



Villanova University

**STRATEGIC  
PLAN OVERVIEW**

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**2020-2030**

Rooted in our Augustinian Catholic values.

**Restless in our desire to ignite change.**

# **ROOTED. RESTLESS.**

## **Villanova University's Strategic Plan: 2020–2030**

A truly great academic institution must always seek to evolve and advance. Through strategic planning, a university creates an important framework for the future—charting a course forward that is rooted in and aligned with the institution's mission and values.

Over the years, Villanova University has effectively employed strategic plans to guide its institutional evolution. With clarity of vision and an unwavering commitment to its Augustinian Catholic heritage, the University has been transformed, with unprecedented success, over the past 10 years.

# OUR FORWARD MOMENTUM

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Guided by the University's 2010-2020 Strategic Plan—*Igniting the Heart. Inspiring the Mind. Illuminating the Spirit.*—Villanova solidified its stature as a highly competitive, nationally recognized research University and one of the nation's leading Catholic universities. Recent successes include:

## **Continued growth of Villanova's national reputation**

In 2016, the Carnegie Foundation elevated Villanova's Classification to the Doctoral Universities—Moderate Research category from the Master's Colleges and Universities category. Due to this change in classification, Villanova moved to the National Universities list in *U.S. News & World Report's* annual "Best Colleges" ranking, placing in the top 50 for the past three years. Previously, Villanova was ranked No. 1 for more than 20 years on the publication's Regional Universities North category. These changes reflected the strength of the University's academic programs and research in niche areas, as well as the institution's overall forward momentum.

## **Record-breaking applications and an increasingly competitive student body**

The rise in Villanova's academic reputation and its increased positive momentum resulted in significant increases in student applications and the enrollment of an ever-more impressive student body. The number of overall undergraduate applications rose 57% between 2010 (14,361) and 2019 (22,872). Concurrently, Villanova is enrolling more high-achieving students than ever as indicated by the average SAT score and GPA of the incoming classes (2010: 1350-1440/1600 SAT, 3.81-4.20 on 4.0 scale GPA; 2019: 1400-1500/1600 SAT, 4.13-4.47 on 4.0 scale GPA).

## **Strategic focus of the academic enterprise**

The University's academic enterprise was strengthened with the creation of the Office of the Provost in 2015. The Provost's Office oversees all academic areas of the University and plays a major role in the development of the institution's vision and strategy, ensuring that Villanova's greatest priority is academic excellence and the holistic education of its more than 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students. This office fosters creative and integrated approaches to enhance Villanova's educational offerings, research productivity and intellectual climate.

## **Faculty expertise highlighted nationally**

The University has experienced an exponential increase in national and international media attention. Faculty and staff are highly sought after as a result of their recognition as leading scholars, industry experts and thought leaders. Coverage featuring Villanova experts is regularly featured in outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, CNN and *The Guardian*, bolstering the University's academic reputation and expanding overall awareness of the institution.

## **Recognized stewardship of University's financial resources**

Citing the University's strong financial position and rising national profile, the credit rating agency Standard & Poor's upgraded Villanova's bond rating to AA- in 2019. Moody's, another independent assessor of institutions' credit-worthiness, also recently reaffirmed the University's A1 rating and upgraded its outlook from stable to positive. Both signal the University's fiscal discipline and recognize the University's strong stewardship of financial resources.

## **Successful comprehensive campaign**

Villanova's previous Strategic Plan was powered by a \$760 million comprehensive campaign, the most ambitious philanthropic effort in the University's history. A key goal of the campaign was to underwrite the initiatives set forth in the Strategic Plan. Among many other achievements, the University's endowment was bolstered by \$321.2 million; \$60 million was raised for the new Performing Arts Center; 300 new endowed scholarships were established; and 40 new and reimagined academic and athletic spaces across campus were funded.

# **Current and Future Trends in U.S. Higher Education**

As Villanova began its strategic planning process, it was critical for the University to review the current state of higher education and understand predicted trends for the industry's next decade.

