

Introduction

Wesleyan was founded in 1831 as a local, predominantly Methodist institution, but from its very beginnings its spirit has been expansive. Its first president, Willbur Fisk, articulated the mission of the school as being “for the good of the individual and the good of the world,” drawing on Methodism’s synthesis of deeply personal spirituality and the pursuit of social reform. Wesleyan would become fully nondenominational in the early 20th century and establish itself as a nationally respected New England liberal arts college.

In the 1950s, Wesleyan embarked on yet another expansion, making itself a small university capable of producing innovative interdisciplinary scholarship and scientific research drawing on the best work from around the globe and aiming to reach a wide audience. The internationalization of the curriculum and the student body had begun, and it would gather momentum over the coming decades.

If the embrace of academic freedom, rather than adhering to a set of religious teachings, was a decisive component of the first change, the support for academic experimentation and creative exploration were emblematic of the second—resulting in the interdisciplinary experiments of the Center for Advanced Studies (later renamed Center for the Humanities), the College of Social Studies, and the College of Letters, along with the creation of small graduate programs in the sciences and a foundational program in world music and ethnomusicology.

All these experiments are now part and parcel of Wesleyan’s distinctiveness. Looking back on that expansive time, Wesleyan’s 11th president, Victor Butterfield, said memorably, “The ferment and mood for innovation and experiment went on, and although they have had their ebbs and flows, they have never stopped. Neither has the dialogue; and for one who was as thirsty as I was, both for the college’s sake and for my own, it has been champagne to the soul.”

The mood for innovation and experimentation was fueled by the crises of World War II and again by the social changes and political upheaval of the 1960s, which also led to a more expansive approach to admission, which now (again) included women as well as

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students from underrepresented groups. Wesleyan became a pioneer in acknowledging the educational potency of diversity on campus, just as it boldly explored cultural productions from around the world. It became increasingly clear that the co-curricular components of the Wesleyan experience were essential to the liberal education offered by the University. The aspiration to cultivate belonging on campus complemented the ambition to become a more global educational institution.

The threats posed by the Great Recession of 2007–2009 spurred new thinking about what was distinctive about the Wesleyan experience and how to provide such an experience for students in perpetuity. In 2009, the University approved the following Mission Statement:

▲ **Wesleyan University is dedicated to providing an education in the liberal arts that is characterized by boldness, rigor, and practical idealism. At Wesleyan, distinguished scholar-teachers work closely with students, taking advantage of fluidity among disciplines to explore the world with a variety of tools. The University seeks to build a diverse, energetic community of students, faculty, and staff who think critically and creatively and who value independence of mind and generosity of spirit.**

Since 2010, Wesleyan has founded five new interdisciplinary colleges and a new program in design and engineering while retooling the career center to enable graduates to translate liberal learning into their working lives beyond the University. It did so while restructuring its economic model, building its endowment, and reaching out to new constituencies in this country and around the world. While building on the momentum of expansiveness, the University also has been striving to be a more inclusive community of learning and exploration.

Today, the United States once again faces a crisis, this one fueled by the combination of pandemic and polarization. The former has resulted in the loss of more than 700,000 lives, while the latter has undermined the legitimacy of basic political structures and the perceived benefits of global engagement. Scientific reasoning has come under fire, even as scientific research has made enormous strides. Higher education has been deeply rocked by the public health emergency and by a perceived legitimacy problem of its own that has led to predictions of the demise of residential undergraduate education. From popular magazines to scientific societies, commentators have been asking whether higher education is still worth it. At

Wesleyan, where connections between liberal learning and lifelong learning are vital, we will show that the answer to that question is a resounding YES!

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The pandemic forced colleges and universities to make reactive changes, but as we plan for the next decade, we should appreciate how the pandemic helps clarify just how schools like ours should change. We have modified our traditional calendars and explored mixtures of online and in-person learning. That openness to pedagogical experimentation should carry over into the post-COVID-19 world.

A popular phrase in this pandemic period has been “we’re all in this together,” but it was quickly clear that the disease had a disproportionate impact on poor and marginalized populations. Inequality—whether in terms of disparities in health care, underlying conditions, or job security—has become ever more visible; and in America, inequality is profoundly racialized, as Black Lives Matter activists and their allies have

highlighted. Higher education can reinforce privilege and divisions, or it can be a vehicle for social mobility and cohesion. At Wesleyan, lessons from the pandemic only strengthen our commitment to fostering a spirit of care and belonging while increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Even before the pandemic, which kept many international students from campus, isolationist tendencies were resurfacing in America. Such tendencies are antithetical to Wesleyan’s expansive and inclusive traditions. Here we embrace a diversity of cultures, histories, and languages, and we plan to increase our capacities to do so.

