

Our GuideStar

Denison provides students with a life-shaping education that unlocks their potential to be the architect of their lives. We are a college where students benefit from world-class academics and co-curricular involvements. A college where a student can compete at a national level in athletics and still study abroad; receive conservatory quality training in the arts and still have the total college experience; develop friendships with peers who both share their world views and who have different world views; pursue existing interests and develop new passions. We are a college that prides itself on the fact that a student can receive a life-shaping liberal arts education and be prepared to launch quickly into a career.

This message is consistent with our past, and our values and supports our endeavor to be one of the most respected universities in the country, admired by parents and college counselors for how students thrive, by companies and graduate schools for the preparation of our students, and by others across higher ed for what we do and how we do it. Denison is a college that moves beyond the false choices that too often define higher education. A college that exists to unlock the potential of students to be the architects of their lives.

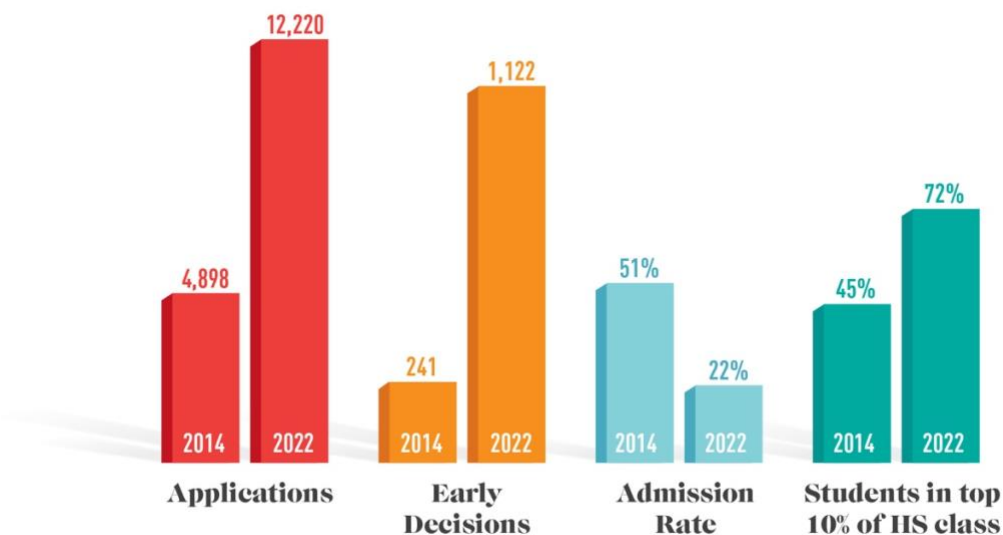
The 2015 Strategic Plan

In 2015, we shared a far-reaching strategic direction for the college – a roadmap that was developed collaboratively with the campus community and the Board of Trustees during my first year on campus.

That [plan](#) read in part:

“This plan seeks to firmly place Denison among the very top national liberal arts colleges by positioning us as a college that is known for attracting talented and diverse students who thrive in an environment marked by strong mentorship, a performance-based culture, and success at launching students into the professions. We also will differentiate ourselves as a suburban college whose proximity to a thriving metropolitan region makes us more interesting, relevant, and vibrant when compared to other liberal arts colleges. And we will support this program with a large endowment that is prudently managed, allowing Denison to be more affordable than other highly ranked liberal arts colleges.”

This chart outlines some metrics that document our momentum and should make us proud:



2015 Strategies and Accomplishments

The 2015 plan focused on five strategies. Following is an overview of our accomplishments in these areas:

First, we expanded the curriculum with new academic programs. We added programs in: Applied Math; Data Analytics; Digital Humanities; Financial Economics; Global Commerce; Global Health; Health, Exercise, and Sport Studies; Journalism; Middle East and North African Studies; and Music Theatre. In addition, Political Science became Politics & Public Affairs and Data for Political Research. And Geoscience added programs in Earth & Environmental Sciences. We built the Michael D. Eisner Center for the Performing Arts and, in doing so, positioned Denison as a top college for art students who can enjoy conservatory-quality training while also having the full liberal arts experience. We created the Center for Global Programs and expanded Denison Seminars, added new international partnerships for study abroad, and increased support for international students.

