

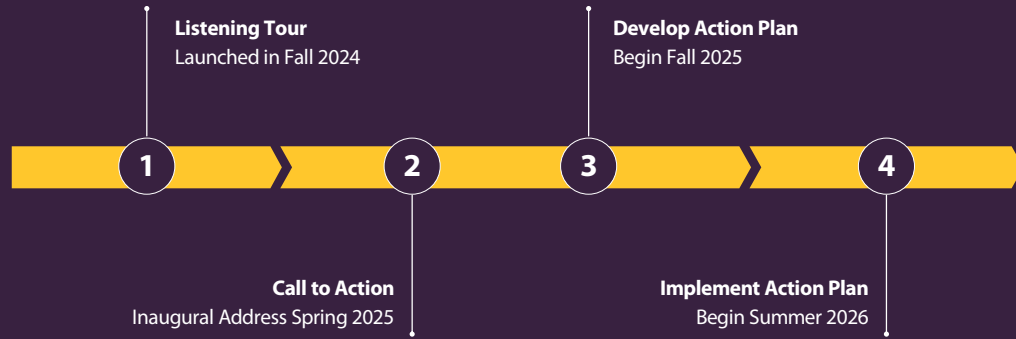
West Chester University

# Fall Address

October 17, 2025



# Pathway





Over 40 sessions with students, faculty , staff, alumni, donors, elected officials, boards and community leaders

Also, there was a website for online feedback



## What are our biggest challenges?

- Housing demand
- Attitudes/sentiment about higher ed
- Geographical limitations to growth
- Physical plant/deferred maintenance
- Student equity/engagement gaps
- Financial stability of system
- Social sustainability
- Public transportation



## What are our biggest strengths & opportunities?

- Creativity, innovation, adaptability
- Research (R2 status)
- Expanding experiential learning
- Graduate enrollment and programs
- Resource-rich environment (Southeast PA, Delaware, NJ)
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Increased community engagement
- Advisory boards
- Telling our story/branding



Word cloud from listening tour data

# What makes WCU different/special?



Triple threat: Access + Affordability + Academics



Teacher-Scholar Model: R1 caliber faculty teach in the classroom



Tenure attracts R1 caliber faculty



Large university but still innovative and adaptable



Our mission to contribute to the "common good"



