

Criterion 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures, and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

4.A. Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance, data-informed decision making, and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

Argument

Guided by its mission and core values that prioritize integrity and community, UCA's administrative structures ensure operational effectiveness through a strong system of shared governance and data-informed decisions based on broad input from its students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, UCA's mission to remain responsive to the diverse needs of those it serves and its commitment to service and partnerships propel active engagement with external constituencies.

Shared Governance

The [Faculty Senate](#) serves as the primary governing body for faculty interests, advising university administration and the Board of Trustees on academic policy, faculty welfare, and institutional strategy. The Senate consists of 22 elected representatives from each academic college, the library, and the faculty at large. Each year senators elect an Executive Committee, consisting of the President, Vice President/President Elect, Secretary, and Parliamentarian, who set the Senate's agenda and lead meetings twice per month throughout the Fall and Spring semesters. Senators serving on one of four standing committees evaluate and make recommendations on faculty welfare, academic quality, institutional support resources, and university committee governance. Over the past six years, the Senate helped guide academic operations through the COVID-19 pandemic, recommended updates to the Faculty Handbook, advocated for competitive salary adjustments and fringe benefits, and advanced funding for faculty Research Empowerment Grants (see [minutes](#)).

The [Staff Senate](#) advocates for UCA staff by communicating recommendations to campus leadership and promoting the welfare, professional growth, and recognition of staff members. The Senate's structure consists of 29 elected staff senators representing

diverse university divisions. Each year senators elect an Executive Committee, consisting of the President, Vice President/President Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian, who set the Senate's agenda and lead meetings twice per month. Senators serve on dedicated standing committees, charged by the Staff Senate to complete specific annual tasks or bring recommendations to the Senate concerning university business. [Meeting minutes](#) from 2020 through 2026 demonstrate a strong record of impact, including providing financial relief to staff experiencing severe unforeseen hardships, awarding Staff Senate Scholarships and Professional Development grants, hosting annual employee recognition initiatives, organizing campus-wide events like the Spring Social and holiday Angel Bear Tree drives, and consistently advocating for staff compensation, policy revisions, and working conditions during institutional decision-making.

The [Student Government Association](#) (SGA) advocates for UCA students, with the core mission of always putting "Students First." The SGA serves as a liaison between students, faculty, staff, and administration; fairly allocates student activity funds; addresses student-related policies; and formally represents the student body. The structure of the SGA includes a student-elected Senate comprising Class Presidents, Vice Presidents, Class Representatives, Academic College Senators, Graduate Senators, Non-Traditional Senators, and an International Senator. It is led by an Executive Board that consists of the Executive President, Executive Vice President, Vice President of Operations, and Vice President of Finance. The organization also uses a system of Standing Committees, including the Student Activity Fund Advisory Committee, Finance Committee, Ways and Means Committee, and Public Relations Committee, to handle specific legislative and operational duties. Each year, the SGA considers and votes on resolutions put before its members. For example, in the 2020-2021 academic year, the SGA passed [resolutions](#) promoting voting accessibility on Election Day, celebrating campus diversity during Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month, and formally expressing gratitude for the resilience of students alongside the dedicated efforts of campus health, housing, and dining service staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beyond the main governing bodies, students, faculty, and staff also serve on 53 standing committees, councils, and boards as charged in the [Faculty Handbook](#) or the [University Committee on Committees Handbook](#). The standing committees in the Faculty Handbook consist of faculty representatives from each academic college and the library, as well as student representatives and ex officio administrators as appropriate to the committee's charge. These committees govern a wide range of academic and administrative responsibilities, including faculty rights, handbook maintenance, curriculum oversight, research support and compliance, academic integrity and student discipline, sabbatical leave, and faculty awards, development, and

salaries. The committees outlined in the Committee on Committees Handbook consist of representatives from staff, faculty, and students as appropriate to the charge of each committee. They encompass a broad spectrum of institutional governance, spanning strategic planning, committee administration, student housing and assistance, employee benefits and wellness, regulatory compliance and campus safety, and operational functions such as technology, athletics, environmental sustainability, public art, and university events.

In addition to the standing university committees, faculty serve on department, school, and college committees that provide oversight of academic operations and decisions, including curriculum and assessment, tenure and promotion, personnel searches, and research compliance. Members of the university administration meet regularly to discuss institutional priorities and consider recommendations from the aforementioned committees. For example, the [Council of Deans](#) meets twice a month to advise the provost and consider academic program and policy recommendations from the curriculum committees and councils. The President's Cabinet, consisting of the president's staff and division heads, meet regularly to advise the president on operational decisions consistent with the university's mission and strategic priorities. Ultimately, the [Board of Trustees](#) convenes during five scheduled meetings per year, or as needed, to hear notifications and reports, and act on proposals from the university administration in accordance with board policies and state law (see the assurance argument for Criterion 2.C).

