

THE POWER OF  
**UNION**

## STRATEGIC PLAN // 2020-2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developing every student to lead  
with wisdom, empathy and courage,  
in ways large and small,  
now and across multiple tomorrows.

**UNION**  
COLLEGE  
FOUNDED 1795



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

**W**hile I knew Union College was a special place even before my arrival on campus in July 2018, embarking on strategic planning within a few months of my tenure was a fantastic way to learn more about our Union community. I am now even more excited about being Union's 19th president because I clearly see the unique assets of the College and the incredible possibilities that lie ahead.

The year-long process was extensive and thorough, with an Executive Committee on campus grounded in the Planning and Priorities Committee, an Ad Hoc Committee of the Board of Trustees, and four working groups co-chaired by a member of the senior staff and a faculty or staff member. We convened weekly and monthly meetings of these groups. In addition, we held several town halls with breakout sessions, and we reached out to various campus constituencies, alumni and parents. This comprehensive process resulted in a series of reports and recommendations that were invaluable. Over the summer, with the help of the Executive Committee, key campus stakeholders, Keeling & Associates, and three writing groups, we developed the goals, objectives and activities based on all of our research.

The result of this process has culminated in a new strategic plan that is a directional document to guide our decision-making over the next five years.

**The Power of Union: A Strategic Plan for Union College (2020-2025) consists of three parts: (1) An Aspirational Preview of Union in 2025, (2) Where We Are Today, and (3) a Vision and Plan to Achieve Further Success.**

This plan is guided by what we have been and by where we need to go. It is guided by an appreciation for the programs and approaches that have served our community so well for decades, and an acknowledgment of the changing experiences and needs of today's students and the opportunities and challenges they will encounter in the coming decades. It is also guided by the words that we heard repeatedly when people described what is and must be core to Union: excellence, rigor, curiosity, discovery, ethics, creativity, innovation, critical thinking, reflection, integrity, accountability, empathy, inclusion, intentionality, resilience, respect, community, joy, and Union pride.

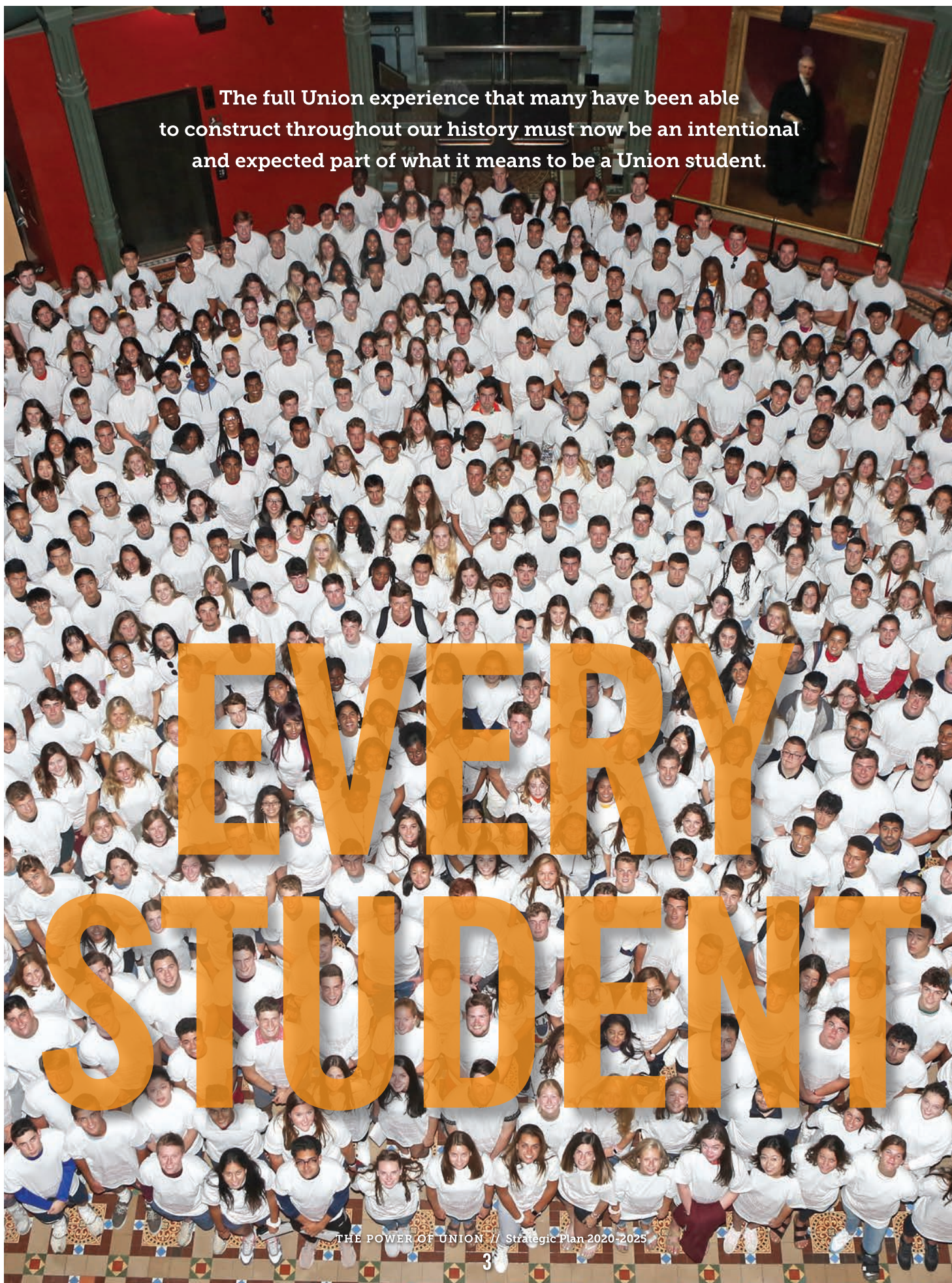
There is one other word that emerged, perhaps more than any other, as what we are and what we must be. **Union** is not only our name, but also the key to our future success. This plan is about the power of unions between ideas, approaches, individuals, and groups that are often thought to be at odds with another, and how bringing them together propels this school and its people to surpass the lofty goals we set for ourselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "D. Harris".

