

**WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY**



**2026-27** Action Plan  
Spotlights



## ***Message from the President***

When I started a listening tour in Fall 2024, during my first year as president of WCU, I had no idea that what would emerge from that process would become something unique in higher education strategic planning. I heard from students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members, and supporters about what makes WCU great, as well as what we could strive for.

One year ago, those conversations became the foundation for our Action Plan, built on a simple belief that the best ideas for West Chester University are found in the creativity, experience, and energy of our students, faculty, and staff.

Over the past year, you proved that to be true.

You embraced our three-part challenge to **Be Better, Think Bigger, and Foster Moments** in our pursuit of getting to awesome, together. You looked at how we work, questioned assumptions, identified opportunities to better serve our students, and brought forward ideas, big and small, for making that happen.

That is what makes this plan different from a traditional strategic plan. It was not created by a small group behind closed doors and handed to the University community. It was built by all of us through listening, conversation, collaboration, and a willingness to try something new.

We received 167 proposals from across campus. More than 200 students, faculty, and staff gathered in May for our inaugural Action Plan Days to review and rate those ideas for their alignment with our mission, their potential to advance the University, and their urgency.

Over the summer, the deans and members of my cabinet took a deeper look at which ideas could move forward this year and which may require more time or resources. This publication highlights just a few of the proposals now moving into action, while the Action Plan website ([wcupa.edu/actionplan](http://wcupa.edu/actionplan)) provides a broader view of the work underway.

Now comes the most important part: putting those ideas into action. Some will create visible change quickly. Others will take time and evolve as we learn. That is exactly how this should work, because getting to awesome is not about perfection. It is about progress.

Thank you for your ideas, your energy, and your commitment to WCU.



Laurie Bernotsky, D.Phil.  
President

# 3-D

## *Action Plan*

In Fall 2025, we introduced an unconventional approach to strategic planning: a **3-D Action Plan**. The model grew directly from the themes that emerged during the University’s listening tour and was designed to reflect how our priorities connect rather than treating them as separate pieces of work.



At the top of the pyramid is **Experiential Learning**. It emerged as one of the strongest themes from the listening process, and it captures an important aspiration for **WCU: to become Pennsylvania’s top public university where every student, regardless of major or financial circumstances, has access to meaningful experiential learning and graduates ready for the real world.**

