

**Draft Foundational Planning Report, The University of the South  
(November 12, 2022)**

**I. Introduction**

**A. The vision for Sewanee**

Sewanee will strive for excellence and stride confidently into the future of the New South while remaining true to itself and its mission. We will live more fully into our aspirational motto (*Ecce quam bonum*: Behold how good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity) and University values (inquiry, community, flourishing and courage). At the same time, Sewanee will provide proof of quality and consistently offer programs of distinction that are aligned with our most unique assets, the Domain, our literary heritage and sense of place, that can be validated by data and external recognition by accepted national and international criteria. All University community members aim to think and act strategically in ways that enable the institution to be more firmly positioned as one of the top small liberal arts schools in the nation.

**Inquiry:** As a world-class liberal arts college, we continually assess who we are and who we want to become to ensure continuous improvement of the quality of the educational experience we offer as an institution. We develop open-minded, informed, and intellectually engaged individuals by providing an education that develops cognitive, rhetorical, and a range of life skills that empower students to go on to become leaders in their communities. As an institution that values inquiry, we expect students to be stretched by the different perspectives they hear in the classroom, read in the library, and encounter in the variety of formal and informal learning spaces across the Domain and in the community. Through the breadth of a liberal arts education, they discover connections across diverse disciplines, while becoming deeply informed in the area that kindles their passion.

This report pays particular attention to, and highlights, our undergraduate experience. It describes foundational principles to inform future planning in the College. We are deeply committed to the liberal arts; we affirm the power of close, deliberate student-faculty relationships for holistic learning; we profess the crucial role of our teaching and mentoring for students' professional lives and citizenship.

**Community:** We cultivate respectful, inclusive, and enduring relationships, and seek to build a community enriched by our diversity centered on equity, justice, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Sewanee is known for close relationships among students, faculty, and staff, but must not be a closed community. Community is not about assimilation. It is about welcoming all people so they feel at home here and empowered to contribute to the community's development. This requires living and working with those who have different backgrounds and different perspectives. Intellectual development is enriched by such engagement. We value the hard work of making our University more inclusive than our founders ever could have imagined, and aspire to "dwell in unity together".

This report builds on Sewanee's already stellar reputation for the close relationships that are the foundation of learning, belonging, and achievement in college. Many of the strategies laid out to

improve student retention are about relationships and belonging, such as a common first-year experience and a first-year village, both of which are designed to build community among peers and place first-year students closer to central campus with easy access to faculty throughout the day. Likewise, the planning efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion will position Sewanee to develop into a promising, inclusive institution while retaining the best aspects of its heritage and traditions. Becoming a shining example of inclusive excellence and racial healing among liberal arts colleges will also further the efforts of the Episcopal Church to become the Beloved Community.

**Flourishing:** We share responsibility for the wellbeing of one another. It's not enough to value long-lasting relationships. We should also value the quality of the lives we each live while we are here. Human flourishing is a mix of mental and physical health, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships. None of this happens in isolation, but within a web of connections among peers, mentors, family, the broader community, and the natural world. We aspire to intentionally construct a college experience that is balanced and supports the flourishing of employees and students alike as they work, study, and socialize together.

This report focuses on improving several aspects of the student experience toward developing students who flourish on campus, and alumni who flourish beyond Sewanee's gates. The collaborative development of a first-year experience, a first-year village, and a peer tutoring/mentoring program with particular emphasis on first-year students will support our students in the critical transition to college. First-year students will connect inside and outside the classroom with faculty and peers to utilize academic support services and promote belonging. Also critical to the student experience is attention to their mental health and wellbeing that extends across several dimensions of their lives. Finally, the student experience is enhanced by their ability to look toward their future with confidence. Our career readiness team will integrate equitable career readiness and preparation with curricular design and pre-professional experiences to engage students proactively in their career preparedness.

**Courage:** We strive for justice, equity, and sustainability in Sewanee and in the broader society. We understand that our academic pursuits, our learning, and our growth, are not just for our benefit. Sewanee faculty, staff, and students work to make the world a better place, a more equitable and sustainable place. We strive to respect and uplift the dignity of every human being, and hope to engender through mentorship the courage that it takes to stand up in the face of oppression and injustice.

This report outlines areas that will require courage to stay on the path toward justice, equity, and sustainability. Sewanee will be an example of how a small, liberal arts institution can engage with its complex past while moving into its future through efforts outlined in this plan and beyond. Becoming a center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation through the American Association of Colleges and Universities will provide a framework for Sewanee to acknowledge its past and begin to foster positive narrative change. Additionally, the University is unique in retaining ownership of leaseholds, which is an unrealized opportunity to treat Sewanee as an experimental town to explore principles of sustainability. Community development here must wrestle with key environmental challenges. The Domain offers us the ability to demonstrate

leadership in key areas of education and responsible growth while aligning with the educational mission of the University.

Leaning into our strengths and values will provide clear points of opportunity for Sewanee to reclaim our status as a top national university steeped in its liberal arts through achievement of excellence in all that we do:

- provide an undergraduate curriculum grounded in the liberal arts, emphasizing our areas of academic strength, that meets the needs of our changing student body and the changing times. We must also take this opportunity to reshape the conversation around the value of such an education so that it resonates with the families of today and of the future. We need to convey that a high-quality liberal arts education will equip this generation not only for their first career, but for careers and workplaces that do not yet exist.
- continue to develop and support our division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as they partner across campus to create equitable systems, policies, practices, procedures, and traditions that allow all students and employees to flourish and to feel valued, and to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive living and learning environment in Sewanee.
- support the achievement, success and wellbeing of our students so that the Sewanee experience, in and out of the classroom, provides them with the creativity, resilience, and skills they will need in order to pivot when our rapidly changing world takes them in another direction.

In order to achieve these goals, we must expand our financial resources through the philanthropy of private donors, foundations, and corporations, through creative development of the Sewanee Village and for-profit endeavors, and through budget realignment in order to provide aggressive financial aid packages for our students and to recruit and retain the most talented faculty and staff.

This foundational planning document provides guidance for the University to move purposefully toward this vision.

## **B. Challenges and Opportunities Ahead:**

Higher education faces a number of structural challenges and opportunities in the near future, which have given definition to our foundational report, and that will inform the work of the 18th vice-chancellor and the direction of the next strategic plan. Some of the challenges that all institutions of higher education, such as the University of the South, face include the following: a forecasted drop in students likely to enroll in college after 2026, the so-called “demographic cliff”; growing diversity among the students bound for college, which will accelerate after 2026; changing values among “Generation Z” and future cohorts of students; and growing financial need of college bound students due to changing demographic trends and recent financial turmoil. (These four structural changes are discussed in greater detail in the appendix.)

The changing demographics of students bound for college is of significant interest to institutions of higher education, not just because the forecasted drop in the number of students nationwide will heighten competition among institutions of higher education, but also the evolving racial and

socioeconomic composition of college-bound students toward those currently less likely to attend. Predictions about the number of students entering elite and national colleges from the South suggest that high-performing liberal arts colleges such as the University of the South, which draws many students from southern states, are better positioned than institutions in New England and the Midwest to weather the demographic cliff. Most of the forecasts for college enrollments after 2026 were made before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic has negatively affected the number of high school graduates continuing their studies in college across the country, including the South. Whether enrollment levels of students in institutions recover to the levels predicted by demographers such as Nathan Grawe remains to be seen.

### **C. Four Pillars to Support the University of the South in the Next Five Years (and Beyond)**

Although the changing landscape of higher education has sharpened our focus on the need to prepare for the future, the strategies and initiatives described in this foundational report will propel Sewanee's institutional development. Building on the four pillars in this report, Sewanee will realize its vision of an institution that provides an excellent education that prepares students of all backgrounds to make a positive impact on the world.

