

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

EAP Form 1.10 (Rev. 11/18)



STATE OF WISCONSIN
EDUCATIONAL APPROVAL PROGRAM
P.O. Box 8366
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The Educational Approval Program (EAP) is a postsecondary education agency that employs a regulatory model focused not only on compliance, but also institutional effectiveness. To facilitate an environment in which schools seek to be effective organizations that improve over time, the EAP requires schools to submit evidence that appropriate planning has been conducted. Although similar to a strategic or business plan, this information will enable the EAP and school officials to engage in a dialogue over time about the effectiveness and future of the school.

Schools that already have some type of strategic or business plan (e.g., schools that have either a corporate or accreditation plan) must adapt these documents to the following requirements and focus on Wisconsin operations and students. The EAP does not expect any school to divulge any sensitive, proprietary business information. The information must address the five elements identified below and provide the information requested.

I. SCHOOL INFORMATION

Name of School:

Ashford University

II. PLANNING ELEMENTS

A. MISSION. Describe your school's mission and vision, which identifies its purpose and its core values.

Please see attached.

B. MARKET. Discuss the nature of your school and the business in which it is engaged. Describe who your existing and/or potential customers are and what motivates them to enroll in your school. Explain how you let these customers know you are in business. Finally, identify who your competitors are and how you are different from them.

Please see attached.

C. MANAGEMENT. Describe your management team and how it functions to lead, administer and position the school. If your school has advisory boards, describe how the school uses them for program and school improvement.

Please see attached.

D. SWOT ANALYSIS. Identify your school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). Based on the results of this SWOT analysis, provide the following:

- 3 to 5 goals for strengths/weaknesses and how they will be addressed by your school.
- 3 to 5 goals for opportunities/threats and how they will be addressed by your school.

The goals should have specific objectives, defined results, a timeline for completion and metrics (some type of evaluation or measurement) by which the institution can evaluate/measure their success. In developing its goals, the school may wish to refer to the Elements of Effective Institutions graphic that is included on the back page of this form.

Please see attached.

D. SWOT ANALYSIS *(continued)*

Please see attached.

E. FUTURE VISION. Describe your school 5 years from now. What will it look like and how will it be positioned in the marketplace.

Please see attached.

III. SUBMISSION

I hereby certify that the information contained on this form and any attachments to the form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Signature of Authorized School Official:

Print or Type Name and Title of Authorized School Official:
Dr. Craig Swenson, President and CEO

Date:

8/27/18

Ashford University

II. INSTITUTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS

A. MISSION. Describe your school's mission and vision, which identifies its purpose and its core values.

Mission

- The mission of Ashford University is to provide high-quality, accessible, affordable, innovative educational programs that meet the diverse needs of individuals pursuing advancement in their lives, professions, and communities.

Ashford's vision, purposes, and values, reviewed and revised by Ashford leadership in 2017, were shared with the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees and are aligned with the university's mission as well as its *2016-2018 Strategic Plan*.

Vision

- Ashford will be a valued and trusted partner with its students in achieving greater levels of academic and career success.

Successful execution of Ashford University's *2016-2018 Strategic Plan* will result in greater student retention and degree completion, a steadily rising total enrollment, increased national visibility and external partnership growth, a larger portfolio of academic programs responsive to workforce trends and demands, and improved sustainability.

Purposes

- To offer online and campus-based educational programs that meet the needs of diverse learners and support student success and completion.
- To integrate current technology that cultivates student-centered learning experiences led by dedicated and qualified faculty wherein students gain knowledge and build skills that support personal and professional development.
- To provide learning opportunities that help students synthesize theory and practice, enabling them to respond ethically to contemporary issues and complex problems.
- To foster a rich student learning environment focused on diverse social, ethnic, economic, and educational experiences and thereby prepare and empower graduates to be collaborative and inclusive within their communities.
- To work closely with employers and workforce development experts to identify the workplace skills and competencies that will enhance our graduates' abilities to contribute to their organizations, achieve greater professional and personal success, and strengthen their organizations.

- To place priority on innovation, continuous assessment, and improvement of student learning, curriculum development, access to learning resources, and responsive student services.
- To maintain operational, financial, and strategic strength that ensures the future of Ashford University.

