



Pathways to Opportunity

2026-2031 Strategic Plan

**Approved by the Missouri State University
Board of Governors
June 26, 2026**

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Message from the Chancellor

Pathways to Opportunity started with a strong strategic vision: Missouri State University-West Plains will shape the future of our region by prioritizing learning, expanding pathways to workforce advancement, uplifting our communities, and igniting opportunity through education and innovation. This vision was based on what we heard at the beginning of the planning process from students, faculty, and staff, as well as stakeholders and partners throughout South Central Missouri. It has galvanized our campus community and will provide the framework through which we engage the region.

The plan is built around five clear imperatives:

1. Expand awareness of Missouri State University-West Plains
2. Grow and maintain enrollment
3. Align institutional offerings with the needs of the communities we serve
4. Strengthen fiscal and organizational resources
5. Enhance partnerships with Missouri State University in Springfield

The goals and outcomes articulated in this plan came from our students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders – not from the top down. They are ambitious, courageous, and – most importantly – they will provide pathways to opportunities.

Now that we have a plan, it's time to go get 'em, Grizzlies!



Zora Mulligan
Chancellor

Higher Education Landscape

Missouri State University–West Plains (MSU–West Plains) is developing its next strategic plan at a time when higher education in the United States is undergoing significant change. Demographic shifts, evolving workforce expectations, rapid advances in technology, and ongoing financial pressures are changing both what institutions do and how they are perceived. These changes are especially important for two-year institutions like MSU–West Plains, which sit at the intersection of access, affordability, and workforce preparation. As the number of traditional college-aged students declines and public confidence in higher education lessens, institutions are being asked more than ever to demonstrate value and relevance to the students and communities they serve.

Many of these trends are well documented at both national and state levels. The number of high school graduates is expected to decline in the coming years due to long-term decreases in birth rates, often referred to as the “demographic cliff.” Missouri is projected to see a 12% decline in high school graduates by 2041.¹ At the same time, enrollment patterns have shifted. Fewer students are enrolling immediately after high school, and more are questioning whether college attendance is worth the cost. National surveys show public confidence in higher education has dropped from 57% in 2015 to 36% in 2023.² While community colleges have seen some recent stabilization, particularly among adult learners, the overall environment remains uncertain.

Along with these demographic and financial pressures are changes in the workforce itself. Employers continue to report difficulty finding qualified workers across a range of industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology. At the same time, they consistently point out gaps in basic employability skills such as communication, reliability, and professionalism.³ Advances in artificial intelligence and automation are also reshaping the types of skills that are needed, often increasing demand for applied, technical, and adaptable skill sets while creating uncertainty around some traditional

¹ Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*, 10th ed. (Boulder, CO: WICHE, 2024), <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Knocking-at-the-College-Door-final.pdf>

² Megan Brennan, “Americans’ Confidence in Higher Education Down Sharply,” *Gallup*, July 11, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx>

³ US Congressional Research Service, *Skills Gaps: A Review of Underlying Concepts and Evidence* (2022), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47059>

degree pathways.⁴ As a result, students are increasingly drawn to shorter, more targeted educational options that lead more directly to employment.⁵

Within this broader landscape, MSU-West Plains operates in a region with its own distinct set of conditions. The surrounding service area is largely rural, with lower-than-average wages, low labor force participation (48.1%), and ongoing workforce shortages.⁶ Median family income data show between 10.2% and 24.4% of families in the service region live below the poverty level.⁷

These conditions create barriers and affect both students and the broader workforce. Issues such as childcare, transportation, and housing can make it more difficult for students to pursue higher education. Meanwhile, lower wages contribute to talent loss as graduates often leave the region in search of higher-paying jobs.

At the same time, there are signs of opportunity: business establishments are growing, certain counties are projected to see population increases, and key industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, and agriculture continue to show demand for skilled workers.⁸ Leaders in this region of the state have a clear vision for attracting more and diverse industries to grow the economy. They also seek to raise wages to address the high rates of regional poverty and offer an improved quality of life for residents. To achieve this, they emphasize that MSU-West Plains is an integral part of that vision because of its role as both a major employer and the primary provider of higher education in the region.

The strengths and threats outlined below are informed not only by national and regional data, but also by Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analyses conducted with multiple stakeholder groups during the fall 2025 strategic planning kickoff. Over 100 stakeholders—including faculty, staff, students, and community and industry partners—participated in focus groups, interviews, and surveys. They were asked for their thoughts about what MSU-West Plains must do in its next strategic plan to build a more successful future for residents in South Central Missouri and beyond. Their perspectives

⁴ Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI, *AI Index Report 2024*, [The 2025 AI Index Report | Stanford HAI](#)

⁵ Johanna Alonso, “Short-Term Credentials Bolster Enrollment Boom,” *Inside Higher Ed*, November 11, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/traditional-age/2025/11/11/short-term-credentials-bolster-enrollment-boom>

⁶ Lightcast, labor market data (version 2025.3), as cited in *Economic Leadership, MSU-West Plains and the Region’s Workforce Needs* (2026).

⁷ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ National Institutes of Health. “Income (Median Family Income) for Missouri by County, All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages, 2019-2023.” [Income Map for Missouri Counties | HDPulse Data Portal](#)

⁸ Lightcast, labor market data (version 2025.3), as cited in *Economic Leadership, MSU-West Plains and the Region’s Workforce Needs* (2026).

provide important context for understanding how the institution is viewed both internally and externally.

Institutional Strengths

MSU–West Plains has a number of strengths that position it well in this changing environment. In many cases, these strengths also point directly to opportunities for growth and greater impact.

