

# LRAP response to the March 2026 Revised Draft of SU's Strategic Plan (2026-2031)

Dear Co-Chairs of the Strategic Planning Committee, Drs. Weer and Hall:

I write to submit LRAP's feedback on the Revised Strategic Plan. First, we would like to thank the Co-Chairs for allowing more time for revision before adopting a final Strategic Plan. We appreciate the committee's willingness to work with us, and we appreciate the many revisions that have been made according to faculty input, including the revision to PILLAR 1, in particular, Goal 1 to include "experiential learning, grounded in the liberal arts and sciences (though we would recommend taking out the clause, "hands on," as it is both redundant and potential ableist).

In general, LRAP also agrees with the way PILLAR 2 is envisioned, however, there is some concern about Goal 2's emphasis on "personalized learning," the subpoint about ensuring "quality of...instruction" and the focus on "Professional Development aligned to key student transition points." As we will detail below, these types of subpoints use language in ways that are potentially concerning to LRAP for their potential to create cumbersome bureaucratic barriers to program development and academic freedom.

Here are five concepts/terms LRAP would recommend revising to better articulate shared faculty visions for the university.

## **"The Real World"**

Talking about education as preparing students for the "real world" ends up undermining all academic relevance by suggesting that somehow faculty, staff, and students are not part of the same systems as everyone else. This false distinction between the "real world" and what we do at the university ends up perpetuating harmful stereotypes like: a. what we do is not relevant to the world b. what we do is only relevant to students with regards to their potential financial success, suggesting that we are only successful if our graduates end up wealthy, and c. the only way for us to be relevant is to pander to what "the real world" thinks it wants (docile labor), instead of allowing experts in every discipline to decide how to best educate their students, our future citizens to think critically and with compassion (conscious labor).

## **"Workforce"**

The strategic plan should make a clearer case that the liberal arts and sciences teach practical skills, including critical thinking, reading and writing, intercultural competence, and problem-solving. Particularly in an age of rapid change, an undergraduate education should focus on

enduring skills that will help graduates adapt to the jobs that will exist in the future, instead of focusing on a narrow skillset for jobs that exist today. For example, the phrasing of Pillar 1, goal 3 sets “workforce needs and regional priorities” apart from “the broad intellectual foundations of a comprehensive liberal arts education.”

## “The Importance of the Region”

This document raises concerns regarding the proposed strategic plan’s emphasis on regional priorities, particularly its potential impact on faculty scholarship, student opportunities, and the University’s broader mission. While regional engagement is valuable, the current plan may unintentionally narrow academic scope and reduce institutional competitiveness.

The proposed plan is inconsistent in its focus by use of the phrases, “region” or “regional” but also “state.” The thrust of the plan is a shift to programs, scholarship, internships, academic programs, and financial support to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. There is concern that this will undermine the current role of many faculty who have significant expertise and scholarship applicable to a broader world while also undermining the attractiveness of SU to students who seek a career beyond the Eastern Shore.

Evidence:

Pillar 1:

The plan’s Pillar 1, at Goal 3, strongly suggests that the status quo with regard to academic programs, faculty, and staff will be altered to satisfy “regional priorities”.

At Goal 4, the plan seeks to advance knowledge and strengthen the *region* through faculty, staff, and student research, scholarship, and creative activity. This suggests that Mid-Atlantic, national, and international scholarship would be subordinated to issues in this region. These issues may lack the depth, breadth, complexity, and importance of scholarship beyond regional focus.

In the enumerated strategy for this Goal 4, investment and support is focused on regional priorities. Similarly, “regional engagement” is again emphasized.

Pillar 3:

Pillar 3 proposes to “uplift the region”. There is a strong emphasis on local partnerships. The plan seeks to “align internships, applied research, and service-learning with regional priority areas.” This “alignment” is not student-centered for many. A large complement of our students want to use their internships to gain a foothold on the wide range of higher quality jobs that are not found on the Eastern Shore. The Eastern Shore does not provide the range, depth, and quality of internships found on the Western Shore and Mid-Atlantic.

Furthermore, the plan does not commit to investment in internships by ensuring that they are high quality and fairly compensated. The plan should commit to funding of these internships as they appear to form the core of “real-world,” “experiential,” “hands-on,” “pipelines.”

Where additional faculty engagement is contemplated in these vocational endeavors, there should be commitment to additional compensation for this expansion of traditional academic assignments. This should include training and other support for faculty recruited for a different role than this current plan suggests.

Pillar 4:

Pillar 4 discusses responsible stewardship for a strong future. Key phrases included “culture of trust” and “strong sense of belonging”. This Pillar is then undermined at Goal 2 by language calling for the strategic alignment of faculty and staff to meet the University’s mission. There is a clear signal to faculty whose scholarship is not “regionally-engaged” that they may face assessment and adjustment of their workloads and roles. The Plan proposes to de-emphasize the importance, funding, and support for faculty and students who are not committed to regional employment, research or academic programs.

We are also concerned that some faculty, students, and parents will see this regional pivot as a strong signal that the University’s goals are not consistent with their needs.

