



University
of Rochester
Student Life

Strategic Plan

STUDENT LIFE, EVER BETTER

Our strategic vision to inspire,
empower, and transform the
student experience.

PUBLISHED
JULY 2026



PREFACE	3
OUR MISSION	4
COMMUNITY & BELONGING	5
GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT	4
SUPPORT & WELL-BEING	8
ACTIVITY & ENGAGEMENT	10
OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE	11
OUR DEPARTMENTS	13



EXPLORE. CONNECT. THRIVE.

It is with great pride that I introduce the inaugural strategic plan for University Student Life. This plan was not written in isolation; it was shaped, over the course of eighteen months, by the voices of hundreds of students, staff, and faculty across the University of Rochester. We sought community feedback at every step, listened closely to what we heard, and returned again to validate our direction before moving forward. What you will find in these pages reflects the wisdom, the experience, and the hopes of the very community it is meant to serve.

The plan is organized with intention, moving from the aspirational to the actionable: a visionary mission for student life, five guiding principles, broad goals that define what success looks like, the tactics that will carry us toward those goals, and annual action items that

hold us accountable along the way. It spans the 2026–27 through 2030–31 academic years, five years of shared commitment for a division of more than twenty units, over 500 staff members, and nearly 1,000 student employees, each playing an essential role in the University's academic mission. Yet we know that no plan, however thoughtfully built, can anticipate every need our students will bring to this campus in the years ahead. For that reason, we will revisit this plan each year, listening closely and adjusting our course as new needs and opportunities emerge.

I am inspired by the creative problem solvers, dedicated staff, and devoted faculty who gave their time and insight to this work, and I am confident it will help us deliver an experience worthy of this remarkable institution. To every student who calls the University of Rochester home, know that everyone in University Student Life is rooting for your success, today and in the five years ahead, as together we work to make this community ever better.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Blackshear". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being more prominent.

Dr. John Blackshear
Vice President for University Student Life



University
of Rochester
Student Life

Our Mission

Explore. Connect. Thrive.

Our mission is to create a welcoming environment where every student feels a genuine sense of belonging. Through meaningful learning opportunities, intentional community-building, and a strong focus on health and well-being, we empower students to explore, connect, and thrive – during their academic journey and beyond.

Guiding Principles

Fundamental areas of focus that guide our work.

- ▶ Community & Belonging
- ▶ Growth & Development
- ▶ Support & Well-Being
- ▶ Activities & Engagement
- ▶ Operational Excellence



STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



Community & Belonging

Strategic Goal

Foster **community** and a sense of **belonging** in a welcoming environment where all students feel at home.

Tactics & 2026-2027 Action Items

TACTIC 1

Collaborate across Student Life offices to design and implement innovative programs and initiatives that foster a sense of belonging and build community for all students.

- Create a shared definition of belonging for the Institution.
- Expand our First-Year Experience initiatives, including Ever Better Beginnings and FYRE residence hall initiatives.
- Explore opportunities to centralize graduate student orientation.
- Continue to grow intentional, home-grown, and collaborative programming within first-year residence halls.
- Identify new opportunities to build community among international students and graduate students.

TACTIC 2

Implement a newly re-imagined campus dining experience focused on inclusive hospitality, emphasizing well-being, creating authentic cuisine, and providing a welcoming environment where every member of the URochester community feels at home.

- Expand collaboration with student organizations to bring authentic experiences to dining spaces, offering comforts from around the globe, and expanding the Dining Around the World program.
- Create individualized dining experiences at times that align with students' needs and schedules, where the value exceeds that of external options.
- Transform dining plans by moving beyond restrictive meal-swipe models to flexible, student-centered spending solutions that support the diverse lifestyles, schedules, and professional pathways of undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and career-specific student populations.
- Conduct an evaluation of the current dining facilities to understand future opportunities and how to incorporate the newest trends.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



TACTIC 3

Develop and implement plans that address key facility priorities, including student housing, student life spaces, learning spaces, athletic and recreation facilities, and spaces that promote student well-being and community building.

- Continue the planning and development of the new Student Life building.
- Continue improving residential hall infrastructure, including interior spaces (bathrooms, lounges, kitchens) and exterior spaces (shelters, seating, landscaping, bike racks, charging areas for lithium batteries, safe storage for e-bikes and scooters).
- Conduct a space study to explore future opportunities for a multi-use building.
- Explore future opportunities for the Fraternity Quad buildings, prioritize urgent infrastructure work, and review current occupancy policies and expectations for Greek and non-Greek houses.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



Growth & Development

Strategic Goal

*As educators, support students' **growth** by providing opportunities to **develop** leadership and life skills, empowering them to thrive at the University and succeed beyond.*

Tactics & 2026-2027 Action Items

TACTIC 1

Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for a robust suite of competency development programs that teach "real-world" skills, leadership, interpersonal dialogue, and civil discourse. Ensure inclusive access for all students - from first-year undergraduates to graduate students across all schools.

- Develop a pilot for a first-year experience course to launch in the fall 2027 semester.
- Continue to grow the Medallion Leadership program as our signature experiential learning program.

TACTIC 2

Expand and integrate experiential learning opportunities across Student Life, ensuring students engage in meaningful experiences that increase career competencies and provide critical growth opportunities.

