



Academic Roadmap

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

June 2024



Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

On November 29, 2023, President Mark Welsh delivered a State of the University address following a Quick-Look Assessment of Texas A&M University. During this address, he outlined the university's future direction based on Vision 2030 – A Decade of Excellence. This vision is structured around four pillars: transformational education, discovery and innovation, impact on the state, nation, and world, and the university as a community (Appendix A). Vision 2030 is further supported by the Strategic Plan: 2020-2025 (Appendix B), which emphasizes six priorities:

1. Enhance transformational education and student success.
2. Elevate graduate and professional education.
3. Strengthen and harness our research enterprise.
4. Grow and support our world-class faculty.
5. Be the best place to live, work, and learn.
6. Engage Texas and beyond to enhance our impact.

CHARGE

President Welsh challenged the university to develop an academic roadmap grounded in Vision 2030 and the Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Provost Sams appointed Tim Scott, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, to lead this effort, working with faculty, staff, and student stakeholders. The committee's charge included:

1. Innovating to improve student success.
2. Studying trends and opportunities to drive curricular redesign.
3. Adapting pedagogy and research to address workforce needs.
4. Exploring interdisciplinary approaches for research and learning.
5. Examining different learning modalities and technologies to assist with retention and graduation.

The committee engaged in discussions to honor our land grant mission and elevate the university's national status. Advances in blended learning, technology, and distance learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are crucial elements of the next strategic plan. Emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence, along with the recruitment, promotion, and retention of faculty and staff, will be pivotal.

SUMMARY

The committee's recommendations focus on reaffirming and augmenting the university's vision and strategic priorities to inform the next academic strategic planning effort. These recommendations are organized into sections focusing on the undergraduate experience and graduate and professional students.

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Raymundo Arroyave, Ph.D., Professor, Material Science and Engineering, College of Engineering

Lisa Brown, Ed.D., Director, Bush School of Government and Public Service

David Cairns, Ph.D., Professor and Head, College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Geography

Danielle Dickey, Ed.D., Senior Associate Dean, Academic Affairs, Texas A&M Health Science Center

Sharon Dormire, Ph.D., RN, Professor, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Nursing Education, School of Nursing, Texas A&M Health Science Center

Alicia Dorsey, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Academic Effectiveness and Planning, and SACSCOC Accreditation, Office of the Provost

Tonya Driver, Ph.D., Director, Multicultural Services Department, Vice President for Student Affairs

Shelley Holliday, M.E.N., Associate Professor of Practice, School of Architecture

Nancy Hutchins, Ph.D., Clinical Assistant Professor, Mays Business School

Michael Johnson, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Interim Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs, Office of the Provost and Professor, College of Engineering

Andrew Klein, Ph.D., Professor and Director of Distance Education Programs, College of Arts & Sciences, Department of Geography, Faculty Senate, Speaker-Elect

Jenna Kurten, Ph.D., Assistant Dean for Student Success and Instructional Assistant Professor, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Blanca Lupiani, Ph.D., Professor and Interim Associate Dean for Research, School of Nursing, Texas A&M Health Science Center, Faculty Senate, Executive Committee Member at Large

COMMITTEE MEMBERS (continued)

Sarah Misemer, Ph.D., Professor and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, School of Performance Visualization & Fine Arts

Cristina Nader, Graduate Student Ph.D., Higher Education

Joseph Pettibon II, Vice President for Planning, Assessment and Strategy, Office of the President

Danny Pugh, Ph.D., Professor of the Practice, Education & Human Resources Development, School of Education and Human Development, Faculty Senate, Executive Committee Member at Large

Daniel Salazar, Undergraduate Student, Psychology, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences

Timothy P. Scott, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Professor, Biology, College of Arts & Sciences

Michelle Taylor-Robinson, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education, Bush School of Government and Public Service, Professor, Political Science

Debbie Thomas, Ph.D., Executive Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, TAMUG and Associate Provost of TAMU, Professor, Geological Oceanography

