



Thrive

**Strategic Plan for 2034
Assumption University**

Our bold vision

Through the goals of this strategic plan, Assumption University outlines an inspiring roadmap, anchored in our steadfast commitment to providing a distinctively Assumptionist Catholic liberal education to all those who seek it.

Embracing a dynamic and forward-thinking approach, Thrive charts a course for excellence. We will position our community to prosper, despite the challenges facing higher education generally and Catholic liberal education specifically.

This plan is bold because our future as an institution demands boldness; we need bold thinking, ambitious goals, and measurable action items to succeed.

Thrive

Our strategic plan for 2034

Thrive is Assumption University's bold 10-year strategic vision to **infuse** our campus with a cohesive commitment to our Assumptionist educational mission, **focus** all decisions on our students' ultimate good, and **grow** our enrollment, reputation, partnerships, and financial strength.

INFUSE

Instill a unified understanding of Assumption's distinctive Catholic liberal arts education across academics, student life, and operations.

FOCUS

Prioritize our students' needs and cultivate a culture of wellness, happiness, and determination.

GROW

Increase access by growing enrollments, philanthropic support, and revenue streams to establish sustainable excellence.



VISION

1

INFUSE: We will infuse the university with a common understanding of our Assumptionist educational mission

- ▶ We will define our Catholic identity in educational terms that draw on Catholic suppositions of the human person that speak universally
- ▶ We will leverage the full potential of the Foundations Program to emphasize the distinctiveness of an Assumption education
- ▶ We will launch a Center for Civic Friendship that will garner national attention
- ▶ We will sustain a culture dedicated to student happiness, well-being, safety, and joy
- ▶ We will free students to study what they love by offering a professional experience or credential to every undergraduate student, regardless of its direct relation to their program of study



Assumption University's unwavering commitment to the enduring principles of Catholic and Assumptionist education will infuse, enrich, and enliven each academic program across the University's undergraduate and graduate schools. This education will equip students to pursue the truth for its own sake and to flourish in their professional and vocational lives.

Goal 1

Cultivate and leverage a cohesive understanding of our identity as a Catholic institution with an educational mission

- ▶ Empower all aspects of campus life to embody our educational mission in their distinct way

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ The Provost and the Director of the D'Amour Center for Teaching Excellence will facilitate educational sessions on Assumption's fundamental educational mission for the enrollment management, university advancement, athletics, and student affairs teams.



Goal 2

Be known for the Foundations Program

- ▶ The Foundations Program will play an important role in the admissions, marketing, student affairs, athletics, advancement, and academic life of the University. The marketing and enrollment management teams will make the Foundations Program a selling point of the institution
- ▶ The Foundations Program will be the identifiable, unifying feature for the undergraduate Schools
- ▶ Assess all academic programs of study based on the extent to which they actively draw on the Foundations Program
- ▶ Each school will identify and develop signature and distinctive educational programs and their own tactical implementation plan

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Prioritize the Foundations Program to support curriculum development, faculty needs, each School's signature/distinctive programs, and ongoing professional development workshops
- ▶ Assess and evaluate the Foundations Program

Year 2

- ▶ Establish an annual four-part "D'Amour Lecture Series" and a lecture series for alumni
- ▶ Incorporate the Foundations Program into programming for incoming students
- ▶ Facilitate faculty orientation, training, and continued discussion about the Foundations Program
- ▶ Conduct student focus groups to understand what students learn and take away from the Foundations Program
- ▶ Each School will develop a strategic plan informed by and reflecting the University's strategic plan

Year 3

- ▶ Institute an endowed Fortin/Fonthier Foundations Chair position
- ▶ Establish a Fortin/Gonthier Core Texts & Enduring Questions department
- ▶ Investigate a degree in—and center for—communications that is innovative and multi-disciplinary
- ▶ Each school will develop signature and distinctive programs tied to the Foundations Program; investigate such programs as a major in Law, Ethics and Constitutional Studies
- ▶ Use market data and faculty collaboration to develop potential new undergraduate academic programs



