



**ATLANTIC
UNIVERSITY**

2024–2027
**STRATEGIC
PLAN**

Toward a Sustainable Data-Based Learner-Centered Institution

Revised on December 19, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Atlantic University (AU) is a private non-for-profit institution established in 1981 under the laws of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and operated by Atlantic University, Inc. whose success in educating students for various digital creative careers has been proven since. AU is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) and has a Renewal License from the Board of Postsecondary Institutions of Puerto Rico. The institution is approved by the Puerto Rico State Approving Agency to provide academic training to the students under various GI Bill® programs and is eligible for Federal Title IV Funds and State Funds from the Board of Postsecondary Institutions of Puerto Rico. The institution is a member of the following organizations:

- HACU - Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
- IGDA - International Game Developers Association
- PRMA - Puerto Rico Manufacturer Association
- Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce
- Retailers United Center

AU is located in the heart of Old Town Guaynabo. It was created in response to the need for a higher education institution in the community and evolved to serve the growing demand for specialized business personnel in digital arts, innovation, and technology.

AU's current offer includes on-campus Bachelor's and Master's Degree programs and online Master's Degree programs all in accordance with the philosophy of the Institution which was founded on the principles of accessibility to all persons and adaptability to the needs of the community.

AU's facilities consist of six buildings and three parking lots with private security. The main building (E-1) includes seven computer and digital design laboratories including a digital press workshop and an Information Resources Center, a recreational area, administration offices, a conference room, elevator, and restrooms.

The Information Resource Center provides library services, access to audio-visual materials, and a research area. It is open to the community and includes remote access to databases and catalog systems. The main purpose of the center is to support and reinforce academic achievement, aiding users including students, faculty members, and community members that require these services.

The second building (E-2) is an annex to the main building and consists of twenty-four (24) classrooms, nine digital arts laboratories, and one information systems laboratory, one commercial art laboratory, one multipurpose digital media laboratory, one audio recording studio, one photography studio, one post-production laboratory, the amphitheater, an art gallery, student services offices,

and the Academic Deanship Office. There are access ramps and one elevator for students with disabilities.

The third building (E-3) is located behind the main building and houses the recently inaugurated Distance Education Office including a small conference room.

The fourth building (E-4) has the Fabrication Laboratory, one laboratory and one classroom. The rest of the building space is used for classrooms and services including the Tutoring Center.

The fifth building (E-5) is the historical site for the City Hall facilities. It is currently a usufruct under an agreement with the municipal government until 2040. AU has renovated the building and is building new facilities for laboratories in virtual production and audio production on the third floor. These facilities are scheduled to be completed on fall 2025. The building also houses a recently inaugurated Student Center and two cybersecurity laboratories. The Guaynabo Museum of History will be developed in the next year as well as other facilities that respond to the agreement entered with the municipality government.

The sixth building (E-6) is a two-floor building which houses additional classes and labs. It currently houses the Simulation lab, a resource center, classrooms, and the E-Sports facilities.

In total, AU has 54 specialized digital laboratories, dedicated exclusively to Digital Graphic Design, Digital Animation, Digital Audio, Digital Cinematography, Digital Photography, Mobile Applications, Business Administration and Cybersecurity, Video Games programs and an Additive Manufacturing Laboratory with 3D Printers.

Finally, the Guaynabo City Government has authorized the sale of lots 20 and 22 which currently house the “Plaza de Gladiadores.” The proposed structure to be built in this location will serve as an extension to Building E-4 providing more space for student services, laboratories, and classrooms.

Works by AU’s staff, faculty, and students have accumulated an extensive and impressive list of awards in such reputable competitions in the various fields the institution is specialized in including local and international film festivals, production competitions, and numerous Suncoast Emmy® Awards.





MISSION

To deliver educational excellence through innovative teaching in arts, sciences, and technology complemented by comprehensive student support services that foster personal growth and social responsibility.

VISION

To lead in innovation and inclusion in higher education across arts, sciences, and technology, establishing ourselves as a cornerstone of economic development and a benchmark for others.



