Framing Our Future

Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's School of Professional Studies

BACKGROUND

The School of Professional Studies (SPS) is dedicated to shaping the future of higher education and professional development by cultivating innovative, cutting-edge, and market-relevant programming for adult learners and corporate partners, all while upholding Wake Forest University's (WFU) commitment to academic excellence and liberal learning. At the core of our mission is a commitment to empowering individuals with the knowledge, curiosity, and skills necessary to thrive in an ever-evolving global landscape. Through a collaborative, dynamic approach, we aim to foster an environment that not only imparts specialized expertise but also promotes leadership, adaptability, and a passion for lifelong learning. We integrate a robust focus on ethics and leadership across all our degree programs, ensuring that our learners are equipped with both specialized skills and the moral framework necessary to lead with integrity. Our curriculum challenges students with profound inquiries fundamental to a liberal arts education, nurturing intellectual curiosity, innovative thinking, and the capacity for in-depth analysis that go beyond specific professions. We are rooted in our commitment to accessibility, academic excellence, flexibility, market orientation, and financial strength. SPS is positioned to align with WFU's broader aspirations to be a catalyst for good in society, both at an individual and societal level, by providing educational opportunities that transcend traditional boundaries and are responsive to the changing needs of today's learners. By embracing emerging trends in technology, pedagogy, and industry demands, we strive to create a learning ecosystem that equips our learners with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to navigate the complexities of their chosen fields and lead effectively. Through collaborative partnerships, cutting-edge curriculum design, state-of-the-art knowledge, and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we seek to be at the forefront of shaping the future workforce, thereby extending the commitments of the University to embody Pro Humanitate in all that we do. Rooted in Wake Forest University's rich history as a liberal arts institution, we strive to cultivate well-rounded individuals who can navigate complex challenges and drive meaningful change in their fields and communities.

At the heart of our strategic plan is a high-level alignment with the thematic goals outlined in the broader university strategic framework (USF), "Framing the Future." Thematic Goal 1, centered on fostering a vibrant learning community, is echoed in our commitment to accessibility and inclusive learning environments for working adults. Through our ongoing work and new strategic initiatives, we aim to create an academic environment that not only provides quality education but also ensures that it is accessible and welcoming to individuals from diverse

backgrounds. This effort aims to establish SPS as a dynamic hub that responds to the evolving needs of working professionals in an online learning environment. Furthermore, our dedication to academic quality and market relevance aligns seamlessly with Thematic Goals 1, 2 and 3. To catalyze innovation and collaboration, we will serve as a platform that fosters partnerships across all WFU schools as well as with industry experts and our surrounding communities. This interdisciplinary and interconnected approach to education encourages the exchange of ideas and expertise across and beyond academic disciplines, ultimately enriching the educational experience and contributing to the university's overarching goal of excellence and relevance in all aspects of its endeavors. And while research is not a part of the mission of SPS, our faculty are positioned to make meaningful contributions to the future of their respective professions as scholar practitioners. As we navigate this strategic journey, our values and principles guide us toward a future where education is not only a means to personal success but also a force for positive change in the world.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

In September 2023, SPS initiated the process of developing a strategic framework by convening the SPS team and key stakeholders to review the USF and discuss early impressions and implications for SPS. In addition to holding multiple in-person discussions, written input was solicited from staff, faculty, students and program advisory board members.

All stakeholders agreed that ongoing SPS commitments are well aligned with the thematic goals and strategic aims of the USF. The feedback from SPS stakeholders has been used to identify proposed initiatives to amplify our support of the strategic framework. SPS will embark on a multifaceted approach to reinforce ongoing efforts and initiate innovative projects as discussed below.

SPS STRATEGIC APPROACH

Thematic Goal 1: Community of Learning

SPS is poised to make significant strides in fulfilling its commitment to supporting accessible and inclusive learning environments for working adults through several ongoing and new initiatives. SPS faculty are teacher-scholars who are practitioners making contributions to their fields, well-informed in relevant industry trends, and with deep understanding of pedagogical approaches to educate adult learners. We will continue to promote excellence in teaching reflective of marketplace best practices and contemporary conceptual knowledge to ensure faculty remain at the forefront of educational advancements. This will include promoting a faculty development program to enhance expertise in inclusive pedagogy and online learning so that our instructional design reflects the diverse needs of our student body. We aspire to have a faculty diverse in their backgrounds, experiences and professional affiliations. In collaboration

with the Office of Online Education, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion our goal is to advance a learning community where faculty can share best practices and collaborate on enhancing inclusive teaching methodologies. These efforts align closely with the university's strategic aim of fostering a vibrant learning community (Strategic Aim 1.1), ensuring that our educational programs remain dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of adult learners.