Strong Regional Presence and Community Connection

One of the institution’s clearest strengths is its role in the region. MSU–West Plains is not just a college; it is a central part of the economic and community fabric of South Central Missouri. With a service area of nearly 88,000 residents and a workforce of over 200 employees, the institution is both a major employer and a primary driver of educational attainment in the region.⁹

This was evident in the Fall 2025 SWOT focus groups, where participants consistently described the university as a “cornerstone” of the community. That kind of standing is vital, especially at a time when many institutions struggle to define their role. MSU–West Plains has an important opportunity to lean further into being a partner in regional economic development by collaborating more intentionally with employers, local governments, and community organizations.

Student-Focused Environment

Another consistent theme in stakeholder feedback is the institution’s strong student-centered culture. Small class sizes, accessible faculty, and a supportive campus environment were all identified as key strengths in SWOT focus groups.

This is particularly important given the population the institution serves. Many students are first-generation, balancing work and family responsibilities, or returning to college after time away from education. A supportive, flexible environment is not just a benefit; it is essential to student success.

Affordability is also a major advantage. As concerns about student debt continue to grow, two-year institutions are often seen as a more practical and accessible option. National data show that skepticism about the cost of higher education is increasing, especially when loans are involved.¹⁰ MSU–West Plains is well positioned to meet this challenge.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, “*Is College Worth It? Public Views on the Value of a College Degree*,” May 23, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/05/23/public-views-on-the-value-of-a-college-degree/>

Workforce-Relevant Programs

The institution already has strong alignment in several high-demand areas, particularly in healthcare and education. Programs like nursing are producing graduates who are directly entering the regional workforce, which is exactly the kind of outcome students and employers seek.

At the same time, regional data point to clear opportunities to build on this strength. In many fields—especially healthcare support, skilled trades, and technical roles—the number of job openings significantly exceeds the number of program completions.¹¹ That gap represents opportunity for program expansion, particularly in short-term certificates, apprenticeships, and other workforce training offerings.

Stakeholders reinforced this in the SWOT focus groups, calling for more flexible, career-aligned programs that allow students to enter the workforce more quickly while still leaving the door open for continued education.

Flexibility and Responsiveness

Compared to larger institutions, MSU–West Plains can move more quickly and adapt to changing workforce and regional community needs. This flexibility is an important strength in a time when both student expectations and workforce demands are rapidly shifting.

Nationally, community colleges are expanding dual credit, adult education, and workforce training programs to respond to demographic changes and enrollment pressures.¹² MSU–West Plains is well positioned in this area, with an already strong dual credit and dual enrollment presence that provides a foundation for continued growth. There is also an opportunity to expand offerings for adult learners. In Howell County alone, nearly 61% of adults are high school graduates with no college degree.¹³

Connection to a Larger University System

The relationship with Missouri State University in Springfield provides access to resources and academic pathways that can benefit students. The ability to offer seamless transfer options, including some bachelor's and graduate programs locally, is a clear advantage.

¹¹ Lightcast, labor market data (version 2025.3), as cited in *Economic Leadership, MSU-West Plains and the Region's Workforce Needs* (2026).

¹² Ellie Ashford, "Going on the Offensive for Student Recruitment," *Community College Daily*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.ccdaily.com/2021/04/going-on-the-offensive-for-student-recruitment/>

¹³ Missouri Census Data Center, *Missouri County Fact Sheet: Howell County, Missouri*, accessed March 25, 2026, <https://mcdc.missouri.edu/applications/MO-county-factsheets/index.php?c=29091>

Still, the SWOT focus groups highlighted an opportunity to better define and communicate MSU–West Plains’ unique identity within that system to strengthen both recruitment and community perception.

Institutional Threats

Alongside these strengths, MSU–West Plains faces a number of challenges that will need to be addressed moving forward. Many of these are not unique to the institution, but they are often more pronounced in rural regions and at smaller campuses.

Limited Awareness of Institutional Value and Offerings

The economic value of earning a college degree remains strong, as individuals with an associate or bachelor’s degree earn significantly more than those with only a high school diploma.¹⁴ Despite these outcomes, public skepticism about the value of higher education continues to grow. Rising costs, student debt, and mixed employment outcomes have all contributed to this shift. Nationally, only about one in five adults believe college is worth the cost if loans are required.¹⁵

For MSU–West Plains, this context underscores the need for a compelling and consistently communicated value proposition. Prospective students and their families are increasingly focused on outcomes—what they will gain from their investment in higher education, how quickly they can complete a credential, and how that credential connects them to employment.

Feedback gathered from focus group participants reinforces this point. The most frequently mentioned recommendation was the need for MSU–West Plains to promote its offerings, programs, and overall value more effectively. Participants said they want to see clear, accessible information about career pathways, programs, and return on investment.

In response, the strategic plan places a strong emphasis on expanding and strengthening marketing and communication efforts. This includes a comprehensive marketing strategy that effectively promotes MSU–West Plains education and training opportunities as well as deepening its engagement with business partners and the communities in the service region. By enhancing its marketing strategies, MSU–West Plains seeks to better tell its story and more clearly articulate the value it provides. In the plan, marketing is elevated from a

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *How Education Impacts Income and Earnings: 2004–2024*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2025/09/education-and-income.html>

¹⁵ Richard Fry, Dana Braga, and Kim Parker, “Is College Worth It?” Pew Research Center, May 23, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/05/23/public-views-on-the-value-of-a-college-degree/>

support function to a central strategy for competitiveness, enrollment growth, and regional economic and workforce impact.

Demographic and Enrollment Pressures

The decline in traditional college-aged students is one of the most significant long-term challenges facing higher education and has direct implications for enrollment and retention at MSU-West Plains. As noted earlier, Missouri is projected to see a 12% drop in high school graduates by 2041.¹⁶ Rural areas like the MSU–West Plains service region are likely to feel this even more strongly. In this environment, growing enrollment and improving student persistence will require sustained focus.

