UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028 FORGING AHEAD

The University of Alabama at Birmingham's [Strategic Planning Council](#) was launched in January 2022 and charged by President Ray Watts to refresh UAB's 2018-2023 strategic plan, Forging the Future, to guide the institution's continued growth, [unprecedented success and positive impact](#) for the next five years, 2024-2028.

President Watts — who often says UAB's most valuable resource is its students, faculty and staff and celebrates their ability to influence people's lives for the better — stressed the importance of the plan's positive impact on the people who make up the UAB community, as well as those in Birmingham, across Alabama and around the world.

"At our core, we are here to make people's lives better, and that starts right here at UAB with our own students, faculty and staff," Watts said. "We are committed to supporting their success and empowering them to make a positive difference in our local and global communities."

In the spring of 2022, the Strategic Planning Council expanded with the addition of several sub-committees and additional subject matter experts who provided research, analysis and insights that informed the development of each section of the 2024-2028 plan, Forging Ahead. By the time the draft plan was presented to the campus community on Oct. 25, 2023, a representative group of at least 55 people from across the university and Health System had contributed to the process.

Following the town hall, the campus community was encouraged to provide feedback during a widely publicized comment period. All feedback received was reviewed, considered, and weighed against similar and competing feedback from other members of the campus community, and several revisions were incorporated in the final plan.

Some feedback was too narrowly focused or specific to a particular area to be included in UAB's overall institutional strategic plan, which is intended to be a big-picture, overarching plan that leads the institution. That feedback will be shared with the appropriate schools, colleges or units for their consideration as they develop their more targeted, localized strategic plans. Forging Ahead metrics are intended to be key, high-level metrics; additional data will be tracked as appropriate by the institution and/or schools, colleges and units to support UAB and localized strategic plan goals.

"I join the Strategic Planning Council in sincerely thanking everyone who reviewed the plan, watched the town hall and provided feedback," Watts said. "I am confident this plan — Forging Ahead — will guide our talented and dedicated students, faculty and staff in building on the momentum of Forging the Future and increasing UAB's positive influence in improving lives."

FORGING AHEAD
STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028

VISION, MISSION, VALUES

Education

Research, Innovation, and Economic Development

Community Engagement

Patient Care

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

DIVERSITY

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision: UAB is a world-class research university and academic health system committed to understanding and improving the human experience.

Mission: UAB enriches society and improves health and well-being through transformational educational experiences, groundbreaking research, innovation and entrepreneurship, community engagement, and world-class patient care while serving our UAB, local and global communities.

Values:
UAB Shared Values: We CARE

Collaborate: Work as a team for the greater good.
Act with integrity: Be accountable and always do the right thing.
Respect all: Champion diversity and opportunities for all, with civility.
Excel: Innovate and strive for excellence in everything we do.

PEERS

Higher-education institutions, as is the case in many other sectors, designate peers as a source for comparative data and for identifying other institutions to review for best practices, advice and potential collaboration. Comparable peers share multiple common attributes, while aspirational peers provide an opportunity to identify gaps and direction for where an institution hopes to advance in the future.

UAB is a traditional research-intensive public university and comprehensive academic medical center, located in an urban setting. A list of peer and aspirational institutions was identified

after an extensive review of other institutions. Over 100 unique and current metrics and characteristics of similar types of institutions were used in extensive data modeling procedures. Examples of some metrics included, but were not limited to: enrollments, research expenditures, numbers of employees, retention and graduation rates, admission rates, degree levels and percentages in each, operational expenditures, public status, and city size. These metrics were sourced from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the National Student Clearinghouse, the National Science Foundation (NSF) Higher Education Research and Development Survey (HERD), U.S. News & World Report, Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), Association of American Universities (AAU), Southern University Group (SUG), Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), and the U.S. Census Bureau. Consideration was also given to the population size of the urban settings of candidate institutions relative to the population of the Birmingham metropolitan area, as well as competition in NCAA sports. Given the multitude of metrics assessed, UAB may exceed or lag a comparable peer institution on a given metric.

The six institutions listed below were identified as UAB's comparable peers.

- **University of Utah*** (Salt Lake City)
- **University of Colorado – Denver/Anschutz Medical Campus*** (Denver and Aurora)
- **Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)** (Richmond)
- **University of Cincinnati**
- **University of Illinois – Chicago**
- **University of South Florida (USF)** (Tampa)

*Newly identified peers of UAB

Three institutions were identified as UAB's aspirational peers. These institutions are currently much larger in student population than UAB, and all are in larger metropolitan areas.