In order to achieve this vision of excellence and to excel in the changing field of higher education noted above, the University of the South must plan to use its existing assets and retool in some areas in order to position itself to prosper in 2026 and beyond. The best way to secure Sewanee's future success is to improve its academic reputation. Pursuit of the four pillars described below will help achieve that end. Sewanee is fortunate to have excellent faculty and staff, a beautiful 13,000-acre campus, and loyal supporters to draw on to meet the challenges ahead.

The University of the South will thrive in the future by building the four pillars below and implementing related strategic initiatives:

1. Curriculum Renewal and Innovation: The University of the South offers a curriculum that attracts students of the highest quality and provides them with the knowledge, creativity and resilience necessary to thrive in the 21st century.
2. Student Success: The University of the South strives to be an institution where students flourish in all aspects of their lives – in academics, mental and physical well-being, personal finances, and career preparedness.
3. Equity and Inclusion: The University of the South strives to create a community where all people feel welcome, irrespective of race, gender, religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity or other form of difference.
4. Domain Optimization: The University of the South uses its greatest material asset, its 13,000-acre domain, to develop new revenue streams and educational opportunities for the University while providing a model of environmental stewardship for higher education and rural community sustainable development.

In fact, this foundational report draws upon years of work and past reports to prepare the University of the South for the years ahead, including the following:

- The [2012 Strategic Plan](#) identified “realizing the potential of the Domain” as a strategic direction, and the [2013 Sustainability Master Plan](#) and the 2022 Climate Action Plan (under consideration) have informed the University’s approach to environmental stewardship and development of research on the Domain.
- The [2016 Village Implementation Plan](#) and the [2022 Urban Land Institute report](#) provide guidance on the commercial and residential development of the inner Domain to be more attractive to employees and students.
- The [2020 Strategic Enrollment Plan](#) identifies steps that the University needs to take to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, and to make our institution an attractive place to study for students of color. Those steps include curricular reforms, revisions to admission strategies, and improvements to on-campus student support.
- The Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, appointed in 2019 and Dr. Sibby Anderson-Thompkins, hired in 2021 to be the University of the South’s first Chief Diversity Officer, are defining the University’s steps to assess and revise our institutional structures, policies, and practices.
- Building on the work of the [Roberson Project](#), in September 2020, the Board of Regents adopted a [resolution](#) that renounced the University of the South’s “past veneration of the Confederacy and of the ‘Lost Cause’ and wholeheartedly commit[ed] itself to an urgent process of institutional reckoning in order to make Sewanee a model of diversity, of inclusion, of intellectual rigor, and of loving spirit in an America that rejects prejudice and embraces possibility.” In 2021, the Board of Regents authorized the [Names and Places Committee](#) to review and offer recommendations for potential revision on 180 places and honorifics on campus.

#### **D. Committee Process and Membership**

The Strategic Planning Committee includes 21 members of the faculty, staff, administration, and student body. In order to broaden participation in the planning process, subcommittees recruited an additional 37 faculty, staff, and students to serve as subcommittee members. Beginning in August 2021, the strategic planning committee members participated in workshops to prepare for their work on the strategic plan. The committee as a whole and its subcommittees spent two months developing a shared understanding of the scope of their work and identifying resources they needed to conduct their work. For six months, subcommittees analyzed data about the landscape of higher education and the situation at Sewanee as part of their SWOT analyses (internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external opportunities, and external threats) related to their subcommittees’ charges. During the spring of 2022, the strategic planning committee and its subcommittees had listening sessions with students, faculty, staff, the board of regents, and board of trustees. The strategic planning committee invited all faculty, staff, and students to respond to a survey on particular issues related to the subcommittees’ work, which solicited 556 responses. Based on the SWOT analyses and information gathered through direct communication with various stakeholder groups, the subcommittees spent two months assembling their reports, which form the bases of this draft foundational report.

During fall of 2022, the strategic planning committee shared the document with faculty, the growth and development committee of the board of trustees, and the board of regents to solicit their comments and advice on earlier drafts of the foundational report. Based on the feedback received, the committee revised the draft report and presented it to stakeholder groups for final revisions.

Preparing the foundational report required the work of many faculty, staff, and students, for which we are deeply grateful. The work was carried out by an expanded strategic planning committee that broke into a management team, a steering committee, and four subcommittees. The following people contributed to the planning process (those participants who joined from outside the University Strategic Planning Committee are designate with an asterisk):

Strategic planning management team:

- Nancy Berner, Parker Oliver,\* Karen Proctor\* and Scott Wilson

Curriculum renewal and innovation subcommittee:

- Terry Papillon and Catherine Cavagnaro (Co-Chairs)
- Nick Roberts, Mishoe Brennecke, Ruth Sanchez, David Colbert,\* Elise Kikis, Amy Patterson,\* Deborah McGrath,\* Matthew Rudd,\* Alexis McKnight,\* and Kate Reed

Student success subcommittee:

- Lisa Stephenson and Doug Drinen,\* (Co-Chairs)
- Allie Dent, Michele Dombrowski,\* Kim Heitzenrater,\* Erica Howard,\* Cassie Meyer,\* Alan Ramirez,\* Jason Rosenberg, and Chris Shelley

Diversity, equity, and inclusion subcommittee:

- Sibby Anderson-Thompkins, Chris McDonough\* (Co-Chairs)
- Husnain Ahmad,\* Al Bardi,\* Matt Brown,\* Rachel Fredericks,\* Kaylei Goodine,\* Lauren Goodpaster,\* Peter Gray, Sylvia Gray,\* Nicky Hamilton,\* Deborah Jackson,\* Micky James-Thrower,\* Steve Keetle,\* Tiffany Momon,\* Mary Ann Patterson,\* Karen Proctor,\* Erica Rozolsky, Betsy Sandlin,\* Vicki Sells, David Stark,\* Klarke Stricklen,\* Yanbing Tan,\* Jim Turrell, Jessica Welch,\* and Makayla Williams.\*

Alternative revenue and domain optimization subcommittee:

- David Shipps and Jon Evans (Co-Chairs)
- Kristen Cecala,\* Myles Elledge,\* Jay Fisher, Julia Gatta, Mike Harber, Iyassu Kebede, Brad Sturgill,\* Andrew Thompson, and Amy Turner\*

The remaining elements of the draft foundational report are reports from the four subcommittees that focus on one of the pillars and an appendix that provides a detailed situational analysis for Sewanee when the foundational report was written.. Three of the four subcommittee reports offer a situation analysis applicable to its work and initiatives that are described as:

- **Operationalized:** initiatives that enjoy a high degree of consensus and resources to begin their work
- **Recommendations:** initiatives that enjoy some consensus but still need time to organize resources in alignment with the initiative, and
- **Considerations:** initiatives that require further discussion and organization because they lack consensus and/or resources to begin operation.

## II. Foundational Principles for Future Curricular Renewal and Innovation

### History of the Work of the Curricular Renewal & Innovation (CRI) Committee

From the beginning, in the eyes of committee members, the CRI process faced an unclear mandate and timeline. The CRI process began under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Reuben Brigety who called for streamlining parts of our curriculum and adding new programs to modernize our course offerings. We began this work at the height of the COVID pandemic, which had led to significant painful cost-cutting measures including a tenure-line faculty hiring freeze and a one-year cessation of retirement contributions by the University for all employees—measures that were ongoing throughout academic year 2021-22, when the CRI committee did the majority of its work. The resignation of Vice-Chancellor Brigety meant that our charge to assess the health of programs was put on hold, emboldening us to think more innovatively. Despite this change, we were unclear on what needed to be produced, given that we were being led by an interim administration. Despite the Board of Regents decision to make supplemental contributions to institutional retirement funds and some thawing of the hiring freeze, the committee operated under a continuous fear about a downsizing of the college faculty and uncertainty about whether resources would be provided to strategic planning, let alone existing programming. This fear hindered our ability to think big and develop the kind of “moonshot” ideas that would require large resource commitments. In addition, it made it hard to build support from faculty members who were concerned about the uncertainty regarding faculty resources.