Goal 3

Prioritize faculty and staff morale

- ▶ Prioritize excellent teaching by relying on tenure-track and tenured faculty and, where appropriate, professors of practice
- ▶ Hire, retain, and support faculty and staff representing diversity of people and points of view
- ▶ Value, reward, and support faculty and staff as vital members of our community, including by compensating them competitively and fairly
- ▶ Emphasize the educational mission and the Foundations Program in undergraduate hiring and tenure decisions

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Decrease reliance on adjunct faculty in specific academic programs and disciplines and emphasize teaching excellence
- ▶ All tenured faculty, adjunct faculty, and professor of practice applicants will address how their discipline fits into and relates to the Foundations Program in the interview process, third year review, and tenure/promotions evaluations

Year 2

- ▶ Support interdisciplinary and interdepartmental synergies in academic programs and course offerings
- ▶ Prioritize the recruitment of diverse people and points of view
- ▶ Use data and survey tools to ascertain the particular support needs of faculty and staff representing diverse points of view

Years 3-7

- ▶ Assign staff to support faculty with grant writing and compliance
- ▶ Increase faculty/staff compensation from 16th to at least 32nd percentile



Goal 4

Determine the sustainability and success of our international academic programs

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Evaluate the benefits and costs associated with the Rome Campus



Goal 5

Prepare our students for lives of meaning

- ▶ Prepare our students for lives of meaningful work and vocation
- ▶ Improve mentoring, tutoring, scheduling, and advising to maximize the academic experience for our students

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Investigate the merits and drawbacks of a four course (four credits per course) schedule for undergraduate students

Year 2

- ▶ Evaluate existing mentoring, tutoring, and other academic support programs across University divisions and streamline processes, avoid duplication, and reward success

Year 3

- ▶ All undergraduates will have the option to graduate with a professional opportunity or credential in an area of their choosing
- ▶ Implement academic advising changes to ensure that students are advised on the Foundations Program, their major-specific requirements, and other opportunities, in addition to developing relationships with faculty members
- ▶ Offer experiential transcripts to allow undergraduates to capture and articulate their internship and career preparedness to graduate schools and employers

Goal 6

Integrate our graduate students into the life of the University

ACTION ITEMS

Year 2

- ▶ Adjust the hours of campus service providers to accommodate graduate students
- ▶ Organize and sponsor programming and campus events geared towards and inclusive of our graduate students
- ▶ Establish a Graduate Student Government Association

Goal 7

Develop new graduate and professional programs for which there is market demand, mission alignment, and a compelling reason for prospective students to choose Assumption University over competitor programs

- ▶ Reevaluate the entire graduate portfolio and build a slate of programs focused not on commoditized spaces but rather on the ways in which we can demonstrate the value of obtaining a graduate degree or certificate from Assumption University



Goal 8

Expand opportunities for the Assumptionist community to be involved and present in the educational life of the University

- ▶ Enlist the help and support of the Assumptionist religious community to enable students to grow in their faith by allowing them to reflect on and consider fundamental questions of Truth, which will lead students to questions of the truth in Christ
- ▶ Facilitate participation in the Church's sacramental life to any interested member of our community

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Incorporate campus ministry, including articulation of opportunities for Catholic and ecumenical worship, into the undergraduate first-year orientation program
- ▶ Provide opportunities for Catholic members of the University community to receive the sacraments and engage in the practice and development of their Catholic faith

Year 2

- ▶ Articulate and live out our mission as an institution of Catholic liberal education—an education that speaks universally and that, by seeking truth, draws us closer to God, no matter who we are or what we believe



Goal 9

Become known as a national model for civic friendship and a culture of inquiry rooted in intellectual courage and humility

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Establish and fund "The Disputed Questions Forum"
- ▶ Sponsor and promote academic programming centered on open debate

Year 2

- ▶ Hold "Teaching Disputed Questions Workshops" each summer for faculty teaching in the Foundations Program





VISION 2

FOCUS: We will make all decisions based on what is ultimately best for the student, rather than what is easiest for the institution

- ▶ We will undergo a cultural jolt in how we think about our work in service of students
- ▶ We will promote a culture of wellness, happiness, safety, and joy among students
- ▶ We will recruit, cultivate, and support graduates who are known for their grit and determination



Assumption will make an institutional commitment that every decision—from how we welcome students to how they pay their bills to how classes are scheduled—will be based on what serves the ultimate good of the student. “Ultimate” indicates that we are not a typical customer-service organization that simply asks and delivers what students want. We have a responsibility to work with them to ascertain what truly serves them. That entails involving them in important decisions and challenging ourselves in every decision we make.