Fuhui Tong, Ph.D., Interim Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate and Professional School, Professor, Educational Psychology, School of Education & Human Development

Desiree Wilson, MBA, Executive Director, Career Center, Division of Vice President for Student Affairs

C.J. Woods, Ph.D. Associate Vice President and Chief of Staff, Division of Academic Affairs

X. Ben Wu, Ph.D., Professor, Ecology & Conservation Biology and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

UNDERGRADUATE FOCUS

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONS TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025

Texas A&M University will continue to embrace students from all corners of our state and foster the rich tapestry of culture and backgrounds found in high school graduates across Texas. Our intensive and inclusive recruitment programs and admissions pathways should focus on reaching high school students who, in essence, look like Texas - a broad, diverse state with a rich treasure of cultures and ethnicities. We need to ensure that we provide sufficient financial support to honor our pledge to provide an accessible Texas A&M education to all. And we must make certain that prospective students, their families, and their high school teachers and counselors have a clear understanding of our strong academic expectations.

~ Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025

To further pathways for admissions, the Academic Roadmap

Committee Recommendations are:

- Utilize and market the reputation of the university, students, rich history of traditions, core values, and Aggie Network to attract new students to meet our land-grant mission and ensure students admitted to the university ultimately matriculate, enroll, and graduate from TAMU.
- Develop a mechanism that could deliver Texas A&M core curriculum classes remotely to rural areas of the State. This may include our extension presence in each county in partnership with technology located at public libraries.
- Create an interactive AI Hologram Tour Guide for the TAMU Prospective Student Center.
- Offer remote academic counseling to high school sophomores and freshmen students across Texas focusing on:

Academic Preparation

- Offer personalized academic advising to help high school students select courses that align with Texas A&M’s admission requirements and the course requirements for specific degrees.

Extracurricular Involvement

- Offer creative messaging to encourage students to actively engage in the Aggie Core Values of Leadership and Selfless Service by developing leadership skills and engaging in community service.

Encourage Leadership Roles

- Urge students to take on leadership positions in clubs, sports, and community service.
- Highlight the importance of sustained involvement in extracurricular activities.

Community Service and Volunteering

- Track volunteer hours and encourage reflection on these and other impactful experiences in application essays.
- Provide information on the holistic review process used by Texas A&M University.

Increase First-Year Retention to 95%

Whether our first-year students have taken dual-credit classes in high school, transferred from a two-year institution, or been readmitted after spending time away from college, every student will face a time of transition. Supporting first-year students during those pivotal months can build a solid academic foundation for success and graduation as we welcome them into the Aggie family and our Texas A&M community.

~ *Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025*

To increase retention, the Academic Roadmap Committee’s recommendations are:

- Elevate and highlight a broad range of campus programs, events, and student-led opportunities to improve students’ awareness around campus orientation, increase their connection with the campus through academic and social engagement to increase their sense of belonging, and help them develop marketable skills.
- Create specialized courses that would allow the workforce to upskill to stay competitive and utilize the Aggie connection on their resumes.
- Continue to invest in first-generation, low-income students, and veterans through dedicated programs like the Routh First-Generation Center, Regents’ Scholars, Century Scholars, and the Veterans Resource Center.
- Offer seminars focused on skills essential for college success, such as time management, study strategies, and critical thinking, and integrate these seminars with general education requirements.
- Develop comprehensive orientation programs that extend beyond the first week, covering academic resources, social opportunities, and ways to get involved in campus life
- Foster opportunities for students to build meaningful professional relationships with faculty to engage in research, discuss post-graduation opportunities, or learn of the latest research findings.
- Continue to collect, analyze, and act on feedback from first-year students through surveys, focus groups, and other methods to improve programs and services.
- Establish peer mentoring programs where upperclassmen mentor first-year students to provide academic, social, and emotional support.
- Enhance course redesign in traditional face-to-face instruction and invest in Early Alert Systems that identify at-risk students early, based on academic performance, attendance, and/or course engagement and provide early intervention.

