

Princeton University Strategic Framework  
June 2019 Update

*Introduction*

On January 30, 2016, the Princeton University Board of Trustees adopted a strategic framework designed to “guide important choices by the University’s trustees, administration, and faculty.” The board noted at the time that “[t]he plan’s objective is not to specify all of the University’s future initiatives, but to create a planning framework for determining them and for understanding the trade-offs among them.” The board and the administration committed to “conduct a thorough review of the framework and publish an updated version on a quadrennial basis.”

Though only three years have passed since the framework’s publication, the board chose to review it this year in connection with its April retreat (an extended set of meetings that occurs once every four years). Over the course of this academic year and the preceding one, the board heard updates on major initiatives being pursued under the auspices of the framework. At its retreat, the board examined significant trends relevant to the basic premises of the framework and its goals, considered the state of the University’s academic enterprise and resources, and explored recent developments that either bore upon the framework’s vitality or raised new questions deserving the University’s attention.

At the conclusion of its deliberations, the board enthusiastically reaffirmed its commitment to the 2016 strategic framework. The board remains firmly convinced that “Princeton University’s long-standing mission—as a residential research university committed to an expansive vision of the liberal arts that encompasses engineering—is robust, valuable, and important to the world.” The board endorsed again the major directions put forward in the framework, including expansion of the undergraduate student body, increased socioeconomic diversity in both the undergraduate and graduate student bodies, and leadership investments in data science, engineering, environmental sciences, and other fields that will enable the University to sustain its excellence and respond to the needs and challenges of the twenty-first century. The board is pleased both with the quality of the initiatives launched over the last three years and with early fundraising results, and it encouraged the design of creative and energetic measures to accelerate progress toward the framework’s goals as the University moves toward the public launch of its upcoming capital campaign.

The board gave special attention to two topics that had evolved significantly since publication of the 2016 framework: the development of the Lake Campus and the future of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory. The board expressed support for the current direction of Lake Campus planning and urged the administration to seek opportunities to articulate more precisely the Campus’s connections to the University’s mission and to the surrounding innovation ecosystem. The board agreed that recent developments at the Laboratory hold great promise for the future, and that the University should explore ways to increase connections between the Laboratory and the University.

### *Major trends*

The 2016 framework identified “two trends of particular importance to the University:” the growing stratification of higher education, and technology’s transformative impact upon “fields of research, forms of pedagogy, the economy, the organization of society, and the challenges for which we must prepare our students.”

The board believes that these trends remain the two most important ones affecting Princeton and its mission. Both trends have intensified rather than abated over the past three years. They contribute to an increasingly partisan political environment in which people worry about technology’s impact on jobs and wages, and in which well-resourced institutions are the subject of intense scrutiny. Additionally, they converge to generate intense competition between Princeton and its peers in technologically oriented fields, including computer science and engineering.

The framework noted that Princeton’s special capacities give it a responsibility to “strive for the highest levels of quality in research and education and for significant and lasting impact in pursuing its mission of service to the nation and the world.” The framework also counseled the University to “act strategically to seize the opportunities created by technological advancement.” The board believes that these propositions continue to provide sound guidance for the University’s planning.

### *Academic Quality*

The framework observed that “[i]n light of the value and robustness of the University’s longstanding mission, its first priority must be to make the investments needed to ensure the continued excellence of its teaching and research programs.” In the course of its 2019 retreat, the board participated in a discussion, led by the provost, about the processes in place to ensure that Princeton’s research and teaching are of “unsurpassed quality.” The board believes that these processes are appropriately robust, and it reaffirms its commitment to “invest as needed to attract the best undergraduates, graduate students, research scholars, and professors.”

### *Affordability and access*

The framework described “affordability” as “one of Princeton’s signature commitments,” and it articulated multiple initiatives aimed at improving the affordability and accessibility of a Princeton undergraduate education. The board “authorized the administration to begin planning for the addition of 500 more undergraduates (125 per class) ... with the expectation that over time it is likely that there will be an additional increase in the number of undergraduates and housing to accommodate them.” The board expressed its conviction that “it is important for the University to identify and attract more qualified students from low-income families.” The framework also declared the University’s intention “to invest as needed to ensure that Princeton’s aid program meets the needs of its students” and to enable students from all backgrounds “not only to attend Princeton but also to share fully in the educational opportunities it offers.”

Princeton has made impressive progress on these commitments and initiatives. In December 2018, the University announced a gift to name Perelman College, one of two new residential colleges that are being designed to accommodate the expansion of the undergraduate student body, and the additional fundraising required to complete the expansion is going well. Princeton has become a nationally recognized leader in attracting and supporting low-income students. *Money*, *Kiplinger's*, and other publications have identified Princeton as among the most affordable colleges in the country.

The board encourages the administration to build upon these successes. Princeton's financial aid program should be not only generous, but emphatically and visibly so—indeed, the University should seek ways to improve what is already a best-in-class program. The University should continue its efforts to attract and support the very best students irrespective of their financial means, including more low- and middle-income students, and it should collaborate with other colleges and universities to improve the prospects for such students nationwide. Finally, the board noted with approval the plan to build not one but two additional residential colleges so that it can substantially renovate or replace some existing housing stock; the board hopes that the University will seize opportunities to accommodate more additional undergraduates when possible.