- **University of Pittsburgh – Pittsburgh, Pa.**
- **University of California – Irvine, Calif.**
- **Rutgers University – New Brunswick, N.J.**

For the following data, it is important to note — as outlined above — that many factors were considered by the Council in assessing peers. The following assessment of NSF HERD rankings was important to the process, but was not the sole criterion in identifying peers and aspirational peers. As UAB is Alabama's largest research institution by the total value of annual expenditures, it was important to identify peers that had a research profile similar to UAB's, which is commonly indexed by NSF HERD rankings. Based on the FY22 HERD rankings, the two new institutions on our list, the University of Utah (#29) and the University of Colorado – Denver/Anschutz Medical Campus (#33), are close to UAB (#27). Additionally, their student demographics are closely aligned with UAB metrics. While the Denver metro area is much larger than Birmingham, the Salt Lake City metro area is similar in size to the population of the

Birmingham metro area. The HERD rankings for the remaining peers are VCU (#47), Cincinnati (#31), Ill-Chicago (#42) and USF (#49). The HERD rankings for the University of Pittsburgh, UC Irvine and Rutgers University are #9, #38 and #28, respectively.

FOUNDATIONS
Financial Sustainability

Strategic Goal: Increase giving from alumni and supporters and ensure that all resources available to UAB are used and managed effectively.

Strategic Objective 1: Increase fiscal year giving.
    Activities:
    1.1. Increase estate planning gifts.
    1.2. Increase giving for scholarships and endowments.

Strategic Objective 2: Increase alumni giving.
    Activities:
    2.1. Engage alumni in campus activities and events, including but not limited to the arts and athletics.
    2.2. Connect alumni with the recipients of their gifts.

Strategic Objective 3: Promote financial stewardship and increase spendable cash and investments to operations.
    Activities:
    3.1. Explore additional revenue opportunities consistent with the mission of the university.
    3.2. Continually assess opportunities to increase efficiencies to best utilize limited resources responsibly and reduce expenses.

Strategic Objective 4: Maintain or enhance the credit rating for UAB.
    Activities:
    4.1. Using revenue projections, assess the ongoing debt capacity for UAB.
    4.2. Monitor the market for promising time periods for debt issuance.

SMART Criteria for Dashboard Metrics for Financial Sustainability Foundation – By 2028:
1. Increase philanthropic gift amounts received by $12.5 million (FY24 baseline = $80 million).
2. Increase alumni giving by $1,250,000 (FY24 baseline = $9.0 million).
3. Improve the spendable cash and investment to operations ratio to 0.75 (FY22 baseline with recent negative equity market fluctuation = 0.57).
4. Maintain or enhance the credit rating of UAB with the external rating agencies with respect to the long-term debt issued by the campus {current ratings are Aa2 (Moody's) and AA+, stable (S&P)}.

NOTE: Forging Ahead metrics are intended to be key, high-level metrics; additional data will be tracked as appropriate by the institution and/or schools, colleges and units to support UAB and localized strategic plan goals.

Diversity

Collaboration, integrity, respect and excellence are UAB shared values and at the core of what it means to be a UAB community member. At UAB, everybody counts every day; this means the practice of valuing each member of our community and the richly different perspectives, characteristics and life experiences associated with the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds and beliefs that contribute to UAB's unique educational, patient care and professional environments. UAB is committed to fostering a diverse, respectful and inclusive campus environment that values all community members. The wide-ranging makeup of our students, faculty, staff and patients enriches the learning, work and care environments and is reflective of the communities we serve. UAB serves a diverse population and aims to create a respectful and inclusive environment, including through education, training and awareness programs.[a]

Strategic Goal: Support a campus community that values wide-ranging experiences and perspectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen pathways to institutional access and educational success for all students.
- 1.1. Prepare students to thrive in contexts and institutions that are increasingly diverse.
- 1.2. Attract a diverse student body, recognizing the many ways in which students add to our community through wide-ranging life experiences and perspectives.
- 1.3. Cultivate new alliances and capitalize on existing partnerships throughout campus and surrounding communities to promote diversity in student enrollment.
- 1.4. Attract a diverse faculty and staff base, recognizing the many ways in which employees add value to our community through diverse life experiences and perspectives.

Strategic Objective 2: Nurture an educational climate that embraces wide-ranging perspectives.
- 2.1. Promote freedom of speech and civil discourse, as well as the value that different life experiences and perspectives provide in enriching the learning environment.
- 2.2. Provide opportunities for ongoing civil discourse.
- 2.3. Offer educational opportunities and resources on engaging in civil discourse for all students, faculty and staff.

