PACE STRATEGIC PLAN

2023–2025

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
PROFESSIONAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Disruption is everywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the world a significantly different place now than it was in 2020. As in many industries, higher education institutions have emerged from the pandemic to encounter changing economic and social conditions. Some are returning to business as usual. Others rush to solutions without assessing the severity of its impact on the higher education landscape and the fundamental changes already underway. Thus, we find ourselves with a brief window of opportunity. This is the moment to stake a claim between the two poles, retaining our pre-pandemic strengths while ensuring that we move swiftly and deliberately to respond to the changing environment. To maximize the opportunity this moment presents, in developing this Strategic Plan we sought to determine where the disruption has occurred and what we will do about it.

PACE always begins with the learner. Throughout the pandemic, we observed their educational goals stall or change altogether. Individual careers were disrupted. Worlds narrowed from the office to the living room, as remote work took hold of many sectors. We saw learners seeking the ability to reskill or upskill to accelerate their preparation for employment in a digital economy. Equally significant, we found them caring more deeply than ever about emerging from the pandemic within healthier communities and sustainable environments.

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Disruption has not been limited to individuals. Companies recognized that they must evolve now. The technological skills required to keep pace with consumer behavior and expectations are pushing against their employees' capacity to deliver. At the same time, many budgets are tightening, forcing them to scramble for new efficiencies among their workforces. Employers would rather retrain than rehire. They are recognizing that it is far more productive to build lasting partnerships with institutions of higher education and other training organizations than to find new solutions each time their employees inevitably need new skills.

Combining pandemic disruption with fundamental shifts that were already underway in higher education is a recipe for uncharted territory. The former only masked the fact that a demographic cliff is nearly upon us. Institutions will soon compete for smaller pools of undergraduate students, while non-traditional audiences grow substantially. Developments in the economy and workforce training are prompting learners to seek educational opportunities throughout the course of their working lives. This is where PACE comes in. We must be ready to fulfill the land grant mission of the University and the needs of Vermont's workforce by serving growing populations of learners beyond our campus borders. A Strategic Plan was needed to ensure we are positioned to serve learners' needs now and in the future.

MISSION/VISION

OUR MISSION at PACE is to...
Provide accessible, high-quality educational experiences for lifelong success.

OUR VISION at PACE is to...
Empower people to solve the world's challenges with curiosity and knowledge.

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PROCESS

Capitalizing on this moment of disruption and opportunity required us to identify what is core to our values and make clear choices about what we need to prioritize for the future. We also were committed to a strategic planning process that was inclusive, transparent, fresh, and rigorous. Accomplishing this would require us to take a few key steps with input from many stakeholders, including staff, faculty, students, alumni, and community members.

First, we looked inwards. We began with a retreat to solicit feedback from our steering committee, which consisted of six senior leaders from across the University. They provided a candid assessment of our organization's strengths and weaknesses. From there, we turned to our staff in an all-hands meeting to identify the macro-level problems we wanted to solve and where we should expend our collective effort. Through both sessions, we found that we champion access. We are learner-focused and provide value beyond technical support. We make meaningful contributions to the University. We fulfill its mission by focusing on the entire trajectory of students' learning over their lifetime and providing guidance and support to academic units to achieve this mission.

Second, we looked outwards. We interviewed over 40 stakeholders and invested countless hours in market research. This revealed opportunities and threats in our external environment that will impact our ability to reach learners. We also understand where we are positioned relative to those dynamics. We found that changing demographics of learners, growing industry clusters, employer

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…PROCESS CONTINUED

partnerships, graduate programming, and pre-college pathways all represent areas upon which we are well-positioned for growth and success. However, we were careful to recognize that we must also overcome crowded marketplaces, cheaper educational options, workforce training alternatives, and evolving perceptions of higher education's value.

Third, we held three ideation workshops dedicated to finding meaningful and actionable solutions. We took a divergent and convergent approach—welcoming all suggestions and brainstorming as many ideas as possible before refining them into a coherent strategy. We returned to our Steering Committee once more to ensure the feasibility of integrating these ideas across campus. Finally, we brought the entire PACE team together once more to ensure everyone had a voice in shaping the future of our work together.

The result is a rigorous, inclusive, actionable Strategic Plan. It will guide us into the future, reminding us where we should place our attention and effort. The pillars represent the five key areas that will remain fixed, as guideposts along this journey. The strategies are the ambitious targets that will drive us toward market opportunities and combat the threats to progress. The tactics will evolve over time as we advance towards these goals, leveraging our strengths and overcoming our weaknesses. We're excited about what the future has in store for PACE!

