

# INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

EAP Form 1.10 (Rev. 11/18)



STATE OF WISCONSIN  
EDUCATIONAL APPROVAL PROGRAM  
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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:

Aspen University

## II. PLANNING ELEMENTS

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

### Aspen University Mission Statement

*Aspen is dedicated to offering any motivated college-worthy student the opportunity to receive a high quality, responsibly priced distance-learning education for the purpose of achieving sustainable economic and social benefits for themselves and their families.*

Aspen University achieves its mission in two ways:

Aspen's **Academic Achievement Goal** is to transition motivated learners to higher levels of productive citizenship by providing a readily accessible education that teaches knowledge and skills of enduring value. A productive citizen is defined as a self-directed, life-long learner who functions successfully in high-performance teams; exhibits professional behavior through leadership, advocacy, cultural competence and ethical conduct; conducts research, using evidence-based practices; leverages technology to produce high-value work products; and achieves and maintains a productive professional career.

Aspen's **Economic Responsibility Goal** is to offer tuition rates low enough that a majority of our students will not incur debt through utilization of federal financial aid. Economic responsibility is defined as Aspen offering tuition rates low enough that a majority of students will be able to afford to pay tuition in cash or through a monthly payment plan (maintaining Federal Financial Aid revenues below 50%).

**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.

Aspen University is a mature private, for-profit institution with about 7,000 students, most of whom are in its nursing programs. The institution offers certificates, and associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees in three schools: School of Nursing and Health Sciences, School of Business and Technology, and School of Education. The School of Arts and Sciences provides the general education coursework for the institution's undergraduate degrees.

Aspen's mission clearly communicates its purpose. The mission is appropriate for the degree levels offered: associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral, as well as for its certificates, in the areas of nursing and healthcare, education, and business and technology. The baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees in nursing are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). Aspen is an approved provider of project management training by the Project Management Institute (PMI). Finally, Aspen is an Educational Member of the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE). It has received candidacy and currently is preparing for accreditation of its baccalaureate and master's business programs. The IACBE site visit is scheduled for November 2023.

With all programs, Aspen continues to stay true to its mission, offering a financially responsible education and enabling students the opportunity to achieve success in their chosen field. With its mission, Aspen establishes its identity within the higher educational community as an institution that provides education programs at an affordable price for adult learners who are working adults.

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affordable for those who are motivated to complete their academic goals paying month to month for their degree. By making college affordable, Aspen increases access for the majority of Americans who want educational advancement without it being financially impossible. The goal is to provide the necessary tools (curriculum, advising, quality faculty, affordable payment plans) so that students can achieve their educational goals and receive a return on their financial investment in seeking a degree with Aspen.

Aspen's website (<https://www.aspen.edu/>) is its primary marketing tool. Online institutions such as University of Phoenix, Grand Canyon University, and Southern New Hampshire University are Aspen's primary competitors. We are differentiated from them by the low cost of our degree programs without sacrificing their quality and rigor.

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**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.

Aspen University is committed to shared governance and believes it to be a fundamental ingredient of a healthy academic institution and an essential right and responsibility of a scholarly community. The Board of Trustees is the governing body of the institution and operates under a set of Bylaws. The Board oversees effective and ethical execution of the institution's mission, fiscal integrity, and educational quality. It offers advice and counsel to the President, makes legal and fiduciary decisions, and develops and approves strategic planning that steers the institution towards a sustainable future. The Board has several Committees under its purview: Audit, Finance, Academic Affairs, Governance, and Executive. The Board of Trustees includes doctors whose educational and medical specialties align with educational offerings as well as education, finance, strategic planning, and governance experts.

Aspen's senior institutional management team consists of Dr. Cheri St. Arnauld (President), Dr. Joanne Weiss (Provost), and Michael La Montagne (Vice President, Finance). Over more than 30 years, the President, Dr. Cheri St. Arnauld, has developed programs, monitored curriculum development for the application of adult learning principles, and spearheaded faculty development to ensure exceptional teaching practice. Dr. Joanne Weiss, Provost, has 17 years of experience in the higher education areas of outcomes-based assessment of student learning, faculty/staff professional development, curriculum and program development and review, and teaching both online and on ground. Mr. Michael La Montagne, Vice President of Finance, has had a 27-year career developing accounting functions, budgeting, forecasting, strategic planning, cash management and leadership development, mostly in higher education institutions with multiple locations.

Aspen has a President's Council and a University Council that meet quarterly to assist Dr. St. Arnauld and Dr. Weiss in ensuring quality in teaching and learning as well as to check that academic and operational policies are appropriate and adequate for the institution. The President's Council is chaired by Dr. St. Arnauld and consists of the Provost, Vice President of Finance, Chief Nurse Administrator, the School Deans, the Vice President of Academic/Regulatory Operations, and the Assistant Vice President for Student Success/University Registrar. The President's Council are final decision makers where policy implementation or revision are needed. The University Council is chaired by Dr. Weiss and consists of all Program Directors, Enrollment Directors, and directors of Academic Affairs departments such as the Registrar's Office, Curriculum Services, and Academic Advising. The University Council handles operational updates and sends forth policy recommendations to President's Council for final approval where needed. Finally, governance is rounded out with the Faculty Senate whose members represent a range of characteristics and perspectives across schools and programs. Because the Senate is comprised of adjuncts working as professionals in their fields as well as full-time faculty, they provide input from a faculty's perspective and offer guidance related to the institution's educational activities.

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**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.

