



WINTHROP UNIVERSITY

UNITED IN EXCELLENCE

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE
AUGUST 2025



PRIORITY: EXCEL, EDUCATE

PROJECT LEAD: SEBASTIAN VAN DELDEN

Since 2022, Winthrop has pursued an aggressive agenda of academic program innovation, aiming to position itself at the forefront of emerging disciplines and workforce needs. Key developments this year receiving full approval by Winthrop and the S.C. Commission on Higher Education (CHE) include new programs in artificial intelligence (first in S.C.!), financial technology (first in S.C.!), an Ed.D. in leadership and innovation, criminal justice, supply chain and logistics, game design (first in S.C.!), and applied software engineering.

Winthrop also successfully achieved its SACSCOC level-change needed to offer its first doctoral program. This approval is pending a site visit during the Spring 2026 semester. National searches for assistant professors in AI, criminal justice, game design, supply chain and logistics, and software engineering were all successful. Some of the new faculty started in Fall 2024 and others will start in Fall 2025. All new programs are enrolling new students. Criminal justice has seen a lot of interest and should reach 50-60 enrolled students in Fall 2025. The inaugural Ed.D. cohort enrolled 17 students, surpassing the initial goal of 12.



WINTHROP ELEVATE LAUNCH

PRIORITY: EXCEL, EDUCATE

PROJECT LEAD: SEBASTIAN VAN DELDEN

Winthrop Elevate represents a bold move into the adult education space through competency-based education (CBE). Elevate launched with the Bachelor of Professional Studies (BPS) and plans to expand into general business and general education courses by 2026. The university secured CHE and SACSCOC approvals, launched the Elevate brand and website, and partnered with RisePoint to support delivery.

Leadership change in the Dean of the School of Graduate, Continuing, and Online Education successfully concluded in June 2025. The inaugural Spring 2025 CBE BPS cohort included seven students and grew to 10 in Summer 2025. Feedback from students included the need for financial aid so Regent software is being pursued to help grow enrollment.

Progress is evident: Elevate received industry recognition, gained its first advisory board member (Suzie Shannon of SC Competes), executed marketing campaigns including billboards and airport ads, and secured a CBE MOU with Affinity Health.



HONORS COLLEGE LAUNCH

PRIORITY: EXCEL, EDUCATE

PROJECT LEAD: SEBASTIAN VAN DELDEN

Officially launched in Summer 2025, the Winthrop Honors College aims to elevate the existing Honors Program into a premier destination for high-achieving students, emphasizing a distinctive “Leading with Leadership” theme. The initiative has made rapid progress. All major objectives were successful, including Nick Grosseohme transitioning into the dean role, a new curriculum that focuses on retention and belonging approved through all levels of faculty governance, an enhanced recruitment strategy was designed and implemented, and the renovation of the Honors Center in Courtyard student housing was completed on schedule.

The inaugural recruiting weekend (February 2025) was a success, contributing to a record number of Fall 2025 admits and deposits. The number of Honors graduates in 2024-25 also hit a historic record high. Additionally, the college secured its first angel investor and five Leadership Council members.

Moving forward, the college will focus on recruiting exceptional students, expanding high-impact experiences, establishing a Faculty Fellows program, and developing long-term scholarship pipelines. The transition to an Honors College marks a transformative step in attracting and retaining Winthrop’s top academic talent.



BRANDING AND MARKETING INITIATIVE

PRIORITY: EXCEL

PROJECT LEAD: JOSEPH MILLER

In phase one of Winthrop: United in Excellence, the university launched an ambitious, multi-year effort to develop and implement a comprehensive marketing and brand strategy. This new initiative will unify and elevate Winthrop’s brand identity across all divisions—including Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, Advancement, Athletics, and Student Affairs—ensuring a cohesive and strategic approach to institutional marketing and communications.

Following a rigorous state procurement process, the university selected the agency 160/90 to lead the brand strategy development. With full approval from the Board of Trustees, the University Communications and Marketing team partnered with 160/90 to complete the first phase of the project — Discovery, Asset Evaluation, and Brand Assessment— to build a data-informed and mission-aligned brand strategy.

