Strategic Directions 2026

PRELIMINARY FINAL REPORT

A Report from the
Strategic Directions 2026 Steering Group

February 2015
February 12, 2015

Dear Taylor Community,

During the past eighteen months, we have had the privilege of listening to the voices of the extended Taylor community, and we have heard how they value Taylor and what they envision for its future. We are moved by the shared commitment to the Lord, to one another, and to Taylor as expressed so thoughtfully and caringly by faculty, staff, and students as well as alumni, parents, and friends.

With that context and in the same spirit, the Steering Group offers this Preliminary Final Report in accordance with our Strategic Directions 2026 charge of designing, organizing, and facilitating a collaborative process that yields approximately five strategic directions to advance the Taylor University mission by 2026.

In return, we ask for your continuing thoughtful and constructive responses—observations, opinions, confirmations, and critiques—during the next few weeks to help us make the report even more reflective of our shared vision for Taylor. Your responses will inform the drafting of the Final Report to be presented to President Habecker later this spring and ultimately to the Board of Trustees in May.

Charting Taylor’s future begins with seeking guidance from the Lord and is informed by the faith, knowledge, and wisdom of the extended Taylor family. Since June 2013, over 1,300 people in 69 gatherings on campus and in 19 cities have given their input. Countless people have prayed for this process. Even as we continue to cherish your prayers, we encourage you to submit your comments on the Preliminary Final Report no later than April 16 at: http://bit.ly/1F9PhGq.

Strategic Directions 2026 is not intended to be a comprehensive and detailed plan. Though none of us can clearly see the future, certainly not to 2026, we know Taylor and the times in which we live. As a result, Taylor must focus on a few significant difference-making objectives, ones that build on existing strengths, core competencies, and guiding principles, and consolidate the broad gains achieved through Vision 2016. We seek not a wide range of incremental advances, but the power of transformation through bold focus.

Three passages from Proverbs reflect our purpose and process: “Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run,” (21:5a); “Form your purpose by asking for counsel, then carry it out using all the help you can get,” (20:18); and “We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it” (16:9 MSG).

As we formulate and refine Strategic Directions 2026, we seek to bequeath a University to future generations that is at least as, if not more, relevant, rigorous, and “on mission” as the one we have inherited from our predecessors. Together, by God’s grace, let us commit to advancing the Taylor mission—not for our sake, but for His glory and for the sake of those whom we are called to serve.

Sincerely,

The Strategic Directions 2026 Steering Group
Strategic Directions 2026 Steering Group

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Strategic Directions 2026 Preliminary Final Report

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Context for Strategic Directions 2026
Since Taylor was founded in 1846, each generation has sought the Lord’s direction for the University’s future, recognizing that guiding and advancing the University are ultimately God’s work, done through His enabling of people who care deeply about Taylor.

With that understanding, the Strategic Directions 2026 Steering Group was entrusted with the assignment to lead and collaborate with the Taylor community to formulate and communicate difference-making strategic directions to help chart a course for the University, Lord willing, to 2026. To that end, we began by asking two questions: What can we learn from history? How should it inform our planning?

Learning from History

After studying models employed by colleges and universities, we found no agreed-upon approach to strategic planning. Further, we were humbled to learn that most strategic planning deliberations produce mere reports, not noteworthy results, and yet we were resolute in our commitment that our efforts, on behalf of the Taylor community, would render a lasting difference.

The idea of the university has endured and proliferated, even as other institutions have come and gone. Today, the university is a pervasive and global phenomenon. Therefore, we decided to learn as much as possible from those schools whose missions advanced most steadily, decade by decade, even if we did not always affirm their respective visions and values.

Exemplary universities, we discovered, are certain of their mission, candid in their self-assessment, and cognizant of external realities. They don’t seek transformational change in the short-term or settle for incremental change in the long-term. They boldly and relentlessly focus on a select few areas of defined or emerging strengths that are central to their mission and that have the most potential, when deepened and/or expanded, to advance their mission.

What we learned from them meant that throughout this process, two questions remained foremost in our minds: What must not change about Taylor? And, what must change about Taylor?

Unchanging Commitments

Taylor has remained a decidedly Christian institution of higher education for 169 years. Individuals with the longest views and deepest experiences with the University agree that Taylor is more determined and distinctive than ever in its Christian commitments, character, and community.

This reality is manifest and anchored in a set of unchangeable truths succinctly articulated in our Statement of Faith. Because we understand these truths to be timeless, we resolved that our commitment to them must never change. Since they undergird the past, inform the present, and guide the future, they are restated here at the outset of this report:

Taylor University is firmly committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ and evangelical Christianity. To assure the central place of Christian principles in the philosophy and life of the University, the trustees, administration, faculty, and staff believe:

- There is one God, eternally existent in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the ultimate Creator and Sustainer of all things in heaven and on earth.
• The Holy Bible is the only inspired, authoritative written word of God, progressively revealing God’s will for humankind.
• Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God who made known and carried out God’s plan of redemption through His virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, bodily resurrection and ascension, and who will return in power and glory.
• The Holy Spirit is present in the life of the believer, testifying to the lordship of Christ and enabling the believer to live a godly life.
• Humankind, though uniquely created in God’s image, rebelled and stands in need of redemption.
• God graciously extends salvation to anyone who comes to Christ by faith.
• The Church is the community of believers who express their unity in Christ by loving and serving Him, each other, and all people.

The essential truths asserted in this statement have shaped the beliefs and behaviors of followers of Jesus over generations and around the world. Motivated by the story of redemption revealed in Scripture, followers of Christ have listened to the Great Commission to “…go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV). Such a charge causes believers to start and sustain many organizations, especially institutions of higher education like Taylor.

Thus, Taylor is characterized as an extension of the Church, a strategic means for a Kingdom end. This relationship must also never change. While the exact words of the University’s mission statement are refined over time, their impetus and importance remain unchanged. The Steering Group’s charge included keeping our efforts and our recommendations grounded in the existing mission statement:

*The mission of Taylor University is to develop servant leaders marked with a passion to minister Christ’s redemptive love and truth to a world in need.*

The mission of Taylor University is implemented within a Christ-centered community of scholarship and Biblical faith distinguished by certain essential Anchor Points, an idea first articulated by President Milo Rediger, initially published by Taylor in 1972 and refined over time. Taylor is committed to being Christ-Centered, Biblically Anchored, Faith and Learning Integrated, Liberal Arts Grounded, Whole-Person Focused, World Engaging, and Servant Leader Motivated. As the name implies, these core values keep Taylor anchored to its unchanging commitments.

This mission and its attendant anchor points guide Taylor’s every curricular and co-curricular educational effort. In this, our Master Teacher is Jesus Christ. His followers, and His students, are known as disciples, and the lifelong process of being formed in His image is known as discipleship.

Because disciple also means learner, Taylor’s conception of learning is inextricably tied to discipleship. This reality distinguishes Taylor from almost all of the 4,000-plus colleges and universities in the United States. It even differentiates Taylor as one of a decreasing few among the 120 Council for Christian Colleges and Universities’ members that require incoming students to articulate a Christian faith (a requirement of all Taylor trustees, faculty, and staff as well). Therefore, it is fitting to use the word discipleship as a primary means of describing Taylor’s distinctive approach to Christian higher education.

