



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

ETSU COMMITTEE FOR 125 **CHAPTER II**





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I. FOREWORD

As East Tennessee State University and the academy as a whole transition into a post-pandemic epoch, they face a series of headwinds that will impact the success of the institution and broader community for the coming decade and beyond. The increasing sense of malaise and political

division that defines our present environment was magnified by COVID and many members of society no longer see higher education as a viable pathway to prosperity. Men, students of color, and non-traditional students have decided to forego college in hopes of a brighter future through alternative pathways. While a short-term wage bump and other distractions have created a false sense of security for such students, countless research studies indicate that a college degree remains the key to generational prosperity and community health. This mistrust of the academy is bolstered by societal forces that have conflated cultural competency with cultural division. And yet our employers insist that our students be able to honor the ideas and cultures of others while approaching their own beliefs with inquiry and humility.

It is within this environment that ETSU embarks upon the next chapter of the Committee for 125 Chapter II (C125.2). At the

onset of the original strategic planning effort, future-facing concerns were focused upon Massive Open Online Courses and of massification. While those threats remain, they have been enjoined by the politics of division and distrust of the academy. Institutional leaders must give careful thought to the manner in which they navigate this landscape. If ETSU is to achieve its aggressive vision, campus leaders must take deliberate and purposeful steps to recruit more men to college, offering programs and services that lead to enhanced economic and career outcomes.

The result of the context above in Northeast Tennessee is evidenced by a significant decline in the region's college-going rate, even as the state has incentivized post-secondary attendance at the community college level. This decline is evidence that the value, not the price, is now the determining factor in deciding to enroll or re-enroll in college. To respond, institutions must begin a realignment of programs, new degrees, and other actions to make the academy relevant to real-world applications. The university must leverage resources to provide a broader narrative of the educational environment and re-establish its place in the prosperity pipeline.

Enrollment is the lifeblood of the university, and campus leaders must remain laser-focused on enrollment growth. This includes recruitment, retention, and adaptation of the current model to meet demand from those who have been left behind. Without an expansion of our current enrollment, the following vision will stagnate. As such, factors that demonstrate the value of



higher education, those that have shown they open enrollment opportunities, and initiatives that ensure all who enroll succeed will receive top priority for promotion and resources as we implement the bold vision contained in the remainder of this report.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

East Tennessee State University is in the fifth year of the current strategic plan and 10 years removed from the development of the institution's current strategic vision. Broad landscape shifts have transpired across all sectors of the academy as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the rich history of long-range planning at the institution, and in response to these shifts, ETSU embarked upon the development of the next strategic vision that will drive planning and resource allocation decisions for the coming decade. To ensure the institution was drawing on the broadest possible set of perspectives, the Committee for ETSU 125 Chapter II comprised a group of local, regional, and national leaders, and was driven by the vision and aspirations of ETSU's faculty, staff, and students. A central question framed the work of the Committee: "How can we build on the lessons learned from the pandemic to build a purposeful 15-year plan that ensures the ETSU of 2036 thrives and continues to be a generative presence in Appalachia?"

This question led to rich and dynamic discussions among the members of the Committee for 125 Chapter II (C125.2) that, while considering practical limitations, did not hesitate

to set a daring vision of a thriving East Tennessee State University in 2036. As it has been throughout its history, the University strives to be recognized for its commitment to place and the transformational impact it has on educational attainment and economic development in the Appalachian Highlands. Through nationally ranked programs, a deep commitment to arts and culture, expansion and innovation in health sciences, and a comprehensive research portfolio, ETSU strives to become one of the premier institutions in the southern region. This ascent will be driven by world-class faculty members who ensure the highest levels of academic quality, while also deploying innovative student interventions that will result in the highest level of student success in the history of the institution.

A driver of these aspirational outcomes is the campus itself, which, through focused master planning, will become a destination campus with a state-of-the art academic building, a new Health Science Hub, and the Martin Center for the Arts. The investments made in athletic facilities, primarily the William B. Greene, Jr., football stadium will bring the community closer to ETSU and result in ETSU becoming even more tightly woven into the cultural fabric of the region.



The Committee for 125 Chapter II envisions a student body that comes from a variety of backgrounds yet can consistently succeed because of a concierge-like experience that will come to define an ETSU education. This re-engineered experience will include an enhanced general education curriculum that prepares students for lifelong learning and professional success, and ultimately, result in a post-graduation experience that spreads the ETSU brand, one graduate at a time, throughout the world.

The story of ETSU over the next decade is one best told by the community it serves, a community that strives for economic and population growth, improved educational attainment, robust opportunities for all citizens, and expanded cultural experiences driven by the commitment of all faculty, staff, and students to the principles implemented at its founding in 1911.

III. MAKING THE CASE FOR A NEW VISION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The beginning of this decade has been a time of seismic shifts in America, with all corners of society and the economy dramatically affected by the dual disruptions of a global pandemic and exponential increases in technological capabilities. Higher education was not immune from these forces, finding itself facing an array of challenges to its traditional model. But as always, trials are also an opportunity to excel and innovate, and universities willing to transform the research and academic enterprise, fully focus on student success, and simultaneously stay rooted in the community will thrive.

East Tennessee State University will be one of those institutions.

ETSU entered the current decade with a strong, consensus-driven strategic plan that had previously been developed under the auspices of the Committee for 125. Whether it was expanding graduate programming, building an interdisciplinary mindset, or initiating critical internal operations shifts, much of the reason ETSU had been able to accelerate through the challenges of the pandemic and emerge as a regional leader was due to the strategic foundations developed by the original Committee for 125.