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[a] In the implementation of our goals and objectives, UAB will comply with all applicable policies (e.g., Equal Opportunity and Discriminatory Harassment Policy, Title IX, etc.) and all applicable laws including, but not limited to, Title VII, Title VI, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Equal Protection Clause. In accordance with these policies and laws, UAB will not make employment or admissions decisions or offer any benefits or advantages based on race, gender, national origin or any other legally protected category.

2.4. Promote awareness of the richly different perspectives, beliefs and life experiences of everyone UAB serves in developing curricular and co-curricular activities to promote well-being and all students, faculty and staff feeling part of the UAB community.

Strategic Objective 3: Engage in research, scholarship and creative activities that explore the impact of wide-ranging perspectives and life experiences that improve the quality of life for all people across diverse populations.
3.1. Incorporate options for research, scholarship and creative activities in the curriculum that recognize the many ways in which students and employees add valuable diversity to our community.
3.2. Offer workshop opportunities for faculty and research staff to design and implement research, scholarship and creative activity projects that recognize the many ways in which students and employees add valuable diversity to our community.
3.3. Recognize and publicize faculty and research staff engaging in research, scholarship and creative activities that recognize the many ways in which students and employees add valuable diversity to our community.

Strategic Objective 4: Enhance excellence and connection to wide-ranging perspectives and life experiences through community engagement.
4.1. Increase and strengthen partnerships with diverse businesses, industries, organizations and community-based entities.
4.2. Cultivate community-university partnerships to understand obstacles faced by individuals with differing perspectives and life experiences.

Strategic Objective 5: Deliver excellence to a diverse patient base.
5.1. Identify and remove barriers to world-class health care for any patient.
5.2. Offer workshop opportunities focused on delivering care to all patients specific to their unique needs.
5.3. Identify and remove barriers to patient satisfaction for patients of all backgrounds.

Diversity Dashboard Metrics – *By 2028:*
1. Encourage participation among all students in success-supporting programs and reduce the graduation rate gap for students with diverse life experiences and/or who require financial assistance (e.g., first-generation, socioeconomic background, Birmingham Promise program participants) by 5%.
2. Sustain and enhance a variety of optional trainings, workshops, programs, courses and speakers with wide-ranging perspectives for faculty, staff and students.
3. Sustain hiring, recruitment and retention practices that adhere to state and federal employment laws while increasing faculty and staff awareness of the value each member of the UAB community contributes to UAB's unique professional environment.

NOTE: Forging Ahead metrics are intended to be key, high-level metrics; additional data will be tracked as appropriate by the institution and/or schools, colleges and units to support UAB and localized strategic plan goals.

Environmental Stewardship

Strategic Goal: Educate the UAB community on environmental stewardship and sustainability, and encourage sustainable practices.

Strategic Objective 1: Promote environmental stewardship/sustainability-related learning outcomes in applicable courses and majors.
   Activities:
   1.1. Pursue academic department-level collaboration for incorporating learning outcomes related to environmental stewardship and sustainability.
   1.2. Explore opportunities to increase participation in sustainability activities through Blazer Core.

Strategic Objective 2: Support interdisciplinary and interprofessional research, scholarship and creative activities related to environmental stewardship/sustainability and encourage sustainable research practices.
   Activities:
   2.1. Recognize interdisciplinary and interprofessional sustainability research.
   2.2. Encourage a Green Labs culture through partnerships with Environmental Health and Safety and individual departments.

Strategic Objective 3: Engage the community in environmental stewardship/sustainability education and programs.
   Activities:
   3.1. Develop formal and informal partnerships with area municipalities and other stakeholders to support sustainability.
   3.2. Develop and share educational publications and programs that address sustainability for a community audience.

Strategic Objective 4: Design, construct and maintain buildings to provide a safe and healthy indoor environment for students, faculty, staff and patients while mitigating the building's impact on the outdoor environment.
   Activities:
   4.1. Increase the number of buildings receiving LEED-certified or Energy Star 75-plus scoring standards.
   4.2. Analyze energy use and environmental impacts of construction and renovation projects.

SMART Criteria for Dashboard Metrics for Environmental Stewardship Foundation – By 2028:
   1. Increase the number of students earning a Sustainability flag in the Blazer Core by 8% (FY23 baseline TBD).
   2. 80% of the new square footage constructed will meet LEED standards, and LEED certification will be pursued on projects over 20,000 gross square feet.

