



IDENTITY
UDC EXPERIENCE
PARTNERSHIPS

UDC STRATEGIC PLAN

Building on the Equity Imperative

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Section 1: Executive Summary

The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) is in an exciting season of transition and progress. Building on the foundation of its previous strategic plan, *The Equity Imperative*, UDC is looking to the future and preparing to set goals and a strategic direction that factors in new circumstances, both internally and externally, that have developed in recent years. It was vital to the institutional leadership that these strategic goals accurately reflect and respond to the stated needs from the University's diverse stakeholders. The planning process was rooted in engagement, access, and transparency with many opportunities for constituents, both internal and external, to provide valuable feedback to guide the process and shape the goals of this plan. This feedback was collected through various methods to meet stakeholders where they were most comfortable, and the response was overwhelming in the best possible way. The passionate engagement of UDC's stakeholders, exceeding all expectations for this process, is an encouraging indicator that the UDC community is primed and ready for the next steps outlined in this planning document. The unprecedented level of engagement in this process, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, Trustees, as well as community stakeholders and civic leaders, demonstrates how much potential UDC has to thrive in the coming period, and more importantly, how many individuals from within the institution and beyond are catalysts for championing the institution's continued success.

This report details the process that UDC undertook from June through November 2022, as well as the results, analysis, and proposed goals that emerged from this widescale community engagement. Beginning with background information about UDC's unique circumstances and position, the report then considers both the local and global context in which this strategic planning process was launched. This background and context not only holistically situates the institution at this unique moment but also encompasses the diverse individuals who form this community and their daily contribution to realizing the University's vision and goals. It is, therefore, useful to reflect on these factors and acknowledge their influence.

After establishing the background and context, the report reviews the stakeholder engagement process, with specifics around the methods and results of these outreach efforts. This section summarizes the findings from survey responses, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and other engagement strategies, both in-person and online. Finally, the report concludes with an analysis of these findings and the consolidation of copious amounts of feedback into clear, measurable recommendations for the future goals that will ultimately shape UDC's next strategic plan. The last section details the robust process of identifying themes and gradually narrowing these themes to bring the next steps into clearer focus without losing any of the vital feedback shared by stakeholders.

This process was both comprehensive enough to encapsulate the prolific response received by UDC stakeholders and targeted enough to be memorable, explainable, and approachable. These recommendations allow for a robust structure to guide UDC's path forward while remaining flexible to respond to uncertainties and unexpected circumstances that may arise.

The UDC community can be proud of their hard work throughout this process and of the fruits of these labors. The University of the District of Columbia is poised to thrive in the years to come!

Section 2: Foundational Aspects of UDC

The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) is a unique and essential institution with a storied history, a bright future, and much to offer its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the broader community. Through a variety of circumstances, UDC is presented with distinctive constraints and opportunities that are unmatched by most institutions of higher education. Understanding these factors and the resulting considerations is vital to any strategic planning process for UDC, as these opportunities and constraints represent the practical framework in which all future plans will be implemented. Beginning with a deep examination of the current circumstances prepares UDC's leadership for the work of translating challenges into possibilities, embracing opportunities, and accomplishing the University's goals.

Throughout its history, UDC has proven its ability to evolve and adapt to a changing environment and the shifting needs of its community. UDC is proudly both an HBCU and the nation's only exclusively urban land-grant University. It primarily functions as a state University but without many of the advantages that would traditionally come from a state system or government. The constraints born of these unique circumstances are a part of UDC's legacy, but so is the ability to transition and transform, ever since its earliest days as Myrtilla Miner Normal School. Unprecedented shifts in higher education over the last few years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and a global reckoning on matters of racial equity, have brought about new cultural and societal shifts, and once again, UDC must consider how it will respond and adjust as it looks to the future.

UDC's previous strategic plan, *The Equity Imperative*, created a roadmap that has guided it well through recent years. The goals enumerated in *The Equity Imperative*—establishing a public higher education model of urban student success, increasing the numbers of UDC degrees and credentials awarded, and graduating transformative urban leaders who are lifelong learners—have led UDC to make notable progress in these areas. Much has changed since 2018 when *The Equity Imperative* was launched and now UDC is compelled to embrace its unique role and distinguish itself from regional competitors who clamor for the same market share and limited applicant pool. Informed by current data and extensive stakeholder feedback, this update to *The Equity Imperative* sets a path for even greater strides toward a UDC that realizes its substantial potential.

As the only public institution of higher education in the nation’s capital, UDC is uniquely positioned to establish itself as a nationally recognized model for not only for urban student success but for urban sustainability on numerous fronts in light of its close ties with District communities and schools. While there’s real potential behind this vision, UDC also faces formidable obstacles towards this end including the high concentration of other colleges and universities in the DMV region and the impact of the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) program in attracting local students to these competitors.¹ Similarly, with the prospect of UDC serving as the “state” University for the District of Columbia, there is a much broader market within UDC’s sights – families with mid and higher incomes and more available options for their higher education journey for whom UDC could be the “institution of first choice” for its promise of an affordable, quality education.

Increasing the numbers of UDC degrees and workforce credentials awarded was a multifaceted goal of *The Equity Imperative*, but a critical ingredient is student recruitment. Potential students consider a multitude of factors as they look for a good fit to further their education, including the school’s reputation in the local community, where they may eventually use their credentials to seek employment. Reputation—an easy to cite but harder to define factor—has been an issue of concern for UDC in the past and for the moment, UDC continues to wrestle with problems of perception, particularly with District natives who recall years of evolving, short-term leadership, underfunding and stagnant programs. But recent efforts have made great strides in this area. As recently as 2019, UDC was ranked number 48 among HBCUs nationwide, but rose quickly to number 30, and has now risen again to the impressive rank of 17 in the 2022 rankings (Source: U.S. News & World Report). UDC was also listed as the top choice on a list of the 15 Best Affordable Mechanical Engineering Degree Programs in 2020 by Affordable Schools.

As UDC continues to pursue excellence through its new strategic plan, it can expect to see even more accolades that turn the tide of reputation. Reputation takes time to build, but UDC is clearly headed in the right direction, and considering this focus was already a part of *The Equity Imperative*, UDC is poised to respond to the current climate from an unprecedented position of stability and strength.

UDC retains the aspiration of *The Equity Imperative* to not just produce well-educated, qualified graduates, but to graduate transformative leaders. UDC Firebirds become alumni who are ready to tackle local and global challenges. Their time at UDC should kindle the flame of leadership and service and fan it into a blaze that can light the way for others. Challenges regarding academic advising or counseling for current students and effective networking and communications for alumni represent opportunities for UDC to become a brighter light to the city and beyond. The students who enroll at UDC are clearly passionate about their choice and actively engaged in institutional efforts for future improvement and growth. These potential

¹ The DCTAG program pays the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition up to \$10,000 annually at public colleges around the country, and up to \$2,500 for private colleges in the DC region, and private HBCUs nationwide. DC students cannot use DCTAG funds to attend UDC.

ambassadors will be a great resource to UDC if their enthusiasm is supported and channeled toward a common goal.