Nationally, universities and colleges must be prepared to navigate an ever-changing landscape as higher education will continue to undergo major shifts in the coming decades. According to industry research, key opportunities and challenges include:

## **Shifting demographics**

In the next 10 years, institutions of higher education will face major shifts in demographics of its prospective students. Overall, the number of high school graduates in the U.S. will peak and then decrease by 2030. The outlook in the Northeast region is particularly challenging as it continues to face significant declines in the number of students graduating from high school each year. Universities and colleges also will be enrolling a new generation of high school graduates that are more ethnically and economically diverse than ever. These changes are occurring at a time when many universities are already struggling to support students to complete their degrees.

## **Changing economics with a focus on return on investment for students**

The labor market value of a bachelor's degree is at an all-time high. However, higher education has come under increased scrutiny with greater focus on ROI and access and affordability. The industry also has seen pushback from employers, with 60% agreeing that current college graduates lack the technical and soft skills to succeed. This criticism has come at a time when tuition and student debt burden has risen quickly. As a result, higher education institutions must focus on providing and demonstrating high ROI. In particular, graduates need to have hard and soft skills that are valuable in the labor market.

## **New learning opportunities through digital offerings**

Over the past 20 years, technology has helped revolutionize the higher education industry, improving learning outcomes and expanding access to new student populations. Recent studies have shown that 35% of undergraduates took at least one course online, and three in four administrators believe that online course delivery is as good as or better than face-to-face instruction. In response, universities are innovating with shorter, more flexible, online and blended degrees and certificates.

## **Challenges to the research enterprise**

Federal research and development spending—which accounts for 55% of total university R&D funding industry-wide—is decreasing as a share of the federal budget. As a result, the remaining support has been concentrated among the nation’s top research universities. This greatly diminishes the prospect for small- to mid-size research universities, similar to Villanova, to tap into these important resources. Such external funding is critical as it helps to drive research, which provides opportunities for faculty scholarship and enhancement of valuable student learning outcomes. To counter this, institutions now are partnering with companies or investing their own resources to fund additional research.

## **Globalization of higher education**

As with countless other industries, higher education has become an increasingly global market. Colleges and universities have seized upon this opportunity, expanding partnerships with international universities. At the same time, many universities are enrolling a larger percentage of international students.

## **A new generation of campus activism**

Today’s students are deeply engaged in the world around them. On campus, they are mobilizing at record levels to express their beliefs and values, and responding to world events that affect them locally. Colleges and universities are struggling to facilitate constructive dialogue between divergent viewpoints while also ensuring a campus environment in which all students feel welcome and free to express their thoughts and beliefs.

## **Developing a Community-Created Strategic Plan**

To develop Villanova's new Strategic Plan, the institution actively engaged the entire University community—faculty, students, staff, alumni, parents, friends and employers—through a uniquely Villanovan, community-based, inclusive and iterative planning process.

Over the course of nearly two years, more than 5,000 Villanovans participated in the strategic planning process through dozens of data-sharing and feedback sessions, targeted focus groups, one-on-one interviews, visioning exercises and community surveys. As findings, impressions and insights evolved, these were shared with the University community affording opportunities for additional feedback and input.

The response and consensus from the University community was powerful. Across all constituencies, there emerged a strong, shared vision for Villanova—for who we are and where we need to go. This community feedback, coupled with trends in the macro environment, directly informed the creation of the new Strategic Plan. It is truly a reflection of the strength of our University community—united in a shared goal to build an even greater Villanova.

## **Our Community Vision**

Villanova University's Strategic Plan is an ambitious 10-year effort designed to propel the University forward to a new level of success. It is a new platform from which we, as an institution, can reach higher in how we serve our students, our community and the world. Rooted in our Augustinian Catholic values and restless in our desire to ignite change, it is a uniquely Villanovan plan driven by our community's shared vision for the future: to remain true to what makes our University special while becoming an even greater Villanova.

Throughout the next 10 years, Villanova as an institution will build upon its strengths; invest in critical areas of opportunity; and enhance the Villanova experience for our entire community, including undergraduate, graduate, doctoral and law students, as well as faculty, staff and alumni.

As we strive to make the University the best it can be, Villanova's prestige will continue to grow. We will be recognized, nationally and beyond, for providing students a unique and transformative education—interwoven with values, knowledge and community—and unparalleled preparation for lifelong success.

As we look to Villanova's future, we also recognize the continued need to strengthen the foundation of our institution. We must remain dedicated stewards of this University's culture and its resources. We will do so by investing in priorities that underpin all aspects of this plan.