Data-Informed Decision Making

The university regularly bases its decisions on the analysis of data collected by the institution and shared with relevant campus constituents. Appropriate staff and administrators can generate on-demand data reports using Argos, a reporting platform that pulls student and financial information from our Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. The Office of Institutional Research also built several Argos dashboards which allow academic leaders to generate custom reports of data trends over time, including class enrollment by time and day, number of majors and SSCH production, DFWI rates, number of degrees awarded, and student-to-faculty ratios. Department chairs and school directors use these dashboards to make projections about future enrollment and program health. The following examples demonstrate the use of data to inform institutional decisions over the last six years.

Summer School Planning

In addition to the Argos dashboards, members of the Academic Council, consisting of all department chairs and school directors, developed a [spreadsheet template](#) that uses data downloaded from Argos to help chairs and directors forecast summer school revenues and expenses, identify trends in summer enrollment over time, and plan future

summer sessions in a fiscally responsible manner.

Salary Study

In 2024-2025, the university engaged in a study of faculty and staff salaries to better understand how UCA compares to peer institutions for faculty and staff pay, and to give UCA administration the data needed to inform discussions for the next three budget cycles. UCA contracted with Gallagher Consulting, a national leader in the area of university compensation, to gather salary data from peer institutions and to advise the members of an ad hoc working group that included representation from the Staff Senate and Staff Senate Compensation Committee, the Faculty Senate and Faculty Salary Review Committee, Institutional Research, Human Resources and Risk Management, and the Office of the President. In collaboration with the Faculty Salary Review Committee and the Staff Senate Compensation Committee, the working group developed pay structures for faculty and staff informed by median salaries of peer institutions. The pay structures identified the target market salary for each faculty and staff position adjusted for years in the position (see the assurance argument for Criterion 4.B for more information). Human Resources communicated information about the salary study to campus in a [frequently-asked-questions document](#) available on their website.

Financial Planning

UCA builds its base budget annually on projected enrollment data, using a conservative bias to prevent over commitment of funds that do not materialize. Since 2018, UCA has paid close attention to the projected trends of Arkansas high-school graduates as a function of the state's birth rate, and the likely impact on UCA enrollments and revenue. State projections showed a 2.2% decrease in high school graduates from 2019 to 2024, followed by a short-term 6.5% increase in 2025, and then a precipitous 8% decline from 2025 to 2032. Coupled with lower college-going rates in Arkansas, the Educational Advisory Board (EAB), an education consulting firm, projected a 20% or greater decline in students attending four-year regional universities in Arkansas from 2017 to 2029. As a result of these projections, the UCA administration built declining enrollment into future budgets and launched the Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI) to realign internal resources with the strategic priorities that would sustain the university through diminishing revenue (see the assurance argument for Criterion 4.B for more information). After the annual base budget opens each fiscal year, the Division of Finance and Administration tracks enrollment data and adjusts the budget based on actual revenue and expenditures throughout the year. The Vice President for Finance and Administration provides updated financial reports to the Board of Trustees, and these reports provide data that assist in decisions around hiring, salary adjustments, infrastructure investments, and a variety of other decisions related to university

operations.

Engagement With Internal and External Constituencies

Internally, the university administration engages with campus constituencies through the established shared governance structure outlined earlier. For example, the president holds monthly standing meetings with the three senate presidents, which also includes the provost, the chief of staff, and the vice president for student affairs. He also meets monthly with the executive committee of each senate. Since 2013, the presidents of the Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and SGA have directly addressed the Board of Trustees before action agenda votes, ensuring the board considers diverse campus perspectives. The senate presidents also outline their annual plans at the October board meeting and recap accomplishments each May. In addition, at the start of each Fall semester, the president, the provost, the Faculty Senate president, and the Staff Senate president present their vision and priorities for the new academic year to the convened faculty and staff at the Opening Convocation. Each senate also provides channels for constituents to ask questions, raise concerns, and offer input, which may prompt further investigation or action. Furthermore, the president and provost attend Faculty Senate meetings to provide timely updates and answer questions. The president also meets with the SGA twice each semester, and the provost attends the monthly meetings of the Academic Council, which consists of all department chairs and school directors.

At least once per semester, the president hosts Campus Talks open to the campus community, during which the president and each of the senate presidents provide updates on that year's initiatives and answer questions. From January of 2020 to March of 2024, the president hosted a series of ten [Campus Forums](#) to ensure the campus had a thorough understanding of the purpose, goals, and progress of the Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI).

UCA also engages with external constituencies through a variety of means to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its educational programs and operations. For example, external reviewers and accrediting agencies periodically evaluate our academic programs, providing feedback for improvements (see the assurance argument for Criterion 3.F for more information). Various colleges, departments, and programs also seek input from public advisory boards. Examples include:

- The College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences maintains a ten-member [college advocacy board](#) consisting of alumni and friends of the college who assist the college in advancing education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as enhancing service to arts patrons, alumni, the community, and external stakeholders.
- The College of Business [advisory board](#) consists of local business leaders who

advocate for the college's mission, guide academic leadership, support fundraising and student career success, and connect faculty and students with external industry insights and professional networks.