Significant investments in wraparound student support services

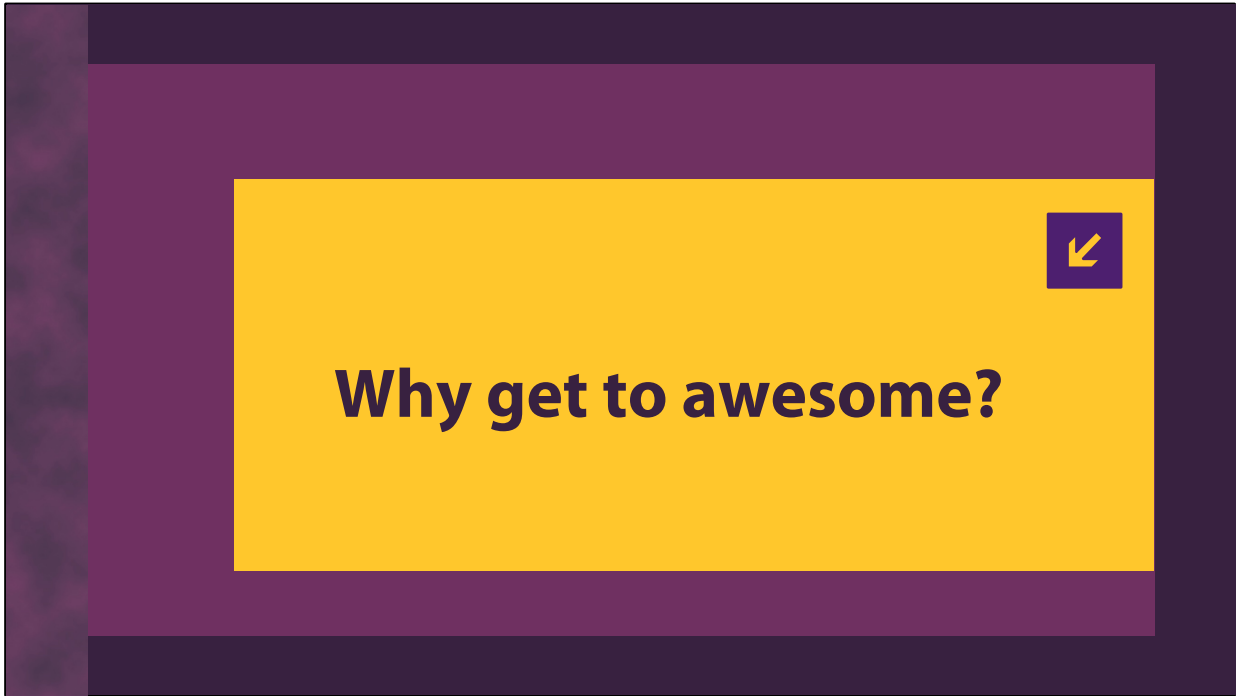


Location

Moving beyond

**“almost awesome”**





Just because we can? Just because we are almost there?

Getting to almost awesome is easier than getting to awesome. The last mile is always the hardest one to make progress along.

Higher ed, ALL of higher ed, has fallen out of favor with the general public.

The value of higher ed isn't as clear as it used to be to the general public.

Higher ed needs to reclaim the ground that has been lost and deliver on our promises to ALL of our students and WCU can and should lead the way.

Higher ed is still the great equalizer in terms of life outcomes.

## How do we get to awesome?

Be better



Think  
bigger



Foster  
moments





## Be Better

Doing things differently *doesn't have to mean* doing more

What can you do as an individual, in your office, unit, department, college, division?

WCU is already doing great things and people already work really hard.

Doing things differently **doesn't have to mean** doing more.

Focus on **mindfulness and habits**.

Ask yourself: *What can I do as an individual?*

Ask together: *What can we do in our office, department, college, or division?*



# Think Bigger

## Upstream thinking:

Stop repeatedly solving the same problems

## Downstream thinking:

How will my actions impact others?

Not “bigger” as in chasing lots of new initiatives.

Bigger in terms of **awareness of impact**:

**Upstream thinking** → stop repeatedly putting out the same fire, think upstream to solved the recurring problem. (Ref: Dan Heath book "Upstream")

**Downstream thinking** → consider how my actions will impact others.



# Foster Moments

"Camp is for the campers"	Maintain the conditions for moments to happen	Recognize them when they occur	Celebrate and encourage them
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This is what we already do and what we're good at.

**"Camp is for the campers."**- It may be our Xth year of this work, but it's our students' first time. Keep the same energy for every student.

Continue to maintain the conditions for moments to happen.

Recognize them when they occur.

Celebrate them and encourage them.



## How will we know we have arrived at awesome?

When we are recognized everywhere, when West Chester University is known as two words outside of Philly, and NOT one word outside of New York.

When EVERY student is thriving with stellar success metrics and majors enriched by experiential learning.

When sustainability in all of its forms is part of what we do every day rather than as a specific set of goals.

When we are trusted by our community and seen by our neighbors as excellent stewards of place.

THAT'S how we're going to know we have arrived at awesome!

# What does awesome look like?



Unparalleled student experience

Experiential learning for ALL students

Excellent teaching and learning

Strong alumni network

Being good "stewards of place"

Stellar student success metrics for all students

Leaning into our R2 status

Sustainability in several forms

Arts & athletics ambassadors

Strong links to community

Living the mission

Themes from the listening tour data



## My summer of insomnia:

How do we capture all of this in a  
strategic plan that won't collapse  
under its own weight?

Given how lean we are and how maxed out everyone is . . .

**How do we capture all of this in a strategic plan that won't  
collapse under its own weight?**



**We don't.**

What if seeing new results required us to try something entirely different?

What if we didn't spend a year building another 3- or 5-year strategic plan?

What if we focused on what we already do well and built from there?

What if we linked our many priorities into one shared direction?