# OUR PLAN: ROOTED. RESTLESS.

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## **Rooted in our Augustinian Catholic Values**

Villanova's Augustinian Catholic intellectual tradition is the cornerstone of a transformative academic community dedicated to the continuous development of the whole person. These values inform every aspect of the Villanova experience, serving as the guidepost for a community of learners who are driven to think critically, solve problems, act compassionately and succeed while serving others.

Surveys of our graduating students clearly highlight the transformational effect of the Villanova experience. Students indicate that they leave the University with a greater sense of who they are; how they have grown as individuals; and how they see the world. We want to build upon this strength—one that defines our institution and differentiates us from our peers—to make the Villanova experience more powerful and potent as ever.

With this Strategic Plan, Villanova will strengthen and advance our Augustinian Catholic values in all aspects of University life. We will thoughtfully and intentionally enhance the holistic care and support offered to those who make up this community—cultivating a sense of belonging so that all can make the most of their Villanova experience. We will expand our ability to provide all deserving students access to a Villanova education.

## **OUR INITIATIVES**

The following directly connect to and advance our Augustinian Catholic values and mission, and pay tribute to Villanova's rich history.

### **Enhancing dialogue across varied groups and perspectives**

As Villanova continues its efforts to enhance representation among its students, faculty and staff, the University must actively foster an environment in which different perspectives are respected, and all voices are valued. Furthering this commitment, Villanova will enhance the quality of dialogue across varied groups and perspectives through an expanded intergroup dialogue curriculum and a university-wide speaker series on relevant, challenging topics. It is important that we continue to ensure an environment where individuals are free to express themselves in a respectful manner.

### **Promoting institutional diversity, equity and inclusion efforts**

Community is at the core of who we are—and we must work proactively to expand our welcome to all, embracing diversity in its multitude of forms, including race, gender, ability, ideology, orientation and socioeconomic status. It is through such a diverse community of scholars and students—representing various viewpoints and experiences—that the Catholic intellectual tradition is best accomplished.

In recent years, Villanova has made strides in recruiting and enrolling a more diverse student population. However, diversity among our faculty and staff has not kept pace. Through this plan, we will expand recruitment and outreach efforts for underrepresented faculty, staff and students. We will codify best practices and provide training on attracting, retaining and supporting a more diverse community.

### **Meeting 100% of demonstrated financial need**

Villanova meets less than 100% of undergraduate financial need. Because the University is not able to meet full demonstrated need, a Villanova education is out of reach for many deserving students who want to call our community their collegiate home. By 2030, we will meet 100% of demonstrated undergraduate financial need with a combination of grants and loans for students, remaining mindful of the socioeconomic composition of the student body.

### **Creating centers to strengthen the impact of our Augustinian tradition**

The University's Augustinian Catholic heritage touches all aspects of the Villanova experience, guiding our pedagogical approach and differentiating the University from its competitors. To advance its impact, we will create a center for Augustinian education—an interdisciplinary, University-wide Center that will work to further embed values-centric curriculum into the undergraduate course of study and to explore how similar programming can be introduced at the graduate level.

### **Consolidating service efforts through a Center for the Common Good**

Through numerous academic and service programs, our students use their knowledge, skills and compassion to better the world around them. Each year, Villanovans dedicate over 250,000 service hours to support communities in the Philadelphia region, throughout the U.S. and around the world. Yet, there is minimal coordination among the myriad colleges, departments and programs sponsoring these efforts across the University. The establishment of a Center for the Common Good, a consolidated University-wide service office, will expand service-learning offerings, enhance the quality and reach of service initiatives, and create a clearinghouse to better connect service initiatives across the University.

### **Maximizing student life and athletic programs to enhance the Villanova experience**

As the Villanova experience extends beyond the classroom, we must ensure that our co-curricular and athletic programs positively impact our community and align with our Augustinian Catholic values. We will assess our portfolio of current offerings for alignment with our values, particularly personal growth and respectful dialogue. This assessment will also examine the financial viability of programs in order to support or launch new programs for students, faculty, staff and alumni.