At the same time, there is a short-term opportunity for the institution: The number of high school seniors is expected to increase for the next three years. The 2025-2026 freshman class for the seven-county service region is 20% larger than this year’s senior class. Likewise, there are currently more sophomores and juniors than seniors.¹⁷ This trend creates a larger pool of prospective students for MSU-West Plains in the coming years and reinforces the importance of recruitment strategies that effectively reach these prospects and connect them to the institution.

However, the short-term increase in the number of high school students has a limited window. Over time, sustaining enrollment will depend on the institution’s ability to broaden its reach and improve retention across diverse student populations. This includes expanding pathways for adult learners and other nontraditional populations who may enter and exit higher education in diverse ways.

MSU-West Plains is also facing intensifying competition for students—not only from other colleges, but from employers and training providers offering faster or more direct routes to employment. Given these circumstances, the institution’s ability to both attract students and support them through completion becomes increasingly important. The strategic plan places equal emphasis on enrollment growth and student retention, recognizing both as critical to the long-term sustainability and impact of MSU-West Plains.

Regional Workforce Misalignment

Although there are areas of strong alignment, there are also clear gaps between what the regional economy needs and what the university is currently producing. In several high-

¹⁶ Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*, 10th ed. (Boulder, CO: WICHE, 2024), <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Knocking-at-the-College-Door-final.pdf>

¹⁷ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: *District and Charter Enrollment 1991-2025* ([LINK](#)); Attachment 7

demand occupations, there are far more job openings than graduates.¹⁸ Employers also emphasized that the issue is not only technical skills. In many cases, the biggest gaps are in “soft skills” or “employability skills”—communication, reliability, and professionalism.

Simultaneously, technological advances, particularly artificial intelligence, are transforming both instructional methods and workforce skill requirements. While some traditional career paths are becoming less stable, new ones are rapidly emerging. These trends add complexity and challenge higher education institutions to reconsider how they teach, assess learning, and prepare students for a changing workforce.

Responding to these challenges requires a more coordinated approach to workforce preparation. Area stakeholders emphasize that MSU-West Plains needs “a seat at the table” in working toward a more vibrant regional economy. The strategic plan places a priority on better aligning programs with regional workforce needs and strengthening the broader skills students need to succeed, regardless of whether they are directly entering the workforce or continuing their education within a transfer pathway. It also emphasizes deeper engagement with employer partners to better understand their needs and ensure that programs and training efforts are responsive and connected to real workforce demand.

Resource Constraints and Operational Challenges

Federal and state funding for higher education is showing modest gains; however, inflation, enrollment declines, and shifting priorities limit how far those dollars can go. Pandemic-era federal stimulus funds that once helped stabilize college budgets have expired, leaving many institutions facing significant financial constraints. At the same time, colleges and universities are grappling with higher operating costs, enrollment uncertainty, and public pressure to hold down tuition increases.¹⁹

Funding challenges are also present at MSU-West Plains, which does not have a local taxing district and relies heavily on tuition and state funding. When enrollment fluctuates and public funding does not keep pace with costs, it creates ongoing financial pressure and requires careful, strategic planning. These concerns were raised during SWOT focus groups, especially around financial concerns, staffing efficiencies, and day-to-day operations. Many departments operate with limited staff, which can make it difficult to expand programs, take on new initiatives, or ensure continuity when positions are vacated.

¹⁸ Lightcast, labor market data (version 2025.3), as cited in *Economic Leadership, MSU-West Plains and the Region's Workforce Needs* (2026).

¹⁹ Cole Clark, Megan Cluver, Tiffany Fishman, and Danylle Kunkel, “2025 Higher Education Trends: A look at the challenges and opportunities shaping America’s higher education sector,” Deloitte Insights (April 7, 2025), <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/2025-us-higher-education-trends.html>

In response, the strategic plan focuses on financial stability and effective operations. This includes bolstering the financial health of the institution by aligning budgeting with strategic priorities, making the most of existing resources, and planning with more intention for upkeep of facilities and space. It also includes ensuring that employees have the support they need to do their work effectively while addressing pay inequities. Together, these efforts are intended to support a more stable and sustainable future for MSU-West Plains. This came through in the SWOT discussions as well, particularly in relation to staffing.

Positioning within the Missouri State University System

Finally, MSU-West Plains continues to navigate its identity within the Missouri State University system. This emerged as a consistent theme in every focus group. Stakeholders identified several opportunities for more intentional and mutually beneficial partnerships between MSU-West Plains and the Springfield campus, including greater collaboration around workforce needs, greater operational efficiencies, more seamless transfer pathways, and more coordinated recruitment efforts.

To address this, the strategic plan prioritizes strengthening the relationship between MSU-West Plains and the broader MSU system as a central institutional goal. This includes clarifying and affirming MSU-West Plains' distinct identity and mission, while also deepening collaboration in ways that benefit both institutions. A more intentional partnership will strengthen MSU-West Plains' ability to serve its region while leveraging the system-wide strengths to expand opportunities for students.

Clarifying the institution's identity and communicating it effectively will play a critical role in strengthening partnerships, enhancing recruitment efforts, and reinforcing the institution's value to the region. By positioning itself as both a distinct regional leader and collaborative system partner, MSU-West Plains can better align its work with institutional, community, and workforce needs.

Overall, MSU-West Plains is operating in a complex and rapidly changing environment. The challenges are vast, but so are the opportunities. The institution's strong connection to its community, commitment to student success, and alignment with workforce needs provide a solid foundation for future growth. The key to moving forward will be how intentionally those strengths are leveraged to respond to the demographic, economic, and technological changes shaping higher education today.

