



President

Scoping Document

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*Report on the opportunities and expectations for leadership in the
appointment of the 29th President of the University of Delaware*

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Context and Process

This scoping document is designed to identify the scope of work of the 29th president of the University of Delaware (UD). The document highlights both the challenges and opportunities that will shape the work of the president, as well as the personal qualities and professional qualifications that will lead to the president's success. This report is based upon the robust observations provided by the UD community through 12 listening sessions and over 150 survey responses. This extensive outreach reflects the input of the Presidential Appointment Advisory Committee (PAAC), the trustees, alumni, students, staff, faculty, and campus administration.

The University of Delaware was served by President Dennis Assanis, the University's 28th president, until his departure on June 30, 2025. The University of Delaware Board of Trustees selected Provost Laura Carlson to serve as interim president, and she has served in that capacity since July 1, 2025. The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees then appointed the PAAC to pursue a robust assessment of Dr. Carlson's strengths in consideration of her possible appointment to the permanent role. This document will serve as a guidepost in that effort.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The next president of the University of Delaware will join a vibrant institution with a rich legacy of academic excellence, public service, research, and innovation. As UD enters a new chapter, the next president will be called upon to lead through uncertainty and adapt to an ever-changing environment while clarifying UD's institutional identity and enhancing its national reputation. The University community is eager for a leader who can address the many current challenges and harness UD's strengths and talent to collectively drive a vision for the future. First and foremost, this leader will be committed to and passionate about the University of Delaware and its great potential, and will provide leadership across the following key areas:

- **Develop and Execute a Strategic Vision Through Inclusive Leadership**

The University of Delaware seeks a president who will lead with purpose, conviction, integrity, and inclusivity—developing and articulating a distinctive strategic vision that reflects the University's Land, Sea, and Space-Grant mission, core values, and aspirations. This vision should unify the institution around shared goals, provide clarity, and guide decision-making across academic, administrative, and financial domains. The strategic plan must prioritize what is mission-critical—focusing institutional energy and resources on the initiatives that most directly advance UD's core purpose and long-term impact.

The next president will be expected to foster a culture of inclusive, transparent, and accountable leadership. In partnership with a cohesive and high-performing senior leadership team, the president will model the University's values and operate with trust, humility, and shared purpose. Leadership development must be institutionalized across all levels to support succession planning, professional growth, and long-term organizational resilience.

A commitment to shared governance will be essential, understanding the unique roles, responsibilities, and expertise throughout the institution. The president must actively engage faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders in meaningful dialogue—facilitating data-driven decisions that are shaped by diverse perspectives and lived experiences. Inclusive decision-making will be central to building trust and driving institutional progress.

Strategic planning, budget processes, and institutional objectives must be aligned to promote clarity, execution, and impact. Enrollment management must be treated as a

top institutional priority, with the president providing strong leadership and support for this vital area. The president will be responsible for dismantling operational silos, encouraging cross-unit collaboration, and fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. Establishing clear metrics and accountability structures will promote measurable progress and meaningful outcomes. As leadership decisions are made, they will be communicated widely and in a timely manner, leading to shared understanding and direction.

This is a defining moment to reimagine how UD leads—from the boardroom to the classroom—and to build a leadership culture rooted in collaboration, equity, and results. The next president will be instrumental in guiding the University toward a future defined by strategic clarity, inclusive excellence, and enduring relevance.

- **Ensure Financial Stability and Position UD for Sustainable Growth**

The next president will assume leadership at a pivotal moment—one marked by financial headwinds but also significant opportunity for growth and diversification. Restoring fiscal health will require disciplined financial stewardship and transparent budgeting practices that build trust across the University community. The president must lead efforts to diversify revenue streams through expanded philanthropic initiatives, endowment growth, public-private partnerships, and strategic partnerships that align with UD's mission and values.

To support sound decision-making and long-term planning, the president must also cultivate improved forecasting capabilities and increase the frequency and clarity of financial reporting. These enhancements will provide greater visibility into institutional performance, promote accountability, and enable more agile responses to emerging challenges and opportunities.

The president will be expected to serve as a visible and persuasive champion for the University's fundraising efforts—setting ambitious goals, cultivating donor relationships, and galvanizing support across internal and external constituencies.

In recent years, institutional growth has sometimes outpaced both physical capacity and available funding. Addressing deferred maintenance and infrastructure gaps will be essential to sustaining academic excellence and enhancing the student experience. Strengthening relationships with government agencies, community stakeholders, alumni, industry leaders, and partners will be critical to unlocking new funding opportunities and elevating UD's visibility and impact.