Believing discipleship to be the essential vocare (calling) of God Himself for Taylor University, we restate and reaffirm that our focus on discipleship must not change. In addition, because the term possesses different meanings and uses within the Christian community, we define here what discipleship means to Taylor.
Our recommendation is as follows:

Taylor University is a voluntary fellowship of evangelical Christian scholars passionate about the development of disciples of Jesus Christ who know Him intimately, love Him sincerely, reflect His character genuinely, and serve His purposes faithfully. Taylor’s is a whole-person ministry intent upon fostering the maturation of students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and vocationally within a context of Christian discipleship.

Discipleship at Taylor happens through a Christian liberal arts education involving both a rigorous academic program and a servant leader–oriented co-curricular program within a primarily undergraduate, highly residential, globally engaged, intentional Christian community.

The Taylor University experience is designed purposefully so students will grow to know what is true, do what is good, and value what is beautiful—to think as disciples of Jesus Christ, to act as disciples of Jesus Christ, and to desire as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Taylor students progressively renew their minds through the study of God’s truth as revealed in Scripture, human reason, and creation, thus cultivating Christian intellectual habits and virtues critical to a lifelong journey of integrating faith and experience, establishing foundational convictions, resolving conflicting truth claims, and developing critical thinking skills.

Taylor students participate in authentic, incarnational, Christian community in which they build up, make allowance for, respect, care for, and speak the truth in love to one another, thereby nurturing the Christian moral virtues of fellowship, hospitality, and reconciliation necessary for thriving within ethnically diverse, global, and pluralistic communities.

Taylor students engage the aesthetic dimensions of human culture and the natural world in order to nourish habits of wonder at and worship of an abundantly creative God, growing in their desire to glorify Him by loving and obeying Him, caring for His creation, creatively contributing to culture, and sharing in human flourishing.

Confident in their identity in Christ and the power of God’s indwelling Spirit to preserve, guide, and empower them—and drawing on their faith, knowledge, and skills—Taylor students are prepared for every role in life to which God will call them, including their families, workplaces, churches, and communities.

Taylor University graduates are then sent out as faithful stewards and servant leaders who are committed to ministering God’s redemptive love and truth to a world in need.

The understanding of discipleship emerges from Taylor’s Statement of Faith, its Mission Statement, and both the past and present of the Taylor program and experience. Partnering with God in this work of forming disciples is what Taylor University does best. As a result, the Steering Group, with the conviction of the discipleship focus and the contributions of others from this process, turned its attention to what Taylor must do better with regards to discipleship by 2026.

Our understanding of the process of discipleship is grounded in our comprehension of who God is and how God interacts with His people. We are called to be disciples of Jesus, and we believe that discipleship is the work of the Lord in people’s lives. Relationship, because of God’s Trinitarian essence—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is part of God’s very nature. Furthermore, God created people to be in relationship with Him and with one another. Discipleship is then cultivated through relationships between and among people in particular places and at particular times.
The particular setting for discipleship at Taylor is within a voluntary community of Christians who intentionally join together for academic progress, personal development, and spiritual growth. The Taylor University Life Together Covenant (LTC) identifies expectations for living in such a community as we seek to fulfill our mission. The LTC, which is annually affirmed by all faculty, staff, and students, provides a framework that shapes our efforts to live in right relationship with God and others. (The entire LTC may be read at: www.taylor.edu/about/mission.)

Discipleship at Taylor University is cultivated in students by the series of interactions they have over the course of four years with academic faculty, student development faculty, staff, fellow students, campus guests, community members, alumni, and family.

These interactions are especially formative for undergraduates at Taylor because of a shared Christian faith, liberal arts foundation, commonality in students’ age and full-time status, a deeply committed faculty and staff, a highly residential campus, a unifying chapel program, coherence of Christian commitment amongst parents and alumni, and a rural setting that further fosters an intentional community.

Consequently, we asked ourselves:

• What must we do better to support students?
• What must we do better to support those who interact with students?
• What must we do to cultivate even more formative interactions with students?

**Supporting Students**

Because we are a student-oriented institution, the first question could have led us to explore every dimension of the University. However, the Steering Group concluded that the greatest difference could be made by studying how incoming classes of students shape the larger Taylor experience, which students are and are not enrolling, and how the funding and composition of student enrollment impacts the University.

The University already has a high proportion of students who exhibit the characteristics that lend themselves to making the most of the Taylor experience: the potential to thrive academically, commitment to whole-person discipleship in an intentional community, and a desire to live out the school’s mission. However, the Steering Group asked if it is possible to have even a higher percentage and a more diverse student body exhibiting these characteristics.

While we feel grateful for steady enrollment in unsteady times, high graduation rates, and superior levels of satisfaction by current alumni and parents, we believe the quality of the Taylor experience is best measured by the way it reflects and serves the Church as well as the larger society. We concluded Taylor could achieve those ends by enrolling a student body more economically, ethnically, and geographically representative of the Church. In so doing, the students’ experience would be enriched, and the mission of the University would be lived out by a more diverse and wider diaspora of alumni.

We were concerned that fewer students with the greatest financial need were enrolling or even applying, and that many other families were making considerable sacrifices so their children could attend. We were heartened by the fact that our current student body is the most ethnically diverse in Taylor’s history but sobered by the realization that it is still behind the changing composition of America’s population, including the Church. This realization comes at a time when high school graduation rates in the Midwest, home to the largest portion of our student body, are flat and projected to remain so for the next decade. That reality, we reasoned, provided an even greater impetus for the University to seek out applicants beyond our traditional strongholds who also have a high potential for identifying with the Taylor mission.
We noted that while 60 percent of students take out loans, their average debt upon graduation is below the national average, and their loan default rate is comparatively low. Nevertheless, debt may cause some students to pursue a more financially lucrative career after graduation rather than what they believe is their true calling.

Strategic planning obligates us to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, not just for the entire University but for each of its directions. As a result, we realized we should prepare ourselves for the possibility that our students’ access to government aid could be challenged because of our historic Christian beliefs and practices. By simple extrapolation, we saw the University’s mission may be at risk should more restrictive regulations be attached to other sources of government funding.

While we gave thanks for our conservative fiscal management and balanced budgets, we were obligated to acknowledge that 90 percent of the University’s annual budget is derived from enrollment revenue, which makes it highly susceptible to economic and demographic changes or anything influencing them.

We expressed gratitude for record levels of generosity by alumni, parents, and friends—and the great enhancements they have made possible to the physical campus for academic, residential, and student life purposes. However, we realized that advances in the aforementioned areas would require far greater levels of philanthropic support.

In the face of these challenging issues, the Steering Group was animated by a desire for the Taylor family to think transformatively, rather than incrementally, about alleviating the University’s dependence on tuition revenue, including student loans.