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PILLARS

ONE
Develop & grow academic programs aimed at preparing learners for emerging and high-skill occupations

TWO
Position PACE as a premier venue for upskilling and reskilling through strong employer partnerships and persistent engagement

THREE
Expand access to the University for increasingly diverse student audiences seeking educational opportunities and credentials

FOUR
Provide high-quality learning experiences by investing in innovative, educational technologies and services, scalable across the PACE portfolio

FIVE
Thrive as a cohesive, results-driven unit with an organizational culture of collaboration, entrepreneurship, expertise, and reliability

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Develop and grow academic programs aimed at preparing learners for emerging and high-skill occupations

Strategy 1.1 – Establish UVM as a new competitor in the regional market of professional, online graduate programs

Tactic 1.1.1 - Spearhead **program development through incentive structures** that encourage academic units to propose and implement innovative new programs by drawing on existing or emergent University academic strengths

Tactic 1.1.2 - Implement a **clear program development model using industry-standard best practices** and existing University governance processes

Tactic 1.1.3 - Sponsor an **annual call for proposals** from the Provost's Office to sustain a regular flow of new programmatic opportunities

Strategy 1.2 – Grow existing non-credit and non-degree program portfolio in proven areas of strength, demonstrated market share, and forecasted demand

Tactic 1.2.1 - **Optimize** the PACE portfolio through an annual program review that identifies programs suitable for dedicated strength-based growth initiatives and sunsets underperforming programs

Tactic 1.2.2 - **Analyze student/alumni insights, student demand trends, and labor market data** to better articulate unique value proposition across programs

Tactic 1.2.3 - **Streamline data systems** to monitor ongoing KPIs using the portfolio-wide monthly dashboard and program-level dashboards

Tactic 1.2.4 - **Scaffold non-credit and credit programs**, creating pathways for students to stack modular learning experiences into recognizable credentials

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…PILLAR ONE CONTINUED

Strategy 1.3 - Develop programs in niche areas aligned with UVM strengths, high-demand skills of the future and projected growth in targeted industries, occupations, and audiences

Tactic 1.3.1 - Identify, vet and potentially partner with **quality third-party vendors** that can augment PACE's instructional and curriculum development capacity

Tactic 1.3.2 - **Focus development efforts by industry cluster** (e.g. renewable energy, health, regenerative agriculture, adv. manufacturing, biotech, and digital technology, analytics and marketing)

Tactic 1.3.3 - **Explore University partnerships** for delivering shared online programs in areas of UVM brand strength to domestic and international audiences

Tactic 1.3.4 - Expand **Summer University** through program development that capitalizes on Vermont's strong sense of place, faculty expertise, and innovative curricula

PILLAR TWO

Position PACE as a premier venue for upskilling and reskilling through strong employer partnerships and persistent engagement

Strategy 2.1 – Build lasting relationships with key employers, delivering timely, relevant, and tailored credit and non-credit educational programs to suit their organizational development goals

Tactic 2.1.1 - Cultivate **employer relationships across non-profit, government and industry sectors** through persistent outreach, communication, and presence in key venues

Tactic 2.1.2 - Assess **employers' learning, training, and organizational development needs**

Tactic 2.1.3 - Pursue **high-ROI employer partnerships**, prioritizing sales efforts by specific industry and workforce size

Tactic 2.1.4 - Seed programs with **grant funding and/or partnerships with sponsoring entities**, advancing the University's research strengths with broader impacts

Strategy 2.2 – Increase awareness of PACE's mission and programs, through an ecosystem of community, government, and alumni networks

Tactic 2.2.1 - Maximize interactions with the **Engagement Advisory Council (EAC) and Office of Engagement** to grow a network of PACE advocates

Tactic 2.2.2 - Participate in existing networks and, where relevant, create **industry-specific advisory committees** to solicit ongoing feedback and deepen understanding of local/regional workforce needs and trends

Tactic 2.2.3 - Generate **alumni engagement** by showcasing alumni outcomes at all opportunities to demonstrate the value of PACE programs

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PILLAR THREE

Expand access to the University for increasingly diverse student audiences seeking educational opportunities and credentials

Strategy 3.1 – Work strategically to strengthen enrollment of pre-college students based on a cohesive portfolio of pathway programs, generating clear avenues for students that may ultimately lead to undergraduate matriculation at UVM

Tactic 3.1.1 - Increase awareness of the **dual enrollment voucher program** through a dedicated outreach plan that connects to Vermont high schools in collaboration with the Division of Enrollment Management

Tactic 3.1.2 - Align **existing pathway programs** with the **Division of Enrollment Management's strategic objectives** to better anticipate course capacity needs and improve the predictability of requests for reserved seats across campus

Tactic 3.1.3 - Organize **periodic focus groups for pre-college students** to reveal insights about their motivations and interests

