their major(s).



Priority 2

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS

Academic excellence is reflected in scholarship, teaching, and creative activities. Because it directly impacts our students, each Southern program strives for academic excellence. This excellence in turn helps to build institutional reputation and value. In broad terms there is often a desire to untangle academic excellence into two components reflecting teaching/learning and research/creative activities. At Southern we seek to make immersive opportunities available in both, independently and collectively, thus ensuring a stronger educational experience. In practice we find a palpable overlap in scholarship and teaching; at Southern they strongly inform each other. Still, discrete definitions can help as we seek to measure growing success.

Scholarship: Impactful products defined by specific disciplines that make a qualitative and/or quantitative difference in those disciplines and in disciplinary-based education.

Teaching: Measurable changes in our students' ability to think creatively and critically, understand and use data in their personal and professional lives, and develop significant abilities to use these skills in making decisions and asking questions.

Our students gain a critical edge when we bring our scholarly disciplines and approaches to our scholarship into the classroom or through relevant external activities and opportunities. To stay current in the classroom, research and creative activities are essential and these efforts best inform our students as they emerge as tomorrow's professionals. The success of our students in a comprehensive domain of academic excellence requires the requisite facilities including a well-supported Library as key players in supporting academic excellence in both research/creative activities and teaching/learning. Connecticut's next generation of entrepreneurs, community leaders, innovators, and problem solvers are best served by an innovative, culturally responsive, prepared faculty, with appropriate support facilities.

BY 2028:

\$14 million in external grants and contracts annual productivity

Increase the quantity of faculty "works" (publications, performances, exhibitions, etc.) in regional, national, and international venues by 5% every two years based on the current ratio of completed works to number of FT faculty.

Continue to support the growth of external awards through the Proposal Incentive Program (PIP) and through apportioning select reassigned time to faculty to allow time

to create major (more than \$275,000) grant proposals that fully financially (tuition and stipend) support at least one student.

Continue to offer first year faculty a reduced teaching load to allow for time to build their program of scholarship and creative activity.

15% increase in graduate assistantships

Through a reallocation of funds or through increased generation of external revenue and growing "indirect"

revenues, increase graduate research and teaching assistantships by 15%.

25% increase in undergraduate and graduate student creative and scholarly products

Increase undergraduate and graduate students actively producing scholarly, artistic, etc. works for/in external venues (publications, shows, art exhibits, readings, professional presentation, etc.) by 5%.

Ensure the growing impact of our scholarship and creative activities through enhanced support and monitoring both qualitative and quantitative measures that allow us to understand our progress and identify areas that need additional scaffolding.

50% increase in collaborative undergraduate/graduate degree programs

Increase the number of 5-year accelerated pathways created to assist undergraduate students to seamlessly enroll in graduate programs.

Effectively market portfolio of accelerated bachelor/master's degrees.

Design cohort degree programs and degree completion programs with flexible and predictable modalities and schedules.

100% increase in degree-linked programs (2+2) at CT State Community College

Attend to feedback from transfer students to deepen and expand our 2+2 partnerships with Connecticut State Community College.

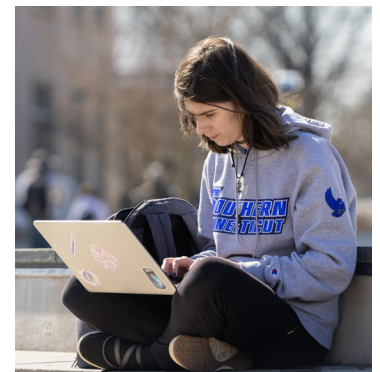
Define clear pathways for CT State students in top transfer majors.

50% increase in students who participate in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus media, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)

Attain Fulbright and additional Scholarships and build national academic partnerships.

Increase and expand the explicit communication of the connections between learning outcomes and career opportunities, civic engagement, and professional competencies through academic programs and co-curricular experiences.

Develop a more robust, nationally recognized, Division II Athletics Program.



Priority 3

JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND EXCELLENCE

Higher Education has been described as the great equalizer for society. Demands to address social justice inequities and institutional racism play an increasingly significant role in American higher education. As a regional campus serving the needs of Greater New Haven's growing diverse population, Southern is the educational home for those communities which have been historically oppressed and underserved. As a result, Southern is poised to be the regional leader in delivering on the promise of Higher Education by creating a diverse, inclusive, and just university willing to engage in institutional transformation where **humanity, belonging, community, and system change** are priorities in all that we do. To achieve this

promise and to maintain institutional viability Southern needs to attract, retain, and graduate students. High-impact practices in meeting these goals include maintaining a faculty and staff which reflects the diversity of the student body and addressing institutional policies which unevenly impede student progress towards the degree. Under the *Shared Equity Leadership model*, this work belongs to the whole Southern community.

Develop an institutional mechanism to evaluate university policies and procedures on the departmental, academic college, and divisional level.

BY 2028:

\$15 million in annual student financial support

With support from Institutional Advancement and the Office of the Provost, Deans and Associate Deans will focus on seeking external donor support for scholarships and endowments.