A forward-looking university that enjoys a robust reputation as a health sciences institution, ETSU is rooted as a hub of education and economic advancement in Appalachia, and is committed to



the core tenets of access and success— were components of the Committee for 125 proceedings but were amplified and advanced by the work of several campus-wide task forces convened throughout the past year. The task forces, focused on research, student success and experience, ETSU Health, academic affairs, and fiscal sustainability, provided a broad opportunity to assess the challenges of the coming decade and ensured that as ETSU continued its second century of operations, the institution stayed fully committed to its foundational principles.

In the early 1900s, policy leaders and elected officials in the state of Tennessee debated the need to create new colleges in each of the three grand divisions of the state focused on preparing teachers to educate citizens in the rural regions and preparing them for a rapidly changing economy. This recognition by the state of the needs of rural communities, coupled with the power of education to transform those communities, has been at the heart of East Tennessee State University since its founding. With the passage of the Normal School Law of 1909, ETSU began with the stated purpose, “For the education and professional training of teachers for the public schools of the State.” When the institution opened in 1911, its founding President Sidney Gilbreath stated the following in an early address to the faculty:

“While the purpose of the Normal School as defined by the General Education Law of 1909 is declared to be ‘For the education and professional training of teachers for the public schools of the State,’ in a broader sense it is interested in the investigation of all the problems ... and in making better conditions for living throughout the territory which it was established to serve.”

“In preparation for this work, four general principles are recognized: first, thorough scholarship; second, the study of education of science; third, practice in teaching under expert supervision; fourth, a thorough knowledge of conditions and needs in the State and in the nation.”

Gilbreath assumed control of the fledgling institution that, from its inception, served as a *de facto* land grant for central Appalachia. The grounds upon which the campus is located were donated by Mr. George Carter, local entrepreneur, business leader, and philanthropist. The city of Johnson City covered the utility costs for the institution in its early years, and community leaders provided scholarships and housing to its first students. The business community, elected officials, and church leaders, as well as citizens of the region, saw that the future of this institution and the future of the region were intertwined. One need only look at the continuing service rendered to the Appalachian Highlands, local industry, and community leaders, and the current ETSU Board of Trustees to see how deeply this tradition has been carried into the 21st century.

Throughout its 110-year history, ETSU has grown from a humble normal school to a dynamic research institution with a nationally recognized mission focus in the health sciences. This evolution has been marked at regular intervals by thoughtful analysis regarding the state and regional landscape that were swiftly followed by efforts to ensure the University remained true to its founding principles, while also continually adapting to serve students and communities in new ways.

As such, the visioning process that unfolded across the campus during 2021 is nested within a tradition of strategic planning. Most relevant to the current efforts is the history of the strategic visioning processes over the last several decades, including the Commission on the Future of ETSU convened in 1986 to define the future through 2011; the Committee for ETSU 125 Chapter I convened in 2012 looking toward 2036; and the 2016-2026 strategic planning process convened in 2016 to prepare for the incoming Board of Trustees.

Against this backdrop, it became clear to university leaders that the post-pandemic era signaled the beginning of a new epoch that would require a similar evaluation and a willingness to not only build on progress that emerged from original Committee for 125 efforts, but also launch new efforts that set the conditions for success throughout the 2020s. Many of the challenges the Committee for 125 Chapter II sought to address were common across the higher education sector. Primary among these challenges is the following:

- **ETSU faces an increasingly competitive enrollment environment:** It is evident to anyone who follows *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or *Inside Higher Ed* that higher education is changing dramatically. This change was notable prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic has accelerated change. The most pressing change is the looming “demographic cliff” (*Higher Education Magazine*, 2019). The 2008 recession resulted in a sharp decline in birth rates in the U.S. and around the world; children born (or not) in 2008 would comprise the incoming college class of 2025-2026. Even as the economy improved, the birth rate did not, which means that college enrollment will feel the impact of this declining birth rate through 2035. Predictive modeling suggests that college enrollment will decline by 15% beginning in 2025, continue through 2029, and then level to a continued decline of 1-2% annually (Bar Shay, 2018). This modeling also suggests that the loss will not be evenly distributed across institutions: Elite institutions will continue to be in demand, but regional 4-year institutions are the ones likely “to lose more than 11% of their students, from 1.43 million in 2012 to 1.27 million in 2029” (Bar Shay, 2018). With fewer students of traditional high school age matriculating into college, the marketplace of higher education will become competitive in what will be a basic supply and demand problem: it is imperative that regional public institutions offer opportunities that appeal to traditional first-year students while also serving a full spectrum of nontraditional students.
- **State policy shifts that place a premium on student success:** Tennessee’s transition to an outcomes-based funding model via the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 shifted operations at ETSU and across the state toward a student success-driven orientation. Of note is that ETSU has consistently outperformed in-state peers in the THEC outcomes formula model. However, operating in an environment where ETSU is not just measured against its own performance, but rather, against a larger milieu of other public institutions necessitates a continual evaluation of student success initiatives and an operating mindset that is relentlessly focused on completion rates.

- **The opportunities (and challenges) inherent in new technological modalities:** Online education has evolved as a complementary strategy to a focal one. Some universities are now delivering complex engineering instruction previously thought to be reserved for in-person classroom delivery via an online modality while remaining fully accredited. The asynchronous delivery required due to public health reasons during the pandemic has set the table both for ETSU and institutions across the country to completely re-evaluate how online instruction is viewed and delivered.
- **The pace of change post-pandemic requires organizational agility:** During the pandemic, businesses of all types had to change, higher education included. It is now clear that the pace of change will not recede after the pandemic becomes endemic. This pressure will be felt particularly in the areas of new program development, talent deployment, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. In the next decade, universities will be required to do more, faster, with less.