Values

- Equity: Inclusion and mutual respect. We learn from one other and commit to the advancement of an inclusive culture in which every individual is treated with dignity and fairness.
- Empowerment: Inspiring and enabling. We give individuals the tools they need to achieve their goals.
- Quality: Unsurpassed and high caliber. We are consistently striving for the highest quality in our programs.
- Ingenuity: Inventive and proactive. We thrive on positive disruption and strive to continuously improve.
- Guidance: Encouraging and supportive. We provide a nurturing environment for faculty, staff, and students to learn and grow.

B. MARKET. Discuss the nature of your school and the business in which it is engaged. Describe who your existing and/or potential customers are and what motivates them to enroll in your school. Explain how you let these customers know you are in business. Finally, identify who your competitors are and how you are different from them.

Ashford University is a private-sector online university that provides educational opportunities through a variety of innovative online degree programs. The university primarily serves the working-adult population, with an emphasis on workforce development. Though the university serves a broad adult population, an important aspect of the university mission and purposes involves educating students from traditionally underserved and at-risk populations.

The university's culture places high value on educational innovation and encourages a singular focus on fostering and assessing student learning.

Ashford University students bring a diverse mix of personal characteristics that enrich the learning environment. A high percentage of students bring prior college experience, often from multiple institutions. In fact, nearly half transfer in more than 60 credits. The majority of Ashford's student population is nontraditional. The institution's online platform has been designed to deliver a quality educational experience while offering the flexibility and convenience that many students require, particularly working adults.

Ashford uses online marketing as well as traditional advertising to let existing and potential students know that Ashford is an affordable and accessible option to pursue higher education. A few comparison or competitor institutions include Kaplan University online, American Public University System, Capella

University, and Strayer University. Ashford's online delivery model, weekly start dates, commitment to affordability, and the transferability of credits make prospective students' programs of interest highly accessible.

C. MANAGEMENT. Describe your management team and how it functions to lead, administer and position the school. If your school has advisory boards, describe how the school uses them for program and school improvement.

Ashford University is governed by a Board of Trustees that oversees university operations and ensures the institution fulfills its mission. The strategic priorities of the Board include mission, organizational structure, academic integrity, operational responsibility, and planning. Trustees meet regularly to ensure accountability of the university to its students and constituencies. The president and chief executive officer is an ex-officio member of the Board, guiding fiscal and strategic priorities set by the Board. The president oversees a senior management team that administers day-to-day operations of the university. Academic oversight of all programs is provided by the provost/senior vice president for Academic Affairs/chief academic officer and a team of executive deans.

The university employs the expertise of advisory boards to ensure the curriculum is current and relevant and seeks their input regarding technology that can enhance the learning experience. Current college advisory boards are described below:

- Established in 2015, the Forbes School of Business & Technology Board of Advisors provides support and counsel to the executive dean of the Forbes School of Business & Technology at Ashford University. Members offer their expertise and experience as advocates in advancing the school and its mission. The Board of Advisors takes an advisory approach to student and institutional connections to the business community from a practical application perspective. The Board of Advisors also consults with the faculty in FSBT in the design and development of the business curriculum. The board plays an important role in ensuring alignment with the current market environment, and a practitioner's perspective on the anticipated evolution of business drivers that influence the skills and leadership capabilities expected of graduating students.
- The College of Liberal Arts (CoLA) Advisory Board has been a tradition since 2014. Board members meet biannually to provide college strategic direction, and assess program quality and effectiveness. The current Advisory Board consists of senior academic leaders and accomplished professionals with background related to the areas of emphasis in CoLA. In the most recent meeting conducted in June 2017, board members and the college leadership included conversation topics on strengths and opportunities among CoLA programs, new program development, and groundbreaking technology to enhance student engagement and success.
- The College of Education utilizes several advisory boards to support faculty, help forecast future trends in education, and keep program offerings current and relevant in the field of practice. The college has an overarching board that informs administrators and faculty on global issues, current practices, and visions for the future. In addition, each program (e.g., Bachelor of Arts in Education Studies, Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education, Master of Arts in Education)

has a board for its specific field of study. Finally, an advisory board of practitioners and subject matter experts provides input on new program development.

