



# **2026-2030 Strategic Plan**

Building a premier regional public university

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## A message from the President

Almost two decades ago, the Missouri Western State University strategic plan called for a **New American Regional University**, my job now is to cultivate those roots and grow something remarkable and relevant for the future. My goal for the next five years is to build a premier regional public university.

Our primary focus has always been and will always be on student success. Students are the reason we exist and we owe it to them to ensure we are offering an unparalleled experience which will lead to an improved quality of life. We believe student success is not possible without extraordinary faculty, staff and administrators, therefore, we will foster a culture of excellence by investing and supporting our people.

At the same time, we will play an integral role in the vitality of the region we serve. MoWest will collaborate with area leaders and the community to provide in-demand job skills for students that are vital for economic growth.

We will also continue to work with lawmakers to advocate for well-funded universities, that will help attract and retain families and provide important workforce training programs. It is a challenging time for higher education, we will work to make college a good thing again.

Finally, our aspirational goal is to improve educational attainment in the region. The State has set post-secondary achievement and workforce participation and we will do our part to help achieve those milestones. There is much work to be done, but we are up to the challenge.



Dr. Elizabeth Kennedy, President



# Executive Summary

Volunteers from faculty, staff and administration began meeting in February 2025 to update the Missouri Western State University strategic plan for 2026–2030.

Using voice-of-the-customer data from surveys and discovery (focus) groups facilitated by a third-party research company, Yoodle; plus trend and market analysis, the objective was to make data-driven decisions and ensure the plan was forward-thinking and realistic.

Through this exercise we were able to return to our regional public university roots, embrace our role of meeting the higher education needs of the region and developed aligned strategies to grow and remain a key contributor to the economy, culture, and vitality of the region and beyond.

## Voice of the Customer

Community and business leaders, referring high school counselors, alumni and donors, faculty and staff, and current and prospective students.

## Strategic Planning Committee

**Joan Brewer**, Dean, College of Science & Health; **James Carviou**, Associate Professor, Communications; **Crystal Dowdell**, Instructor, Criminal Justice & Legal Studies; **Zachary Fears**, Assistant Director of Athletics, Sports Performance; **Samantha Fowler**, Coordinator, Marketing & Communications; **Sara Freemyer**, Director, Human Resources; **Joel Hyer**, Dean, College of Liberal Arts; **Jay Johnson**, Provost and VP Academic Affairs; **Kathy Kelly**, Administrative Coordinator, College of Business and Professional Studies; **Suzanne Kissock**, Assistant Dean, College of Business and Professional Studies; **Haley Lindsey**, Director, Financial Aid; **Jennifer Malone**, Assistant Professor, Education; **Mark Mills**, Professor, Biology; **Natalie Mikita**, Associate Professor, Chemistry; **Jason Morrill**, Director, Institutional Research; **Monica Phillips**, Academic Advisor, Student Success & Academic Advising Center; **Jerry Pickman**, Senior Philanthropy & Government Relations Officer, Institutional Advancement; **Ed Taylor**, Professor, Political Science & **Tama Wagner**, Chief Assistant for Strategic Initiatives, President's Office



# Mission, Vision & Brand Position

## **Mission** (what we do)

Missouri Western State University is a student-centered learning community preparing individuals for lives of excellence through applied learning.

## **Vision** (why we do what we do)

Missouri Western will be the premier open access regional university, known for transforming the lives of our students and the communities we serve.

## **Brand positioning statement** (who we aspire to be)

MoWest is the premier applied learning institution, offering opportunities for all students to gain industry-related, real-world experience and excel in today's dynamic job market. As a career-focused university for everyone, we provide a hands-on, practical education that seamlessly integrates classroom learning with professional success. With flexible learning options, including online courses, evening classes, accelerated programs and open access enrollment, MoWest ensures that education is accessible and adaptable to meet the needs of the region, state and beyond.



## **The Griffon**

A griffon is a mythical creature that is half lion and half eagle. It was chosen in 1917-18 as the mascot of

St. Joseph Junior College, the institution which later became Missouri Western State University. The Griffon was selected because it was considered a guardian of riches, and education is viewed as a precious treasure. Its wings are spread in the shape of the state of Missouri to signify the union of the college with the state university system in 1977. The Griffon received a brand refresh in 2025.

# Values

## Service

We share the common purpose of serving students, one another and the people of the region.

## Enthusiasm

We are enthusiastic about learning and confident that we can make a difference in the lives of students through their learning.