The president will be expected to leverage the University's intellectual capital, physical assets, and strong reputation to generate new sources of revenue and build long-term financial resilience. With strategic foresight and financial acumen, the next president will play a central role in securing UD's future and positioning the institution for sustainable success.

- **Strengthen Academic Excellence and Articulate UD's Strategic Identity**

As an R1 University, the University of Delaware is uniquely positioned to shape the future of research, teaching, and innovation. The next president will be charged with advancing academic excellence while further shaping the University's research priorities and infrastructure in a cost-effective manner and leveraging interdisciplinary programs and unique capabilities. Supporting faculty distinction and student success through innovative pedagogy, technology integration, and robust academic and student support systems will be essential.

At a time when higher education is undergoing profound transformation, clarifying UD's institutional identity will be critical to strengthening its strategic positioning and enhancing its national reputation. This includes refining the University's messaging within the broader higher education landscape, elevating its visibility through thought leadership and rankings, and articulating a compelling narrative about UD's mission and contributions to the State of Delaware and beyond.

The next president should prioritize quality over expansion, cultivating academic growth and strategic initiatives that are intentional, inclusive, and aligned with the University's core values. With momentum in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, sustainability, and workforce development, UD is poised to lead. This is a pivotal opportunity to define the University's academic future with boldness, clarity, and a deep commitment to excellence and equity, while remaining good stewards of the University's available resources.

- **Foster a Culture of Engagement Through Visible, Inclusive, and Collaborative Leadership**

The next president will be expected to build trust, transparency, and open communication across all levels of the University—creating an environment where disparate voices are heard, respected, and valued. This requires not only consistent and clear messaging but also active listening and authentic engagement with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners through ongoing, meaningful dialogue.

A strong and consistent presence on campus will be essential. The president must be visible and approachable, attending a wide range of events, from academic forums and student gatherings to cultural celebrations and community activities. By showing up, listening deeply, and engaging personally, the president will foster a sense of connection, shared purpose, and pride across the University.

The president will play a central role in shaping UD's institutional culture—one that reflects its values, embraces diversity, and empowers every member of the community to thrive. Above all, the president must lead with empathy, humility, and authenticity, cultivating a welcoming and collaborative environment where people feel seen, supported, and inspired.

■ **Lead with Strategic External Engagement and Advocacy**

In addition to fostering internal connection, the next president must prioritize external engagement as a core leadership responsibility. This includes serving as a compelling advocate for the University in public, alumni, and political spheres — especially in building strong relationships with state and local officials. A key priority will be establishing stronger, more frequent communication channels with the state government leaders to build upon UD's prominent role as an economic development engine for the state. Navigating political dynamics with integrity and finesse will be essential to advancing UD's interests and securing continued support for its mission.

Expanding UD's community engagement must include a deliberate effort to grow the University's presence across all regions of the state. The next president will be expected to identify and pursue opportunities that align with the unique strengths, needs, and assets of each campus and its surrounding community—particularly in areas such as workforce development, healthcare, economic innovation, and public service. Leveraging regional distinctions, including proximity to government institutions, industry hubs, and underserved populations, will be key to strengthening UD's strategic partnerships and enhancing its statewide impact.

The president must also strengthen alumni affinity and donor relations, cultivating a broad base of support rooted in shared pride and purpose. With strategic vision and relationship-building skills, the president will be a critical participant in achieving our fundraising goals—and ultimately lead its successful execution.

By bridging internal and external communities, the president will elevate UD's visibility, expand its impact, and reinforce its continued relevance and resilience in a rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

■ **Champion a Student-Centered Approach to Elevate the UD Experience**

Students are at the heart of the University of Delaware's mission, and the next president must place student success at the center of every decision. Elevating the student experience in meaningful and lasting ways will require sustained investment in student life, academic advising, career services, and experiential learning opportunities that foster holistic development and prepare students for life beyond graduation.

Fostering an environment of constructive dialogue and opportunities to engage with others that offer different perspectives will be a critical component in shaping the student experience.

Improving retention and graduation rates will demand inclusive, data-informed strategies and enhanced support systems that reflect the diverse needs of UD's student body. The president must prioritize that high-traffic student facilities—including housing, dining, and the student center—are regularly reviewed and upgraded to meet evolving expectations and promote a vibrant campus life.

A student-centered approach also means cultivating a strong sense of belonging, community, and school pride. The president should ensure inclusive programming and campus engagement initiatives that reflect the richness of UD's student population. Just as critically, the president must be a visible, consistent, and approachable presence—attending campus events, engaging in informal conversations, and being known not only as a leader, but as a listener.

