

2026-2029 Strategic Plan

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES.
ADVANCING STUDENT SUCCESS.
STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES.



Introduction

PennWest is entering its next chapter with purpose, momentum, and a clear vision for the future.

Building on the progress of recent years, the university is well-positioned to expand educational opportunities, strengthen workforce partnerships, and prepare students for meaningful lives and successful careers. As higher education continues to evolve, PennWest will continue to innovate, adapt, and lead in ways that create lasting value for students and the communities we serve.

This Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for the next three years. It reflects the collective input of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community stakeholders, and establishes a shared vision for the future and a focused set of priorities that will guide our work across the university.

At its core, this plan is guided by one principle: every decision we make should strengthen the student experience and improve student outcomes.



Mission, Vision and Values

Our Mission

Through innovation, academic excellence, and empowering environments, PennWest University provides accessible education that cultivates career-ready, life-long learners and leaders, who enrich and engage each other, their communities, the region, and beyond.

Our Vision

PennWest University empowers students to achieve meaningful goals through a broad array of nationally accredited undergraduate and graduate programs, career-focused learning, and support systems that foster lifelong success.

Our Values

Learning

We are a community of educators who provide a learning environment where students thrive and achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals.

Growth

We are student ready, guiding our students towards personal, financial, and academic success.

Inclusion

We advocate for all members of our campus communities and provide an equitable, supportive environment that builds a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Collaboration

We engage in innovative partnerships, programs, and opportunities to address the needs of our regional communities and the commonwealth.

Culture

We share a sense of purpose that unites the PennWest University community at large and provides opportunities to learn, work and thrive.

Who We Serve

PennWest serves learners from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and life circumstances. We provide accessible, affordable, and transformative learning opportunities across Western Pennsylvania and beyond. Recognizing that higher education is not a one-size-fits-all journey, we support students with diverse goals, pathways, and aspirations through three physical campuses and flexible online learning environments. PennWest is committed to meeting learners where they are and supporting their success at every stage of their educational journey, including:

- First-time students pursuing degrees full-time or part-time, on campus or online
- Dual enrollment students, both in-person and online, beginning their higher education pathway
- Adult learners, including those returning to complete degrees, seeking career advancement, or exploring new fields
- Transfer students continuing their education from other institutions
- Graduate students in both campus-based and fully online programs
- Working students balancing education with employment and family responsibilities
- Learners in workforce-aligned, certificate, and professional development programs
- Alumni engaging in lifelong learning, career advancement, credentialing, and continued connection to the institution through educational opportunities

We recognize that there is no single pathway through higher education, and we welcome all learners. By providing flexible learning options, comprehensive support, and meaningful opportunities for personal and professional growth, PennWest empowers students to achieve their goals and thrive in an evolving world.

Strategic Planning Process

PennWest's strategic plan was developed by a task force through a collaborative process involving students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other university stakeholders. Through focus groups, community feedback opportunities, and planning discussions, participants identified the student experience as the central focus for the university's next phase of growth and improvement.

This work resulted in four Pillars of Student Success that serve as the foundation of the strategic plan:

PennWest Pillars of Student Success

- Recruitment, Retention, and Progression
- Student Experience in the Classroom
- Student Experience Outside the Classroom
- The Connection to Post-Graduation Purpose

Additional stakeholder feedback helped shape the strategic initiatives outlined in this plan, while a dedicated working group conducted a review of the university's mission, vision, and values.

Grounded in the student experience, these pillars will provide the framework for institutional priorities, decision-making, and resource allocation.

Implementation and Accountability

This framework and the initiatives that follow will guide the institution's work throughout the plan's life. For each initiative, clear ownership will be assigned to designated leaders and cross-functional teams responsible for implementation.

Annual action plans will outline specific priorities, timelines, required resources, and success measures. Progress will be reviewed regularly to ensure accountability and to make adjustments as needed based on performance and available resources. Specific, measurable outcomes for enrollment, retention, and the university budget are established twice a year through the PASSHE Comprehensive Planning Process (CPP).