It also became apparent during the strategic visioning process that efforts that have unfolded over many decades have resulted in East Tennessee State University moving forward in a unique position of momentum. Two examples of this posture are the unparalleled brand identity that has been built across the country regarding the University's health sciences mission and the unmatched sense of commitment to place. This regional mission continues to guide the University, just as it did at its founding, as not merely an institution of higher education located in Appalachia, but rather, an institution inextricably linked to the people, culture, and mountains that surround our campus.

IV. BEGINNING A NEW CHAPTER



The Committee for 125 Chapter II process closely follows the 125 Chapter I proceedings, primarily because of the successful nature of those earlier efforts. Moreover, these prospective plans build on a foundation of rigorous vision-setting that has been in place since 1911 and specifically emerged during the proceedings of the Commission on the Future of ETSU in 1986. That work, launched almost 40 years ago, was charged to look ahead to the University's centennial in 2011, and outlined five principles that guided the campus throughout the ensuing decades:

1. Universities are best characterized by their people, their human processes, and the products of those efforts.

2. Teaching and learning will remain the central mission at ETSU, as they are at most universities.
3. Augmenting a long-standing commitment to teaching is a growing participation by ETSU faculty in adding to the broad body of knowledge and to its employment in advanced professional service.
4. All faculty of ETSU are expected to be accomplished scholars.
5. All students at ETSU will be expected to be active participants in the learning process.

Since that time, ETSU has developed concerted efforts to engage institutional, regional, and national experts to bring to bear the greatest possible composition of perspective and knowledge regarding the future of higher education; it is a defining feature of the institution and what makes ETSU more than just a regional public institution. Planning is a process of reinvigoration and renewal, allowing an institution to let go of dreams not realized and imagine new ones. But in the higher education context, this process must be driven by community— both the faculty, staff, and students directly connected to the campus and the broader set of local and state stakeholders. ETSU has ensured that the long-standing process of strategic planning that starts with people and principle was utilized again with the Committee for 125 Chapter II. The resulting work will guide the institution through another decade of growth exceeding in measure the past four decades.

V. ETSU COMMITTEE FOR 125 CHAPTER II PROCESS OVERVIEW

A. Activities & Timelines



In 2020, campus leaders were aware of changes to the policy, fiscal, and demographic landscape that necessitated a new vision and revised strategic plan. Recent years had seen ETSU entering a new period of governance, with the advent of the first ever Board of Trustees, all members of whom had inherited the vision of the Committee for 125 Chapter 1, rather than engaged in shaping it. Many long-time campus leaders who shepherded the institution over the previous decades had retired. On a decidedly positive note, most ambitious goals outlined during the 125 Chapter 1 process had been realized. These factors came together against the radical disruptions of the pandemic, making clear that the University and community were ready for a new vision in a new era. In preparation for what would become the Committee for 125 Chapter II, the university completed

many activities to prepare the institution. Below are some key activities completed in preparation for the launch of the C125.2 visioning process:

- Senior Leadership Retreat at EAB (March 2020)
- Strategic Marketing Review (Completed 2020)
- Community Engagement Task Force (Recommendations 2020)
- Advising Task Force (Recommendations 2020)
- Admission and Enrollment Review (Implemented 2020)
- Scholarship Review (Phase One Implemented 2020)
- Program Development and Revitalization (2020)
- Combined Graduate Studies and Continuing Studies to form one college (2020)

As with so many other activities, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a delay to the formal launch of the C125.2 process. Despite this delay, and the unprecedented demands the pandemic made on the faculty, staff, and leaders of the university, the Committee for 125 Chapter II planning process was formally initiated in March of 2021. Members of the Committee for 125 Chapter II are as follows:

Mr. Scott Niswonger, Former ETSU
Board Trustee
Dr. Linda Latimer, ETSU Board Chair
Ms. Melissa Steagall-Jones, ETSU
Board Trustee
Mr. Louis H. Gump, Committee for
125.1 Chair
Rev. Lester D. Lattany, Pastor of
Friendship Baptist Church
Mr. Alan Levine, President, Ballad Health
Dr. Rob Anderson, President, SHEEO

Mr. Scott Jenkins, Strategy Director,
Lumina Foundation
Dr. Mildred Garcia, President, AASCU
Dr. Alisa White, President, Sam Houston
State
Dr. James Votruba, President Emeritus,
Northern Kentucky University
Dr. Brian Noland, President, ETSU
(Chair)
Dr. Mike Hoff, Chief Planning Officer,
ETSU (Staff lead)

The C125.2 visioning process was conducted in four phases, commencing with project launch, task-force proceedings and data gathering, and constituent engagement. The final phase, focused on the draft vision and plan development, was focused on articulating what was learned in the first three phases. The entire 125 Chapter II process was facilitated by former THEC Director Mike Krause, now serving in a consulting role to ETSU.

The Committee for 125 Chapter II met throughout the year, with initial convenings centered around a critical examination of institutional data as well as larger trends in higher education. The committee was asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of the institution and begin

discussion of broad ideas that would form the pillars of a strategic vision for ETSU over the next 15 years.

The second convening focused on hearing directly from the task force leaders about the in-depth and subject-specific discussions that had unfolded over the previous months. Importantly, this phase provided an opportunity to create an iterative feedback loop between the committee and the respective task forces. The third meeting was used to hone the focus of the work and provide the committee with a summary vision and set of outcomes from each task force. The committee also discussed the current key performance indicators and the need for a new peer group to help the institution calibrate performance and gauge success in future years.

