

Executive Summary - The Chicago School Today

Introduction

In alignment with The Chicago School's mission to educate the next generation of change-makers in innovative theory and culturally competent practice, the strategic plan and annual goals for the past three years underscore our commitment to enhancing the integrated health of individuals, organizations, and communities. The plan has reflected our dedication to growth, rebranding, maintaining and securing accreditation, financial diversification, and operational efficiency, all while maintaining a focus on our core mission. The strategic plan aligns with and advances this mission through targeted goals and initiatives. Collectively, these trends indicate a forward-looking strategy aimed at enhancing institutional resilience, reputation, and overall effectiveness in the higher education landscape.

As we continue to focus on the preparation of students for the professional world by offering hands-on application, training opportunities, and the guidance of our experienced practitioner-scholar faculty, we reflect our progress towards strategic goals.

1. Growth and Expansion

- **Expand Existing Programs:** Enhance and broaden programs like Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT), Applied Clinical Psychology Program (ACP), and School Psychology, including new online options offered through grant funding.
- **Focus on Undergraduate Education:** Strengthen our undergraduate programs to better prepare students to address complex societal challenges.
- **Broaden Programming Scope:** Ensure our programs align with our mission, reflecting our commitment to innovative theory and culturally competent practice.
- **Consolidate Geographical Footprint: Streamline** and optimize our physical presence (i.e., Chicago location) to decrease empty space. We are currently building an improved space for the Dallas location.

2. Diversified Financial Portfolio

- **Increase Grants and Funds:** Pursue diverse funding sources to support our mission and ensure long-term financial stability. Over the past several years, we have established a proactive strategy to stabilize and grow the institution's financial base, reducing reliance on traditional funding sources (i.e., tuition) and enhancing financial resilience.

3. Rebrand

- **Evolve Institutional Identity:** Rebrand to highlight our expanded educational focus and commitment to addressing health and community challenges beyond psychology. The rebranding initiative is aimed to update and modernize the institution's image and appeal to a more diverse audience, reflecting a shift in institutional priorities and a broader academic scope.

4. Accreditation and Academic Quality

- **Achieve and/or Maintain University and Programmatic Accreditation:** Invest in resources to meet accreditation standards and uphold our commitment to high-quality, culturally competent education. There is a strong focus on achieving and maintaining accreditation standards to ensure high academic quality and institutional credibility. Further, our emphasis on accreditation demonstrates our commitment to

meeting and achieving regulatory requirements; crucial for maintaining institutional and industry reputation and eligibility for funding.

5. Shorter Pathways to Completion

- **Develop and Enhance Existing Early Entry Agreements:** Create streamlined pathways for students to complete their degrees efficiently, supporting our mission to equip change-makers with the skills they need. This focus reflects an intent to improve student retention and graduation rates by facilitating smoother transition between programs, and reducing time-to-degree, and decreasing overall cost of subsequent program.
- **Creation and Implementation of Research Project Extension Policy:** The Extension Policy provides additional resources and support provided to students during their independent research projects. Additional experts were hired in the National Center for Teaching and Learning and Institutional Review Board to provide targeted support to students during thesis and dissertation phase. Requirements of work agreements within each extension course provide increased transparency into deliverables and milestones to allow program leadership to intervene when appropriate.

6. Wraparound Supports for Under-Served Populations

- **Enhance Support Programs:** Strengthen services and programming for first-generation students, and other under-represented groups to improve retention and success. Within the last three years, the University received the McNair TRIO grant. Our McNair Scholar Program furthers our commitment to inclusivity and equity, with a focus on addressing barriers and providing tailored support to ensure success for historically underrepresented students.

7. Improved Operational Efficiencies

- **Centralize and Streamline Services:** Optimize student and academic support services to enhance effectiveness. Over the past 18 months, the university has been actively engaged in the transition from a campus-based structure to one of four colleges all under **One University** (1U). Due to the shift to 1U, we have centralized key functional areas: Student Support, Admissions, National Center for Teaching and Learning, Library Services, and the Writing Center. The centralization of resources, people power, and institutional knowledge (away from these existing in every campus regardless of capacity and size) has enabled more targeted support for students regardless of location and modality. We have centralized our services to improve operational processes and improve the student experience.
- **Modernization:** The Chicago School has modernized the curriculum by integrating and incorporating AI and Power BI to improve student outcomes and experiences, ensuring our curriculum remains relevant and impactful. This demonstrates our effort to stay current with technological advancements and enhance the educational experience, preparing students for a rapidly evolving job market.

Conclusion

This strategic plan represents a comprehensive approach to advancing The Chicago School's mission. By focusing on growth, diversification, shorter pathways to graduation, rebranding, and implementing operational efficiencies, we are well-positioned to fulfill our commitment to educating change-makers and enhancing community well-being. We remain dedicated to collaborative efforts with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other key stakeholders as we focus on continuous improvement.