Using this framework, the following broad initiatives for each student success pillar will guide the institution's work.





Strategic Initiative Summary

Recruitment/Retention/Progression

Initiative 1: Create a PennWest student navigation and case-resolution model (“No Wrong Door” support)

Initiative 2: Expand adult, transfer, and workforce-aligned pathways

Initiative 3: Make PennWest affordability clear, visible, and actionable

In-Class Student Experience

Initiative 1: Provide a teaching and learning environment to develop career-ready and adaptable graduates for an evolving workforce

Initiative 2: Develop and encourage classroom experiences driven by best practices in pedagogy, retention, and student success

Initiative 3: Integrate student-facing support systems and advising support into the classroom and instructional experience

Out-of-Class Student Experience

Initiative 1: Align the PennWest student promise (clear expectations, consistent messaging, and experience delivery)

Initiative 2: Invest in cross-campus engagement opportunities for students

Initiative 3: Strengthen student onboarding, advising, and support to promote early success and a sense of belonging

Connection to Post-Graduate Purpose

Initiative 1: Integrate career and workforce readiness systematically throughout the student experience

Initiative 2: Create clear connections between academic programs, career opportunities, and employer partnerships

Initiative 3: Create an infrastructure for equitable access to experiential learning

Initiatives by Pillar

Pillar 1: Recruitment/ Retention/Progression

Initiative 1: Create a PennWest student navigation and case-resolution model (“No Wrong Door” support)

PennWest will establish a “No Wrong Door” support model that ensures students never navigate complexity alone and every question is met with accountability, clarity, and resolution. This initiative will fundamentally redesign how students access support by eliminating institutional silos and replacing fragmented service delivery with a unified, student-centered navigation and case-resolution system. The model will unify enrollment, financial aid, academic and career advising, and progression touchpoints into a coordinated system of intake, triage, ownership, and resolution. This approach ensures that students receive timely, accurate, and consistent support regardless of where they enter.

Initiative 2: Expand adult, transfer, and workforce-aligned pathways

PennWest will implement a coordinated strategy to expand and clarify adult, transfer, and workforce-aligned pathways, making it easier for students to enter, re-enter, and progress efficiently. This initiative targets significant growth opportunities among adult learners, returning students, transfer students, and those pursuing workforce-connected pathways, with a stronger emphasis on prior learning assessment (PLA), articulation agreements, and flexible degree-completion options. By enhancing visibility and simplifying navigation, PennWest will drive enrollment growth within key populations, improve credit mobility and time-to-degree, support persistence for working learners, and better align academic offerings with workforce and regional needs.

Initiative 3: Make PennWest affordability clear, visible, and actionable

PennWest will redefine how students and families experience affordability by creating a transparent, confidence-building financial journey that supports informed decision-making at every stage of the student lifecycle. This initiative will replace fragmented and opaque processes with clear, consistent communication about the true cost of attendance, the timing and reliability of financial aid, and the pathways available to make a PennWest education attainable. By increasing clarity and predictability, PennWest will build trust, reduce enrollment melt, strengthen student decision-making, and minimize financial stress that can lead to stop-out

Pillar 2: In-Class Student Experience

Initiative 1: Provide a teaching and learning environment to develop career-ready and adaptable graduates for an evolving workforce

PennWest will prepare career-ready, adaptable graduates through early and consistent experiential learning opportunities, as well as intentional integration and connection to employer desired skills and competencies. This initiative will support faculty access to technology for high-quality instruction across in-person, online, and hybrid formats, while expanding faculty development in effective teaching practices across all modalities. It will also enhance student and faculty access to training and professional development to ensure graduates are literate, responsible, and skillful users of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

Initiative 2: Develop and encourage classroom experiences driven by best practices in pedagogy, retention, and student success

PennWest will strengthen teaching practices that improve student learning, retention, and completion. This initiative will support faculty in using inclusive, evidence-based approaches across all course formats, and encourage ongoing professional growth in active learning, engagement strategies, and accessible course design. It will also improve coordination across teaching, course scheduling, advising, and student support efforts to create a more consistent and supportive academic experience. Building on existing programs and proven practices, PennWest will create learning environments that help more students succeed and stay on track to graduation.