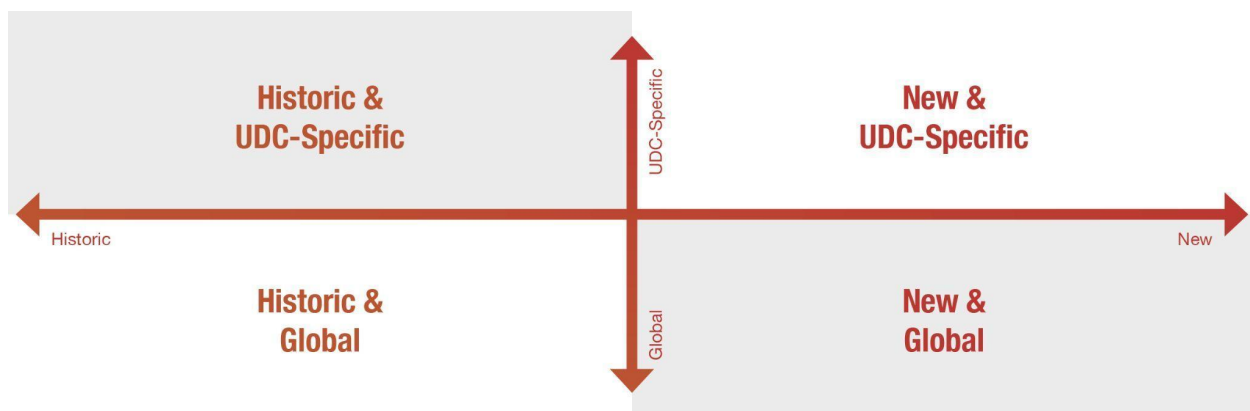
The process of creating this new strategic framework to guide UDC in the coming years has been thorough and exhaustive. The efforts will be well rewarded with increased clarity of purpose and practical steps to begin the process. It is important to begin, however, by acknowledging that this plan stands on the shoulders of UDC's impressive history, and *The Equity Imperative* in particular. With a nod of gratitude back to this legacy, it is time to turn to the future and take the action to write the University's next chapter.

"UDC deserves to be heard. We are Firebirds after all. We should all soar."

Section 3: Situational Context

No planning process is undertaken in a vacuum. The situational context, both internally and externally, will necessarily influence and inform the processes and procedures, as well as the strategies and recommendations that emerge from them.

UDC brings several opportunities and challenges into the planning process. Some of these are unique to UDC and its specific circumstances and constraints, while others are held in common with many other institutions of higher education across the country and around the world. Some are new, the product of recent events and the corresponding cultural responses, while others have followed UDC throughout its history. These distinctions must be considered and recognized before proceeding with plans to address them; UDC's challenges and opportunities cannot all be viewed through the same lens. Given the unique nature of the District of Columbia within a national and global context, and the University's relationship to the District, one could argue there is no institution in the world quite like UDC. To reflect on the situational context of this planning process, a variety of factors can be categorized according to whether they are historic or relatively new, and whether they are specific to UDC or part of a wider, more global context.



“UDC is global—but a direct reflection of the Nation’s Capital.”

Historic and UDC-Specific

As reflected in the Foundational Aspects section, UDC has a rich history and deep roots to draw from as it considers the future. Future planning must always honor this history without holding so tightly to it that it limits the opportunities for the future.

UDC must contend daily with the constraints that have caused it to struggle in both the past and the present. Because many of these are unique to UDC, there are often few examples of best practices employed by other institutions of higher education that UDC can look to for guidance or inspiration. While these constraints can easily be viewed as limitations or significant obstacles, they also present tremendous opportunities to galvanize the community to generate a unique impact. When there are few external models and examples suitable for UDC’s path, guidance for the future should primarily be internal. The UDC community is deeply invested in the future of this vital institution, which was clearly visible throughout this engagement process. This community will be the source of ideas, inspiration, solutions, and momentum for the future of UDC.

The legacy of UDC, most recently represented by the work of *The Equity Imperative*, is strong enough to provide a firm foundation for building the future. UDC can be proud of *The Equity Imperative* and all that it represents. It was impossible, however, for *The Equity Imperative*—or any strategic plan—to fully anticipate the shifts that have taken place in the world since it was written. Therefore, while the foundation it laid will remain intact, it has become necessary to re-evaluate *The Equity Imperative*, particularly to discover who and what may be missing from it, and to update it according to the new realities of the contemporary workplace and how higher education must respond to these “new norms.”

At the heart of the questions that emerge from UDC’s history is the issue of identity. Resulting from the combination of three distinct institutions, UDC has yet to firmly establish its own distinct institutional identity and is often obscured through the lens and biases of the past. Who is UDC? Who does UDC serve and why? While these questions are not new, the recent circumstances and the process of looking forward has brought them to the surface in a new way. It is increasingly clear that the question of identity, and perhaps perception, is central. Many other questions, which often seem more obvious and urgent, flow from the core of UDC’s identity. Without a clear and conveyed sense of identity, other voices will impose their ideas and expectations on UDC further limiting the institution’s potential and possibilities. Goals, direction, and action steps should flow from a core identity.

Identity is the first step.

Historic and Global

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions of higher education faced challenges similar to some of those that UDC has experienced. Issues related to funding are a common struggle, and when there are circumstances such as changes in government funding or widespread economic downturns, these have many clear impacts on higher education. While some of UDC's financial constraints are somewhat unique, they are not alone in these concerns.

Recruiting and retaining high caliber people to the UDC community, whether faculty, staff, or students, is another concern that UDC shares with many other universities. While the events of recent years have amplified these issues, they are not new and are part of the higher education climate in which UDC exists. Even questions about alumni relations, while impacted by UDC's specific circumstances, are historic and global in nature.

While UDC must adapt and adjust to the effects of these challenges, it is important to observe that the circumstances that create them are largely outside of their direct control but are simply a part of the context they find themselves in.

New and UDC-Specific

UDC finds itself in a period of transition that holds tremendous promise for progress and positive change.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are far reaching, and the long-term effects are not yet clearly understood. The impact on higher education has been significant, affecting how students learn, how faculty teach, and many aspects of the student experience on-campus. The creative new solutions that were born out of necessity have an opportunity to be transformative, but only if we don't rush back to a "normal" that was never equitable in the first place. The adoption and mastery of technology to allow meaningful high-tech *and* high-touch engagement are yet to be fully leveraged and present wonderful opportunities for UDC in the coming years.

The much needed, much delayed, and hopefully lasting shifts in the national consciousness regarding racial equity in the United States have renewed interest for many students (and donors) in HBCUs, and there are opportunities for UDC in this climate as well. Additionally, the evolving conversations about work, be it the "Great Resignation" and/or a tightening labor market, puts UDC in a unique position to provide continuing education and professional training as the DC workforce considers the next steps in their careers.

Finally, UDC's leadership transition will present opportunities for fresh ideas and perspectives as a new President builds on strengths to initiate change and guide UDC into its next chapter.

New and Global

The effects of the pandemic extend throughout higher education, and there are indications that these effects may disproportionately impact HBCUs. Against the wider backdrop of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, educational institutions at all levels have been forced to pivot and adapt again and again. While there are opportunities inherent in this transitional period, there are also a great many challenges. UDC is in good company in the struggle to plan for the future in the midst of so much uncertainty.

Despite the pivotal role they play, many HBCUs continue to struggle with lack of investment, the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the populations they serve, and enrollment challenges. Recent studies are showing a significant increase in student interest in HBCUs which presents an opportunity.

Context of the Planning Process

The scope of this strategic planning process evolved during this engagement in order to best meet UDC's needs during this transitional time. This has been a Board-directed, stakeholder-informed, cross-functional and comprehensive planning effort. The Board of Trustees was engaged at every step of the engagement, from kick-off in June 2022, through a full Board Retreat in November 2022.

The work was informed and supported by two robust working groups that provided both oversight and guidance to the process every step of the way. Both the Strategic Working Group and the Strategic Advisory Committee were instrumental to this process and stayed well connected throughout. These groups comprised a wide range of nearly 50 representatives including Student leaders, Vice Presidents, Deans, Labor Reps, Alumni, departmental leads, Cabinet representatives and Board members. This array of institutional representatives informed vital planning milestones and ensured diverse perspectives and priorities were reflected throughout the process, from the many corners of the UDC community.