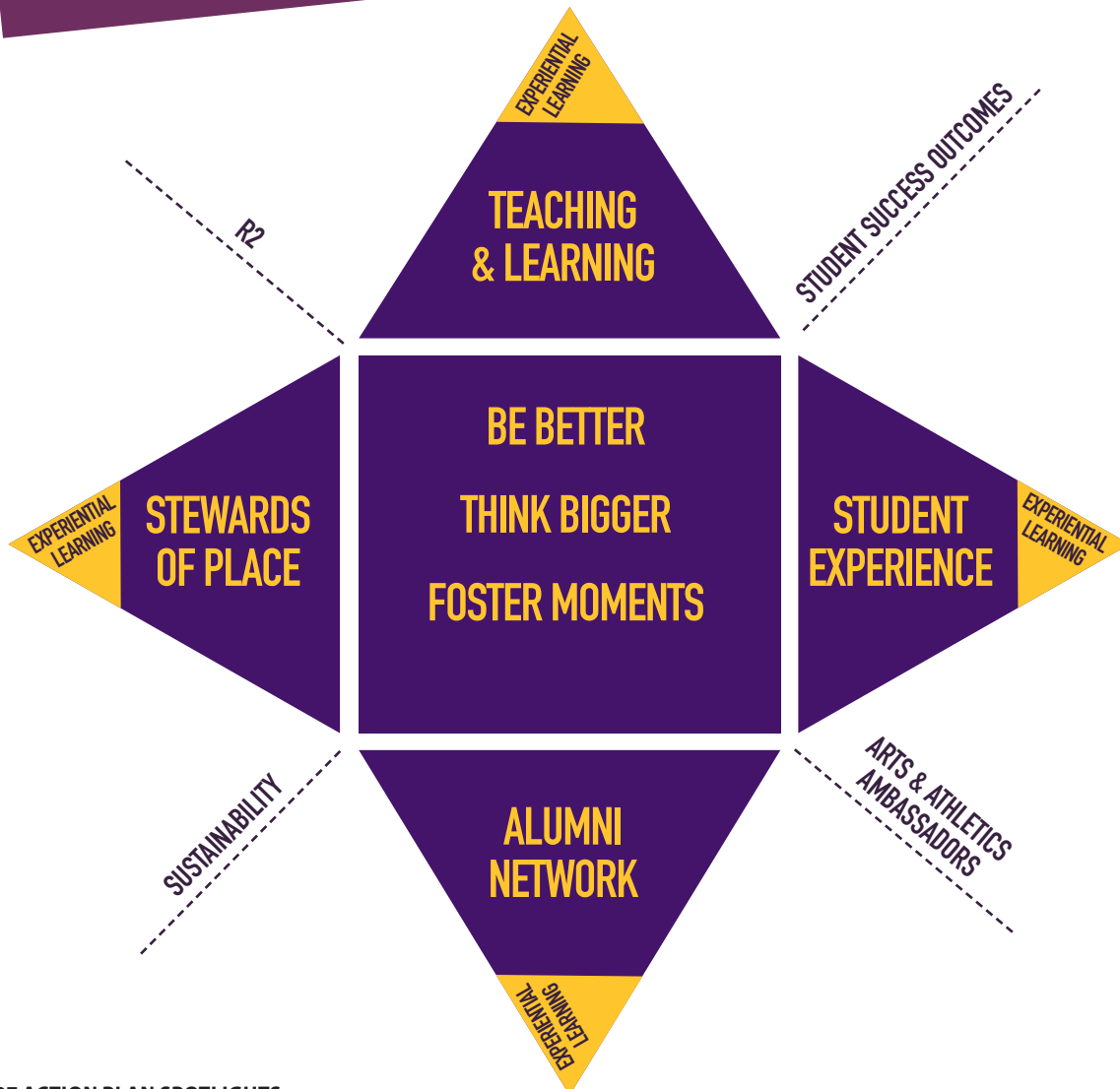


Internships, student teaching, clinical experiences, practica, service learning, leadership roles, research, study abroad, entrepreneurial experiences, and meaningful work all give students opportunities to put knowledge into action. Yet access to those experiences is not always equitable. Expanding that access is one of the ways WCU can move from almost awesome to awesome.



## So how did the themes from the listening tour become a 3-D Action Plan?

The entire model is grounded in WCU's mission and our connection to the communities we serve. The Action Plan begins with three drivers that define how we will move from almost awesome to awesome: Be Better, Think Bigger, and Foster Moments. From there, the priorities that emerged through the listening tour take shape as the four faces of the pyramid, with additional themes highlighted at the vertices where those priorities intersect.



### *Three Drivers:*

## How We Get to Awesome

The faces are supported by three drivers that define how we approach the work.



#### **Be Better**

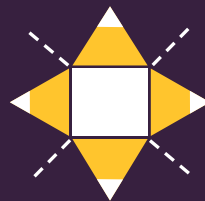
Doing things differently does not have to mean doing more. Examine our habits, routines, and ways of working, and look for opportunities to improve what we already do.

#### **Think Bigger**

Think upstream to address recurring problems at their source, and think downstream about how our decisions and actions affect others.

#### **Foster Moments**

Create the conditions for meaningful moments to happen, recognize them when they occur, and celebrate and encourage them.



### *Four Strategic Priorities:*

## The Faces of the Pyramid

The four faces of the pyramid represent WCU's major strategic priorities:

#### **Student Experience**

Create a student experience that is seamless, supportive, and deeply engaging, so every student has the opportunity to thrive and feel connected to WCU.

#### **Teaching & Learning**

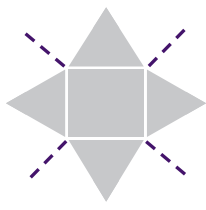
Advance high-quality, inclusive teaching and learning that prepares students to succeed personally and professionally and contribute to the common good.

#### **Alumni Network**

Our alumni are our University in action. Expand and activate WCU's alumni network as a powerful resource for students, engaging alumni as ambassadors and career partners who create meaningful opportunities for experiential learning, professional growth, and community connection.

#### **Stewards of Place**

Strengthen WCU's role as a steward of place by building partnerships, expanding opportunity, and contributing to the vitality of our region and Commonwealth.



## **Connectors:** **Where the Priorities Intersect**

The pyramid has five vertices. Four connect two adjacent strategic priorities, while the fifth, Experiential Learning at the apex, brings all four strategic priorities together. Many connections are possible, but the four side vertices highlighted in the model represent important areas where work across two faces can reinforce one another and create greater impact.

### **Student Success Outcomes**

Connects Teaching & Learning with Student Experience by focusing on the conditions, supports, and experiences that improve tangible outcomes such as persistence, completion, and student achievement.

### **R2**

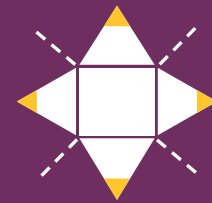
Connects Teaching & Learning with Stewards of Place by advancing research, scholarship, creative activity, and discovery that benefit students, communities, and the Commonwealth.

### **Arts & Athletics Ambassadors**

Connects Student Experience with the Alumni Network by recognizing how students who represent WCU through competition, performance, leadership, and visibility can build lifelong connection and pride.