VALUES

Innovation

Cornell University's Dr. Samuel Bacharach, who leads the course "Leading for Creativity and Innovation" says that innovation is **the practical application of creative ideas to drive organizational results**. Richard K. Lyons, Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation & Entrepreneurship at UC Berkeley states on his part that innovation is a **fresh way of thinking that creates value**. They hold that an innovation culture must have **appreciation, transparency, collaboration, continuous coordination, and an ongoing sense of celebrating each other**. **Also, risk taking and failing must be allowed and even celebrated.**

Our institution's programs and image are associated with fields that may have seemed innovative a few years ago but are now met with the realities of the market, abounding offer, and diminishing local demand. The institution obtained Department of Education's funding for a grant that should bring us to the forefront locally and provide an edge for up-to-the-times educational offers and laboratory services. The theme goes in line with our existing ethos: simulation. The products of the project should demonstrate our capacity for research and curriculum creation in simulation and related fields. Also, new facilities for virtual and audio production will position us well to be able to offer education and laboratory services that will be one-of-a-kind in the local industry. However, many challenges remain to truly position us, as we should, in the cusp of innovation in the fields we have become experts on and further.

During recent innovation sessions conducted by the Dr. Jordan, team members offered their views at the emerging themes in innovation they perceive the institution should engage in.

The general categories agreed upon were:

1. New programs and educational offers – members requested integrating degree and non-degree seeking courses and programs, facilities, or curriculum in topics as varied as women's studies, artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship, ethics, defense, health, safety, interdisciplinary, quantum computing, and research.
2. Short courses – all coincided in the need to offer an on-campus and distance learning short course offer.
3. Distance education – offer various modalities including general education courses sections and hybrid courses.
4. New clients/students – bring international students and adult learners.
5. Outreach – Industry experts, symposia, workshops to the larger community, visiting faculty were among the ideas provided.

Innovation sessions' findings at Atlantic University seem to ratify the need for offer diversification and a learner-centric business model.

Table 3 below shows a proposed innovation matrix model that accounts for various types of innovation. This table aids in categorizing the perceived innovation that does not necessarily translate into disruption but contextualized to our institution's current state of matters, responds to the needs of our stakeholders. AU must position itself to implement paradigmatic change proactively to remain competitive at the local level and be able to expand its offer to the national and international levels.

Table 3: Innovation Matrix for Higher Education Sector at the Local Level

	Product	Process	Structure	Market
Continuous Improvement	Accredited programs	Institutional Effectiveness Instruments	New positions created	High school grads
Incremental Change	Distance education standards	Streamlining recruitment processes	Reorganization and automation	Hybrid offer to existing students
Radical Change	Virtualized classrooms	Immersive applied AI	Student-Centric Organizational Structure	
Paradigm Shift	Competency Based Credentials and Degrees	Adaptive instruction and continuous assessment for levels of mastery	Clinics for apprenticeships	Adult-learners

Diversity

Our institution's historic philosophical principle honoring accessibility and adaptability coincides with the present-day realities that attribute high value to diversity. Around 20% of our student body has at least one disability, a statistic which mirrors the prevalence of disabilities in the general population. Our current model has allowed us to serve a diverse population within the local and niche confines of our existing offer. As we move to offer education and training beyond our physical campus and to non-traditional students our diversity value will stand as a recognition of the human enterprise and the commitment to justice our institution stands for.

Respect

Peter Smith, in an Inside Higher Ed column published on September 22, 2020 (Smith P., 2020) wrote that "respect" is about justice and responsiveness to learners' needs. He goes on to argue that "having an organizational culture in which respect is reflected in the practices and services offered as well as in the attitudes of the employees will go a long way toward making a learner who was formerly excluded feel welcome and part of a supportive community. And that, in turn, will increase her chances of success." Our institutional stakeholders recognize this value as intrinsic to what we do and what we intend to do in the future. It is definitely in alignment with the strategic positioning proposed herein.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The learner lifecycle model shown in Figure 1 below was discussed and agreed upon as a relevant and sensible framework for institutional development. The learner lifecycle excellently positions the institution to respond to the needs of the learner, its customer, addressing the techno-global dilemma of the need for lifelong learning. The framework that seeks to address the needs of learners throughout a lifelong learning cycle was adapted from The EvoLLLution®, an online higher education publication “with over 2,500 content contributors who are driving digital transformation within their institution—college deans, state system presidents, working adults, hiring managers, government officials and everyone in-between...” The learner lifecycle model looks to learners-customers and guides the organization-business in attaining her loyalty. The model effectively responds to a diversity of learners at all stages of educational formation and work experience as well as geographical location. It addresses the rapidly changing technological revolution realities of the 21st century at the time it recognizes the needs of various constituencies who our institution seeks to serve in the near future.

