

**Sonoma State University and the California State University:
A Bridge to the Future**

The Chancellor and the Board of Trustees of the California State University have indicated their full commitment to sustain Sonoma State University as an independently accredited university that assures educational access and delivers high-quality educational programs to the region it serves. The Chancellor's commitment is reflected in the recent announcement that the presidential search process will commence in Fall 2025.

Sonoma State has faced a significant loss of enrollment and of revenues because of lower enrollment. This revenue loss has required major financial reductions and reallocations.

Below we offer a description of Sonoma State's Bridge to the Future. The listed goals, metrics, and tactics describe the efforts needed to assure a strong and vibrant future for Sonoma State, including notable additions to the University's academic programs and administrative efforts.

The Context

There are three important aspects of the context within which Sonoma State must develop its Bridge to the Future. First, for multiple years now a substantial number of campuses in the California State University system, including Sonoma State University, have experienced declining enrollments. In her March 2025 report to the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Garcia described both causes and consequences of this demographic trend, which were "brought on, in large part, by a significant demographic shift impacting the entire region and many other areas of our state and nation, with declining birth rates and reduced numbers of high school graduates projected to negatively impact the pool of college-going students through 2040 and beyond.

"This shift," Chancellor Garcia continued, "is affecting multiple campuses across the system, but among the most significant negative impacts are those being experienced at Sonoma, Cal State East Bay, and San Francisco State." Similarly, Cal Poly Humboldt and Cal State Channel Islands have experienced similar dramatic enrollment declines. Chico State and Monterey Bay have also had steep declines, but in the past year have seen some stabilization in their enrollment numbers. Our campus, Sonoma State, with a loss of 38% of its enrollment since 2015, is among the steepest enrollment losses within the CSU system.

Concurrently, other universities within the California State University system are experiencing significant increased enrollment pressures. These schools include Cal State San Marcos, San Diego State University, Cal State Fullerton, Cal Poly Pomona, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Additional allocations, or base budget increases to support the enrollment growth at these universities, must come from CSU system funds.

Noteworthy as well is that all CSU campuses have had increased costs over the past five years, including necessary wage increase for employees, large inflationary pressures on mandatory costs, and the need to provide additional services to students. The CSU Sustainable Funding Model Workgroup identified a \$1.5-billion deficit in 2023 when comparing the expenditures of all the CSU campuses with their revenues.

The CSU system of universities is interdependent and, while it seeks to leverage its collective strengths, there are real limitations to the system's ability to "bail out" every university that experiences financial challenges. To do so would, frankly, challenge the CSU's overall financial stability.

The second contextual factor guiding our plan for Sonoma State's future is Chancellor Garcia's commitment to assure that graduates of the CSU campuses will have a pathway to a career when they graduate. To paraphrase Chancellor Garcia:

Our students are seeking a pathway to social mobility and an economically independent life for themselves and their families. It means that we need to do more to develop career pathways and to introduce students to the myriad of career options that exist for every major and field of study.

Finally, Chancellor Garcia has directed all campuses within the system to be "innovative and proactive" by leveraging the strengths of the California State University system. That call for innovation has resulted in a commitment by the presidents of Cal State East Bay, San Francisco State, and Sonoma State to develop a single structure and framework for the organization and operations of certain administrative functions typically included in the portfolio of vice presidents for administration and finance. This organizational structure is tentatively called the "San Francisco Bay Area University Network." While this administrative restructuring will not immediately provide financial relief to Sonoma State, the initiative will allow some administrative costs to be available to support Sonoma State in the future.

Goals for Sonoma State as it Reimagines Itself

As Sonoma State University looks to the future, we seek to meet several overarching goals:

1. Increase the number of full-time-equivalent students.
2. Engage the region even more fully as a partner in increasing social mobility, developing informed citizens, and providing employees who meet regional workforce needs.
3. Ensure sustainability by bringing cost-per-student in line with the California State University's average cost per student. **The cost-per-student average at Sonoma State is 33% higher than the CSU campus average.**

4. Enhance financial resources through administrative cost and functioning improvements in the Network with SFSU and CSUEB, along with increased entrepreneurial uses of university facilities and infrastructure.
5. Create and market additional reasons for students, parents, and community members to come to the Sonoma State University campus and use its facilities.

Our recent budget decisions now need to become investment decisions. Those investments are going to help recruit students, retain them, prepare them for careers, connect them to on-campus and regional employment and business opportunities, and keep them in the North Bay to reduce the region's "brain drain" and create a "brain gain."

