

Final Report: Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022

Ouachita Baptist University Planning Committee – December 2017

The Final Report summarizes the work done by the Planning Committee from August 2016 to December 2017. It builds upon the Interim Report released in March and the Preliminary Final Report released in October.

The Board of Trustees is being asked to review and approve the Strategic Directions and related Goals. You are not being asked to approve the narrative in this Report; the purpose of the narrative is to give context. The narrative over time, associated with explaining and communicating the Strategic Directions and Goals, will be refined, adjusted and/or contextualized.

Context for Strategic Planning

Charge: The charge for our work: utilize a deeply collaborative approach to formulate a five-year plan with difference-making strategic directions. It is built upon the University's commitment to:

- current statements related to Vision, Mission, Values, and Learning Goals;
- the existing relationship with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention; and
- a primary identity as an undergraduate and residential institution.

Additionally, to sustain and strengthen these commitments, the University must:

- increase student enrollment;
- consider new undergraduate programs, and, potentially, graduate programs that are innovative and nontraditional; and
- grow philanthropic support.

Committee: The Planning Committee includes faculty Nancy Hardman, Bethany Hicks, and Mike Reynolds (and Terry Carter joining as new University Committee Chair); Deans Bryan McKinney and Jeff Root; staff Keldon Henley, Stan Poole, Nicole Porchia, and Jason Tolbert; student Haley Brown (replaced by new Senate President Hannah Bunch); and President Ben Sells serving as chair.

Collaboration: At Ouachita, we believe the wisdom of the Lord comes in part from listening carefully to those who care most deeply about the University. As a result, we provided many opportunities for constituencies to speak into the process, including the following.

- Inviting faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, friends, and Arkansas Baptists to respond to a survey – over 1,300 responded (with more than 5,000 pieces of data, including responses from 700 students)
- Setting aside time in the last five Board of Trustees meetings for their participation
- Devoting time during the August 2016, January 2017, and August 2017 faculty/staff gatherings for input and discussion
- Writing and widely circulating a 26-page Interim Report in March and Preliminary Final Report in October
- Providing opportunity for various Advisory Boards to give insights
- Holding meetings with faculty of every School and staff from all Departments

- Getting input from the University Committee, Deans' Council, and Administrative Council
- Asking 35 additional faculty/staff from across the campus to help develop Goals

Research: As described in the Interim Report, the Committee's work has been informed by research. For example, we:

- Evaluated the impact of the current strategic plan approved in 2011;
- Assembled a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative description of today's Ouachita;
- Considered the findings of Program Reviews;
- Described the current and emerging state of higher of education;
- Assessed the University's strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats; and
- Analyzed the 1,300 survey responses.

Strategic Directions

As a result of the current planning process, the Committee concluded that the Ouachita mission has never been more vibrant. We are a better University since 2011 by the grace of God; the efforts of faculty and staff; the partnerships with alumni, friends and Arkansas Baptists; and the involvement of our students. To that end, we celebrate recent developments such as:

- Achieving the highest graduation rate of any university in Arkansas;
- Being ranked the number one private university in the state;
- Accomplishing a 17.9% increase in first-time freshmen;
- Benefitting from the refinancing of long-term debt;
- Realizing an 11% growth in philanthropic gifts.

We believe that Ouachita is rising, going from strength to strength. Yet we must continue to be intentional about being better in deepening and expanding the impact of the Ouachita mission. It is why we are purposeful about program reviews, annual reports, and employee evaluations; intentional about accreditation processes; and focused on strategic planning. We must be especially determined to make our mission more viable financially. In doing so, we will take a strategic and significant step toward the greater fulfillment of our mission.