About Missouri State University-West Plains

MSU-West Plains is a public, two-year, open admission campus of the Missouri State University system. The institution is separately accredited by the Higher Learning

Commission and offers a full college experience, featuring high-quality instruction, along with student housing, opportunities for engagement through a wide range of student activities, and intercollegiate athletics. As part of a system distinguished by its public affairs mission, MSU-West Plains includes public affairs as part of its educational program focus with one tenet aimed at developing “...educated persons of high character and integrity, inspiring them to serve others and their respective communities...”

MSU-West Plains operates under the governance of the Missouri State University Board of Governors. The chancellor serves as the institution’s chief executive officer, reporting to the system president and the board, and is responsible for overall campus operations. The MSU-West Plains Administrative Council, comprised of central administrators, collaborates to develop and implement the institution’s goals and priorities.

Geographic Focus

MSU–West Plains is in West Plains, Missouri, which is the largest city in a 100-mile radius and serves as the commercial center of the region. The University primarily serves students in the Missouri counties of Carter, Douglas, Howell, Oregon, Ozark, Reynolds, Shannon, Texas, Wayne, and Wright.

In addition to serving the educational needs of its service area, MSU-West Plains provides programs to:

- Areas not served by Missouri’s other two-year institutions;
- An international campus in Dalian, China where educational opportunities benefit both regional and international students; and
- The global community of students via traditional and emerging technologies.

History

MSU–West Plains was established in 1963 as the West Plains Residence Center, created to expand access to higher education in rural South Central Missouri. Prior to its founding, residents of West Plains and the surrounding region often had to travel more than 100 miles to attend college, creating a significant barrier to educational attainment and workforce development. The creation of the Residence Center marked an important moment in addressing these geographic and economic challenges.

A key figure in the campus’s founding was state legislator Granvil Vaughan, whose advocacy and persistence were instrumental in bringing a college to the region. Recognizing both the need for local access and the transformative potential of higher education, Vaughan worked to build support among community members, local leaders,

and then-Southwest Missouri State College (now Missouri State University) Board of Regents. Despite initial skepticism locally and at the state level, Vaughan successfully advocated for approval of a trial residence center, contingent upon having at least 100 students enrolled. On September 16, 1963, the West Plains Residence Center opened its doors with 111 students and a small faculty, at first operating out of facilities provided by the West Plains R-7 School District.²⁰

The early years of the Residence Center were defined by strong community support and resourcefulness. Without initial accreditation or guaranteed state funding, the institution relied heavily on local investment and volunteerism. Community members donated facilities, funds, and services, contributing to the development of key campus assets such as the library, student center, and what is now Kellett Hall. Early leadership, including Dean Marvin Green, played multiple roles in administration, recruitment, and operations, reflecting the grassroots nature of the institution's growth.²¹

Institutional recognition expanded over time through a series of legislative actions. In 1977, the campus was officially renamed the West Plains campus of then-Southwest Missouri State University. In 1981, the Missouri legislature granted the campus permanent status, solidifying its role within the state's higher education system. A decade later, House Bill 51 (1991) authorized the campus to offer one-year certificates, two-year associate degrees, and both credit and noncredit courses, significantly expanding its academic mission. In 2005, Senate Bill 98 formally renamed the institution Missouri State University–West Plains, aligning it with the broader university system's name change.²²

Since its founding, MSU–West Plains has evolved from a small satellite learning center into a comprehensive two-year campus offering a full college experience. Today, the campus serves around 2,000 students and provides a range of associate degree programs designed for both transfer and career readiness, as well as certificates and workforce training opportunities. Through Missouri State University's Outreach programs, select bachelor's and master's degrees are also available on the West Plains campus, further expanding access to higher education in the region.

“MSU–West Plains transforms lives through impactful education and training, offering personalized support for student success, and strengthening our communities” is the institution's mission, and it reflects a longstanding commitment to access, community engagement, and regional impact. Over more than six decades, the campus has played a

²⁰ Jennifer Moore, “As MSU-West Plains Celebrates Its 50th Anniversary, a Look Back on Its Challenges, Milestones,” KSMU, February 15, 2013, <https://www.ksmu.org/local-history/2013-02-15/as-msu-west-plains-celebrates-its-50th-anniversary-a-look-back-on-its-challenges-milestones>

²¹ Id.

²² Id.

significant role in transforming the educational, economic, and cultural landscape of southern Missouri, helping to grow a more educated workforce and fostering greater acceptance of higher education across the region.

Current Facts

Academic Programs

MSU–West Plains is a two-year institution that offers 24 associate degrees and 34 certificate programs designed to support both transfer and workforce entry. The institution provides a comprehensive range of programs across liberal arts, health professions, business, agriculture, and technical education.

At the associate level, the institution offers Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science, and Associate of Arts in Teaching degrees, providing students with multiple pathways aligned to their academic and career goals. Transfer-oriented degrees in areas such as general studies, business, agriculture, computer science, engineering, and education prepare students for a seamless transition to four-year institutions. Career and technical programs—including nursing, health information technology, advanced manufacturing, welding and fabrication, veterinary technology, and information technology—support immediate workforce entry and regional economic development.

Certificate programs provide credentials that support short-term training, upskilling, and career advancement. These offerings span agriculture, business, health care, hospitality, information technology, and technical trades, enabling students and working professionals to quickly gain industry-relevant skills.

The institution is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Academic programs are delivered through instructional divisions that emphasize student success, workforce readiness, and responsiveness to regional and state needs. Many programs are developed in collaboration with industry partners to ensure alignment with current and emerging workforce demands.