**Supporting Those Who Interact with Students**

When describing the lasting impact of their Taylor experience, the vast majority of alumni point with deep appreciation to the selfless and tireless efforts of many faculty and staff members. Indeed, Taylor is very fortunate to have colleagues who share a Christian commitment, feel a profound sense of calling, express strong devotion to students, and display giftedness in their respective assignments. Their many, varied, and substantive interactions with students cultivate an environment where disciples of Jesus may be deeply rooted.

To make the greatest possible difference, the Steering Group concluded, the University must give exceptional attention to supporting academic faculty and student development faculty who are on the frontline, inside and outside the classroom, having meaningful, deep, and frequent discipleship-fostering interactions with students. (The use of “faculty” in this document refers to both academic faculty and student development faculty.) This need will prove increasingly important because one out of three current academic faculty members could retire by 2026.

The Steering Group affirmed the significant roles of staff members and their contributions to discipleship. However, we believe there must be at this time a particular strategic focus on the faculty.

The Steering Group concluded the four most effective means for strengthening faculty are: creating more time to interact with students, developing faculty professionally and personally, broadening ethnic diversity to better reflect the aspired-to diversity of the student pool, and adjusting compensation to better reflect market realities.

Generating more time for faculty interaction with students, we realized, deepens the effect of Taylor’s whole-person discipleship focus. We have a servant-hearted but over-worked faculty. A sustainable solution is not simple, quick, or inexpensive. We must make progress in addressing workload expectations for all
faculty and develop expectations that acknowledge differences in roles (e.g., teaching, scholarship, and service).

We particularly believe faculty must have more time for students in Foundational Core classes, mentoring students in high-impact learning opportunities, participating with students in global and intercultural experiences, and advising students related to their vocational and career preparation.

We affirmed the University’s investment in the Bedi Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence and the high level of faculty participation in its development opportunities. We believe the investment needs to be expanded and extended to include personal and spiritual growth, because a commitment to whole-person discipleship requires whole-person development.

While the Taylor student body is more diverse in terms of ethnic and international students, the faculty is not. A more diverse faculty, because of the experiences and perspectives it brings, is a stronger faculty for all students and provides models and encouragement for a changing student body. Additionally, we noted that female faculty members are underrepresented, particularly in leadership roles requiring faculty experience.

Taylor benefits from a deeply committed faculty who live in an area with a comparably low cost of living. However, the labor market for higher education is national and even international in nature. The University has thus comparatively fallen behind in providing adequate compensation. With the coming wave of retirements and a limited pool of distinctive candidates, we believe this challenge must be addressed in order for Taylor to attract, hire, and retain more of its first-choice faculty candidates.

Cultivating Formative Interactions with Students

After sifting through extensive contributions from many people, the Steering Group identified four key types of distinctive interactions that define the Taylor experience. These types of interactions possess momentum on campus, inspire support from alumni and parents, and, when done well and truly integrated, produce the whole-person discipleship that sets the University apart from all others.

The four interaction areas are foundational education, signature learning, global engagement, and vocational formation.

STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONAL EDUCATION

The Steering Group agrees with what it heard consistently and forcefully from all quarters of the Taylor family—that Taylor must continue and strengthen its commitment to being a Christian liberal arts college. Student participation in the Foundational Core Curriculum helps students know what is true, good, and beautiful; broadens their learning; and increases their ability to learn throughout life. Collectively engaging the enduring questions of life helps foster substantive interaction between students and faculty.

The Steering Group acknowledges the campus leadership of the Foundational Core Curriculum Committee and the innovative work of faculty members to strengthen the core courses that constitute more than one-third of credit hours required for graduation. The Steering Group affirms the priority of making the entire core curriculum more integrated, engaging, and innovative. However, the Steering Group recognizes that to do so will require more time and support for faculty and thus resources from the University.
EXPANDING SIGNATURE LEARNING

The Steering Group, after reviewing best-practice literature and testimonies from current students and faculty, is convinced that signature learning offers great potential for all Taylor students. By signature learning experiences, we mean the high-impact educational practices of undergraduate research, service-learning, community-based learning, and capstone projects. Involving students in signature learning opportunities helps them develop critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills and better prepares them for work, graduate school, and living in a complex world. The intensive nature of faculty-mentored signature learning opportunities leads faculty to build distinctive relationships with students.

The Steering Group recognizes the current efforts related to expanding signature learning opportunities at Taylor. And, we believe these opportunities should be available and appropriately designed for all students. However, the University will need to address faculty workload, curriculum requirements, and funding levels in order to make this possible.

BROADENING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

The Steering Group celebrates and sees the potential to build upon Taylor’s long-standing and nationally prominent percentage of students studying abroad as well as its history of students participating in local, national, and global mission and service trips. Through global engagement experiences students understand, appreciate, and value diverse cultures and peoples and develop intercultural competencies. Broad and lasting relationships develop between students and faculty when they live, learn, and serve together in different cultures.

The Steering Group recognizes the ongoing work of the Comprehensive Internationalization Leadership Team and the opportunities it sees for Taylor to capitalize on and extend its global engagement programs. We believe even more progress can be made by promoting higher levels of student-to-student cross-cultural engagement on campus, ensuring more consistency in the design of all cross-cultural learning experiences, attracting more diverse faculty and staff, and making external global partnerships more intentional.

DEVELOPING VOCATIONAL FORMATION

The Steering Group affirms the need to help students broadly understand vocation as God’s common and particular callings upon their lives as well as to help them achieve success in securing choice work or graduate school opportunities upon graduation. Student participation in internships, practicums, and research opportunities, combined with other curricular and co-curricular experiences, enables them to discover, develop, and apply God’s calling on their lives. Vocational exploration provides a rich avenue for deeply personal and memorable interaction between students and faculty.

The Steering Group acknowledges the considerable improvement in the services provided to students by the Calling and Career Office and the focus on God’s all-encompassing call on their lives. We believe even more intentionality is required in fostering vocational discernment by helping students to better know their strengths, interests, and skills; introducing them to helpful alumni networks; increasing student participation in internship-type experiences; and providing increased opportunities for witnessing how faculty model vocational faithfulness.

Strategic Directions

The Steering Group concludes that the essence of the Taylor discipleship experience is not something new, but something woven into the fabric of our culture—the right kind of students having the right kinds of interactions with the right kind of faculty. When these are sustained and enhanced, by the enabling of the
Spirit, they advance discipleship in the lives of students and thereby, over time, advance and fulfill the Taylor mission.

Therefore, the Steering Group recommends the University be guided by the following six strategic directions, which are described in more detail in the next section:

- Cultivating Distinctive Students
- Supporting Committed Faculty
- Strengthening Foundational Education
- Expanding Signature Learning
- Broadening Global Engagement
- Developing Vocational Formation

In the year 2026, Taylor University will be, Lord willing, an even more thriving, distinctively Christian, liberal arts university. This will be realized by maintaining and strengthening its focus on intentional community and the discipleship of students through close mentoring by faculty. And, this will be accomplished by providing every graduate with a deep foundation of knowledge, a signature learning experience in a discipline, well-developed global and intercultural competencies, and singular vocational preparation for servant leadership.
Recommendations for Strategic Directions
Framework

Since the inception of this assignment, the title given to the task has been Strategic Directions 2026. Implicit in this name is that the Steering Group, facilitating a deeply collaborative process with the Taylor family as a whole, is attempting to chart a course to where it envisions Taylor will be by the year 2026. Although this is true on one level, it is perhaps better to say that, by faith, we are attempting to discern a path to where the Lord will lead us by the year 2026. Thus, the framework for the recommendations, or Strategic Directions, that follow relies heavily on that directional metaphor.