Second, we invested in campus life with a focus on wellness, diversity, and entrepreneurship. This included building the [Ann & Thomas Hoaglin Wellness Center](#) and creating a new [comprehensive approach to student wellness and well-being](#). We focused on expanding staff and diversity programming and developed a comprehensive cross-campus plan, [Denison Forward](#). Finally, we focused on Entrepreneurship and Design Thinking by launching [The Red Frame Lab](#). Each year, about

20% of our students engage with programs like Red Corps Fellows, Red Startup, and Red Frame Consulting.



Third, we created the Knowlton Center to launch our students quickly and successfully into lives and careers.

Through the [Knowlton Center for Career Exploration](#), we have launched [Career Communities](#) to help students explore professional paths, a comprehensive employer relations program to source internships and jobs, and [Denison Edge](#) to close gaps in skills so students can compete for internships and jobs. We also extended this work to support our alumni five years post-graduation. The Knowlton Center is working closely with academic departments to support the career exploration work they are doing with their majors. We have created more support for students competing for post-graduation fellowships through the Lisska Center and retooled our on-campus student employment program to ensure students are acquiring strong workplace attributes.

Fourth, we institutionalized the Center for Learning and Teaching and developed the Lisska Center. We institutionalized [The Center for Learning and Teaching \(CfLT\)](#) to support faculty at all career stages to develop and enhance teaching skills. And we launched [The Lisska Center for Intellectual Engagement](#) to strengthen our commitment to student and faculty research through the Summer Scholars Program and student advising for post-graduation fellowships. More recently, The Lisska Center has taken the lead on promoting dialogue across difference, including a [set of debate programs](#) with the Braver Angels and the American Council of Trustees & Alumni and the [Minds Wide Open](#) speaker series.

Fifth, we worked to increase Denison's institutional visibility. We have refocused and expanded our work on strategic communications, branding, and marketing, making strides toward increasing visibility and better positioning Denison within the higher education landscape. We've considerably improved our websites and forward-facing communications. We revamped the *Denison Magazine*. We created Regional Advisory Boards of alumni (BOA) who have been instrumental in their regions. We significantly enhanced and expanded our Family Leadership Council.

We also made a large commitment to increasing financial aid: We doubled the amount of need-based financial aid

we are awarding and became one of only 75 colleges (out of 4,000) to meet the full demonstrated financial aid need of every student we admit. We also mapped and then closed financial stressors including the creation of [Red Thread Grants](#) to alleviate financial hardships for students experiencing difficult circumstances.

To support these initiatives, we embarked on the largest fundraising campaign in the college's history and raised \$247 million. Along with strong investment management, our endowment now stands at over \$1 billion, putting us in a rarefied category of well-resourced colleges and universities.

The Higher Education Landscape

Prospective families are making college decisions relative to **perceived value**, which sits at the intersection of experience, outcomes, and cost. Prospective families and students want to know three things: Will my students have a great experience and thrive? Will they have a job when they graduate? Can we afford it, and is it worth the investment relative to other options?



Denison's Market Position

There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Within this landscape, we are positioning ourselves as a liberal arts college that gives students both a life-shaping liberal arts education and the skills and experiences to launch quickly and successfully into a profession.

The challenge for most universities is size, scale, and focus. Undergraduate education is a small piece of what they do. Most students will never form a meaningful relationship with a professor or get involved in a co-curricular experience. These kinds of relationships and experiences are core components of a life-shaping college experience and are commonplace at Denison. We will continue to double down on faculty mentorship, campus life (athletics, arts, campus orgs, study abroad, etc.), and the deep friendships that define Denison. At the same time, many liberal arts colleges continue to be lackluster with career preparation. We are using the Knowlton Center, Red Frame Lab, Lisska Center, alumni networks and the Columbus region to be best-in-class in helping students explore and launch into successful careers.

