

*Strategic Plan Development and Maintenance Process*

*GVSU Strategic Plan 2016-2021*

**Environmental Scan Process for  
the GVSU 2016-2021 Strategic Plan**

Grand Valley State University's *Strategic Plan 2016-2021* is grounded by a thorough, timely environmental scan undertaken in 2013 and 2014. During this process, the current and anticipated factors most likely to impact the University in the years ahead were identified, including demographic, economic and cultural trends affecting higher education; demographic, educational, economic and social data from West Michigan, statewide, the nation and world; information about the current and projected landscape of higher education in the U.S. and abroad; the technology trends most likely to affect the institution's pedagogical, administrative and management functions; and in-depth information about GVSU's current successes and challenges, including the voluminous data available from the institution's dashboard and its updates from the *Strategic Plan 2010-2015*.

This foundational environmental scan included some 12 Strategic Conversations – conducted as facilitated focus group sessions with all members of the University community, including students, faculty, administrators and staff; administration of online surveys to some approximately 180 individuals, posing similar questions in an electronic format that allowed for open-ended responses; key informant interviews and conversations with many of the influencers in the University community, including university board of trustees, university administrators, senior management team members, and academic leaders at GVSU and GVSU's peer institutions; content analyses of recent articles published in the higher education professional literature about anticipated needs, approaches to meet these needs and other anticipated changes in the field expected to occur in the decade ahead; and content analyses of the strategic plans of other Institutions of Higher Education in Michigan and those of our peer institutions.

A significant amount of information about the institution's environment was also available from the more than 25 accreditation and re-accreditation studies its schools and departments have successfully undertaken since 2010, as well as from the feedback provided by site visitors affiliated with these external accrediting bodies, including but not limited to The Higher Learning Commission's North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Other data-gathering aligned with and incorporated into this ongoing strategic planning process was undertaken by the Development Division, which surveyed Grand Valley's donors using the same electronic survey instrument. In addition, a survey of GVSU alumni is planned using the same survey to secure additional feedback from that important source.

From the data garnered from this expansive environmental scan, GVSU's Strategic Positioning Committee derived information about GVSU's current internal strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, aspirations, and challenges. The process we have used and continue to use to understand these characteristics of the University is both organic and iterative, with a purposeful focus on ensuring the outcomes of the *Strategic Plan 2016-2021 are both aspirational and achievable within the resources we are likely to have available in the period.*

## **The Strategic Positioning Process for The 2016 - 2021 Strategic Plan**

Grand Valley State University maintains its objective of being a high functioning, well-regarded, and decidedly productive institution of higher education. Its journey toward achieving excellence at all levels and becoming one of the nation's premier comprehensive universities is guided by a thorough strategic positioning process. A goal of this process is to develop a strategic plan that reflects and incorporates the institution's previous positioning documents while setting a course for the next five years that is bold, new, and optimistic.

The Strategic Plan 2016-2021 includes a vision of what Grand Valley aspires to be, as well as a statement of its mission, vision, and values that guide its institutional behavior and culture at every level. The intent was to develop a results-oriented plan, with a focus on increasing student success for the learning environment. As a result, the 2016-2021 strategic positioning process was facilitated by the use of an inclusive method, which involved a broad representation across the university. The goal of utilizing this method was to include students, alumni, board members, staff and faculty, as well as the community, to ensure the voices of all stakeholders would be heard, and to create a highly transparent and shared vision for the university's future.

At Grand Valley, the strategic positioning process begins with the Board of Trustees (BOT), who gives voice to the mission and vision of the university. A key function of the BOT was to review and affirm the institution's mission statement, and its creation of a new vision statement and values statement – the foundational elements of the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. The new statements underscore GVSU's full commitment to its students and their academic and lifelong success. The BOT remained involved as the outcomes, strategic priorities, and other elements of the plan evolved, under the guidance of an institution-wide Strategic Positioning Committee (SPC).

An important early step in the positioning process included the formation of the 25-member, institution-wide SPC to advise and guide the 24 month development process. Led by the Associate Vice President of Assessment, Accreditation, and Strategic Positioning, a primary goal for the SPC's process included soliciting feedback from students, alumni, staff, faculty, and the community on university-wide priorities through the end of the decade. This was accomplished in part by the decision to have the SPC host a series of "Strategic Positioning Conversations," to collect critical data that would inform the university's strategic visioning efforts. Twelve Strategic Positioning Conversations took place in the fall of 2013, and each session was co-facilitated by two SPC members with one Public Administration graduate student who functioned as an additional researcher. Invitations from university President Thomas Haas were e-mailed to all students and staff prior to the sessions. Additionally, Provost Gayle Davis contacted all faculty members via e-mail to participate in the strategic positioning sessions.