## From this . . .



Unparalleled  
student  
experience

Experiential  
learning for  
ALL students

Excellent  
teaching and  
learning

Strong alumni  
network

Being good  
"stewards of  
place"

Stellar student  
success metrics  
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Leaning into  
our R2 status

Sustainability  
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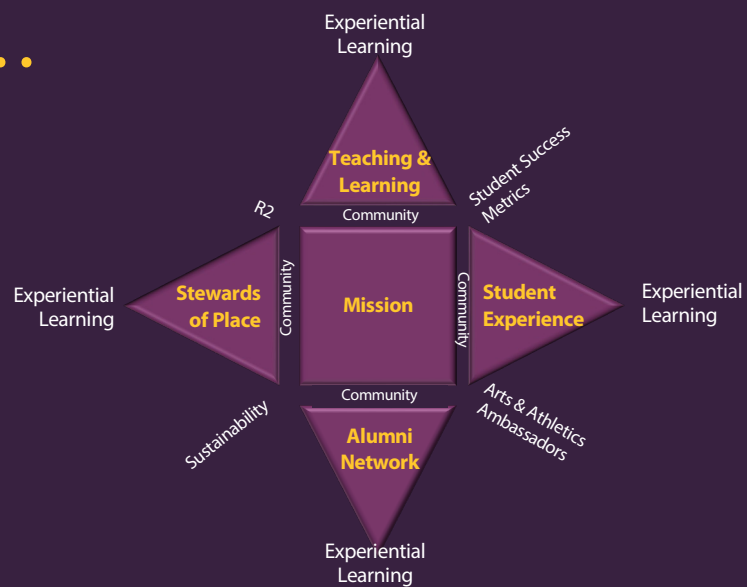
Arts & athletics  
ambassadors

Strong links to  
community

Living the  
mission

Recall that this is from the listening tour, same as slide 15

To this . . .

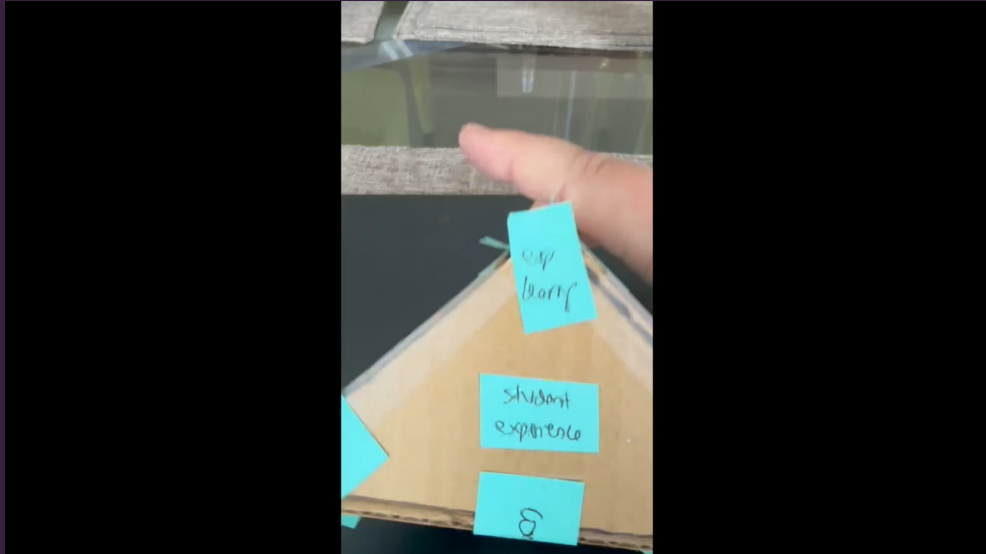


This looks complex, but this is what was living in my head this summer.

How do we make this work?

We think about it in a new way . . .

To this . . .



. . . think about it in 3-D.

This was me at my kitchen table one Saturday morning in July, it was the beginning of what evolved into the pyramid on the next slide.