Despite these barriers to success, the CRI committee met once a week during the 2021-22 academic year. During spring 2022, subcommittees on various themes (cross-curricular initiatives; new initiatives; assessment) met once a week in addition to the weekly full committee meeting. While we generated several ideas about new initiatives described below there was no general consensus among the committee on initiatives. We also never prioritized which initiatives should gain focus and resources. We held 10 listening sessions with faculty during which several ideas were generated, but there was no agreement on specific programs. After late April 2022, we had no meetings in-person to iron out priorities or flesh out a final report. Around the same time, our fears about downsizing were realized in a report from the Provost that noted that only half of the open tenure-track lines would be filled in the coming years. The faculty then voted in September 2022 to pause the strategic plan, partly because of faculty concerns about hiring, but also because of the view that it was problematic to be making such big decisions before the arrival of a new vice-chancellor.

### Moving from Strategic Planning to Foundational Principles

Because of the challenges detailed above, the CRI committee does not feel that this is the time to propose a list of new curricular initiatives. Instead, we propose a series of foundational principles

that we think should inform all the work of the College, and we suggest some next steps. These principles were first articulated by the college chairs during February 2022 and they ultimately formed the basis for a faculty resolution that garnered overwhelming support in April 2022. The CRI committee now is endorsing these faculty-approved principles. Although not directly stated until this document, these principles have undergirded our work and ideas regarding new initiatives.

These principles are rooted in the recognized need for concrete investment in faculty resources to provide our students the very best education for life and work in the twenty-first century. They acknowledge the pressing need to be solidly prepared for the predicted demographic decline in 2026. These principles inform our vision for a Sewanee education, and they should guide any future strategic planning for the curriculum under a new administration.

### **Foundational Principles for Future Strategic Plans**

We are deeply committed to the liberal arts; we affirm the power of close, deliberate student-faculty relationships for holistic learning; we profess the crucial role of our teaching and mentoring for students' professional lives and citizenship.

#### **1. Commitment to the liberal arts:**

- through intellectual inquiry across diverse disciplines within the arts, languages, humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and sciences in order to examine creativity, interrogate discovery, and promote human dignity;
- by emphasizing the interdisciplinarity of knowledge and affirming that solving the world's problems requires understanding within and across disciplines;
- by centering a faculty-driven curriculum that reflects deep expertise and specialization within academic subject areas.

#### **2. Commitment to the power of student-faculty relationships:**

- through close, deliberate mentoring of students in research, creative projects, and performance;
- through student-engaged learning, which challenges students to dig deeply into their studies within and outside of the classroom;
- through high-impact and creative teaching practices that push students to interrogate and apply knowledge in the classroom and beyond.

#### **3. Commitment to building knowledge and skills for career readiness and citizenship:**

- through teaching students to value and include multiple perspectives in their learning and by providing them discipline-specific skills to enable their problem-solving processes;
- through promotion of community-engaged learning;
- through our commitment to diversity, equity and justice in our teaching, knowledge production, and decision-making, and our work to instill such commitment in our students for their lives as citizens.

### **Lessons learned and procedures going forward**



During the course of our work we discussed a number of ideas for revising the curriculum, including reworking general education, rethinking the first-year experience, revising comprehensive exams, and adding new or strengthening existing programming (eg. data science or environment and sustainability). In all cases, we considered how such revisions to our curriculum would align with the principles stated above. Ultimately, our ability to move past this low-hanging fruit and toward a consensus around the most important, and visionary, next steps was hindered by the factors stated above; namely, lack of clarity on the committee's mandate and limited resources. We are not in a position, therefore, to offer any formal recommendations.

In order to identify and advance any ideas in the future, we think the CRI work would benefit from the following procedures:

1. Adopt a clear mandate;
2. Define a clear timeline and deadlines;
3. Work to build support with stakeholders in order to foster legitimacy for the work. (Stakeholders are students and faculty, including but not limited to the heads of various programs that could be affected by any curricular changes);

In summary, all committee members are committed to curricular renewal and innovation to ensure Sewanee's future, and we look forward to working with current and future administrators in such consensus-building processes.

### **III. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

#### **Focus of The Second Pillar: Improving Campus Culture, Climate, and Community**

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Subcommittee was charged with developing an action plan to improve campus climate, culture, community, and sense of belonging for all community members. Above all, the DEI Foundation Plan will allow us to truly fulfill our University motto to "dwell together in unity" and be a model for, a leader in, and a conduit for racial healing and reconciliation for the region.

#### **Situational Analysis**

To provide opportunities for members of the community to participate in the strategic planning process, the campus committee held stakeholder engagement activities, including a student session sponsored by the NAACP and Order of the Gown, faculty meetings coordinated with the College and School of Theology, an alumni session during the 2021 Alumni Weekend, and a special session with Black alumni in Theology. The committee also held targeted focus group sessions with BIPOC faculty and students, and employees from various ranks for input and feedback throughout spring 2022.

Over the past decade, Sewanee has conducted self-studies and commissioned working groups or task forces to recommend strategies for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. These recommendations and implementation efforts have led to a more diverse campus and greater

attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. Based on our review of past surveys and reports, several challenges and threats emerged:

- Lack of competitive salaries and lack of access to affordable or available housing for faculty and staff
- Geographical constraints due to rural location and its proximity to urban centers such as Chattanooga or Murfreesboro
- A siloed culture that leaves some faculty and staff feeling like "visitors" and not valued members of the campus community
- Campus surveys and climate reports reveal that students of color (e.g., African American and Latinx), LGBTQ+ persons, and women perceive the campus climate less positively than their white, male, and non-LGBTQ+ peers
- lack of accessibility support for employees or efforts to ensure that our facilities are in compliance with ADA
- Need to enhance messaging and communication around institutional commitment to DEI
- Need for a DEI education plan designed to increase awareness and competency in diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Lack of representation of diverse students, faculty, and staff especially Black/African American or Latinx

### **Forging a New Course for Sewanee**

As part of the commitment to DEI, the University of the South hired Dr. Sibby Anderson-Thompkins to serve as the University of the South's inaugural Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer. Since her arrival last fall, she has worked in collaboration with campus partners to develop a new central Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which includes the Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity and Title IX and the Office of Inclusive Excellence, whose collective purpose is to provide strategic leadership and a robust institutional infrastructure to support the cultivation and sustainability of a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment for all here at the University of the South. The division's mission is to foster an equitable and inclusive living, learning, and work environment that allows each community member—students, faculty, and staff—to flourish. We achieve this mission by integrating equity, fairness, and care into our campus culture, institutional policies, practices, and programs.

### **Priorities**

Based on the SWOT analysis, eight priorities were identified as the most critical findings/insights that came out of these processes that lay the foundation for the action plan put forth.

1. Increasing student sense of belonging and fostering an equitable and inclusive living and learning environment.
2. Enhancing the recruitment, hiring, retention, and success of diverse students, faculty, and staff, and a sense of belonging for all.
3. Infusing DEI into the College's curricular innovation and renewal to reflect diverse content and inclusive teaching practices.

4. Increasing DEI-related education and engagement for all students, faculty, and staff.
5. Elevating ADA compliance and accessibility as a campus priority.
6. Ensuring equitable and inclusive campus policies, practices, and procedures –specifically in the areas of discrimination and bias.
7. Creating clear, cohesive messaging and communication that promotes Sewanee's commitment to DEI to internal and external audiences.
8. Leveraging the Roberson Project for Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation, the Names and Places Committee, and the Council for Indigenous Engagement to create positive narrative change about race and promote racial healing and transformation on our campus and in the surrounding community, and establish a nationally recognized Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center and facility.