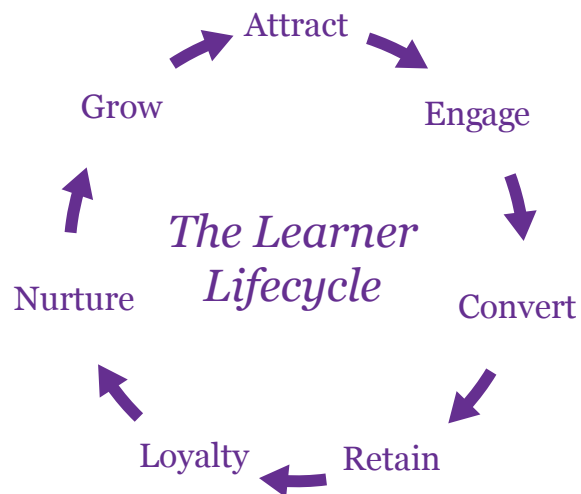


Figure 1: The Learner Lifecycle

The strategies we seek to implement to achieve our goals and objectives are informed by this framework. In the same manner, the proposed strategic goals and objectives include activities that address needs related to one or more of the Learner Lifecycle framework stages.

Attract

We will attract prospective students through efforts that coincide with our strategic goals. Among others, activities designed to attract prospective students include the establishment of partnerships and targeted, personalized,

high impact marketing and recruitment campaigns and efforts to Increase the pipeline. Furthermore, outreach and development efforts to communicate an institutional culture of innovation will impact learners during the attract phase of the lifecycle coinciding with efforts undertaken in activities born out of Strategic Goal 1 and Strategic Goal 3 discussed at length in below.

Engage

To capture and retain the prospective student's attention, we must achieve continued engagement through nurturing campaigns, community outreach to a diversity of local and national stakeholders, through the establishment of partnerships and the implementation of activities (including internships, special projects, and externships) and events with government, academia, industry, and non-governmental organizations. These activities are in line with all three of the Strategic Goals proposed herein.

Convert

Conversion of the learner from prospective to enrolled is a process that will benefit from streamlining our current procedures and implement data-based customer service as well as automated operators in the Admissions and Enrollment Operations Cycle. These correspond greatly with activities found to address our Strategic Goal 1.

Retain

We commit to retention as it is in line with our mission at the time it is one of the most important metrics in higher education. Our proposed activities to address Strategic Goal 2 will satisfy the need to provide holistic Student Success Services and establish a data-based decision-making learner-centric culture.

Loyalty and Nurture

Currently, our Alumni do not remain connected or seek out lifelong learning opportunities we must provide. We will establish the AU Alumni Association including a Mentorship and Opportunity Matchmaking Program to position the institution as a lifelong learning services partner for alumni, industry, and government as shown in activities that respond to objectives associated to our strategic goals. Furthermore, we will establish an alumni store, a donation fund and a membership structure that includes special discounts in services offered by the institution to our bona fide alumni. These activities are mostly aligned with our Strategic Goal 1 and Strategic Goal 2.

Grow

We will diversify our services and the demographic groups we serve by expanding our portfolio through an academic program offer that includes residential, hybrid and distance degree and non-degree seeking credentials. Our Strategic Goal 1 addresses this Learner Lifecycle phase.





STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In this plan we propose goals the institution is to achieve in the next three years. While goals seek to help set course by providing a macro direction, objectives stemming from these should be specific and achievable. The agreed upon goals are driven by the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) principle which should guide objectives development with their corresponding key performance indicators (KPIs).

Given the current state of the institution, its operations, the community, the external factors impinging on institutional outcomes, and the agreed upon strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, we deem it necessary to include goals that address institution wide changes. Many of the proposed objectives may overlap in that their ultimate impact will percolate throughout the institution and impact as well as require the collaboration of multiple operational units. Therefore, it is crucial for all community stakeholders to understand the overarching goals and its respective objectives.

Again, activities for the attainment of the three major goals are informed by a theoretical framework that seeks to put the learner/student at the center. The objectives and corresponding KPIs are meant so as to respond to this model for learner-centeredness in higher education.

Strategic Goal 1: Drive growth through diversified education and innovative revenue streams.

Over the next three years, we will increase our total revenue by 10% by introducing at least two new revenue streams and diversifying our educational offer beyond degree seeking residential programs. We will allocate resources and conduct market research to identify and integrate these new revenue streams and programs, ensuring sustainable growth and reduced dependency on tuition.