## **Over-Emphasis on Alignment & possible link to Retrenchment**

The plan mentions align/aligned/alignment ten times, with particular emphasis on aligning university programs and resources with **regional workforce needs and priorities**. The plan repeatedly calls for aligning key elements of the university (e.g., faculty and staff as well as resources and programs) with them -- as well as with SU’s institutional strategic priorities that are heavily oriented toward meeting those same regional workforce needs and priorities.

While this issue merits some attention, it is too much of a central theme in the plan. Further, the way it is repeatedly invoked is suggestive of a narrow notion of “career skills development” to meet workforce needs (e.g. the professional degree programs and neglecting broader skills in critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and diversity literacy) as well as some degree of parochial regionalism. This sells us (SU) short. We all do various forms of career skills development in a multiplicity of ways across campus, and we all contribute in manifold ways to the region – imagine the hole that would leave in the economy and culture if SU were not here.

More concerning is that **directions on strategic alignment for programs and resources could plausibly become a basis for retrenchment decision-making regarding program downsizing or elimination**. The SU Faculty Handbook indicates that “long-range educational planning” is among several non-financial factors to be considered in retrenchment (SU Faculty

Handbook, Chapter 2, “Faculty Retrenchment” section

<https://catalog.salisbury.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=651#retrenchment>

## “Metrics”

The plan places great emphasis on measuring outcomes for “program review” “reinvestment” (PILLAR 1, Goal 3), “to evaluate effectiveness and guide decisions about expanding, refining, or sun-setting student success-initiatives” (PILLAR 2, Goal 2), the ability to “establish university-wide approaches to community and employer partnerships” and “measure and communicate SU’s economic, social, and cultural impact on the region and State” (PILLAR 3, Goal 1), align “workforce planning, succession strategies, and targeted professional development ... with current and emerging institutional priorities” (PILLAR 4, Goal 2), to “launch capital campaign[s] aligned with institutional priorities” (PILLAR 4, Goal 3), and to allow “AI-enabled tools to support decision-making” (PILLAR 4, Goal 4).

Though measuring success is a necessary part of today’s world, the overemphasis on data to guide us is concerning. Not only does data not show a full picture of what happened, but also producing it has the potential to a. limit academic freedom, b. change disciplinary priorities, c. alter the student experience.

Many faculty come from disciplines that rely more on different forms of data to make decisions. Some use qualitative data, some use an individualized approach that is not conducive to data collection, and others rely on repetition and targeted assignments created in real time to respond to student needs. If faculty are expected to propose everything they want to do first, and measure it according to what they hope will happen in a class, then many faculty will lose their academic freedom to teach and assess students in their own personal and discipline-specific way.

If data is used to make decisions on where funding is allocated and funding is based on aligning with the strategic priorities, then departments will be forced to change many of their practices if they do not align with the plan. This also limits academic freedom.

Similarly, if every class on campus is trying to align with these specific priorities (measurable experiences, focused on the region, and very visible), then students will no longer experience the same type of diversity with regards to class content and style as they currently do. As it is, a student can see the same gen eds in multiple classes, making it seem like disciplines do not matter, academic freedom is unimportant, and the student experience has been pre-written according to data points about “success” and “good investment” instead of quality of education. This is even more true if Administration relies on AI to decide paths forward. AI is not capable of holding nuanced views. If we use it to find efficiencies, that is all it will look for without considering if efficiency is the only value that matters when we are talking about education.

Finally, if our main goal is to increase the number of programs that complete a particular goal, we can say we met our goal without considering the quality of the programs. Many SU study abroad courses would not currently meet the criteria of a credible international student experience by most experts in the field, and yet SU can still say it is “increasing Study Abroad.” Higher numbers do not mean anything. We recommend avoiding the quantity approach to data collection as a valid tool for measuring student experiences.

## **THINGS MISSING:**

- Hire qualified people: many departments are in need of new hires; study abroad does not have a director, registrar is understaffed, several key people on campus have more than one title
- Dual Enrollment: does the university plan to accept this regional call to work with local high schools to create more DE pathways?
- Gen Eds: How will we assess the effectiveness of our gen eds? How can we simplify the process? Currently, many committees are overreaching in their feedback, causing a backlog of proposals and much faculty frustration
- Online systems: How can we reevaluate the systems we use? Why do we need so many? Submitting funding, course proposals, and meeting with people used to be somewhat simple, now it takes so much time and causes extra unnecessary stress.
- Campus health: How can we highlight and expand SU’s green initiatives? How can we reimagine healthy food options on campus in sustainable packaging? What other considerations might we make for the physical and mental health of our students?
- Campus Culture: How can we slow down to better highlight and appreciate all we are? Why do we insist students approach education with a checklist mentality instead of encouraging slow, intentional exploration? Why do we want students worrying about jobs and trying to publish before they have had a chance to learn? Why do we spend money on celebrations and not scholarship?

## **Additional steps:**

LRAP will ask to see faculty feedback and to be able to work with the steering committee to continue to revise the strategic plan draft.

LRAP is submitting a motion to the Senate to request participation in the implementation steering committee as well.

Sincerely,

Sally Perret, LRAP Chair