

# Purpose and Relevance

# **REIMAGINED**

## **A STRATEGIC VISION FOR BUENA VISTA UNIVERSITY**

### **2018-2023**

Since the founding of Buena Vista College by the Presbyterian Church in 1891, our institution has advanced despite many challenges along the way. As we prepare an ambitious strategic plan for the next five years, nationally we are in a moment of uncertainty for private, rural colleges and universities. We are living in a world that will test our University. We must remain rooted in our principles and focused on our mission and values. We must be mindful and accept our strengths. And yes, we must also accept our weaknesses. We must—we absolutely must—be ambitious in fulfilling our promise.

From the outset, we have proclaimed that Buena Vista University (BVU) would be an institution dedicated to teaching, education, and service. The values set forth by our founders endure as a lasting foundation. Our values may be the same, but the world is different. Considering the myriad of challenges facing institutions like us, we must be open to being bold, taking risks, and challenging our norms. We must become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

BVU, as a contemporary institution of rural, private higher education, can be a case study of flexibility and strength; key components of the resiliency needed to meet the demands of a twenty-first century university. However, we can be better. We should be better. We must be better.

If BVU is to navigate its way through this turbulent world, our purpose and relevance must be even more profound. If we are to persevere, if we are to flourish, we must be clear—and, we must be confident.

We must take risks and implement a bold vision. A vision that reaffirms our University's worth and dynamic ability to embrace change and impact lives. We must reimagine and reaffirm our distinctive and defining qualities. We must reposition BVU to be a recognized destination of higher education filled with intensity and innovation. We must amplify our investment in our faculty and staff, as well as encourage students to push academic boundaries. We must reclaim our worth—our worth as a known commodity with profound outcomes.

## MISSION

We prepare students for lifelong success through transformational academic, professional, and co-curricular programs.

## VISION

To be a nationally recognized leader in rural higher education known for its remarkable student learning and outcomes. We will be an institutional destination—ambitious in our efforts to distinctively and boldly inspire students to serve, empower, and transform communities through *Education for Service*.

## VALUES

- **PASSION**—We are committed to student and employee success. We work in ways that support their growth, development, goals, and readiness to thrive in society.
- **TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES**—We create experiences for our students that open their eyes to a new sense of self and the surrounding world.
- **MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS**—We value the close-knit nature of our community. We support each other in the achievement of our individual and collective goals.
- **INSPIRATION**—We seek opportunities to inspire one another to excel. We are supported by our past and our traditions that lead us to build an even better future.
- **STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY**—We manage resources and set priorities to secure the finest learning environment, opportunities, and sustainable world for our students today and tomorrow.
- **RESPECT AND INCLUSIVENESS**—We foster an appreciation for all persons by providing an open and inclusive environment where all are treated with respect.

# Purpose and Relevance REIMAGINED

## STAKEHOLDERS

“How will we know that we are meeting the goal?”

and

“What is the impact of meeting the goal to those we serve?”