Each of the six Strategic Directions is articulated within the following structure.

- Guiding Aspiration
- Advancement of Discipleship
- Outline of Goals
- Evidence of Progress

The Guiding Aspiration is an articulation of part of what Taylor hopes to be by 2026. Within the directional metaphor, the Guiding Aspiration tells us where, following this Strategic Direction, we hope to go by 2026.

The paragraph titled Advancement of Discipleship is a brief statement of why the Guiding Aspiration integrally supports the distinctive work of discipleship articulated previously in the Context section. In terms of the metaphor, this tells us why we hope to go where the Guiding Aspiration articulates.

The Outline of Goals consists of a short list of actions that Taylor needs to do in order to become what it aspires to be in the Guiding Aspiration. In the metaphor, the Outline of Goals lays out some of what we need to do to get where we want to go.

Finally, the Evidence of Progress section lists observable indicators of progress towards meeting the Goals, and hence the Guiding Aspiration. To complete the metaphor, the Evidence of Progress section gives us ways to observe that we are headed in the right direction in order to arrive at where we aspire to go.

The goals and evidences should provide the basis for the next step in the planning process. Once these are confirmed, they will frame the work of developing and determining specific quantitative and qualitative measures, benchmarks, and targets at an institutional level and correspondingly within the other levels of the University.
Cultivating Distinctive Students

Guiding Aspiration

Taylor University will strengthen its ability to enroll students, irrespective of financial need, who distinctively demonstrate the University’s most prized qualities: potential to thrive academically, commitment to discipleship in an intentional community, and a desire to live out the school’s mission.

Advancement of Discipleship

Taylor’s ability to provide a formative experience is in direct proportion to the depth of commitment that students bring and to the deepening effect of interactions with each other, faculty and staff, and alumni. Discipleship at Taylor will be enhanced when students from a range of economic, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds can afford to attend.

Outline of Goals

- Reinforce the University’s commitment to recruiting students who are academically motivated, spiritually committed, and drawn to the school’s mission.
- Manage costs affecting tuition levels as innovatively as possible without compromising the Taylor experience.
- Increase the number of attending students with a deep desire to join the Taylor community but whose families would not otherwise have the financial capacity for them to enroll.
- Achieve ethnic diversity of students that is more reflective of the composition of high school graduation classes and the North American Church.
- Accomplish a higher level of geographical diversity both internationally and within the United States.
- Secure far greater philanthropic support by linking scholarship and programmatic needs to significant Christian causes and concerns.

Evidence of Progress

- Taylor will be better known for and improve its ability to attract more students from more backgrounds.
- Enrollment increases and superior stewardship will result in more effective and efficient utilization of University resources without sacrificing the essence of the Taylor experience.
- Alumni, parent, and friend engagement and support will significantly increase.
- People who are currently unaffiliated with the University but drawn to its mission will provide substantial philanthropic support.
- The endowment will increase significantly.
- The University will be more financially sustainable by being less enrollment-driven, less dependent on state/federal student aid, and less reliant on student debt.
Supporting Committed Faculty

Guiding Aspiration

Taylor University will be the preferred employer for committed Christian, mission-driven faculty members who demonstrate academic excellence, the potential for distinctive contributions to the holistic discipleship of its students, and personal calling to its intentional community.

Advancement of Discipleship

In the university context the primary development of students as Christian disciples occurs through mentoring and discipling by academic and student development faculty members and is made more meaningful and enduring by the personal example they set.

Outline of Goals

- Facilitate more faculty and student interaction by articulating and implementing faculty workload expectations that promote balanced lives.
- Implement a flexible approach to measuring faculty workload that acknowledges differences in roles and giftedness (e.g., teaching, scholarship, service).
- Advance the ethnic, international, and cultural diversity of faculty and academic leaders, including increasing the number of women, to reflect as well as support a more diverse student body.
- Expand the faculty development program to provide more holistic and career-long support of professional, personal, and spiritual growth.
- Put into place a competitive faculty compensation package to consistently attract and retain exemplary colleagues.

Evidence of Progress

- Faculty will report having considerably more time to invest in students inside and outside of the classroom.
- Faculty will report that they feel highly supported in professional, personal, and spiritual matters.
- The ethnic, international, and cultural diversity of faculty and academic leaders will increase significantly, including more women in faculty and leadership roles.
- The University will attract, hire, and retain more of its first-choice faculty candidates.
- Faculty will report considerably higher rates of satisfaction with salary, benefits, teaching load, prospects for career advancement, and overall job satisfaction.
- Faculty productivity, by all reasonable and objective measures, will increase.
Strengthening Foundational Education

Guiding Aspiration

Taylor University will be an intentional community in which students participate in a highly integrated, engaging, and innovative, liberal arts based Foundational Core Curriculum.

Advancement of Discipleship

Taylor’s approach to the liberal arts helps students develop as disciples by immersing them in a rich dialogue about life’s important questions; developing their faith, knowledge, and capacities; broadening their learning and ability to learn throughout life; and encouraging their intrinsic motivation to pursue God’s wisdom, truth, and love.

Outline of Goals

- Provide faculty members teaching in the Foundational Core Curriculum the time and resources to regularly collaborate, develop, and teach the core courses.
- Resource and support the development of highly effective pedagogy, course sequencing, integrated thematic course content, and optimal class size within the core curriculum.
- Continually develop the core curriculum to ensure that it is creative, meaningful, and engaging.
- Continually assess the core curriculum to ensure that it achieves its articulated learning objectives.
- Prioritize the teaching of core courses by faculty members whose interests and pedagogical approaches align with the integrated and engaging nature.

Evidence of Progress

- Students will embrace the immediate and long-term value of their Foundational Core Curriculum learning experiences.
- Students will demonstrate growth in the foundational core learning objectives of aesthetic literacy, civic mindedness, communication fluency, critical thinking and information literacy, quantitative and scientific literacy, responsible stewardship, and spiritual maturity.
- An increasing proportion of offered core courses will be demonstrably integrated, recognizably innovative, and provably effective.
- Faculty will have enough margin for investing their full measure of talents in developing and delivering engaging pedagogy and innovative curriculum of core courses.
- Faculty teaching core courses will report increasing levels of satisfaction with these courses.
- Alumni will attest to the core curriculum’s efficacy and transformative impact throughout their lives.
Expanding Signature Learning

Guiding Aspiration

Taylor University will be an intentional community in which students participate in faculty-mentored, signature learning experiences, which are projects that involve firsthand engagement with a problem important to the student and to society; are conducted across at least one semester; require significant inquiry, analysis, reflection, and writing; and result in a student-developed intellectual or creative work.