**... and finally to this**

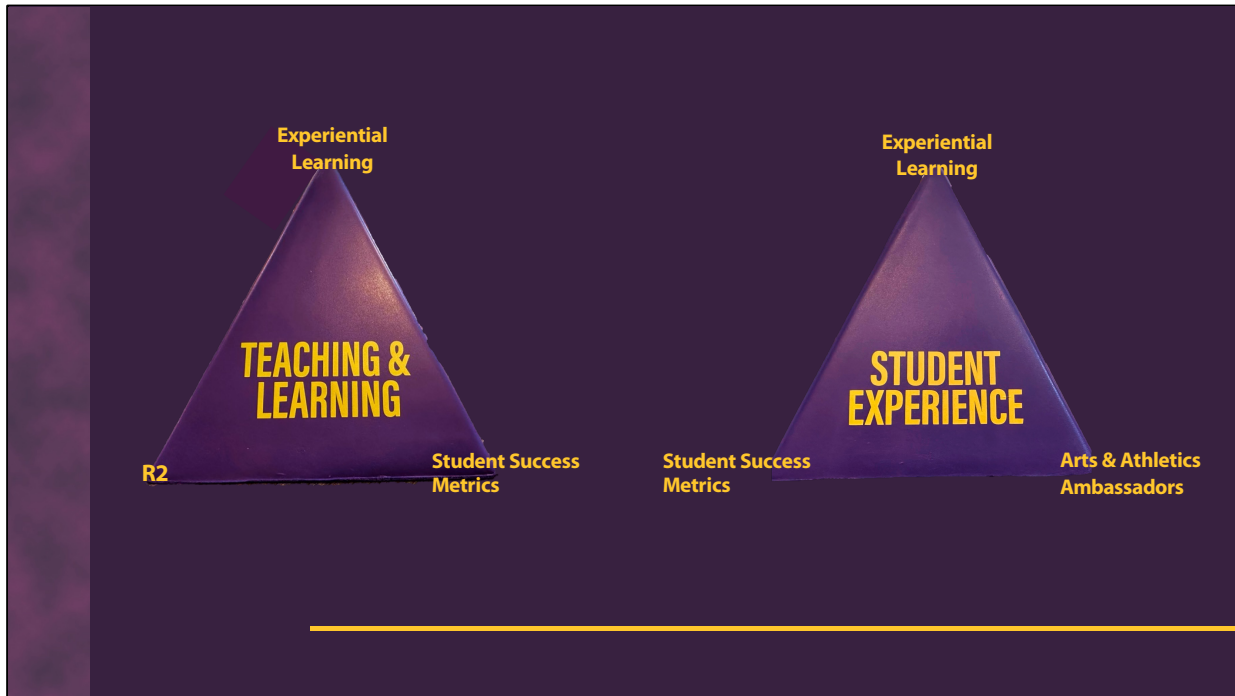


This is a symbolic representation of what is going to be the action plan in 3D.



# Action Plan

Strategic priorities in 3-D



Each strategic priority (face) has three connectors (vertices) . . .  
 But the top of each one is experiential learning (apex).

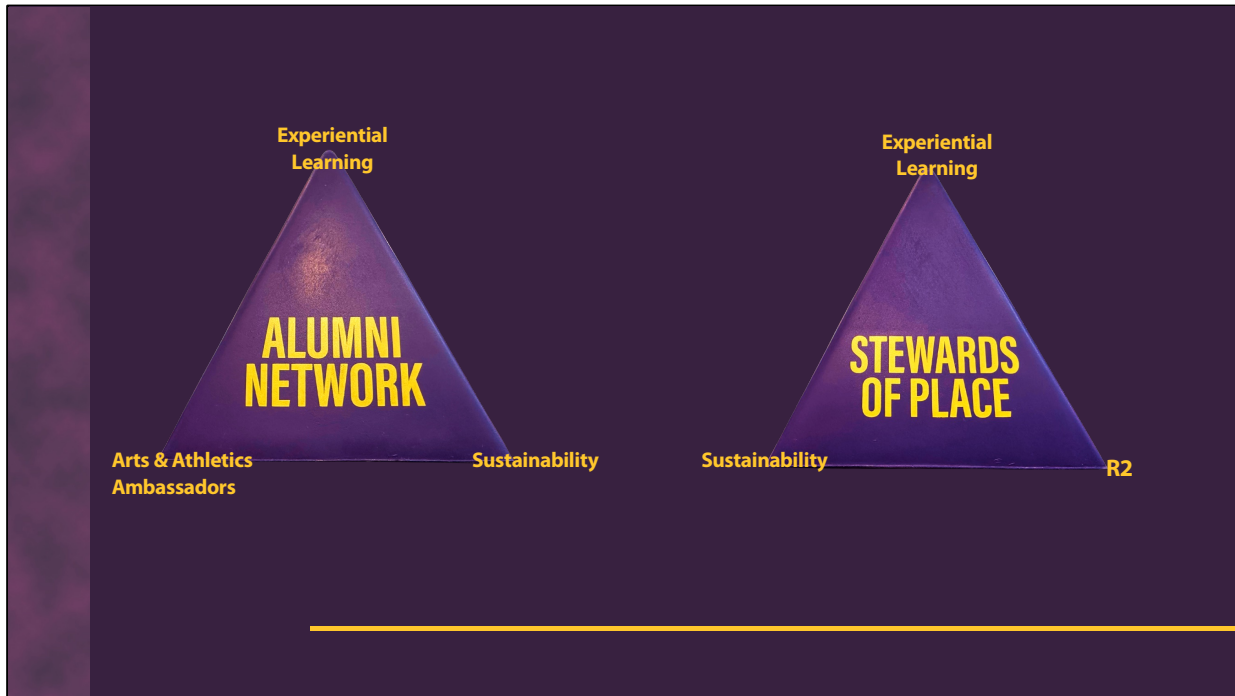
Four strategic priorities (faces):