B. Constituent Engagement

Throughout 2021, the president and other members of the leadership team met with over 300 community members and groups, ranging from local community service organizations to elected officials. One of the most informative sessions during this time was the series of employer roundtables hosted by the ETSU Alumni Office. In these forums, employers affirmed the value of an ETSU degree, while also highlighting the need for more work to be done regarding the general education curriculum and the associated set of skills inherent in being an ETSU graduate.

Below is a brief list of key meetings and listening sessions that highlight substantial input offered by the broader community during this process:



Selected Constituent Meetings:

- ETSU Leadership and SCORE Listening Tour, December 2020
- Independent & Group Meetings – Legislative Delegation, 2021
- ACE Board Meetings, 2021
- Chamber of Commerce Meetings (Bristol, Kingsport, Johnson City), August-September 2021
- Employer Roundtables, September 2021
- Sevier Economic Development Luncheon and Discussion, September 2021
- ETSU Board of Trustees Retreat, September 2021
- ETSU 125 Chapter II Roundtable with Regional Superintendents, October 2021
- ETSU University-Wide Townhall Re: ETSU 125 Chapter II, October 2021

- Student Listening Sessions, April and November 2021
- Faculty Senate, Presentation of 125 Chapter II, November 2021
- ETSU Dean's Retreat, January 2022
- Small group discussions with key constituency sectors across campus, January and February 2022

VI. HIGHLIGHTS FROM 125 CHAPTER II TASK FORCE REPORTS

As part of the ETSU 125 Chapter II process, the university established multiple task forces focused on pillars of support for the mission of ETSU: Academics, Student Success and Experience, Research and Scholarship, ETSU Health, and Fiscal Sustainability. Each of these pillars also represents an opportunity for external engagement with other universities, school systems, health care institutions, and other governmental/non-governmental agencies that drive regional stewardship.



Each task force was provided the previous work of the Committee for 125 Chapter I and accompanying task force reports. The task forces were staffed with recommendations from deans and other senior leaders and included community members identified by the president. The task forces were charged with imagining the needs of the future and to vision broadly the future of ETSU within their domain. Finally, they provided expected outcomes, referenced later in this report, which would achieve the visions summarized below.

A. Academic Task Force:
ETSU is an academic destination university of the 21st century and drives regional stewardship.

The academic enterprise at ETSU begins and ends with faculty and staff. ETSU invests in faculty in many ways and will continue to prioritize this investment in service of driving student success. An example of this investment is the Center for Teaching Excellence that has developed over the past decade into a holistic center of faculty development. A key component of this focus has been a concerted effort to identify savings and reallocate those savings to improve faculty compensation. Finally, the faculty experience has been improved by increasing opportunities for faculty to participate in research and scholarly activity, as detailed in the task force vision for Research and Scholarship provided later in this report. Additionally, ETSU has made significant investments in staff, ranging from educational benefits to adjustments that allow for more flexibility and improved staff support.



ETSU develops undergraduate, graduate, and professional students through a robust education that features high-impact practices, real-world experiences, and interdisciplinary/inter-professional opportunities, enabling graduates to be lifelong learners with vital careers as well as engaged citizens in an increasingly interconnected global world. The institution has improved the academic environment by remaining focused on what best serves students – a combination of classroom instruction aligned with practical experience. Additionally, cross-college collaboration on interdisciplinary work has improved the ability of ETSU to offer a distinctive college experience. Finally, the residential experience provided to students living on campus has strengthened campus community and benefited student success.

ETSU also has enhanced its role as an academic leader in the region, expanding access and appeal for transfer, adult, and non-traditional students; providing specialized, just-in-time training for local career opportunities; partnering with local school districts to set high standards for coordinated curricula across the life span, and inspiring the citizens of the Appalachian Highlands to seek career vitality and personal growth through lifelong learning. The driving force behind these changes is a sustainable academic culture where faculty, staff, and students respect a

variety of human experiences. The expansion of online programs and close collaboration of faculty across colleges has ensured every student at ETSU, regardless of modality, is provided excellent instruction and prepared for life after college.

By remaining focused on faculty and staff, relevant academic programs, student experience, and community needs, ETSU is now seen as one of the top regional universities in the South – the university of choice for recent high school graduates and adult learners within 250 miles of Johnson City. While enrollment and persistence are elements that indicate the success of ETSU academics, the real measure of success for our program portfolio is that over half of ETSU programs are ranked in either national or regional publications that recognize the contribution of our faculty and staff to our academic mission and in signature academic programs such as health sciences, and regionally focused programs, such as Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies and Appalachian Studies.

**B. Student Success and Experience
Task Force: ETSU leads all
Tennessee universities in making
progress toward Complete College
Tennessee Act (CCTA) objectives.**

ETSU is nationally recognized for its distinctive and impactful student success and experience programs that provide all ETSU students with opportunities to build a constellation of rich relationships with faculty, staff, and student peers; to explore and find a clear sense of vocational purpose as well as navigate the institution with a strong sense of purpose; and to recognize the value of high-impact practices, experiential learning, and co-curricular activities through enhanced tracking and transcription processes that celebrate and credentialize an array of student experiences and achievements beyond course grades. One example of the support provided to students is the First-Generation Student Center that provides services that have seen the enrollment and graduation of this and other student populations exceed expectations.