Advancement of Discipleship

To live, work, and minister effectively in an increasingly complex world, disciples of Jesus Christ must possess substantial critical thinking, creative, and problem solving skills. Faculty-mentored, signature learning experiences provide opportunities for faculty and students to build substantive relationships centered on intellectual growth, which can readily and naturally expand to professional, personal, and spiritual mentoring.

Outline of Goals

- Design common expectations for experiences that qualify as signature learning at Taylor.
- Articulate common definitions and success criteria for these categories of signature learning: undergraduate scholarship, service learning, community-based learning, and capstone projects.
- Formulate or refine assessment instruments to measure changes in student learning outcomes from participation in signature learning.
- Review and modify all major curricula, the Foundational Core Curriculum, and co-curricular programing to better align teaching inputs and expected outcomes with signature learning experience objectives.
- Boost personnel, policies, processes, and procedures for supporting, incentivizing, and delivering faculty-mentored, signature learning.
- Increase internal and external funding devoted to providing students with faculty-mentored, signature learning experiences.

Evidence of Progress

- An increasing number of students will participate in at least one faculty-mentored, signature learning experience of undergraduate scholarship, service learning, community-based learning, or a capstone project.
- Assessment instruments will show growth in students’ disciplinary knowledge, intellectual skills, civic responsibility, interdisciplinary learning, and professional skills.
- A higher percentage of students will graduate from Taylor with evidence of an intellectual or creative project that is their own signature work.
- There will be an expanding number of joint faculty-student produced papers, posters, projects, and presentations.
- An increasing number of Taylor students will be accepted into top-tier graduate programs and professional schools.
Broadening Global Engagement

Guiding Aspiration

Taylor University will be an intentional community in which students demonstrate growth in their understanding, appreciating, and valuing of diverse cultures and peoples; their global knowledge and engagement; and their intercultural competency.

Advancement of Discipleship

As part of the global Church in an increasingly pluralistic society which is embedded in an ever-shrinking world, twenty-first century disciples of Jesus Christ must be equipped with new understandings, attitudes, and skills to effectively live, work, partner, worship, and minister among people with diverse cultural backgrounds and worldviews.

Outline of Goals

- Specify a common definition of global learning and intercultural competency and the desired student learning outcomes for both.
- Embed and assess global learning and intercultural competency learning objectives throughout the curricular and co-curricular program.
- Establish a continuous faculty and staff development program to increase understanding in best practices regarding global engagement and intercultural competency.
- Ensure that all cross-cultural learning experiences offer effective orientation, on-site cultural mentoring, and post-experience reflection.
- Involve students in at least two significant and structured cross-cultural learning experiences based on a wide scope of campus, local, national, and/or global opportunities.
- Emphasize and establish global and intercultural engagement programs across campus and strengthen external global partnerships.

Evidence of Progress

- Students will demonstrate growth in global and intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes as assessed by standardized instruments.
- Faculty and staff will demonstrate greater understanding and effectiveness in intercultural competency as a result of access to more professional development opportunities.
- Significantly higher levels of positive cross-cultural, student-to-student engagement on campus will be documented.
- Increasing strategic and globally significant-long-term global partnerships will be established that meet best-practice guidelines.
Developing Vocational Formation

Guiding Aspiration

Taylor University will be an intentional community in which students discover, develop, and apply God's vocational trajectory for their lives.

Advancement of Discipleship

By cultivating an understanding of how vocation contributes to Christian discipleship, students better reflect the “one body but many parts” of the Church when their giftedness and experiences are lived-out in their families, churches, communities, geographical locations, and careers.

Outline of Goals

- Create conditions for students to discover a robust theological understanding of vocation through curricular and co-curricular programs that explore and develop their strengths, interests, and skill sets.
- Furnish every student with the opportunity to participate in at least one experiential opportunity (e.g., internship, practicum).
- Inspire students to apply resources, connections, and opportunities to what they have learned about vocation so they transition well from students to alumni.
- Provide a diverse array of opportunities for students to connect with alumni that help them grow and develop in their sense of calling.
- Support faculty and staff to flourish in their own vocations, modeling for students the holistic nature of God’s calling.

Evidence of Progress

- Students will experience early and consistent educational experiences and co-curricular opportunities that support vocational and career development.
- The number of students participating in at least one experiential opportunity (e.g., internship, practicum) will increase.
- A growing number of alumni will connect with current students for vocational and career assistance.
- The percentage of students finding full-time employment with their preferred employer in their intended career path within one year of graduation will continue to increase.
- Students will report engaging with and observing faculty and staff who are modeling faithful living in response to their own vocations.
Summary

As the Strategic Directions are increasingly realized, Lord willing, by the year 2026 Taylor University will be known as a dynamic learning community that:

- consists of remarkable students, widely diverse in their origins and backgrounds, who were enrolled because they best demonstrated the University’s most prized qualities of academic achievement and motivation, commitment to whole-person discipleship in an intentional community, and a desire to live out the school’s mission;
- employs an impressive array of committed, Christian, mission-driven faculty members who were drawn to the University from across the country and around the world, and who demonstrated the potential for distinctive contributions to the discipleship of Taylor students; and
- provides every student a particular set of holistic and integrated experiences, which together are transformational for the whole-person development of each student as a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ, achieved principally through four interaction areas—foundational education, signature learning, global engagement, and vocational formation.

In these ways, Taylor will exemplify a community in which students and faculty go deep, high, wide, and long into the knowledge of the love of God, as illustrated in Ephesians 3:17-19: “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (NIV).

Through foundational education, students and faculty will lay a deep foundation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Through signature learning, students and faculty will participate in high-impact learning experiences. Through global engagement, students and faculty will prepare for ministry in a wide variety of settings. Finally, through vocational formation, students and faculty will respond faithfully to the call to a long walk of obedience with God.

This whole-person discipling of servant leaders will define the purpose of Taylor University and lend enduring meaning to its mission “to develop servant leaders marked with a passion to minister Christ’s redemptive love and truth to a world in need.”

Foundational education is designed to help students develop as whole persons and better understand Christ’s love and truth in its many and various expressions. Signature learning helps prepare and equip students to serve as leaders in their disciplines or fields and to become marked with a particular passion. Global engagement helps students better understand and effectively minister to a world in need and to become participating agents in God’s redemptive work in the world. Vocational formation helps students discern their general calling, which is to Christ, and to connect them with their particular callings as servants.

Together these four particular student-faculty interactions have a special convergence with the potential to significantly advance the Taylor mission in the lives of our students and alumni, preparing them to be Christ-following, servant leaders who minister faithfully in the Church and to the world.

Soli Deo Gloria
Appendix
Appendix

In developing the Strategic Directions 2026 Preliminary Final Report, the Steering Group is mindful of others who helped chart the path to the University’s present and future. Examples include Milo Rediger’s *Goals for the 80s and Beyond*, Jay Kesler’s *Vision for Taylor University and Plan for Actualization*, and Gene Habecker’s *Vision 2016*. Common to all was the desire to ensure the integrity of Taylor’s historic mission and purposes. We are grateful for a strong foundation, long traditions, and innumerable enduring examples of academic and spiritual integrity.