The approach for this plan is to define and describe a few areas where the greatest difference needs to be made to advance Ouachita in the next five years. Often, higher education strategic plans, in well-intentioned efforts to please multiple constituencies, are so broad that their impact is diminished. Therefore, the Planning Committee recommends six Strategic Directions:

- Sustain Christ-Centered Identity
- Advance Faculty/Staff Support
- Ensure Transformative Learning
- Grow Residential Enrollment
- Diversify Educational Offerings
- Strengthen Key Partnerships

Strategic Directions and Goals

Given the complex, competitive, and disruptive nature of the current higher education environment, we believe a five-year plan is the most prudent and productive approach. Furthermore, our approach is defined by the following features:

1. *Strategic Directions*: Three-word phrases intended to be meaningful and memorable as well as directional in nature. While there are more than six strategic directions for Ouachita to pursue, for now these six are most important in deepening and expanding our important mission.
2. *Goals*: One-sentence statements that give definition and focus to the Strategic Directions. The progress Ouachita is experiencing, in part, comes from focus. As a result, we purposefully limited this plan to four Goals per Strategic Direction. While there are other worthy and important goals, these Goals are most imperative.
3. *Priorities*: While Strategic Directions and related Goals provide focus for the next five years, Priorities provide focus for one year at a time. They are specific, measureable, and achievable. Priorities help translate Strategic Directions and Goals into action. Similar to the process that began in 2016-2017, Priorities will be established annually by working through existing university groups, shared broadly with the University community, and evaluated. They will be reset each year in light of the Strategic Directions and Goals, as well as in response to new challenges and opportunities.

Because our strategic planning approach is highly focused, it means some areas may not be referenced directly in the plan. However, many of the Strategic Directions, Goals, and Priorities have application to and affect multiple areas of the University. The balance of the Preliminary Final Report focuses on the Strategic Directions and Goals, including the context for each.

As we continue to move forward, individuals and departments will have responsibility for specific Goals and Priorities. There will be an annual reporting process similar to what I already do for the September Trustee meeting.

The next page provides an overview of the Strategic Directions and Goals followed by descriptions of each Strategic Direction and related Goals.

Summary of Strategic Directions and Goals
Strategic Plan for 2018-2022

Sustain Christ-Centered Identity	Advance Faculty/Staff Support	Ensure Transformative Learning	Grow Residential Enrollment	Diversify Educational Offerings	Strengthen Key Partnerships
Continue to employ highly qualified Christians who care deeply about students and the University's mission	Improve employee compensation and benefits to competitive levels in the region	Enhance teaching, learning, creative expression, and scholarship excellence across the University	Increase awareness of and better promote Ouachita among more prospective students and families	Accomplish substantial and viable enrollment growth through Ouachita Online	Enhance communication and engagement with alumni, supporting their efforts to serve faithfully in all areas
Foster in students an ability and inclination to integrate love of God and love of learning	Expand campus diversity while improving support for minority students, faculty, and staff	Elevate high-impact educational practices as a distinctive feature of the Ouachita student experience	Optimize existing degree programs and initiate new ones that demonstrate potential for sustainable growth	Research and develop financially sustainable graduate programs that enhance Ouachita's academic profile and extend its reach	Enlist alumni and friends to help students gain competitive internships, job opportunities and graduate school success
Strengthen existing efforts to develop students' servant leadership capabilities	Increase personnel where needed to accommodate strategic enrollment growth	Extend the impact of University Learning Goals through co-curricular and athletic programs	Address affordability through innovative financial aid strategies and practices	Pilot professional development courses and certificate programs for adult learners	Cultivate and realize a significant increase in mission-advancing philanthropic gifts
Serve the church by preparing more people called to vocational ministry	Strengthen resources for professional development to promote excellence and job satisfaction	Build upon rising retention and graduation rates to achieve exemplary levels	Develop and implement a campus master plan to guide strategic investments in physical facilities	Expand academic opportunities for high school students	Encourage mutually beneficial relationships to enhance quality of life on campus and in local and regional communities

Sustain Christ-Centered Identity

Context:

We believe that God works through the people who care deeply about Ouachita to advance His work in the world. In our Vision statement we say that Ouachita “seeks to foster a love of God and a love of learning”; in our Mission, we say that Ouachita is a “Christ-centered learning community”; and our first Value states that “we believe life is lived most abundantly in response to the love of God through Jesus Christ.” As a university founded and sustained by Arkansas Baptists, and as an extension of the Church, Ouachita has a purpose that is more relevant than ever before in light of the needs and hopes of this nation and the world.

Goals:

Continue to employ highly qualified Christians who care deeply about students and the University’s mission.

