



Strategic Plan

Annual Report: 2023-2024 Academic Year

The Mercy 2025 Strategic Plan, launched in October 2020, specifies four strategic goals and related objectives that are rooted in the institution's mission of providing transformative educational experiences to students. The development of the plan was informed by evidence from focus groups conducted with faculty, staff and students; data-rich self-studies of the first-year experience and of the institution during the decennial review; institutional indicators; and market data on enrollment and regional trends.

The strategic goals center on four areas: teaching and learning; support for student success; affordability and financial health; and building college community. To evaluate progress on the plan, metrics for each strategic goal were identified and reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee in spring and fall 2019. Emerging outcomes for these metrics are reviewed annually by that Committee.

This document provides an update on each metric and a summary of the key activities that contributed toward our strategy in the fourth year of the plan. The timeframe for this report is July 2023 through June 2024.

Goal 1: Teaching and Learning — Key Initiatives

Gateway Course Redesign: Several interventions were either initiated or launched during the 2023-24 academic year in key gateway courses. Following the earlier redesign of ENGL111, the Composition Coordinator convened a group of faculty (supported by IREPO) to rebuild ENGL112 with a focus on writing in a range of academic and professional contexts. CISC131 also underwent a curricular revision and now includes embedded teaching assistants (resulting in dramatic decreases in DFWI rates from Fall 2021 to Fall 2023, from 50.7% in F21 to 38.6% in F22 to 23.8% in F23). In Spring 2024, the COMPASS Title V project convened cohorts of faculty working on redesigns of BIOL110 and BIOL112 (focused on active learning and with units foregrounding real-world applications), as well as the development of a new Quantitative Reasoning course intended for students who would typically take MATH115.

First Year Seminar: Launched a pilot in Fall 2023 of a new First Year Seminar that was rolled out in four sections of Critical Inquiry of a “proof-of-concept.” This new course was developed in coordination with a First-Year Experience Task Force and was designed with a holistic focus on helping students articulate a sense of academic purpose and helping them engage with their learning and the Mercy community. The FYS pilot continued as part of the COMPASS project in Fall 2024 in 32 sections, with a full-scaled rollout scheduled for Fall 2025.

General Education: A new model of General Education was approved by Faculty Senate in May 2024 with a target rollout/implementation date of Fall 2026. Mercy was awarded a \$2.9 million Title V grant to support faculty development and student support in the coming five years as we implement this new model of General Education for all undergraduate students. The COMPASS project is designed to meet a number of objectives aligned with the strategic plan—including improving student GPAs in their first year, improving student retention, and improving our graduation rate.

Installation of Pods in Mercy Libraries: The IREPO award supported the purchase and installation of five soundproof multi-use cubicles in the Dobbs Ferry and Bronx libraries to provide students with a quiet space to participate in online classes, work in groups, and/or meet with online tutors without disrupting others. Two individual pods were installed in the Dobbs Ferry Library, along with one group study pod, and two additional individual pods were installed in the Bronx Library.

CSTEP Stipend Assistantship Program: CSTEP provided stipends to both students and faculty mentors during the Fall 2023 semester for their collaborative work conducting research. The University was honored to have 15 participating students and 10 faculty members.

CSTEP Scholarship: CSTEP created their first scholarship initiative that covers the full-cost of additional research opportunities for students.

New programs and/or program redesigns:

The Bronx Catalyst Program: Catalyst is a cohort-based academic initiative that embeds career readiness and intrusive student engagement within an interdisciplinary curriculum designed by Mercy faculty. The program, which is based at the Mercy Bronx campus, recruited an inaugural class of 58 students for the academic year 2024-25 in three areas of educational focus: Business, Education, and Social Work. Students who are admitted into Catalyst are provided a unique set of

supports that includes scholarships, other resources such as a computer and a meal plan, as well as a robust mentorship program.

The MSBA Certificate Program: Launched the development of course shells to create a series of three certificates that can stack into the MS in Business Analytics (MSBA) program. The initiative is funded by the Grad-Pro grant which funds marketing and scholarships in addition to the development of the course shells.

Finance Insurance and Risk management (F.I.R.M.): FIRM is an extension of the Finance program with the addition of nine specific risk management and insurance related courses to prepare students for an industry where there is pent-up demand for new graduates due to the aging demographic of the current workforce.

Psych Mental Health Nurse Practitioner: New York State Education Department (NYSED) has approved the launch of the Psych Mental Health Nurse Practitioner program. This program is designed to address the growing need for mental health providers by preparing graduates with the advanced skills and knowledge required to provide comprehensive mental health care. The first cohort starts in the fall of 2025.

Master's in Nursing Education: The Nursing Education MS track was revised and approved to enhance the preparedness of future educators to effectively address diversity, equity, and inclusion. The revised curriculum equips them with critical resources to foster inclusive learning environments and drive meaningful change in nursing education.

Competency-Based Education: To reduce DFWI rates, the SON began the process of transitioning to Competency-Based Education (CBE), which will emphasize opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of critical skills and competencies. This approach further ensures that our curriculum remains relevant, responsive to current healthcare needs, and adaptable to student interests in ways that empower them to become leaders in nursing practice.