- The College of Education regularly convenes an executive advisory board and advisory boards for each of its programs consisting of UCA faculty and K-12 teachers and leadership (see [minutes](#)).
- The College of Health and Behavioral Sciences maintains an [advisory board](#) consisting of UCA current and retired faculty, CHBS alumni, area health professionals, and community members.
- The Schedler Honors College meets periodically with the Honors College Partnership Board, consisting of alumni and parents.
- The Department of Computer Science and Engineering meets annually with its [advisory board](#) which provides advocacy, guidance, and support to the department, and serves as a liaison between the department and IT employers in the state.
- The Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies maintains an 18 member [Alumni Advisory Council](#) that advises on curriculum, mentors students, and collaborates with faculty to support events and fundraising efforts.
- The Department of Health Sciences maintains [advisory boards](#) consisting of area health professionals for each of its programs.
- The Engineering Physics program has a five-member advisory board of alumni and primary employers that meets annually with faculty to provide guidance and feedback that will help the department succeed and develop new opportunities.
- The Community Development Institute (CDI) [advisory board](#) consists of regional community leaders that assist with the development of CDI curriculum, marketing and promotion, resource development, and external stakeholder support.

Certain university standing committees also include members of the community as appropriate to their charge, including the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, Institutional Review Board, Public Art Committee, Service-Learning Advisory Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, and Veterans Committee.

UCA partners with local industry and other institutions of higher education to meet the educational and workforce needs of the region. For example, the [UCA Aviation Academy](#) works with Central Flying Academy of Little Rock to provide non-credit instruction leading to pilot licensure at the Conway Regional Airport. The Department of

Health Sciences has [consortial arrangements](#) with Baptist Health College of Little Rock and CHI St. Vincent Infirmiry School of Radiologic Technology to provide upper-division instruction in Medical Laboratory Science, Nuclear Medicine Technology, and Radiography leading to a Bachelor of Science. UCA partners with [20 two-year institutions](#) to maintain the seamless transfer of coursework through 475 2+2 articulation agreements. The College of Science and Engineering recently partnered with the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton and the Conway Development Corporation to launch the new Innovation Campus that co-locates academic programs, technical training, and industry partners to prepare graduates for high-demand careers.

UCA also works closely with the state government. UCA's Director of Governmental Affairs and External Relations actively engages with state legislators to ensure legislative actions support UCA's mission to serve Arkansas students. For example, the state legislature passed Act 340 (a.k.a., the ACCESS act) in 2025 mandating higher-education reforms that [ensure students build skills and access quality career pathways](#), [create free, unbiased learning settings](#), [save students money](#), [create opportunities for all learners](#), and [eliminate barriers to scholarships](#). Act 566 of 2025 established a new [requisite core](#) as the basis of the state's minimum general education curriculum, requiring all students complete a course in U.S. History and American Government, rather than a choice of either one.

UCA leadership engages regularly with the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE) to implement and follow these and other existing laws and policies. The president meets periodically with the Commissioner of ADHE, as well as the other presidents and chancellors in Arkansas, and the provost, associate provost, and vice president for student affairs also attend the bi-annual meetings of Chief Academic Officers and Chief Student Affairs Officers to learn about updates and new initiatives from ADHE. Relevant UCA offices submit annual reports to ADHE, and the Office of the Provost communicates regularly with ADHE's Academic Affairs Office to ensure timely submission of program reviews, viability reports, and curriculum proposals to the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board. UCA actively participates in ADHE working groups and task forces. For example, UCA's president is leading an ADHE working group to incorporate return-on-investment metrics in the state's productivity funding formula per the ACCES act. The Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness served on a task force that produced recommendations on the development of reduced-credit bachelor's degrees, and the Assistant Provost for Assessment and General Education represents UCA on a working group redesigning the state minimum general education requirements. Finally, the Offices of the Provost, Institutional Research, and the Registrar have coordinated closely with ADHE over the past year to convert all of UCA's courses to the new state-wide common course numbering system.

4.B. Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

Argument

UCA's mission and core values guide its financial and personnel management to fulfill immediate operational demands while ensuring long-term institutional sustainability. Through operational transparency and balancing short-term spending with long-term stewardship, UCA's fiscal management demonstrates integrity and a commitment to the public trust. By optimizing its resources towards student success, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and its faculty and staff, UCA promotes intellectual excellence, academic vitality, and a commitment to the people who make up our community.