2022-2027 Strategic Priorities

Charting Denison’s strategic direction for the next five years (2022-2027) builds on the success and momentum created by the previous strategic plan. We will focus on the following six areas as top institutional priorities:

Priority	Actions
Financial Aid and Affordability	Continue to strengthen financial aid packages with more grants and fewer loans, continue to focus on financial stressors, and stay committed to low- and middle-income students.
Faculty and Academic Programs	Ensure departments are properly resourced, support outside the classroom components of courses/majors that create mentorship moments, improve academic spaces, support scholarship/creative work, and invest in the Arts, Global Programs, Lisska, and CfLT. Implement Academic Priorities document.
Residential Student Community	Reexamine the first-year experience, focus on being a welcoming and inclusive campus, help students develop the habits and skills of well-being, and enhance spaces that bring students together. Implement Student Life Plan .
Career Exploration	Continue to develop the four pillars of the Knowlton Center, making Sophomore Journey a signature program. Support recent alumni. Also focus on connecting with academic programs, Lisska Center, and Red Frame Lab.
Alumni Engagement	Add value and meaning to the lives of our alumni. Focus on reimagining major events, making ReMix a signature program, bringing alumni back to campus to connect with students, and engaging alumni in the work of Knowlton Center.
Workplace Environments and Operational Excellence	Focus on campus community, Denison Forward, professional development, compensation & benefits, and sustainability. Expand HR Office to help lead this work.

1. Financial Aid and Affordability: We are committed to enhancing financial assistance to ensure that students admitted to Denison can afford to attend and do not graduate with a large debt burden. With this plan, we will build on our work to meet the full demonstrated financial need of our students. Financial aid will be the top priority of our fundraising, and we will continue to strengthen financial aid packages with more grants and fewer loans.

We will also continue our work to reduce financial stressors by building on the Red Thread Grant program and making sure study abroad, summer internships and other important Denison experiences are affordable and accessible to all students. We need to make sure we stay affordable to middle-income families who are too often locked out of private higher education.

2. Faculty and Academic Programs: Our curriculum is designed to immerse and engage students. Denison’s challenging liberal arts foundation across a wide range of disciplines exposes students to a diverse set of intellectual and creative perspectives. Students become autonomous, critical, and creative thinkers informed by data and science, driven by ethics and values, aware of global humanity and history, and ready to launch quickly and successfully into lives and careers.

Our ability to provide this kind of education is dependent upon a talented and engaged faculty who challenge students academically and a student advising system that encourages students to take a wide range of classes that can open their minds and imaginations. Maintaining a challenging academic environment that balances support and high expectations to help students learn the competency, reward, and importance of producing high-quality intellectual and creative works is core to this work, and student-faculty/staff relationships have defined the college for generations. Developing a mentor relationship is one of [the strongest predictors](#) that college will be transformative for a student.

The Provost's Office has worked with faculty to create an [Academic Priorities](#) document. This document lays out principles that serve as a foundation for our academic program and a set of priorities for the college.

Invest in our faculty and academic programs to ensure they are properly resourced to do the highly relational and deeply engaging work with students that defines Denison. We need to continue to ensure that each academic program is properly staffed. We will add some new tenure track lines and find ways to convert long-standing visiting faculty to a new category that recognizes that they are continuing members of our faculty. We will also explore a "professors of practice" model that would allow us to tap into our alumni and faculty networks and Columbus to expand the range of experiences and perspectives of our faculty. In some academic programs, this would allow us to enhance what we are teaching and expose students to a slightly wider range of views and perspectives. Our highly successful Ensembles-in-Residence program is one example where this has worked well.

Enhance learning by investing in the wide range of ways faculty work with students outside the classroom on intellectual and creative projects. Examples include our long-standing and nationally recognized [Summer Scholars Program](#); multi-day excursions that academic programs like Studio Art, Global Commerce, Cinema, Global Health, and Geoscience (now Earth and Environmental Science) have been taking with their students; Denison Seminar courses; and on-campus festivals like TUTTI that give students a chance to work with faculty in new ways. Faculty need resources to help organize this kind of work that deepens learning and often leads to important mentoring moments.

Continue the work we have started across the arts. Looking ahead, five initiatives will help us achieve our goals. First, we will build the new Music Theatre minor, designed to promote collaboration and innovation across the performing arts. Second, we will create a residential summer camp for high school students in music, theatre, and dance, designed to showcase Denison's approach and allow prospective artists the opportunity to engage with our faculty while in high school. Third, we will add a design component to the Studio Art major and incorporate practical work experience into the curriculum. Fourth, we will continue to make important upgrades to facilities across the Fine Arts Quad, including development of a film production facility to enhance our Cinema major. And fifth, we will explore new career exploration and internship opportunities tailored to the needs of students in the arts.