## **OPERATIONALIZATION**

### **STRATEGY 1—BUILD AN INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE CHANGE**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have become increasingly important to the success of every facet of an institution's operations. According to Damon Williams (2013) real cultural change requires systematic strategy, leadership development, culture evolution, deliberate practice, and the tactical ideas that are a part of managing organizational change. Therefore, the focus of our foundational plan is to identify required infrastructures, policies and processes, best practices, and strategic actions that will support deep cultural and organizational change.

#### **Actions**

1. Establish the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to provide strategic leadership and a robust institutional infrastructure to support the cultivation and sustainability of a diverse, inclusive and equitable environment for all here at the University of the South. Reporting units include the Office of Inclusive Excellence and ADA, Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX.
2. Secure a highly visible student-facing permanent location for the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and reporting units and staff.
3. Roll out new series of foundational online DEI-related education, training, and engagement for all students, faculty, and staff. This includes required Title IX and anti-discrimination training.
4. Revise and issue an updated University Anti-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy.

### **STRATEGY 2—DEVELOP A STRATEGIC DEI BRANDING AND MARKETING PLAN**

With the Office of University Communications, articulate clear, cohesive messaging to promote the University's institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

#### **Actions**

1. Contract with an external Communication Consulting firm to design and produce key deliverables such as branding elements, front-end website, social media covers, press releases, and media kits.
2. Create a communication strategy that articulates how diversity, equity, and inclusion are tied to the core values and mission of the institution.
3. Develop compelling messages, including opportunities for dialogue, that encourage all community members to connect the importance of DEI to their success and the success of the institution.
4. Provide clear, consistent, and regular messaging of the DEI priorities and actions being taken to achieve desired outcomes.

### **STRATEGY 3—FOSTER STUDENT BELONGING, COMMUNITY, AND MATTERING**

Increase retention of underrepresented and diverse student populations by fostering belonging, community, and mattering through critical support services and celebrations of history and heritage, cross-cultural dialogue, and interconnections.

#### **Actions**

1. Intercultural development programming (new cross-cultural collaboration between Global Citizenship, the Office of Civic Engagement, and the Office of Inclusive Excellence) builds connections across cultures and prepares all students for a diverse workforce and global society.
2. Office of Inclusive Excellence's launch of new program series that creates affinity counter-spaces to foster a sense of belonging, community, and mattering for BIPOC and underrepresented students with, but not limited to, the Queer & Ally House, Hola, and the Black Student Union.
3. Office of Inclusive Excellence newly launched cultural awareness and celebration activities to honor and celebrate all members of the Sewanee community.
4. College of Arts & Sciences coordination of National First Gen Day, an annual event to celebrate students, faculty, and staff who are the first in their families to pursue a four-year undergraduate degree.
5. College of Arts & Sciences and the Center for Teaching sponsor workshops for faculty to promote inclusive pedagogy and practices, and student affirmation and mattering in the classroom.

### **STRATEGY 4—INCREASE FACULTY DIVERSITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES**

With the College of Arts and Sciences, support the hiring of diverse faculty through investments in — and deployment of — evidenced-based DEI recruitment and inclusive hiring approaches. Increase the number of diverse tenure-track faculty members from underrepresented populations.

#### **Actions**

1. Institute, maintain, and monitor accountability measures of diversity throughout the faculty hiring process in the College of Arts & Sciences. The deans, chief diversity officer, and provost will actively participate in and monitor each faculty search process.

2. Develop and maintain a database of diverse faculty candidates (e.g., ABDs, postdocs, and visiting faculty) and institute creative search and advertising practices to diversify applicant pools.
3. Leverage visiting assistant professors to recruit diverse faculty candidates and establish a formal policy and process for conversion to tenure-track positions.
4. Strengthen and update formal search committee training for key faculty and staff involved in faculty hiring.
5. Institute an equity advisor program and require an equity advisor representative to be involved in all faculty hiring.
6. Formalize cohort hiring policies and processes for all hiring departments.
7. Provide high-quality training for department chairs to provide wraparound support to new faculty, with attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion (e.g., onboarding, mentoring, coaching).
8. Identify and invest in external opportunities for mentorship from consortium partners.
9. Institute a departmental review process for department diversity and inclusiveness throughout the College of Arts & Sciences.

### **STRATEGY 5—INCREASE DIVERSE FACULTY AND STAFF SENSE OF BELONGING, COMMUNITY, AND MATTERING**

Support the retention of diverse faculty and staff through investments in evidenced-based approaches for enhancing the workplace environment and investing in career-advancing professional development.

#### **Actions**

1. Launch and provide funding for affinity groups such as the LGBTQ Faculty/Staff Group, BIPOC Faculty Group, and Colleagues of Color, led by diverse faculty and staff members themselves, to host events that bring colleagues together for fellowship and professional networking.
2. DEI-sponsored Community Dinners and “Dinner and Dialogue” to community building and facilitating difficult conversations across identity groups.
3. DEI-sponsored chapter of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) that will offer new opportunities for women faculty and staff to get involved at a local level and provide leadership and professional development opportunities on a regional and national level.
4. Strengthen promotion and tenure and non-tenure track review processes to maximize retention of women and diverse faculty, promote inclusive teaching, and recognize the value of scholarship, teaching, and service work in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
5. Establish a formal spousal hiring policy for faculty candidates.

### **STRATEGY 6—SECURE DESIGNATION AS AN AAC&U TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING, AND TRANSFORMATION CAMPUS CENTER**

AAC&U has partnered with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) effort to support campuses and communities in embracing racial healing and uprooting conscious and unconscious beliefs in the hierarchy of human value. The national

TRHT consortium prioritizes inclusive, community-based healing activities and policy designs that seek to change collective community narratives and broaden the understanding that Americans have of their diverse experiences.

### **Actions**

1. Establish a comprehensive plan for a Sewanee Center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation that leverages the Roberson Project, the Name and Places Committee, the Episcopal Church and the School of Theology and the College, and the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
2. Secure a designation as an AAC&U Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center and become part of this national consortium.
3. Launch racial equity education, racial healing circles, and cross-racial dialogue for all faculty, staff, students, and the broader community.
4. Create a sustainability plan to support and broaden the impact of the Roberson Project, DEI, and the Center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **STRATEGY 1—LAUNCH CAMPUSWIDE “DEI-IN-ACTION” SIGNATURE EVENT AND ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT**

This signature event will provide an opportunity for the campus community to come together to examine a theme or topic related to DEI through educational or planning workshops, speakers, or showcase of best practices in action, or community-building activities. Similarly, an annual impact report can capture the progress campus partners are making in advancing DEI.

### **Actions**

1. Launch an annual “DEI-IN-ACTION” event for the campus community to review the University’s DEI Strategic Plan, acknowledge past accomplishments, identify key challenges, and highlight areas of focus for the coming year.
2. Ensure each Division is represented to discuss, plan, or update their divisional/departamental level DEI action and accountability plans.
3. Create and publish an annual impact report that accurately measures and communicates the effectiveness of our DEI efforts and any actions that must be taken to achieve better outcomes.

### **STRATEGY 2 — CONDUCT EQUITY AUDITS**

Establish an equity rubric for conducting equity reviews of existing policies, procedures, and/or programs to ensure Sewanee’s policies and systems promote belonging community and transparency throughout the University community.

### **Actions**

1. Institutionalize a regular schedule for equity audits of University policies, procedures, and/or programs to ensure no unintended harm or inequitable outcomes for specific populations.
2. Review pilot phase or initial equity review to provide the University with baseline data and case examples.

### **STRATEGY 3 —LAUNCH CAMPUSWIDE DEI COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

Partner with the Office of Communications (OCOM) to use meaningful context to turn DEI data into compelling narratives that make messaging more impactful and demonstrate the necessity for continued efforts in DEI.