ETSU's Scholarship Programs provide scholarship recipients opportunities to engage in meaningful activities that facilitate student success and fulfillment and stand as a best practice for providing an affordable high-quality education in rural America. To achieve this outcome, ETSU Academic Performance Scholarships (APS) focus on experiential learning, scholarships that de-emphasize the concept of "student worker" and emphasize instead opportunities for scholarship recipients to participate in high-impact practices, such as undergraduate research, campus or community service, civic engagement, leadership programs, and/or peer-mentor programs, among others. These scholarships provide value to the student, the organization, and the community; increase the probability of graduation; and decrease the time to degree.

Students from across the globe seek enrollment at ETSU because of the robust campus experience offered to residential students. In collaboration with Housing and Residence Life, ETSU academic colleges provide “residential colleges” that embed academic support structures and faculty leaders into residence halls, thereby facilitating living-learning communities, high-impact practices, academic study sessions, “house” competitions among residence halls and/or living-learning communities, and increased visibility of student services and academic support, among many other possibilities. In addition to the co-curricular experience, there is a robust campus life accented by the athletic, entertainment, and cultural experiences that provide students and the community an opportunity to engage with one another, yielding opportunities for personal and regional growth.

Through the work that began with the 2022 Quality Enhancement Plan focused on Community Engaged Learning, ETSU captures a vast array of meaningful data about student success and engagement and provides students with credentials that relate to their experiential learning and co-curricular activities (study abroad, internships, field experiences, research, leadership, and service, for example). To accomplish this outcome, ETSU implements an integrated software platform that tracks the quantity and quality of student engagement activities and their correlation to Complete College Tennessee Act objectives, as well as creates a system to provide alternative, or experience-centered, transcripts that document and celebrate student experiences beyond coursework.

These initiatives and many others have led to both growth in enrollment and increased student success, the latter being demonstrated by retention of over 80% of first-year students and graduation of at least 70% of all entering students.

C. Research and Scholarship Task Force: ETSU is recognized, through funding and program rankings, as one of the premier R2 research universities in the nation.

Research and scholarship at ETSU are characterized by a culture of excellence and by high-quality rigorous scholarship that enhances the regional, state, and national academic reputation of the university and supports its overall mission. The improved research reputation of the institution increases the ability to receive funds from both public and private sources and allows ETSU to recruit faculty that further contribute to the institution’s success. It should also be noted that ETSU demonstrates a common standard of rigor across doctoral and masters programs to ensure that graduates excel in their fields and/or continued education.



ETSU has become one of the highest-caliber Carnegie-designated R2 research institutions, which is characterized by teacher-scholars dedicated to providing students with a learning experience that includes direct involvement in the scholarly process. New faculty are recruited with the expectation that they promote this culture of excellence in teaching and scholarship, and they will be provided with the appropriate resources to do so. Faculty hires are made with a view toward developing interdisciplinary programs in both teaching and scholarship that cross boundaries within and between colleges. These changes are the result of the early implementation of cluster hires around emerging fields of research and scholarship.

The ETSU Research Corporation plays a significant role in advancing scholarship by facilitating research innovation, aligning university scholarship resources for entrepreneurial ecosystem development, promoting regional development and workforce development, and supporting media and marketing. Through its partnerships with world-class innovators, it will develop programming such as training in synthetic biology to enhance STEM education at K-16. These relationships will provide student opportunities for experiential learning and job placement. Overall, the ETSU Research Corporation will provide a scholarship collaboration hub that will rival similar units at larger research universities.

The impact of the research and scholarship enterprise not only gains recognition and improves ranking, but is also a major financial component of the institution providing over \$70 million in externally sponsored activity. That financial contribution has led to increased faculty salaries and improved research startup funds and allowed for a broader reach of the clinical enterprise from psychology to medicine. In many ways, these funds have stabilized the institution's financial position, ensuring the university's ability to weather fluctuations in enrollment.

D. ETSU Health Task Force: **ETSU Health transforms the health of the region through education, research, and team-based care.**

The growth of ETSU Health over the past decade has been driven by four key strategies: first, expansion of the clinical enterprise in both size and scope; second, increased collaboration within inter-professional education with participation among all colleges at ETSU; third, diversification of the research portfolio; and finally, adding academic programming that aligns with ETSU's mission and meets the needs of people in rural Appalachia.



A key strategy for ETSU Health has been to expand its clinical services that include deliberate, collaborative approaches for existing services to provide more comprehensive care to patients and clients. For example, ETSU has integrated substance use disorder services under a single

umbrella. Building on the integration that currently exists in providing care for substance use disorders and drawing on expertise and participation from additional collaborators, including early childhood education, social work, psychology, public health, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nutrition, exercise science and kinesiology, criminal justice, and Quillen College of Medicine residency programs, ETSU is a recognized leader in treating substance abuse. Leveraging the university's expertise in addiction science, ETSU created a recovery community for students. As the complex needs of students increase in this area, the university has developed an embedded program to serve students with addiction. Additionally, ETSU Health's partnership with Ballad Health allowed for collaborative approaches to offer additional clinical service locations and options for patients. These offerings have combined to improve the health of the region, as demonstrated through improved rankings on childhood obesity, less tobacco consumption, improved childhood outcomes, and a longer life expectancy.

With the success of Bishop Hall, ETSU's Interprofessional Education and Research Center, as a model of collaboration among the colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, and Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences, ETSU has established additional partnerships that create physical spaces that bridge across historical university and professional boundaries and offer new opportunities in meeting the university mission. For example, ETSU has a child care facility with interprofessional learning and research components with participation from early childhood, pediatrics, social work, psychology, speech language pathology, and nursing. Partnership with other community entities, for example Ballad Health's child care facility close to Johnson City Medical Center, provide cooperative opportunities for this work. This collaboration has led to the development of innovative programs over the past decade that meet community needs and demonstrate excellence among Academic Health Science Centers.