**DAVID R. HARRIS**  
*19th President of Union College*



The full Union experience that many have been able to construct throughout our history must now be an intentional and expected part of what it means to be a Union student.





# WISDOM

An extension of knowledge, data, and information





## **PART 1:**

# An Aspirational Preview of Union in 2025

The keys to Union's success are the synergistic use of classroom and discretionary time, the immersive experiences both inside and outside the classroom, the strengthening and deep integration of the traditional liberal arts and engineering, the expansion of connections across internal and external communities, and an intentionality that ensures the full power of Union is embraced and experienced by **all** students.

### **Union is thriving because...**

- We are a diverse and inclusive community of scholars at the forefront of undergraduate education, defining and redefining what it takes to prepare students for multiple tomorrows, both those we can anticipate and those we cannot.
- We embody the power of a holistic approach in preparing students to achieve their goals in the near and long terms.
- Our students master critical skills and competencies through integrated, innovative, liberal arts and engineering curricula that champion breadth and depth, and through a range of intentional, immersive experiences that include research, athletics, clubs, internships, service, study away from campus, and Greek life.
- Our location in the historic revitalizing city of Schenectady and proximity to the Capital Region and nearby Adirondack Park provide abundant educational, cultural, social, recreational, community engagement, and internship opportunities.
- We are a community where students, faculty, staff, and alumni inspire one another to identify, pursue, and achieve beyond what they thought possible.
- Our alumni revel in remaining part of this community, providing advice, friendship, and myriad opportunities, from admissions interviews, welcome receptions, internships and job opportunities, to the financial support that is critical to ensuring access to a transformative Union experience.
- Being comfortable being uncomfortable is what we expect of ourselves and our community; a journey we take together with mutual admiration and support.
- We appreciate that long histories do not entitle us to long futures.
- We gain wisdom and lead by making the most of our diverse range of academic offerings and innovating on them; prudently developing and stewarding resources; embracing the personalized, supportive, and challenging environment our size and culture provide; taking every opportunity to learn lessons in many ways, from many people, and in many places; and never being afraid to do what it takes to ensure that we achieve the academic and developmental goals that have driven us since 1795.

**...our focus is the whole U.**

## **PART 2:**

# Where We Are Today

### **BUILDING ON STRENGTH**

Our deep and rich traditions, groundbreaking innovations, state of the art facilities, vibrant academic offerings, and talented and dedicated faculty and staff members serve as the foundations upon which we can reconceive and rejuvenate a Union education so students and faculty are best positioned to address key areas of inquiry, practice, and action now and in the future.