Together with these three groups, LINK conducted a thorough, inclusive, and transparent process to ensure that all UDC stakeholders and key community members had opportunities to share thoughts, opinions, and experiences that would be helpful to the process. A deeper exploration of this interdepartmental and cross-collaborative process is provided in the Stakeholder Engagement section.

The parameters of this engagement did not include an exhaustive review of organizational or departmental budgets or work plans. That will be an important part of the implementation steps to come.

“HBCU is our heritage and our demographic is expanding.”

Section 4: Stakeholder Engagement

High-Touch Engagement

To inform the creation of UDC’s new strategic framework, extensive feedback was collected from both internal and external stakeholders between the months of June and November 2022. This extensive engagement process utilized a range of techniques to ensure that the process was exhaustive, far-reaching, and gleaned a multitude of diverse viewpoints. The level of engagement grew exponentially as, following every touchpoint, additional opportunities for discussions arose. In the end, the total number of discussions grew from a scoped number of 12 interviews to over 150.

These one-on-one discussions and focus groups resulted in thousands of pages of written transcripts detailing thoughts, feedback, and suggestions from both internal and external stakeholders. Further, they captured the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of those affiliated with UDC, from those living in the DMV region to those scattered globally, reflecting a broad range of demographics around age, nationalities, and professional and academic backgrounds. What each of these participants shared was their willingness to dedicate their time to provide their perspectives with the intention of elevating UDC for the future.

In addition, the 150 stakeholder interviews were supplemented by a range of opportunities to engage with students, staff, and faculty members, such as at ice cream socials, BBQs, and on-campus events such as Convocation, Faculty Development day, and Alumni Fireside Chats and publicized office hours with LINK staff. In order to ensure broad access, discussions were held both on and off campus, in-person and in virtual settings, during the day, evenings, and weekends.

The list of stakeholders who were engaged in this process is extensive, including those identifying as students at various stages of their academic careers and various life stages; staff and faculty members, with a broad range of tenure and varying levels of experience; board members and the executive cabinet, labor leaders, student advocates and staff in advisory roles; alumni from across the region and around the world; community members and community group leaders; civic leaders and representatives from local churches; business leaders and chamber of commerce representatives; and local government officials and representatives. This led to the provision of unique insights into particular dimensions of UDC’s work and where it could have the greatest impact moving forward. In order to encourage candid feedback, all participants were reassured that comments would not be directly attributed to them unless they requested otherwise.

Stakeholder participation was encouraged through a variety of means, including newsletters, flyers, posters, social media posts, meetings (both specific to the planning process and attendance at departmental team meetings), email blasts and a specifically curated [strategic planning website](#). It should be noted however, that participation was entirely voluntary.

To ensure consistency, each stakeholder was asked a series of specific questions relating to their affiliation with UDC, then their thoughts on the perception of the institution, UDC's strengths, areas for development, and the single best piece of advice for the future. These standard questions allowed for a consistent, structured approach, while additional questions were tailored to the individual stakeholders, allowing for the organic development of conversations. In addition, it was important that engagement focused on perceptions of *The Equity Imperative*, and the key elements that should be retained going forward. This, in itself, was useful to indicate the level of awareness of UDC's current strategic plan, as a foundation through which greater promotion of this work can be positioned across the wider UDC community.

It is important to reflect the parameters of engagement; namely to ensure that this was open, transparent, and all-encompassing. Feedback was solicited from those with deep knowledge of the institution, as well as those who may have had less frequent engagement.

High-Tech Engagement

In addition to outreach via the digital platforms mentioned above, significant stakeholder feedback was collected via the broadest engagement tool: a survey that received over 1,200 responses. The online survey amassed broad feedback from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members in conjunction with focused stakeholder interviews. Each stakeholder engagement provided an opportunity to remind constituents about the survey and the platform it provided for more extensive feedback and insight into the needs of UDC at this time. The digital survey remained a steady touchpoint of engagement and insight for the array of UDC's diverse stakeholders, including the most senior personnel to those at more junior or operational levels within UDC's staffing structures, students, alumni, and internal and external constituents of every sort. The survey data served to create a bedrock for analysis which was complemented by the more in-depth feedback gathered through stakeholder interviews and focus groups. It has also been proposed to University leadership that the survey results remain a rich repository of information which should be reviewed and understood for myriad purposes beyond the planning process.

Strategic Direction and Process Advisement

In order to oversee the strategic planning process, two distinct groups were established; the Strategic Working Group and the Strategic Advisory Committee, the members of which were encouraged to adopt the role of advocates for the process at both an operational and strategic level respectively. These groups ensured a programmatic cycle of engagement and recommended other levels and types of engagement opportunities to ensure the process built momentum.

The Strategic Working Group, comprised of 20 nominated representatives from various departments across UDC, met at the beginning of each month and served to review and analyze feedback as it was collected. The Strategic Advisory Committee, a similarly curated group of 25 internal UDC stakeholders, met at the end of each month and focused on the direction of the strategic planning process as a whole and identified key themes that the revised strategic plan should incorporate as it progressed. A core task of both groups was to act as a critical reviewer and sense-check findings, asking probing questions to explore emerging patterns and themes. The groups further identified specific areas of accomplishment facilitated by *The Equity Imperative*, as well as specific aspects that required further tailoring to meet the needs of the institution and all those affiliated going forward. Both groups provided critical insight and guidance for the analysis and interpretation of the collected feedback as well as how that feedback should shape UDC's strategic planning process. This framework reflects the effectiveness of interdisciplinary groups in overseeing and shaping processes integral to UDC.

A further pivotal element of the strategic planning process was the role of the Board of Trustees, who effectively bookended the process through a series of meetings culminating with the final presentation of findings at the Board retreat in November 2022. The Board was integral to ensuring the scope of the plan and recommendations were fit for purpose, and giving assurances about the credibility of the process.

Section 5: Findings

The level of engagement experienced throughout the planning process is a testament to the commitment of the members of the UDC community in shaping the future of UDC and supporting the institution on this journey.

This section details both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the strategic planning survey and the wider stakeholder engagement touchpoints. The data and related contextual information from the engagement process reflects there are clear parallels in areas which it was felt UDC currently succeeds, as well as broad areas in which the institution can develop.

A comprehensive record of thematic notes captured during stakeholder interviews will be provided to UDC. In addition, the decision was made to deploy the survey through Qualtrics Software, to ensure all data would be owned by UDC. This will enable future benchmarking exercises to be undertaken consistently by the institution.