Financial Resources

Over the past six years, UCA's financial resources successfully navigated through the COVID-19 pandemic and declining enrollments thanks to intentional efforts such as the Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI), the UCA Now fundraising campaign, and other strategic decisions to reduce costs, prioritize ongoing deferred maintenance, and realize debt savings via refinancing. These efforts have led to a prolonged period of financial stability over the past six years. UCA's cash reserves have remained steady during this period, exceeding 3% of the total operating budget, with current reserves at 4.34%. The maintenance of healthy reserves has also allowed the university to address major renovations and deferred maintenance, as well as respond effectively to unexpected maintenance needs, over the past two years. UCA's composite financial index (CFI) score has exceeded its benchmark in four of the past five years (fiscal years 2021 – 2025), with the year in exception the result of a strategic information technology update that resulted in increased expenses. We expect a temporary decrease in the CFI score for the 2026 fiscal year due to the strategic use of reserves as described above. As another index of UCA's financial stability, Moody's bond rating of UCA has remained A2 with a stable outlook, indicating low credit risk and a low likelihood of a rating change over the medium term.

Because of the efforts described below, UCA has been able to:

- Construct much-needed academic facilities, including the Windgate Performing Arts Center and the Integrated Health Sciences Building.
- Convert the old Communication Sciences and Disorders building into a new Student Success and Veterans Resource Center.
- Renovate academic spaces, housing, and food service facilities, including upgrades to air quality control across campus.
- Continue investment in information technology and network improvements.

- Fund the UCA Commitment initiative and other institutional and private scholarships.
- Fund cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), market equity increases, and an increase of the minimum annual salary to \$29,120.
- Lease space at the Conway Development Center to house the new Innovation Campus.

Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI)

Resource optimization efforts began in 2017 with the completion of a “zero base budget” exercise to identify gaps between departments’ self-reported needs and current budget resources, followed in 2018 and 2019 by the selection of a modified revenue center management approach that delegates revenue and expense responsibility to the academic colleges and a software system (Anaplan) to provide budget data analytics. After these three years of preparation, the UCA administration formally launched the Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI) in 2020, as an ongoing, data-informed, campus-wide effort to optimize the university’s budget. Over the next six years, ROI allowed UCA to identify and align existing internal resources to support student success, invest in strategic initiatives, build financial reserves, and retain employees at a competitive market salary. ROI generated 75% of “new” funding through reallocation rather than relying on state funding growth or steep tuition hikes, while avoiding furloughs, layoffs, and cuts to employee benefits. Recurring internal reallocations of \$2.0 million to \$2.5 million annually enabled UCA to absorb projected net revenue decreases while still funding COLAs, faculty advancement pools, increases in the minimum salary, and increases to 90% of market to keep salaries competitive.

UCA NOW

Bolstering good financial management, UCA has enhanced its commitment to fundraising over the past six years. In 2021, the university publicly launched a comprehensive capital campaign, [UCA NOW](#), with a goal of \$100 million by June 2024. The campaign exceeded its goal, raising over \$109 million to support

- 114 newly endowed scholarships, totaling \$1.5 million in private scholarships awarded annually
- 15 new faculty and programmatic endowments
- 300% growth in endowments from \$17 million to \$52 million
- The new Integrated Health Sciences building, which expanded facilities to graduate up to 50 more nurses each year, serve 1,000 clients per year in the Community Care Clinic, and provide 7,000 hours of therapy, screening, and evaluation in the Speech-Language Hearing Center.
- The Windgate Center for the Fine and Performing Arts, thanks to a \$20 million matching gift from the Windgate Foundation.
- UCA Commitment, including a \$10 million endowment from the Windgate Foundation and over \$438,000 in donor gifts

Personnel Resources

UCA maintains sufficient faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services (see assurance argument for Criterion 3.C). To that end, UCA has managed its personal resources by providing competitive pay to attract and retain needed talent and offering voluntary retirement incentives to right-size its personnel base in the face of declining enrollments.

Competitive Pay

As a result of a campus-wide salary study conducted in 2024-2025 (see the assurance argument for Criterion 4.A), UCA created pay structures that identify a target market salary for each staff position and faculty rank adjusted for years in position or rank. In June 2025, the UCA administration notified employees and their supervisors of their current base salaries as a percentage of their target salary from the pay structure. According to Gallagher Consulting, to remain competitive with peers, UCA should keep employee salaries within 10% of their targets. Below 90% of target represents a possible misalignment and below 85% represents significant misalignment. The pay structures revealed that 41 (5.99%) of 684 staff members and 135 (28.24%) of 478 faculty members had a base salary less than 90% of their target. On January 1, 2026, all employees included in the study below 85% of their target salary had their base salaries adjusted to 85%, and on July 1, 2026, all employees included in the study below 90% of their target salary had their base salaries adjusted to 90%.