### **A CHALLENGING CONTEXT**

Colleges and universities face a confluence of factors challenging their viability: a decline in the number of high school graduates, the shrinking middle class, high costs, public perception and concerns over rising student debt, emphasis on job and career preparation, increased regulations and compliance, and the competition to attract exceptional students. To ensure that Union will thrive in this changing higher education landscape, we need innovative approaches to recruiting, developing, and retaining talented students, faculty and staff; prudent fiscal management; effective messaging; ambitious fundraising; and responsive infrastructure.

### **PREPARING FOR MULTIPLE TOMORROWS**

The global climate crisis, human migration, economic turbulence, prejudice and discrimination, threats to freedom and democracy, and assaults on rationality and objectivity are among the forces that will affect students' futures in profound ways.

One of the most powerful forces that will impact our students is the rapid technological change that has fueled a constantly shifting economic environment and corresponding disruptions to the world, its cultures, and its politics. These technological disruptions are changing jobs and sectors, even those thought to be immune to

change. As new occupations emerge and existing professions become outdated or obsolete, students will change jobs every few years. And as technology simultaneously broadens and narrows our access to information and our interactions with one another, we must grapple with the moral and ethical questions it raises. Social science research suggests that this generation of students, the first to grow up in a digital world with smartphones and social media, has distinctive social patterns, behaviors, mental health, and academic needs.

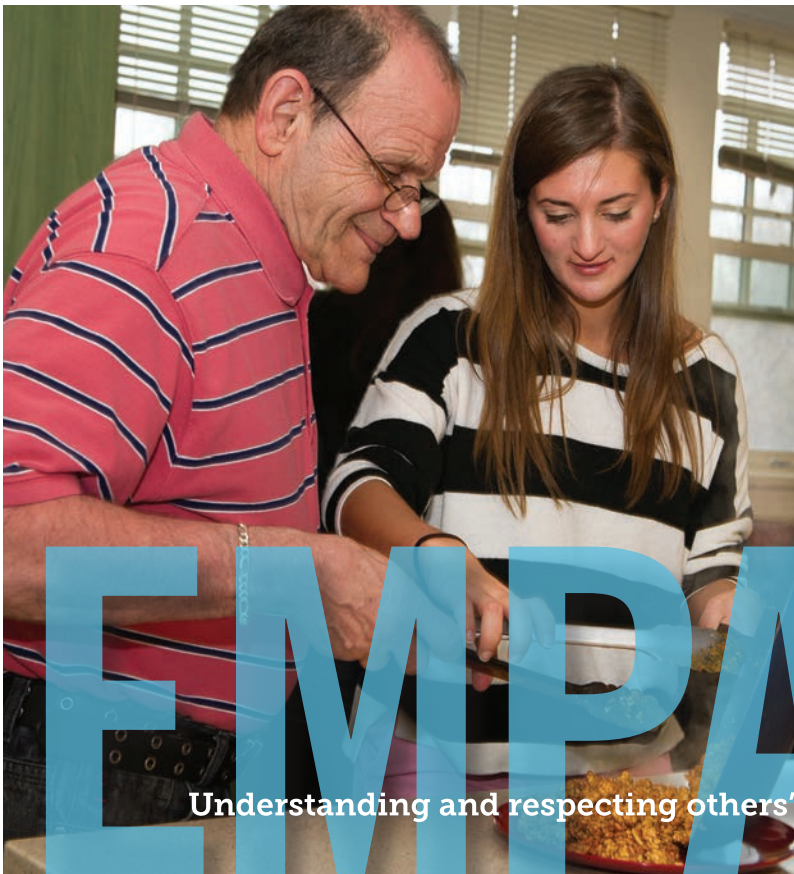
All of these factors have significant implications that are difficult to foresee and impossible to fully appreciate. Students will engage a world that demands breadth and depth, as well as resiliency and flexibility.

### **UNION WILL THRIVE**

Throughout our long history, we have placed a premium on the ability of a liberal arts education—steeped in diverse ideas and perspectives that cultivate critical thought and strong communication skills—to prepare students to effectively address the social, political and economic problems that face our communities locally, nationally, and globally. In our interconnected and rapidly changing world, Union students also need a range of experiences—learning from successes and failures alike—to develop new skills that will enable them to produce, synthesize, and employ knowledge.