ETSU Health has diversified its research profile by creating space that fosters innovation and collaboration. The Innovation Park property provides a unique opportunity in conjunction with the City of Johnson City to envision the creation of a health science hub that further extends the education, research, and clinical mission of ETSU Health. Adjacent to existing ETSU Health clinical facilities and Ballad Health's Johnson City Medical Center, the land is perfectly situated for possibilities such as a health campus, living-learning community, and publicly facing clinical facilities for ETSU Health.

The changes in ETSU Health are evidenced by the increased number of patient visits to clinics, the substantial impact on research funding, and the share of degrees produced at ETSU by the Health Sciences. ETSU is recognized by the Association of Academic Health Centers as a model for community-driven health science education and clinical services.

E. Fiscal Sustainability Task Force: ETSU is renowned for its transparency, planning, and decision support.

In achieving fiscal sustainability, ETSU broadens and deepens its community through market reach and regional impact. Elemental to both growth and sustainability, ETSU becomes the

institution of choice for a broadening array of constituencies. These include students both online and on-campus, employers in the region, current and future faculty and staff, and individuals in our region benefiting from our teaching, professional and clinical operations, research, service, arts, and athletics. ETSU's budget and planning model balances college autonomy and creative competition with collective accountability and collaboration. Collaboration exists as the rule, not the exception. Collaboration across colleges, departments, operational units, and other campus-stakeholders is incentivized at college and administrative levels. Colleges and the administration regularly manage sustained reserve and strategic initiative funds. Faculty and staff make timely and effective investments to grow programs, advance research, and recruit and retain talent.



The distribution and expenditure of funds remains tied to the mission and strategic plans of every unit. Colleges and administrative support units use regular budget projections to proactively grow strategic programs, courses of study, and other mission-critical initiatives. Academic programs are constantly improving and evolving with annual program reviews built on readily available quantitative and qualitative data. Faculty and program chairs use dashboards synthesizing data in real time to make informed decisions based on the actual costs of instruction and as tied to their goals and objectives. Workloads and supports are set to achieve each unit's plans. Key performance indicators inform programmatic assessments and create direct impacts on funding at the department, college, university, and state levels.

ETSU's model of operational efficiency not only improves organizational effectiveness, but also instills confidence and support from funders, donors, and our communities. Peer institutions seek to learn from our highly ranked programs and award-winning planning and operations. Tennesseans and institutions across the country look to ETSU as a model regional comprehensive research university and exemplar in regional service and economic development. People know our university for not only what we do, but also for how we get things done.

One key pillar of the new financial model is the growth of the institution's endowment through the success of multiple fundraising campaigns. The ETSU Foundation and Alumni Association have created an alumni culture that increased the percent of alumni who give by 10 percent over the past decade. The ability of our advancement office to relay the story of ETSU in a way that provides direct funding for endowed chairs, scholarships, and facilities made possible the growth of the institution envisioned by the Committee for 125 Chapter II.

The combination of these activities and other changes ensures an affordable, high-quality, college education, while also leading to increased faculty and staff salaries and improved facilities. With an endowment over \$200 million and annual giving of \$30 million, as well as reserve balances equivalent to 20 weeks of operating cost, ETSU is fiscally sustainable for the near future.



VII. VISION FOR THE 125TH YEAR OF ETSU

In 2036, when a visitor approaches the Appalachian Highlands, the presence of East Tennessee State University looms large. It is seen in the far outskirts of the region on “Welcome to ETSU” signs; in the high-tech, manufacturing, and health care corridor that embraces the region; and in the vibrant college town of Johnson City, where campus and community are synonymous. The message is clear – ETSU is a foundational presence in the region, contributing to the overall high quality of life, innovation, industry and business, health, and well-being, as well as cultural vitality. These themes define its overall “Culture of Excellence,” attributed to guided visioning and planning for ETSU’s 125th anniversary.

In the neighborhoods near main campus, students, parents, alumni, tourists, and others populate the restaurants, retail stores, hotels, and businesses that have developed into a “new downtown” geographically connected to the university. Some in this busy crowd are on their way to the Martin Center, which features programs from the musical treasures of Appalachia to Broadway and beyond. Along with ETSU’s Multicultural Center, the vitality of a global society is brought home so that everyone – resident or visitor – can enjoy the richness of a global culture at ETSU.

As you move toward downtown Johnson City, due to the success of the West Walnut Street Corridor redevelopment, a visitor could miss where the university stops and the city begins. Thanks to partnerships between the university and city, this redevelopment has provided walkable spaces from the university through downtown, allowing for the development of public-private partnerships that provide co-working and educational space that includes credit and non-credit classes. Furthermore, the university has driven residential development that expanded the opportunity for out-of-state graduate and professional students to develop a sense of place that has led many of those students to remain in the Appalachian Highlands area post-graduation. Among the major features of this space are King Commons and Founders Park, where residents and students regularly participate in festivals, fitness experiences, arts show cases, and other cultural experiences before dining at one of the many restaurants downtown.

Enthusiastic fans from across the region have gathered to enjoy various exhilarating gameday experiences due to the championship athletics environment. ETSU's "front porch" philosophy toward athletics has significantly engaged the campus and the community. ETSU is well-positioned in its conference of choice and, due to a substantial array of modern facilities, can host collegiate competitions in a best-in-class manner. The Center of Excellence for Sport Science and Coach Education (in conjunction with the SERK department), through continued investment, is seen as a global leader in the field and positively impacts the research, teaching, and service reputation of the entire university. Specific examples of these facilities are the William B. Greene, Jr., football stadium, the adjacent outdoor adventure course, and the renovations to Freedom Hall. These improvements have been made possible by the sustainable athletics business plan and financial model that returns revenues to the academic infrastructure, embodies a shared-use philosophy, and deepens connections with the community at large.