UCA also provided a 2% across-the-board salary increase in four of the last six fiscal years (2022, 2024, 2025, and 2026) to adjust for the rising cost of living. Faculty members who earned promotion also received an increase in base salary according to the following ranks:

- \$2,500 for Lecturer/Clinical Instructor I to Lecturer/Clinical Instructor II
- \$4,000 for Lecturer/Clinical Instructor II to Senior Lecturer/Clinical Instructor
- \$4,000 for Assistant Professor to Associate Professor
- \$5,500 for Associate Professor to Professor

In addition to base salary adjustments, the Board of Trustees [approved](#) a \$600 bonus for all full-time employees paid on November 15, 2024, as the result of a one-time reallocation of \$1,073,160 in the budget for the 2025 fiscal year. The Board of Trustees also [approved](#) an annual faculty longevity bonus similar to the career service recognition bonus already in place for staff. Staff members with 10 or more years of service receive a one-time annual career service recognition bonus on the anniversary month of their hire. The amount of the bonus increases with years in service, paying \$800 for 10-14 years and increasing to \$1,500 for 25 or more. Beginning in 2025, all full-time continuing faculty members in a terminal rank (professor or senior lecturer/clinical instructor) will also receive a one-time bonus on September 15, with amounts also increasing based on years in rank, from \$800 for 1-4 years to \$1,500 for 15 or more years.

Voluntary Employee Retirement Incentive

The UCA Board of Trustees approved the following four Voluntary Employee Retirement Incentives, or VERIs, over the last eight fiscal years (FY):

- **FY 2020:** Full-time employees 60 years of age or older with a minimum of ten full years of continuous service at UCA could receive a 25% payout of their FY 2020 base salary plus an additional 1% for every year of service up to a maximum of 50%. Of the 179 eligible employees, 49 accepted the VERI.
- **FY 2021:** Full-time employees 59.5 years of age or older with a minimum of ten full years of continuous service at UCA could receive a 10% payout of their FY 2021 base salary plus an additional 0.5% for every year of service over ten years up to a maximum of 20%, and a \$300 per month contribution into a health reimbursement account for 36 months after retirement. Of the 175 eligible employees, 19 accepted the VERI.
- **FY 2023:** Full-time employees 59.5 years of age or older with four or more years of combined service or any age with 28 full years of service to UCA or the State of Arkansas could receive a 10% payout of their FY 2023 base salary plus an additional 0.5% for every year of service over ten years up to a maximum of 20%, and a \$300 per month contribution into a health reimbursement account for 48 months after retirement. Of the 249 eligible employees, 67 accepted the VERI.
- **FY 2027:** Full-time employees 55 years of age or older with four or more years of combined service or any age with 28 full years of service to UCA or the State of Arkansas could receive \$5,000 plus 20% of their FY 2027 base salary plus an additional 1% for every year of service over ten years up to a maximum payout of 30% of base salary plus \$5,000. Of the 360 eligible employees, 51 accepted the VERI.

A total of 186 employees accepted the VERI. While costing UCA in the short-term, the incentives freed salary funds for future reallocation to strategic priorities.

4.C. Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations, and the external environment.

Argument

Guided by its mission and core values, UCA engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement across its institutional operations. UCA's commitment to integrity and intellectual excellence directs transparent operational proceedings and continuous assessment of its academic programs, ensuring that student learning assessments and internal operations data inform strategic decisions. UCA uses enrollment and financial forecasts to direct institutional resources toward the programs and infrastructure needed to deliver an outstanding education that remains responsive to the needs of those we serve.

Strategic Planning

UCA has a history of strategic planning to guide decision making and resource allocations. On May 27, 2021, the Board of Trustees approved a strategic plan to direct university operations through the end of the 2026 fiscal year (FY), covering the majority of this review period. On May 27, 2026, the Board of Trustees approved UCA 2035, a strategic plan for FY 2027 through FY 2035.

Strategic Plan FY 2022 – 2026

In October 2019, the president [charged](#) the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) to revise and refresh the existing strategic plan. The SPC included the Associate Provost (serving as chair), the Provost and Executive Vice President, the presidents and vice presidents of the Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and SGA, as well as faculty, staff, and student appointees, and a representative each from the Council of Deans, President's Cabinet, Board of Trustees, and community. The SPC prepared initial drafts of the strategic goals and sought campus feedback in Spring 2020, but that review was interrupted by the pandemic until Fall 2020. Following the campus feedback, the SPC submitted the final draft of the revised strategic plan in January 2021 for consideration by the Board of Trustees (see [Strategic Plan Timeline 2019-2020](#)).

UCA's [Strategic Plan for FY 2022–2026](#) maintained the university's 2011 vision, mission, and core values and established three strategic goals designed to (1) support and empower students to succeed, (2) ensure students thrive after graduation, and (3) address grand challenges while maintaining long-term sustainability. Additionally, the plan identified “enablers of success” to drive action in alignment with the goals, including the Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI), performance metrics to track progress towards the strategic goals, and long-term external partnerships to expand opportunities for students and regional impact.