Increase Graduation Rates

65% 4-year Graduation Rate

85% 6-year Graduation Rate

We believe “Once an Aggie, always an Aggie,” and we further believe, “Once an Aggie, then a graduate.” Texas A&M offers a wealth of curricular and co-curricular support and enrichment programs, but we must routinely review and strategically expand these services to continue raising graduation rates across all student groups. While new technologies will provide dashboards to monitor academic progress and well-being, we cannot lose sight of the value of personally engaging with our students about their experiences on campus. Building those relationships helps faculty and staff intervene quickly when students need help staying on track to complete their degrees.

~ Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025

To increase graduation rates, the Academic Roadmap Committee’s

Recommendations are:

- Strengthen and grow academic advising to ensure advising is timely, consistent, personalized, and holistic.
- Leverage the use of university-provided Learning Management Systems to reduce overall educational costs and discourage the use of costly third-party tools passed onto students.
- Focus on growing and refining formal and informal opportunities (co-curricular involvement, faculty and staff engagement, and peer group social interactions) for holistic engagement and integration of campus experiences.
- Commit to developing an online completion degree for the many stop- outs across the state of Texas by broadening online completion strategies.
- Use campus mentoring platform(s) to connect students and increase their sense of belonging throughout their time at TAMU.
 - Establish peer mentoring programs where upperclassmen mentor first-year students.
 - Train peer mentors to provide academic, social, and emotional support.

- Include sessions that help students build connections with peers and faculty.
- Create online communities for parents and families that have been traditionally underrepresented at TAMU – English as a second language (ESL), first generation, etc. – with discussion boards, monthly live zoom meetings, hearing common concerns, and providing A&M resources.
- Ensure that students have regular access to knowledgeable and supportive academic advisors.
- Implement proactive advising models where advisors reach out to students periodically to check on their progress.
- Provide accessible mental health services, including counseling, workshops, and wellness programs.
- Promote a campus culture that prioritizes mental health and reduces stigma.
- Use data analytics to identify patterns and predictors of student success and attrition.
- Regularly review retention data to inform policy and practice.

Foster Lifelong Success

Aggies are lifelong learners, and we firmly believe that education from Texas A&M does not end with a diploma. We support long-term professional development and successful careers for graduates, and doing so means helping students develop the ability to gain and evaluate new information and synthesize it to solve complex problems.

~ Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025

To foster a culture of lifelong success, the Academic Roadmap Committee’s recommendations are:

- Create a sustainable funding model to support the growth of interdisciplinary programs that provide students unique opportunities to develop a broad understanding of complex problems and potential solutions and support the knowledge and skills needed for the future workforce.
- Match students with High Impact Practices (HIPs) that are aligned with

their strengths and interests, these include:

- Leveraging research opportunities unique to a comprehensive research institution, as well as other high-impact practices (capstones, collaborative learning, internships, study abroad, etc.),
- Work across the state and nation to identify real-world problems in business and society and allow teams of students to work on them as part of HIPs
- Valuing and supporting faculty roles in supporting HIPs through promotion, tenure, and pay.
- Increase the number of Aggies that receive national fellowships and other prestigious awards.
- Implement guidelines and procedures for the creation of badges or micro-credentials designed to officially document students' experiences and their development of marketable skills.
- Utilize the former student network and other constituent groups to provide student mentoring to increase career readiness and professionalism.
- Embed opportunities in majors (e.g., separate courses, topics woven into existing courses) to help students better understand and articulate skills and competencies gained across courses and other academic or co-curricular experiences to increase job placement.
- Facilitate management of high-quality academic content, including interdisciplinary programs, that meet the needs of the state and the world, creation of sustainable funding models, development and management of relevant degree programs, incentives for training grants, and Academic Program Review.
- Ensure the development and continuous improvement of academic programs designed to prepare students to meet the needs of the state and the world.