### **Sustainability**

Connects the Alumni Network with Stewards of Place by advancing environmental, financial, and social sustainability in ways that strengthen WCU and the communities we serve.



## **Four Faces of Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning takes many forms across WCU. The capstone highlights four broad ways students put their learning into action beyond the traditional classroom:



- Licensure
- Professional Credentials



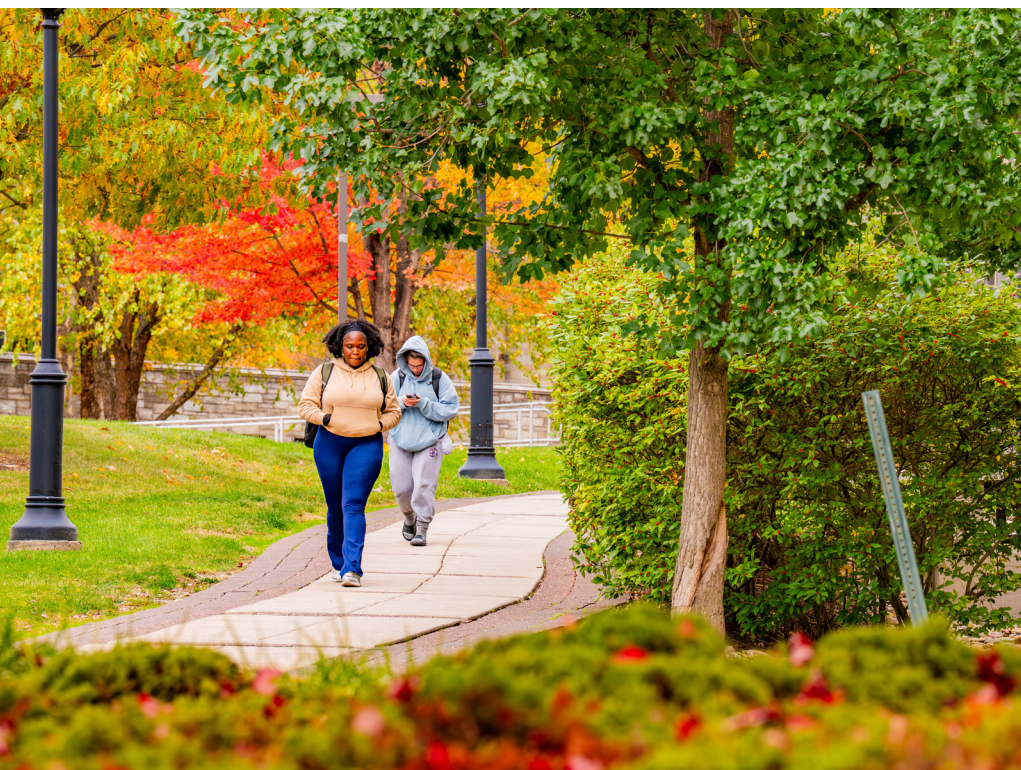
- Research
- Entrepreneurship

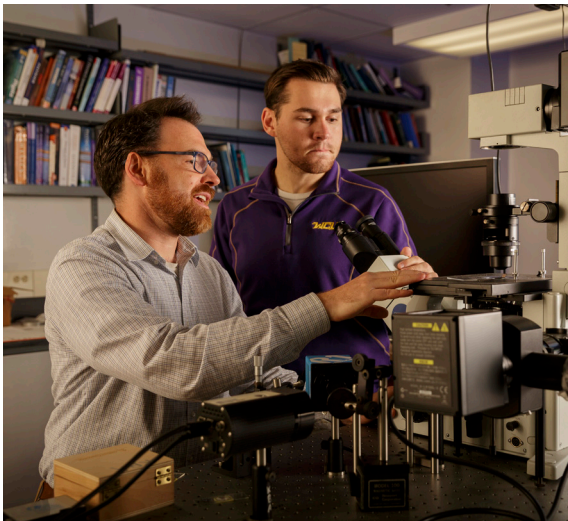


- Nonprofit
- Government
- Service Learning



- Arts & Athletics Ambassadors
- Student Leaders





## Action Plan

# SPOTLIGHTS

The following pages highlight just a few of the ideas now moving forward through WCU's Action Plan. Organized around our four strategic priorities, these initiatives show how members of the University community are putting **Be Better, Think Bigger, and Foster Moments** into action. Together with many other ideas underway across WCU, they are helping us move from almost awesome to awesome!



## **Simplify How Students Get Help**

WCU launched One Stop Student Service Center at the start of the Fall 2026 semester to make it easier for students to get help without navigating a maze of offices. Using a high-touch, concierge-style approach, the center connects students with support for registration, billing, financial aid, academic success, mental health, housing, wellness, and more. The goal is to resolve barriers at the first point of contact whenever possible, so students can spend less time figuring out where to go and more time focused on learning. Early response has been strong, and the center will continue to evolve based on student needs and feedback.