Before the sessions convened, participants were informed of several important emerging trends in higher education that will affect the delivery of post-secondary education for the class of 2021 and beyond. These trends included, increased competition for students due to more post-secondary pathways, increased financial pressures on students and colleges, and increased use of technology, to name a few. The committee wanted the participants to be aware of these trends before entering the Strategic Positioning Conversations in order to provide a framework to consider the strategic positioning questions that would facilitate the development of the 2016-2021 strategic goals.

Following the twelve sessions, data analysis was conducted by Public Administration graduate students. Thematic analysis was conducted within and across each question, considering the higher education trends identified by the SPC, as well as additional emerging themes raised by respondents. The strategic analysis concluded with recommendations for the SPC to consider as they entered the next stage of positioning.

The results of the Strategic Positioning Conversations provided numerous emerging themes that served as a basis for the development of an online community survey. This survey provided additional research data that proved to be valuable to the strategic positioning process, and was sent via e-mail to various advisory boards, community partners, and other community stakeholders, including the GVSU Dean's Advisory Committee members, the Deans of all colleges within GVSU, GVSU Student Services, and the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies. To obtain a broad representation, external community constituents were drawn from for-profit, non-profit and government, faith-based, and other community organizations who were invited to participate in the survey. Respondents represented organizations primarily in Kent and Ottawa counties with others distributed across the lower half of the state, and several with a statewide and/or national presence. Of those who were invited to participate, 60% did so, and contributed their ideas on GVSU's future via this opportunity. Nearly all participants had some form of direct dealing with the university, primarily through participation in advisory board meetings, working with students and faculty, offering internship placements, and by attending events sponsored by the university.

The Community Survey 2014 consisted of questions drawn from the Strategic Positioning Conversations findings, and the survey findings were consistent with the findings of the Conversations in terms of having common themes. Additionally, the survey provided a more elaborate representation of community stakeholder interests, as well as providing necessary data for the strategic positioning process. In collaboration with the President's Cabinet, the SPC utilized all institutional feedback in structuring seven core values statements and five new outcomes to serve as the action framework for GVSU's strategic plan. Together with the Strategic Positioning Conversations, the Community Survey 2014 proved to be a key research component necessary for an inclusive and highly transparent strategic positioning process that the university sought to attain.

In 2014, the SPC continued working with the President's Cabinet to develop a comprehensive set of strategic priorities, objectives, and actionable strategies aligned with each of the five aforementioned outcomes. Beginning in early 2015, all colleges and divisions of GVSU created 2016-2021 strategic plans. These plans are fully aligned with the institution's strategic framework of outcomes, strategic priorities, objectives, and actionable strategies. These plans detail what strategies, activities, and tasks each part of the university will complete in this six-year period to ensure the institution as a whole achieves its five outcomes. The GVSU Strategic Plan was presented to the BOT for approval, and the plan was endorsed by the BOT in April 2015.

Simultaneous with planning efforts throughout the institution, the SPC, President's Cabinet, and other stakeholders have worked to fully coordinate institutional budgeting, accountability, and accreditation efforts with the strategic plan. The fundamental objective of the strategic positioning process is to provide Grand Valley with a guide to achieving and sustaining academic excellence in an environment that exemplifies an unprecedented commitment to innovation, quality, and service that is the best among its peer institutions and competitors and is recognized as such. Additionally, the goal of the university's strategic positioning process now and always is to ensure that the university continues to accurately identify its strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results; appropriately sets challenging

outcomes and priorities; and effectively acquires and allocates adequate resources to realize its vision and achieve its priorities, no matter what the future brings.

As a university actively engaged in becoming a stronger, more capable version of itself, Grand Valley is committed to strategically positioning for and attaining greatness, regardless of what lies ahead. Through this increasingly participatory and inclusive strategic positioning process, Grand Valley will be a university that is continuously on a journey to becoming its next better self as it moves toward 2021.

### **Maintenance and Tracking of On-going Progress for the 2016 - 2021 Strategic Plan**

The institution-level plan, as well as the division, program and unit plans, are maintained on a web-based management system that allows for transparency in reporting plan components to all of our constituents. Included are annual updates regarding progress made toward accomplishing the plan objectives. This process allows for easily sharing our work across the institution, making it possible to collaborate at macro and micro-levels to accomplish our objectives. It also provides a level of accountability to each other and to our constituents including our BOT, students, local and regional communities, alumni, accreditors and financial stakeholders.

The strategic plan is a living document that requires periodic review and refreshing. This is accomplished through regular reviews by the Strategic Positioning Committee, the President's Cabinet, and other university leadership groups. As an example, the strategic plan was reviewed and updated during fall 2016 in light of new strategic initiatives developed between the President and the BOT. Finally an annual progress report regarding progress made towards accomplishing plan objectives is prepared and presented to the BOT annually.