Focus on the myriad ways Global Programs is infused throughout the curriculum and all aspects of the student experience. We are developing new partnerships with universities abroad to offer direct enrollment opportunities for our students. We are focusing more on summer opportunities, STEM off-campus programs, and enhanced support for historically underrepresented students. Denison Seminars will continue to be a priority. We also need to continue the on-campus work to create programs that foster cross-cultural, cross-national connections that lead to more learning and that generate lifelong friendships/relationships across differences.

Invest in academic facilities. We will focus on implementing recommendations made through the academic space planning process led by the faculty steering committee and Sasaki architects. We will focus on creating spaces that facilitate collaboration (e.g., faculty-to-faculty and faculty-to-student), allow for flexibility as academic programs change, minimize "silos," reduce underused spaces, and balance the needs for visibility and functionality. We will start with a complete renovation of Doane Hall to become a hub for faculty and courses focused on quantitative reasoning. The building will become a home for Computer Science and Data Analytics and will foster deeper conversations and more opportunities for students to graduate with data competency, expressed broadly. We will then renovate Fellows Hall, paying particular attention to creating spaces and ways for collaboration among our humanities departments and humanities-related programs. One idea has been to develop some sort of Humanities Center that would coordinate and enhance the work across academic departments. Another early priority will be the Bioreserve. We will then work on other academic spaces.

Ensure that we are supporting the scholarship and creative work of our faculty. This work is core to the professional identities of our faculty. It is also an important way for faculty to contribute to the wider world.

3. Residential Student Community: We are a fully residential campus because we extend liberal arts learning across

every part of campus. Athletics, residential halls, campus organizations and other co-curricular activities serve as design studios for students to further develop and practice liberal arts skills and habits. We also believe that there is something powerful about living with high-achieving peers who are committed to their education, want to do well in life, and bring a wide range of views, perspectives, and life experiences to campus. Students challenge and learn from each other.

Student Life has worked with students to create a set of priorities, which you can find [here](#). That document lays out five priority areas for ensuring the Denison residential college experience is life-shaping and defined by what our Student Life team is calling the three “Rs” of the Denison campus experience:

- *rigorous experiences* that help students develop intellectual depth, deep engagement, and resiliency
- *residential experiences* that leverage the full campus as a learning space across all four class years
- *relational experiences* that take place as students live, learn, and work together, fostering a culture of care, making connections, and seeking out new perspectives and ideas

We will focus on ensuring that residence halls are sites where students learn to live with a diverse set of peers and create healthy neighborhoods. We will maximize student spaces, including Slayter Hall, the Moonies, and other spaces for social life. We need to take a fresh look at the first-year experience including core components of how we onboard students into Denison (e.g., June-O, Pre-Os, Aug-O), and extend how we do this work with students and families beyond the first few weeks.

We need to do less campus programming and make sure the programming we do is of higher quality and effectively brings students together. We need to think with more intentionality about how our strengths in athletics and the arts can help build a sense of community. Both athletics and the arts anchor campus life and help create a campus where students own their Denison experience.

The [Denison Forward](#) initiative is crucial to our work. By design, we bring a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds to campus. We need to make sure that every student feels a sense of welcoming and belonging, where they are listened to, valued, and respected. We also need to encourage students to embrace differences. Much of the learning takes place as students develop relationships with people like themselves but also with peers whose life experiences and worldviews are different. We want students to learn to work across differences even when it is challenging, to build healthy and diverse communities, and to value learning others’ perspectives.

We will also continue to focus on our new [comprehensive approach to student wellness and well-being](#). The opening of the Hoaglin Center and our new partnership with The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center should allow us to create a campus wellness center known for high-quality medical and counseling care. It also gives us an opportunity to enhance how we help students develop the skills and habits of wellness. While not all aspects of health are under our control, students have more ownership than they sometimes realize. We need to help students recognize how sleep, nutrition, movement, social connection, and time spent outdoors all impact our physical and mental health. We need to add more wellness and mindfulness programming throughout campus, helping students develop the emotional agility and resiliency that supports their physical and mental health.