ELEVATING OUR GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL FOCUS

DEVELOP A GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

Elevating Texas A&M's existing Office of Graduate and Professional Studies to a graduate school demonstrates a strong commitment to graduate education while enhancing our external visibility. The new graduate school will provide central financial and administrative support to improve academic programs, create new programs that reflect the increasingly multidisciplinary nature of scholarship, enhance student success, and attract students of all backgrounds to pursue advanced degrees.

~ Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025

To be a consistently competitive and nationally recognized Graduate and Professional School, Texas A&M must:

- Grow opportunities to advance graduate research and discovery.
- Leverage research opportunities unique to a comprehensive research institution, as well as other high-impact practices (capstones, collaborative learning, internships, study abroad, etc.).
- Establish competitive assistantships and benefits to attract and retain the best graduate students.
- Increase campus-wide minimums for graduate stipends and require consistency within colleges.
- Encourage and financially support graduate research and scholarship at national conferences.
- Facilitate faculty securing training grants focused on enhancing innovation and the quality of academic programs offered across the university.
- Develop robust online and virtual course instruction to expand the availability of degree programs, graduate certificates and courses offered online to increase access to working professionals across the state and nation by eliminating the need to be physically located in College Station.
- Ensure the quality of courses offered and provide the highest quality educational experience for all students, regardless of mode of delivery.
- Facilitate students pursuing an academic credential (such as a degree) part-time to meet competing demands on their time and to grow a well-educated workforce.

Build a Culture of Excellence in Advising, Mentoring, and Professional Development.

Texas A&M’s commitment to providing an effective graduate education requires a holistic focus on each student’s personal well-being and professional success. We must prepare students for a wide range of career options by mentoring and advising them for long-term success. It is also important to ensure our university is a place where all students feel welcomed and respected.

~ *Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025*

To improve the graduate student experience, the Academic Roadmap Committee recommendations are:

- Commit to resources for better faculty advising training and ensure consistency across the graduate student journey (general entry, committee selection, proposal development, scheduling examinations, etc.).
- Create a standardized graduate student handbook with graduate advising resources maintained in a central location and/or programs should maintain comprehensive graduate handbooks linking to centralized resources.
- Commit to improving faculty retention efforts to ensure that world- class faculty are retained at the university so that the next generation of leaders in academia, industry, and research receive the best training possible.
- Integrate effective mentoring into faculty evaluations and Promotion and Tenure criteria.
- Provide heightened awareness and access to mental wellness professionals and resources to support graduate students.

- Increase graduate students' knowledge and use of career services as a resource to document learned skills and prepare for the competitive job market.
- Ensure graduate programs explore career tracks to focus on developing adequate skills for graduate students who may seek faculty careers at non-research-intensive universities (mainly teaching/pedagogy) as well as those who choose employment outside of academia, (e.g., commercial, governmental, NGO sectors).

Cultivate Academic Innovation in Graduate and Professional Programs

Just as our university has evolved and embraced new technologies and learning programs, our graduate and professional programs should also enjoy the support and momentum necessary to adopt new information technologies and enhance learning experiences. Doing so helps meet increasing demand for our programs and positions learners to reach their personal and career potential across a lifetime. Texas A&M will utilize technology to ensure that graduate and professional students can benefit from and enjoy the Aggie experience, whether or not they are physically on campus.

~ Roadmap to Excellence, Strategic Plan 2020-2025

To support academic innovation, the Academic Roadmap Committee's recommendations are:

- Expand courses offered virtually in addition to traditional face-to-face instruction.
- Consider more part-time offerings based on workforce needs and the location of the populations served.
- Implement guidelines and procedures for the creation of badges or micro-credentials designed to officially document students' experiences and their development of marketable skills.
- Elevate and better align certificate programs as students seek to broaden their credentials for professional advancement.
- Expand the tuition assistance program to include certificate programs for post-bachelor educational advancement.