With this strategic plan, we will leverage our unique academic offerings and invest in immersive experiences to ensure that every student develops the skills and knowledge to lead for whatever their future will hold. Rather than prepare students for a specific and known tomorrow, we are preparing students to lead across multiple tomorrows.





# EMPATHY

Understanding and respecting others' experiences and perspectives





A woman with brown hair tied back is performing an aerial silk routine. She is suspended in the air, holding onto a white fabric with both hands and feet. She is wearing a black long-sleeved top, black leggings, and a green skirt. The background features large windows with a view of greenery outside. The room has white walls and framed pictures. The text 'GOOD RAISE' is overlaid on the right side of the image in large, orange, 3D letters.

# GOOD RAISE

Doing what one believes to be right  
and important not just popular or easy;  
being comfortable being uncomfortable



**PART 3:**

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# VISION

**THE UNION COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLAN IS INSPIRED BY A BOLD, ENDURING VISION:**

Developing every student to lead with **wisdom, empathy,** and **courage,**  
in ways large and small, now and across multiple tomorrows.

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# MISSION

**THE MISSION THAT HAS BEEN OUR BEACON SINCE 1795, WE NOW ARTICULATE AS:**

Union College provides a rigorous, holistic, and immersive residential liberal education that emphasizes **integration, innovation, inclusion,** and **reflection** for every student.

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# INTEGRATION

Exposing students to the ideas and perspectives of the artist, the computer scientist, the engineer, the humanist, the mathematician, the scientist, and the social scientist to cultivate the whole person—the head and the heart—through a range of diverse learning experiences.





## STRATEGIC PLAN // 2020-2025

Our plan is focused on two goals—  
identifying how we will achieve our vision, and  
ensuring we have the resources to thrive:

1.

Union will strengthen and enhance a vibrant community of learners, scholars, and teachers that blends the liberal arts and engineering, transcends disciplinary boundaries, bridges classroom and immersive experiences, and engages and embraces diverse experiences and perspectives.

2.

Union will ensure that it has the resources required to thrive in a changing higher education landscape.



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# GOAL 1.

Union will strengthen its vibrant community of learners, scholars and teachers, so that we can more fully blend the liberal arts and engineering, transcend disciplinary boundaries, bridge classroom and immersive experiences, and engage and embrace diverse experiences and perspectives.

1.

Reimagine the curriculum and renew pedagogy to anticipate and respond to contemporary and emerging academic needs and opportunities.

1. Emphasize and integrate cross-disciplinary opportunities, pursue the power of immersive and experiential approaches to achieve critical learning outcomes, and empower all students to become more active participants in their educations.
2. Ensure Union's faculty, academic programs, teaching and experiential learning opportunities prepare students to respond to current and future challenges.

2.

Provide an intentional, invigorating and supportive student experience outside the classroom that is integrated with academic learning, develops critical competencies, and prepares all students for healthy, fulfilling, and joyful lives of purpose.

1. Ensure that high impact, collaborative and immersive learning experiences are essential cornerstones of the Union experience for all students.
2. Reimagine the residential experience to fully realize the transformative potential of a living and learning community.
3. Enhance student personal and academic support services (Class Deans, Accommodative Services, Wellness Center) to respond effectively to the unique and emerging needs of a changing student body.

3.

Inspire, advance, and support independent and collaborative research and scholarship, creative expression and discovery.

1. Support faculty in elevating a distinctive academic culture that values engagement with ideas, generates knowledge that advances understanding and has broad impact on society.
2. Establish new programs, activities, and spaces that promote and sustain opportunities for innovation, experimentation, and creative expression among students, staff, and faculty. Examples include the MakerSpace, engineering teams and a range of performing arts pursuits. Success will require financial and space resources, as well as a new approach to faculty and staff expectations that values the mentorship and guidance they provide.

## 4.

Cultivate respect and understanding for all members of the Union College and broader communities, and welcome, include and support a measurably more diverse college community.

## 5.

Enhance a learning environment that supports development of the self through a habit of introspection for deep understanding and lifelong commitment to intellectual and personal growth.

1. Develop among all members of the Union community a sense of belonging, empathy, responsibility, respect, and pride, both on and off campus.
2. Raise expectations for, and strengthen cultural competency and the ability to engage with, difference among all members of the Union community.
3. Ensure that students of all economic backgrounds can access and take full advantage of the opportunities Union provides.
4. Develop an explicit, integrated, strategic and collegewide approach to attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining a more diverse population of students, faculty and staff.
5. Integrate Union into the fabric of the Schenectady community, and deepen relations with Schenectady as a neighbor, partner and friend.