Enrollment

Fall 2025 enrollment reached 1,986 students, representing the highest enrollment in the past decade. Overall enrollment has remained stable, despite noticeable declines in 2022 and 2023 that were likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While total enrollment has remained steady, the composition of the student body has shifted significantly. The number of degree-seeking students declined from approximately 1,400 in 2015 to 905 in Fall 2025. During the same period, dual credit and dual enrollment

participation more than doubled, increasing from fewer than 400 students to 997. This shift reflects a broader trend toward serving more part-time and high school students.

The geographic reach of the institution has also expanded. Although the majority of students continue to come from within the service region, the proportion of students from outside the region has increased notably in the past two years. By Fall 2025, more than one-third of all students came from areas outside the service region.

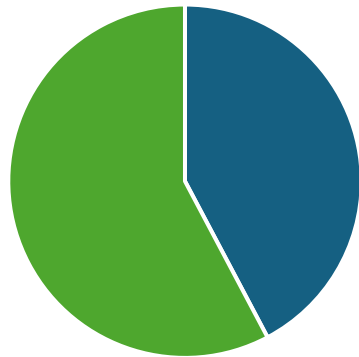
In terms of course delivery, student preferences reflect strong demand for flexibility. Most students (65%) enroll in at least some online coursework, with 38% taking fully online schedules. Seated course participation has increased slightly with 35% of students participating in only seated or hybrid courses, while 27% enroll in a mix of online and in-person courses.

Degrees Conferred

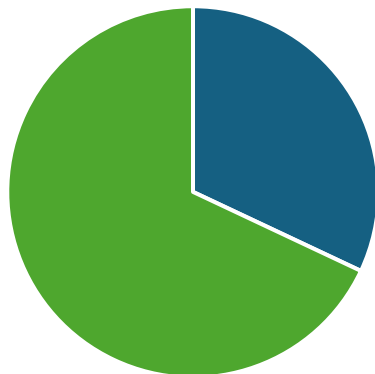
Degrees Conferred (Summer 2025-Spring 2026)	Number
Associate of Arts	127
Associate of Science	125
Associate of Applied Science	35
Certificate	39

Employee Characteristics

Appointment	Faculty	Staff	GA	Student
Full-time	41	90	0	0
Part-Time	54	71	1	53
Total	95	161	1	53



Approximately 42% of employees work full-time



Approximately 32% of full-time faculty members have a terminal degree.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

Missouri State University-West Plains transforms lives through impactful education and training, offering personalized support for student success, and strengthening our communities.

Vision

Missouri State University-West Plains will shape the future of our region by prioritizing learning, expanding pathways to workforce advancement, uplifting our communities, and igniting opportunity through education and innovation.

Values

At Missouri State University-West Plains, being a Grizzly means we **CARE**.

C – Commitment to Students

We place students at the heart of all we do, providing the support, opportunities, and resources they need to succeed.

A – Accountability in Stewardship

We compassionately support our personnel and responsibly steward our fiscal and operational resources through analytical decision-making.

R – Relevance in Education

We deliver rigorous and relevant educational and workforce opportunities that align with regional needs to promote learning, career-readiness, and lifelong growth.

E – Engagement in Our Communities

We engage our communities with purpose, partnership, and a commitment to positive impact.

Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes

GOAL 1: EXPAND AWARENESS OF MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY-WEST PLAINS

Strengthen MSU-West Plains' visibility, reputation, and community engagement to drive enrollment growth and institutional cohesion.

Strategy 1: Implement marketing practices that improve the reach and consistency of messaging and more precisely target audiences and improve brand awareness

Outcome 1.1: By September 2026, a five-year marketing plan will be established and implemented with its own goals, strategies, and key performance indicators.

Outcome 1.2: By June 2027, a coordinated system will be implemented to track prospective student touchpoints and attribute inquiries and applications to specific marketing efforts.

Outcome 1.3: By November 2027, the average of monthly new users visiting the MSU-West Plains website will increase by 15%, from the baseline of 8,000 in 2026 to 9,200, with a yearly target goal thereafter of 10-15% improvement over the previous year.

Outcome 1.4: By August 2027, social media engagement will increase 15% from the baseline of 251,000 for 2025 to 289,000, and link clicks will increase 10% from 22,000 to 24,200.

Outcome 1.5: By August 2027, increases in website traffic and social media engagement will contribute to a 20% increase in inquiries and applications, and a 10% increase in credit hours at census, from the Fall 2025 baseline of 16,816 to 18,498.

Strategy 2: Develop meaningful, quality connections to the communities we serve by organizing, optimizing, and enhancing employee and student outreach efforts

Outcome 2.1: By August 2026, the Engagement Committee will implement a comprehensive annual plan with metrics and key performance indicators to ensure a consistent and meaningful institutional presence at the highest-profile community events across each county in the service area, enhancing institutional visibility and supporting enrollment growth.

Outcome 2.2: By October 2031, the number of meaningful community engagement activities will increase by 50% over the 2025 baseline metrics as determined by the Engagement Committee.

Strategy 3: Break down silos within the campus community and create ambassadors by connecting employees through training, discussion, and improved access to institutional knowledge

Outcome 3.1: By December 2026, employees will be provided with clear and accessible institutional messaging and key information to support outreach, recruitment, and community engagement efforts.

Outcome 3.2: By June 2027, training will be implemented to improve cross-departmental communication and access to institutional knowledge.

Outcome 3.3: At least 80% of full-time employees will participate in the annual holiday lunch and spring picnic each year.

Outcome 3.4: By October 2031, improved internal messaging and coordination will contribute to increased student satisfaction, retention, and enrollment outcomes, as measured against established benchmarks determined by the Engagement Committee.

Strategy 4: Amplify and leverage Grizzly Athletics as a tool for regional, national, and global brand awareness and service to our communities

Outcome 4.1: By June 2030, Grizzly Athletics will compete at a high level as indicated by an increase in regional, district, and national competition visits, from three teams participating in post-season FY 2025 to five teams in FY 2030.