Simultaneously, our commitment to value-based tuition pricing and efficient program delivery aims to make a quality education more attainable for working adults, directly contributing to the university's overarching goal of ensuring affordability and accessibility (Strategic Aim 1.1). SPS will continue to conduct analyses of existing tuition structures and efficient program delivery mechanisms to identify opportunities for enhancement. SPS will also sustain efficiency measures in program administration and identify ways to leverage technology for streamlined processes without compromising academic quality. We also strive for accessibility through our admissions criteria and process, taking an applicant's holistic academic and professional experience into consideration as well as how our programs align with their professional goals.

We are also excited to support a new project focused on fostering a cohesive online learner community. This comprehensive approach, guided by Swarbick's Eight Dimensions of Wellness model, seeks to ensure that online students receive personalized and scalable support that transcends individual academic programs, creating a community reflective of the caring ethos inherent to Wake Forest. By leveraging technology and collaborating with the Office of Online Education, Campus Life, and other WFU schools and administrative units to optimize the power of the online learner network, we hope to promote a compelling community of online learners, reflective of Wake Forest's mission and values and emphasizing the whole student experience (Strategic Aim 1.1).

Additionally, SPS will take a leadership role in university planning efforts to enhance lifelong learning support for alumni, collaborating with other schools, Alumni Engagement, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, and the Office of Personal and Career Development. This includes developing a sustainable model for cross-school enrollments and other innovative pathways to support the personal and professional development of Wake Forest University students and alumni (Strategic Aim 1.1) for implementation across the University.

SPS will continue to ensure our programs prepare graduates for the future of work. Each SPS program requires an experiential practicum, providing immersive learning experiences to students that can address issues of societal importance. Our academic directors have collaborated to formulate a shared learning philosophy for experiential practicum courses, fostering a consistent approach across programs to prepare graduates to lead in the workforce (Strategic Aims 1.2 and 2.1). We will aim to maximize resources available through the newly established experiential learning center to support this work (Strategic Aim 1.2). To maximize the impact of

our experiential learning initiatives, we will establish a comprehensive database to track and assess the community impact of practicums, contributing to the overarching goal of producing graduates ready to make meaningful contributions in their professions, ensuring that our programs align with the university's goal of being a catalyst for good in society, in support of similar University-wide efforts. Moreover, SPS recognizes the significance of mentorship and will leverage program advisory board members and other thought leaders as mentors to its students. This mentorship approach resonates with the university's strategic goal of fostering impactful, experiential learning experiences (Strategic Aim 1.2).

Collaboration will be a cornerstone of our strategy, as we will continue to partner with other WFU schools to drive programmatic innovation and agility with a market orientation, aligning our strategic direction with the university's commitment to excellence and relevance (Strategic Aim 1.1). SPS partners with industry experts to develop and deliver credit and non-credit programs so that they are based on a strong academic foundation and infused with current and future industry trends. SPS will help serve as a cross-school platform to bridge programmatic boundaries and infuse an interdisciplinary, market-oriented approach into program development that addresses the evolving needs of the workforce.

SPS will continue to integrate equity, ethical leadership, and digital acumen as thematic focuses across all curricula (Strategic Aims 1.2 and 1.3). Our rigorous learning assessment process will be applied to identify and address any gaps, ensuring that our programs reflect the highest standards of ethical leadership and digital proficiency as well as globally focused initiatives, such as sustainability. We will also collaborate with relevant University partners (such as the Program for Leadership and Character) to support the integration of impactful themes in our program curriculu. As part of this commitment, we will refine curricula as needed to align with a new university-wide leadership development model, applying it consistently across programs, including practicum courses. This approach not only ensures purpose in community impact but also contributes to the university's strategic goal of nurturing well-rounded, ethically responsible leaders prepared for the challenges of the modern workforce.

Initial Actions Steps:
- Co-lead university planning efforts with other University partners (other schools, Alumni Engagement, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, and the Office of Personal and Career Development) to enhance lifelong learning support to alumni.
- In collaboration with the Office of Online Education, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and other Schools, launch a faculty development program focusing on inclusive pedagogy and online learning for adults for SPS faculty.
- In collaboration with other University partners, including the Office of Online Education and Campus Life, launch a cohesive online learner community that supports the whole student experience.

- Review and revise, as needed, SPS curriculum and program portfolio to ensure ethical leadership, digital acumen, and program-specific areas of academic distinction.