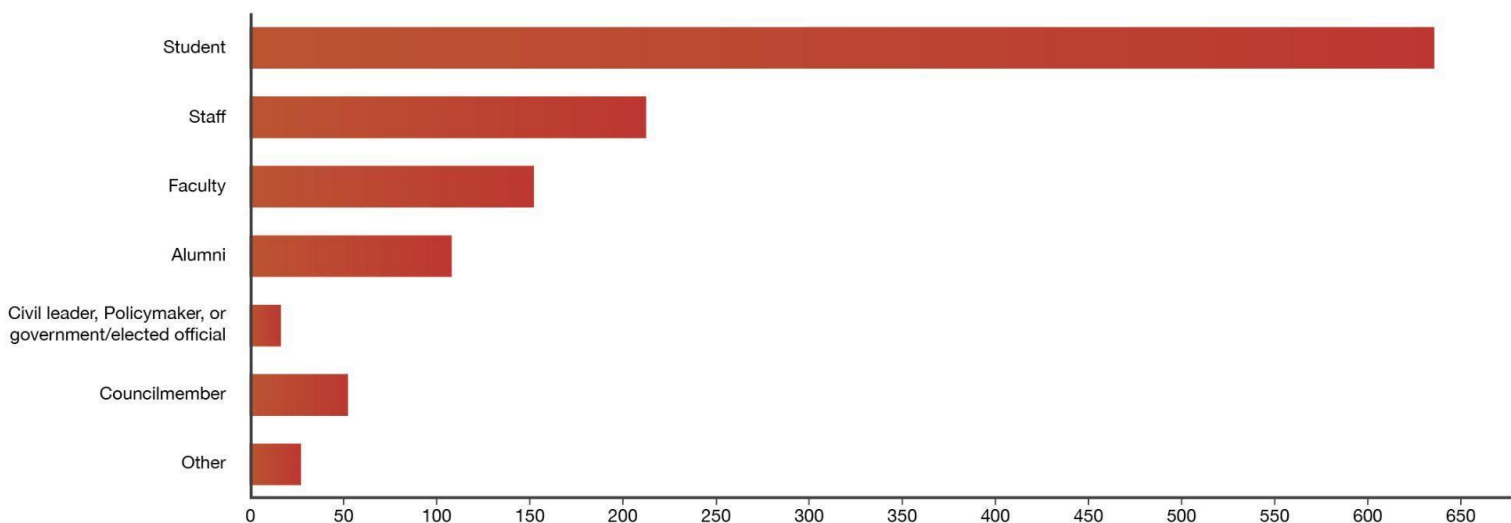
Survey Overview

The strategic planning survey received 1,203 responses. The largest number of responses were from students, which is reflective of the level of investment and the sense of commitment felt within the student body.

Additionally, it is important to note that a large proportion of respondents indicated they hold dual identities, for example identifying as both a staff member and a student, or a faculty member and alumni. It is important to consider, then, the breakdown of feedback and the primary way in which respondents identified themselves, to inform the perspectives respondents brought to the survey process.

Overarching Findings - All Respondents

Figure 1 reflects a breakdown of survey respondents.



It is noteworthy that 43% of respondents indicated they had been affiliated with UDC for less than two years, which means most of their direct experience with UDC has been during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A common theme throughout the survey responses, supplemented by findings from other stakeholder touchpoints, indicates that all stakeholder groups felt that UDC's greatest strength is providing an affordable, enriching student experience. They also acknowledged that UDC has "weathered many storms," and highlighted the fearless or "scrappy" perception of the institution; this is a University that will rise up and propel itself with forward momentum. Further, the level and nature of feedback provided indicates that UDC has many champions who are willing to be advocates for agency and change, and who are ready to support the institution on its path forward. Amid the changing landscape of higher education and wider societal issues, it will

remain pivotal to UDC's success that mechanisms are built in to support this resilience and allow adaptability in the wake of new and emerging challenges. Through the survey and most discussions, *misperceptions* of the institution within the DMV region emerged as a significant constraint. Central throughout the surveys and engagement touchpoints was the notion of *possibility, potential, and opportunity* that awaits UDC as it moves forward.

"Fly firebirds, and fly higher still."

In order to build on the success of *The Equity Imperative*, it was important to garner feedback about the current strategic planning goals and gauge whether they continue to be relevant. The survey asked respondents to rank the three goals from *The Equity Imperative* and confirm whether these remained relevant as initially articulated, remained relevant but required updating, or were no longer relevant to the current forecasting process.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of responses based on stakeholder type and indicates each group's responses related to relevancy and needed modifications.

<i>*Table 1: Equity Imperative Goals Remain Relevant and Require Modification</i>			
GROUPS	GOAL ONE Establish in the District of Columbia a Public Higher Education Model of Urban Student Success	GOAL TWO Increase the Numbers of UDC Degrees and Workforce Credentials Awarded	GOAL THREE Graduate Transformative Urban Leaders who are Lifelong Learners
Students	78%	82%	80%
Staff	74%	77%	70%
Faculty	75%	70%	67%
Alumni	79%	89%	89%

External Stakeholders	76%	77%	84%
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Students: Overarching Findings

Of the survey respondents, 689 identified themselves as students, some with a dual identity as community members, staff, alumni, and a small number as faculty. Most (61%) identified their tenure at UDC as two years or less, with another 30% answering between 3-5 years. This is important because these students have experienced most of their learning in an online setting. It should be further noted that 62% of student respondents had not heard of *The Equity Imperative*, which reflects the opportunity for greater involvement and participation from students in the future. Given the level of response to both the survey and other forms of stakeholder engagement, there is an appetite for students and other members of the UDC community to be champions of the strategic plan and help drive forward the recommendations for UDC's future.

Key words such as *supportive*, *opportunity*, *inclusive*, *diversity*, and *affordable* were most commonly used by students during interviews and in their responses to open-ended survey questions. The key themes they highlighted for areas of future consideration centered around experiential learning opportunities. The CAUSES program (College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability, and Environmental Sciences) was noted often by respondents as an example of a program that intentionally connected “campus with community” and provided community outreach opportunities. Learning and teaching were highlighted as areas of strength, particularly due to the level of investment on the part of staff and faculty. Qualitative feedback indicated that increased administrative support would allow more time to provide a tailored, transformative student experience. Students are also interested in more experiential learning opportunities, as well as high-tech, high-touch approaches made available by a more modernized infrastructure—such as IT services and individualized learning environments and experiences—that respond to the individual needs of students. Diversity was a common theme, and it was felt that there could be a greater understanding of, and provision of services that suit the needs for, student groups with specific needs. This included those identifying as LGBTQ+, BIPOC, mature students, student parents, and those with accessibility needs. This is required to enable a more holistic, all-encompassing experience. The theme of inclusivity was a common one, shaping all aspects of the UDC experience and learning environments.

“I arrived on day one, there were princes, people with accents, wheelchair users, and transgender students. UDC is for everyone.”

Staff: Overarching findings

There were 257 survey responses from staff, though, again, many indicated a dual identity. Of these 162 (63%) identified themselves as over the age of 40. There was a broad split in the length of service, broken down into categories of 0-2, 3-5, 6-10, and 11-20 years. This is important as it reflects that perspectives about strengths and areas in which the institution should develop were consistent across all lengths of service. Open-ended response answers from staff were also consistent with much of the feedback gleaned from interviews and stakeholder groups, focusing on the *potential* and *opportunities* that were open to UDC. These responses centered largely around UDC's commitment to diversity, noting greater opportunities to highlight its distinct nature and celebrate its identity through ongoing, effective communications and marketing. Interestingly, 40% of staff respondents were unaware of UDC's ranking among the top 30 HBCUs in the *U.S. News and World Report* college ratings at the time of survey deployment, and among the top 15 public HBCUs.

“UDC meets you where you are... and continuously builds you up!”

In acknowledging that the institution truly transforms lives, there were many references to a greater need for pathways and pipelines into specific industries, as well as a need to ensure that these opportunities are tailored to the job market. In addition, staff expressed that through the role of research and learning, UDC has the potential to become not only DC's research institute; but from a national perspective, to lean into research capabilities and to develop solutions to societal issues such as gun crime, mental health advocacy, the disparity in health care, and social justice. We heard that UDC is uniquely positioned to become a lead research hub for urban research and sustainability. It should therefore lean into the ability to create and sustain such a foundation, which will increase visibility and, through the power of education, help alleviate these societal challenges and ensure ongoing, meaningful contributions to communities.

Much of the staff feedback prioritized enrollment and retention of students. While there are pockets of best practices within UDC, there are also greater opportunities for integrating programmatic opportunities and adopting a culturally relevant framework to ensure clearer pathways from workforce through degree attainment. Several respondents also noted that while the institution should celebrate its legacy as an HBCU, there was much untapped potential in broader markets like Latinx and international students.

“It takes a village to help students succeed.”

Faculty: Overarching Findings

Out of the 184 faculty respondents, 86% identified themselves as over the age of 40, again with a broad mix in tenure status and seniority. The findings of the survey were supplemented by attendance at Faculty Development Days, on-campus events, and office hours. Similar to staff respondents, the themes of *possibilities* and *opportunities* were prominent in the findings. Further questions revealed a need for greater emphasis on communications and marketing. For example, 32% of faculty were unaware that UDC ranks among the top 30 HBCUs in the *U.S. News and World Report* college ratings, and among the top 15 public HBCUs.² On the subject of research and teaching, faculty expressed a need for citizenship education programs, particularly in the area of community wellness, through greater levels of community, local, national, and global partnerships to lead student engagement beyond the classroom. Such citizenship programs will facilitate a community for learning, growth, and development that fosters lifelong confidence and success for students. Another common theme centered around opportunities to engage students in formal decision-making processes through the involvement of adjunct faculty in critical committees about student engagement, professional development, and curriculum planning.

There was much feedback about the role of internships for academic credit being embedded and applied more consistently through the different programs to create more viable and extensive pathways for graduates. In addition, feedback indicated that UDC should continue to build relationships with top tier (R-1) schools to provide students with access to professors and resources to enhance student learning, skills, and support for dissertation committees. Suggestions included the creation of “temperature-check” surveys for students to gather ongoing feedback regarding their learning experiences, which may identify structural barriers that can impact retention, graduation, and pathway opportunities into the job market. There were suggestions of specific groups to oversee this process, such as a customer service group that plans ways to improve customer service, a grant development group that identifies and supports additional ways to secure funding, a scholarship group that focuses on securing student aid, and a tutoring group that focuses on finding additional one-on-one support for academic support.

Constraints due to the misperceptions of UDC within the DMV region were mentioned, with 14% of respondents indicating that this was an area that could be improved through marketing and communications. Suggestions for future focus centered around the District of Columbia's tuition assistance grant (TAG) funding and how changes in this formula can help encourage and provide opportunities for students to attend UDC. There were also comments regarding the faculty and staff, related to providing professional development and career advancement to grow and empower high-performing staff and further focus on both tangible and intangible infrastructure. Customer service was also a common theme, with suggestions of consistently applied training and department protocols. Staff also suggested services such as daycare and on-campus housing provision to meet the needs of students and to ensure accessibility remains paramount to the UDC experience.

² During this engagement period this ranking with US News and World Report improved substantively and was widely celebrated and promoted.

“We educate citizens, not worker bees. No one department is better than another because of their ability to turn out ‘workers.’ This is a mistaken connection that can cause us to lose sight of what matters- learning authentically for active citizenship.”

Alumni: Overarching Findings

Alumni represented 161 survey respondents, which was supplemented by one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and specific alumni-related events. There was a broad mix in the number of years respondents have been affiliated with UDC, ranging from 0-2 years up to 41 years.

Affordability, accessibility, and standard of education and teaching were highlighted as fundamental strengths of UDC. Areas in which it was felt UDC could develop centered around advertising and promotion. Further discussion around these themes was explored during one of the more in-depth discussions, where it was felt that robust marketing and communications should be an area of focus. Again, 47% of respondents indicated that they were unaware of UDC’s HBCU ranking status, with 27% unaware that UDC is the nation’s only exclusively urban, land grant University. In providing feedback on areas they felt UDC could lean into opportunities, they cited establishing greater connections between the alumni community and academic learning programs, experiential learning opportunities, and civic engagement opportunities. Alumni in several discussions indicated that there is a need for UDC to capitalize on opportunities to develop specific citizenship modules to ensure a more holistic learning environment, in order to ensure “well rounded” graduates who are responsive to market needs locally, nationally, and globally. This program will develop graduates who possess the knowledge, skills, and understanding to play their part as active, empowered and responsible citizens, through their effective community contributions. Another prominent suggestion was to utilize the knowledge, understanding, and shared experience of the alumni in service of current and prospective students, faculty, and staff. Significant feedback from alumni mirrored that of other stakeholder groups, that the learning experience should be amplified through the lens of greater experiential opportunities, with tailored programs to better prepare students for the vicissitudes of industries and markets.

An overarching theme was the pride and commitment of the alumni to champion UDC. This would enable UDC to enlist this group as powerful advocates by providing opportunities for alumni to serve as ambassadors and champions of the University.

“The country and world depend on this.”

External: Overarching Findings

A total of 105 external stakeholders responded to the survey. Given that there were a number of subcategories, namely community members, civic leaders, and elected officials, it was important to offer opportunities to participate in focus groups and one-on-one interviews to supplement the survey responses. In this manner, feedback was provided by those identifying as mental health advocates, church leaders, community activities, and former staff.

Broadly, external stakeholders called for UDC to raise its profile with local communities predominantly through new partnerships. During the majority of these discussions, the desire was expressed for UDC to offer experiential learning opportunities in and of local communities. Another prominent theme was significant interest in UDC opening up the campus for events through which the community could see wider participation and therefore support the institution. The farmers market was cited as a key example of this, with ideas for performances, evening classes, and career fairs, particularly for those community members who expressed an interest in lifelong learning. There was also interest from the community in helping to shape citizenship modules to run concurrently with academic disciplines and current community outreach offerings. These may include promoting critical inquiry into dimensions of contemporary citizenship, and exploration of ways through which students may participate in and contribute to communities and wider society through active and responsible citizenship. External stakeholders also shared feedback about the look and feel of the campus, with recommendations for the enhanced infrastructure of both technology and buildings, and the addition of on-campus housing and retail spaces.

“The more ‘we’ as FIREBIRDS entrench ourselves with what our communities are the better ‘we’ produce solutions to and for us.”

Section 6: Proposed Goals

Strategic planning is a dynamic engagement of thoughts and ideas that come together to create goals, subgoals, work plans, and metrics that an organization uses to chart its path for the coming years. It was clear from the start that UDC’s plan must be inclusive and comprehensive regarding thoughts, needs, schools, departments, and people. It must look at systems, external factors, and both internal and external interactions. The resulting goals will guide the University’s future in its efforts to increase UDC’s presence, education base, and research capabilities, while acknowledging constraints and challenges such as funding, infrastructure, and sustainable enrollment.

With the UDC *Equity Imperative* as a starting point, this engagement considered a substantial variety of data inputs. Additional input came from meetings with the Working Group and Advisory Committee, collectively consisting of 45 people representing faculty, students,

administration, unions, and other demographics within the UDC community, such as student support, faculty development, and external stakeholder engagement. The collected information was discussed and analyzed with a view toward forward movement, collaboration, cohesive messaging, advancement, UDC students, staff, faculty, and alumni needs, constraints, inclusion, and partnerships. Keeping such wide perspectives allowed for robust conversations that unearthed concerns and aspirations for the full UDC community. Collectively, we worked with the UDC community on various iterations of themes derived from this broad scope of feedback. We identified 14 key themes that encompassed fundamental beliefs and the spirit of UDC, with strengths, opportunities, desired outcomes, and challenges, as well as ideas for strengthening UDC's culture and overall direction. The 14 themes that emerged, in no particular order, were:

THEMES	
Technology and Infrastructure	Identity
Talent and Transformational Leadership	Funding
Student Experience	Enrollment and Retention
Research	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
Marketing and Communications	Customer Service
Pathways and Pipeline Development	Community
Partnerships	Alumni

Overarching Themes

Each of these 14 themes had its foundation in *The Equity Imperative*. In developing the concepts for each, it is important to look at what is already working well and what could be improved based on stakeholders' feedback.

Technology and Infrastructure: UDC must identify and capitalize on technological opportunities to improve overall interactions throughout the student journey. Technology is a driving force and provides opportunities to facilitate interaction and raise UDC's profile. It is also a valuable tool for teaching and learning that can enhance the educational experience for everyone.

Infrastructure concerns which need to be addressed relate to physical structures such as buildings and facilities. There are also less tangible infrastructure concerns, such as organizational structures, systems and operations, that affect how UDC is perceived.

Talent and Transformational Leadership: UDC attracts strong, high-performing students who are supported and educated to excel and go on to notable careers as impactful leaders. Attracting, developing, and supporting this talent is a key commitment for UDC. The same dynamic is needed around attracting and retaining talented faculty and staff, whose personal development and professional journey are also factors in promoting and creating the leaders of tomorrow. There also needs to be real value placed on high-quality teaching, facilitated by strong incentive structures and wrap-around supports.

Student Experience: UDC has always been an education system dedicated to serving students across all academic and demographic levels. As a premier HBCU, the only exclusively urban land grant institution in the country, and the only public University in the Nation's Capital, UDC embraces its history, legacy, and service. This means the student experience at UDC is unique and must meet expectations and aspirations on both a personal experience and educational level. The student experience begins with enrollment, including registration, financial aid, and scheduling. It continues with student relationships with faculty and staff, the availability of guidance and counseling, opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, Greek life, etc.) and access to support systems when navigating challenges. The student experience is about the whole student and must be adaptable to meet individual needs and expectations.

Pathways and Pipelines: A cornerstone of the student experience at UDC begins with a myriad of pipelines into the University and the distinct pathways available to students for realizing their full human potential. Roughly 70% of the University's enrollment is comprised of DCPS graduates so the local public school system is a vital facet of UDC's student composition. This is a double-edged reality, where the University can rely on a certain level of enrollment from this population, but at the same time inherits the complexities of these students who are often underprepared to successfully take on a college curriculum. The political dynamics of the TAG awards even further complicate the situation. Building this pipeline is essential to institutional sustainability as UDC strengthens its alliance with the Anacostia high school feeder pattern and other public schools. Similarly, its retooling of its academic offerings aims to provide seamless, multi-credentialed, lifelong learning pathways with strategic on- and off-ramps according to students' needs from workforce to degree programs. By leveraging its partnerships with district schools, local industry, and federal agencies, UDC has an unprecedented opportunity to supplement classroom instruction with experiential learning and better accommodate the evolving needs of its diverse student population. Together this will enable seamless, multi-credentialed pathways with multiple on- and off-ramps from the community college through to a bachelor's degree.

Research: UDC is exploring the prospect of becoming DC’s research institution University through R2 Carnegie status. This requires high-functioning and successful research faculty and the facilities to support them. Such a vision demands interested and invested faculty and students, a willing and supportive community, and adequate funding. To pursue this, UDC must consider various methods of recruiting and retaining faculty and staff, engaging students, improving its methods and reputation, inviting new partnerships, and reaching out to the research community.

Marketing and Communications: UDC has done much over the last decade to distinguish itself, but has not always been successful in promoting and sharing these accomplishments. Contributing factors to these marketing challenges include a lack of staff, insufficient resources, ambiguity around UDC’s identity, and mixed messages around communication priorities. An enhanced marketing and communications strategy and unit are needed for getting the attention and exposure needed for UDC, and for engaging stakeholders in promoting the UDC brand. With a newly hired Vice President over this area, the institution has taken a crucial step towards underscoring the importance of this effort but new resources must be identified for and dedicated to developing a marketing and communications unit that can deliver on these broad and all-encompassing needs.

Partnerships: The basis for any mutually beneficial relationship is the formation of partnerships that allow for collaboration, consistency, and communication. Partnerships at UDC are not just with the external community; they need to exist in a formal way among faculty and staff. Currently, there are many informal and advantageous partnerships that help open doors for students in need of something “extra” in their learning experience, as well as partnerships to help teachers navigate the challenges of teaching versus mentoring and guiding.

UDC must also establish and maintain the external partnerships that are necessary for accreditation, funding, and enhancing the University’s standing and reputation, but it struggles with the bandwidth to effectively leverage what always begins as a promising alliance. Partnerships emerged as a central theme for this planning effort because the University must lean into partnerships at every level to realize its own potential—not only the obvious partnerships that are codified in MOUs with distinct deliverables, but partnerships with feeder schools, the Van Ness residents, prospective students who are tapped through principals and counselors, and ultimately partnerships with the faculty on the frontlines of instruction and research.

Identity: Another core theme that has emerged is identity. Who is UDC? Who does UDC serve? Can UDC be all things to all people? These questions are being asked by the UDC community—internally and externally—and will need to be answered clearly as UDC charts its course.

There is also a struggle between the old and the new. UDC evolved from the merger of multiple schools. Today it comprises a system that spans workforce programs and doctoral degrees, a community college and a law school, and lots more, some of which are too often perceived as separate entities as opposed to an integrated system. So, who is UDC and who should it be? Some say it should first embrace and uphold its commitment to the community college market since 40% of enrollment is there. Others say it should focus on the law school because of its highly ranked clinical program that helps underserved and marginalized populations. Some say UDC should focus on research and invest more resources in its technical programs, while others say the University should be more focused on the community and create programs such as Developing America's Workforce Nucleus (DAWN) and CAUSES to serve populations across DC, especially East of the River.

What about UDC's legacy as an HBCU? We hold it up proudly, especially considering that UDC ranks highly among affordable public HBCUs in the U.S. But do we meet student expectations of what constitutes an HBCU experience along the lines of campus life and traditions? These are all legitimate questions being asked in a constructive and affirming way by UDC stakeholders. All of these are factual aspects of the University's complex identity – the challenge arises in determining consensus around priorities and where precious, limited resources are spent.

Funding: UDC is funded primarily by the District government with other smaller donors, grants, and philanthropic contributions. While this steady stream of government revenue is positive, in many ways, it also represents a significant constraint to consistent, sustainable growth. Some of this is historical; UDC lost a tremendous amount of funding under the Control Board period (1995-2001) and has yet to recover. Some of this is variable, as education funding in DC fluctuates according to political and philanthropic trends. There are many reasons for the continued devaluation of UDC which must be examined and addressed into the future.

Additionally, because UDC is not eligible for DC TAG (DC Tuition Assistance Grant) funding, many students who consider attending UDC end up choosing other alternatives where they can use TAG funding to underwrite the cost of presumably more prestigious options that may not necessarily provide the support and environment they need for success.

Enrollment and Retention: UDC enrolled over 10,000 students less than 10 years ago. Today, enrollment has climbed to 3,500 students, a painstaking process of coming out from under the COVID years. On the bright side, as overall HBCU enrollments declined in recent years and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted higher education broadly. UDC is now seeing more steady enrollment levels. As the national landscape reflects an upswing in interest and enrollment in HBCUs during 2022, this presents a significant opportunity. Going forward, UDC needs to increase its outreach to this prospective market while also focusing on student retention so UDC is meeting students where they are and encouraging them on their continuing and lifelong

learning journeys. This means providing supportive faculty and staff, navigable systems, and affordable degrees that provide multiple on- and off-ramps in accordance with the flow of each student's personal needs and capacity.

Diversity: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging are foundational beliefs that define what an organization does and how it reacts when engaging a community of varied demographics with diverse socioeconomic, physical, and mental health needs. This must be incorporated into every operational and philosophical area of UDC to resonate as an expectation, not a desire. UDC must embrace students, faculty, and staff with extraordinary and differing needs, and provide opportunities for access and inclusion at all levels; including those with physical disabilities, alternative learning requirements and abilities, student/parent populations, and those with accessibility challenges. Providing support for these diverse groups will create greater pathways for the success of the UDC community.

Customer Service: UDC has many “customers.” How those customers experience the University is a key driver for many of the other items on this list of themes, including the UDC experience and opportunities for partnerships. Customer service is both internal—serving students, faculty, and staff in areas such as registration, financial aid, guidance and support, HR, IT, and administrative assistance—and external in areas such as contracts and procurement, accounts receivable and payable, vendor management, and providing services to the local community. These all impact both perceptions of UDC and the actual experience, so customer service must be well resourced, efficient, and effective.

Community: The UDC community is vast and encompasses not just students, faculty, and staff, but also the external, geographic community as well. The locations of its campuses and programs gives UDC opportunities to engage and partner with a variety of hyperlocal, regional, national and international actors that share our DC home. UDC's reach spans beyond a regional context, through various mechanisms such as the application of online teaching and alumni community. The concentric circles of influence are wide reaching and all encompassing. Regardless of physical distance from UDC, the sense of proximity and connectivity to the institution was a common theme throughout engagement touchpoints.

There is also a unique opportunity for UDC to get involved in the community and find ways to give back. This might be through its programs that can be extended to the community, or by acting as a subject matter expert in various disciplines that might benefit community activities, and/or through the research efforts raised earlier in this document.

Alumni: There are over 40,000 UDC alumni worldwide. They are from DC as well as from a variety of communities across the country and around the world, all with backgrounds that uniquely define the diversity and experiences of UDC. What they sometimes lack, however, is a

clearly defined way to engage with the schools and provide their insight, guidance, networks, and resources. Many alumni want to be involved with students, as teachers or as employers of choice for graduates. UDC must embrace the alumni community and look for ways to include them in all aspects of the schools. Their support is invaluable for students, who will see themselves in these alumni and see what is possible.

Theme Refinement

In the next level of iterative planning, the discussions centered around what should be included across all groups and stakeholders as key points, and what should be the focus for strategy and forward movement.

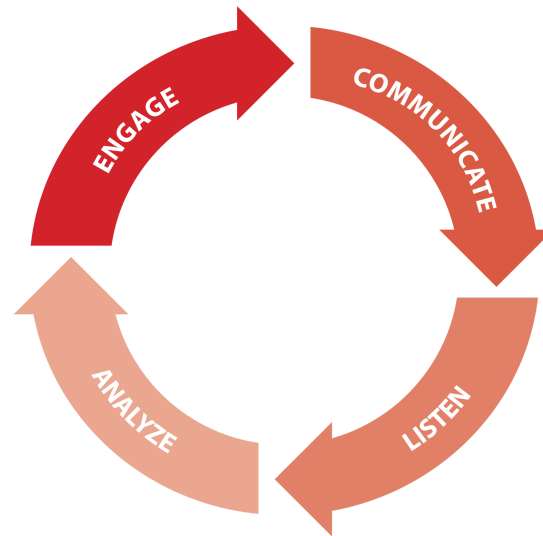
As the analysis and conversations evolved, patterns emerged in the themes related to what they represented and the possible outcomes. Efforts were then directed toward clarifying these themes with different stakeholder groups. The Strategic Working Group, the Strategic Advisory Committee, and the Board of Trustees were each provided a comprehensive presentation on all 14 themes, and then asked to rank their top five. These groups were not asked to “pick” the strategic planning goals. Rather, they were asked to consider the various lenses that they bring to this process, and to use that lived and shared experience to help prioritize which goals are most significant. These polls were conducted anonymously, to best capture feedback separate from the pressures of groupthink and any formal or informal reporting relationships.

This filtering activity revealed the top five themes for each group (shown below):

STRATEGIC WORKING GROUP 9/7	STRATEGIC WORKING GROUP 9/28	STRATEGIC WORKING GROUP 10/1
Enrollment and Retention	Enrollment and Retention	Marketing and Communications
Technology and Infrastructure	Technology and Infrastructure	Student Experience
Community Engagement	Student Experience	Enrollment and Retention
Marketing and Communications	Marketing and Communications	Funding
Student Experience	Talent and Transformational Leadership	Customer Service

Three common priorities emerged from all three groups: Enrollment and Retention, Student Experience, and Marketing and Communications. It is noteworthy that both internal groups aligned around Enrollment and Retention as their highest priority, while the Board of Trustees prioritized Marketing and Communications and Student Experience in this exercise. A robust discussion on this point revealed that the Board of Trustees felt that Enrollment and Retention were key, but recognized that improving Marketing and Communications and Student Experience would naturally improve Enrollment and Retention at the same time, therefore these were higher priority areas for focus. This idea of what is an “input” and what is an “output” when it comes to goals became a key factor in further refining themes into goals.

Throughout this process, we used a Feedback Loop to ensure that each step of the process built upon each other.



Informed by the ranking and refinement efforts above, and supplemented by ongoing stakeholder engagement and data analysis efforts, the 14 themes were organized into five thematic goals.

Thematic Goals

The five thematic goals are: Identity, UDC Experience, Funding, Values and Operations, and Partnerships and Service. Given the extensive feedback that went into each of the 14 themes, there was real intent behind not losing either the essence or specifics of any goal in the filtering process. The 14 themes fully embedded within the five thematic goals are as follows:

GOAL	THEMES	
Identity	Student Experience Alumni Talent and Transformational Leadership Community	Marketing and Communications Partnerships Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
UDC Experience	Identity Enrollment and Retention Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Community Customer Service Pathways and Pipeline Development	Student Experience Technology and Infrastructure Marketing and Communications Talent and Transformational Leadership Alumni Partnerships
Funding	Partnerships Alumni Technology and Infrastructure	Student Experience Research Marketing and Communications

Values and Operations	Technology and Infrastructure Customer Service Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Enrollment and Retention	Marketing and Communications Talent and Transformational Leadership Enrollment and Retention Student Experience Identity
Partnerships and Service	Alumni Community Identity Customer Service	Pathways and Pipeline Development Student Experience Research Funding

These five thematic goals were then analyzed further, asking three key strategic questions: What?, So What?, and Now What?



What does each thematic goal mean? What would it mean to UDC if this goal were achieved? And, what resources are required to make it happen?

This level of analysis is helpful not only from a ranking and clarity standpoint, but also to ensure the ultimate strategic planning goals can be clearly and effectively communicated by a variety of stakeholders to a variety of stakeholders. Strategic planning efforts are most effective when everyone can see themselves in the goals, and when the goals are widely understood.

The result of this analysis was that these five themes were not all standalone goals in themselves, but rather a list of inputs and outcomes. As such, they were not all equally effective in their ability to contribute to UDC's inclusive and forward movement.

This final stage of research and deliberation led to three distinctive and encompassing Strategic Planning Goals that incorporate all of the original themes as either key inputs or important outcomes.

Themes	Thematic Goals	Strategic Planning Goals
Technology and Infrastructure	Identity	Identity
Talent and Transformational Leadership	UDC Experience	UDC Experience
Student Experience	Funding	Partnerships
Research	Values and Operations	
Marketing and Communications	Partnerships and Service	
Pathways and Pipeline Development		
Partnerships		
Identity		
Funding		
Enrollment and Retention		
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging		
Customer Service		
Community		
Alumni		

Strategic Planning Goals

The three Strategic Planning Goals are: **Identity**, **UDC Experience**, and **Partnerships**.