#### **Actions**

1. Coordinate internal and external web pages with compelling messages that illustrate our commitment to DEI in our living, learning, and workspaces.
2. Create an annual impact report that accurately measures and communicates the effectiveness of our DEI efforts and any actions that must be taken to achieve better outcomes.
3. Develop and implement a social media and marketing campaign to engage a broad and diverse talent pool and communicate key initiatives and programs.
4. Integrate DEI into all communications. Coordinate with stakeholders to include DEI when crafting and issuing internal and external communications and building or acquiring information technology solutions.

### **STRATEGY 4—INCREASE NON-INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT**

Support hiring of diverse non-instructional staff through investments in—and deployment of—evidenced-based DEI recruitment and hiring approaches. Increase hiring rates of diverse staff members from underrepresented populations.

#### **Actions**

1. Enhance the University’s recruitment strategies to attract more diverse applicant pools through continuously identifying, acquiring, assessing, and hiring candidates to fill open positions at Sewanee.
2. Human Resources institute, maintain, and monitor accountability measures of diversity throughout the staff recruitment and hiring process;
3. Human Resources enhance current advertising practices to support hiring managers in diversifying applicant pools.
4. Invest in institutional subscriptions such as Diverse Jobs and HERC to enhance recruitment of diverse applicants.
5. Establish a formal Sewanee Student-to-Staff Program to create a “pathway or pipeline” cultivating future diverse staff members.

### **STRATEGY 5—INCREASE NON-INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF RETENTION**

Support the retention of all staff through investments in evidenced-based approaches for enhancing the workplace environment and investing in career-advancing professional development.

### **Actions**

1. Institute new employees/pre-onboarding initiatives to increase the sense of belonging and connection of all staff in the first 90 days of employment.
2. Provide ongoing training and coaching for supervisors on inclusive leadership to improve the culture of belonging and mattering for all staff within their units.
3. Ensure all job descriptions and roles are written concisely and that work plans articulate clear and specific job duties, responsibilities, and expectations.
4. Ensure all job descriptions and annual performance evaluations will include the core values of inquiry, community, flourishing, and courage, and competence in or contribution to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
5. Regularly conduct compensation studies and audits to ensure equitable salary structures for salary and income.
6. Establish a formal spousal hiring policy to address the “two-body problem” for staff/administrative candidates.

## **FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **STRATEGY 1—THOUGHT & TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Establish the University as a national thought and research leader around racial healing and positive social transformation. Positively and proactively elevate the University's visibility and reputation as a transformational leader around race and social justice issues. The University becomes a destination for tourism, academic conferences, research, and policy development.

### **Actions**

1. Increase visibility through local and national involvement in the Center's activities.
2. Erase stigmas of race, culture, basic needs, and people; and provide a new avenue for dialogue of people to culminate in better understanding and eliminate the fear of differences.
3. Establish an anti-racist environment while also working towards providing equitable opportunities for students to succeed not just in the classroom but in their personal lives as well increase students' locus of control, self-efficacy, and social capital to understand their own ability to utilize resources such as student services, academic support services, and technological support to reach their educational goals.
4. Become a model for other institutions in the South and across the country when it comes to Transformative Education and Racial Equity.

### **STRATEGY 2—THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH'S CENTER FOR RACIAL EQUITY AND TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE**



Create an interdisciplinary academic center that by leverages the AAC&U TRHT, Roberson Project, the research of the Name and Places Committee, and academic or social justice programs such as the Study of the South, Environmental Justice Institute, and the Indigenous Engagement Initiative, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the Office of Civic Engagement to promote, and foster positive narrative change, social justice, racial healing and transformation for the University, the region, and the nation.

### **Action**

1. Build or renovate a dedicated facility to house the above programs and initiatives as a collaborative space that hosts conferences, an anti-racist teaching lab, and historical/archival research workshops.

## **IV. STUDENT SUCCESS**

### **Defining Student Success**

At Sewanee, we provide a rigorous, world-class liberal arts education that develops students who are critical thinkers pursuing lives of purpose and engagement with their communities. As enrollment becomes more competitive, it is important that we create a clear pathway for success that complements the excellence of what happens in the classroom. At its core, student success is about enrolling, retaining, and graduating students who are empowered with the skills and values demonstrated to foster successful lives; this is grounded in the excellence of our liberal arts education and supported by systems and experiences throughout a student's time at Sewanee.

Sewanee has moved to a strategic enrollment management model by restructuring its administrative organization to include a Vice Provost for Student Success. This position has direct oversight of the areas that impact a student's enrollment, retention, and career readiness, including Admission & Financial Aid, Registrar & Academic Services, Integrated Advising & Career Readiness, Student Life, and Wellness & Flourishing. This restructuring is a significant step toward reinforcing and improving Sewanee's positive student experience in the face of increasingly dramatic changes to the landscape of higher education.

The approaching demographic cliff speaks to our need to scrutinize both our recruitment strategies to become more competitive in a more diverse environment and our strategies related to undergraduate retention. [Sewanee's Strategic Enrollment Plan \(SEP\)](#), developed collaboratively by a team of faculty, staff, and administrators, addresses our admissions and enrollment management strategies through 2025. The Student Success Pillar builds on the Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEP) and focuses primarily on the student experience.

### **The Focus of the Student Success Pillar**

Stellar academic programming and teaching are primary areas of priority for the institution. The experience outside the classroom is also important and can either support or detract from the curricular experience. Sewanee has participated in The Healthy Minds survey for

several years. These data indicate that the institution needs to develop dynamic programs and services to increase students' mental health support, reduce social isolation, increase positive academic and social dynamics, and curtail substance abuse behaviors. Providing the support and resources that our students need in order to flourish socially is an essential aspect of recruitment, retention, and on-time graduation.

The Student Success Pillar focuses on: improving the first-year experience, enhancing student well-being/flourishing, prioritizing career readiness and preparation for life beyond the mountain, and supporting student academic success.

## **STRATEGY 1—RETENTION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

**Enhance our relationship-rich environment to increase student retention and assist students with achieving academic success.**

*In Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College*, Peter Felten and Leo Lambert of Elon University argue that “decades of research demonstrate that peer-to-peer, student-faculty, and student-staff relationships are the foundation of learning, belonging, and achieving in college.” While the importance of these relationships is known, it’s far more important and difficult to create a relationship-rich environment where “students will have frequent opportunities to connect with peers, faculty, staff, and others.” (2021) Student Success at Sewanee will build on our already exceptional reputation for close relationships to foster and create additional relationship-rich environments.

### **Actions**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Action 1: Connect all first-year students to pre-professional, academic, and peer network support by establishing a new first-year experience for all incoming students.**

In an era of rising student debt and increasing focus on outcomes in higher education, it is important that students are provided with a solid foundation upon which to launch their postsecondary education. Student success, year-to-year persistence, and retention through graduation require more than just a rudimentary orientation. [Research from AAC&U](#) shows that a for-credit first-year experience (FYE) offering is a key high-impact practice at the outset of a student’s academic experience (Finley, 2019).

According to AAC&U, successful FYE courses should: be rooted in the university curriculum and delivered over the first term; include personal assessments, reflections, and other personal skill-building content; include content on time management and healthy living habits; and support the development of career and education goals and plans (Swaner & Brownell, AAC&U, 2010).

Thus, the Student Success Subcommittee will collaborate with the College faculty, and the Curriculum Renewal and Innovation Subcommittee, to design a course that gives students a first-class introductory experience to Sewanee’s liberal arts education while also expanding the student experience beyond the classroom. Ideally, this course will build on the university's values

and the excellent Finding Your Place (FYP) program already established to integrate opportunities for personal and social responsibility with relationship-building between students, faculty, and the community. It will provide an opportunity for students to develop skills of rigor and critical thinking central to a liberal arts education as well as identify their strengths and talents, engage in the community, and develop purposefulness.