Outcome 4.2: By June 2027, the number of Grizzly student-athletes who continue competing as student-athletes at four-year institutions or professionally will increase by 30%, from 10 in June 2025 to 13 in June 2027.

Outcome 4.3: By June 2027, Grizzly Athletic events will show a 20% increase in game attendance from an average of 436 attendees in FY 2025 to an average of 480 attendees in FY 2027, as measured by ticket sales and pass lists.

GOAL 2: GROW AND MAINTAIN ENROLLMENT

Achieve sustainable enrollment growth and improve student persistence by expanding accessible pathways, strengthening recruitment and retention strategies, and ensuring a seamless student experience from inquiry through completion.

Strategy 1: Strengthen enrollment growth through data-informed recruitment

Outcome 1.1: By October 2031, enrollment of full-time equivalent degree-seeking students will increase by 30%, from a Fall 2025 baseline of 798 to 1037, as measured by annual Fall census data.

Outcome 1.2: By October 1 of each year, the campus will establish an annual enrollment management plan that includes annual goals for recruitment and retention that align with the 2031 goal for enrollment growth. The annual plan will include specific targets for overall growth as well as targets for individual student populations such as academic programs, athletic programs, and the Mountain Grove campus.

Outcome 1.3: By August 2029, 90% of prospective students will receive timely, personalized communication through integrated technology solutions, as measured by communication tracking and response rates.

Outcome 1.4: By August 2030, financial aid awarding processes will improve enrollment yield by at least 10% among aid recipients, as measured by Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates, aid acceptance, and enrollment yield data.

Strategy 2: Improve student persistence through proactive, coordinated support

Outcome 2.1: By October 2031, retention of full-time students will improve from a Fall 2025 baseline of 62% to 66%, reaching the 75th percentile of peer institutions, as measured by a new report created by Institutional Research.

Outcome 2.2: By October 2031, retention rates for part-time students will increase by 30%, from the Fall 2025 baseline of 21% to 27%, as measured by fall-to-fall persistence data (a new report created by Institutional Research).

Outcome 2.3: By October 2031, persistence rates for adult learners will increase by 15%, from the Fall 2025 baseline of 64% to 70% of full-time adult learners and 38% to 53% of part-time adult learners, as measured by fall-to-fall persistence data (a new report created by Institutional Research).

Outcome 2.4: By August 2028, 100% of students identified as needing early intervention will receive personalized outreach from appropriate faculty, success coaches, and advisors within defined timeframes through the early alert system, as measured by early alert response and intervention tracking.

Outcome 2.5: By October 2031, 50% of degree-seeking students placed on Academic Restriction will persist to degree completion within 150% timeframe of completion, and first-time students who voluntarily withdraw will return within two semesters following withdrawal.

Outcome 2.6: By October 2031, the student self-service academic planning tools will produce and maintain 90% accurate degree completion information as measured by annual graduation evaluations.

Strategy 3: Align academic pathways with transfer and workforce outcomes

Outcome 3.1: By October 2031, graduation and transfer rates will improve from a Fall 2025 baseline of 54% to 63%, reaching the 75th percentile, as measured by a new report created by Institutional Research.

Strategy 4: Enhance student experience and campus engagement

Outcome 4.1: By October 2028, student participation in campus events, student organizations, and athletic events will increase by 30%, from the Fall 2025 baseline of 782 to 1,016, as measured by a new report created by Student Life.

Outcome 4.2: By October 2031, student satisfaction and sense of belonging will improve by 10%, as measured by institutional surveys.

Outcome 4.3: By October 2031, 8% of students will participate in a co-curricular academic experience. (e.g., experiential learning, honors program, collegiate presentations/competitions, education abroad).

Strategy 5: Build institutional capacity for student success through defined roles and success coaching

Outcome 5.1: By July 2026, the institution will clearly define, document, and communicate roles related to recruitment and retention, as measured by institutional documentation.

Outcome 5.2: By Fall 2027, a comprehensive student success coaching model will be implemented across all academic and student support areas, as measured by program implementation benchmarks.

Outcome 5.3: By Fall 2028, 80% of faculty and student-facing staff will complete training in student success coaching strategies, early intervention, and student communication, as measured by training records.

GOAL 3: ALIGN INSTITUTIONAL OFFERINGS WITH THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

Ensure academic and workforce programs are aligned with regional economic, workforce, and community needs to improve student completion, employment, and transfer outcomes.

Strategy 1: Increase student enrollment in experiential learning opportunities

Outcome 1.1: By August 2028, the Academic Affairs Division will implement a standardized process for collecting the number of experiential learning opportunities completed by students, as measured by 100% of academic divisions and co-curricular activities submitting data into a centralized database.

Outcome 1.2: By May 2031, student participation in experiential learning will increase by 10% over the FY 2028 baseline established through the data collection process implemented by Academic Affairs as measured by institutional data provided to Academic Affairs.

Strategy 2: Connect curriculum to career readiness for all academic programs

Outcome 2.1: By July 2028, Academic Affairs will establish baseline data from the Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO) assessment and establish a growth goal based on that data.

Outcome 2.2: By May 2031, 80% of graduates will demonstrate increased workforce and career-readiness competencies, as measured by the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and benchmarked against National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) standards.

Strategy 3: Partner with other higher education institutions to expand pathways that improve degree completion efficiency for MSU-West Plains students

Outcome 3.1: By October 2031, MSU-West Plains will increase the number of transfer pathways with institutions from 14 to 28 to support degree completion efficiency and transfer preparation for MSU-West Plains students, as measured by number of memorandums of understanding (MOUs), articulation agreements, and institutionally recognized advising academic maps.

