



Lesley
UNIVERSITY

Strategic Framework for Lesley University

Building on a foundation of work across the university, Lesley proposes to create a new university model based on active partnerships between educators and employers; support for students and alumni over the arc of their careers; and community development in our physical campus and the virtual space, to create “ecosystems” of systemic change to diversify the fields for which we prepare our students.

Lesley University has a long and distinctive history of educating and supporting professionals in the vital human arts that nurture people to live their best lives, challenge inequity, heal communities, and promote human connections. These professions, which thrive at the intersection of education, mental health, the arts and related fields, are facing unprecedented shortages and challenges at a time when they are needed more than ever. They also suffer from a lack of diversity and inclusion so important to human development.

This legacy of educating, supporting, and celebrating these professionals, as they work to make their impact on individuals and communities, is core to all that we do. We do this through our combination of expertise in these professions and the general educational foundation we provide around being human and leading a meaningful career and life. We sometimes use the term “human arts” to describe our distinctive areas of study, combined with our focus on the art of being human. As the nature of the demands on these professionals and the organizations that employ them change, we must work together to build pathways for a diverse group of individuals to channel their passion for helping others into fulfilling careers in these essential fields.

We strive to harness Lesley’s long-standing strengths in the human arts, our deeply rooted values and experience in developing professionals who will make an outstanding social justice impact, and our identity as an institution that provides an education encompassing an understanding of self and the confidence and skills to serve the broad dimensions of these critical professions. We seek to develop faculty, student and alumni inquiry and scholarship that advances human potential at the frontlines of practice. By doing so, we will respond to the pressing challenges of the 21st Century, such as environmental sustainability, and to the needs of employers, such as

diversifying the frontlines of practice, setting ourselves apart as being one of the great professionally focused universities in the country.

Over the next three years, Lesley will invest in the following priorities to meet this goal:

Working in Partnership

Based on a legacy of partnerships with schools, civic organizations, non-profits and companies, we understand the importance of partnering with the organizations that employ our graduates, to create and illuminate the pathways for a diverse group of individuals to access, navigate, and thrive in their careers and lives.

We will:

- establish an Office of Partnerships, within the Office of the President, so that we can engage with and manage relationships with these organizations across the university, including the Threshold Program. These partnerships created in concert with faculty will provide multiple benefits to our students in finding career pathways, to employers in recruiting and retaining a better developed and more diverse workforce, and to the community in access to needed resources, through community and co-curricular engagement, such as the mental health clinic from our Riverside Community Care partnership.
- work with these partners to build a more diverse workforce—in all respects—to identify and eliminate barriers in these careers and provide ongoing support and development.
- ensure that students who choose these professions are more directly connected to work with these employers in projects, internships, practicums, field placements, research, scholarship, training, and long-term employment, in some cases by combining scholarship funds with employer recruitment and retention programs, as these relationships should be of substantial mutual benefit to both parties.
- ensure that our structure provides resources to allow faculty and staff within Lesley to be engaged in building programs that partners seek; create reporting structures so that those who work with partners across Lesley stay informed; and add proper supports for partner relationships.
- establish locations for partners central to our mission directly on our Doble Campus, as a tenet of our Campus Plan, so that collaborations are integrally connected to the student and community experience.

Career-long Support

We understand that the practitioners we educate will require not only ongoing learning and skill-building but also continuing networking, professional identity development, and self-care.

We will:

- create and launch a holistic support model which identifies a menu of commonly needed opportunities for continued learning, networking and personal well-being, targeted toward student and alumni interests in each School and the Threshold Program.
- identify our current offerings within this menu, emphasize professional practice strengths already at Lesley, determine priorities in filling gaps in our offerings, and develop near-term solutions for addressing those gaps.
- identify priority areas where an alumni network would help provide professional support and opportunities for engagement across faculty, staff, students and partners, and create a structure at Lesley for managing those networks to redesign our engagement with our alumni.
- create connections throughout our campus, including among our faculty and staff, to support people in obtaining and renewing credentials and qualifications and finding resources for self-care, so they can achieve the career progress they are seeking.
- redesign the website to be a source of inspiration to prospective students, current students, and alumni alike, by providing an expansive view of all the pathways one might take within their chosen field, outlining intersections and gateways to new fields for career changers, and framing program choices based on what an individual's goals are.
- expand our offerings of online, hybrid, and low residency courses and programs to meet prospective students and professionals where they are.

Program Extension

Practitioners in these professions are working in burgeoning fields that frequently combine in-demand disciplines so innovation will need to keep abreast of these developments.

We will:

- develop educational opportunities that allow people interested or working in the “human arts” professions to explore all the ways to work in these areas.
- continue to identify needs, utilizing our partners and other connections, and have a process to prioritize and ensure that our programming is responsive to changes in the environment, including through the Center for Human Arts Innovation.

