

A photograph of a young man with short dark hair, wearing a light blue hoodie, smiling broadly and looking upwards and to the left. The background is blurred, showing other people and warm lighting. The entire image is framed by a thin red border.

# STUDENTS FIRST

A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2024-2027

UPDATED OCTOBER 1, 2025

# CORE VALUES

## BELONGING

Motivated to foster a sense of **community** in a **family**-oriented atmosphere where people feel **cared** for, **respected**, and valued. Champions individuality and acceptance while emphasizing acts of **service**. Cultivates **relationships**, **collaboration**, and **teamwork**. Carries forward a **legacy** of progress deeply rooted in our history, **pride**, and **mission**.

## EXCELLENCE

Committed to **quality** in an academic environment with **learning** and a quest for **knowledge** at the core. Fuels institutional and personal **growth** and **continuous improvement** while striving for **innovation**. Fosters holistic **achievement** and academic, athletic, and co-curricular **success**. Draws confidence from our longevity of **institutional and financial stability**.

## INTEGRITY

Driven to lead and to inspire others to realize their own **leadership** abilities and potential. Values **responsibility**, **accountability**, and **ethical** decision-making, both as individuals and as an institution. Honors **authenticity** and transparency. Displays **passion**, **perseverance**, and **adaptability** as we face the challenges of an ever-changing environment.

## MISSION

The mission of the University of Mount Union is to prepare students for fulfilling lives, meaningful work, and responsible citizenship.

## VISION

As a community, the University of Mount Union upholds its mission by continuously and proactively creating a learning environment for holistic growth and a promising future.

### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #1

## GROW ENROLLMENT STRATEGICALLY

Demographic declines, coupled with fierce competition and questions regarding the value of a college degree, continue to impact higher education. We must position ourselves for enrollment stability and planful growth in order to adapt and succeed. This challenging environment demands that we focus on strategic steps that enhance the undergraduate and graduate student experience, whether delivered on campus or online, and rally as a community to actively further our enrollment efforts.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #1

Stabilize the institution's total enrollment and develop a plan for future enrollment growth.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #2

Make every possible effort to keep a Mount Union education financially and academically accessible to new and returning students of all backgrounds.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #3

Explore new and elevate existing programs – academic, athletic, and co-curricular – that are relevant, drive enrollment, and ensure success after graduation.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #4

Enrich the campus, its properties, and its perimeter to provide a modern and engaging experience for all students.

### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #2

## BOLSTER STUDENT RETENTION

At the heart of all we do is a drive to foster an exceptional experience that engages students in our welcoming and inclusive environment. Whether they are learning on-campus or online, or in undergraduate, graduate, or other educational programs, they should feel engaged, supported, and valued in an atmosphere that respects and celebrates their differences while meeting their unique needs and expectations. By meeting them where they are, we can be more effective in shaping their success and supporting their journeys toward graduation.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #1

Continue to build upon our solid foundation in advising, retention, and specialized student support programs.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #2

Strengthen the student engagement experience by fostering community, leadership, activity, and belonging in a safe and welcoming environment.

### STRATEGIC ACTION #3

Foster an inclusive and accessible learning environment that allows students to feel a sense of belonging when engaging with content and learning experiences.

# PURPOSE

The University of Mount Union cultivates a learning environment that acknowledges, accepts, and meets differing needs so that everyone is valued, experiences belonging, and achieves their full potential.



## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #3

### DEVELOP STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Although, historically, many colleges and universities, especially small, private institutions, have chosen to go it alone when facing periods of challenge, modern times demand a shift in strategy. While the volatility of the higher education environment has rendered many institutions vulnerable, Mount Union is committed to transcending the barriers as we pave the way for student success. A partnership evolution may be the catalyst for not only surviving but thriving in the higher education arena.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #1

Partner with employers to explore programmatic development based on their training, continuing education, and degree-required needs.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #2

Enhance community and corporate partnerships, explore co-branding opportunities, and leverage our alumni network to allow for more community-engaged research and experiential learning for students.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #3

Partner with regional officials and community leaders to foster continued collaboration and enhance Alliance and its offerings.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #4

Collaborate with other institutions to offer academic pathways to enhance affordability and reduce the time it takes to earn a degree.

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #4

### POSITION THE INSTITUTION FOR DISTINCTION

Mount Union has realized a well-earned strong standing among institutions of higher education, yet the ability to shape and share the unique and compelling stories of our exceptional university and student experience has never been more critical. By highlighting what makes us truly distinct – our people, academic programs, athletics, rankings, facilities, offerings, and more – we will be poised to position ourselves as a top choice in Northeast Ohio and, eventually, extend our reach regionally.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #1

Continue to implement a brand and campaign that defines Mount Union's distinctiveness.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #2

Build our brand presence on campus through an environmental marketing strategy that highlights our students and alumni.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #3

Showcase our people, academics, campus, facilities, digital learning, athletics, and student experience through various marketing channels.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #4

Strive for campus-wide and student-centered excellence in ways that establish us as the top choice among comprehensive private regional universities in Northeast Ohio.

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #5

### ENHANCE BELONGING AND WORKPLACE CULTURE

At Mount Union, our focus has been and always will be on putting students first. Yet, no institution can be successful in the long run without employees who believe in its mission and understand their role in achieving it. We are committed to continuously improving our workplace culture to ensure an enhanced sense of belonging and pride for all employees. We stand behind the philosophy that when our people feel valued, they are better poised to play a critical role in the experience and success of our students.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #1

Offer competitive and equitable compensation, benefits, and professional development opportunities for all employees.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #2

Intentionally develop a respectful workplace culture that enables all employees to feel a strong sense of engagement and belonging.

#### STRATEGIC ACTION #3

Develop internal communication strategies and rollout procedures that are tailored to various employee populations and enable the community to efficiently manage change.

# DIRECTIVE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

In the fall of 2023, the Board of Trustees mandated that the administration concentrate its efforts for the future on three key priorities – enrollment, retention, and affordability. This directive was to be carried out while maintaining fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency. These four obligations, coupled with the institution's overarching mission, vision, purpose, and core values, serve as checks and balances to ensure that the *Students First* plan not only moves the University forward but does so in a conscientious, sustainable, and strategic manner.

## ENROLLMENT

As an enrollment-driven institution, our financial resiliency relies on our ability to stabilize and strategically grow our total enrollment.

## RETENTION

Likewise, our capacity to retain enrolled students influences our fiscal health while also ensuring that we fulfill our commitment to our students and their success.

## AFFORDABILITY

At Mount Union, we stand strong in our commitment to offer an education that is financially accessible to students and families of all backgrounds.

## FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Although Mount Union's financial health remains intact, we must be laser-focused on keeping it that way to ensure the institution is mitigating risk and positioned for sustained success.

As a result of this directive, a *Students First Dashboard* has been developed to gauge progress toward key metrics related to the areas of enrollment, retention, affordability, fiscal responsibility, and fundraising.

# PLANNING PHILOSOPHY

The ever-changing nature of higher education demands that today's colleges and universities be nimble and proactive in their planning. Thus, *Students First* is a three-year, rolling strategic action plan that will be reviewed and modified as necessary. The plan offers a framework, providing both strategic initiatives and strategic actions that will be moved forward through the campus-wide development of annual goals that support the plan.

# PLAN UPDATES

Updates regarding *Students First – A Strategic Action Plan 2024-2027* are available on the Mount Union website. Hover over the QR code image to the right with your smart phone or tablet to scan or visit:

[mountunion.edu/strategic-plan](https://mountunion.edu/strategic-plan)

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