Strategy 4: Enhance the university's role as a regional partner supporting economic growth and community development

Outcome 4.1: By October 2031, academic and training programs will demonstrate alignment with regional workforce needs within a 60-minute drive-time radius using labor market data and advisory board input, with documented implementation of recommendations and 30% enrollment growth in high-demand programs.

GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN FISCAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

Advance long-term institutional sustainability by aligning resource allocation with strategic priorities, strengthening financial reserves, optimizing facilities planning, and sustaining a well-supported workforce.

Strategy 1: Strengthen strategic budget planning for institutional resource allocation

Outcome 1.1: By June 2027, the institution's budget planning process will implement a documented annual budget development timeline that integrates short-term operational needs and long-term financial commitments, as measured by the published budget calendar.

Outcome 1.2: By June 2027, the institution will complete an annual budget planning and review cycle that supports implementation of the strategic plan, as measured by annual budget reports and documented review meetings.

Strategy 2: Enhance financial reserves for institutional operational stability

Outcome 2.1: By June 2027, and at the conclusion of each fiscal year thereafter, the campus will increase its education and general reserve by 1% annually, compared to the FY 2025 baseline.

Strategy 3: Implement facilities planning and prioritization for campus infrastructure to support institutional needs

Outcome 3.1: By June 2027, the institution will conduct a campus-wide review of facility use to identify opportunities for improved space efficiency, as measured by a completed facilities use report and facilities master plan.

Outcome 3.2: By June 2030, recommendations from the facilities master plan will be prioritized and incorporated into the capital improvement plan.

Outcome 3.3: By October 2031, the number of projects on the campus deferred maintenance list will decrease by 20%, from a baseline of 82 projects to 64, as measured by physical plant record. The baseline and goal numbers may be reevaluated when the campus updates its deferred maintenance inventory.

Outcome 3.4: By June 30, 2030, the institution will pursue strategic partnerships and external funding opportunities to support priority facility needs identified in the facilities master plan, including those related to student programs and athletics.

Strategy 4: Sustain a well-supported workforce

Outcome 4.1: By July 2027, employees with five or more years of service and compa-ratios below 80% will be prioritized for pay adjustments to bring them to at least 80% of their salary range midpoint, with emphasis on those in pay grades 45 and below.

Outcome 4.2: By July 2031, all employees will be at 80% of their midpoint pay range.

Outcome 4.3: By April 2027, launch an initial administration of ModernThink's Great Colleges to Work For survey to assess employee satisfaction levels, identify key areas for improvement, and set a goal.

Strategy 5: Promote responsible fiscal management and resource stewardship by reducing institutional costs and financial risk through improved energy efficiency and strengthened revenue collections practices

Outcome 5.1: By July 2027, implement energy conservation measures and negotiate with utility providers to ensure annual utility spending increases at a rate slower than inflation.

Outcome 5.2: By July 2026, identify an existing campus position to be assigned collections duties in addition to current responsibilities.

Strategy 6: Strengthen engagement with University Advancement to support long-term sustainability

Outcome 6.1: By August 2026, the institution will partner with University Advancement to develop and implement an annual plan that includes goals aligned with MSU-West Plains' fundraising priorities and measurably strengthens engagement with the campus.

GOAL 5: OPTIMIZE PARTNERSHIPS WITH MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY IN SPRINGFIELD

Strengthen strategic partnerships with Missouri State University in Springfield to expand academic pathways, increase resource-sharing, and advance regional impact.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with Missouri State University in Springfield to make transfer seamless

Outcome 1.1: By October 2031, the number of students who transfer from the West Plains campus to the Springfield campus (in person, online, or on the West Plains campus) will increase from the 2025 baseline of 55 to 100.

Strategy 2: Develop streamlined admission processes that allow students to enroll across both campuses with minimal administrative barriers

Outcome 2.1: By October 2031, cross-campus enrollment will increase by 15% from the Fall 2025 baseline of 74 Springfield students enrolled in West Plains courses and seven West Plains students enrolled in Springfield classes to 125 and 50 respectively, as measured by a new report created by Institutional Research.

Strategy 3: Recruit students who were denied admission to Missouri State University in Springfield

Outcome 3.1: By Fall 2031, MSU-West Plains will enroll 1% of eligible students who were denied admission to MSU-Springfield, from the Fall 2025 baseline of 0.17% as measured by a new report created by Institutional Research.

Appendix A: Strategic Planning Committee Membership

Committee Co-Chairs

Dr. Jason McCollom

Associate Professor, Department Chair of
Arts, Letters, and Education

Lindsey Waggoner

Director of Career Services

Committee Members

Wayne Cahoj

Bookstore Manager

Joanna Patillo

Assistant Professor of Nursing

Alyssa Collins

Assistant Director, Human Resources;
Institutional Compliance Liaison

Rachel Peterson

Director of Athletics

Chad Corley

Associate Vice Chancellor for Marketing &
Communications

Dasha Russell

Assistant Professor, Associate Dean

Trevor Cressman

Director of Workforce Development &
Community Education

Tresa Ryan

Assistant Professor, Program Director,
Department Chair of Health Information
Technology

Heath Lair

Technology Support Specialist

Dr. Brenda Smith

Associate Professor, Program
Coordinator-Hospitality Leadership and
Child and Family Development,
Department Chair of Business & Applied
Science

Rocky Long

Instructor, Director of Music

Lauren Willis

Director of Counseling Services

Appendix B: SWOT Analysis Small Groups

Small group discussions for the 2026-2031 Strategic Plan kicked off during the Fall 2025 semester. Sessions were conducted with multiple groups, and in all, over 100 stakeholders—including faculty, staff, students, and community and industry partners—participated in focus groups, interviews, and surveys. Meetings were held in person and virtually for the West Plains campus, and various groups of attendees represented those contributing to the project:

- Academic Leadership
- Administrative Council members
- Alumni and friends
- Business and community leaders
- Director-level administrators
- Elected officials
- Faculty
- Faculty Senate
- Staff
- Staff Senate
- Student Government Association
- Students

In addition, a consultant conducted individual interviews with the presidents of Missouri State University-West Plains' primary "friends" groups, Friends of Garnett Library and the Grizzly Club; current and former members of the Board of Governors, the president of Missouri State University, economic developers, and superintendents.