## **Supporting the professional development and wellness of Villanova staff and faculty**

The University's faculty and staff are at the heart of the day-to-day life on campus. Their time at Villanova is often significant, extending well beyond the four years undergraduate students spend on campus. With this Strategic Plan, the University will further invest in our faculty and staff. We will develop leadership and skills trainings to support employees in their professional growth. We also will introduce and champion employee resource groups to help advance inclusivity, wellness and a sense of belonging at Villanova.

## **Restless in Our Desire to Ignite Change**

Augustine's restless, searching heart echoes on campus and within Villanovans. Unrivaled in higher education, Villanova's academic experience supports students as they search for truth through knowledge and discover their unique paths. It is an intellectual and holistic journey that positively impacts character formation and readies Villanovans for lifelong success both personally and professionally.

With this Strategic Plan, Villanova will continue to advance dynamic opportunities for learning, growth, career progression and the creation of new knowledge. The University will continue to value, invest and excel in both teaching and scholarship—championing how their interconnection enriches the academic environment for both faculty and students.

## **OUR INITIATIVES**

The following will enhance Villanova's academic environment and the outcomes they help create.

### **Better optimize workload for research-active faculty**

Faculty research and scholarship have been key to Villanova's impressive rise in national stature over the past decade, as well as learning outcomes of our students. Yet, as the University's research aspirations have grown, so have the pressures on our research-active faculty. To advance and sustain faculty research and scholarship at Villanova, we must allow more time for faculty to engage in their scholarly pursuits. Over the course of the 10-year plan, we will make progress on this issue with the addition of 60 new faculty positions and the implementation of thoughtful and equitable systems for reducing teaching loads.

### **Continue to build a research infrastructure commensurate with a national university**

The productivity of our teacher-scholars is directly impacted by the administrative support they receive. To enable faculty and students to further their research and scholarship, Villanova must continue to shift the administrative burden from faculty to professional staff through continued

investment in the University's operational research infrastructure. Villanova will expand resources in areas including research compliance, grant writing and management, and external promotion of the University's research. Furthermore, it is imperative for the University to increase and enhance its academic facilities and scholarly resources, including classrooms, laboratories and libraries, to better align with Villanova's status as a national research institution.

### **Provide institutional investment for high-potential research and scholarship**

As federal funding for research continues to dwindle, many Universities are investing their own resources to advance high-potential research projects. To that end, Villanova will establish a Research Acceleration Fund, which will provide seed funding and support potential research and scholarly projects that offer compelling opportunities for the University, faculty and students.

### **Enhanced undergraduate and graduate student engagement on scholarly and research endeavors with faculty**

Today's high-achieving students increasingly expect substantive research experiences during their undergraduate and graduate careers. Villanova has long been committed to offering high-impact student research opportunities for students to bolster their academic experience. To maintain our national position, we must expand high-quality research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, and provide training for faculty to support the creation and management of outstanding research experiences for students.

### **University-wide initiative to enhance the graduate student experience**

Graduate students are a sizable and essential part of the Villanova community, representing approximately 35% of our student population. However, graduate students often experience varied levels of support and connection to the larger university, both as students and as alumni. This is an area where we must improve.

Increasing support for our graduate students will advance our research mission, build our community and strengthen our national stature. Through a new university-wide effort, we will build graduate student support that aligns with industry best practices and minimizes inequities and inefficiencies across programs within Villanova. The University also will explore opportunities to expand learning communities and offer on-campus housing to graduate students.

### **Exploring and applying new teaching methods and tools**

Villanova's faculty is comprised of outstanding teacher-scholars who are equally committed to fostering creative learning environments, developing original teaching methods, and inspiring discovery and innovation through research. We will deepen our commitment to teaching innovation by expanding faculty support for the integration and application of new teaching methods and tools. We also will create a taskforce to explore new innovative, flexible and modular undergraduate delivery approaches, ensuring that the University keeps pace with an ever-changing industry.

### **Enhancing student and alumni career services**

A Villanova education goes beyond the pure joy of intellectual discovery; it also provides a vital pathway for personal success and satisfaction. The University will continue to employ a holistic approach to our career services and professional development programming, enhancing support for undergraduate and graduate students so that they may discern and subsequently thrive in their chosen careers. Potential new programming includes self-assessments (e.g., identity and professional interest assessments) for every incoming student; personalized coaching and mentoring toward graduate school or a career; and expanded data collection on alumni outcomes.