## Respect

We act with respect toward all members of the campus community, building trust and maximizing human potential.

## Tradition

Each year, MoWest lives by these core values by designating the incoming freshmen class with one of these six core values.

## Quality

We are committed to the quality of our programs, our students, and our partnership with the people of the region.

## Freedom

We promote the free exchange of ideas that makes education liberating and democracy unique.

## Courage

We seek the challenge and adventure of shaping the future with an increasingly global perspective.

# Our History

The Honorable John E. Downs, a native of Saint Joseph; a marine, state representative, state senator, US representative and an attorney was instrumental in the founding of Missouri Western State College. Downs believed investing in higher education would benefit St. Joseph for generations to come.

Starting from humble beginnings, Missouri Western State University (formerly college) was founded through a partnership between community leaders from the St. Joseph School District and the Commerce Club (predecessor to the St. Joseph Chamber of Commerce). Launched in 1915 at old Central High School, as part of the high school; providing education to “grade 14.” The tuition at that time was \$40 in-state and \$60 for out-of-state students, for the year and payable in advance.

In 1925, MoWest moved into its own building which was a former elementary school on the same property as Central High School. In 1933, it took over the former Robidoux Polytechnic High School where it stayed until moving to the current location on Downs Drive in 1969.

The first classes at the current location were held in the Fall of 1969 and more than 2,500 students were enrolled. Missouri Western State College officially became Missouri Western State University on August 28, 2005. At that time, MoWest was designated as the “statewide institution of applied learning.”

Missouri Western State University, affectionately called MoWest, aims to be a premier open-access regional university, known for transforming the lives of its students and the communities it serves.

## Board of Governors

Lee Tieman, Chair

Bill Grimwood, Vice Chair

Scott Albers

Dan Danford, '78

Todd Michalski, '92

Lisa Norton

Bill Severn

Garrett Jackson, Student Governor



# Our Story

**“For the everyday American, regional public universities are where access and affordability meet, allowing students to pursue quality higher education that leads to economic and job security.”**

Cecilia M Orphan, PH.D., University of Denver and Mac Wetherbee, Data Analyst, Boston Red Sox, *Expanding Higher Education's ROI for Students and Communities, Third Way*, March 11, 2025

The concept of a regional public university (RPU) did not originate with a single event, but rather evolved to address the growing need for accessible higher education in the United States. Today, 70 percent of all students, or seven million annually, attend a four-year regional public college or university.

The growing demand for a skilled workforce in industries like manufacturing, and vocations such as public education and nursing, plus other local economic drivers led to the establishment of RPU's in Missouri.

More than one hundred years ago, the idea of Missouri Western State University was planted. It has since developed to become deeply rooted in the local community and has made a significant economic impact.

MoWest strives to be a partner in the educational, economic, cultural, and social development of the region. In a 2024 survey, more than 77 percent of those asked agreed MoWest lives its mission by serving its students, the community and the people of the region.

As the state-designated applied learning institution, MoWest offers opportunities for all students to gain industry-related, real-world experience and excel in today's dynamic job market. MoWest provides a hands-on, practical education that seamlessly integrates classroom learning with professional success. MoWest is a career-focused University; for everyone.

- Dedicated to applied learning
- Approachable and affordable
- Open to everyone



# Demand increasing for higher education and workforce training

In 1983, 32 percent of prime-age workers had any postsecondary education and 32 million of the 100 million jobs in the workforce required at least some college education. By 2021, the number of overall jobs had increased to 155 million, and 101 million of these jobs or 68 percent required postsecondary education.

According to the Georgetown University report, “The future of Good Jobs; Projections through 2031,” there is a projected good job growth over 20 percent for highly-skilled workers. A “good job” in this study is defined as one that pays: at least \$43,000 with a median \$74,000 for workers ages 25–44. For workers aged 45–64 a good job is one that pays at least \$55,000, with median earnings around \$91,000.

In 2031, the distribution of good jobs across the three educational pathways is projected to be:

- Roughly 8 out of 10 good jobs will require a bachelor’s degree
- 58.2 million good jobs will be on the bachelor’s degree pathway, which will account for 66 percent of all good jobs. (Seventy-nine percent of jobs on the bachelor’s degree pathway will be good.)
- 16.4 million good jobs will be on the middle-skills pathway, associates degrees and certifications, which will account for 19 percent of all good jobs. (Fifty-two percent of jobs on the middle-skills pathway will be good.)
- 13.2 million good jobs will be on the high school pathway, which will account for 15 percent of all good jobs. (Thirty-six percent of jobs on the high school pathway will be good.)