Goal 1

Make all decisions based on what is ultimately best for the student—and what cultivates joy amongst the student body—rather than what is easiest for the institution

- ▶ Establish a shared understanding of what a student-centric mentality entails across all divisions and departments
- ▶ Allocate University resources based on what improves the student experience
- ▶ Make it easier for our students to engage in “the business of being a student”

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Actively solicit and empower student voices and perspectives in decision-making across the University
- ▶ Use survey and data-driven methods to monitor and understand student satisfaction
- ▶ Simplify onboarding and clearance process for new and returning students

Year 2

- ▶ Implement work-day patterns and rhythms that serve and promote students’ needs and best operational practices for our entire community of students, including undergraduate, graduate, residential, and commuters
- ▶ Prioritize recruiting staff that think strategically and ensure that our hiring and staffing practices across campus divisions prioritize strategic decision-making and high-touch student engagement
- ▶ Offer programming and campus events, such as an off-campus shuttle, a pub/lounge, and other programming initiatives that focus on building connections and restoring vibrancy and fun to campus life
- ▶ Establish a “one-stop shop,” staffed by employees trained to solve problems across divisions, for students and families who have questions about payment, financial aid, and related business processes

Goal 2

Foster positive relationships between all University constituencies and promote a culture of respect and meaningful interaction between all members of the University community

- ▶ Create an inclusive learning environment that embraces diversity of people and points of view

ACTION ITEMS

Year 2

- ▶ Recruit and retain faculty and staff who value diversity of people and points of view
- ▶ Develop and implement programming and pathways to promote multicultural awareness

Year 3

- ▶ Administer Climate Surveys every three years and other data and assessment tools, such as national surveys, annually, and use those tools to improve policies and practices for the best interests of students

Goal 3

Revise, and scale existing programs, processes, and structures to promote student happiness, safety, success, wellness, and retention

- ▶ Establish a holistic, collaborative, and innovative approach to mental health and wellbeing that involves all divisions
- ▶ Develop systems and allocate resources that recognize the importance of athletics to student and campus life

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Provide in-person and virtual Title IX and ADA compliance training and educational programming to faculty, staff, and students on an annual basis
- ▶ Increase attendance at athletic events through targeted outreach to the University community, including alumni
- ▶ Stay ahead of emerging trends in collegiate athletics across all NCAA divisions
- ▶ Allocate University resources towards ensuring that athletics staff, including coaches, are educated on the mission of the University

Year 2

- ▶ Ensure adequate staffing for counseling and health education
- ▶ Hire an independent Title IX Coordinator who will report to promote a culture of support, well-being, and accountability
- ▶ Ensure adequate numbers of athletics personal trainers and other medical and training personnel to promote safety
- ▶ Provide equitable access to quality athletic facilities



Goal 4

Continually revise our strategic goals relating to the campus master plan, striving to improve the scope and condition of our buildings and facilities in service of the student experience

- ▶ Invest in our physical plant and renovate existing structures and facilities, including building a new residence hall

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Determine the renovation needs, and potential next steps, for Nault, Young, and Hanrahan Residence Halls

Year 2

- ▶ Assess and develop an annual progress plan for ADA-compliant building entrances and residential offerings for our student population, with ongoing assessment of campuswide ADA compliance

Goal 5

Seek and cultivate the qualities of grit and determination in our prospective and enrolled students

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Enrollment management will work with faculty and other divisions to develop specific tools for evaluating an applicant's propensity to grow and succeed as a student





