

## Heart of a Tiger: Celebrating success, part 4

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HAYS, Kan. - Our strategic plan for 2019-2024, "Unlocking Untapped Potential," is the cornerstone for a versatile and evolving approach to strategic planning and execution. Goal four of our plan emphasizes the significance of our resources and infrastructure. This goal underscores our dedication to maintaining and enhancing our facilities to align with our University community's growth and dynamic needs. By utilizing a well-defined strategy and fostering strong stakeholder engagement, we cultivate an efficient and competitive environment for our students, faculty, and staff.

When we established this goal, we had achieved a remarkable two decades of continuous enrollment growth. However, the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic thrust our strategic planning into an unpredictable landscape. While we set ambitious strategic plan benchmarks, our growth mindset instilled in us a resilience and innovative spirit that allowed us to pivot and progress, even amid adversity.

Wesley Wintch, our Vice President for Administration and Finance, and Dana Cunningham, Director of Facilities Planning, led this work. They reflected on our journey, acknowledging that it has been fraught with challenges, particularly the impact of COVID-19 on enrollment and ongoing projects. Despite these obstacles, our team quickly adapted, implementing effective contingency plans that enabled us to maintain progress toward our strategic objectives.

Our most ambitious goal was to achieve an annual overall revenue growth of 5 percent from all sources over the next five fiscal years, allocating 30 percent of this growth to bolster our facilities and infrastructure. Although we only met our revenue growth target once during the five years, we did achieve three years of revenue growth during the five years, symbolizing our adaptability and perseverance.

Updating our master plan was another pivotal strategy. We not only completed this essential task but also pioneered the implementation of a digital master plan. In our discussions about enhancing teaching and learning across our campuses, we recognized the critical need to prioritize improvements in our online educational environment. Today, we proudly stand among the first institutions to adopt a comprehensive digital master plan, leading efforts to enrich online student learning through standardized course designs and fostering meaningful interactions among students and faculty.

Throughout the strategic planning period from 2019 to 2024, we engaged in approximately 220 projects to enhance our facilities, demonstrating our resolute commitment to addressing deferred maintenance and improving campus infrastructure. One notable initiative was the refurbishment of Cunningham/Gross Hall, which benefited from 24 improvement projects.

"Even amidst the challenges presented by the pandemic, we discovered unexpected opportunities," Wesley noted. "We successfully secured more than \$5 million in grants for critical upgrades to the HVAC system in Gross Coliseum, and as always, the generosity of philanthropists has fueled our success. These achievements exemplify our capability to transform obstacles into tangible successes, enabling us to advance projects that might otherwise have been stalled."

Dana emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the planning and construction phases. Regular consultations with department heads ensured that new spaces met their unique needs. At the same time, ongoing updates from the Executive Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Team fostered responsiveness and adaptability in our planning efforts.

Our strategic improvements to infrastructure have significantly shaped campus culture. Renovations in high-traffic areas, such as Rarick Hall, have created inviting and functional spaces, enhancing the overall experience for students and faculty alike. While we recognize that further work in this area is necessary, the resources allocated for innovative projects have made a marked difference within our campus community.

Looking ahead, we are eager to build upon the successes of the past five years. Upcoming initiatives include completing the renovation of Forsyth Library, constructing a new athletic training complex, upgrading the grounds, expanding Stroup Hall, and so much more.

These projects reflect our unwavering commitment to improving facilities and enriching the experience for our students and staff.

Over the past five years, we projected an expenditure of approximately \$6.88 million for infrastructure enhancements; however, we exceeded expectations, with actual spending surpassing \$12.2 million. This achievement highlights our commitment to developing our infrastructure. It reinforces the significance we place on investing in our campus environments. Among our major expenditures were significant projects such as the completion of the Art and Design Building and renovations in Rarick Hall, both of which have greatly improved our University's functionality and aesthetic appeal.

Wesley and Dana acknowledged that while we have made substantial progress, challenges persist—especially concerning enrollment trends and inflation, which have driven up repair and renovation costs. "Nonetheless, we remain vigilant and equipped to navigate these challenges. The additional funding for addressing deferred maintenance opens up new opportunities for modernizing our facilities to better meet today's students' needs."

Our strategic plan also kept us focused and dedicated to the task of strengthening our business continuity and contingency plans. This proactive approach has proven invaluable, equipping us with the operational resilience necessary to weather unexpected challenges.

"Collaboration across departments has been integral to our success," Wesley remarked. "Our experiences have reinforced the importance of teamwork and a unified strategic direction."

As we reflect on our progress in achieving Goal 4 of our strategic plan, we take immense pride in our collective achievements in enhancing the condition of our campus facilities. Despite our ongoing challenges, our steadfast commitment to investing in our infrastructure enhances our competitive edge among peer institutions throughout Kansas.

Our facilities strongly reflect our dedication to creating a welcoming and productive learning environment. Visitors often express admiration and surprise at the vibrant opportunities in the western plains. This sentiment, combined with the hard work of our faculty and staff, fosters an inviting atmosphere that enriches the educational journey for all our students.

"As we review our progress in achieving Goal 4 of our strategic plan, we feel an overwhelming sense of pride in our collective efforts to maintain and enhance our campus facilities. Although challenges remain, our commitment to investing in our infrastructure fortifies our competitive edge among peer institutions across Kansas," shared Wesley and Dana.

Goal 4 encapsulates our unwavering commitment to growth and excellence as a leading educational institution. Through strategic foresight and collaborative teamwork, we are poised to enhance our infrastructure and resources further, effectively meeting the evolving needs of our university community. Together, we eagerly anticipate a future brimming with opportunities for growth and excellence.

We are confident in our success because we view challenges as opportunities. The talented, innovative, and dedicated professionals who drive our University forward are the true architects of this strategic plan. Reflecting on our grit, it is why we continue to persist and excel through tough times and why I am so inspired as we build upon the success of our five-year plan and lead forward into a new horizon with our 2024-2027 strategic plan.

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