Future steps involve review and refinement of preliminary brand concepts, development of a paid media strategy, and the creation of a comprehensive brand toolkit and guidelines for internal rollout beginning in Fall 2025. These efforts will be followed by an integrated execution phase, ensuring that the new brand supports key university priorities such as student recruitment, academic program development, alumni engagement, and fundraising.



TUITION TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE

PRIORITY: ENRICH

PROJECT LEAD: JOSEPH MILLER

In 2023-2024, Winthrop University launched its Tuition Transparency Initiative, beginning with an 8.5% tuition reduction for all in-state undergraduate students for the 2024-2025 academic year. While Year One focused on aligning our tuition and fees with instructional and administrative costs – thus lowering the overall cost of attendance, Year Two built on that momentum by refining the structure and delivery of tuition and fees to better support student success and financial sustainability.

Returning student persistence, new student enrollment, retention, and net tuition revenue were examined to guide structural changes in the second year. Key activities included conducting price sensitivity analyses, modeling various tuition structures, and presenting proposed scenarios to the Board of Trustees to finalize 2025-26 tuition and fees.

A tiered per-credit-hour cost model was adopted and encourages students to enroll in 12–15 credit hours per semester. This model aligns with the “Fifteen to Finish” strategy, which promotes timely graduation and ongoing eligibility for academic and state-based aid programs. Also, new merit scholarship strategies were established for incoming freshmen and transfer students.



CAMPUS LIFE ELEVATION

PRIORITY: ENRICH

PROJECT LEAD: SHELIA BURKHALTER

Student Affairs took the lead energizing campus life and sparking renewed excitement for student traditions and Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL). Over the past year, there have been record-breaking levels of involvement and leadership from students, signaling a strong re-engagement in campus life.

One of the most notable achievements is the growth in registered student organizations — from 91 in 2022 to 116 in 2025.

FSL also has experienced remarkable momentum. A new FSL director was welcomed, bringing dedicated leadership to advance visibility, growth and expansion. Membership soared from 197 to 252 between fall and spring, with all three Greek councils posting gains: IFC from 37 to 47, CPC from 92 to 101 and NPHC from 68 to 101. Academic excellence remains a hallmark, with 13 of 15 chapters above a 3.0 GPA and an overall cumulative GPA of 3.24.

This year’s highlights included Greek Week, participation in national conferences, Orientation marketing, direct mail outreach to incoming students and branded promotional materials. Next steps include exploring chapter expansion opportunities.



DATA HEALTH INITIATIVE

PRIORITY: ENGAGE

PROJECT LEAD: KEVIN HUGHES

This initiative was a joint effort to both provide an updated wealth screening of the entire alumni database, as well as an audit of alumni contact information. Wealth screening and the data that it provides, while not the only data point, is a key element of successful major and planned gift fundraising. It had been since 2016 that a full wealth screening of Winthrop's alumni database had been conducted. Therefore, it was long overdue and was particularly urgent that this information be obtained to support Winthrop's comprehensive campaign.

With the updated wealth screening information available, it is now enabling the University Advancement division to optimize gift officer portfolios, ensuring efficient outreach to the best potential prospects. This data also has uncovered new prospects for the team to contact, thus expanding fundraising opportunities now and in the foreseeable future.

To dovetail with the wealth screening, University Advancement also conducted a full audit of alumni contact information, including home mailing addresses, email addresses and cell phone numbers. The email and cell phone data is particularly important given the rising cost and shrinking ROI of direct mail, especially with younger alumni. This screening process identified over 18,000 new email addresses for alumni and over 40,000 new cell phone numbers. This information will enable the division to start communicating and engaging with a wider swath of Winthrop's alumni community.



ANNUAL GIVING INVESTMENT

PRIORITY: ENGAGE

PROJECT LEAD: KEVIN HUGHES

The role of the leadership annual giving officer is akin to a junior development officer, in that the day-to-day work is very similar to major gifts development officers. However, the work is focused specifically on those donors who are believed to have the capability to give annually at the leadership level (\$1,000+) but who are not there yet. The outreach is focused on those donors who give in the \$250-999 range, and also those individuals who are non-donors, but who have the potential to give at the leadership level. Thus, this position is uniquely positioned to both increase overall revenue, as well as donor participation. An additional benefit of the position is that this role will also periodically identify major gift prospects that can be transitioned to a development officer for further cultivation.