This Report and the process leading up to it benefits from and builds upon this strong foundation. The Appendix is provided to help demonstrate the collaborative process central to the Steering Group’s charge, to offer supplementary background information that informed the Report, and to acknowledge the contributions of the extended Taylor family. Following are summaries of the extensive collaboration and significant research, organized around six themes:

- The Collaborative Process
- Profile of Taylor University Today
- Evaluation of Vision 2016, including Strengths and Weaknesses
- State of Higher Education, including Threats and Opportunities
- Taylor’s Distinct Role in Higher Education
- Development of the Strategic Directions

**Collaborative Process**

The Steering Group’s charge to develop Strategic Directions 2026 (SD2026) included facilitating a deeply collaborative process with faculty, staff, and students as well as alumni, parents, and friends.

Through this far-reaching engagement and wide participation of the Taylor family, this process is intended to yield specific and strategic directions that are of, by, and for the community. As a result, we trust that it will be more naturally owned, implemented, and sustained by the community with a clearer, more convicted sense of purpose.

From June 2013 to the release of the Preliminary Final Report, over 1,300 people in 69 gatherings on campus and in 19 cities gave their input. Additionally, Steering Group members had many individual conversations, and 700 students completed an online survey.

The Steering Group was aided by a partnership with the Master of Arts in Higher Education (MAHE) program, including assistance from their faculty and students in multiple and significant ways. The MAHE program has made it possible for the Steering Group to draw on research about Taylor, strategic planning within in higher education, and trends affecting colleges and universities.

Following is a brief outline with some additional details on the groups, forums, and people who have collaborated with the Steering Group:

- *University Planning Council* (50 faculty, staff, and students): SD2026 was a major agenda item for their last six meetings.
- *Campus Forums*: The Steering Group organized 11 sessions open to faculty, staff, and/or students (plus time devoted at faculty meetings).
- *Strategic Issues Review Team* (University Cabinet and Academic Leadership): SD2026 was a significant agenda item for their last five meetings.
- **Advisory Councils** (i.e., Alumni Council, Parents Council, Investment Council, and Board of Visitors): SD2026 was a key discussion item for 10 meetings.
- **Alumni/Friend Gatherings**: Important feedback on SD2026 was gathered at events held in 19 cities.
- **Board of Trustees**: The Co-Coordinators provided updates on SD2026 and received input at the last four board meetings.

**Profile of Taylor University Today**

Thinking strategically about Taylor's future necessitates understanding the Taylor of today. The following 11 key areas reflect core values, essential facts, and areas of institutional momentum.

**CHRIST-CENTERED AND BIBLICALLY ANCHORED**

For 169 years, Taylor has remained faithful to her founding mission. Students, faculty, and staff affirm the University’s Life Together Covenant, including a Statement of Faith. Servants’ towels, symbolic of Christ’s washing the disciples’ feet, are given out to both incoming freshmen and graduating seniors as a humble but powerful reminder of the servant leadership to which they pledge themselves and their lives. A vibrant Chapel program held three days a week in the Rediger Chapel/Auditorium remains an essential cornerstone of the Taylor community.

**STUDENT PROFILE**

Each year, approximately 450 academically-motivated freshmen from across the country and around the world reinvigorate the highly residential Taylor campus. Their average GPA is 3.7 and their average ACT score is 26 (national average is 21). This year students represent 41 states and 37 foreign countries, with about one-third coming from Indiana. Nearly 20% of those on campus are American ethnic, international, or third-culture students. About 60% of students graduate with an average debt of $25,150, which is below the national average. In the latest National Survey of Student Engagement, 89% of seniors say they would attend Taylor again, which is significantly higher than peer institutions. For the eighth straight year, Taylor has been named the number one Midwest University in the category Best Regional Colleges in the U.S. News and World Report survey, America’s Best Colleges.

**ACADEMIC FACULTY**

Taylor’s faculty disciple students in and out of the classroom. The student-faculty ratio is 13:1. Many of the University’s faculty and staff families live close to campus and are regularly involved in Student Development activities. Teaching is a recognized strength of the Taylor faculty. Taylor’s faculty includes several award-winning professors, and each year approximately 85% of faculty members participate in pedagogical development through the Bedi Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence. They are actively involved in scholarship that enriches their teaching as they write books and articles, undertake important research, and present to their peers. Of the full-time teaching faculty, 97% have the highest degrees in their field. In a recent survey, 93% of alumni could cite a professor by name who had a significant, personal impact on their lives. One hundred percent of the faculty report having a meaningful relationship with God.

**LIBERAL ARTS GROUNDED**

Taylor, founded as a liberal arts college, continues to prepare students to interact with, interpret, and serve the world around them. Broad knowledge in the arts and sciences provides the opportunity to learn about God, His world, and His people. A liberal arts education develops essential skills such as participation, critical thinking, and collaboration which equip students for success both in careers and in other life roles.
The liberal arts core is the foundation for the undergraduate degree programs that are organized into three schools: the School of Humanities, Art, and Biblical Studies; the School of Natural and Applied Sciences; and the School of Social Sciences, Education, and Business. Popular and fast-growing majors include biology, kinesiology, business, elementary education, and film.

**Collaborative Scholarship**

Faculty-mentored student scholarship, a key component of the Taylor educational experience for many students, provides some of the most practical and profound learning opportunities that students enjoy. These signature experiences are provided throughout the school year and over the summer. Because 63% of classes have 20 or fewer students, there are many opportunities for one-on-one interactions between faculty and students that lead to long-term collaborative scholarship.

**Whole-Person Focus**

A vibrant Student Development experience has long been a hallmark of a Taylor education. The process of developing servant leaders starts in the residence halls where freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors live together on each wing and floor. The residence hall experience is augmented by a wide array of opportunities made available through Taylor World Outreach (TWO) and Taylor Student Organizations (TSO). They include well-loved traditions like Youth Conference, Airband, and Taylathon. Students can participate in programs ranging from Inter-Class Council (ICC) and Integration of Faith and Culture (IFC) to Student Activities Council (SAC) and Student Senate. Also, last year, students, faculty, and staff volunteered more than 47,000 hours to community service.

**Athletics**

Taylor’s competitive and comprehensive athletic program includes baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, softball, tennis, track, and volleyball. For each of the past two years, all 18 of the varsity sports at Taylor have earned NAIA Scholar-Team status, placing the University in the top three in the nation. In addition to the programs for our 350 student-athletes, Taylor has active club teams including equestrianism and lacrosse. More than 75% of our students also participate in intramurals. The annual Silent Night basketball game is an example of Taylor’s many campus traditions.

**Global Engagement**

Four out of every five undergraduates participate in some type of study abroad experience before graduating. Taylor is regularly ranked near the top of all baccalaureate institutions in the nation in the Open Doors survey, published by the Institute of International Education in association with the U.S. State Department. The Taylor Lighthouse program is in its 41st year of sending students abroad on service-learning projects.