We seek to meet our goals through specific efforts in six areas: 1) expanding and enhancing student recruitment; 2) academic program innovation; 3) building campus community; 4) developing career and work-based learning; 5) enhancing community engagement and service; and 6) maximizing administrative cost gains and entrepreneurship.

Goal: 1. Expanding and Enhancing Student Recruitment

Goals:

Increase enrollment to Sonoma State University through robust recruitment and enrollment marketing efforts. Expand partnerships, direct admissions, and dual enrollment programs. Streamline admissions processes to reduce barriers. Increase enrollment capacity in high-demand and new majors. Engage alumni and community partners.

Metric:

Increase overall enrollment by 20% within five to seven years (6,800 FTES).

Tactics:

1. Increase recruitment efforts and implement improved marketing campaigns that employ best-practice strategies, omni-channel digital advertising, and direct interactions.
2. Expand partnerships with school districts and community colleges in the North Bay region and across California for dual-credit guaranteed and direct admissions.
3. Expand dual enrollment programs with local high school districts leveraging A-G and AP courses to increase eligible graduates and reduce time to degree. Expand concurrent enrollment with community colleges aligned with transfer pathways and ADTs.

4. Explore the potential to offer admission and academic support to students not otherwise eligible through a pilot program, utilizing the existing Title 5 authority.
5. Streamline recruitment processes by leveraging AI, implementing predictive analytics, and automating transfer credit articulation and pre-admission advising.
6. Develop increased enrollment capacity in high-demand and new majors.
7. Recruit adult and other non-traditional students seeking to change careers and upskill to programs designed and scheduled to meet their needs.
8. Seek opportunities to engage alumni and other advocates as ambassadors locally and in key regions.

Please Note:

While the university is committed to the above enhancements to recruiting, marketing and outreach efforts, a reality must be acknowledged: A significant demographic shift has already affected the region, with impacts felt not only at Sonoma State but at other Bay Area CSU universities including Cal State East Bay and San Francisco State. Declining birth rates and reduced numbers of high school graduates are projected to negatively impact the pool of college-going students through 2040 and beyond. These demographic trends are not expected to change and will continue to create challenges that require constant review of recruitment strategies with occasional adjustments.

Goal: 2. Academic Program Innovation

Develop and implement new academic programs that will attract and retain students by reframing and repositioning current programs to align with workforce demands and interests of the current generation of students.

Metric:

Launch a minimum of four new, high-demand academic programs within three years, while working with existing programs to enhance student interest and demand. The projected enrollment growth is 1,000 students in five to seven years.

Tactics:

1. Expand existing programs that produce a significant number of graduates for the region's workforce, concentrating on the area's wine business and logistics, among others.

2. Accelerate approvals and hiring for programs in four or more of the following: Health Sciences, Health Profession Studies, Public Health, Clinical Lab Science, Data Science, Robotics and Computer Engineering, Business, and Social Work.
3. Identify undergraduate and graduate degree programs that would be unique in the CSU and/or northern California.
4. Secure additional funding for faculty, staff, and lab infrastructure.
5. Expand online and hybrid course offerings and utilize other modalities appropriate for non-traditional students.
6. Establish industry partnerships for experiential learning and internship opportunities.
7. Create advisory councils to provide input on current industry needs, develop relationships with key employers, and grow the community of advocates.

Review existing programs to identify those that, with minor modifications, could attract more students.

Goal: 3. Building Campus Community

Goal:

Enhance student life, engagement, and belonging at Sonoma State University to support student success and well-being.

Metrics:

Through a comprehensive array of clubs and organizations, campus events, club sports and recreational activities, artistic endeavors, and community service initiatives, Sonoma State University is committed to growing campus participation by 20% and enhancing opportunities for students to engage meaningfully, foster connections with their peers and with the institution, and pursue avenues for both academic and social development. By implementing the following tactics, Sonoma State University aims to create a thriving campus community that promotes student engagement and a strong sense of belonging.

Tactics:

1. Expand Engagement Opportunities:

- Promote diverse student organizations and clubs catering to various interests. This tactic includes expanding the support and visibility of club sports, which already provide significant engagement opportunities on campus.
- Offer an expanded calendar of weekly events, including campus traditions and co-curricular programming.

2. Enhance Campus Spaces:

- Revitalize Seawolf Plaza with music, lighting, and an outdoor living room space.
- Develop *The Gardens at Campus Rec* (outdoor park) to provide recreation, relaxation, and community.