Initiative 3: Integrate student-facing support systems and advising support into the classroom and instructional experience

PennWest will integrate academic support services and advising more fully into the classroom experience to improve student success, retention, and graduation outcomes. This initiative will embed resources such as tutoring, peer mentoring, and library support directly into course design, making them more visible, accessible, and part of everyday learning. It will also support faculty in their advising responsibilities by introducing the PennWest Advising Academy, an official training program that equips faculty to incorporate holistic, strengths-based conversations into course interactions and connect students’ academic work to their goals and future plans. By bringing support and advising closer to where learning happens, PennWest will reduce barriers to access, increase early engagement, and create a more inclusive and supportive academic experience.





Pillar 3: Out-of-Class Student Experience

Initiative 1: Align the PennWest student promise (clear expectations, consistent messaging, and experience delivery)

PennWest will establish a unified Student Promise to ensure alignment between what the university communicates and what students experience throughout the full student lifecycle. This initiative will address inconsistencies in messaging around program expectations, class modalities, and campus experiences by delivering clear expectations and consistent communication across all campuses. PennWest will strengthen trust and reputation, improve enrollment conversion, reduce preventable dissatisfaction and attrition, and create a more coherent and reliable student experience.

Initiative 2: Invest in cross-campus engagement opportunities for students

PennWest will expand and integrate cross-campus and inclusive engagement opportunities that connect students across all locations and modalities. This initiative will create shared experiences that mirror the integrated academic environment, enabling participation in signature events, traditions, athletics, and co-curricular activities across campuses and for online students. By increasing access, visibility, and coordination of engagement opportunities, PennWest will foster a stronger sense of belonging, enhance student connection to the institution, and differentiate the PennWest experience as uniquely collaborative and community driven.

Initiative 3: Strengthen student onboarding, advising, and support to promote early success and a sense of belonging

PennWest will develop a comprehensive readiness-to-success model that prepares, supports, and positions students for success, regardless of their entry-level readiness. This initiative will align clear academic expectations with coordinated advising and targeted support at key transition points, including admission, first-term registration, gateway coursework, and early progression milestones. By strengthening onboarding, enhancing advising coordination, and providing proactive interventions, PennWest will improve student fit, build early confidence and a sense of belonging, increase persistence and progression, and support a strong balance between access and academic success.

Pillar 4: Connection to Post-Graduate Purpose

Initiative 1: Integrate career and workforce readiness systematically throughout the student experience

PennWest will better connect career preparation to every stage of the student experience through a unified student support framework. This initiative will support students from entry through graduation with clear connections between what they study and their post-graduation purpose (career, graduate school, professional advancement). Academic programs, advising, and student experiences will be more intentionally linked so students can see how their learning builds toward careers. By providing clearer guidance and steady support over time, PennWest will help students stay on track, make informed choices, and graduate with a stronger sense of direction.

Initiative 2: Create clear connections between academic programs, career opportunities, and employer partnerships

PennWest will strengthen direct connections between students, alumni, and employers to support strong career outcomes. This initiative will deepen collaboration with industry partners to shape academic programs, expand hands-on learning opportunities, and create clearer pathways into employment. It will also strengthen connections with K-12, career and technical education programs, and community colleges, while more fully engaging alumni. Together, these efforts will make it easier for students to gain relevant experience, build professional networks, secure sustainable employment, and transition successfully into their careers.

Initiative 3: Create an infrastructure for equitable access to experiential learning

PennWest will make it easier for all students to take part in internships and other hands-on learning experiences. This initiative will reduce barriers that currently limit participation, allowing more students to gain practical, career-related experience that leads to stronger outcomes after graduation. By expanding access and providing targeted support, PennWest will ensure that all students, not just those with financial flexibility, can take advantage of opportunities that build skills and improve job prospects. PennWest will treat experiential learning as a right, not a privilege, by creating the infrastructure needed to support equitable access and engagement.



PennWest
UNIVERSITYSM
PENNWEST.EDU