Finally, the consultant surveyed area employers by reaching out to every chamber of commerce in the service area.

Appendix C: Work Group Membership

Goal 1: Expand Awareness of Missouri State University-West Plains

Co-Chairs

Chad Corley*

Associate Vice Chancellor for Marketing & Communications

Rachel Peterson*

Director of Athletics

Members

Kris Brinkerhoff

Instructor, Web & Media Services Specialist

Emilie Brotherton

Support Coordinator, ASCEND

Rocky Long*

Instructor, Director of Music

Dr. Jason McCollom*

Associate Professor, Department Chair of Arts, Letters, and Education
Co-Chair of Strategic Planning Committee

Ashlee Smith

Instructor, Allied Health & Nursing

Kenzie Warren

Admission Counselor

Lauren Willis*

Director of Counseling Services

**Denotes Strategic Planning Committee members*

Goal 2: Grow and Maintain Enrollment

Co-Chairs

Melissa Jett

Director of Admissions

Dr. Angela Totty

Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Services

Members

ReBena Atkinson

Instructor, AAT Program Director, Dual Credit Coordinator

Michelle Bryan

Registrar

Bruce Cavitt

Academic Advisor

Jennifer Edgeller

Tutoring & PAWS Coordinator

Kristi Huff

Administrative Assistant I

Jacy Miller

Mental Health Clinician

Anthony Priest

Assistant Professor, Department Chair of Natural & Applied Sciences

Cathy Proffitt-Boys

Associate Professor, Dean of Career & Technical Education

Carrie Steen

Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness

Todd Stockton

Technology Support Specialist

Pam Tate

Mountain Grove Campus Coordinator, Student Support Specialist

Lisa Wade

Assistant Professor, Dean of Nursing/Director for Nursing

Justin Wade

Director of ASCEND

Joan Wright

Coordinator of Adult Literacy & College Readiness Programs

**Denotes Strategic Planning Committee members*

Goal 3: Align Institutional Offerings with the Needs of the Communities We Serve

Co-Chairs

Trevor Cressman*

Director of Workforce Development & Community Education

Dr. Michael Orf

Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

Members

Lacey Campbell

Assistant Professor, Department Chair of Nursing

Elizabeth Mahan

Instructor, Behavioral Health Support Program

Gary Phillips

Professor, Department Chair of English, Communications & Letters

Brenda Smith*

Associate Professor, Program Coordinator-Hospitality Leadership and Child and Family Development, Department Chair of Business & Applied Science

Lindsey Waggoner*

Director of Career Services

Co-Chair of Strategic Planning Committee

**Denotes Strategic Planning Committee members*

Goal 4: Strengthen Fiscal and Organizational Resources

Co-Chairs

Keri Elrod

Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Support

Dr. Robert Greim

Director of Development

Members

Wayne Cahoj*

Bookstore Manager

Drew Clark

Digital Marketing Coordinator

Alyssa Collins*

Assistant Director, Human Resources; Institutional Compliance Liaison

Kileene Collins

Executive Assistant III, Student Services

Alex Graham

Assessment & Accreditation Director

Christina Kerley

Accounting Manager, Business Office Director

Brian Mitchell

Director of Facility Operations

Dasha Russell*

Assistant Professor, Associate Dean

Jennifer Walker

Director of Financial Aid

**Denotes Strategic Planning Committee members*

Goal 5: Optimize Partnerships with Missouri State University in Springfield

Chair

Dr. Michael Orf

Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

Members

Leigh Adams

Associate Professor, Dean of General Education & Preprofessional Programs

Cindy Bridges

Director of Advising and Academic Support

CJ Collins

Director of Management Information Systems

Heath Lair*

Technology Support Specialist

Krista Lair

Director of Online Learning & Instructional Tech

Joanna Patillo*

Assistant Professor of Nursing

Erica Puckett

Assistant Director of Admissions

**Denotes Strategic Planning Committee members*

Appendix D: Peer Institutions

Process

Institutional Research established criteria to use to identify peer institutions in consultation with the Strategic Planning Committee and the Administrative Council, then identified peers that meet the criteria. The criteria and a draft list of peers were presented to the Board of Governors at their February 19, 2026, Programs and Planning Committee meeting.

Criteria

- Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma institutions
- Carnegie-aligned (Associate's Colleges: High Transfer or Mixed)
- Strong transfer mission with applied/CTE programs
- Mostly rural or small population center
- Comparable enrollment scale and governance
- Comparable transfer rate

Peers

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Arkansas Northeastern College | 10. North Arkansas College |
| 2. Arkansas State University–
Mountain Home | 11. North Central Missouri College
(MO) |
| 3. Coffeyville Community College
(KS) | 12. Pratt Community College (KS) |
| 4. Connors State College (OK) | 13. State Fair Community College
(MO) |
| 5. Crowder College (MO) | 14. Three Rivers College (MO) |
| 6. Eastern Oklahoma State College | 15. University of Arkansas Community
College–Morriton |
| 7. Garden City Community College
(KS) | 16. University of Arkansas Hope–
Texarkana |
| 8. Mineral Area College (MO) | 17. Northeastern Oklahoma A&M
College |
| 9. Moberly Area Community College
(MO) | |