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PILLARS
Education

Strategic Goal: Prepare UAB's student body to become healthy, engaged global citizens and leaders by providing a world-class, socially conscious education.

Strategic Objective 1: Enroll, retain and graduate a high-achieving, diverse student body of global and local citizens empowered to think critically and act civically and professionally at UAB and beyond.
>   **Activities:**
>   1.1. Grow recruitment activities focused on increasing a diverse student body with richly different perspectives, characteristics and life experiences.
>   1.2. Enrich student belonging through enhanced engagement opportunities for all students, with an emphasis on innovative programs and providing flexibility with course offerings for various types of students (e.g., adult learners, opt out students, online, prior learning, short courses, etc.).
>   1.3. Promote high-impact practices (e.g., experiential learning, interdisciplinary learning, global learning; First Year Experience; learning communities; and undergraduate research) and innovative academic programming.

Strategic Objective 2: Recruit, develop and retain a diverse faculty and staff to lead, teach and support UAB's innovative educational programs.
>   **Activities:**
>   2.1. Retain, recruit and hire a diverse faculty and staff body who will lead in scholarly inquiry, teaching, interdisciplinarity, global citizenship and leadership.
>   2.2. Foster a culture of lifelong learning, critical thinking and global awareness that supports and encourages academic, professional and personal development and mentorship for faculty and staff.
>   2.3. Provide best-in-class teaching, learning resources and co-curricular activities for faculty and staff with emphasis on the use of high-impact practices and student success.

Strategic Objective 3: Provide innovative and experiential curriculum and co-curricular experiences through "Blazer Core" that places community and connection at the heart of education.
>   **Activities:**
>   3.1. Provide a coherent, intellectually stimulating and community-connected undergraduate curriculum (Blazer Core and majors) to address 21st century needs/skills that is delivered through high-impact teaching and experiential learning practices.

3.2. Provide co-curricular opportunities that support the academic mission of the university and enrich the student experience.

3.3. Provide world-class graduate and professional programs that prepare future leaders in academic research, public service, creative entrepreneurship and professional practice.

Strategic Objective 4: Engage students, faculty and staff in UAB's emphasis on health and well-being.
   Activities:
   4.1. Integrate health and well-being in curricular and co-curricular educational experiences.
   4.2. Incorporate health and well-being concepts into faculty and staff activities.
   4.3. Promote UAB as a signatory of the Okanagan Charter and Health Promoting University.

   SMART Criteria for Dashboard Metrics for Education Pillar – By 2028:
   1. Increase total enrollment by 5% (1% per year; baseline 22,164).
   2. Increase the first-time, full-time freshmen retention rate by 2.9 percentage points (baseline 84.2%).
   3. Improve the six-year graduation rate to 70% (baseline 62.6%).
   4. Increase the number of students earning a Wellbeing flag in the Blazer Core by 8% (FY23 baseline TBD).

   NOTE: Forging Ahead metrics are intended to be key, high-level metrics; additional data will be tracked as appropriate by the institution and/or schools, colleges and units to support UAB and localized strategic plan goals.

Research, Innovation and Economic Development

Strategic Goal: Empower innovative research, scholarship and creative activities that drive knowledge and job creation focused on improving society.

It is important to note that, at the time Forging Ahead was drafted, UAB was engaged on a parallel track in its Research Strategic Initiative — Growth With Purpose, guided by faculty and staff input and third-party experts to inform specific actions UAB will take across each of the following strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Enhance UAB's institutional culture of collaboration and innovation.
   Activities:
   1.1. Foster an environment that facilitates collaboration and promotes innovation.
   1.2. Promote successful interdisciplinary and interprofessional research collaborations internally and externally.
   1.3. Expand and strengthen collaborations with external partners, sponsors and funders.

Strategic Objective 2: Drive research and innovation across the enterprise.
   Activities:
   2.1. Strengthen and grow priority areas of research, scholarship and creative activities.
   2.2. Grow and diversify sources of funding and support.

2.3. Retain, recruit and develop outstanding, innovation-focused faculty, staff and students.

2.4. Grow infrastructure (talent, technology, space and equipment) to support research excellence.

2.5. Expand access, participation and expenditures in clinical trials.

2.6. Continue to grow productive collaborations with Southern Research.

Strategic Objective 3: Improve society through processes and products.
   Activities:

3.1. Facilitate intellectual property (IP) development.

3.2. Streamline internal processes to lower barriers to realizing innovative ideas.

3.3. Foster economic development in the city of Birmingham to transform and sustain a thriving local hub for life sciences innovation and creativity.