To keep pace with the good job demand, we’ve simply got to make college a good thing, again. “A strong educational system fosters a skilled workforce, which, in turn, helps attract companies and brings new jobs, drives economic growth, and is a key component in improving quality of life for everyone.” Black, 2024; Camoin Associates

## Bachelor’s degree pathway

- Management
- Business and financial operations
- Healthcare professional
- Education
- Computer and math science
- Architecture and engineering
- Life, physical and social sciences
- Legal
- Community and social service
- Arts, design, entertainment, sports and media

## Middle skills pathway

- Construction and extraction
- Healthcare technical
- Protective services
- Installation, maintenance and repair
- Production

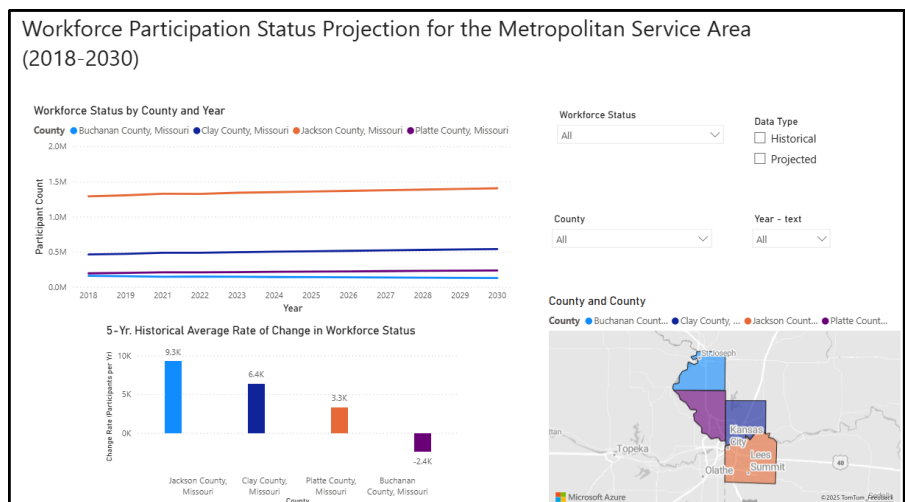
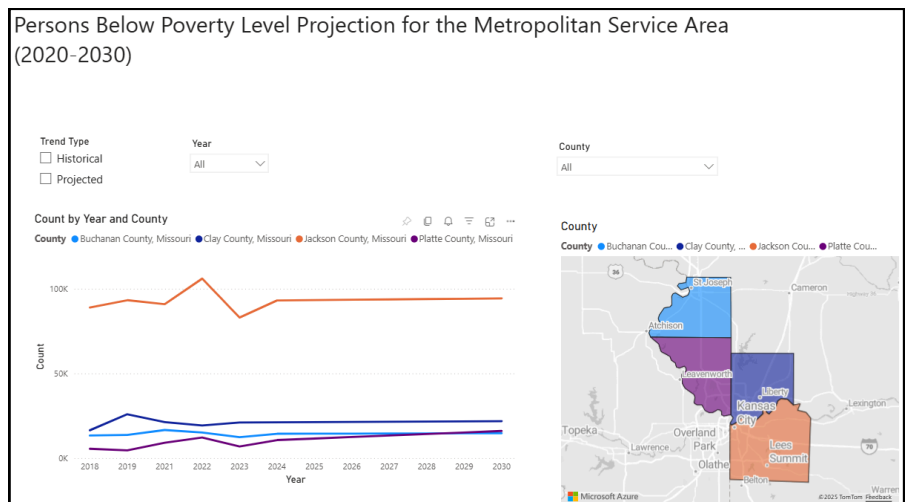
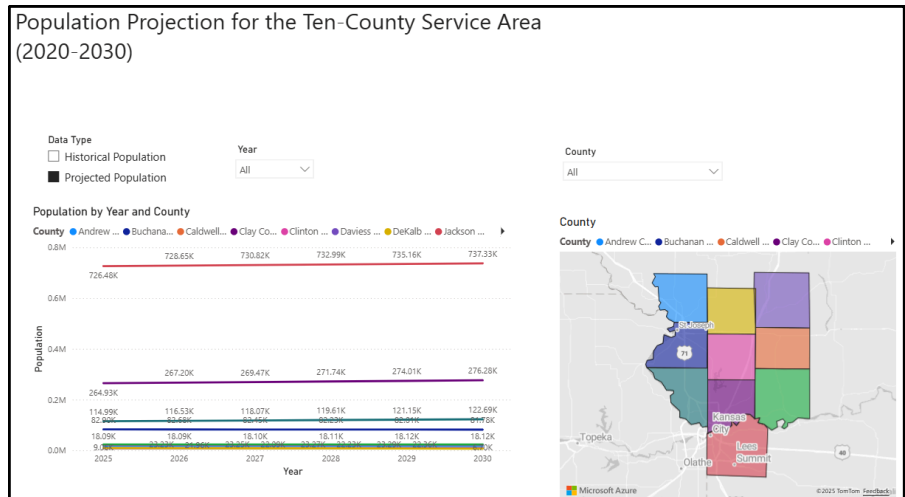
# Our Regional Service Area