A focus on wellness also gives us a chance to change campus conversations about failure, helping students learn that failure and struggle are part of a college experience and normal parts of life. By design, college delivers profound personal growth as students work to overcome obstacles and develop the tools to succeed. This means we should not be afraid to challenge students out of fear that it will have a detrimental impact on their health. The greatest gift we can give our students is “a push” because it sends a message that we believe in them. One of our faculty is fond of saying, “Things worth doing are hard, and hard things are worth doing.” But we also need to do this in ways that recognize that our students are in very different places with their own personal development. Colleges that do this well understand that education should be about both support and accountability.

We will also continue to focus on being a campus where students are encouraged to have their minds wide open. [The Denison Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom](#), which was passed by the faculty in 2016, is a clear statement about how and why liberal arts colleges need to be places where people are expected to ask questions and challenge orthodoxy of all kinds, especially our own. The “residential” should be designed to encourage

students to take what they learn in their classes and engage their peers through intellectual inquiry and debate. We need to be a campus community where students are open and willing (and understand the importance) of hearing views they find challenging and uncomfortable.

4. Career Exploration: While we want students to have a great four-year experience, we don't aspire for this to be the best four years of their life. We want them to come back for their 50th Reunion and state that their lives turned out better than they ever could have imagined when they arrived at Denison because the college educated them in the liberal arts while preparing and launching them quickly and successfully into lives and careers.

This means encouraging students to use their time at Denison to ask big questions about the kinds of lives they want to live. We want them to then understand how careers are part of building the lives they want to live. And we want them to use part of their time at Denison to develop the skills, habits, networks, and experiences to launch quickly and successfully into their lives and careers. Our career center is vital in every step of the student journey at Denison and beyond. Our work begins when students step onto campus and continues throughout their first pivotal professional experiences.

The Grand Strategy: A Formula for Successful Career Launch



The four pillars of the Knowlton Center are also central to this work and include: Career Communities & Coaching, Alumni & Employer Relations, Faculty Partnerships, and Denison Edge. Our goal is to get most (if not all) of our students through [the Journey Program](#) before the end of their sophomore year and then connected to a [career community](#), where they will work with career coaches and locate alumni, parents, and friends of the college who can be helpful to them. Through these connections and the Knowlton Center's employer relations program, students will find internships and use their summers and breaks to explore careers and develop important skills and experiences. As students start to narrow in on potential career paths, they will take advantage of [Denison Edge](#) to close the gaps between what we teach in the curriculum and what they need to compete for jobs and graduate programs. Knowlton will continue to support students five years post-graduation, as they make early career pivots and launch.

To enhance this work, the Knowlton Center is focusing on partnerships with:

- **Academic departments** to add career-related components to courses and majors, where appropriate and guided by the faculty
- **The Liska Center** to engage students who are interested in prestigious fellowships and top-tier graduate and professional programs
- **The Red Frame Lab** to support students who are interested in entrepreneurship and consulting through programs like Red Start Up and Red Corps Consulting

5. Alumni Engagement: We are fortunate to have an incredibly successful and loyal alumni community. We need to adapt and change alumni engagement to ensure it is meaningful for our alumni; impactful to the college in priority areas like student recruitment, career advising, and sourcing internships and jobs; and that contributes to the college's continual financial health through the Annual Fund. In Spring 2022, we did our first alumni survey in decades to better understand what our alumni value and how they want to be connected to the college. Based on that work, we are going to:

- 1) **Refine our long-standing events** (e.g., Big Red Weekend, Reunion, Denison Everywhere) and regional

- events to meet the changing lives, interests, and needs of our alumni
- 2) **Grow ReMix as an event that engages alumni** from across the generations who share a professional interest or passion
 - 3) **Develop the infrastructure to offer impactful volunteer roles to interested alumni** who can support academic programs, admissions, and other strategic initiatives of the college
 - 4) **Infuse alumni into the work of the Knowlton Center** to build more support for young alums and enhance professional networking and internships

6. Workplace Environments and Operational Excellence: This work starts by supporting our people with a focus on compensation, including both salaries and benefits. As a first step, we worked with consultants to review our benefits structure. The Personnel Committee worked with Human Resources on this project last spring and is helping develop a set of recommendations for ways we can expand the benefits we offer. You can read more about this work [here](#). We are now doing similar work with an outside consultant to explore our salary structure for faculty and staff, always with an eye toward improving it.