Students’ lives are enriched through relationships with faculty and staff who care deeply about Ouachita. We are purposeful to not only attract and hire exemplary faculty, staff, coaches, and administrators, but to support them so they can flourish in their work, whatever their role. At Ouachita, we believe *every* person contributes to the University’s mission and is involved in Christian ministry.

Foster in students an ability and inclination to integrate love of God and love of learning.

We love God and we love learning. We believe the Bible is true and that all truth is God’s truth, so we seek to discern and celebrate all that is true, good, and beautiful. Students can better serve the Kingdom and the common good if they understand that their love for God and their love for learning need not and should not be separated. We desire to help students value the journey of becoming life-long learners and life-long lovers of God.

Strengthen existing efforts to develop students’ servant leadership capabilities.

Leadership is the ability to influence positively how others think and act. As a Christian university, we are drawn to a servant leadership approach. It is important to influence others by following the example of Jesus Christ, who said He came to serve rather than to be served. Through our curricular, extra-curricular, athletics, and spiritual life programs, we believe there is an opportunity to more intentionally develop students’ servant leadership capabilities.

Serve the church by preparing more people called to vocational ministry.

The local church is foundational for worship, discipleship, service, and witness. As a university founded and supported by Arkansas Baptists, we believe there is a special responsibility to prepare more people called to vocational ministry. This is especially timely given national trends: a decrease in students preparing for ministry and an increase in retirements from ministry.

Advance Faculty/Staff Support

Context:

Our mission is realized through the service of Christian faculty and staff interacting with students. Alumni speak with deep appreciation for the investment our employees have made in their lives. We aspire to be a place where all faculty and staff genuinely identify with Ouachita's mission, serve as authentic role models for students, embrace academic freedom and professional responsibility, and thrive in our community. We also desire for these individuals to gain appropriate compensation and support, as well as satisfaction in their work. Yet faced with financial constraints, Ouachita's compensation and support has fallen significantly behind that of our peers. Renewed efforts must focus on determining appropriate compensation and staffing levels that balance affordability for students with fair workloads for our people. As we re-invest in faculty and staff, they will be better able to invest in students.

Goals:

Improve employee compensation and benefits to competitive levels in the region.

Faculty and staff are attracted to Ouachita's mission. We honor their contributions and enable them to be student-focused by providing competitive compensation in the context of our regional peer institutions. We must work to attract and retain exemplary colleagues by making consistent progress toward benchmarks for salary and benefits.

Expand campus diversity while improving support for minority students, faculty, and staff.

Diversity cultivates learning. It also reflects God's creativity, the increasing ethnicity of Southern Baptist life and the North American church, and the changing demographics of the areas where we recruit students. Retention and learning outcomes improve when students are taught, mentored, and led by people they identify with, including those who share their ethnicity. We are growing in the percentage of minority students, currently 15% of the student body. However, we have not experienced similar growth in attracting minority faculty and staff. Our efforts must be extended, including better supporting minority students.

Increase personnel where needed to accommodate strategic enrollment growth.

The critical word "strategic" reflects the following factors: growing undergraduate enrollment to capacity; starting graduate and other programs; adapting to changing enrollment and work patterns; incorporating new technology; responding to regulatory demands; stewarding resources we already control; and, maintaining affordability.

Strengthen resources for professional development to promote excellence and job satisfaction.

Like other organizations, Ouachita has seen employee development efforts lose ground and become fragmented in times of financial stress. We must develop and fund a holistic approach that provides career-long support for professional, personal, and spiritual growth, including more focused orientation for those new to Ouachita and Christian higher education.

Ensure Transformative Learning

Context:

Known for its outstanding faculty and staff, supportive campus community, and rich opportunities for co-curricular involvement, Ouachita has an opportunity to build on these strengths through a focus on transformative learning. By emphasizing excellence in our classrooms, research labs, and studios across campus and by adopting new strategies designed to advance student learning, we can strengthen the university's effectiveness in preparing students for the world beyond Ouachita.

Goals:

Enhance teaching, learning, creative expression, and scholarship excellence across the University.