Northwest Missouri is considered part of America's heartland. It has a storied history filled with westward expansion, river life, an occasional outlaw, and its development into an agricultural and industrial center.

Modern Northwest Missouri faces challenges related to population loss, due to out-migration and slow natural increase, and the need to create new economic opportunities in rural areas.

As a public regional university, Northwest Missouri's challenges are Missouri Western's challenges.

This plan sets to embrace opportunities to increase student enrollment in a declining population. To attract and retain faculty and staff and to help the region enhance its economic vitality.



Jason Morrill, Director, Institutional Research





## Strategic Priorities

### Plan priorities (1–5 years)

Enhance student-centered transformational experiences

Invest in our people and places

Cultivate meaningful community collaborations

### Aspirational priority (long-range)

Improve educational attainment in the region



# Priority 1: Enhance student-centered transformational experiences

## Opportunity 1:

Optimize recruitment, retention and degree completion empowering each student to thrive academically and personally.

## Opportunity 2:

Develop and maintain academic programs that equip students and lifelong learners to lead and innovate in the regional economy and beyond.

## Opportunity 3:

Enhance MoWest brand awareness and reputation to improve student, faculty, staff and community experience.

## Priority 1: Enhance student-centered transformational learning experiences

### Dashboard

Priority	Start Date	End Date	Lead(s)	Measure	Status
Opportunity 1: Optimize recruitment, retention and degree completion empowering each student to thrive academically and personally. Focus on creating transformational experiences through enhanced campus life.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>Enrollment Management &amp; Marketing</li> <li>Academic Affairs</li> </ul>	# Increase in first year, first time students # Increase in students retained # Increase degree completion # Increase in graduate students # Increase in graduate students retained % Increase in positive student experience (perception survey)	
Opportunity 2: Develop and maintain academic programs that equip students and lifelong learners to lead and innovate in the regional economy and beyond.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>Academic Affairs</li> </ul>	# Increase degree completion # Increase in graduates employed, 180 days, 1 year # Increase in students earning industry-recognized credentials	
Opportunity 3: Enhance MoWest brand awareness and reputation to improve student, faculty, staff and community experience.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>Enrollment Management &amp; Marketing</li> </ul>	% Increase in annual perception survey	



# Brand refresh: Voice of the Customer

To better understand the current perception of Missouri Western State University we engaged, Yoodle, a brand, marketing firm to conduct comprehensive research with internal and external audiences. Those audiences included: alumni, community leaders, donors, faculty, high school counselors, staff and students.

A solid brand is important because it will build recognition, trust, and loyalty among those considering or already attending MoWest. It also helps differentiate MoWest from its competitors and attracts top talent.

The feedback from that voice of the customer research, which included focus groups and surveys, has been used to develop this strategic plan and to update the MoWest brand.

These are the highlights:

- The community loves Missouri Western because it listens and adapts to the changing needs of the community and workforce. Also, “everyone” calls us MoWest, everyone.
- MoWest should continue to focus on career readiness and real-world job training.
- Missouri Western is welcoming and open to all students who want to learn.
- Students choose to attend Missouri Western because of its quality education, it is closer to home and its comparatively very affordable.
- MoWest does need to work on telling our story, correcting misconceptions about degree offerings and support services and improving the student life experience.





## Priority 2: Invest in our People, Processes, and Places

### Opportunity 1:

Cultivate a culture of excellence by investing in and supporting faculty and staff, update the Human Capital Plan.