- The College of Health, Human Services, and Science also employs advisory boards in a variety of ways. Its predominant board consists of leaders, scholars, and professionals who serve as advocates for the college and advise deans, program chairs, and lead faculty members on major issues and future directions related to academic programs. The college also has two program-specific bodies: the BS in Health Information Management Advisory Board, and the RN-BSN Program Advisory Committee. The BS in Health Information Management Advisory Board assists faculty and sponsoring educational institution personnel with the development and revision of program-specific goals and curriculum, monitors program needs and expectations, and ensures program responsiveness to change. The RN-BSN Program Advisory Committee considers current health care organizational, community-based, and system-level best practices in patient care as well as the evolving policy influences that have relevance for the RN-BSN program curriculum. Members review the established curricula of the program, instructional-related program materials, and periodic achievement of outcomes.

D. SWOT ANALYSIS. Identify your school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). Based on the results of this SWOT analysis, provide the following:

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Strengths

Faculty and staff commitment to student success.

WSCUC accreditation.

Weaknesses

Interdepartmental communication.

Opportunities

Continue systematic measurement and assessment of our students' performance and learning.

Elevate operational efficiency.

Threats

The potential of new federal legislation, increased competition, and the influence of negative media on perceptions of the university.

Ashford – Annual/Strategic Work Plan

Ashford is in the final year and actively working on the completion of its *2016-18 Strategic Plan*, which began on January 1, 2016. Building the current three-year plan required a cross-departmental, university-wide effort of analysis and evaluation over a 16-month period. Ashford is satisfied with the progress it has made in the areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats so minimal changes have been made to the goals, but the institution will continue to monitor its outcomes.

The key strategies listed below make up the strategic focus for 2016-2018. The Board of Trustees and the President's Cabinet oversee the process of implementation and evaluation of strategic plans.

Plans for the Coming Year

- Enhance individualized support for our students
- Ensure a students' academic experience supports career goals
- Pioneer new practices in online teaching and adult learning; elevating faculty and student engagement
- Advance institutional understanding and achievement of equity
- Expand program offerings responsive to workforce trends and demands
- Achieve higher levels of program quality and student learning
- Build and maintain strong external strategic partnerships
- Improve quality and flexibility of operating processes
- Further promote organizational health and culture, contribution to strategy and connection to institutional values

Significant Accomplishments in the Previous Year

New Programs

The university is well into its plan to develop and launch several new bachelor's and master's degree programs over a two-year period. Decisions to develop these programs followed feasibility studies and research into students' interest and needs. **Table 1** lists new programs that have completed all stages of the approval process and launched in 2018.

To launch, a new program must receive approvals from the following:

- Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE)
- The U.S. Department of Education
- Other states

Table 1. New Programs Launched in 2018

New Program Name	Launch Date
Master of Human Resource Management	January 2, 2018
Master of Arts in Early Childhood Educational Leadership	January 23, 2018
Master of Science in Instructional Design and Technology	January 23, 2018
Master of Public Health	February 13, 2018
Bachelor of Science in Information Technology	February 13, 2018
Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Development With Differentiated Instruction	February 27, 2018
Bachelor of Arts in Marketing	February 27, 2018
Bachelor of Science in Human Services Leadership	March 13, 2018
Bachelor of Science in Computer Software Technology	June 12, 2018
Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction	August 14, 2018
Master of Science in Finance	August 14, 2018

Specialized Accreditation

- International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE): All programs offered through the Forbes School of Business & Technology (FSBT) are accredited by the IACBE. The FSBT participated in a reaffirmation of accreditation site visit with IACBE in May 2017 and was part of a pilot for a new specialized accreditation for accounting programs. In December 2017, the FSBT was notified that its business programs had been reaffirmed for seven years and that its accounting programs had been awarded specialized accreditation by IACBE.
- Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM): Since achieving CAHIIM accreditation for the Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management program in December 2017, graduates may now sit for the exam for Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA).
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE): Ashford's College of Health, Human Services, and Science submitted their self-study to CCNE for the RN to BSN program in December 2017 and hosted a site visit January 31-February 2, 2018. Ashford responded to the CCNE team's report on March 15, 2018. CCNE's Accreditation Review Committee (ARC) met in July 2018. A final decision is expected at the October 2-5, 2018 Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting.
- Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA): The Forbes School of Business & Technology (FSBT) developed the initial application for accreditation for the Bachelor of Arts in Sports and Recreation Management. The university achieved candidacy status in March 2018 and has begun the self-study process. A site visit is scheduled for June 2019.