In the preamble to the strategic goals, the plan emphasized UCA's commitment not only to the success of its students, but also to deploying strategic initiatives that engage the entire university in addressing “grand challenges” facing the state and region. In June 2022, UCA

identified one such grand challenge: financial barriers preventing Arkansas students from attending or staying in college. Select members of UCA's leadership converged in a working group, nicknamed the "Moonshot Team," to prove and execute a plan that would be a game changer in the state by removing financial barriers to a postsecondary education. Over the course of the next fifteen months, the Moonshot Team grew into multiple groups working to develop the policies, procedures, and communications necessary to implement what became [UCA Commitment](#), UCA's [Quality Initiative](#). On September 7, 2023, UCA Commitment was officially launched and marketed to prospective first-time undergraduate students seeking admission for the Fall 2024 term.

In the 2021 – 2022 academic year, the SPC identified [key performance indicators](#) (KPIs) to track progress towards the three strategic goals. Over the last five years, these KPIs demonstrated that UCA's strategic plan effectively aligned institutional resources with measurable improvements in student success, post-graduate mobility, and long-term organizational sustainability.

The KPIs for Strategic Goal 1—first-year retention rate, six-year graduation rate, and time to degree—included target goals by 2025. UCA exceeded its 2025 goal for six-year graduation rate with a five-year rolling average of 52.04% (rising continuously from 49.36% for the Fall 2015 cohort to 53.86% for Fall 2019, well above the 48.00% target) and successfully achieved its time-to-degree goal with a five-year rolling average of 4.42 years (improving to 4.27 years in 2024–2025 against the 4.40-year benchmark). While the five-year rolling average for one-year retention (73.15%) fell short of the 76.00% goal, recent annual rebounds (reaching 74.20% in Fall 2024) and notable gains among Pell Grant recipients (from 67.00% of the Fall 2020 cohort to 71.2% of the Fall 2024 cohort) demonstrate meaningful progress toward closing student success gaps under Strategic Goal 1.

KPIs for Strategic Goal 2 demonstrate high post-graduation career and academic outcomes, including a 73.81% five-year average placement rate in full-time employment or graduate school within six months of graduation, consistently high satisfaction rates averaging 90.85% for undergraduate and 93.62% for graduate degree earners, a decreasing proportion of undergraduates taking on student loan debt (dropping from 53.50% to 50.50%), and more than double the number of engaged alumni (growing from 2,278 to 4,583, pushing the alumni engagement score from 2.69 to 3.09).

Finally, KPIs aligned with Strategic Goal 3 show long-term institutional sustainability, highlighted by an expansion in first-time undergraduate enrollment from 1,854 (Fall 2021) to 2,079 (Fall 2025), a strong 18.5% average market share among the ten four-year public universities, steady student semester credit hour (SSCH) production with growth in online capacity (comprising 22.9% of undergraduate and 44.8% of graduate SSCH in 2024–2025), an unblemished Moody's "A2 with Stable Outlook" credit rating, operating budget reserves averaging 4.14% (consistently exceeding the 3% policy minimum), and cash on hand averaging 153 days (comfortably exceeding the 90-day operational baseline, though short of its long-term goal of 180 days).

In [January 2025](#), with assistance from the Educational Advisory Board (EAB), UCA embarked on the development of a new strategic plan to guide the university through 2035. The planning process began with a [Central Strategy Team](#) (CST) conducting detailed SWOT analyses and landscape reviews to evaluate UCA's identity, enrollment, market share, student readiness challenges, and regional workforce alignment. During [February](#) and [March](#), the CST gathered broad internal perspectives by conducting a campus-wide survey, reviewing market trends, and hosting over 20 Community Conversations across departments. By [April](#) and [May](#), the team moved beyond broad visioning, performing gap analyses and dividing into breakout groups to refine emerging themes into four draft strategic imperatives. In [June](#), the CST translated these imperatives into specific goals, and by [July](#), UCA expanded participation by onboarding dedicated [Working Groups](#) consisting of academic and administrative subject-matter experts. During [July](#) and [August](#), these working groups pressure-tested the goals by identifying resource dependencies (such as space, staffing, and technology), preliminary cost estimates, and initial and long-term ownership to ensure the goals were actionable. By [September 2025](#), the team finalized the draft imperatives, goals, and objectives for campus-wide Feedback Labs designed to gather insights from faculty, staff, and students during the remainder of the fall term. In the end, this year-long strategic planning process involved

- 1,400+ survey participants
- 500+ contributors in Community Conversations and Feedback Labs
- Representation from every division through cross-campus Working Groups
- Dozens of advisory groups, forums, and leadership reviews
- Three major rounds of campus feedback integrated into the plan.