A commitment to excellence in teaching, learning, scholarship, and creative expression requires ongoing efforts to keep programs and academic facilities up to date and adequately funded; to recognize and support the scholarly and creative work of faculty and students; and to foster a learning community that encourages and rewards excellence.

Elevate high-impact educational practices as a distinctive feature of the Ouachita student experience.

Many of our academic departments are already engaging students in high-impact educational practices, a set of widely-researched strategies with a proven record of producing strong learning gains for undergraduates. Examples include first-year seminars, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative projects, undergraduate research, global learning, service learning/community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses or projects. With greater coordination and resources, Ouachita can ensure that every graduate has multiple opportunities to participate in such powerful learning opportunities.

Extend the impact of University Learning Goals through co-curricular and athletic programs.

With strong participation rates in co-curricular programs and a high proportion of student-athletes, the University's overall educational impact is significantly shaped by the effectiveness of student learning outside the classroom. In keeping with the university's aims to educate the whole person, transformative learning occurs when learning outcomes are reinforced and applied throughout every aspect of the student experience.

Build upon rising retention and graduation rates to achieve exemplary levels.

The outcomes Ouachita seeks to promote are most fully accomplished when students stay the course and successfully progress to graduation. With a more explicit focus on transformative learning, student engagement is likely to increase, thereby promoting retention. Rising retention and graduation rates suggest that the university is accomplishing its mission by successfully preparing students to live, work, and serve their families and communities.

Grow Residential Enrollment

Context:

Ouachita's undergraduate program is highly residential, with 95% of students living on campus. The commitment to residential undergraduate education contributes to students' formative experiences and should not change. Enrollment has averaged 1,500 for twenty-five years but the University has the capacity to grow to 1,750 while maintaining its residential character. By growing to capacity, we will graduate more students shaped by our values and prepared for a life of intellectual and spiritual growth, meaningful work, and reasoned engagement with the world. Additionally, growing to capacity allows better stewardship of the physical campus and greater financial sustainability of the mission.

Goals:

Increase awareness of and better promote Ouachita among more prospective students and families.

Enrollment growth results from many factors, including programs, facilities, and scholarships. It also is a function of having a sufficient number of applicants. Comprehensive and digital marketing strategies that resonate with today's students and families are needed to attract more applicants who value the University's mission, especially in the high-growth state of Texas.

Optimize existing degree programs and initiate new ones that demonstrate potential for sustainable growth.

To grow from 1,500 to 1,750 students, it is most efficient to grow within existing degree areas and programs attractive to prospective students. At the same time, we must be alert to current degree programs that are in decline because of societal trends related to student demand and employment opportunities. It is also important to examine trends in undergraduate programs and analyze labor market projections to discover new programs with potential for growth that fit the mission and nature of the University. This assessment should include a thorough understanding of the required costs, faculty, staff, facilities, accreditation, and other factors.

Address affordability through innovative financial aid strategies and practices.

We will strengthen our ability to attract students who prefer Ouachita and who are a great match for the University. We will effectively address college affordability through innovative financial aid strategies as well as responsibly managing costs without diminishing the Ouachita education and experience.

Develop and implement a campus master plan to guide strategic investments in physical facilities.

Ouachita has 1.3 million square feet of space, generally enough to accommodate 1,750 students. However, the University needs a master plan for facilities and space to align with the strategic plan, to help define fundraising opportunities, and to address deferred maintenance.

Diversify Educational Offerings

Context:

Ouachita is a stronger undergraduate Christian liberal arts university than it was a decade ago, and that must not change. However, for missional, educational, and financial reasons, the University must diversify its educational offerings. Online, graduate, certificate, and other similar approaches are growing for several reasons: solving complex problems requires creative and additional education; gaining advanced knowledge and skills is important in a global knowledge-based economy; an increasing number of non-traditional students want to change or advance their careers; and freshmen are enrolling with increased amounts of college credit. Ouachita is late in this arena which brings challenges and opportunities. Responding to these trends extends the University's mission and reach, diversifies enrollment, and strengthens financial sustainability.

Goals:

Accomplish substantial and viable enrollment growth through Ouachita Online.