**Vocationally Equipping**

The Calling and Career Office helps students live out the University’s mission by discovering, understanding, and pursuing the highest and best uses of their God-given talents. The office assists students with finding internships and jobs and with exploring graduate school. Services range from workshops to industry-specific resume help and mock interviews. The office assists students in understanding and applying their aptitudes. Within six months of graduation, 90% of alumni are in full-time employment or graduate school. A recent grant from the Lilly Endowment is helping develop and support students who want to start or work in entrepreneurial settings, including nonprofit organizations.
ALUMNI, PARENTS, AND FRIENDS

There are 20,000 Taylor alumni living in all 50 states and 80 countries. Taylor’s extended community shows its support for Taylor in multiple ways. For example, every year one out of three alumni participate in a Taylor event or make a gift. Parents, 95% of whom would support their student’s choice to attend Taylor again, regularly volunteer and support the University. Each year, for example, hundreds of people gather in homes of parents to pray for the campus. Also, in the past 10 years, more than 10,000 families and individuals have given Taylor gifts totaling more than $150 million.

PEOPLE AND BUDGET

Students are served by 433 full-time faculty and staff, of which 126 are academic faculty, 21 are Student Development faculty, and the balance support academic and co-curricular programs, alumni and friends, and facilities. Major components of the University’s $77 million annual budget are $34 million for personnel, including $5 million for health care; $17 million for institutionally funded scholarships; $8 million to support academic and co-curricular programs; and $4 million for facilities. The annual operating budget is primarily funded by student charges ($37,821 per student for 2014-15). The University’s endowment is $85 million.

Evaluation of Vision 2016, including Strengths and Weaknesses

When Gene Habecker was named President of Taylor in August 2005, virtually no one could see or even imagine the massive economic storm gathering on the horizon. As a result, Vision 2016, formulated in 2006 and adopted by the faculty in 2008, was full of hope and high expectation. By winter of 2009, however, the full effects of that storm had been visited on all of us. They were felt most keenly, perhaps, by Taylor parents seeking to pay their children’s tuition with less home value to leverage and little hope of increased income.

At the same time, the families of prospective students across the country were turning increasingly toward institutions with lower tuitions and/or higher financial aid packages. It is proving increasingly difficult and expensive to convince prospective students and their families of the value of the Taylor experience. For the same reason, the University’s ability to vie for faculty and staff was impaired, leaving the University with less diversity and representation from the world it seeks to minister to, learn from, and be a more integral part of.

It is a testament to the grace of God and the committed faculty and staff of Taylor, then, that so much was achieved in the face of such powerful and unforeseen circumstances. Most importantly, Vision 2016 proved helpful in:

- sustaining fidelity to the University’s Biblically-anchored, Christ-centered mission;
- attracting students who are academically motivated and spiritually committed;
- enrolling the most global and ethnically diverse student body in our history;
- preserving and selectively enhancing the academic and co-curricular programs;
- maintaining stable undergraduate enrollment (around 1,900 students);
- improving the physical campus to better support the Taylor experience; and
- strengthening the University’s fiscal health through conservative financial management and unparalleled generosity by alumni, parents, and friends.

We are grateful for the progress and the strengths these achievements reflect; however, we are also cognizant of our weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. The effort and attention required to complete a major project such as the Euler Science Complex, navigate the economic environment, and close the Fort Wayne program and campus—according to the voices we heard—meant that issues and constraints were not always communicated effectively to faculty and staff.
Because colleagues are creative and service-oriented, we continue to start new initiatives but often without sufficient funds. And, we are less likely to curtail or change existing programs. As a result, there are insufficient resources to achieve many specific aspirations. Additionally, while it is the mission rather than money that draws talented and committed faculty and staff, we have lost ground in our ability to offer essential compensation in some areas.

The enduring strength of a Taylor education, as testified to by alumni in multiple ways, is found in the important interactions with faculty and the formation of life-long friendship among students—all within a whole-person community of faith and learning. Ensuring more effective communication with colleagues and sufficient resources for students and faculty will better enable Taylor to do what it already does best.

State of Higher Education, including Threats and Opportunities

While concerns about the state of American higher education continue to mount, with critics clamoring about everything from excessive expenditures to a loss of academic rigor, many of these issues do not reflect on Taylor. Indeed, the University has an opportunity to demonstrate how it stands apart from the general state of decline and to serve as a model of a distinct, authentic, rigorous, and responsive institution of higher learning.

What does resonate with Taylor and poses the greatest threat to the fulfillment of its mission is the decline in the availability of traditional students as well as growing government involvement that often seems at odds with academic freedom and Biblically informed policies.

Demographic realities have created more intense competition for available students across the landscape of higher education. The way that most four-year institutions seek to create a competitive recruitment advantage is through their financial aid awards. Those with the largest endowments, wealthier students, and lowest discount rates have a distinct advantage in this market.

Colleges with smaller endowments attempt to keep up their enrollment by increasing the percentage which they discount full tuition. When discount rates increase, however, they leave a university with insufficient revenue to meet core educational needs, much less address deferred maintenance and the obsolescence of some instructional equipment. These issues then are “deferred” to the future in the hopes of a better day. Yet, we expect the current demographic patterns will persist for the next 15 years. Because Taylor is tuition-driven, it must be particularly resourceful in seeking new efficiencies, new approaches, and new revenue to remain viable in this period and be very selective of where it seeks to widen its margins of excellence.

The combined threats of steady or declining tuition revenue and the potential loss of direct or indirect governmental support create an unprecedented set of challenges for Taylor.

Opportunity lies in accepting the realities and disruptions that shape these challenges, in anticipating their impact, in seeking innovative ways to mitigate them, and in thriving despite them. Some of the opportunities include:

- Being distinctively Christian in an increasingly less-distinctive Christian higher education market.
- Introducing Taylor to new constituencies expressing interest in Christian higher education.
- Attracting independent Christian philanthropists and others willing to make substantial investments in a decidedly Christian college.
Taylor’s Distinct Role in Higher Education

At Taylor, we believe learning cannot be fully accomplished without faith in the triune God who has created and sustains all things and who acts in redeeming love for the world. This faith undergirds all that we do, beginning at a prospective student’s first admissions visit and persisting through graduation, where students receive their diploma along with a servant’s towel and a Bible. These are meant to be both symbols and tools for the graduating servant leaders, who are possessed of a strong sense of obligation to apply their talents where they can be most helpful to the world’s needs for the good of others and for the glory of God.

Of the 4,000 plus institutions of higher learning in the United States, there are only 120 that comprise the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. Taylor is one of ten, or fewer, which requires students to articulate Christian faith for admission. Faculty and staff possess the same commitment and have a deep loyalty to students, one another, and Christ. Remaining true to that identity has allowed Taylor to emerge as an ever-more distinguished university, one that is poised for even greater distinction.

Other institutions have reduced the personal attention afforded to students in a variety of ways. These include larger class sizes, the increased use of teaching assistants, and a shift of focus to virtual learning as a means of containing costs, of increasing the organization’s stature as a research institution, or of simply surviving. Taylor faculty and staff have taken the road less traveled.