- build pathways to programs through additional options for combined degrees and/or clusters of courses, such as 4+1 programs, stackable credentials, dual degrees at the graduate level, and new combinations of graduate degrees and certificates.
- promote our new outcomes-based General Education program so people understand how differentiating it is and so that it creates connections across disciplines for students in ways that are meaningful to them and lead them toward innovative pathways and solutions.

Visibility

The critical nature of the human arts professions is not always recognized or celebrated as much as other professions; Lesley should be at the vanguard of changing that.

We will:

- establish a visibility campaign across these fields to bring focus to the incredible expertise and scholarship within the Lesley community, linking that work to the university.
- publicly advocate for the long-term professional and personal value of these areas of study and work and their impact on society to create a more just world.
- connect the visibility campaign to affordable and illuminated pathways at Lesley to respond to demand in these critical fields.
- Adjust our programming—how we market and celebrate our University—to help prospective and current students and alumni feed the rich array of careers available to people with skills in the areas for which Lesley provides training, with a focus on amplifying diverse voices in these fields.
- establish annual awards that recognize excellence in these professions and celebrate achievement.
- utilize our Thought Leadership Series and other guest lectures to shine a spotlight on the tremendous work done by professionals in these fields and their importance in the world.
- create stronger connections with our alumni so we can better highlight their impact in the human arts and have our alumni serve as passionate ambassadors of the value of a Lesley education.
- ensure that we are understanding the market, building awareness, and telling our story effectively within it.

Engagement Across Campus

We recognize the wide range of work that goes into providing the individuals we educate with the experience that will spur them forward.

We will:

- create and execute the prioritized plans that are necessary to build a community that honors our commitment to social justice and our framework for equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice and ensure that this framework, which is central to all areas of our work, includes diverse, neurodiverse and global perspectives, and expands beyond the classroom and into students' co-curricular activities to help them learn the skills for meaningful work and life.
- continue to develop the systems, processes, policies, and financial resources, including the use of data, to operate the campus effectively and equitably.
- complete a substantial amount of the Campus Plan, so that our campus is welcoming to and accessible by our entire community, including the Cambridge community.
- continue to review and assess how best to provide living, dining and retail options across campus.
- build the relationships which will attract the funding necessary for the work we envision.
- build awareness of internal resources and the interdisciplinarity of our work throughout all areas of the university, including an easy-to-use resource guide.
- work across the campus to build financial sustainability.

Process of Framework Development

The Lesley community has been working in some of the ways described above, and with many of these concepts, over many years in many different ways, including the multi-year Lesley 2030 strategic planning process, work within the Schools and Departments to consider their own strategic focuses and University-wide discussions to articulate all that is distinctive about Lesley.

In numerous meetings over this 2021-2022 Academic Year, in thirteen different workstreams, teams of faculty and staff started looking at enrollment trends, and opportunities for growth. Those meetings resulted in the strong themes above. At the same time, work around the 40th anniversary of the Threshold Program resulted in development of similar themes. What has emerged is a consistent picture of where we need to go as a university to benefit all of our students and alumni and create more visibility on our expertise in the human arts.

When We Achieve Our Goals

What will the impact be on students?

- Students from many backgrounds will be welcomed at Lesley and will access better opportunities in careers that allow them to create a more just and humane world.
- More students with differing abilities who need additional support over the arc of their lifetimes will have the support they need through the expanded impact of Threshold.
- Diverse abilities and perspectives will be celebrated and students' differences will be seen as central to the value they bring as they embark on their careers, whether as part of a team or as independent artists, instructors, or entrepreneurs.
- Students will better understand how their skillsets and education connect to different career paths and will have the opportunities to explore these paths and build their education through varied course offerings and well-developed partnerships.

What will the impact be on faculty and staff?

- Because we will be able to plan with this Framework, faculty and staff will enjoy better resources to support the programs and partnerships that make their work fulfilling and purposeful.
- Lesley will be an inclusive community of diverse faculty and staff that share their scholarship and expertise to inspire change in their respective fields and educate and support individuals at all stages of their careers.
- The incredible scholarship and research of faculty will be more visible to professionals and other scholars and industry experts through the visibility campaign.

What will the impact be on organizations doing this work?

- Organizations will fill recruitment gaps and improve retention with diverse, qualified, passionate candidates who personify the Lesley difference.
- Neurodiverse Lesley alumni will become valued assets for employers, bringing unique skills and empathy to their roles.

What will the impact be on alumni and communities that we serve?

- Alumni will experience their education serving and supporting them over the long term, and their continued connection to Lesley will allow them to pivot throughout their careers and lives.
- Alumni following creative paths will have access to training and a community so that even individuals, such as visual and other artists and entrepreneurs striking out on their own, have the benefit of institutional support, mentors, and colleagues.

- The communities that our work serves will be more directly and intimately connected to Lesley and will understand what we can offer them.

Overall, Lesley University will be known as the place people go in order to get the supports that they need in their vital, in-demand professions. As the expert resource and support system in the human arts, Lesley will welcome in and connect our diverse set of students, faculty, and staff to people in our community, including alumni, organizations, and employers.

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