With two degree programs in place and the opportunity for new ones (e.g., interdisciplinary and degree-completion), Ouachita Online is primed for growth. Increased attention must be given to marketing and to staff support as enrollment grows. There also are opportunities for Winter and May terms, and for helping traditional students finish their degrees.

Research and develop financially sustainable graduate programs that enhance Ouachita's academic profile and extend its reach.

Because graduate programs will be new, rigorous research of education and labor trends, reviews of programs offered by peer institutions, and studies detailing anticipated expenses and revenues are necessary. Programs may be residential, online, off-site, or blended in format; they must strengthen the University and must not over-burden faculty and staff.

Pilot professional development courses and certificate programs for adult learners.

Initiating certificate programs in post-baccalaureate and non-degree professional development areas may be a way to begin or may be a result of establishing graduate programs at Ouachita. Such programs might allow us to be innovative in responding to opportunities and experimenting in new areas.

Expand academic opportunities for high school students.

These programs can be effective gateways to attract prospective students, allow children of alumni to experience Ouachita, provide employment opportunities for faculty and current students, and optimize the use of the campus during the summer.

Strengthen Key Partnerships

Context:

Ouachita's mission is fulfilled by alumni living out the University's vision and mission in their families, churches, careers, and communities. Alumni lives and careers provide the vivid testimony of the significance of the Ouachita experience. Parents of students, citizens of Arkadelphia and Clark County, and other friends play an important role in advancing our mission of shared purpose. We must invite and then serve alumni and friends as they partner in meaningful and relevant ways to advance Ouachita.

Goals:

Enhance communication and engagement with alumni, supporting their efforts to serve faithfully in all areas.

The University should strengthen communication in ways that recognize and match peoples' interests and preferences; invite their input and involvement; and share institutional progress while acknowledging challenges. Because Ouachita is intentional about its vision and mission in the lives of its students, it is a natural and important extension for the University to encourage alumni to continue growing in the love of God and love of learning, ongoing intellectual and spiritual growth, lives of meaningful work, and reasoned engagement with the world.

Enlist alumni and friends to help students gain competitive internships, job opportunities, and graduate school success.

Because of Ouachita's alumni and friends network, the University can make a greater commitment to—and become known for—opening doors to students for internships, jobs, and graduate school. In doing so, we strengthen both our ability to attract students to Ouachita and the impact of their experiences. As we further excel in this way, students and alumni are more likely to be grateful for and involved with their alma mater.

Cultivate and realize a significant increase in mission-advancing philanthropic gifts.

We endeavor to inspire alumni to pray for Ouachita, volunteer their time and talent, encourage high school students to apply, invite students into their networks, participate in university gatherings, and much more. We also endeavor to see increases in alumni participation rates and total fundraising activity by making demonstrable progress on the larger five-year strategic plan, engaging and listening to alumni and friends, sharing how their interests and passions converge with Ouachita's vision, and showing how their giving meaningfully advances the University.

Encourage mutually beneficial relationships to enhance the quality of life on campus and in local and regional communities.

We desire to work with Arkadelphia, Clark County, area churches, local schools, and other organizations to help our community realize its potential as a "great small college town" with a quality of life that attracts and serves students, faculty, and staff—and that benefits all who call this region their home.

Conclusion

When considered in the light of the needs and hopes of this nation and world, the Ouachita mission is more relevant than ever before. We can imagine graduating greater numbers of Ouachitonians who have been anchored in our Christ-centered identity:

- attracted by a greater diversity of undergraduate, graduate and other innovative programs;
- supported by committed faculty and staff;
- strengthened by partnerships with alumni and friends; and,
- transformed by their learning experiences

to serve the purposes of God in their generation through their families, churches, communities, and careers across the country and around the world.

All of us are stewards for a season of God's gift and grace known as Ouachita Baptist University. The Planning Committee is optimistic about the future and looks forward to the formal adoption of the Final Report. Let's make Ouachita better, not for our sake, but for the sake of those we are called to serve.

In all of our work, three passages from Proverbs (*The Message*) affirm our purpose and process: *Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run* (21:5); *Form your purpose by asking for counsel, then carry it out using all the help you can get* (20:18); and *We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it* (16:9).