Thematic Goal 2: Community of Inquiry

While the mission of SPS is not research-focused, we are dedicated to amplifying the impact of the university's underline scholarly expertise in its engagement with learners and external partners. As we continue to expand our academic portfolio, we will give priority to the development of new credit and non-credit programmatic offerings that leverage the university's areas of scholarly distinction (including the study of sustainability, which has been incorporated in several of our existing programs). Faculty experts from across the university will be invited to share their insights, enriching the learning experience and supporting experiential learning opportunities in these core areas of strength. This holistic approach ensures that SPS not only delivers market-focused programs but also actively contributes to advancing the university's scholarly mission in collaboration with its diverse academic community (Thematic Goal 2).

Initial Actions Steps:
- Collaborate with other academic units to pursue jointly developed programs that celebrate the research expertise of our full-time faculty, and support the Deans Council's efforts for the development of a cross-school program collaboration framework to facilitate the agile development of new educational offerings.

Thematic Goal 3: Community of Partnerships

To further deepen connections with communities, SPS will take a shared approach in developing an effective partnership management strategy, including the creation of a program advisory board member dashboard that provides real-time updates on demographics, diversity, regional impact, and industry reach (Strategic Aims 3.1 and 3.2). This dashboard will serve as a crucial tool in establishing a sustainable approach for engaging key community leaders in the stewardship of programs. Additionally, SPS will provide insights from our experience to support the formulation of a university-wide infrastructure for effective community partnerships, creating a seamless and integrated approach that supports the university's commitment to community engagement and regional impact (Strategic Aim 3.2).

SPS will continue to conduct regular market scans in order to stay abreast of shifting community talent needs and opportunities in alignment with the established university partnership framework. Through the analysis of workforce trends and identification of emerging talent needs in our region (Southeastern USA), SPS ensures that its program portfolio remains responsive to the evolving economic development of our communities, defined by those identified by the university (Strategic Aim 3.3). This commitment dovetails with the university's broader goal of societal engagement and community collaboration, as outlined in the strategic framework.

Through collaboration with internal and external partners, including business, non-profit, civic, K-12, and higher educational organizations, SPS will also actively lead and support partnerships in Charlotte and beyond (Strategic Aim 3.3), contributing SPS's expertise and resources to broader university efforts. SPS will continue to collaborate with university partners to help manage key relationships within the university enterprise, particularly with Atrium/Advocate Health, ensuring that degree, certificate, and executive education offerings align with their evolving talent needs (Strategic Aim 3.3). SPS continues work to expand its relationship with Atrium/Advocate Health to support enterprise talent development as well as the implementation of a National Center for Clinical Trials. We will continue to collaborate with Atrium partners to envision how we can share educational and work space in the Levine Center for Education, while identifying pathways for Atrium/Advocate Health teammates to enroll in relevant SPS programs, such as the master's degree programs in health informatics and health administration. Through these strategic actions, SPS is positioned to support the University as a proactive and collaborative force in regional talent development and community enrichment.

Initial Actions Steps:
- Create a program advisory board member dashboard to monitor demographics, diversity, regional impact, and industry reach of external program advisors.
- In collaboration with other university partners, support the formulation of a university-wide infrastructure for effective community partnerships, including in Charlotte and beyond.
- In collaboration with our other schools and the College, expand opportunities to partner with Atrium/Advocate Health through credit and non-credit program pathways.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Continuous improvement is a core value of SPS and innate to our internal processes and ongoing work. To assess the effectiveness of the initiatives outlined above, SPS will focus on leveraging existing outcome indicators, whenever possible, to assess how we are implementing the framework and whether our actions are having the intended impacts. This process will include evaluating student outcomes, including program completion, learning achievements, and employment outcomes (of course, new key performance indicators may be identified as we complete the above initiatives). To ensure equity in our practices, assessments will also include a detailed study of student outcomes by various identity groups. In addition, assessment activities will involve determining the impact of our activities on our broader communities. Our framework, subject to periodic evaluations of achievements and adherence to established timelines and goals, will evolve as a dynamic document. Informed by thorough reports and assessment data, decision-making will strategically allocate resources to support these initiatives, ensuring their success. This iterative approach, with engagement from key SPS stakeholders (e.g., staff, faculty, students, alumni, advisory board members), aligns with the university's dedication to excellence and continuous improvement.

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Through these comprehensive initiatives, SPS is poised to contribute significantly to the fulfillment of Wake Forest University's strategic goals and objectives, further establishing itself as a dynamic force in higher education.