Academic and Student Development faculty along with staff colleagues continue to devote an enormous amount of time to spiritual, intellectual, and personal development of students. If universities kept tabulations of hours logged in faculty-student interactions, in and out of the classroom, Taylor would, no doubt, rank at or very near the top. Indeed, the Taylor value proposition could be expressed as a formula would be Faculty + Key Interactions + Students = Discipleship → Mission Advancement. And, since discipleship of the whole person is the means of shaping servant leaders who minister Christ’s redemptive love and truth to a world in need, Taylor seeks its ultimate distinction in this world in the faithfulness of the lives of its alumni. More than 90% of Taylor alumni report attending church once a week or more. While some achieve greater fame in certain walks of life, many alumni live out the Gospel in selfless ways every day and impact the lives of thousands of others in quiet but certain ways.

Development of the Strategic Directions

The focus on discipleship and the strategic directions developed over eighteen months of collaboration with the Taylor community. It takes too much space and perhaps is unnecessary to recount every iteration that led to the Preliminary Final Report. However, in the spirit of transparency and to give more context to the Report, the following information is provided.

As noted earlier, during fall 2013 the Steering Group elicited and received over 600 distinct recommendations on how to make Taylor better by 2026. The thematic analysis was completed by MAHE students, and a more detailed one was completed by the Steering Group.

Discipleship

The analysis confirmed other conversations occurring on campus about a more intentional focus on discipleship. As a result, the Steering Group concluded that discipleship, rather than being one of a few strategic directions, should be more clearly seen and understood as a University distinctive that would frame the development of the strategic directions. A small group of campus colleagues, some of whom were also on the Steering Group, were drafting a statement on discipleship that the Group adopted, expanded, and refined and which is now included in the Context section of this Report.
NINE CATEGORIES

The analysis also resulted in the 600+ recommendations being placed in one of nine broad categories using the following descriptors:

- **Academic Excellence** characterized by rigor and relevance that results in enduring educational value and life-long competencies.
- **Academic Innovation** that accelerates learning opportunities, giving students a lasting competitive advantage in their chosen callings and careers.
- **Diverse Campus** in the composition of students, faculty, and staff that better represents the mosaic of the global Christian movement.
- **Faculty and Staff Support** that serves to attract colleagues who exemplify the higher ideals of Taylor, sustains a well-balanced community, and strengthens the example provided to students.
- **Financial Sustainability** that ensures the perpetuation of Taylor’s mission, makes the University affordable to students who stand to benefit the most from the Taylor experience, and reduces financial dependence on the government.
- **Global Strategic Engagement** that equips the Taylor community to be interculturally competent, anticipates and adapts to global changes, and acts on global opportunities and obligations.
- **Service Engagement** with local communities, especially in Upland, that demonstrates living in community beyond campus for significantly improved relationships and an enhanced way of life.
- **Vocational Development** for students to discover, prepare for, and follow God’s calling for serving God’s purpose in their generation.
- **Physical Environment** that provides an attractive, functional, and sustainable campus which enhances the living/learning aspects of the University and surrounding community.

During spring 2014, the Steering Group shared the nine categories in campus forums and meetings involving faculty, staff, and students and with advisory groups at off-campus gatherings, including alumni, parents, and friends. Participants were asked to select the five categories that seemed most strategic, and this feedback was considered by the Steering Group.

ELEVEN CRITERIA

Additionally, during the winter and spring of 2014, as the Steering Group began to assess the many worthy recommendations it received, it became clear that evaluative criteria needed to be established to determine which were most strategic and consistent with the committee’s charge. Eleven criteria were developed with the first two being considered the most important. The remaining nine were helpful in making more subtle distinctions among so many thoughtful suggestions.

- **Difference-Making**: Potential to make a significant difference in advancing the University’s mission by 2026.
- **Connection to Discipleship**: Potential to be informed by and contribute to the institutional distinctive of discipleship.
- **Contribution to Decision-Making**: Strategic and specific enough to be useful for making choices and setting priorities.
- **External Demand**: Attractive to external stakeholders, including prospective students/families, alumni, and/or donors.
- **Internal Demand**: Attractive to internal stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and/or current students.
- **Builds on Strengths**: Takes advantage of existing program effectiveness and/or institutional support and momentum.
- **Potential for Excellence**: Likelihood of achieving a high level of quality and/or performance.
- **Opportunity for Differentiation**: Potential for effectiveness and success that set Taylor apart from its peers.
- **Prospect for Sustainability**: Potential to sustain and amplify goals and objectives beyond 2026.
- **Allows for Flexibility**: Leaves room for dynamism, nimbleness, and inventiveness in implementation.
- **Holistic in Nature**: Potential for relevance across curricular/co-curricular contexts and/or creates opportunity for interdisciplinary connections.

**SIX STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

*Interim Report*: Drawing upon all of the Steering Group’s work during the 2013-14 school year and what we believe is guidance from the Lord, six strategic directions began to emerge. During the summer of 2014, six clusters of faculty and staff from across the campus worked to further develop and refine the strategic directions that were part of the Interim Report released in September 2014. These are restated here: 1) Investing in Students, 2) Investing in Faculty, 3) Foundational Core Curriculum, 4) Faculty-Mentored Student Scholarship, 5) Global Engagement and Intercultural Competency and 6) Vocational Development

*Preliminary Final Report*: During fall 2014 there was further and extensive engagement with faculty, staff, and students as well as alumni and parent-related advisory councils in addition to the Steering Group’s own deliberations. As a result, the Steering Group further refined the six strategic directions that are discussed at length in the body of this Report: 1) Cultivating Distinctive Students, 2) Supporting Committed Faculty, 3) Strengthening Foundational Education, 4) Expanding Signature Learning, 5) Broadening Global Engagement and 6) Developing Vocational Formation.

*Areas Not Referenced*: It may be helpful to note why some areas of the University are not explicitly referenced in the report. Reasons include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) The Steering Group’s charge was to focus on those areas which would, when strengthened, have the most difference-making effect on the entire University; 2) Our efforts are running in parallel with the University Programs Review, which is examining every area of the institution, leading to specific program-by-program recommendations; 3) Some areas were making such considerable progress that we felt safe in assuming they will be sustained; 4) Some areas were so fundamental to daily operations (e.g., campus facilities and buildings constructed in the last decade) that their importance seemed to go without saying; 5) Strategic Directions 2026 will elevate some areas without treating them as a separate focus (e.g., more scholarship aid will strengthen intercollegiate athletics); and 6) While we considered making “financial sustainability” an explicit strategic direction, we concluded the higher priority should be placed on directions that had the most direct bearing on advancing discipleship and fulfilling our mission: students, faculty, and their interactions. Mission goals, we believe, precede and inform philanthropic goals, which must be complemented by sound fiscal management practices.

*Philanthropic Implications*: In addition to wise stewardship of Taylor’s people and programs, the actualization of Strategic Directions 2026 would require substantial philanthropic investment by current and future alumni, parents, and friends. It will likely entail the involvement of independent Christian philanthropists who may not know Taylor but identify with its mission. To give a preliminary perspective, it would not be unrealistic to conclude that the endowment would need to exceed $500 million. (In the past 10 years, the current endowment has grown from $50 million to $85 million, and annual fundraising has risen from $10 million to almost $20 million.)