**Action 2: Create a peer tutoring/mentoring program available to all students in all courses, with a particular emphasis on first-year students who receive grades of “D” or “F” or withdraw from courses (DFWs) at midterms and finals, and students on academic warning and suspension.**

Both hierarchical (e.g. student-faculty member or student-adviser) and peer (e.g. student-student) mentoring are recognized as best-practice strategies for promoting college student success. Peer mentors and mentees are more likely than participants in hierarchical mentoring relationships to share a common perspective with regard to how they understand and enact the college student role. Differences in perspective impact the process of student identity acquisition, perceived mentor credibility, and the likelihood of mentees following their mentors’ advice (Developing Effective Student Peer Mentorship Programs, Peter Collier, 2015).

Sewanee mentees will be able to choose their peer mentors. A large part of the success of a mentor/mentee relationship depends on how well the mentor and mentee connect with each other. Sewanee mentors will be provided training in motivation, university services, time management, study skills, communication skills, and leadership—as well as training in what their role as mentor entails.

## **FOR CONSIDERATION**

**Action 3: Create a first-year village, where all first-year students are housed together and have easy access to student success resources such as peer tutoring/mentoring and counseling/wellness.**

The planning and design of campus housing is informed by decades of research about how to support new students in their transition to college and help them feel a sense of belonging on the new campus. Sewanee’s First-Year Village will be designed to make classes, faculty, advisors, and academic support readily available to students in close proximity to where they live.

Eventually, the First Year Village could be integrated with the First-Year Experience course and expanded into a First-Year Living and Learning Community that could provide living environments that connect students’ in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences and optimize engagement in learning activities within the residence. First-year students would be engaged in effective educational practices, such as meeting with faculty, utilizing academic support services, and studying or working on projects with other students, enhancing their ability to be successful in their first year, and encouraging retention to the second year.

**STRATEGY 2— PRIORITIZE STUDENT BELONGING AND WELL-BEING**  
**Focus on our students’ belonging, well-being, and development in the six domains of flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017)**

It is essential for the next generation of college students to pursue a broad state of well-being that extends across several dimensions of their lives. While this broader consideration of well-being surely includes a measure of financial success (such as managing one's economic life to reduce stress and increase security), it also includes victory in other areas, such as purpose (finding fulfillment in what you do each day), social life (meaningful relationships and love), community (engagement with others in the area where one lives), and physical well-being (good health and enough energy to get things done every day).

Regarding mental health, our responsibility is to create with all students the broad and deep learning opportunities that make possible engagement and conditions that support flourishing, self-realization, and purposefulness. As a priority of the institution, we design, implement, assess, expect, and insist on multiple and repeated opportunities for meaningful engagement (including challenging students, intentionally asking them to risk examining assumptions and perspectives that have shaped their identity) that lead to deeper learning and civic and psychosocial development.

## **OPERATIONALIZED**

### **Action: Expand the work of the Wellness Commons**

The University of the South has prioritized student flourishing through the Wellness Commons, located at the heart of campus, promoting the domain of mental and physical wellness by bringing the Wellness Center, FitWell, and Sewanee Outing Program together under one roof.

As part of a campus-wide emphasis on student well-being and purpose, the Well Center is focusing on the following:

- providing all students with timely access to affordable and/or free evidence-based health and mental health treatment services;
- expanding support for professional development and continuing education for the professionals in the Wellness Commons in order to provide students with the most innovative and cutting-edge treatment, coaching, and educational opportunities;
- expanding training initiatives for campus professionals that build on existing gatekeeper programming and extend to coaching and mentoring interventions;
- providing students opportunities to design, envision, and enact their own flourishing/well-being map for their Sewanee experience;
- encouraging students to identify, reflect, and act on values they want to carry into their future personal and professional lives;
- teaching students to deal with real-world challenges, gain proficiency in analytical thinking and communication skills, and work collaboratively in diverse teams to seek solutions;
- challenging students to think critically, act ethically, and lead with purpose;
- supporting students in developing strategies and habits to support health and well-being;
- providing opportunities to create meaningful connections with each other, with faculty and staff, and with the broader community of Sewanee alumni, parents, and friends.

**STRATEGY 3: Increase equitable access to experiential learning opportunities, guided support for career readiness, and professional and civic skill development for all students during all four years at Sewanee.**

The ongoing national discussion about the value of higher education, in general, and that of a liberal arts education, in particular, has been a significant challenge for liberal arts and sciences colleges across the United States. Colleges have concluded that to provide great value to students and thrive in this challenging environment, they need to make a compelling case for the career readiness of their graduates to prospective students, their families, and the public at large.

Employers are looking for graduates with multiple skills and abilities that can be applied to many entry-level positions. They want employees who can write, research, learn new languages, have some technical skills, organize and analyze data, work under pressure, meet deadlines, collaborate with others, and are eager to learn new skills. For-profit, non-profit, and arts-related organizations recognize that liberal arts graduates have acquired these skills through their education, internship and work experience, and extracurricular activities.

**Actions**

**OPERATIONALIZED**

**Action 1: Examine the barriers to equity that impact career readiness: internship and research and funding, access to social capital through mentorship and Sewanee's networks, and college readiness.**

Equity and inclusion are extremely important in career readiness as we think about the recruitment process and workplace. The [National Association of College & Employers \(NACE\)](#), established in 1956, is the leading source of information on the employment of the college-educated. NACE recently [defined](#) career readiness competencies, a set of skills and attributes every college student should develop to help launch successful professional careers.

The University of the South is fully committed to equity in student support and fostering inclusiveness and belonging. Sewanee is investing in initiatives and altering policies to support students from historically underrepresented groups, first-generation students, and other marginalized groups in developing these competencies in the same ways as their more privileged peers. Addressing these facets of the Sewanee experience will support more equitable outcomes for all our students.

**Action 2: Integrated Advising & Career Readiness will continue to proactively engage all students in career preparation during our students' time at Sewanee.**

Career readiness provides a framework for addressing career-related goals and outcomes of curricular and extracurricular activities, regardless of the student's field of study. For new college graduates, career readiness is a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college-educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management. For employers, career readiness plays an important role in finding talent and

is a framework for sourcing and developing talent through internships and other experiential education programs.

All Sewanee students will develop a four-year career readiness plan, beginning when they arrive on campus as first-year students. Through exploring their interests, values, and preferences as early as the first year, our students will begin to understand how various majors they are considering align with their interests and career goals. Activities such as internships or volunteer work clarify students' choices by connecting their academic endeavors with career aspirations. The Sewanee Integrated Advising & Career Readiness team helps students understand, develop, enhance and learn to articulate the NACE core competencies so that in their senior year, students are ready to focus on preparing for and executing a successful job search and/or application for graduate or professional study or fellowships. The career readiness process will ensure that students have certainty about their first destinations and that they are qualified to succeed as candidates.

## **V. DOMAIN OPTIMIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT**

### **Summary Narrative**

Sewanee provides an exceptional education for our students. The importance of the Domain to this core mission has changed throughout the history of the University, and continues to evolve. We propose a close examination of Domain optimization in order to provide the best possible support for maintaining this core mission. The Domain can more readily serve as a comparative advantage within an increasingly competitive industry of higher education. We propose that the University establish and manage those current endeavors and enterprises that complement a vibrant academic enterprise with a thriving non-academic community to bolster our ability to serve as a destination for education and recreation that simultaneously provides a responsive and resilient approach to climate change and for the essential needs of the University.

Our vision for an optimized Domain includes:

- offering the Sewanee community opportunities bolstered by investments in initiatives that drive an enhanced experience,
- a community with opportunities that drive hiring and retention of employees,
- consistency with the core values of sustainability and inclusion, and
- expanding educational opportunities associated with our land base.

