

## Introduction

Wayne State University is a premier university in the heart of Detroit and for nearly 150 years has served as a place of opportunity, support, and innovation for students, faculty, alumni, community members and partners looking to improve the quality of life. Urban universities have long viewed their mission as embedded in the life of the community in which they participate and like other urban institutions, Wayne State University's mission is manifest in its history, location, and tradition. The university was founded in 1868 as the Detroit Medical College, when five young physicians, veterans of treating the wounded in the Civil War, set out to improve medical education. The institution expanded as several local colleges and professional schools, including the College of the City of Detroit, were united in 1934 to become Wayne University. In 1956, the university was renamed Wayne State University and in 1959 was constitutionally established by amendment to the Michigan constitution. The present thirteen schools and colleges have evolved in many ways since the university's beginning, but have always been committed to principles of access and academic excellence, providing "the opportunity to keep learning close to life in a great ... city." (Hanawalt, 1968)

Since our inception, Wayne State University has been inextricably linked to the destiny of Detroit, a city that has been both a symbol of the American Dream and the challenges of urban life. Consistent with External Environment Findings presented in the HLC's 2020 Strategic plan, Wayne State University has experienced state disinvestment, both common to all public institutions of higher learning, yet disproportionate to institutions with missions of access and opportunity, and further amplified by conditions leading to the 2013 Detroit bankruptcy. Nevertheless, the university has navigated through these economic challenges, reallocating internal resources and investing strategically to maintain and improve value to students. To advance priorities of student success, along with access and opportunity for diverse and underserved populations, the university improved retention and graduation rates, and increased institutional financial aid to minimize cost and maximize affordability.

The spirit and resilience that made Detroit great have re-emerged in full. In 2013, Dr. M. Roy Wilson became Wayne State's 12th president and renewed our promise for opportunity, excellence, and transformation. There is new vision, creative leadership, authentic collaboration, and growing investment. "Distinctively Wayne State," the strategic plan for 2016 to 2021, captures a collaborative vision and provides a path that builds on the successes of the past while guiding us to new achievements. We are a complexly diverse student, faculty and staff community, but together, we bring an abiding commitment to institutional transformation leading to a learner-centered university. We have the enthusiastic support of our senior academic leadership team, a core group of engaged faculty members from across the disciplines, student success staff members, and student leaders to re-imagine education and research, focusing on student and community needs.

Examples of current efforts intended to be both synergistic and transformational include general education reform; our assessment initiative; high impact student success programs; diversity initiatives such as the Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Working Group; the Academic Advisors Training Academy; and related NSF and NIH-funded diversity and student success efforts such as the ReBUILDetroit, WIDER/SSTEPS, and BEST grant programs. Within research, we have rededicated ourselves to addressing real-world challenges, such as health disparities and technology innovation, in a rapidly evolving urban environment. A central example is the Integrative Biological Sciences Center (IBio), a \$93 million facility opened in 2014, which brings together faculty and students in environmental sciences, bio- and systems-engineering, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma and bio-behavioral health to study and ultimately end health disparities in Detroit.

The ultimate goal of all of these efforts is to create a learner-centered culture in which we promote success for all students and citizens. Our students are prepared not just for careers, but as actively engaged leaders in their diverse communities. President Wilson, wrote that the university has broad responsibilities "...including diversity and inclusion...woven into our history, our mission, our strategic plan." He continues, "While freedom of speech is important, we will not tolerate acts of harassment or intimidation taken against anyone." In an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, DeRosa (2016) comments that, "not only are these strong words in support of safety, but Wilson's linking of this position to the mission and plan of the university also illustrate how the rhetoric we use in our daily committee work and Student Life offices should also guide us to speak out when there are national threats to the diversity and inclusiveness of our country." These values guide us in creating institutional change by engaging in a full complement of systemic efforts in administrative, teaching, and learning programs that link to local and national initiatives aimed at transforming undergraduate and graduate education and success of all our students and faculty.