Goal 2: Student Success — Key Initiatives

Improving Retention Rates: First-time, full-time freshman retention rates have improved each year since 2020 and are now approaching pre-pandemic highs. During this time, metrics for transfer students have reached all-time highs.

Peer Academic Support: The School of Liberal Arts expanded the use of Teaching and Learning Assistants in key gateway classes. We utilized Math Learning Assistants in 7 sections of MATH115/6 in Fall 2023 and 7 sections in Spring 2024; utilized English Learning Assistants in 4 sections of ENGL111 in Fall 2023, 3 sections of ENGL112 in Spring 2024, and 2 sections of ENGL112 in Summer 2024; and utilized Teaching Assistants in 4 sections of CISC131 and CISC231 in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024.

Content-Based Mastery Series: The School of Nursing designed and introduced content-based mastery tutoring sessions to enhance student performance on standardized tests developed by Assessment Technologies Institute (ATI). These sessions focus on reinforcing core nursing concepts, building clinical judgment skills, and providing targeted support in areas where students need improvement. Led by experienced faculty, the program aims to boost confidence and competence, ultimately improving student outcomes and retention rates.

Peer Mentors: The peer mentorship program was expanded to a set of targeted courses with high instances of DFWI grades including ACCT 120, MGMT 255, ECON 125, FINC 235, and MKTG 220. The initiative is organized in collaboration with the Center for Academic Excellence and Innovation (CAEI) and faculty. In addition to students visiting the center, a few peer mentors have been embedded into courses to provide more support to students.

Libraries Mentorship Program: The libraries ran a second iteration of its mentorship program, implementing changes from the pilot in the Fall 2022 semester. As with the previous iteration, one mentee was chosen from the Westchester and Manhattan student workers. The program was eight weeks, during which the mentor and mentee spent three hours per week together. Time was split between the mentees' research guides and career readiness. Each mentee, upon their exit interview, cited numerous benefits they gained. They talked about learning project management from the creation of their research guides and learning research skills that will be applicable to their future coursework. They were also grateful to learn more about soft skills and "professionalism." At the end of the program, it was evident that the mentees gained greater confidence in their ability to navigate future work environments.

Financial Literacy Courses: The ECON 200 Managing Your Money course was redesigned and promoted across the university to embed financial literacy in the curriculum.

First Year Success Workshops: Workshops were held for freshmen to provide a holistic portfolio of student success initiatives and interventions to improve student retention and graduation rates. Some of the topics included resources on campus, technology platforms, syllabus review, financial aid, time management, test taking skills, registration, academic policies, wellness and career development.

Delta Alpha Pi: The Office of ACCESSibility rolled out Delta Alpha Pi, an international honor society recognizing high achieving students with disabilities. There were 35 members in the 2023-24 academic year; nine of those members graduated.

Student Health and Wellness Initiatives: With a focus on strengthening access, availability, and support for student wellness and health, the University implemented wellness programs, provided mental performance coaches for student athletes, expanded collaboration with the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences to offer student internships within the counseling center, and continued a partnership with BetterMynd, the online therapy platform for college students.

Career Education for Students: With the goal of providing students with career education including exploration, preparation, and experiences that will lead to well-prepared graduates with positive career outcomes, the following were implemented: The Workforce Transition Program which is a collaboration of the Office of ACCESSibility with Career Services to assist students with disabilities in preparing to pursue job and internship opportunities by offering support involving longer meetings, and consultation on disability disclosure; CSTEP Career Education for students; and the EPIC career in curriculum program.

Goal 3: Affordability and Financial Health — Key Initiatives

Successful Reaccreditation: After a March site visit from a team of peer reviewers, Mercy's reaccreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education was reaffirmed. The next evaluation visit is scheduled for 2031-32.

Fundraising and Scholarships: In FY24 we raised \$3.2 M in cash/pledges/commitments, which exceeded our goal and was up 16% from prior year, due to an increased focus on Planned Gifts and foundation prospects. In FY24, 530 students received \$1.7M in support from 98 donor-funded scholarship funds. We raised funds for a 10th cohort of Mercy Scholars, who continue to defy the odds: 90% graduate in 4 years vs. 4% nationally. In addition, in September we held the first Athletics Day of Giving, which raised over \$29k from over 220 individuals.

Largest Freshman Class in School History: Mercy welcomed its largest freshman class in school history in Fall 2023, which serves as the catalyst for an overall enrollment increase of 3%. The successful class, coupled with improving retention and persistence rates for first-time, full-time freshman, provides lasting financial stability at the undergraduate level.

Oxford International: The Oxford International partnership launched, in earnest, in Fall 2023 with the first cohort of eight students enrolling at the Manhattan campus. The partnership is expected to generate significant international student enrollment each fall, spring, and summer.

Record Amount of Institutional Aid Distributed to Students: Fall 2023 continued the university's commitment to affordability for its students, seeing a record \$17.5M of merit, need, and donor-based institutional funding offered to enrolled students.