The Domain is well-established in our identity as a community and an environmentally focused institution, and community development here must wrestle with key environmental challenges. Success of our institution depends on thriving employees, attracting students, and providing unparalleled educational experiences for those students, and the Domain is a critical asset available to achieve all these objectives.

### **SECTION 1: Community Development, Sustainability, and Related Co-Curricular Endeavors**

#### **Goal 1: Improve the experience of a thriving Sewanee community**

Our community is stronger and flourishes when employees can meet their basic needs such as finding stable, long-term and affordable housing that leads to stronger commitment to and engagement with the broad Sewanee community. Increased recreation and full-time residents will enhance the success of downtown businesses, which serves the demand of our students for additional opportunities.

**Goal 2: Model Sewanee as an innovative leader in sustainable operations, community development and land stewardship.**

The Domain offers us the ability to demonstrate leadership in key areas of education and responsible growth while aligning with our environmental focus and particularly with our responsibility to climate change. The University is also unique in retaining ownership of leaseholds, which is an unrealized opportunity to treat Sewanee as an experimental town to explore principles of sustainability.

**OPERATIONALIZED INITIATIVES**

**STRATEGY 1: Build a collaborative community development plan that identifies opportunities to:**

- Identify Urban Land Institute (ULI) recommendations (April 2022 study) that match with institutional priorities and values.
- Reverse what is now detrimental to attracting and retaining employees - expensive owned housing environment, stress on University rental housing pool, lack of private home rental availability - to an advantage through creative financing and leveraging Sewanee Village Ventures investments.

**STRATEGY 2: Long term planning for employee housing as a strategic imperative (owned and rented):**

- Create supporting policies that allow the University to more readily fulfill the promise of living on the Domain for those choosing to do so.
- Create an on-ramp to residing on the Domain for as many employees as possible through the use of creative financing and other policies.
- Expand owner opportunities for affordable housing that prioritizes employees and full-time residents. A Housing Action Plan committee was established in August 2022 and intends to recommend programs and policies designed to support this initiative.
- Explore revisions to current leasehold and related policies.
- Consider the structure of use and governing policies related to University rental housing to align with anticipated needs that may differ from historical trends. A Rental Housing committee was established in August 2022 and intends to recommend programs and policies designed to support this initiative.
- Utilize Sewanee Village Ventures (SVV) as an investment vehicle to expand the supply of affordable housing (owned and rented).

**STRATEGY 3: Adopt and Implement the 2022 Climate Accountability Plan:**

- Dedicate resources and take actions at all levels of operation and planning to meet the University's carbon-neutrality commitment by 2030.

- Collaborate with students and colleagues to create and embody the Stewardship, Community, and Leadership initiatives on campus that exemplify a carbon-neutral culture and stewardship practice.

## **RECOMMENDED INITIATIVES**

### **STRATEGY 1: Build a collaborative community development plan that identifies opportunities to:**

- Review policies relating to external use of University facilities to explore and promote new revenue opportunities.
- Consider an External Affairs Office to promote corporate training and other organized groups to more fully utilize University assets (e.g. the Sewanee Inn, trails).
- Determine the opportunity represented by heritage tourism throughout the Domain in coordination with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and relevant academic departments/programs.
- Explore the benefits, risks, and expense of creating an incorporated village.

### **STRATEGY 2: Factor sustainable development criteria into town and campus planning (See the [Climate Accountability Plan](#) for details):**

- Cooperate with the greater Sewanee community to identify and practice sustainable lifestyles.
- Fulfill the University “To Zero” commitment by decarbonizing and converting to a carbon-neutral campus, as close to 2030 as possible.
- Practice sustainable Community action by planning and leading with care and compassion for others, the environment, and ourselves; for example, through efforts in environmental justice, equity and access, resiliency, and campus transportation.
- Exemplify accountable Leadership by staying curious and sharing and acting on our values; for example, through efforts in student action leadership, and education and research.

### **STRATEGY 3: Provide leadership in sustainability and conservation within the region:**

- Provide academic fora and workshops that connect faculty with regional conservation professionals
- Exemplify climate-conscious and accountable Stewardship by leading with behaviors and actions; for example, through efforts in purchasing, socially responsible investing, landscape ecology, food systems, and water systems.
- Practice sustainable Community action by planning and leading with care and compassion for others, the environment, and ourselves; for example, through efforts in environmental justice, equity and access, resiliency, and campus transportation culture

## **FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **STRATEGY 1: Explore a close relationship with the expanding state park system adjacent to Sewanee to allow for:**

- Joint promotion of golf course, equestrian center, trails, and downtown as a destination for new visitors.



- Cooperative and coordinated management opportunities: hunting, recreation, species protection, law enforcement, etc..
- Combined with the Domain to create new student opportunities (internships, scholarly collaboration) with private businesses, government agencies, and land trusts.

## **SECTION 2: Efforts that Enhance the Integration of the Domain into the Curriculum**

**Goal: Leverage the Domain as a living lab for academic and co-curricular excellence. Improve place-based education and extracurricular engagement for students.**

Sewanee's connection to the land has tremendous potential for student opportunities that remains undercapitalized. Although our land base provides impressive access to the natural world, our connections beyond the boundaries of the University are limited and could be enhanced to increase our profile and student opportunities. Secondly, the University is unique in retaining ownership of leaseholds, which is an unrealized opportunity to treat Sewanee as an experimental town to explore principles of sustainability.

## **VI. APPENDIX: THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Institutions of higher education have entered very challenging waters that include long-term demographic changes, changes in values and perception of the return on investment in education, and financial uncertainty that has accompanied economic shocks and widening economic inequality. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected family finances (albeit unevenly), attitudes toward work and education, mental well-being among students, and the finances of institutions of higher education. While colleges such as the University of the South have been preparing for the long-term structural changes, the additional cross currents created by the pandemic have presented additional complexities for institutional planning. Below, we analyze the four main structural changes that will shape the strategic direction of the University of the South in the coming decade. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and accelerated some of the structural changes that institutions of higher education are navigating.

### **A. "Demographic cliff":**

Based on analyses of demographic trends in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, Nathan Grawe (2018), an economist at Carleton College, has forecast a fifteen percent drop of the college-bound population beginning in 2026 from 2012 levels. The sharp decline in birth rates in the wake of the financial crisis is one of the primary drivers of this demographic decline. The expected drop of students likely to go to college after 2026 is particularly pronounced in the Northeast and Midwest, while, according to Grawe's revised forecast (2021), Southern states will have slight growth in their college-bound populations.

The revised forecast gives some source of optimism to colleges such as Sewanee that draw a disproportionate number of students from southern states, but some early indicators and other structural changes suggest that the University of the South will need to focus efforts to attract large classes of exceptional students. First, the COVID-19 pandemic, which began after Grawe's forecast had been made, has had a significant effect on national and Tennessee enrollment patterns in colleges and universities. Even prior to the expected demographic cliff of 2026,

Grawe forecast a decline in college-bound students in 2020 with a sharp bounceback in 2021 followed by moderate growth for the nation as a whole. According to the [National Clearinghouse](#), however, aggregate enrollment in colleges and universities across the nation declined each year during the period 2017-2021; private four-year colleges had an increase in enrollment in 2019 followed by three years of downturn in enrollments. This downturn in enrollments in the last three years has been reported in [The Washington Post](#) and [Higher Education Today](#), among other sources. Data from the [National Clearinghouse for Fall 2022](#) chronicle an additional 3.1 percent decrease in freshman at private non-profit institutions and a 0.4 percent decline in first-year enrollment at “very selective” private non-profit institutions, Sewanee’s category. Tennessee’s data also reveal a downturn in college-bound students since 2019, including a decline in the number of students from the state enrolling in private nonprofit four-year colleges ([National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#)). It remains to be seen whether national and state student enrollment patterns will bounce back after the worst years of the pandemic pass.