### ***Residential Life***

The 2016 framework stated that “a key feature of Princeton's undergraduate program is its commitment to a vibrant and immersive residential experience,” and that the University must sustain and enhance the quality of its residential life programs so that students continue to benefit from meaningful and rewarding experiences that prepare them to develop talents, assume responsibilities, and exercise leadership in their lives beyond Princeton.”

The University implements these commitments partly through integrated, University-wide strategies and programs that address student wellbeing. These strategies and programs not only respond to particular conditions, such as mental health or substance abuse issues, but also seek to nurture healthy habits that will promote wellness over a lifetime. The Vice President for Campus Life led a discussion of the University's approach to these matters, and the board expressed confidence in the strategy.

### ***The University's resources and economic model***

The 2016 framework “authorized the administration to propose an increase to the spend rate that would take place over fiscal years 2017 and 2018.” The goal of the increase was to “provide resources that the University could use to co-invest with donors to fund [its] strategic priorities.” That increase was implemented as planned.

At its 2019 retreat, the board heard reports on the University's financial condition and on the protocols governing the use of the strategic co-investment funds generated by the spend rate increase. The board reaffirmed its confidence in the spending policy and accompanying analysis set forth in the 2016 framework, and it expressed approval for both the use of the strategic

co-investment funds in the University's capital plan and also the administration's proposed criteria for allocating those funds in connection with campaign fundraising targets.

### ***The Lake Campus and the innovation ecosystem***

The strategic framework noted that “Princeton’s faculty members see growing opportunities for research collaborations with partners outside of academia to advance the University’s educational mission,” and also that as “faculty members and students become increasingly interested in the potential to apply their ideas to problems through entrepreneurial activity, they seek greater connection to the resources that facilitate such activity.” In light of these developments, the framework identified a need for Princeton to “cultivate interaction between its faculty members, researchers, and students and their counterparts in the non-profit, corporate, and government sectors.” It recommended that the University consider multiple strategies, including “planning for the development of campus lands in ways that make possible productive interactions.”

Over the past four years, the University has made important progress toward these goals, as exemplified by the opening of the Entrepreneurial Hub on Chambers Street in Princeton, the launch of Princeton Innovation Center BioLabs in Plainsboro, and the establishment of new collaborations with Celgene, Google, Microsoft, and other partners. As the University continues to plan the development of its lands south of Lake Carnegie, it envisions the Lake Campus as a site for research collaborations between the University and other entities, as well as for graduate student housing, athletic facilities, administrative offices, convening spaces, and other initiatives.

The board reviewed early conceptual designs for the Lake Campus in connection with the campus planning process, much of which postdate publication of the strategic framework (the campus plan was published in December 2017). The board regards the development of the Lake Campus as having major long-term implications for the University, and it accordingly devoted substantial time during its retreat to discussion of the University’s strategic objectives for the Campus.

The board endorsed two principles recommended by the administration to guide planning for the Lake Campus: first, the Lake Campus will feel like a lively, attractive, and yet distinctive part of Princeton University, and, second, the Campus will advance the University’s educational and research mission, and contribute to the regional innovation ecosystem, by providing co-working spaces for projects that will bring together Princeton faculty, postdocs, or students with industry, government, non-profits, or other research institutions. The board urged that the administration further develop its thinking about how best to achieve these objectives, and how to set realistic expectations for what the project might accomplish.

### ***The Plasma Physics Laboratory***

Princeton University operates the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory (PPPL) for the United States Department of Energy. PPPL, which began operations in the 1950s, is in a pivotal phase of its history. The Laboratory’s flagship machine, NSTX-U, experienced a major technical problem in 2016 and has been off-line since that time. In the wake of that event, the University

sought new leadership for the Laboratory; after an international search, a successor, Sir Steven Cowley, was hired in May 2018 and took office as director of the Laboratory in July of that year. In March 2019, the Department of Energy agreed to extend Princeton's contract to manage the Laboratory by three years.

The Laboratory now has a mandate to demonstrate its ability to carry out its flagship project successfully and to develop a vision for its own future and that of the American fusion program. Princeton's administration believes that the Laboratory is most likely to succeed if it becomes more closely connected to the University; the administration also believes that expanding these connections has significant upside for the University's mission and strategic priorities.

The board agreed that the Laboratory's ambitious research program is consistent with the University's aspiration to make a difference to the world through teaching and research of unsurpassed quality. The board encouraged the administration to explore possibilities for increasing the connections between the University and the Laboratory in ways that advance the missions of both organizations. The board noted that such efforts would require consent and support from the Department of Energy, and it asked the administration to keep it updated about progress and developments in the University's relationship with the Laboratory and the Department.

### *Conclusion*

The board believes that the goals and directions established by its 2016 framework remain fundamentally sound. It accordingly reaffirms the assessment delivered at the conclusion of that earlier report:

“Princeton's distinctive model and mission are today more vibrant, valuable, and relevant to the world's problems than ever. The University's exceptional character and resources provide it with a special capacity to deliver teaching and research on questions both profound and urgent. By accepting the leadership responsibilities that accompany that capacity, and by seizing the opportunities to use and address technology's impact on the development of knowledge and society, Princeton University extends the principles that define it as a liberal arts university into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and honors its commitment to serve the nation and the world.”

The board is pleased by the progress made since adoption of the framework and confident of the University's capacity to succeed in its pursuit of its strategic goals. The board looks forward to supporting the administration's continuing efforts, and, as noted earlier, encourages the design of creative and energetic measures to accelerate progress as the University enters the public phase of its upcoming capital campaign.