3. Strengthen Support Services:

- Expand the HUB center’s engagement and belonging spaces for historically underrepresented communities.
- Collaborate with academic resources to provide holistic student support.

4. Elevate Student Life through Programming:

- Curate inclusive social, educational, and cultural events through Associated Students Productions (ASP) to foster engagement.
- Ensure, through regular feedback collection, that campus events are accessible and reflect student interests.

Goal: 4. Developing Career and Work-Based Learning

Goal:

Expand career services and experiential learning opportunities to improve student career readiness and employer engagement.

Metric:

Implement a structured career pathway/internship pathway program for 60% of majors (30) with at least 500 participating students per major per year by Year Five.

Tactics:

1. Develop structured pathways and internship programs across all majors.
2. Hire faculty mentors and career advisors to support work-based learning.
3. Partner with regional employers to create placement opportunities.
4. Expand alumni and corporate networks to facilitate mentorship and job placement.
5. Create advisory councils to provide input on current industry needs, and develop relationships with key employers to grow the community of advocates.
6. Develop key recruitment and marketing strategies for each new discipline.

Goal: 5. Enhancing Community Engagement and Service

Goal:

Establish Sonoma State as a vital intellectual, cultural, economic, and service partner in the region, creating a true “college town” experience.

Metric:

The tactics below will be initiated within 12 months.

Tactics:

1. Create a vibrant President’s Advisory Council that meaningfully engages a spectrum of regional and community leaders.
2. Engage Associated Students student government to develop an understanding of student needs from the community.
3. Work with the cities of Rohnert Park, Cotati, Santa Rosa and Petaluma related to town-gown relations (e.g., development of Rohnert Park’s new downtown).
4. Enhance service learning and community service opportunities and programs through the Career Center, Residential Life (REACH), and other Student Affairs departments and programs.
5. Identify unique graduate programs that meet the needs of the region.

Goal: 6. Achieve Administrative Cost Improvements and Maximize Campus Space for Entrepreneurship.

Goal:

Leverage the strengths of three CSUs (Sonoma State, San Francisco State, and East Bay) to reduce administrative overhead of business functions in the San Francisco Bay Region University Network.

Develop underutilized campus spaces to generate revenue and enhance student engagement.

Metric:

Realize a projected 20% reduction in the costs of supporting the functions of the Division of Administration and Finance within five years of the full implementation of the Network.

Generate \$1 million in new annual revenue by year five through entrepreneurial initiatives.

Tactics:

1. Join with East Bay and San Francisco State to create one unified administrative structure for business functions included within the portfolios of the Administration and Finance Vice President.
2. Conduct a regional market analysis to identify unmet community needs.
3. Develop a Data Science Center for training, research, and consulting.
4. Develop an Entrepreneur Incubator for student and community startups that leverages access to faculty and students.
5. Monetize athletic facilities through rentals and memberships.
6. Relaunch SSU Summer Youth Camp (Lobo Summer Camp) for local youth as a revenue-generating program.
7. Seek outside counsel to study utilization of currently closed dining venues, including leasing opportunities to outside entities.
8. Seek additional revenue opportunities with the Green Music Center and Marina Crossing.

Use of Potential Budget Restoration

Should either the State of California or the California State University System allocate funds to SSU that are currently scheduled to be cut in fiscal year 2026, the University will use its University Budget Advisory Committee (UBAC) to prioritize and recommend to the President which programs should be funded with the restored dollars. UBAC is a long-standing committee at SSU with representatives from faculty, staff, and students who have participated in regular meetings on the University's finances. The University community has been invited to submit proposals to UBAC, for either new programs or those scheduled for discontinuation. It will begin reviewing proposals in mid-April and will make its recommendations by mid-May. Thus, should funds be restored for the 2025-26 budget, the University will be prepared to move ahead quickly with any restoration of discontinued programs or development of new programs, such as those listed in this proposal. Please note that any new degree programs will be subject to Senate curriculum approval policies.

Conclusion:

We estimate that the expenditure cost of the above steps to build Sonoma State's Bridge to the Future will be about \$10 million, some of which can be one-time funding. Costs linked to the hiring of faculty and staff require recurring funding.

By modernizing recruitment, innovating curriculum, enhancing career pathways, and leveraging campus resources, Sonoma State University can drive significant enrollment growth and financial sustainability. Strategic investments in these initiatives will position Sonoma State University as a competitive and accessible institution for students in California and beyond.