**Certain campus partners were highlighted as exemplary in meeting the needs of our graduate students, including the University Libraries and the University Writing Center.*

APPENDIX A

Decade of Excellence 2030

Transformational Education

- Providing students with premier programs and transformative experiences inside and outside the classroom remains our highest priority to prepare each individual for roles of responsibility in service to society.
- Meld technological advances with sound pedagogy to transform the university, while remaining committed to accessibility.
- Serving the population of Texas will enrich the learning environment for all.
- We will excel at developing graduates with creative and innovative approaches to solve problems at every scale, while preserving our traditions and core values.
- Target special populations like first-generation students, Veterans, and stop-outs. Consider the creation of non-traditional degrees delivered via different modalities for certificates, degrees, and continuing education.
- Utilize technological advancements to deliver courses in classrooms and online. Use technology to provide wider access to education, while preserving a highly personal educational experience.
- Focus on relevant job skills for our graduates with the future in mind. Enhance the educational value to our graduates while remaining affordable and accessible.
- Our curriculum must be globally infused, involve “hands-on” research and professional training, and other practices that promote deep learning and the prepare our students to solve real world problems.

Referenced from [Decade of Excellence Strategic Plan 2020-2025](#)

APPENDIX B

Strategic Plan 2020-2025 Undergraduate Focus

Develop Pathways for Successful Admissions

- Enhance outreach to support prospective high school students and those enrolled at community colleges.
- Increase financial aid scholarships through philanthropy.
- Work collaboratively with counselors and instructors in high schools and community colleges to help them understand pathways to admissions, and especially with those serving early-college high schools.

Increase First-Year Retention to 95%

- Create a university-wide first year experience that promotes a sense of belonging for all new students and connects them to academic and student support services, peer mentors, and co-curricular opportunities.
- Implement changes in curricular policies to help students identify the best-fit major as soon as possible.
- Support student engagement and proven well-being activities to increase first-year retention and close gaps that exist for historically underserved populations, such as first generation or low-income students.
- Enhance and expand professional development for staff and faculty to support all students.

Increase Graduation Rates: 65% 4-year Graduation Rate, 85% 6-year Graduation Rate

- Enhance engagement with students to prevent enrollment interruptions.
- Leverage ongoing academic and engagement programs such as the Math Learning Center, First-Generation Center, Early Alert System, a one-stop help desk, and student spaces to gather, engage, and support each other.
- Facilitate course redesign to bolster student success, improved learning, and Open Education Resources where possible.
- Eliminate disparities in retention and graduation rates.

Foster Lifelong Success

- Support student engagement in high-impact experiences (honors programs, interdisciplinary courses, international experiences, internships, living-learning communities, student employment, student leadership, student organizations, and undergraduate research).
- Better integration of academic and co-curricular learning experiences to apply leadership and personal development in their academic field.
- Elevate Career Center programming to improve placement and mobility metrics.

Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Graduate and Professional Focus

Develop a globally recognized Graduate and Professional School

- Strategically enhance our graduate and professional programs and elevate their visibility and prominence nationally and internationally.
- Attract, develop, support, and graduate outstanding graduate students.
- Commit to providing multi-year competitive funding for full-time doctoral students, including increasing training grants and philanthropy.
- Improve interdisciplinary graduate and professional education.
- Deepen engagement with graduate and professional alumni.
- Expand professional master's programs, including integrative bachelor's and master's degrees.

Build a Culture of Excellence in Advising, Mentoring, and Professional Development

- Expand offerings of graduate student professional development programming to enhance career success.
- Equip faculty and staff to better advise, mentor and teach graduate students and promote their professional growth.
- Provide a positive environment for all graduate students, faculty, and staff so students can achieve their full potential.
- Improve career guidance and placement resources for graduate and professional students.

Cultivate Academic Innovation in Graduate and Professional Programs

- Provide great transparency of graduate and professional student data and career outcomes to foster continuous improvement and greater transparency.
- Develop infrastructure and learner support services to ensure a high-quality digital learning environment and foster community.
- Establish innovative credentialing opportunities for professional advancement for traditional students and through continuing education.
- Create an educational advancement program and policies to provide opportunities for employees to achieve additional education.
- Enhance professional and personal development programs for lifelong learners, including a focus on leadership.