We also need to take a renewed look at creating and recreating community on campus, starting within offices and divisions of the college and then extending across campus. We are building housing so faculty and staff who desire to do so can live in Granville and near each other. We need to make childcare easier to access. We need to invest in better and longer onboarding of new faculty and staff and continually invest in our managers to make sure we have good work environments.

To do the above, we need to invest in our Human Resources Department, ensuring they have the resources to focus on culture and community. At the same time, we also need to pay attention to a challenging economy and continue to operate on balanced budgets. Managing our endowment wisely and launching a new fundraising campaign will be important.

We also need to lean into the social issues that our people care about and manage the college in ways that represent our values. There are two that are crucial to the future and where we need to do more:

- **A focus on being an inclusive and welcoming campus** where everybody feels listened to, valued and respected, and supported to thrive and succeed. This is the work of [Denison Forward](#) and the IDEA committee that will oversee this work. This work requires the commitment of every part of the college. And it is a journey. As we take steps forward, we need to celebrate what we have done and identify the next steps.
- **Addressing sustainability and climate change.** We have done good work over the last 15 years. The Sustainability Committee is working on a new plan. The next phase of our work will focus on how we generate and purchase electricity, heating, and cooling in ways that reduce our carbon footprint to meet an ambitious goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 and carbon net zero by 2045.

As we do this work, we also need a continual focus on getting work done right, communicating promptly and well, and managing our resources in ways that ensure long-term health.

Two notes: There are two opportunities that cut across our priorities and act as enablers. Both are important.

- **Columbus:** The growth and vitality of central Ohio creates an expanding array of opportunities for the college. Columbus makes it easier to attract students, faculty, and staff who are excited to live in the region. There are local and regional businesses that enhance every part of the college, from facilities work to professional development training. The region is a laboratory for our students and faculty to do intellectual and creative work. One recent example is the way we found new ways for people living in the region to work with students to help launch The Red Frame Lab, the Knowlton Center, and our programs in Journalism, Global Commerce, and HESS. The arts are another place where we have tapped into local people, places, and opportunities. We need to continue to think in new ways about how to infuse the community throughout our work. The movement of Intel into our region will change our community rapidly. We need to pay attention to both the new opportunities and the challenges.

- **Technology:** Increasingly, technology infuses the work we do across the college. We need to commit to providing the systems and tools that allow us to be effective, innovative, and aligned across the college. We will use emerging technologies to think bigger and bolder about our work in a wide range of areas, including alumni engagement, career exploration, global programs, professional development, research, admissions, and our academic and student life programs. We will take a data-driven approach and use informed, ethical practices to set our direction and assess our impact. We will work with faculty and students to understand the ways technology can accelerate learning and build meaningful connections while always recognizing the value of the experiences we have when we put our devices down. We are committed to creating a digital strategy that supports the strength of our community and allows us to leverage intentional, reliable, and effective systems that accelerate our delivery of Denison’s mission and goals.

Final Words: This plan builds on the work we have been doing to position us into the future. In doing so, we will continue to chart the future of a great residential liberal arts college — a great college for motivated students who embrace challenges and understand that we grow by doing hard things. A college filled with students who are motivated, engaged, and excited to be challenged by faculty and staff who care about them, to live in a community of diverse peers, and to put in the hard work needed to unlock their potential to be the architects of their lives.

Denison has always been shaped by relationships, experiences, and opportunities. By continuing to focus on these facets of a great college experience, we will continue to position Denison as one of the most respected universities in the country, admired by parents and college counselors for how students thrive, by companies and graduate schools for the preparation of our students, and by others across higher ed for what we do and how we do it. Denison is a college that moves beyond the false choices that too often define higher education. A college that has stayed true to its roots while adapting to meet the needs of each generation of students.