VISION 3

GROW: By growing our enrollment, brand, partnerships, and philanthropy, we will place the University on vibrant financial footing and ensure any qualified student who seeks an Assumption education can access it

- ▶ We will grow our undergraduate, graduate, and professional certificate enrollments to at least 3,000 students
- ▶ We will break the cycle of crisis by shifting significant portions of discount to philanthropy
- ▶ We will provide access to our distinctive education to all those who seek it
- ▶ We will replenish and expand our endowment



We will break the cycle of survival and replace it with a mentality of growth. That requires growing undergraduate and graduate enrollment, establishing a strong and recognized brand that reflects what is distinctive and valuable about an Assumption education, replenishing our endowment, and growing philanthropy. We will expand access to an Assumption education by working with external corporate, community, and philanthropic partners who recognize its value.

Goal 1

Grow and expand total enrollment to at least 3,000 students

- ▶ Enrollment targets as follows:

	Current	Fall 2025	Fall 2028	Fall 2034
Undergraduate	1,650	1,845	2,135	2,400
Graduate	347	420	500	800

- ▶ Build understanding among key audiences about the universal relevance of Catholic Liberal Education
- ▶ Increase market share beyond New England
- ▶ Adapt our marketing approaches through research, strategy, message testing, campaign implementation, analysis, and refinement
- ▶ Build, scale, and deploy a strategic marketing plan aimed at growing awareness and understanding of the Assumption brand
- ▶ Increase our campus residency rate



Goal 1 Grow and expand total enrollment

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Make Assumption's understanding and conception of Catholic liberal education central to our brand and enrollment marketing campaigns
- ▶ Identify, refine, and implement strategic marketing efforts aimed at attracting and retaining prospective students
- ▶ Deploy brand implementation efforts, including launching a cross-functional marketing group to involve all campus divisions
- ▶ Determine on-campus housing options for graduate students
- ▶ Create a research tool to assess and measure understanding of Catholic liberal education

Year 2

- ▶ Increase applications from approximately 5,200 applications in FY2024 to 5,850 in FY2029
- ▶ Prioritize efforts to recruit students from Catholic secondary schools and from diverse geographical and socioeconomic areas and backgrounds to provide equitable access to an Assumption education
- ▶ Assess the educational and economic advantages and opportunities associated with increased international recruitment
- ▶ Assess opportunities to recruit veterans and prospective Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) members
- ▶ Build a robust, integrated in-house marketing team that will support our enrollment goals, support our philanthropy goals, and reduce our reliance on third-party vendors

Year 3

- ▶ Increase undergrad retention from 82% to 88% by year 3 and 90% by year 7



Goal 2

Create a new paradigm for philanthropy, cultivating donors inside and outside of our alumni network, to ensure that an Assumption education is accessible to all qualified students who seek it

- ▶ Embark on a fundraising campaign to raise at least \$100 million by 2034, with specific emphasis on access and replenishment of the University's endowment
- ▶ Offer at least one externally funded scholarship to every Assumption student who needs financial assistance to complete their undergraduate degree
- ▶ Prioritize and increase alumni engagement and philanthropy
- ▶ Treat our students as "alumni-in-residence" and promote a culture of philanthropy and engagement

ACTION ITEMS

Year 1

- ▶ Increase advancement staff by hiring front-line fundraisers to address alumni engagement, major gift, annual giving, planned giving, and corporate and foundation giving opportunities, with a goal to increase annual fundraising from \$1.2 million to \$5.7 million in 18 months and \$9.95 million by 2028
- ▶ Introduce the Access AU Scholarship Program, adding 50 per year
- ▶ Use funds raised for both current use and endowed scholarships to replace institutional aid, reducing the institution's discount rate
- ▶ Expand our regional and local alumni events by 150%, growing to 30 high-quality events per year