Another distinctive aspect of the Wesleyan experience is the strength of the commitment to civic engagement. Civic preparedness, of course, is one of the key benefits of liberal arts education for democracy. Such preparedness includes learning to live with ambiguity, to listen to different points of view, and to appreciate contexts of great complexity. Efforts in America and around the world to delegitimize democratic institutions pose a profound challenge to schools like Wesleyan. It is a challenge that we have an obligation to respond to, and this plan calls for increased emphasis on civic preparedness. It also calls for the promotion of intellectual diversity on our campus: our response to the polarization afflicting American politics and culture. We want our students to seek to understand the logic of arguments of those with whom they disagree, to test their own thinking against different approaches to enduring questions. To help that happen, we must be intentional in protecting freedom of speech and seeking out serious ideas from traditions underrepresented on our campus.

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Toward Wesleyan’s Bicentennial reflects all these concerns. Our mission—to provide an education in the liberal arts that is characterized by boldness, rigor, and practical idealism—is not changing, but we pursue that mission in light of changes in the world around us. Most importantly, we intend to move aggressively to pursue our mission beyond the borders of the Middletown campus. We have long had “impact disproportionate to our numbers,” and now we will expand that impact by inviting more people around the world to join our lifelong network of learning.

This new framework for planning, as was the case with Wesleyan 2020, is organized around three overarching goals:

1. **Enhance our distinctive educational program, capitalizing on academic strengths;**
2. **Build on our reputation as a leader in pragmatic liberal education;**
3. **While enhancing access, make Wesleyan more sustainable through prudent management and diversification of revenue sources.**

We aim to provide the best possible education to some of the world’s most accomplished students who will use Wesleyan’s resources to energize and sustain lives of purpose and impact beyond the University.

Below we take each of these three goals in turn, noting selective strengths and vulnerabilities and then stating more specific objectives and action items—some short-term, others targets for continuous improvement.

1

Enhance our distinctive educational program, capitalizing on academic strengths

- STRENGTHS:**
- The University is highly selective, choosing a student body whose members are capable of expanding their horizons and deepening their knowledge by learning from one another and from a faculty that is devoted to their intellectual, personal, and social growth
 - The University recruits and retains faculty who are effective teachers and regularly contribute to the advancement of their fields
 - The University curriculum supports customizable educational itineraries that foster focused independent work, breadth of knowledge, and the capacity for lifelong learning
 - The University cultivates a campus culture—including athletics, the arts, and co-curricular and residential programs—conducive to adventurous learning and effective civic engagement

- VULNERABILITIES:**
- The University's experimental academic ethos is in tension with its historic investment in traditional disciplines that slows curricular innovation
 - The University has had difficulty retaining a diverse faculty
 - The University's support of diffuse educational experiences can make it difficult to maximize employment opportunities

VISION

In 2031 Wesleyan University will be widely recognized for offering a creative, rigorous, pragmatic liberal education that fosters personal development and social responsibility while empowering graduates to shape a changing world. Going beyond the traditional liberal arts college model, the University's programs, on campus and beyond, will attract accomplished and adventurous learners at various stages in their lives who have an appetite for bold inquiry and creative practice grounded in an inclusive community.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION ITEMS:

- **Strengthen connections between liberal learning and lifelong learning**
 - Develop key competencies (expression; quantitative analysis; cultural awareness; spatial reasoning) in students that they can carry with them long beyond graduation
 - Weave civic preparedness into offerings of departments/programs
 - Deepen undergraduate and alumni connection to the career center
 - Develop Wesleyan_Online—a suite of standalone classes and degree-oriented programs
- **Further diversity, equity, and inclusion**
 - Enhance faculty and staff diversity
 - Improve retention of faculty and staff from underrepresented groups
 - Promote intellectual diversity, freedom of speech, and attentive listening
 - Increase diversity of student applicant pool
 - Build an African Scholars Program that is similar to our Freeman Asian Program
 - Ensure that all students are able to succeed in chosen fields of study
 - Use BA/MA program to increase number of students from underrepresented groups who are accepted into STEM PhD programs
 - Enhance language programs and partnerships for a more global campus

- **Stimulate research, pedagogical innovation, and effectiveness**
 - Increase number of lecture classes using models that enhance student engagement
 - Support cohort-based interdisciplinary programs
 - Increase the number of independent projects completed by students in the social sciences
 - Complete construction of new Public Affairs Center by 2024 and use new spaces to facilitate curricular innovation
 - Complete new life sciences building by 2026, leverage it for learning and advanced research, and ensure that it serves as a welcoming, campus crossroads
 - Create College of Computational Studies and promote data skills across the curriculum
 - Grow Design and Engineering Program, helping it to achieve departmental/college status, adding two positions in three years and two–three additional positions if enrollments grow