Similar to what the division has experienced recently with other searches, it took an extended period of time to identify a successful candidate for this position. However, the new hire started work on April 1st. In less than 3 months, 30 personal meetings (4 in April, 18 in May, and 8 thus far in June), and 927 email and phone interactions with donors and potential donors have been completed. Meeting numbers will continue to increase on a monthly basis now that onboarding has concluded.



ATHLETICS FUNDRAISING INVESTMENT

PRIORITY: ENGAGE

PROJECT LEAD: CHUCK REY

Since launch in mid-January 2025, this initiative has demonstrated strong early momentum and meaningful return on investment. With a staff salary and benefits totaling \$67,375 in the fiscal year the initiative already has generated \$55,000 in new revenue and, more importantly, laid the groundwork for transformative growth. Highlights include securing the first two major gifts for men’s and women’s golf, conducting 39 one-on-one qualification meetings, and developing a structured pledge program for recurring annual gifts. Nineteen proposals—totaling an additional \$490,000 in potential revenue—are currently pending, reflecting a high level of activity and engagement.

Significant progress also has been made in broader strategic objectives. Fundraising priorities have been identified for each team, and outreach efforts have intensified, with weekly calls targeting major gifts and endowed scholarship opportunities. The initiative has expanded its scope beyond the local region and is making headway toward naming opportunities for the athletics complex. Plans are underway to launch an Athletics Giving Society to enhance recurring donor participation and to support the next phase of NCAA revenue share and NIL program development. These actions indicate a solid foundation for sustainable fundraising success and increased long-term support for athletics.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

PRIORITY: ENHANCE

PROJECT LEAD: LISA COWART

The Divisions of Human Resources and Academic Affairs collaborated to enhance professional development opportunities and employee satisfaction. The LinkedIn Learning platform was utilized as employees completed 5,182 courses. Faculty also continued to participate in the QEP’s ACUE Career Concentration training, achieving a 90% completion rate with 181 faculty members trained. In addition, 13 “Listen and Learn” sessions were offered, with 120 employees participating. Approximately 50 employees also took part in HR process training.

Employees received total compensation statements in February 2025. In October 2024, salary adjustments totaling \$500,000 were awarded to 125 employees as part of Year 4 of the university’s 5-year plan to bring salaries to the minimum of the competitive pay range.

The New Faculty Mentoring Program, Welcome to Winthrop New Staff Orientation, and the in-person New Hire Orientation received extremely positive reviews from participants.



BUDGET PROCESS OVERHAUL

PRIORITY: ENHANCE

PROJECT LEAD: KEVIN BUTLER

Finance and Business Affairs transformed the university’s budget development process and strengthened budget operations through enhanced reporting. This initiative began by developing a Budget Calendar that detailed every step of the budget process and assigned specific timelines and responsibilities for each task. Budget request forms were simplified and a Budget Committee was created to assist with process governance.

The division also worked to support budget management activities through system changes and expanded training and reporting. The Accounting Team reversed discontinued accrual activity in departmental budget data, resulting in higher reliance on system reports. The Budget vs Actual report was reengineered and leadership was provided periodic reports that reflected the burn rates for each of the divisions. A final product of the budget process reform was to centralize the cost of institutional software and contracts, removing the clutter from departmental budgets.



CAMPUS ROADMAP

PRIORITY: ENHANCE

PROJECT LEAD: KEVIN BUTLER

The project’s goal was to combine the outcomes of the Strategic Plan, Academic Master Plan and the Campus Master Plan to produce a 10-year road map for capital infrastructure projects. The university engaged Gordian Sightlines to perform an initial campus assessment related to maintaining campus space. Gordian was subsequently contracted to perform a space utilization assessment on classrooms and meeting spaces. Cabinet members were queried regarding their future space needs. This project is continuing into a second phase in FY26. All of this data will be used to feed into an updated Campus Master Plan layout which will drive the optimization of campus space and solutions sets for excess real property.



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