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

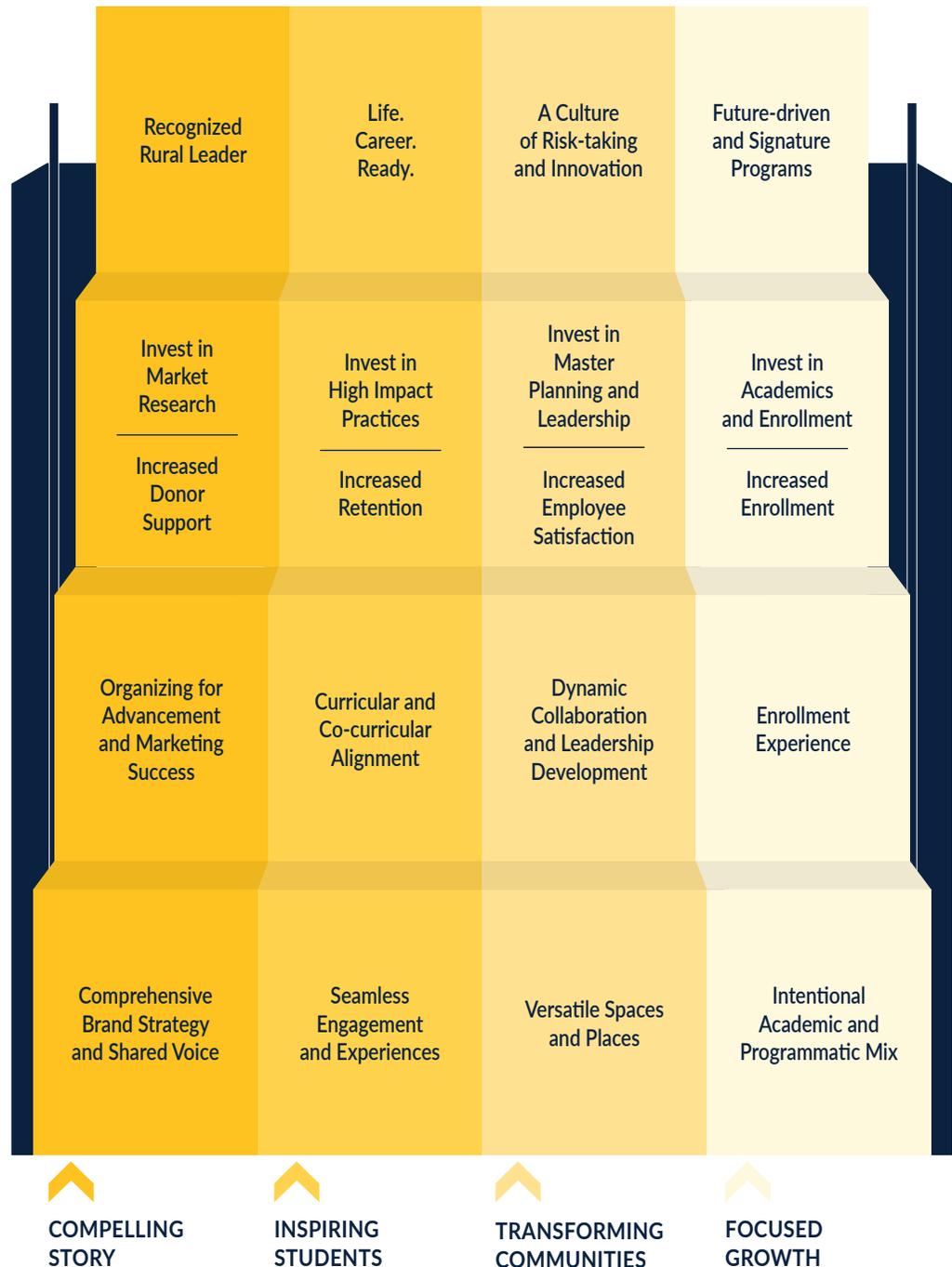
“What are the resources (input and output) needed?”

## INTERNAL PROCESSES

“What is the infrastructure needed to accomplish the goal?”

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

“Do we have the right people and programs in place?”



# A Strategic Plan for **BUENA VISTA UNIVERSITY**

The strategic themes for BVU provide a clear pathway to immediate and future success, while staying true to the University's mission, vision, and values. The themes are as follows:

## **THEME I:** **COMPELLING STORY**

BVU will be a known leader in rural education and in transforming rural communities from surviving to thriving. Through investments in market research and stakeholder engagement, we will build a shared voice and brand that is not only relevant—but compelling. To accomplish this, we will:

- Position BVU as a leader in empowering rural communities through the development of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. We will demonstrate the value, and impact, of being connected to the Storm Lake community, and to our site communities.
- Invest in research to drive strategic decision making.
- Resource and develop a comprehensive strategy to engage alumni, community members, and friends through rigorous programming and strategic engagement.
- Boldly position the BVU brand to be a recognized institution of higher education that is a destination in Iowa and beyond. Actively utilize strategic storytelling to proudly share the positive impacts of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We will share not only who we are, but what we do. All of this will be accomplished through the development of a comprehensive, segmented, marketing plan.

## THEME II:

# TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

BVU will support a culture of risk-taking and innovation through the development—and investment—in our physical footprint and human resource capital. Not only will BVU be a dynamic place to work, but BVU will be a community that values its natural and capital assets to support student success. This will be accomplished by:

- Creating an “Idea Incubator” that encourages entrepreneurship, collaboration, creativity, and innovation to promote interdisciplinary idea exploration and implementation at BVU and beyond.
- Capitalizing on our most natural asset—the lake. Through curricular and co-curricular program development and utilization, BVU will market our unique physical connection to the lake to prospective students and families with intentionality.
- Enriching and improving the success and experience of our students, through a student success assessment with a focus on high-impact practices and a campus master plan that connects that student experience to the physical spaces and places of the campus.
- Aggressively positioning BVU and Storm Lake as a destination for camps, conferences, festivals, and alternative-use programming.
- Being recognized as a “Best Place to Work” organization that values its employees by investing in both faculty and staff development from onboarding to retirement. BVU employees will have opportunities to be actively engaged in leadership and personal development programs.