- **Strengthen foundation for creative practice**
 - Reinvigorate the Center for the Arts as catalyst for producing new creative work
 - Expand Shapiro Writing Center with hires and new programming
 - Expand access to the arts, providing more students with experiences in artistic practice whose effects will persist long beyond graduation
 - Enhance alumni network for Wes Creatives

- **Energize distinctive residential and co-curricular learning**
 - Facilitate student progress toward residential learning goals
 - Build student cohorts while increasing capacity for independent living
 - Integrate athletics more fully in student life and campus community
 - Support teams and individual students competing at the highest levels

CHANGES MADE IN 2025

- **Ensure retention rates are comparable across various employee demographic groups**
- **Use the BA/MA program to increase the number of students on financial aid who are accepted into STEM PhD programs**

2

Build on our reputation as a leader in pragmatic liberal education

- STRENGTHS:**
- The University is a community of educators whose work can have a positive impact in multiple fields
 - The University is well known in major US population centers for attracting strong students who are lively, creative, and engaged
 - The University has increased its visibility internationally, especially in China and India
 - The University is recognized as a locus of path-breaking scholarship and creative practice and for demonstrating the vitality of the liberal arts

- VULNERABILITIES:**
- The University is thought by many to be unaffordable for most students
 - The University is said not to prepare students adequately for the job market
 - The University is in a location in which it is challenging for employees to find jobs for other family members
 - The University is small and under-resourced compared to some of its peers

VISION

In 2031 Wesleyan will be internationally known as a creative force for expanding access to bold and rigorous liberal learning and for empowering its alumni to have a powerful impact on the world.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION ITEMS

- **Highlight what makes Wesleyan distinctive**
 - Establish Wesleyan as a hub for engagement, arts and culture, service, and transformation—an axis for ideas, innovative thinking, and connections
 - Establish the University as a destination for talented faculty, students, and staff
 - Establish the University as a prime opportunity for investment and philanthropic support
- **Develop stronger connections between alumni and current campus community**
 - Improve fundraising participation and volunteer activities
 - Increase alumni engagement with in-person and online events
 - Develop online courses for alumni to engage in lifelong learning and connect with current professors
- **Strengthen the reach and predictive power of Admission**
 - Build size of student applicant pool
 - Enhance cultural, geographic, and economic diversity of student applicant pool
 - Demonstrate value of Wesleyan experience
- **Emphasize power of pragmatic liberal learning**
 - Make the case for liberal learning as lifelong endeavor
 - Show the connections between meaningful work and liberal education
 - Cultivate in students the sense that in coming to Wesleyan they are joining a lifelong network of learning

3

While enhancing access, make Wesleyan more sustainable through prudent management and diversification of revenue sources

- STRENGTHS:**
- Endowment of \$1.5+ billion
 - Operating reserves
 - Proven fundraising ability
 - Property available for utilization (Long Lane, Hamlin, former bookstore)
 - High student demand/strong reputation

- VULNERABILITIES:**
- Reliance on tuition revenue
 - Comparative endowment size
 - Debt, expensive facilities projects underway
 - The University's high-touch, residential experience is costly, and a difficult model in which to achieve economies of scale
 - The University faces US demographic trends in the next decade that make recruiting domestic students more challenging, and international recruiting has been disrupted by politics and the pandemic
 - The University offers a liberal education whose "return on investment" will not be readily apparent to many, especially as the cost of attendance rises

VISION

In 2031 Wesleyan will depend on traditional undergraduate tuition for a smaller portion of its budget, which will allow the University to invest resources in its program, financial aid, facilities, and research.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION ITEMS

- **Reduce reliance on tuition**
 - Find efficiencies in "behind the scenes" operations
 - Diversify revenue streams
 - Grow endowment
 - Provide steady pipeline of gifts to endowment
 - Maintain spending rate below 5%
 - Support investment team's efforts to maintain top-quartile performance
- **Support financial aid**
 - Increase percentage of tuition revenue devoted to aid
 - Raise \$100 million in scholarship funding
 - Increase percentage of low- and middle-income students on campus
 - Eliminate financial considerations in admission decisions
- **Plan for improvements for a sustainable campus post-science building**
 - Convert energy infrastructure for renewable energy
 - Replace least efficient student residences
 - Improve use of campus year-round