Tactic 3.1.4 - Revisit **the degree completion working group findings** to determine if there are feasible ways to support students with some college but no degree

Strategy 3.2 – Foster inclusive learning environments within all PACE courses/programs, while increasing diversity of instructors, collaborators, and learners

Tactic 3.2.1 - Produce and utilize a **PACE Inclusive Excellence Plan (IEP)** that supports the University's DEIJ goals

Tactic 3.2.2 - **Contract with subject matter experts** with knowledge of current DEIJ best practices to develop and deliver DEIJ programs along of continuum of need and opportunity for corporate and/or non-profit organizations

Tactic 3.2.3 - Establish a **DEIJ advisory board** that can keep PACE current with inclusive practices

Tactic 3.2.4 - Conduct **an annual targeted review of PACE curriculum and content to ensure programs remain inclusive and accessible** for all learners

Tactic 3.2.5 - Provide **instructor training and resources** in inclusive pedagogy

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Provide high-quality learning experiences by investing in innovative, educational technologies and services, scalable across the PACE portfolio

Strategy 4.1 – Enrich the quality of learning experiences, build a sense of community, and enhance career readiness among all learners at PACE

Tactic 4.1.1 - Offer **career coaching** as a service for any PACE learner

Tactic 4.1.2 - **Scale online learning communities** across the PACE portfolio of programs, enabling learners to access a community of learners

Tactic 4.1.3 - **Strengthen evaluation of the student experience in all courses**, dedicating effort to measure quality and satisfaction with our portfolio at each stage of the student lifecycle

Tactic 4.1.4 - **Research assessment of prior learning (APL) models** and implement relevant models at UVM

Tactic 4.1.5 - Recruit, onboard, support, and develop outstanding instructors to provide high-quality learning experiences and, where relevant, support their integration with degree-granting units

Strategy 4.2 – Lead the University in cutting-edge, tech-enabled pedagogies with effectiveness at the forefront of all educational offerings

Tactic 4.2.1 - Support the University in its **LMS transition to Brightspace**

Tactic 4.2.2 - Embed **problem-based, applied, and team-based learning components where relevant** into programs

Tactic 4.2.3 - Pilot **emerging educational technologies**

Tactic 4.2.4 - **Review curriculum on a three-year cycle**, creating tailored plans for updating content offerings and course materials

Tactic 4.2.5 - In collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning, lead the creation of a university-wide infrastructure to **ensure best practices in online teaching and learning**

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Thrive as a cohesive, results-driven unit with an organizational culture of collaboration, entrepreneurship, expertise, and reliability

Strategy 5.1 – Focus dedicated energy on re-building our organizational culture to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic as a stronger and unified team

Tactic 5.1.1 - **Enhance employee morale and wellness**, supporting our staff with a dynamic, fun, and flexible work environment

Tactic 5.1.2 - Reinforce that PACE is a learning organization by availing **regular professional development opportunities** for our skilled staff to continue their professional growth

Tactic 5.1.3 - Organize our teams around **strategic initiatives, required skills for implementation, and individual strengths**

Tactic 5.1.4 - Instill a **sense of pride** in the collective goals we are aiming to accomplish

Strategy 5.2 – Accomplish our work in an efficient yet thorough manner with clear divisions of labor, collaboration, and accountability

Tactic 5.2.1 - Promote **clarity and transparency** around organizational decisions and processes

Tactic 5.2.2 - Fulfill our campus partners' expectations by **delivering on commitments within a clearly-established timeline**

Tactic 5.2.3 - Network with professional associations and peer/aspirant institutions to **heighten awareness of organizational best practices** in professional education units

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CONCLUSION

The pillars, strategies, and tactics make our mission ahead very clear. **Our mission now is to provide accessible, high-quality educational experiences for lifelong success.**

Bringing this mission to life will require a solid plan of action as we move from strategy to implementation. Our functional teams will come together to identify key performance indicators to ensure that we monitor and evaluate our progress against each strategy. They will outline realistic timelines, so we maintain a consistent stream of milestones and successes. Discrete next steps will help put this plan into motion by ensuring that certain processes and foundational support are in place to accommodate each of our pillars. Finally, the functional teams will have conversations about the resources needed to achieve these efforts, giving us the ability to invest in areas that will enable our growth.

This Strategic Plan is ambitious. It is exciting but not easy. But together, we can accomplish great things by moving in the same direction. And the disruptions experienced in higher education will surely continue beyond the immediate years following the pandemic. Thus, we can certainly expect continuous change in these uncertain times. However, with our new energy, new leadership, new direction, and new building, we can be confident in the direction we have chartered. This path will be illuminated by our vision: **to empower people to solve the world's challenges with curiosity and knowledge.**

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