Provide more competitive scholarships at the point of admission and offer financial aid awards that are renewable over 4 years to provide reliable affordability.

Establish three-year fundraising priorities and dollar goals that financially advance the University's strategic plan and its focus on access, recruitment, and retention; academic excellence; and student success.

10% increase in representation of faculty and staff who reflect the diversity of our students and community we serve

Cultivate strategic alignment and consolidation of intentional interdisciplinary cultural and educational university-wide initiatives focused on DEI, social justice and racial equity.

Launch an institutional assessment tool to measure success regarding institutional culture and climate, identified DEI metrics, and targeted student outcomes over time.

Identify policies and procedures which inhibit the hiring and retention of diverse faculty and staff.

Intentionally seek more diverse pools of applicants for all faculty and academic staff positions through more focused and inclusive searches and through initiatives like our recent Southern Faculty Fellows program.

15% growth in faculty and staff affinity groups/experiences and peer-mentoring programs

Benchmark and increase faculty and staff sense of belonging.

Increase availability of professional development experiences for faculty and staff.

Launch the Campus Climate Support Program.

15% growth in curricular and pedagogical opportunities for inclusive teaching and learning

Establish institutional definitions for social justice, equity, anti-racism, restorative practices, belonging, and inclusion that lead to operational and accountability standards for institutional leadership.

Improve DEI-related professional development and learning opportunities for faculty and staff.

Launch an institutional assessment tool to measure success regarding institutional culture and climate, identified DEI metrics, and targeted student outcomes over time.

Create dashboards across divisions to track DEI goals and progress towards achievement.

Ensure that our faculty have developmental support to allow them to excel in enhancing a learning environment that encompasses both “classroom” and experiential learning.

Create targeted support cohorts focused on outstanding teaching (online and on ground), research, writing, and grant-seeking.

Ensure an inclusive learning environment fostered through disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge that actively addresses and incorporates student feedback into our practice.

Identify additional curricular development funds to support traditionally marginalized students to succeed, how they incorporate an inclusive teaching and learning environment, and how they best utilize experiential learning opportunities.

Nurture a culture of excellence in teaching and learning by supporting regular presentations by speakers on interdisciplinary topics, as well as an annual interdisciplinary faculty research conference, in keeping with our social justice mission and in consultation with Deans and Departments.

Developing training and support systems to provide faculty/staff the knowledge and skills needed to develop and maintain experiential learning opportunities.

Increase faculty use of active learning pedagogy including universal design for learning.

Engage diverse community stakeholders in campus initiatives and classroom learning opportunities.

Identify DEI Liaisons across departments.

Create a communications toolkit for campus liaisons on key DEI initiatives.



Priority 4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Southern will promote and foster the centrality of engagement in our region, the state, and beyond. Graduates will be prepared to lead in their communities and be successful in their vocational path from classroom and experiential learning in community engagement, internships, and off-campus employment. Southern will engage Alumni, Nonprofit, and Corporate Partners who

contribute to the overall mission and vision of the university and deepen and strengthen our role as the public university of Southern Connecticut. Interact with and understand our communities, specifically in the classroom as a holistic part of the learning experience, and to help students and faculty be their authentic selves throughout their educational experience at Southern.

BY 2028:

60% of students will have engaged in internships, research, work-based learning experiences, and/or community-based service learning by the time they graduate.

Expand the integration of applicable real-world relevance/experiential learning across curriculum for first-year students.

Expand opportunities available to students for service learning, civic engagement, professional development, and on/off campus leadership opportunities.

Enhance relationships with companies and organizations in the Greater New Haven and Bridgeport regions to expand the number of relevant and purposeful paid or credit-bearing internships and experiential learning opportunities.

Increase the number of majors that require experiential learning.

Increase networking between students and alumni.

Develop robust, comprehensive corporate, nonprofit, and civic relations program with the aims of providing pathways for students (and possibly alumni) to secure mentorships, internships, coops and job placement after graduation AND as a means of developing philanthropic support to benefit educational opportunity at Southern and more experienced student talent for employers.

Raise funds and establish a program for awarding funding for unpaid internship experiences in non-profits or other organizations that cannot afford to pay interns.



Combined 25%

Increase and strengthen partnerships with K–16 schools, other educational institutions, and regional organizations.

Assess Southern’s current community engagement and collaborations with Connecticut-based community groups and individuals.

Establish a committee to improve coordination of university community engagement activities.

In orientations for faculty, staff, and students, incorporate a sense of place--a history and present of our city and region that invites community co-educators in and fosters a commitment to community “citizenship.”

Increase and strengthen partnerships with employers and industry

Grow five new corporate partnerships that support collaborative research.

Conduct an inventory of industry partnerships across campus to better coordinate and grow work with employer partners across various industry areas.

Increase in community engaged research and creative activity

Increase inquiry-based learning opportunities within the community.

Launch SCSU’s first comprehensive campaign in alignment with funding priorities

Identify timeline for quiet phase and public launch.

Examine organizational structure, resources, and people available to accomplish the University’s fundraising objectives.

Develop school/college and division priorities and action plans to accomplish overall university philanthropic objectives.





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