The University also will expand its career services programming to support Villanovans well beyond their time as students. We will actively foster the continued success of our graduates by providing alumni career services, professional development, and facilitating alumni networking and mentoring between seasoned professionals and more recent graduates. In response to current market demands, the University also will expand its practical preparation offerings—such as classes or seminars in career and life skills—to prepare students for success beyond Villanova.

### **Fund to support Centers of Excellence**

Villanova currently is home to more than 20 Centers of Excellence and two University-wide interdisciplinary institutes—academic hubs that support faculty research, teaching excellence, curricular development, and the intersection of research and practice. We will further invest in these theme-based academic institutions and centers—enhancing resources, facilities and scholarly holdings to enable faculty and students to pursue research and scholarship opportunities.

## **Strengthening Our Foundation**

Underpinning Villanova's entire Strategic Plan are foundational elements that are essential to the University's long-term success. It is ultimately the strength of Villanova's foundation that will provide the necessary support for the above strategic initiatives and ensure the continuation of Villanova's upward momentum.

As stewards of our University and the Augustinian academic tradition, we must position Villanova to achieve its potential and thrive—now and into the future. We must continue to invest in a wide range of infrastructure and priorities in order to ensure our success, including:

### **Transforming our academic facilities**

Many of Villanova's academic and research facilities have remained virtually unchanged for decades. While the University has made recent strides to modernize and upgrade classrooms across campus, much more needs to be done. We lag behind our peer institutions, most of which boast highly specialized, state-of-the-art facilities. With this Strategic Plan, the University will transform and increase our academic facilities with an emphasis on the STEM areas. We are exploring numerous projects that include major additions or renovations to existing academic facilities, as well as new buildings.

### **Extending the University's commitment to sustainability**

Sustainability has been a part of our institutional policies and practices, and a focus of the University's long-term planning for years. While we've made strides to date, we must—as an Augustinian Catholic institution—come together to take substantive, transformative action to support the planet, its people and ensure prosperity for all. We must foster the health and flourishing of all God's creation. Our approach to sustainability planning will be uniquely Villanova, advancing our efforts in ways that are deeply connected to our values. It will be incumbent upon each Villanovan to play an active role in ensuring that our planet and its people prosper for generations to come.

### **Continuing to invest in leveraging technology and data/analytics**

For the past two and a half decades, Villanova has successfully utilized its data to inform and drive its institutional strategy. As we look ahead to an increasingly data-driven future, the University will more effectively and efficiently deploy its data to drive student success, support the research enterprise and steward Villanova's resources.

### **Continuing to build and steward the necessary financial resources to power our Strategic Plan**

To achieve Villanova's ambitious goals, it is essential that we continue to increase the University's financial resources. To help bring this plan to life, we will launch a new capital campaign and continue to carefully steward Villanova's financial resources to ensure the University's long-term success and stability.

# REALIZING OUR VISION

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Implementing a strategic plan as bold as Villanova's will require significant commitment and resources. To achieve our goals, approximately \$70 million of additional investment will be added to the University's annual budget by 2030. The University also will invest approximately \$400 million in capital improvements necessary to elevate Villanova's academic facilities to a level reflective of the University's stature as a national research university.

The plan will be executed using a phased approach throughout the next 10 years, strategically focusing on an implementation plan that ensures the continuation of our strong fiscal position. The sequencing and execution of strategic initiatives will be impacted significantly by the finite nature of the University's physical space.

Work is currently underway to determine key metrics for each initiative in order to effectively monitor the University's progress. Implementation updates, plan metrics and related news will be shared through a dedicated website ([strategicplan2030.villanova.edu](http://strategicplan2030.villanova.edu)).

Moving forward, it is important to recognize that this plan is a living document. While pursuing strategic opportunities, Villanova will remain nimble and responsive to changes and challenges that may arise in the industry or in the economy, adjusting our plans if necessary.

# VILLANOVA'S PATH FORWARD

This Strategic Plan sets forth an exciting path for the next chapter in the University's history. It is a plan that honors our past and our Augustinian Catholic values; embraces our present and Villanova's distinctive experience and exceptional value; and charts our future, which we will realize with focus, drive and determination.



**VILLANOVA**  
UNIVERSITY