## **Expand Supports for Student-Athletes**

WCU is developing a more comprehensive academic support program designed specifically for student-athletes as they balance academics, athletics, and student life. The initiative will focus on their academic, personal, and professional development and will bring together Athletics, Enrollment Management, and Student Affairs. Planning will take place during the 2026–27 academic year, with an initial goal of providing support and resources to at least half of WCU's student-athlete population. The broader aim is to create a more coordinated system of support that helps student-athletes succeed throughout their WCU experience.

## **Identify Upstream Student Supports**

WCU is working to identify students who may be struggling academically or financially earlier, before setbacks become crises. Using tools such as midterm grades, attendance checks, Navigate reports, and first-year programs, faculty and staff can spot warning signs sooner and connect students with support in real time. The initiative also calls for more personalized outreach to students at risk of being dropped for nonpayment, with familiar campus contacts involved when possible. Some elements can begin immediately, while broader coordination across colleges and student-support offices will continue to develop over time.

### **Strengthen Math Readiness**

WCU is exploring a summer math bridge program to help incoming STEM students strengthen their math preparation before beginning college. The program would focus especially on students from low-income and Pell-eligible backgrounds, helping them improve math placement and enter STEM coursework better prepared for success. Faculty from the Center for STEM Inclusion and the Department of Mathematics would help shape the program, with external funding supporting its development. The goal is to launch as early as Summer 2027 and measure success through math placement, course performance, and reduced rates of D, F, and withdrawal grades in STEM courses.

### **Build Leadership Skills for Department Chairs**

WCU launched a Chair Success Academy this summer to help department chairs strengthen leadership, communication, interpersonal, and conflict-resolution skills. Because chairs typically step into these roles with deep academic expertise but limited formal leadership training, the academy was designed to address practical challenges they face in leading departments. Developed collaboratively with the Faculty Ombuds, Council of Chairs, Teaching and Learning Center, and other campus experts, the program was incorporated into training for incoming chairs. Initial feedback was positive, and follow-up check-ins during the academic year will help refine future sessions.

### **Connect Students with Alumni Entrepreneurs**

WCU will create a searchable directory of alumni-owned businesses to strengthen connections among alumni, students, and career opportunities. Alumni business owners will be invited to participate in ways that fit their interests and capacity, including offering jobs or internships, mentoring students, participating in networking and career events, and supporting programs such as the Career Closet and Fund for Unpaid Internships. The initiative will give alumni new ways to stay connected to WCU while expanding students' access to professional networks, real-world insights, and employment opportunities. The directory will be developed and launched in phases, with a goal of building a strong, active network of participating businesses.

### **Define Career Readiness for Every Student**

WCU is developing campus-wide career learning outcomes to better define and measure what it means for students to be ready for their next step after graduation. Led by the Twardowski Career Development Center, the effort brings together faculty, staff, students, campus leaders, alumni, and external partners to create shared expectations for career readiness across classrooms and other learning experiences. Draft outcomes are being reviewed through a broad, transparent process. The goal is to move beyond using participation in career activities as the primary measure of success and use data to better understand how well students are prepared for life after WCU.

## Elevate WCU as a Leader in Sustainability

WCU will develop a coordinated sustainability communications strategy to better tell the story of the University's longstanding work in this area. Many members of the WCU community are surprised to learn about initiatives such as geo-exchange heating and cooling, Zero Waste efforts, campus gardens, the Brandywine Sustainability Workshops, and the Gordon Natural Area. By highlighting these and other accomplishments more intentionally, WCU can strengthen awareness of sustainability as part of its identity and mission. The effort will bring together the Office of Sustainability, Communications and Marketing, the Sustainability Council, faculty, and students.

## Leverage WCU's Role as a Research University

WCU's Carnegie R2 designation reflects an important institutional strength: a teacher-scholar model that connects research, innovation, and student success. R2 status gives WCU new opportunities to expand undergraduate research, graduate scholarship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and applied learning while strengthening our impact on the communities and region we serve. Rather than changing who we are, this designation allows us to build on what WCU already does well by creating more opportunities for students to learn alongside faculty researchers and by using scholarship and discovery to advance both student success and the common good.



**“WCU will become Pennsylvania’s  
top public university where every  
student, regardless of major or  
financial circumstances, has access to  
meaningful experiential learning and  
graduates ready for the real world.”**

**— President Laurie Bernotsky**



GETTING TO  
**AWESOME**  
TOGETHER.

Explore more initiatives  
and follow our progress:  
[wcupa.edu/actionplan](https://wcupa.edu/actionplan)