The evolution to the three proposed strategic goals was methodical and informed at every step by deep stakeholder engagement and analysis. These goals are adaptable and dynamic, which will take UDC well into the future and allow the flexibility to meet unexpected challenges.

Each of these goals uniquely and definitively connects all areas of UDC: all schools, stakeholders, users, facilitators, observers, and partners by showing how they are included, where they intersect, how they can collaborate, what they are getting through their engagement with UDC, and how their efforts will build a stronger overall environment.

Identity

Define who UDC is and you will know where UDC is going.

UDC must define its identity in order to honor its legacy and celebrate the present of who UDC is and who UDC serves. This is key for all stakeholders. It is only with a clear identity that UDC can tell its story, build community internally and externally, boost morale, maintain an inclusive culture, attract and retain talented and transformational leaders as students and faculty, amplify the reputation and visibility of UDC, utilize and celebrate alumni, foster solid and beneficial partnership for research and funding, and lean into new opportunities while reducing constraints. Clarifying identity will confidently define what it means to be a proud HBCU and urban land grant institution, and an integrated educational *system* that meets its students where they are on their learning journey and provides pathways to progress. It will guide the various parts of the UDC family as they come together to eliminate silos, work collaboratively, and create a path to a unified and cohesive UDC.

The answers will define who UDC is and what UDC does, and will keep the University in the driver's seat when it comes to direction and purpose. People are more than happy to project their perceptions on UDC. It's time to reclaim the mantle of defining—confidently and proactively—who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

Inputs for this goal will include marketing and communications as mechanisms for engaging, informing, and reaching a wider audience; partnerships to allow for greater reach and awareness of UDC and its potential; alumni who will continue to embody the legacy and heritage that is UDC; and faculty and staff who not only create the leaders of tomorrow, but are also inspirational leaders themselves.

Outcomes of this goal will be increased enrollment and retention of students and faculty, as well as increased funding, a renewed reputation, and a boost to morale. UDC's clear identity will also position UDC as the city's premier University for all residents.

“UDC should feel like a hat I want to wear, a flag I want to have on my wall.”

UDC Experience

Exploration of the UDC experience began with a singular focus on the “student experience,” which remains a critically important priority. But, the process makes clear that the UDC experience must extend to include the experience of all UDC stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners. The experience of all those who touch UDC must be a focus, as this University is an ecosystem where all parts need, support, and rely on each other. We ignore the interconnections at our peril.

Students need to feel supported throughout the application and acceptance process, including financial aid, course selection, and overall guidance in navigating the process. This time can be difficult, frightening, and overwhelming; students need to feel like they belong. Students are attending the #17 HBCU in the country for a reason—to have that special HBCU experience. Whether they are participating in sports or clubs, becoming part of the Divine Nine, or interacting with fellow students, they come to UDC for this lasting and real immersion into college life, and UDC must deliver this experience. The impact of student experience doesn’t end with graduation. A positive student experience during their time at UDC will help them assimilate more easily into their workplaces and prepares them to be qualified, valued contributors and leaders.

Faculty and staff experience UDC, beginning with their recruitment and hiring process, through their time in or around the classrooms, their work on campus or online, their opportunities for career advancement, their time providing world-class teaching or conducting industry-leading research, and their interactions with students, other faculty, staff, and partners. Intentional resources need to be allocated to allow faculty the time and space to teach and do their jobs well. Staff should be rewarded with sincere and regular recognition of their efforts as they work to achieve set goals and serve the school populations.

The UDC experience is also about alumni, partners, and external stakeholders and their interactions with UDC. From grants and funding to community engagement, to participation in projects, on boards, and for initiatives, these connections create lasting impressions that must be nurtured in order for UDC to achieve its goals of being an exemplary University system.

Finally, as the survey replies showed, many of your faculty, staff and alumni are students too. The UDC experience leans into a commitment to the systems, culture, resources, innovation, infrastructure, customer service, and collaboration necessary for progress.

Inputs for this goal include marketing and communications; customer service; technology and infrastructure; and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. When done well, these themes build a positive, nourishing, and enriching environment that provides support, allows for inclusion at all levels, and creates lasting impressions on all who interact with UDC.

Outcomes will be increased enrollment and retention for students, faculty, and staff; a greater alignment with UDC's identity; increased funding and opportunities for support and resources; and an improvement in reputation, graduation rates, and community participation.

“UDC continues to transform itself over time to meet the changing needs and expectations of its students and the District of Columbia community.”

Partnerships

Strong partnerships are based on mutual trust. UDC currently has both internal and external partnerships that can be fostered, and the unique opportunity to forge intentional new relationships that meet the needs of this moment.

Internal partnerships include those formed among faculty to focus on teaching and educating their students and creating enriching and rewarding experiences for themselves. Such partnerships exist already but should be formalized to make them available to everyone, and to encourage additional resource allocation to develop them further.

External partnerships mean the engagement of all stakeholders to provide support and pathways for enriching experiences and opportunities. External participants may be alumni, donors, the community, local government, other universities, the business community, and research entities. UDC can become a sought-after partner for research, collaboration, knowledge building, and thought leadership.

UDC can leverage partnerships internally and externally to become a “school of first choice,” not just for students but also as a valuable partner in the region.

Inputs for this goal include marketing and communications to engage partners; UDC experience to get everyone involved, including alumni and faculty connections and networks; identity, which helps build relationships; technology to enable and entice larger and more complex collaborations; and pathways and pipelines for lasting interactions.

Outcomes include a greater UDC experience with possibilities for expanded collaborations; funding for additional activities; increased enrollment and retention of students and faculty who find the UDC partnerships enticing and fulfilling; and the creation of pathways and pipelines for students, both while attending UDC and after they have completed their degrees.

“I come from a small island, I wanted that sense of community, on a global stage.”

Evolution of *The Equity Imperative*

When these three strategic planning goals are compared with the UDC *Equity Imperative*, there are clear intersecting pathways from the new goals to the goals and subgoals of *The Equity Imperative*. Thus, this new strategic plan is a cohesive continuation of the previous plan. The table below shows the alignment between the current strategic planning goals and the goals of *The Equity Imperative*.

STRATEGIC PLANNING GOALS	THE EQUITY IMPERATIVE GOALS
Identity	Goal One Establish in the District of Columbia a Public Higher Education Model of Urban Student Success
UDC Experience	Goal Two Increase the Numbers of UDC Degrees and Workforce Credentials Awarded
Partnerships	Goal Three Graduate Transformative Urban leaders who are Lifelong Learners

Section 7: Next Steps

The next step in this strategic planning process is for UDC to establish the definitions and subgoals that will form the basis for next steps. These goals and subgoals will be used to formulate objectives and create working plans for achieving the goals laid out above. This effort involves identifying specific paths to the subgoals, metrics for each, and clear plans for how to achieve them.

Given the robust nature of the strategic planning process, UDC is primed to utilize the evidence collated, including metrics, datasets and detailed thematic stakeholder engagement notes, to make evidence-based decisions and devise a rigorous and meaningful implementation plan.

In recognition of the vast levels of engagement and the commitment shown by all members of the UDC community throughout this process, it will be critical to routinely cycle through the feedback loop with the many, many stakeholders who helped craft this effort so far. This can happen through the provision of timely updates, continued opportunities for involvement with, and clear communication around outcomes of this initiative.

The support for UDC and appetite for the institution's true potential to be realized reflects significant opportunity for each and every student, staff and faculty member, alum, and community member to adopt the role of ambassador. This collective action will help propel the institution forward, to continue building on its already rich and distinguished achievements on a pathway to progress.