ETSU's academic portfolio spans a full spectrum of programs, with signature undergraduate and graduate programs that are nationally recognized. These programs rest on a fundamental basis of a revised general education curriculum that develops a core of critical thinking skills. This approach is buttressed by a research and scholarship enterprise that expands the strength and reach of the curriculum, deploys an applied research approach to address regional challenges, and focuses on continuously evolving teaching and learning methodologies that considered the lessons learned from the pandemic. Additionally, the university demonstrates a renewed focus on applied research that improves the region, particularly in the health sciences, and has increased research funding and student learning. In sum, the commitment to such approaches has generated an institutional brand known for agility in its response to economic and workforce demands and for the ever-stronger intellectual and research capabilities of an educated population.



ETSU is recognized as a leading R2 Research university with expertise in the areas of health science and technology. Through focused cluster-hires, ETSU has been able to obtain research funding that has enhanced faculty and student recruitment. Additionally, the Center of Excellence in Higher Education is providing actionable research that is changing not only the higher education landscape in the region but also providing insights that are improving primary and secondary education that led to more students being prepared for college – a model for other regional public institutions in the nation. Investment through public-private partnerships have allowed for the physical expansion of the research enterprise. The most productive of these facilities is the ETSU-Eastman Valleybrook Campus, which offers unique educational programming, houses research that drives the public purpose of the institution, and serves as a venue for private research firms that help move scholarship from

theory to market. This facility is a place for cross-discipline collaboration that sees faculty working together in ways never imagined. The model implemented at ETSU Valleybrook is studied by other regional public institutions that hope to collaborate with private enterprise to produce meaningful outcomes for their community.

While ETSU has evolved into a deeply engaged research institution, focused on improving the education, economy, health, and well-being of the people of the region, the university remains dedicated to its foundational mission to prepare teachers for the needs of the modern classroom. Through concerted partnerships with regional school districts, ETSU has emerged as a model institution in the preparation of new teachers and has developed professional development practices that are recognized nationally for their innovation and flexibility. Through dual enrollment, early college, and other access initiatives, ETSU faculty and staff have developed solutions to the college access challenge. As a result, the college-going rate for partner high schools exceeds 90 percent. Through coordinated curricula, these students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education.

Through strategic enrollment management programs, ETSU is enjoying a surplus of applicants because of its transformative student-centered programs that have been aggressively marketed and distinguish the university from its peer institutions. These characteristics include a signature First-Year Experience that support a record four-year graduation rate, a model advisement program, and multiple in-class and online channels that utilize the latest instructional techniques and technologies for access and learning. The university's strong partnerships with regional businesses provide opportunities for internship experiences essential to student success that also serve critical business needs that have improved economic development opportunities for the region.

Educators from around the world visit ETSU to learn from the multitude of student success measures developed by visionary and dedicated faculty and staff. As one of the first Tennessee institutions to exceed the requirements first established by the Complete College Tennessee Act in 2010, the university partners globally to develop and apply state-of-the-art standards for student success. ETSU's multipurpose Culp Center is a model for one-stop-shopping for all student services, from recruitment to career placement. As a premier institution known for its longstanding relationships with K-12 schools and community colleges in the region, ETSU is widely recognized for its continued engagement in career development and other support throughout the lives of graduates.

While ETSU's popularity as a residential campus is studied by public and private universities throughout the southeastern region of the U.S. and beyond, the university has also become a model for institutions serving the still-growing populations of non-traditional students. The educational options required by the unique needs of this group spawned major instructional changes and flexible approaches that facilitated their paths to degrees and careers. ETSU is

seen as an emerging leader in virtual education that provides remote instruction for a variety of undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs previously limited by space and/or equipment costs.

ETSU Health is a premier model for community-based health care, spanning the full spectrum from education to research to practice. ETSU graduates staff every aspect of medicine in the region, and residents of the Appalachian Highlands reflexively associate every facet of medical care with the university. Moreover, ETSU seeks an ever-expanding partnership with Ballad Health, pursuing seamless linkages in planning, budgeting, operations, and strategy. Ultimately, this alignment will result in benefits for both entities, but most importantly, contribute to a healthier and more vital regional population.

Consonant with this mission focus on health sciences, the Quillen College of Medicine will increase its class size, resulting in more physicians with a rural focus, many of whom will make their home in the local area. Simultaneously, ETSU will continue to grow the visibility and import of the College of Nursing, becoming a state center of excellence for nursing. Finally, in service of ETSU's recognized role as the premier state institution for public health education, ETSU will grow its data and analysis footprint, becoming the repository for all state and regional health care data.

By leveraging these strengths, ETSU's impact on the economic health of the region has positioned the university at the intersection of significant economic development solutions and innovative industries or partnerships fostering a thriving regional business center. With graduates making up four-fifths of the regional college-educated workforce within 75 miles of campus, and numerous alumni who have stayed to contribute to the region, ETSU has a powerful imprint on the leadership, personality, and values of East Tennessee and neighboring states. The university's reputation in the arts has grown and is exceeding expectations in producing talented graduates who are contributing to the culture of the region and beyond. These results have been enabled by the ETSU spirit – proudly aware of its historical strengths yet embedded in a tradition that is innovative, adaptive through regular planning, and mindful of emerging best practices.

