

March 31, 2023

John D. Keenan, *President*

Commissioner Noe Ortega  
Department of Higher Education  
One Ashburton Place, Suite 1401  
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Commissioner Ortega,

Culminating what has been an inclusive and comprehensive planning process on campus this past year, I am pleased to submit the updated and final version of Salem State University's strategic plan that our Board of Trustees is expected to approve formally at its meeting on April 12. With Dr. Winnie Hagan's consent, we are submitting the plan prior to the trustees' vote to approve in order to allow sufficient lead time for the BHE's executive committee to review the plan in advance of our Touch Point III meeting with the full Board on May 9. I shall notify Dr. Hagan immediately following the trustees' vote on April 12.

This final version of the plan is not substantially different from the version reviewed with Dr. Hagan and you at our Touch Point II meeting on February 22, but we believe it is considerably improved based upon the constructive feedback Dr. Hagan provided on behalf of the staff who reviewed our draft thoroughly. Among the enhancements are a more explicit articulation (in the Mission and Core Values sections) of:

- Salem State's role both within the Commonwealth's public education *system* as an integrated whole and as *the* state university on the North Shore, where we have a unique opportunity to leverage local assets and relationships and to have a positive regional impact while also making a difference in individual lives; and
- Salem State's dual commitment (a) to cultivating critical skills and lifelong habits of mind through educational experiences grounded in the liberal arts and (b) to preparing students for rewarding careers and upward social mobility in an ever-evolving economy and society; these commitments are not mutually exclusive but rather are mutually reinforcing in ways we believe prepare our graduates exceptionally well for success.

Our plan also responds to Touch Point II feedback by:

- including Key Progress Indicators (KPIs) closely tied to the plan's goals and objectives as well as the desired outcomes expressed in an earlier section of the plan; I am confident these KPIs will help members of the Salem State community hold each other accountable for upholding common values, supporting shared goals, making progress toward them, and maintaining public trust; and
- drawing clear attention to the plan's alignment with DHE goals and priorities—not only as expressed in the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity, but also in the Student Support and Success Framework adopted in June 2022; you will find the assessment of our strategic plan's alignment with DHE's plans in an appendix.

At the core of the plan we submit to you for BHE approval is Salem State's commitment to student success and life readiness; you will see this highlighted as a "strategic imperative," and you also will find this commitment woven throughout the goals and objectives. Also embedded throughout the plan is our fundamental commitment to promoting equity, closing achievement gaps, and eliminating racial disparities. As a community, we must redouble efforts to promote equitable access to the opportunities Salem State offers; toward that end, we will work to dismantle barriers to the recruitment, retention, engagement, and advancement of students, faculty, and staff from historically under-represented or marginalized populations. In this context we are excited and proud that this strategic plan will propel us to become the Commonwealth's first four-year, public HSI/MSI.

I would also like to highlight another particularly significant element of the plan: our determination to be, and be recognized as, *the* civic engagement university within the Commonwealth's public higher education system. SSU is well positioned to leverage historic strengths, current relationships, and innovative new strategies in ways that differentiate our university but also, and most importantly, enrich the educational experience of our students while also making important contributions to civic life, environmental sustainability, and the cultural, social, and economic vitality of the North Shore region. It is worth noting that as part of this round of strategic planning, we developed and adopted a refreshed mission statement that specifically highlights this outward-facing public purpose.

Our goals and objectives relating to environmental stewardship and climate action represent another exciting opportunity to further distinguish Salem State as a leader and model for others. The strategic plan calls on us to reflect our commitment to sustainability in every aspect of campus life and operations—from academic programs, to administrative decision making, to capital planning, to individual choices and behaviors. This commitment is clearly articulated among the core values in the strategic plan. These core values, like our mission statement, were refreshed and revised as part of the strategic planning process. Now we must be unified behind them and regularly evaluate whether we are living up to them.


As you will read in the appendix that describes our planning process, we sought to be inclusive throughout the plan's development. Along the way drafts of the plan have been shared with members of the SSU community, and most recently the final draft was vetted with members of my executive team and the All University Committee, a key piece of our shared governance system. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. I am confident members of the SSU community will be unified as well as energized in their common pursuit of the plan's goals and in taking actions designed to operationalize the plan's objectives. Many specific strategies and initiatives already have been identified by the Strategic Planning Committee and eight working groups that focused on each of the plan's goals, so we are in excellent shape to transition from long-range strategic planning to short-term implementation planning. Implementation will be a University-wide undertaking; every unit, department, office, and individual—whether trustee, senior administrator, staff member, faculty member or student—should be able to find places where their particular goals, roles and responsibilities intersect with a strategy, initiative, or desired outcome of the strategic plan.

Over the summer, my executive team and I will be focused on this critical transition from long-range strategic planning to short-term implementation planning. We are fully committed to putting this strategic plan into action and holding ourselves accountable for progress. Building on recommendations submitted by the Strategic Planning Committee, we will set short-term priorities and assess the financial implications to ensure alignment of action plans with available resources. We also will develop division-level action plans, identify benchmarks and set targets for plan-related performance indicators, and prepare an attractive shorter version of the strategic plan to be used with our various external audiences to raise awareness and generate support.

We already have taken steps to ensure our *Meet the Moment* comprehensive campaign—which will be announced publicly on May 6 and whose goal is to raise \$75 million—fully aligns with the aspirations and objectives captured in the strategic plan; it will provide fuel for much of the work to be done. In addition, with the benefit of generous state funding support, we are already on a path to realizing the ambitious goals of SSU BOLD, our transformative campus renewal and modernization project that is a key centerpiece of the strategic plan.

I have every confidence this strategic plan for 2023-2028 will position Salem State University to advance critical statewide priorities, fulfill our public mission and role in the wider community, serve our diverse students, and support our talented faculty and staff more effectively than ever. We are indeed poised and ready to “Meet the Moment!” I look forward to discussing the roadmap to our future with you and your colleagues at the upcoming Touch Point III meeting.

Sincerely,



John D. Keenan  
President