Strategic Objective 4: Expand UAB's economic impact on the state.
   Activities:

4.1. Strategically invest in student enrollment and retention to increase economic impact.

4.2. Facilitate faculty and staff hiring and retention to positively impact the state economy.

4.3. Increase patient volume to serve the state.

4.4. Expand research funding to expand UAB's economic impact on the state.

SMART Criteria for Dashboard Metrics for Research, Innovation and Economic Development Pillar – By 2028:

1. Increase external research expenditures by 28% to $913 million (baseline $713 million).

2. Increase IP disclosures by 25% (baseline 104 on a three-year average).

3. Increase the economic impact of UAB to $15 billion (FY22 baseline = $12.1 billion).

NOTE: Forging Ahead metrics are intended to be key, high-level metrics; additional data will be tracked as appropriate by the institution and/or schools, colleges and units to support UAB and localized strategic plan goals.

Community Engagement

Strategic Goal: Engage with UAB and external communities in meaningful and mutually beneficial collaborations that contribute to the public good.

Strategic Objective 1: Enhance the climate for student community engagement.
   Activities:

1.1. Increase the proportion of students engaging in community activities.

1.2. Increase the number of community engagement service hours completed by graduating students.

Strategic Objective 2: Enhance the climate for faculty and staff community engagement.
   Activities:

2.1. Elevate and reward community engagement activity, research and scholarship throughout UAB for faculty and staff.

2.2. Formalize the value of community engagement in faculty and staff roles and responsibilities in recruitment, evaluation, nomination and promotion procedures.

Strategic Objective 3: Build an educated citizenry and workforce.
    Activities:
3.1. Retain graduating students in-state (employment, graduate school, military service, volunteerism).
3.2. Address the state's workforce needs with degree programs and non-degree certificates.

Strategic Objective 4: Support and maintain the UAB Grand Challenge program, "Live HealthSmart Alabama," and its goals to improve the health of all Alabamians and serve as a model for the United States and beyond.
    Activities:
4.1. Align internal resources to enable action.
4.2. Identify and secure ongoing external support.
4.3. Expand inclusive processes for participation within UAB and the collaborating communities.
4.4. Expand "Live HealthSmart Alabama" beyond Birmingham.

SMART Criteria for Dashboard Metrics for Community Engagement Pillar – By 2028:
1. Increase the number of community engagement hours completed by enrolled undergraduates, graduate/professional students, faculty, and staff to over 27,000 hours (baseline 24,704 hours).
2. Increase the number of graduating students who remain in-state for employment, graduate/professional education, volunteerism, or military service to 77% (baseline 69%).
3. Expand "Live HealthSmart Alabama" to five additional sites (baseline five sites in Birmingham area).

NOTE: Forging Ahead metrics are intended to be key, high-level metrics; additional data will be tracked as appropriate by the institution and/or schools, colleges and units to support UAB and localized strategic plan goals.

Patient Care

Strategic Goal: Provide the highest-quality patient-centered integrative care and translate discoveries into revolutionary therapies.

Strategic Objective 1: Improve patient access and satisfaction through integration of clinical services and preventive care across UAB's health care delivery entities.
    Activities:
1.1. Develop a phased process of integrating care.
1.2. Enhance patient experience, from appointment process to wayfinding, to post-care communication.

1.3. Achieve national recognition as a place where patients experience highly satisfying health care services.

Strategic Objective 2: Invest in signature treatments that will be delivered through recognized flagship programs.

    Activities:
2.1. Identify distinctive areas of expertise that generate prestige and set UAB apart from competitors.
2.2. Retain and recruit world-class faculty and staff to develop and provide these treatments.

Strategic Objective 3: Develop infrastructure to ensure statewide access to telehealth services.
    Activities:
3.1. Create a centralized system to support existing and new telehealth programs at UAB.
3.2. Develop a network of partnerships across the state to enhance patient access.

SMART Criteria for Dashboard Metrics for Patient Care Pillar – By 2028:

1. Increase patient visits across all health-related entities by 15% (baselines vary by entity).
2. Improve or maintain patient satisfaction scores above 90% as defined by health-related entity (baselines vary by entity).
3. Increase the number of telemedicine patient interactions by 25% (FY23 baseline visits 3,974).

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The University of Alabama at Birmingham — as one of three doctoral research universities in the University of Alabama System — maintains a strategic plan that is aligned with the UA System's vision, mission, values and core principles and is approved by the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees.