



The Chicago School 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Focus Group & Survey Summary

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Summary

Between October 2024 and January 2025, thirteen focus groups were conducted to gather input on The Chicago School's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan.

- 5 sessions open to all employees (full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and staff)
- 3 sessions open to faculty only (full-time and adjunct)
- 1 session with members of the National Faculty Council Executive Committee
- 1 session with members of the Diversity Action Board
- 1 session with the members of the Academic Affairs Leadership Council
- 1 session with members of the Operations Leadership Council
- 1 session with members of the Proposed IllinoisCOM Council of Student Advisors

There were 167 unique participants in the above focus groups. Of those participants, 104 (62%) were staff, 48 (29%) were full-time faculty, 5 (3%) were adjunct faculty, and 10 (6%) were students. Though these focus groups to date were primarily for gathering employee input, students participated in the IllinoisCOM Council of Student Advisors and Diversity Action Board groups. There were also some employees who attended multiple focus groups, but they are only counted once in the total number of participants. The focus group sessions were facilitated by members of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee. In addition, employees were given the opportunity to provide feedback via an asynchronous input survey; there were 24 respondents in total. Of those respondents, 13 (54%) were staff, 9 (38%) were full-time faculty, 1 (4%) was an adjunct faculty, and 1 (4%) was a student.

This document summarizes the key themes identified across the focus groups and asynchronous survey.

Key Themes

Focus group and survey participants were asked to identify trends in higher education that may have the most impact on The Chicago School in the coming years. Participants also identified challenges and opportunities associated with those trends. Several themes emerged during the Steering Committee's review of the focus group and survey notes.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access

Focus group participants discussed the importance of increasing support for diverse students and employees at the university. The recent hiring of an Executive Director of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) was noted as an opportunity for improving the IDEA environment at the university. Focus group participants also discussed opportunities to conduct climate surveys and form employee resource groups (ERGs). There was particular concern around anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion legislation at both the state and federal levels. Laws may differ from state to state, which will pose a challenge to national universities like The Chicago School.

Financial Sustainability and Cost Sensitivity

Focus group participants noted the challenge that high tuition costs and limited financial aid can have on students. Prospective students are particularly sensitive to cost, and that is



sometimes the deciding factor in those students choosing to attend another university. There is no desire to continually increase tuition; focus group participants noted an opportunity in diversifying the university's revenue streams so we are not solely reliant on tuition for revenue. The Chicago School must also focus on adapting existing academic programs to changing student, community, and workplace needs while also building new programs where demand exists. In addition, there is an opportunity to better position the university in the market by focusing on what sets us apart, such as our involvement in our local communities. As the value of higher education continues to be questioned, we will need to develop new ways of communicating our value to prospective and current students.

Technology Integrations

Internal challenges with technology were frequently discussed by focus group participants. For example, many internal processes are done manually on disconnected software, such as using multiple Excel spreadsheets to track information. There is an opportunity to automate and centralize many of our technology processes to reduce errors and increase efficiency, which will allow employees to focus on more value-added tasks (e.g., mentoring students). In addition, centralizing our technology processes will improve the user experience for students. Furthermore, artificial intelligence will continue to influence the ways we work and learn, and we need to determine how to incorporate responsible use of AI into the classroom and the workplace.

Student Experience

Student expectations have changed significantly over the past few years, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. Students themselves are different too, and they may not come into the university with the same level of academic preparedness as previous generations of students. Student mental health continues to be a major concern and focus group participants said that the university needs to provide more robust mental health support services. Other student support services need to be made more accessible as well, with greater visibility on ground campuses. As mentioned above, student-facing technology could be centralized and automated for a more seamless user experience.

Employee Experience

The employee experience was the final key theme identified by focus group participants. There are opportunities to build a greater sense of community among employees, especially since employees are not located at the same physical location. Focus group participants mentioned the importance of employee involvement in decision-making via shared governance as well as improved faculty compensation, support for research and scholarship, and advancement opportunities for adjunct faculty.

Headlines

Focus group and survey participants were also asked to create headlines showcasing the future of The Chicago School. These headlines are grouped by theme. Duplicate headlines have been removed. Participants noted that these headlines could help show our value to students, aid in student and employee recruitment and retention,

Theme 1: Academics and Integrated Health

1. Chicago School Leads the Way in Healthcare Education
2. Chicago School is a National Model for Training Integrated Health Professionals
3. The Art and Science of Healing: A New Generation Emerges – Chicago School graduates largest number of integrated mental and medical health professionals in the country
4. Say hello to the clinicians of the future who understand how to work with the complexity of the life of someone in 2030 and can integrate resources and utilize technology.
5. The Chicago School sets a new standard in healthcare education by offering interdisciplinary programs that merge physical, mental, and community health.
6. Ensuring whole health care is promoted i.e. body, mind, etc. It's important to recognize that mental health is connected to physical, spiritual, emotional health etc.
7. Graduates from The Chicago School's College of Medicine open an innovative integrated health practice, blending physical and mental health services in groundbreaking ways.
8. The Chicago School has led the way in building educated and trained healthcare professionals in the US
9. The Chicago School opens its fifth program in health sciences.
10. The Chicago School ends the shortage of School Psychologists and becomes the school of choice for school psychologists due to efficient and innovative technologies to teach skills and theories with hands on experiences to serve local communities
11. The Chicago School has produced the most BCBA's and LPC's of any university in the country over the past 5 years.
12. 100% of PsyD graduates are licensed within 3 years of obtaining their degree.
13. All Chicago School campuses have received APA-accreditation and rank nationally for PsyD programs.
14. The Chicago School is a leader in quality clinical experiences, faculty that is knowledgeable and practicing in a wide variety of specialties, and provides the education needed for quality career opportunities.
15. Chicago School Sets New Standard for Clinical Training and Residency Success
16. Degrees will ensure that students experience professional and personal growth
17. The Chicago School re-opens its San Diego Campus and announces the opening of 3 additional campuses in the USA.



18. The Chicago School is committed to providing a world class education for all individuals with a passion and commitment to the betterment of their community's integrative health.
19. The IllinoisCOM graduates its first cohort of 85 Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine
20. ICOM becomes first medical school in Chicago in 100+ years
21. The Chicago School Becomes Leading Producer of Primary Care Physicians in Illinois
22. "The Chicago School is the leading educator for practitioner and professional psychology careers." *The headline is equally linking career outcomes to both licensure and non-licensure programs. TCS would benefit from a cultural shift that recognizes, values, and invests in non-licensure programs -- where there is arguably a bigger market and workforce.*
23. Innovative clinical partnerships involving clinical psychology and medicine.
24. The Chicago School is recognized as the leading professional psychology program in producing future psychologists through flexible programming and integrated experiences while maintaining high standards of training.

Theme 2: Community Impact and Partnerships

1. The Chicago School opens free clinics at every campus to serve their local communities.
2. The Chicago School opens pop-up clinics around the city to serve communities in need.
3. Students become part of the solution to address disparity in mental health access
4. The Chicago School: Building our global institution of culturally sensitive professionals through innovation in communities around the world.
5. The Chicago School Builds Bridges with Local Public Libraries to Improve Health Outcomes in Communities
6. Governor J.B. Pritzker partners with The Chicago School to expand the 'No Health Without Mental Health' initiative, advancing integrated, accessible healthcare for all.
7. Chicago School Achieves Outstanding Community Impact Through Student Service
8. The Chicago School has embraced clinical language diversity to address various communities often ignored in America.
9. University has found a way to partner with organizations to do more workplace certifications and degree credentialing
10. Stable workforce and collaborative partnerships between faculty to have innovative service-learning projects.
11. The Chicago School services all those in need with the next generation of health and mental health professionals in all areas of the country and around the world!
12. The Chicago School Leads Nation in Transformative Mental Health, Impacting Millions Across Communities. *Being a leader in a field of great need to society will help us to grow, recruit, and retain students, staff and faculty.*
13. A headline about how The Chicago School serves as a stellar example of a multi-faceted educational and community service organization would be amazing. *This*



would represent a culmination of a vision to be a relevant part of our communities in genuine ways. This multi-pronged approach to health and mental health education would represent a shared vision of excellence throughout all programs and Colleges.

Theme 3: Student Success

1. The Chicago School provides and meets students' needs, creating the highest retention and enrollment in the nation.
2. Learning for everyone: The Chicago School provides personalized learning opportunities for students to succeed and creates a culture of inclusivity.
3. The Chicago School celebrates pathways from secondary to post-secondary education increase representation among historically marginalized student groups, setting a national example for inclusivity.
4. The Chicago School leads PsyD programs in APA match rates for students of color.
5. The Chicago School has eliminated the debt of all of its graduates and has pledged full tuition to a direct referral from graduates who have already paid their loans; Future students will also be covered.
6. Chicago School Recognized for Excellence in Student Support and Development
7. (AI generated) The Chicago School Achieves Unprecedented 100% First-Time Pass Rate Across All Professional Licensure Exams, Sets New Standard for Mental Health Education
8. The Chicago School leads the charge in developing practitioners who are dedicated to the mental health and well-being in their community and around the globe.
9. Leading psychological research university in the heart of Chicago has most diverse student body.

Theme 4: Technology and Innovation

1. Student experience will be more enhanced and connected (to peers and faculty) through technology
2. The Chicago School's practicing alumni have successfully leveraged AI to create multiple mental health initiatives.
3. The Chicago School leads higher education in embracing cutting-edge technology to accelerate the wellbeing of local and global communities
4. The Chicago School Revolutionizes Health Care with library innovations (offering resources and support for students, faculty, and the broader community).
5. Chicago School Pioneer in Medical Education Technology Integration
6. Innovative AI-driven technology enhances training and practical skills for the first graduating class of the College of Medicine, shaping the future of medical education.
7. The Chicago School pioneers AI-driven mental health training, empowering graduate students to serve underserved communities through experiential learning breakthroughs.
8. The Chicago School Champions Employee Retention with Innovative Degrees, Emphasizes Growing Value of Higher Education.



9. Academic competitors strive to copy The Chicago School's successful rebirth in a challenging environment
10. The Chicago School: Pioneering the Future of Mental and Medical Healthcare Through Innovation and Compassion
11. The Chicago School ends the shortage of School Psychologists and becomes the school of choice for school psychologists due to efficient and innovative technologies to teach skills and theories with hands on experiences to serve local communities
12. (AI generated) The Chicago School's Revolutionary Mental Health AI Program Cuts Therapy Wait Times by 80%, Serves 1 Million Underserved Patients
13. TCS at the Forefront of More Effective Care: Multi-disciplinary, cutting-edge training

Next Steps

Future focus group sessions are planned for students and alumni in early Spring 2025 to gather additional input on the themes and strategic vision generated by the previous focus groups and survey respondents. We will request endorsement of the draft strategic vision by the Board of Trustees in May 2025, and goals and action items will launch in Summer 2025.

Additional Resources

If interested, the notes from each focus group session are located on the [Strategic Plan webpage on the Community Site](#). Any personal or private information has been removed from the notes.