Building trust and connection with students will require compassionate communication and a genuine commitment to understanding their lived experiences and aspirations. This is an opportune time to reimagine the student experience at UD and reaffirm the University's commitment to student success through leadership that is strategic, inclusive, and deeply personal.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The University of Delaware's next president must embody a dynamic blend of visionary leadership, operational expertise, and inclusive values. This individual must lead with integrity, inspire a diverse community, and advance the institution's mission with clarity and purpose. The ideal next president will bring the following qualities and qualifications:

Visionary Leadership and Strategic Thinking

The president should be a bold and strategic thinker, capable of setting a compelling vision for the University's future. They must be a confident and capable leader—someone who not only articulates actionable goals but also galvanizes the institution to pursue them with purpose and unity.

- Is deeply passionate about the UD mission, vision, and values, and understands the university's distinctive role and value proposition within the broader higher education landscape.
- Demonstrates the ability to unify, inspire, and mobilize diverse constituencies—including faculty, staff, students, alumni, and external partners—around a shared and forward-looking vision.
- Leads decisively through complexity and uncertainty, showing resilience and clarity while instilling optimism and confidence across the University.
- Possesses a deep understanding of higher education governance, academic freedom, and institutional culture, and actively cultivates leadership at all levels to build a sustainable leadership pipeline.
- Respects the Land, Sea, and Space-Grant mission and the essential balance of teaching, research, and service, and leads efforts to integrate these priorities into a coherent institutional strategy.
- Recognizes and respects the varied needs and priorities of the colleges and units and leads with empathy and strategic insight to align them with the University's overarching goals.
- Demonstrates the leadership role UD plays as an economic engine of the State of Delaware and elevates UD as the State's flagship university, serving as a central pillar of educational and socio-economic advancement throughout the region.

Strategy and Execution

The president must bring not only strategic vision but also the managerial acumen to translate that vision into action—recognizing that effective execution requires collaboration, coordination, and empowerment across the institution.

- Listens actively and integrates feedback from a wide range of stakeholders when shaping the institution's strategic direction, ensuring that plans are inclusive and grounded in reality.
- Builds and develops high-performing teams that embody the University's values and can successfully deliver on strategic goals. Leads with clarity and purpose while fostering a culture of excellence, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Navigates uncertainty with finesse while maintaining agility and adaptability.
- Makes and communicates decisions in a manner that is timely, transparent, and inclusive, reinforcing trust and shared ownership of outcomes.
- Empowers colleges, departments, and units to implement strategic priorities with clarity, autonomy, and accountability—facilitating alignment while respecting local expertise.
- Delegates effectively, avoiding micromanagement, and creates a culture of shared responsibility where leaders across the University are trusted to lead and deliver results.

Transparent and Inclusive Communication

The president must be a clear, consistent, and authentic communicator who fosters trust through transparency and engagement. The president should be committed to inclusive dialogue and responsive leadership.

- Communicates openly about institutional priorities, financial matters, and decision-making processes.
- Engages regularly and meaningfully with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members.
- Values diverse voices and perspectives, fostering an environment where all members of the community feel heard and respected.
- Exhibits emotional intelligence, honesty, empathy, and ethical leadership.
- Actively fosters a sense of belonging and supports underrepresented groups.

Relationship Building and Campus Presence

Strong interpersonal skills and a visible, approachable presence on campus are essential. The president must build trust through principled actions, genuine engagement, and physical presence.

- Cultivates relationships across internal and external constituencies with integrity and consistency.
- Maintains a visible and active presence on campus, engaging with the community in meaningful ways.
- Leads with humility, prioritizing people over prestige.

Operational and Financial Stewardship

The president must bring sound judgment and strategic acumen to the University's operations and financial management. The president should be capable of aligning resources with institutional priorities and ensuring long-term sustainability.

- Makes strategic investments and allocates resources to maximize impact and performance.
- Capable of making the tough choices and trade-offs required.
- Understands the implications of various budgeting models on academic and administrative units.
- Simplifies complex issues and drives effective execution of plans.
- Prioritizes infrastructure, staffing, and sustainability to support institutional growth and resilience.

Fundraising and External Advocacy

The president must be a compelling, passionate advocate for the University, capable of building strong external relationships and securing philanthropic support.

- Represents the University effectively in public, alumni, and political arenas.
- Demonstrates skill in fundraising, donor relations, and stewardship.
- Navigates political dynamics with integrity, diplomacy, and strategic foresight.

Institutional Culture and Community Building

The president must be a steward of the University's culture, fostering collaboration, inclusion, and shared governance. They should lead with values that strengthen the campus community and uphold the institution's mission.

- Champions shared governance, respecting the unique roles and responsibilities of different constituents.
- Cultivates a collaborative environment, leveraging knowledge-based decision making.
- Promotes a welcoming, accessible, and inclusive campus for all identities and abilities.
- Strengthens institutional culture through principled leadership and active community engagement.