# A Strategic Plan for **BUENA VISTA UNIVERSITY**

## **THEME III:** **INSPIRING STUDENTS**

BVU will create a pathway to success that will provide current and future students with exceptional experiences to make them life and work ready. The University will make it a priority to invest in high-impact practices, align curricular and co-curricular priorities, and create seamless engagements and practices for a transformational undergraduate experience that will increase enrollment and retention. This will require us to:

- Infuse distinctive career development experiences into curricular and co-curricular programming. Create and fund opportunities for student-run businesses on and off campus.
- Improve technology throughout the BVU experience, academically and socially, to meet the expectations of twenty-first century students.
- Redesign the First Year Experience to meet the modern needs of incoming students.
- Create campus experiences that defy expectation. Repurpose current curricular and co-curricular programming and space that are student-centered, so they become hallmarks of the BVU experience.
- Work across the campus community to support and sustain the growth of a just, equitable, vibrant, and intellectually challenging educational environment for all. We will embrace the reality that we live in an increasingly diverse world, and it is important that we embrace the diversity in a multi-layered and authentic way for BVU. As one step on this path, we will launch the University's first Office of Diversity and Inclusion.
- Expand the Center for Academic Excellence to support students in the areas of special education, STEM, writing, literacy, and testing. Integrate the Center for Academic Excellence with library services and information technology to create a modern center for teaching and learning that supports innovative teaching practices and varying learning styles.

## THEME IV: FOCUSED GROWTH

BVU's founding men and founding women were entrepreneurs who had a cultural and academic vision. Dr. William H. Cumberland wrote, "The history of Buena Vista College reveals a determined effort to survive in spite of harsh economic times, wars, and often a churchly indifference to its success and growth." Despite our perseverance, despite our past success, we cannot be complacent. To help BVU grow into the next phase of its history we will:

- Launch the Institute for Agriculture, Food, and Resource Management to meet the needs of a region boasting some of the country's largest agricultural production. The creation of new academic majors in agriculture will support growth both in Storm Lake and with our site partners.
- Create new athletic and co-curricular programs to support diverse student interests. The addition of a marching band, pep band, dance team, and competitive cheerleading squad will enhance the overall student experience and support growth.
- Develop a comprehensive retention program that includes integrated support from admissions, academics, and student success. New programs and partnerships in student success will help students stay on track, thrive, and succeed. We will increase our focus on students facing a myriad of challenges and obstacles. Our enhanced Student Success initiatives will foster student development through research, services, and advocacy. New retention resources will promote successful college transitions, engagement, timely graduation, and lifelong achievement.
- Rethink and redefine the enrollment experience to include an improved campus visit experience, the creation of a "Welcome Center," specialized recruitment efforts, and seamless transition to enrolled students through academic liaisons.
- Work toward the continuous improvement of our academic programs and offerings. The commodification of higher education has forced colleges and universities to rethink their academic offerings. A prescribed academic curriculum has long been considered essential to building a robust academic community. Prescription, however, risks stagnation. It tends to inhibit the appreciation of innovation and discovery. We will build processes that annually evaluate current programs for enhancement, modification, or discontinuance, as well as add new undergraduate and graduate programs to meet the needs of current and future students.

# MEASURING PROGRESS

BVU's Strategic Plan consists of four strategic themes and numerous action items. University leadership has established key performance indicators to monitor—at a glance—progress on the Strategic Plan. These indicators are quantitative in nature and are measured annually at the end of each fiscal year. Key performance indicators make for an important last step to a strategic plan by measuring the outcomes of the plan. Simply stated, “*Are we making progress on our goals?*” Like the Strategic Plan, key performance indicators guide decisions that are strategic and promote alignment with the campus community.

To support the progress of the Strategic Plan, members of the University Leadership Team will work in tandem with their respective campus academic and non-academic leaders to create annual operating plans that will strategically address the above goals and define quantitative measurements where applicable. Additionally, the BVU Board of Trustees will work through established Board Committees to create strategies, timelines, benchmarks, and work plans where appropriate to address the above goals. Each year, the President of the University will report on the progress of the strategic plan to the Board of Trustees at the first full meeting of the fiscal year.

## Reimagining **OUR FUTURE**

To aspire to, and achieve, our own version of change, BVU must shape its future through an explicit articulation of mission—an actionable articulation which is a reflective plan integrating purpose and priorities.

We are called to reimagine the scope of how we will discover, challenge, teach, create, and preserve knowledge. We must apply to our study of institutional self the same principles of continuous examination and rigorous inquiry that guide academic research, scholarship, creative activity, and dialogue. We will do this well.

As we look ahead, we need to build on our current distinctions and reimagine a vibrant future.

### **We must imagine a future where we:**

- openly engage with, and invest in, Storm Lake, Buena Vista County, and the State of Iowa.
- are a preferred institutional destination, not a second choice.
- champion a campus culture that is transformed by a diverse student body who is choosing BVU because we champion differences and are reflective of the world in which we live.
- are bold, daring, and are strategically taking risks.
- learn from our mistakes and double down when good strategies merit ongoing success.
- embrace a shared vision for today, tomorrow, and beyond.

**We will not only imagine this future, we will create it—together.**