Emergency Grant Funding: In the 2023-24 academic year, Mercy gave out over \$407,000 in emergency grants to help students who needed a little extra to get them to graduation. This funding from institutional and donor sources helps students complete their dreams of a degree.

Financial Strength: Mercy maintained its overall financial strength during FY24, as demonstrated by a reaffirmation of its "A" credit rating in 2023 from Standard and Poor's ("S&P") Global Rating Services. S&P cited healthy financial resources relative to debt, strong operating margins, and stable enrollment as key factors in determining the "A" rating. The University's endowment grew to \$336.5 million (95% of which is unrestricted) as of June 30, 2024 and achieved an annualized return of 12.7% (net of fees) for FY24.

Grant Activity: Faculty and staff engaged in grant-funded activity with multiple agencies, resulting in 25 new grant awards in addition to 19 ongoing grants. The five-year average (excluding HEERF funds) is \$10,341,324; the 2023-2024 total was \$12,820,274, primarily from Federal agencies (\$8.3M), but also including funding from New York State (\$3.3M), subawards (\$509K), and foundations (\$165K). Two major institutional projects were funded this year by the U.S. Department of Education, including a Title V Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions grant, COMPASS, for \$2,939,762 and a Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans grant, GRAD-PRO, for \$2,888,606, both of which will receive funding over five years. These projects are focused on initiatives that will support teaching and learning for undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of majors. The goals of COMPASS are to increase the persistence of students; improve their on-time graduation rates; and meet student social, emotional, and academic needs through an enhanced First-Year Experience and a fully remodeled General

Education curriculum. The redesigned General Education curriculum will work towards a more integrative, dynamic, and equity-minded model for all Mercy students and will support student engagement and retention. GRAD-PRO's comprehensive approach will expand postbaccalaureate educational opportunities for students; provide an enhanced focus on academic and career alignment; and provide supplementary resources including scholarships to offset the cost of educational expenses.

Goal 4: College Community — Key Initiatives

Rebranding as Mercy University: In August, Mercy announced its name change to Mercy University. The change in status, approved by the New York State Board of Regents, reflects the breadth of its programs across a wide variety of disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate levels and is a landmark moment in Mercy’s nearly 75-year existence.

Alumni: In FY24, we held a number of events around the country to introduce Mercy and CNR alumni to President Parish, including an event in California hosted by a CNR alumna. In total, 46 events were held throughout the year for various alumni groups including affiliates of nursing, business, various athletics teams and class reunions. In addition, alumni donations were up 8% over the prior year and commitments were up 68%, due to increased efforts on planned gifts.

Financial literacy seminars: A series of financial literacy seminars were organized at the Manhattan and the Dobbs Ferry campuses to engage the broader Mercy community on financial literacy themes. The Manhattan campus initiative consists of 4 one-hour sessions organized outdoors over the summer at Herald Square (across from Macy’s). The Dobbs Ferry campus initiative brings together middle and high school students for a half-day workshop on core financial skills including topics on investing or financing for college.

Prison Education Program: In partnership with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, we continued to deliver associate and bachelor's degree programs to students at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. In AY 2023-24, program enrollment returned to pre-Covid levels, with 169 students registered and 41 degrees conferred. In Spring 2024 we began implementation of processes to better facilitate degree completion for students who exit the facility prior to completing their academic programs.

High School Achievement Program: This program engages local high schools (20 in Westchester County, 1 in Orange County) to provide college-level coursework to high school students. In AY 2023-24, the program enrolled 1,207 unique students in 92 courses, taught by 64 instructors.

Strengthening Each Campus by Focusing on Individual Cultures, Communities, and Environments with the Following:

- **Community Events:** Campus Life hosted a variety of events promoting engagement within the college community. Events included a salsa dancing event during Hispanic Heritage Month, a Veteran’s Brunch, Black Excellence Dinner & Performance, Bronx Women’s Tea Party, Women’s Empowerment Conference, Pride Month events and a 9/11 Memorial Service.
- **Athletics Diversity Highlight:** Student athletes from all 10 teams wrote short biographies recognizing leaders and prominent figures during Black History and Hispanic Heritage months. These biographies were shared on our athletics website.
- **Residential Life Manhattan Exploration:** Residential Life hosted several events for Dorm34 residents to explore Manhattan and its offerings.

Employer Connections: The University has a goal to develop and sustain community connections that position the University as a valuable resource and engaged partner. Mercy hosted or brought students to visit several high-profile employers, including Americare, Citrin Cooperman, CohnReznick, JP Morgan, KPMG, New York State Police, New York State Senate, Oxford University Press, PKF O'Connor Davies, PWC, Regeneron, US Air Force Medical Services, the Westchester County District Attorney's Office, and the Westchester County Probation Department. In addition, Career and Professional Development partnered with the School of Nursing on their end of semester NCLEX review weeks. Recruiters from Montefiore, New York Presbyterian, Northwell Health, NYC Health + Hospitals, White Plains Hospital, and others conducted on-campus recruitment during the School of Nursing's NCLEX Review Week. This is now an annual partnership bringing employers to campus three times a year to recruit students who are about to earn their Nursing licenses.