Library and Writing Center

To better support students in its online learning environment, the institution further expanded its Ashford University Library and Ashford Writing Center services.

- All students can access a librarian as well as a writing consultant 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the online chat features in the classroom and on the library website.
- Students can also get help 24/7 with the Library's QuickAnswers service, which provides a large knowledge base of frequently-asked questions that address research and library topics.
- The Writing Center offers paper review service with 24-hour turnaround, downloadable information on research and writing, and free access to a grammar-checking tool called Grammarly.
- On-demand subject tutoring has been expanded significantly to a further 173 courses. Since launch through June 30th of this year, there have been a total of 122,758 individual sessions with a live online tutor (including library, writing, and subject-matter tutoring) and 68,011 papers reviewed.
- Students who use tutoring continue to have higher course points and higher persistence in completing their next four courses over non-users. In addition, students who used these services had a higher pass rate than non-users: 9% higher for subject tutoring, 12% higher for library tutoring, 14% higher for writing tutoring, and 26% higher for paper review. As a result, both fail and drop rates decreased for students using all forms of tutoring but most significantly for those students who used paper review where the drop rate decreased by 20%. Students who used their free premium Grammarly account also earned significantly more points in a course than those who did not.

Civitas Learning

Ashford has partnered with Civitas Learning to expand and refine the use of predictive analytics in student support. The Civitas analytical platform, Illume Students, enhances Ashford's advising outreach by allowing the university to identify, early in a course, students who exhibit at-risk behaviors for dropping out. This ability has not been possible with Ashford's current student information systems platform. Using the Civitas patented methodology, prediction-based propensity score matching, Ashford's leadership is now able to examine large groups of students, analyze behaviors, and develop outreach interventions that will increase student chances of persistence. Additionally, the Civitas Inspire for Advisors tool identifies individual students who may possess previously unknown risk factors, based on the aggregation of behaviors of past students coupled with the recent history of an individual student. Having this information creates new opportunities for interventions targeted at identifying and addressing a student's individual needs.

The Civitas platform complements Ashford's initial predictive segmentation activities and facilitates ongoing analyses of behaviors predictive of student risk and student success. This strategy increases the university's ability to track and predict behavior throughout the student lifecycle and further empower student support teams to implement personalized intervention strategies.

The academic advising team launched Civitas Inspire for Advisors in April 2017, and the university added Civitas Inspire for Faculty in June 2018. These tools allow advisors and faculty to implement proactive student outreach, offer personalized student interventions, and elevate collaboration and efficiency through shared visibility and accountability to student performance and behavior.

Honors College

In May 2017, the university launched the Ashford University Honors College to create an opportunity for students who demonstrate advanced academic abilities to learn in a differentiated and more challenging environment. This program provides these academically engaged students with greater opportunities to develop leadership skills, gain a global perspective, and learn to practice civic responsibility.

To be eligible for admission to the Honors College, students must have completed a minimum of 30 transferable college credits with a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or higher. Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.50 or higher to remain in the Honors College. As of June 26, 2018, 253 students had been accepted into the Honors College, and the average GPA for students enrolled was 3.89.

Education Partnerships – Full Tuition Grant

Ashford University is a strategic partner through an alliance for the Full Tuition Grant (FTG). A company's tuition assistance dollars, combined with the FTG, covers required education-related costs for students. When partnered with an approved company's tuition assistance program, the FTG allows eligible students to earn their degrees without student loan debt. Students in the FTG program must elect to not receive funding from federal student financial aid programs while participating in the program. By offering this program, participating organizations can retain employees, grow their talent pool for management and succession planning, and promote their qualified employees from within. Twenty-seven new partners have been added in 2018 for a total of 122 FTG strategic partnerships.