Year 2

- ▶ Conduct feasibility studies and campaigns for capital, endowment, and annual use gifts and funds
 - ▶ Increase annual current-use (restricted and unrestricted) gifts from \$1.2 million to \$2.2 million annually
 - ▶ Raise at least \$3 million in capital and endowment gifts during non-campaign years
- ▶ Research and implement alumni messaging strategies
- ▶ Relaunch the Alumni Association and the Alumni Board of Directors
- ▶ Increase alumni participation in campus events, including speaking opportunities, collaboration with the Career Services & Internship Center, and mentorship opportunities with Aspire, Sophia, and other campus initiatives
- ▶ University Advancement and Student Affairs will collaborate to increase the visibility of University Advancement efforts and connect students with alumni
- ▶ Promote engagement with students to develop a culture of philanthropy
- ▶ Re-invigorate the student Ambassador Program to encourage engagement between current students and our alumni

Year 3

- ▶ Increase President's Council membership from 250 to 400 members, including 100 new associate members

Goal 3

Diversify our revenue streams beyond traditional, undergraduate day-school tuition, with an eye to sustainability, strategic partnerships, facilities rental opportunities, advancement initiatives, and innovative degree and certificate programs

- ▶ Prioritize graduate and professional development programs and opportunities that are mission- and market-driven and serve the interests of the University and its corporate partners

ACTION ITEMS

Year 2

- ▶ Conduct market research in the areas of graduate and professional development education in an effort to identify and develop new programs and course offerings, including custom certificate and training programs for businesses and K-12 institutions
- ▶ Use targeted marketing efforts to increase awareness of our graduate programs and professional development opportunities

Year 3

- ▶ Launch a marketing campaign to attract corporate partners in Worcester, Central Massachusetts, and New England more broadly



Culture Matters

Thrive is Assumption's first ten-year rather than nearer-term strategic plan. That is deliberate: To become what Assumption can be, we must break the cycle of short-term thinking.

For years, whether enrollments were up or down, Assumption has operated in crisis mode. The result has been a corrosive, risk-averse mentality rooted in a culture of "no." Thrive calls us to replace it with a culture of thoughtful risk, shared ambitions, and an impulse to think in terms of what is possible rather than what is not. We do not aim simply to survive. Assumption will thrive. We will embrace bold dreams and, equally important, achieve them by holding one another accountable.

Institutions are differentiated not only by the content of their strategic plans but also by whether they actually implement them. We will. Thrive delineates a bold vision achieved by specific goals and detailed, measurable, timebound tactics.

Perhaps most important, we must approach this decade of rebuilding and growth with the disposition that it deserves and demands: joy. Education is hard and often exhausting work. But it is also exhilarating. The bold visions that Thrive calls us to realize by 2034 will require a great deal of each of us. But it is a work of joy—the deepest rejoicing, the kind that comes from a shared pursuit in the company of friends.

Thrive charts a course for excellence

In our next decade, Assumption University will become a premier institution with national reach, not merely a Catholic university but a particular type of Catholic university—one in diminishing supply but, because it speaks to enduring human needs, persistent demand. We will become known as a Catholic university that defines its Catholic identity in terms of the education we offer—an education that welcomes and speaks to all who seek to pursue truth in the company of friends. It is animated by a particular tradition of inquiry while speaking to people of all backgrounds and beliefs. Thrive places a stake in the ground that both embraces the enduring education we offer and nimbly adapts to changing student, economic, and social needs.

Many liberal arts institutions are reacting to the pressures they face differently, by chasing the latest trends and becoming more like one another. Amid economic headwinds and pressure to deliver near-term return on investment, these institutions are making stark choices: either to retreat into the enduring ideas that help form students for meaningful lives or to jettison those in favor of technical career preparation alone. Yet either of those options, in isolation, is doomed to fail. The result is to erase anything that makes Catholic liberal education distinctive and convert it to a commodity instead, one anyone can offer and no one can distinguish. Those institutions will fall because they will compete on price and short-term outcomes alone. Meaningful lives include rewarding work. And institutions that focus on technical preparation without integrating enduring ideas into it prepare students only until the inevitable and rapid moment when technology or the employment market changes.

In sum: Assumption University chooses growth by distinction rather than extinction by emulation. We choose to stand. We choose to rise. We choose to thrive.

Greg Weiner
President





Assumption
University