- Teaching & Learning
- Student Experience
- Alumni Network
- Stewards of Place

5 Connectors (vertices):

- Experiential Learning (apex)
- R2
- Student Success Metrics
- Arts and Athletics Ambassadors
- Sustainability

Base is the mission and community



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Four strategic priorities (faces):

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Base is the mission and community



## Why is experiential learning the key connector?



Could WCU be the state system university where EVERY student can do experiential learning regardless of financial status or major?

That would be **AWESOME!**

### Why is Experiential Learning the Key Connector?

- Students consistently identify experiential learning as a top priority, yet many face financial barriers to participation.
- Alumni emphasize how critical these experiences were to their success after graduation.
- Study abroad, service-learning trip, resident assistant work, other types of work.
- Donors are eager to invest in opportunities that directly support student growth and career readiness.
- What if WCU became the state system leader where *every student*, regardless of financial status or major, could access meaningful experiential learning?

-->That would be **AWESOME**

## Next steps for fall

1 Start thinking about how you can contribute

2 Pick an approach:

Be better

Think bigger

Foster moments

3 Pick a priority and/or a connector (pyramid)

4 Focus on three questions:

- What will you do?
- When will you do it (timeframe)?
- How will you know you are making progress?

You are hearing this for the first time and it's ok to take a little time to think it through.

My ask:

- Start thinking about how **you** can contribute, both as an individual and as a member of your team.
- Pick an approach: Be Better, Think Bigger, Foster Moments
- Pick a priority and/or a connector (pyramid)
- Focus on three questions:
  - What will you do?
  - When will you do it (timeframe)?
  - How will you know you are making progress?

## Spring 2026

Flesh out your plan(s) by Spring Break



We will synthesize by priority/connector



Reconvene before commencement to hear what we have collectively developed



Launch in Summer 2026



Flesh out your plan(s) by Spring Break.

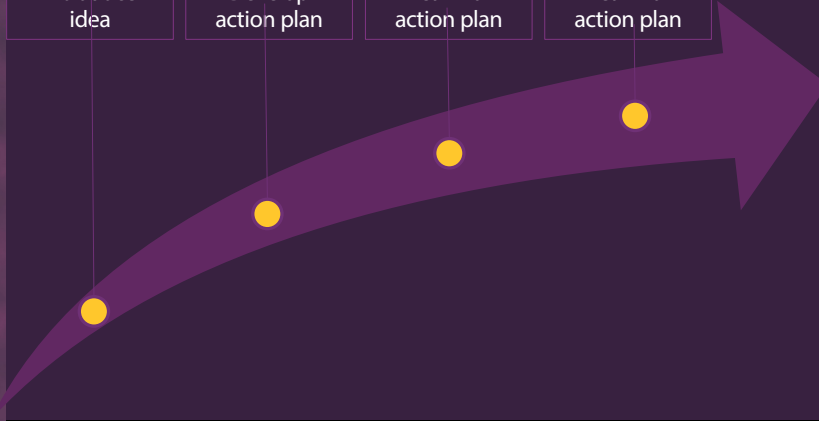
We will synthesize by priority/connector.

Reconvene before commencement to hear what we have collectively developed. Launch in Summer 2026.

We're going to have people to assist with templates for you to operationalize your ideas. In late April I will share the action plan that we all wrote together.

## Our sights are set on awesome

Fall 2025	Spring 2026	2026-27	2027-28
Introduce idea	Develop action plan	Year 1 of action plan	Year 2 of action plan





**FROM  
ALMOST  
AWESOME . . .**



Almost awesome works and gets the job done, example, we had scoreboard that works, gets the job done.

But when we decided to replace it, it sparked a vision for our lead donor and that blossomed into a full football game day conversation . . .

Football Saturdays at WCU

The closing slide is one example of what awesome can look like . . .



Video of new scoreboard

West Chester University

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