The next step is execution and a call to every constituency, both internal and external, to join hands in translating this vision into reality on behalf of those for whom the University exists to serve. If we can join forces in this journey, it can be the most satisfying and beneficial work that any of us can imagine. Together, we will build on behalf of a brighter and more sustainable future for not only our students but also the public whom we serve.

APPENDIX I: NEXT STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The timeline and associated activities below represent a selection of aspirational actions and/or outcomes that were developed by task forces or presented during campus/community listening sessions. These potential actions frame an agenda focused on enhancing the university's access

mission, student success goals, and community impact. These three concepts (access, success, impact) structure the action agenda that undergirds the institution's overall mission to improve the quality of life for the people of the region and beyond. By embarking energetically upon this agenda, ETSU will become a steward of place.

A. Years 1-5

- Launch a comprehensive student support center that provides full-spectrum concierge-level support from the point of application to career placement with a special focus on first-generation students.
- Enhance bridge programs that couple pre-enrollment services with mentoring throughout the freshman and sophomore years.
- Implement leadership initiatives that close achievement gaps.
- Implement the results from an external assessment of the institution's decentralized budget model as well as business practices and operations, with a focus on customer service and efficiency.
- Launch a comprehensive review of university peers to develop an updated cohort of realistic and aspirational peers that will drive planning, budgeting, and marketing efforts across the campus.
- Implement a coordinated process of academic department chair development and regular training.
- Explore and obtain membership in the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities.
- Complete the following capital improvements:
 - a. Brown Hall renovation (Phase I)
 - b. Academic building construction
 - c. College of Business and Technology updates
 - d. Planning process for engineering building
 - e. Dedicated marching band space
 - f. Planning process for football stadium expansion
 - g. ETSU Health facility on the Innovation Campus
 - h. Lamb Hall renovation
 - i. Planning process for Warf Pickel renovations
- Complete strategic facilities master plan.

- Create innovative programs in each of the following areas:
 - a. Health Sciences
 - b. Business and Technology
 - c. Arts and Sciences
- Expand presence in downtown Kingsport and open a new off-campus location in one of the state's large metropolitan areas.
- Improve Valleybrook campus such that it is a fully equipped center to promote innovation in key research and educational areas.



- Create Center for Community Engagement in conjunction with the QEP and expand the number of experiential learning opportunities for students.
- Implement a faculty-driven process of general education renewal that ensures every graduate of ETSU is prepared for lifelong learning and professional success.
- Ensure the university is leveraging the historical relationships with the military to provide pathways for military veterans, dependents, ROTC Cadets, and active duty servicemembers serving around the world to obtain a college credential.
- Provide targeted investments in the facilities that support athletics and the Center of Excellence for Sport Science and Coach Education.

B. Years 5-10

- Expand and revitalize Continuing Education with robust, dynamic programming for non-credit learning in the region, offering opportunities in Johnson City and at Allandale/downtown Kingsport sites.
- Double the number of online undergraduate programs and grow enrollment in online programs.
- Undertake review of campus branding, with an accent on market competition and alignment with the vision inherent in the C125.2 report
- Improve faculty and staff salaries to a level equivalent to the peer average by year five.

- Launch a competency-based education program targeted toward the needs of adults across the region.
- Double the volume of externally sponsored research activity.
- Be recognized as a “Great College to Work For.”
- Improve graduation and retention rates for Pell-eligible students to levels equivalent to aspirational peer institutions.
- Reach 90 percent of students participating in internship or real-world experiences with their majors or area of interest and reflecting upon the internship/experience in terms of community and place.
- Expand Access ETSU.
- Build academic program/faculty partnerships with area middle and high schools that will bring ETSU faculty expertise into secondary school settings.
- Develop multiple pre-college academies for middle-high school students and create a seamless pipeline for matriculation to ETSU.
- Double the number of adaptive learning classroom spaces in each building.
- Establish a faculty “culture of contribution” in which research and teaching programs are closely interrelated and responsive to industry needs (i.e., a growing sense of faculty responsibility for this; it is not the work of a single center or person).
- Train ETSU faculty and staff in resiliency and best practices to empower them to revise curriculum and teaching practices and improve daily interactions.
- Enhance academic support structures for post-traditional students.
- Make at least five cluster hires in existing or potential growth areas of research and broader scholarship, particularly focused on health sciences.



- Maintain and expand current funding levels from NIH and increase research expenditures derived from federal agencies other than NIH (National Sciences Foundation, USDA, etc.).
- Ensure all students at ETSU have opportunities to participate in collaborative scholarship activities (e.g., research, creative activity project, internship, etc.) before graduation.
- Establish at least three fixed-term endowed chairs of excellence in identified strength or growth areas of scholarship.
- Begin construction of a new residence hall.
- Create five new interdisciplinary programs.
- Develop co-curriculum for “soft skills” (e.g. teamwork, global awareness, communication, leadership, etc.) that can be documented on an experiential or co-curricular transcript and via badges (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/09/digital-badging-spreads-more-colleges-use-vendors-create-alternative-credentials>).
- Partner with a local high school with a high-risk population to develop the first cooperative high school opportunity in our region to provide a seamless transition from high school to college.
- Increase research access to Little Bucs and University School to serve as learning and research sites for faculty and students across the university.
- Enhance Sherrod Library to become the key academic space for ETSU with makerspace, studios, data visualization labs, etc. much like the James Hunt Library (<https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/spaces?s=1#/all/all/Hunt/>) at North Carolina State University.
- Update Alexander Hall (University School) to make it a state-of-the-art, accessible learning laboratory for ETSU students’ and faculty’s learning and research.



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Note: This document was revised in 2025 to comply with state and federal regulations.
The original document has been preserved in the university's archive.