[UCA 2035](#) anchors the university's operations to the following four imperatives, each with specific goals, defined objectives, and actionable tactics.

1. **Centering Student Success:** We put students first by pairing excellent teaching with a connected, caring, and academically strong environment where every learner can thrive.
2. **Arkansas Campus of Innovation:** We bring people, disciplines, and ideas together to turn collaboration, creativity, and applied learning into solutions that strengthen Arkansas and serve the public good.
3. **Discovery in Action:** We make discovery central to the UCA experience, using research, creative activity, and real-world problem-solving to strengthen learning and deliver meaningful impact.
4. **Future-Ready Foundations:** We invest in the people, culture, systems, and infrastructure that enable our community to excel—today and for decades ahead.

These imperatives will define UCA's priorities for the decade ahead, focusing the university's decisions and actions while allowing it to adapt as conditions change. Beginning in Fall 2026, a new Strategic Planning Committee will convene to set metrics for evaluating progress toward

the goals. As progress is made and conditions shift, goals, objectives, and tactics will be reviewed, refined, and replaced to ensure resources and effort remain aligned with the university's priorities.

UCA 2035 comes at an inflection point in the history of UCA and higher education. Higher education must adapt and evolve as families demand transparent costs and clear career outcomes, students enter with diverse preparation levels, and employers require adaptable graduates ready for rapidly evolving technologies. To that end, UCA 2035 reframes the university's 2011 mission into a new, streamlined mission statement that better reflects UCA's distinctive role in expanding opportunities, advancing discovery, and strengthening communities. Our mission now states that

The University of Central Arkansas brings teaching, discovery, and community partnership together to educate students, expand access to opportunity, and serve the public. Through learning, scholarship, creative activity, and applied experience, we advance readiness for meaningful work, civic contribution, and lifelong growth.

Instead of core values, UCA 2035 includes a set of commitments that operationalize the mission and provide context for the plan's imperatives.

- **Student Opportunity and Momentum:** Students and learning remain at the center of the UCA experience, with expanded access and clear pathways that support progress, deepen knowledge, and advance readiness for meaningful work, leadership, and lifelong growth.
- **Partnership and Engagement:** Partnerships with communities, industries, and public institutions connect learning and innovation, strengthening economic opportunity, cultural vitality, and civic life.
- **Discovery with Impact:** Research, creative activity, and inquiry are integral to the UCA experience, advancing knowledge while contributing to solutions that address the needs of communities and professions.
- **Foundations for the Future:** People, systems, infrastructure, and resources are aligned to sustain excellence in learning, discovery, and partnership while enabling UCA to adapt and thrive over time.

Enrollment Forecasting and Planning

As indicated in the assurance argument to Criterion 4.A, enrollment forecasts play a significant part in the university's planning process. Birth-rate data and high-school graduations in Arkansas have been used for nearly a decade to project future enrollments and budgets that inform university staffing and facility needs. Extensive use of enrollment forecasting fueled the Resource Optimization Initiative (ROI) discussed in the assurance argument to Criterion 4.B. Leading up to each term, the Vice President for Enrollment Services and Student Success sends regular updates to campus leadership on admissions, enrollment, and retention (see [sample report](#)). Throughout the year, the Office of Institutional Research also sends a weekly admissions report to campus leadership (see [sample report](#)). These reports help campus

leadership predict shifts in student demand to ensure adequate capacity, such as temporary staffing, course sections, and residential space.

Reports in Argos allow department chairs and school directors to monitor enrollment trends in their programs over time. Enrollment trends help determine resource allocation such as the need for faculty lines and learning spaces. For example, when increasing demand for nurses began in the early 2000's, the University had insufficient physical space to house a larger cohort in that program, even though, according to recorded and forecasted data, student demand was high and growing, and demand for nurses in the healthcare arena was on the rise. The School of Nursing met the demand through an innovative curriculum design, increasing enrollment by 50% (from 50 to 75 students per cohort) while planning began for the new Integrated Health Sciences Building. Once construction on that facility was completed in 2021, the program expanded to its current size of 125 students per cohort.

Fiscal Planning

The financial management of the campus has, historically, been based on a centralized approach with a focus on the university's priorities and on ways in which division and departmental priorities link to and support institutional goals and initiatives. Each fiscal year, the Division of Finance and Administration prepares the annual operating budget and submits it for approval by the Board of Trustees at their May meeting (see [annual budget books](#)). Over the past six fiscal years (FY 2022 – 2027), the division has prepared the budget with cautious optimism and three primary objectives: (1) focus on student success, (2) maintain stable reserves, and (3) minimize the financial impact to students and their families. The core basis for each operating budget relied on the following conservative financial assumptions and revenue planning:

- **Credit Hour Projections:** Administrators applied data-informed enrollment estimates, setting credit hour assumptions at conservative levels relative to prior-year actuals—98% in FY 2022, 96% in FY 2023 and FY 2024, 97% in FY 2025, 100% in FY 2026 and FY 2027—following projected high-school population shifts.
- **Tuition and Fee Pricing:** The Board of Trustees authorized an average tuition-and-fee increase of approximately 3.3% each year, balancing operational revenue needs with student affordability. Although expanding from \$85,642,456 to \$97,286,805 over the past six years, tuition and fee revenue remained a relatively stable proportion of the total budget, ranging from approximately 41.99% (in FY 2024) to 44.55% (in FY 2027).
- **State Funding:** Administrators managed the budget to account for changing state allocations. Each budget included the current year's productivity funding distributed under the Revenue Stabilization Act, which increased by a combined \$6,246,044 in FY 2022 – 2024, before contracting year-over-year by a combined \$3,340,991 in FY 2025 – 2027. The budgets also included the prior-year's state distributions from the Educational Excellence Trust Fund, which grew from \$5,503,483 in FY22 to \$7,640,948 in FY27. Overall, state appropriations as a relative share of total revenue declined from 31.46% (\$60,756,666) in FY 2022 to 28.02% (\$61,205,574) in FY 2027.

- **Auxiliary Revenues:** The Board of Trustees approved an average increase of approximately 5% in room and board rates each year to account for increasing costs to auxiliary enterprises, including housing, dining, and athletics, expanding the contribution from 23.20% of total revenue in FY 2022 to 25.38% (\$55.4M) in FY 2027.
- **Departmental Cost Control and Transfers:** Leadership held departmental operating budgets flat year-over-year with only select strategic exceptions. The administration reallocated internal funds to priority needs and authorized targeted plant fund transfers to offset specific prior-year commitments.

As a result, UCA directed planned expenditures toward quality improvements in core human capital, campus infrastructure, direct student financial aid, and strategic debt management:

- **Personnel Investments:** Salaries and benefits represented the university's largest investment, absorbing 53.70% to 56.28% of total operating budgets in alignment with higher education benchmarks. UCA strengthened human capital through:
 - Funding 2.0% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) in FY 2022 (\$1.74M), FY 2024 (\$1.93M), FY 2025 (\$1.98M), and FY 2026 (\$2.07M).
 - Increasing full-time minimum wage rates from \$11/hour in FY 2022 to \$13/hour in FY 2024, \$14/hour in FY 2025, and \$15/hour (\$31,200/year) in FY 2026.
 - Allocating \$220,000 annually for faculty promotions and advancement, instituting faculty longevity bonuses in FY 2026, and targeting 90% market salary benchmarks for faculty and staff in FY 2027.
 - Implementing a Voluntary Employee Retirement Incentive (VERI) in FY 2023 and FY 2027 (see the assurance argument for Criterion 4.B).
- **Maintenance & Operations (M&O):** M&O expenditures grew from 15.68% (\$29.9 million) in FY 2023 to 19.52% (\$42.6 million) in FY 2027. This investment expanded campus technology contracts, academic/administrative software support, custodial services contracts, food service/housing commitments, and centralized computer replacement initiatives.
- **Scholarships and Fee Waivers:** Institutional student aid accounted for 14.17% to 15.78% of operating budgets (\$29.8 million to \$31.8 million annually). UCA permanently integrated scholarship funding into the recurring base budget in FY 2022, eliminating dependence on prior-year reserve transfers. The university increased funding for entering academic scholarships and athletic awards to account for increases in tuition and fees.
- **Debt Service and Capital Infrastructure:** Debt service comprised 7.17% to 8.48% of annual operating expenditures. Budgets directly supported modern learning environments, including the Integrated Health Sciences Building and the Windgate Center for Fine and Performing Arts. In FY 2027, UCA added bond service for renovations in district cooling and hydronics while successfully retiring legacy debt (paying off 2006 Series B & C bonds and 2015 Series B bonds).

This six-year financial trajectory demonstrates UCA's capacity to maintain balanced operations, protect financial health, and systematically channel revenue growth into direct improvements in instructional quality, faculty quality, student financial aid, and campus facilities.

Throughout each budget cycle, budget managers monitor expenditures at the department and division levels. The ERP finance system includes controls that prevent deficit spending and ensure consistent and complete accounting. Administration relies on various reporting to anticipate needs and temporarily adjust budgets within the year to allocate resources appropriately. These reports include regular operating summary, unrestricted/unallocated cash report, Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and CFI projections, and a five-year projection.

Additionally, the Board of Trustees actively engages in the university planning and budget process. The Vice President for Finance and Administration presents the updates and revisions to the operating budget at each Board meeting. The Board's Audit and Finance Committee meets quarterly, and during the fall and winter meetings reviews proposed tuition, room, and board rates. The full board reviews the proposed budget elements during a spring workshop before considering next year's operating budget at its May meeting.