The University of the South has begun to feel some of the effects of the national and state enrollment changes. At Sewanee, the number of domestic applicants to the institution grew from 2019-2021 but declined in the 2022 admission cycle, and the number of enrolled undergraduate students held steady through academic year 2021-22 but then dropped significantly. In order to recruit large classes of students with a high academic profile, the University has had to increase its financial aid offers. Recruiting a particular number of students is not the sole measure of successfully responding to demographic changes; the University must also attend to how much it discounts its tuition and fees to attract students while also generating revenue to offer a rewarding student experience. Data on enrollment trends are from a limited time period and affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, some of the trends suggest that Grawe’s forecast for the South may be optimistic because of the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Setting aside how enrollment trends may fluctuate after 2026, the initiatives in this foundational report will help to ensure that Sewanee will become an even more attractive place for students, faculty and staff from all backgrounds to flourish in their studies and work, and that it has the necessary resources to develop as an institution. Simply put, the strategic initiatives will lay the path for institutional advancement and recognition of our academic excellence.

## **B. Changing Demographic Composition of College-bound Students:**

Beneath the headline forecasting the demographic cliff is a shift in the racial composition of college-bound students. In 2018, the [Census Bureau](#) announced that non-Hispanic Whites comprised a minority of the population under 18 years of age for the first time. In Southern states, the main pockets of growth of college-bound students after 2026 will be among LatinX and Black students. In Grawe’s work on changing college student demographics, he notes that the share of southern non-Hispanic whites enrolling in college will drop to 50 percent of all students by 2034.

While this provides an opportunity for Sewanee to racially diversify its student population, Sewanee’s experience enrolling students from racially diverse backgrounds has lagged behind our comparative and aspirant peer institutions. In 2020, only 18.7 of the University of the South’s undergraduate student population was non-White (including international students),

according to IPEDS definitions, while 32.9 percent of our peer institutions' student populations and 36.1 percent of our aspirant institutions' student populations were non-White. Since 2013, the University of the South has made only modest progress in recruiting and retaining students of color, while our peer and aspirant comparison institutions have advanced more rapidly in this regard.

### **C. Value Changes among College Students:**

“Gen Z,” which includes people born 1997-2012, have demonstrated significant value changes from prior generations. According to reports by [Pew Research Center](#) and [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), Gen Z values include deep concern about the environment and climate change; a penchant to actively address global challenges; an acceptance of diversity along racial, gender, and sexual orientation; and a desire for hands-on learning experiences. These shifts in values have implications for how institutions of higher education will need to adjust their curriculum, pedagogy, and co-curricular offerings to meet the expectations of Gen Z students.

This generation also has experienced the 2008 financial crisis and economic turmoil associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, heightening their concern about student debt and finding gainful employment upon graduation from college. Gen Z students and their families display [distrust of higher education](#), especially on the issue of the value gained from soaring costs of higher education, often referred to as the “return on investment” (or ROI). For some, the calculation of going to college at all has shifted, which contributes to the [declining number of students](#) pursuing degrees in higher education in the last three years. Despite the perception of the financial value of a college degree, a [2020 Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) study showed that workers with a bachelor's degree earned 67 percent more than workers with just a high school education.

### **E. Financial Challenges:**

The economics of higher education are proving a challenge to students and universities alike. Over the last two decades, the [higher education price index](#) typically has risen faster than the consumer price index, placing financial strains on families that send their children to college. Conversely, universities confront cohorts of entering students with increasing financial aid requirements, placing stress on university budgets. Federal grant programs such as [PELL grants](#) have not been increased at the same rate as the rising cost of higher education, exacerbating this economic challenge. A [survey by YouGov](#) found that 61 percent of respondents agreed that “financial challenges that come with earning a degree make college inaccessible.” Perhaps most disconcerting about the survey results was the fact that concern about the financial challenges of paying for higher education increased with the education levels of the respondents; 69 percent of respondents with a postgraduate degree stated that lack of affordability is the main reason for not pursuing a college degree, compared to just 46 percent of respondents with just a high school degree.

The University of the South has experienced the effects of structural financial shifts in the form of rising financial aid obligations. The COVID-19 pandemic both increased short-term costs of delivering a safe in-person educational experience, consistent with the University's pedagogy, while creating uncertainty about short- and medium-term enrollment trends. To appeal to Gen Z students and their families, the University of the South will need to make a strong case for academic and financial benefits of the education it provides.

### **F. Student Mental Health Issues:**

According to national data collected by the Healthy Minds Survey, during the period between 2013 and 2021, college students' mental health changed significantly. Among college students, national rates of depression have increased by 134.6%, rates of anxiety increased by 109.5%, eating disorders by 95.6%, non-suicidal self-injury by 45.5%, and rates of suicidal ideation by 64%. As rates of mental illness have increased, national rates of student flourishing (positive mental health) have decreased by 32.5% during the same time period. The impact of worsening mental health has implications for student persistence and academic success; though the impact of mental health has largely been missing from the national dialogue about student success (Ketchen Lipson, 2022). In fact, major depressive disorder is the most powerful predictor of student dropout rates, with students struggling with depression two times more likely to “drop out or stop out” of college (Eisenberg & Ketchen Lipson, 2021). Strategies that prioritize early identification and intervention are critical, as well as providing students access to high-quality treatment in a timely and responsive manner. Campus-wide educational and prevention initiatives, delivered by professional staff and peer educators, which provide access to evidence-based coping skills in a supportive and relationship-rich environment that fosters acceptance, belonging, and flourishing have never been more important.

### **G. Sewanee’s Racial History and Current Context:**

The University of the South has a distinctive history, inextricably linked to this country's legacy of slavery and racism. Given the University of the South's history, the institution bears a particular burden—and *opportunity*. As an institution, we must confront our legacy of race, slavery, and reconciliation and the vestiges of that legacy to bring about a true sense of belonging for all within our community, particularly for those from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, the legacy of slavery necessitates even more urgently for us to be a place of racial healing and transformation for our students, our campus community, the local region, the Episcopal Church, our state, and the nation.

Over the past decade, Sewanee has conducted self-studies and commissioned working groups or task forces to recommend strategies for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. These recommendations and implementation efforts have led to a more diverse campus and greater attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. Based on our review of past surveys and reports, several challenges and threats emerged:

- Lack of competitive salaries and lack of access to affordable or available housing for faculty and staff
- Geographical constraints due to rural area and its proximity to urban centers such as Chattanooga or Murfreesboro
- A siloed culture that leaves some faculty and staff feeling like "visitors" and not valued members of the campus community
- Campus surveys and climate reports reveal that students of color (e.g., African American and Latinx), LGBTQ+ persons, and women perceive the campus climate less positively than their white, male, and non-LGBTQ+ peers
- lack of accessibility support for employees or efforts to ensure that our facilities are in compliance with ADA

- Need to enhance messaging and communication around institutional commitment to DEI
- Need for a DEI education plan designed to increase awareness and competency in diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Lack of representation of diverse students, faculty, and staff especially Black/African American or Latinx

**H. Summary:**

The changing context in which institutions of higher education operate create uncertainty and present challenges. As Grawe and others note, the best protection against the demographic cliff is recognized academic excellence; those ranked as elite liberal arts colleges, usually defined as the top fifty schools, will fare better than those ranked below elite institutions. Similarly, institutions that embrace the values of Gen Z students and future cohorts of students with appealing curricula, pedagogies, and student experiences will be well-positioned to thrive in a highly competitive field of higher education. Finally, liberal arts colleges such as the University of the South must continue to articulate the value of the liberal arts experience and its economic return. This foundational report seeks to achieve these goals by positioning the University of the South to raise its academic profile and flourish in the coming decade.