E. FUTURE THINK. Describe your school 5 years from now. What will it look like and how it will be positioned in the market place.

Ashford University's 2016–2018 Strategic Plan has three **Pillars of Success**, which guide future thinking and provide insight to where the university plans to focus the institution's strategy.

Student Learning & Success

Ashford offers high-quality, real-world instruction and support services in a learner-centered environment that serves its diverse student body and results in student success.

Academic Strength & Reputation

Ashford aspires to lead its sector in offering high-quality academic programs and instruction that result in well-prepared graduates who successfully use their knowledge and skills to contribute to society and their own advancement.

Organizational Integrity & Effectiveness

Ashford continually improves the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, is committed to high internal and external standards, and ensures student success is the basis for decision making.

Merger of Ashford University with University of the Rockies and Proposal to Transition to an Independent, Non-Profit University

On March 12, 2018, Bridgepoint Education announced a proposed merger of Ashford University and University of the Rockies (UoR). University of the Rockies is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and also owned by Ashford's parent organization, Bridgepoint Education, Inc. A proposed change of ownership and transition of Ashford to an independent, nonprofit university was also announced.

During its June 27-29, 2018, meeting, the WSCUC Commission acted to approve the proposed merger such that University of the Rockies will become an Additional Location of Ashford. The evaluation team concluded that the proposed merger has the potential to sustain and benefit existing Rockies programs and also strengthen Ashford's profile in graduate education, without negatively affecting Ashford's ability to continue to meet the WSCUC standards of accreditation. This action is now pending approval from the U.S. Department of Education.

With regard to the proposal to transition Ashford to an independent, nonprofit university, following the submission of all required documentation, the WSCUC Substantive Change panel acted to proceed to a site visit on September 19, 2018, to consider this proposal.

Merger

As University of the Rockies joins with Ashford University, the result will be a comprehensive institution with an expanded scope, but one that fits well within, and fully supports, the fulfillment of Ashford's mission. The merger complements the university's strategic vision and strengthens its ability to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The creation of the doctoral college and the addition to Ashford of the doctoral faculty from UoR will inform and invigorate the graduate culture of Ashford. In doing so, it serves as a forceful response to a past WSCUC recommendation encouraging Ashford to give greater attention to its graduate culture.

In creating opportunities for the respective faculties of the institutions to engage, each will inform the efforts of the other. The curriculum at all levels should be shaped in positive ways through this synergy. Additional pathways will be created for current and future Ashford students. Undergraduate and masters-level programs may be adjusted to better prepare students for advanced studies. The practice-based strengths of the Ashford faculty and curriculum will influence and enhance the effectiveness of new professional doctoral programs slated for introduction.

Strategic planning and budgeting processes are similar at both institutions, and the cycles are well aligned. This existing alignment will facilitate the development of a plan that plots a joint course and enhances institutional sustainability. The familiarity of staff at both institutions with a shared vocabulary, similar approaches to the governance process, and common IT systems support the change.

Transition to a Nonprofit University

With Ashford University's proposal to transition to an independent, nonprofit university, Bridgepoint Education's strategy calls for moving away from its current structure as a holding company for Ashford and University of the Rockies in favor of becoming an Online Program Management (OPM) provider of online administrative management services to a broader array of institutions, and being more responsive

to the needs of employers and the changing workforce. Doing so will require that Bridgepoint divest itself of its institutional assets, Ashford University and University of the Rockies.

With the support of Bridgepoint, Ashford's Board of Trustees voted to endorse the concept of Ashford University, LLC, becoming a private, nonprofit university, concluding that the university's future sustainability is best served by changing its legal status to a not-for-profit institution. Reverting back to its historical nonprofit status held from 1918 to 2005 would allow the university's faculty and staff to further strengthen their focus on student learning and outcomes.

The university's leadership strongly supports the proposed return of Ashford University to an independent, self-governed status and feels that this change will better position the university to respond in ways that will contribute to the emerging future of the higher education system. The university's sustainability will be strengthened by the approval of this substantive change, as will its ability to fulfill its mission to the benefit of students as it continues to serve the educational needs of a dynamically changing student population.