The institution has great potential and a significant opportunity to identify new revenue sources that ensure operational and developmental sustainability and growth. Also, the diversification of the post-secondary education courses and programs modalities (on-campus, distance, hybrid) we offer as well as non-degree seeking credentials that serve non-traditional students will positively impact revenue.

Strategic Goal 2: Lead in student success and lifelong learning with innovative pilot programs.

By the end of 2024-25, we will develop and launch a pilot program showcasing best practices in Student Success and Lifelong Learning to serve as a model in at least one another Arts-Science-and-Technology-Focused Hispanic Serving Institution by 2027. We aim to achieve a 10% increase in student engagement and retention rates compared to baseline data. Throughout academic years 2025-26 and 2026-27, we will evaluate, report, and optimize the program's effectiveness.

The current ad hoc operational model must give way to an organization driven by data that **not only responds but seeks to predict** learner's needs in pursuing upward mobility, self-fulfillment, and betterment. Furthermore, the learner lifecycle model guiding this plan will provide the basis for our learner-centered approach to success services. We must capitalize to implement student success practices we will be able to afford thanks to a \$3M grant approved by the Department of Education that will extend from October 2023-September 2028. The Fostering Inclusion and Student Success (FISS) project will allow the institution to establish a best practice model for student success services, accompaniment, and holistic attention to learners needs that is set to pervade our institutional makeup as it progresses throughout the next three years and will surely serve as a model to institutions similar to ours.

Strategic Goal 3: Empower a culture of innovation through structured programs and active engagement.

Over the next three years, we will foster a culture of innovation by implementing and running structured programs, including 10 yearly innovation workshops, an idea incubator to collect and evaluate at least 50 new ideas every year, and a recognition system to award at least five outstanding innovations yearly. We will allocate resources and engage the community at all levels to ensure active participation and sustain these initiatives, with quarterly reviews to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments.

At every level, we must look to **turn creativity into actionable benefits to our organization**, our society, and the world. Our institution has the potential to magnify impacts and obtain major recognition on the digital creative arts in Puerto Rico and beyond.

The Department of Education grant for \$1.3M for three years awarded to AU by its Modeling and Simulation Program (MSP) responds to the United States Congress' interest in addressing the "numerous applications for Federal and state governments and their partners in the defense, education, gaming, shipbuilding, and workforce training sectors, allowing them to generate data to help make decisions or predictions about their systems."

The MSP program will allow AU to maximize the application of lab facilities to enable research and development as well as the creation of a minor in simulation modeling. It will boost and impact Puerto Rico's R&D agenda in simulation and will provide the opportunity to educate through professional certificates in



specialized technical areas of great interest such as world creation, immersive simulation, data visualization, and additive manufacturing (3D printing). As a result, AU will be positioned to offer higher education in careers in advanced technology fields that will place Puerto Rico in the cutting edge of the knowledge economy.

This MSP project helps align skill sets with industry needs and lays the foundation for specialized knowledge applicable to a great array of industries including entertainment, defense, healthcare, education, workforce training, and construction industries.

Participants and graduates will also have the ability to further their intellectual property through training and support in entrepreneurship at AU's incubator, The Colosseum.

The program will also help increase modeling and simulation literacy in society at large.

The project positions Puerto Rico as a major player at the national level since the Modeling and Simulation Program (MSP) certificates and degree program will serve as a distinctive contributor to the expansion of the country's modeling and simulation workforce. This will not only benefit Puerto Rico and the Caribbean but also students in other jurisdictions who may take advantage of the offer through distance learning as well as the broader community since the application of these technologies has the potential to revolutionize various industries.

The project/program will take advantage of AU's laboratory facilities, including the Visualization Modeling and Simulation Laboratory (ViSiM Lab), the Spatial Computing and Virtual Reality Lab, and the Fabrication and 3D Printing Laboratory (FabLab), for comprehensive support for the proposed programs.

Furthermore, a cybersecurity bachelor's program has been presented for state approval and will likely be available for recruitment at the beginning of 2025. Our effort to establish the Puerto Rico Cybersecurity Hub has gained momentum as off the end of the 2023-24 academic year with the establishment of the Cybersecurity Working Group and the presentation of various proposals to obtain grant funding. These efforts will continue throughout the period considered in this plan and are factored into our proposed activities.