Opportunity 2: Optimize and memorialize institutional processes to improve quality, communication, and overall performance.

### Opportunity 3:

Revitalize and implement a Master Facilities Plan to modernize and create an inspiring campus environment.

## Priority 2: Invest in our People, Processes, and Places

### Dashboard

Priority	Start Date	End Date	Lead(s)	Measure	Status
Opportunity 1: Cultivate a culture of excellence by investing in and supporting faculty and staff. Including the implementation of a <b>People Plan</b> and consistent professional development framework.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>VP Finance</li> <li>Human Resources</li> <li>Academic Affairs</li> <li>Faculty Senate</li> <li>Staff Association</li> </ul>	% Increase in faculty/staff engagement and satisfaction (survey) % Increase in faculty/staff retention # Succession plans % Leadership development participation completion % Leadership development participation completion results increase in engagement and satisfaction (survey)	
Opportunity 2: Optimize and memorialize institutional processes to improve quality, communication, and overall performance.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>VP Finance</li> <li>Academic Affairs</li> <li>Faculty Senate</li> <li>Staff Association</li> </ul>	# Of processes reviewed and memorialized # Of processes approved (% of goal) % Estimated cost savings (efficiency) % Improved communication (survey)	
Opportunity 3: Revitalize and implement a <b>Master Facilities Plan</b> to modernize and create an inspiring campus environment.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>VP Finance</li> </ul>	% Completion for projects % Increase in user satisfaction (annual perception survey) % Increase in overall perception (annual perception survey)	



## Priority 3: Cultivate meaningful regional collaborations

### Opportunity 1:

Execute the role of a public regional university by aligning academic programs and student experiences with regional workforce needs.

### Opportunity 2:

Expand and diversify non-tuition/fee revenue sources while fostering a culture of data-informed decision-making.

### Opportunity 3:

Build a regional advocacy coalition to champion and elevate public support for the University.

## Priority 3: Cultivate meaningful regional collaborations

### Dashboard

Priority	Start Date	End Date	Lead(s)	Measure	Status
Opportunity 1: Execute the role of a public regional university by aligning academic programs and student experiences with regional workforce needs.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>Academic Affairs</li> <li>Workforce Development</li> </ul>	% Programs aligned with regional need (Labor Market analysis + required skills) % Improvement in graduation placement rates in the region and beyond # Of partnerships with employers, workforce boards, et al.	
Opportunity 2: Expand and diversify non-tuition/fee revenue sources while fostering a culture of data-informed decision-making.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>Foundation</li> <li>Committee</li> </ul>	% Growth in external funding sources aligned with regional need # New non-tuition/fee revenue source partners # Of data informed decisions (aligned with process improvement)	
Opportunity 3: Build a regional advocacy coalition to champion and elevate public support for the University.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet</li> <li>Foundation</li> <li>Strategic Initiatives</li> </ul>	% Increase in legislative support and investment in the University % Increase in advocacy partners	

# Priority 4: Improve the quality of life in our region through higher educational attainment

Opportunity: Support and improve education attainment in the region. By 2031, 66 percent of good jobs will require a bachelor's degree, and 19 percent will require certification or an industry-related credential.

## Priority 4: Improve educational attainment

### Dashboard

Opportunity: Support and improve educational attainment in the region			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Cabinet</li><li>▪ Strategic initiatives</li><li>▪ Enrollment Management</li><li>▪ Academic Affairs</li><li>▪ Early College Academy (ECA)</li><li>▪ Undergraduate</li><li>▪ Graduate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>% Increase in regional high school to college enrollment</li><li>% Increase in dual credit enrollment in the region</li><li>% Increase in community college to college enrollment in the region</li><li>% Increase in adult learners</li><li>% Increase in degree completion</li><li>% Increase in graduate degree completion</li></ul>	
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## **Timeline**

July 11 – Final Committee edits

July 14 – Review with Dr. Kennedy

July 17 – Review with Cabinet

August – September – Review with Faculty, staff and students, Board of Governors

October – December – Implementation planning and prep

- Designate Priority owners
- Recruit Priority leads (consider Strategic Planning Committee members)
- Recruit Priority sub-committee members

November – Seek Board approval

## **Implementation process**

1. Develop an action plan (list of specific tasks)
2. Develop a timeline (milestone completion)
3. Resource recommendations
4. Finalize dashboard/KPI's and measures (with Jason)
5. Work the action plan
6. Report outcomes