1. Empower students to develop ownership and accountability, understanding of oneself within the larger human ecosystem and independence in pursuing educational interests.
2. Cultivate personal development, growth and reflection through the application of academic experiences in internships, volunteerism and other immersive experiences.
3. Support collective as well as individual engagement and reflection, enabling students, faculty and staff to gather together to share and grow as a community.





Curiosity. Inquiry. Experimentation. Creative expression.  
Problem solving. Staying relevant. Making a difference in large and small ways.  
Influencing and impacting our understanding of the world today.







# INCLUSION

A commitment to being an inclusive community that fosters lifelong relationships grounded in shared experiences.





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# GOAL 2.

Union will ensure that it has the resources required to thrive in a changing higher education landscape.

1.

Create a sustainable, diversified and achievable financial model that supports the highest priorities and goals of Union College.

1. Create robust and comprehensive financial and capital planning and budgeting processes that are responsive to emerging trends and fiscal constraints.
2. Build a culture of financial rigor, transparency and holistic, data-driven analysis that guides financial decision-making and the strategic use of resources.
3. Systematically identify and develop new revenue sources.

2.

Create a robust communication and marketing strategy that reaches new markets, advances Union's academic reputation and articulates our distinctiveness.

1. Establish the new role of vice president for communications and marketing with the mandate to find new and more effective ways to tell the stories of our faculty, students, staff and alumni to those who know us, and to those who do not, across geographies, generations and communication styles.

3.

Increase support at all levels and strengthen the culture of philanthropy at Union.

1. Launch an ambitious comprehensive capital campaign to advance Union's strategic priorities.
2. Systemically engage Union students, alumni and parents to maximize Union pride, cultivate lifelong relations with one another and Union, and help Union achieve its institutional goals.
3. Grow Union's endowment, Annual Fund and Parent Engagement Program.

4.

Develop and implement a long-term enrollment plan that expands Union's pool of applicants geographically, maximizes net revenue and enhances the diversity of our student body.

1. Offer an Early Action application option to increase the number and diversity of students who select Union.
2. Target geographies where Union is underrepresented relative to peer schools. This includes hiring a West Coast recruiter, and partnering with College Relations to coordinate alumni and recruiting events.

5.

Ensure that Union recruits, retains and develops the faculty and staff required to meet its mission.

1. Re-envision marketing and recruitment strategies to attract talented faculty and staff.
2. Design and implement multi-faceted, tailored professional development activities to ensure the outstanding staff and faculty who are attracted to Union continue to be exceptional contributors on campus, locally and nationally.
3. Ensure that faculty and staff are recognized and rewarded for efforts that are consistent with institutional goals.

6.

Create a collegewide infrastructure to support the development of Union's innovative student learning and living experience.

1. Develop an information technology infrastructure that is responsive, reliable, accessible and secure.
2. Embrace a technological foundation to facilitate the exploration of emerging/evolving technologies to advance teaching, learning and research.
3. Update and maintain facilities at the highest level while pursuing sustainability, energy efficiency, green standards and carbon neutrality.
4. Update the campus and energy master plan to inform and guide facilities goals and objectives.




THE POWER OF  
**UNION**

The future of Union requires that we build on our rich history and accomplishments while boldly innovating to achieve enduring goals in the face of evolving challenges and opportunities.

**The future of Union is the Power of Union**

The power of Union between ideas, approaches, individuals, and groups that are often thought to be at odds with one another, but that combine to propel this school and its people forward. They include:



Liberal arts	Engineering
Theory	Practice
Classroom	Experiential
Excellence	Access
Commonalities	Differences
Students	Alumni
Town	Gown
Local	Global
Tradition	Innovation
Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Union communities	Union

The Power of Union will develop every student to lead with wisdom, empathy, and courage, in ways large and small, now and across multiple tomorrows.

**THE POWER OF UNION IS U!**

# REFLECTION

Understanding oneself within the larger human ecosystem to empower and develop a sense of ownership, accountability, and independence in pursuit of educational and personal interests.







THE  
POWER  
OF  
**UNION**

**UNION**  
COLLEGE  
FOUNDED 1795

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[www.union.edu](http://www.union.edu)

The full Strategic Plan document can be found at: [union.edu/strategic-plan](http://union.edu/strategic-plan)