Finally, the redefinition of the operations of the Innovation Office will provide a clear roadmap for activities and projects with institutional impact beyond the limits of its existing scope.





PROPOSED OBJECTIVES

The proposed objectives stem from the approved goals and are meant as a guide for institutional units to create work plans, proposals, and projects that address the goals to be approved by the Board. The proposals stemming from this Strategic Plan should include objectives, activities, KPIs, time frame, Operational Unit Lead, as well as identify a budget to be presented to the Board for approval.

A separate infrastructure maintenance and development plan must be developed that considers ongoing institutional needs as well as the growth proposed herein.

Strategic Goal 1: Drive growth through diversified education and innovative revenue streams

Over the next three years, we will increase our total revenue by 10% by introducing at least two new revenue streams, diversifying our educational offer beyond degree seeking residential programs, and optimizing our recruitment and enrollment processes. We will allocate resources and conduct market research to identify and integrate these new streams and programs, ensuring sustainable growth and reduced dependency on tuition.

Objective 1.1: Increase total enrollment revenue by 5% in three years through the optimization or creation of degree and non-degree seeking programs.

Objective 1.2: Increase total revenue from non-tuition new revenue streams by 5% in three years.

These objectives are designed to drive sustainable growth, diversify income, and enhance our institution's financial stability and educational impact.

Strategic Goal 2: Lead in student success and lifelong learning with innovative pilot programs.

By the end of 2024-25, we will develop and launch a pilot program showcasing best practices in Student Success and Lifelong Learning to serve as a model in at least one another Arts-Science-and-Technology-Focused Hispanic Serving Institution by 2027. We aim to achieve a 5% increase in student engagement and retention rates compared to baseline data. Throughout academic years 2025-26 and 2026-27, we will evaluate, report, and optimize the program's effectiveness.

Objective 2.1: Develop and launch the Student Success and Lifelong Learning Pilot Program by End of 2024-25.

Objective 2.2: Achieve 5% increase in student engagement and retention rates.

Objective 2.3: Increase first-year retention rates by 5% in three years.

These objectives are designed to enable a Student Success Services and Lifelong Learning pilot program that increases student engagement and retention rates at the time it serves as a model for other Hispanic Serving Institutions in the arts, sciences, and technology.

Strategic Goal 3: Empower a culture of innovation through structured programs and active engagement.

Over the next three years, we will foster a culture of innovation by implementing and running structured programs, including 10 yearly innovation workshops, and idea incubator to collect and evaluate at least 50 new ideas every year; and a recognition system to award at least five outstanding innovations yearly. We will allocate resources and engage employees at all levels to ensure active participation and sustain these initiatives, with quarterly reviews to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments.

Objective 3.1 Implement and Run Structured Innovation Programs:

These objectives will help build a robust framework to foster a culture of innovation, ensuring sustained engagement and successful outcomes over the next three years.

Proposed Objectives Conclusion:

The strategic goals associated with innovation and student success will indirectly impact revenue and likely increase the projected increase.

The implementation plan stemming from this Strategic Plan must be preceded, maintained, assessed, and adjusted by the Strategic Planning Committee. A specific effort led by the Office of the President to appoint a **Strategic Plan Project Manager** as a point of contact in charge of educating the institutional community while promoting the plan's adoption, addressing resistance, and contributing to eliminate roadblocks will increase the likelihood of a successful implementation.



EVALUATION PLAN

Formative

Based on the agreed upon KPIs, each Lead Operational Unit director will prepare a yearly progress report due at the end of August of each year. The report will be gathered by the Strategic Planning Committee into an institutional report. The committee will review, analyze, and make recommendations for needed changes in the plan goals, objectives, strategies, or key performance indicators. The recommendations will be presented to the community and the Board by the end of September each year.

Each director at a responsible unit will measure progress, offer feedback, and adjust as needed on a periodic basis to ensure the plan's sustainability and feasibility. The responsible parties will provide periodic reports to the Strategic Planning Committee members who will, in turn, provide a summary of findings and recommendations for the consideration of the President and the Board

Summative

A 3-year final assessment report will provide the level of achievements and areas for improvement as compared with initial goals proposed. The committee will provide a report on the remediation of missed goals and recommendations for a new three-to-five-year strategic plan.

DISSEMINATION PLAN

The Strategic Planning Project Manager will provide training and coordinate dissemination in a manner consistent with change management efforts focused on community adoption that help ensure success.







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