- Identify all experiential learning opportunities currently offered to students across USL. Work in partnership with the Greene Center to determine the future direction of experiential learning opportunities for students within USL.
- Implement a unified student employment experience across USL offices with similar onboarding procedures, centralized communication, and annual student employee satisfaction surveys.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



Support & Well-Being

Strategic Goal

*Provide essential resources and **support** through a unified system to help students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, while promoting holistic **well-being**, including mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health.*

Tactics & 2026-2027 Action Items

TACTIC 1

Establish an interdisciplinary committee dedicated to student well-being.

- Analyze well-being assessment tools currently in use, determine future needs, and lead an ongoing well-being survey strategy for USL.
- Provide a comprehensive annual report on the state of student well-being to inform continuous improvement.
- Enhance the visibility, accessibility, and effectiveness of well-being and support resources by defining offerings, evaluating services, and improving communication to help students connect to them.

TACTIC 2

Analyze and address the needs of our most vulnerable students using a data-informed approach.

- Better understand our students' food insecurity and develop ways to address this need.
- Create a proactive outreach protocol and develop a user experience survey for the CARE Network.
- Collaborate with Academic Excellence to address the needs of supporting faculty with distressed students.

TACTIC 3

Increase staff and student readiness and response in emergencies.

- Provide training to over 200 students and USL staff on AED/CPR and Naloxone best practices, aiming to increase the number of individuals on campus prepared to respond effectively during emergency situations.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



TACTIC 4

Reimagine and expand Religious & Spiritual Life to foster our students' spiritual well-being and build connections across diverse traditions within the campus community.

- Analyze current programs and initiatives, assess gaps in need, and strategize the development of future offerings.
- Develop new spaces to create inclusive environments for our largest faith communities.
- Foster the growth of three new spiritual communities.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



Activities & Engagement

Strategic Goal

Engage students in meaningful traditions and **activities** that celebrate the uniqueness of the student body and foster respect and inclusion.

Tactics & 2026-2027 Action Items

TACTIC 1

Host activities, traditions, and events that enhance school spirit, celebrate the University of Rochester's unique identity, and foster student engagement across all schools.

- Continue to increase engagement in Spirit Fridays.
- Develop and implement a strategy to increase attendance of all URochester community members at athletic events.
- Create a comprehensive communication strategy across multiple channels to inform students about our activity and engagement opportunities.
- Elevate existing residence hall traditions and events.

TACTIC 2

Transform campus recreation, bringing together club sports, fitness, recreation, and intramurals in new ways that better meet evolving student needs.

- Implement initial phases of the intramurals/group fitness transition plan.
- Create a funding request proposal for the expansion of campus recreation and present to Advancement.

TACTIC 3

Enhance training for student event managers for on-campus events.

- Develop a new training to assess better, mitigate, and transfer risk during on-campus events through SWARM (Students Wanting Activities Responsibly Monitored) Event Manager Trainings.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



Operational Excellence

Strategic Goal

*Create a high-performing and people-centered division by streamlining **operations**, fostering employee growth and belonging, leveraging data and communication strategically, and developing the next generation of student affairs leaders.*

Tactics & 2026-2027 Action Items

TACTIC 1

Redesign operating procedures across University Student Life to centralize processes, services, teams, and systems, enhancing efficiency, streamlining work, and promoting fiscal responsibility.

- Create and implement a strategy to centralize IT and finance functions across USL.
- Propose a centralized approach to managing systems and services across USL.
- Provide training for USL leaders on budget management and program evaluation.
- Evaluate opportunities for the expansion of CCC across USL.

TACTIC 2

Foster an exceptional employee experience within the USL team by delivering a welcoming onboarding process, supporting professional development, celebrating and publicizing accomplishments, and regularly incorporating employee feedback to drive improvement.

- Improve communication with USL staff by launching a staff newsletter.
- Create avenues to celebrate and publicize employee accomplishments.

TACTIC 3

Continually foster partnerships with offices throughout the institution to collaboratively enhance the student experience.

- Create a “lookbook” of funding opportunities to share with Advancement.
- Prioritize increased engagement with, and strategize plans to collaborate with, the following offices in the 2026-2027 academic year: Undergraduate Admissions, Office for Global Engagement, and URochester Libraries.

STRATEGIC GOALS & TACTICS



TACTIC 4

Contribute to the higher education career pipeline by offering internships, fellowships, and assistantship opportunities for current students, as well as career opportunities for recent graduates, to gain experience in student affairs while enhancing the student experience.

- Fully launch the Apeiron Project this fall by creating a USL Student Advisory Committee.
- Strategize opportunities for Graduate Assistants who work across multiple USL units and contribute to our success.

TACTIC 5

Develop and implement an assessment strategy that leverages institutional data, student surveys, involvement metrics, published higher education literature, and industry best practices to strategically collect, analyze, and report data, creating a road map that aligns with and supports student success.

- Complete an inventory of surveys launched and data collected across all USL offices.
- Create and implement a USL survey strategy.



University of Rochester

Student Life

Our Departments

ATHLETICS & RECREATION

Varsity Athletics
Intramural Sports
Recreation

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT

Paul Burgett Intercultural Center
LGBTQ Life
Religious & Spiritual Life

CAMPUS DINING & AUXILIARY SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS

Student Activities
Leadership
Student Conduct
CARE Network
Health Promotion
Orientation & New Student Programs
Parent & Family Relations
Risk Management

STUDENT LIFE OPERATIONS

Student Centers & Services
Capital Planning / Renovation / Space Planning
Student Life Events
Project Administration & Finance
Systems Administration

RESIDENTIAL LIFE & HOUSING SERVICES

Undergraduate & Graduate Housing

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICE

Primary Care
University Counseling Center
Administration & Finance



University of Rochester

Student Life