Strengths:

- low cost, high quality degree programs
- leadership with experience in higher education

Weaknesses

- home grown student information system
- manual budgeting process

Opportunities

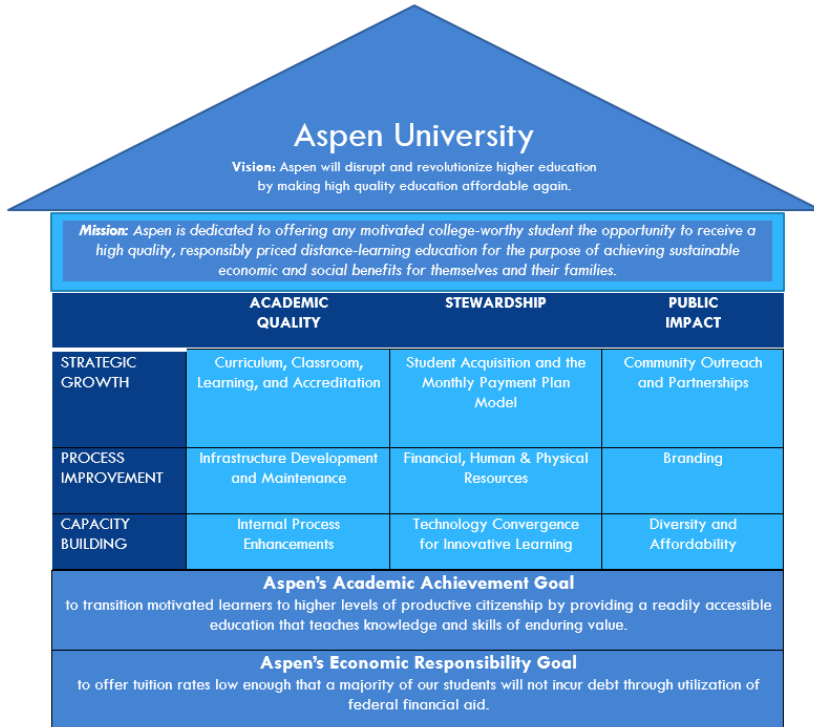
- expand brand through additional degree offerings
- expand programmatic accreditations

Threats

- managing regulations of USED and other regulators
- others copying monthly payment plan model

Aspen's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan addresses the SWOT above. To achieve its mission and the goals outlined in Section A above, Aspen has developed an Institutional Effectiveness Blueprint, which is used to ground and monitor Aspen's effectiveness. Aspen has graphically conceived of this blueprint through the illustration of a house. Central to Aspen's strategic intention is the success of its students. The peak of the illustration demonstrates that the vision and mission are at the forefront of decision making.

## ASPEN UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGIC "BLUEPRINT"



The vertical columns in the house represent the **University Pillars** of academic quality, financial stewardship, and public impact. To meet its mission and fulfill its vision, the University, through these pillars, affirms its commitment to provide a high-quality learning experience to its students with careful and responsive management of its resources. It is Aspen's vision that students deserve an affordable quality education that culminates in graduates who contribute economically and socially in ways that impact the community.

- Academic Quality: the classroom, curriculum, and learning environment provide for an engaging experience where students achieve the University Mission-based Outcomes and Program Learning Goals and graduates achieve economic and social benefits for themselves and their families.
- Stewardship: careful fiscal responsibility; responsible management, monitoring, and allocation of all resources (human, physical, and financial) to meet the University's vision of making a high-quality education affordable again.
- Public Impact: graduates will positively impact the communities where they live and where they work. Aspen is committed to the well-being of the public.

The horizontal rows in the house represent Aspen's **Strategic Objectives** of strategic growth, process improvement, and capacity building. These objectives provide the framework to support the University Pillars. These core objectives provide structure that helps Aspen's leadership and staff define its evolving key performance indicators. The objectives guide the strategic planning activities.

The blending of the University Pillars with Objectives provides Aspen the ability to precisely focus on its mission. The intersections shape the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which inform departmental decision-making, annual goals, and plans.

The Strategic Growth objective is to continue to grow responsibly. Aspen will leverage data for informed market decisions to evaluate industry trends, partnerships, acquisitions, accreditation, new program growth, and other opportunities. Aspen will evaluate and forecast financial risk together with the potential return. Specific Pillar intersections for Strategic Growth that address the SWOT issues above include:

- Academic Quality: Curriculum, Classroom, Learning, and Accreditation
  - Initiative 1.2: Expand University and programmatic accreditations and programs.
- Stewardship: Student Acquisition and the Monthly Payment Plan Model
  - Initiative 2.2: Continue to implement the Monthly Payment Plan option for select degree programs.

The Process Improvement objective is to assure continuous improvement in business and academic operations. Aspen will assure that our diverse students have an engaging and accessible teaching, learning, and support environment. Aspen will strive to provide an exceptional customer experience. Specific Pillar intersections for Process Improvement that address the SWOT issues above include:

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- Academic Quality: Infrastructure Development and Maintenance
    - Initiative 1.1: Provide the software and hardware systems needed to meet ongoing process improvement.
  - Stewardship: Financial, Human & Physical Resources
    - Initiative 1.2: Continue to implement the budget and processes needed to ensure the University's financial health.

The Capacity Building objective is to assure the development of systems, processes, and people that supports and reinforces the institutional vision. To do this, Aspen will demonstrate leadership in diversity and innovation in how it offers quality higher education. Aspen will evaluate and improve upon the operations that allow it to execute on its existing mandate to make college affordable again. Specific Pillar intersections for Capacity Building that address the SWOT issues above include:

- Academic Quality: Internal Process Enhancements
  - Initiative 2.1: Monitor cost of instruction to ensure continuing affordability of our programs.
  - Initiative 1.1: Create and monitor increasing departmental efficiencies.
- Stewardship: Technology Convergence for Innovative Learning
  - Initiative 2.1: Utilize innovative technology to manage all elements of the graduate life cycle supported by the Center for Graduate Studies.
- Public Impact: Diversity and Affordability
  - Initiative 1.2: Develop human capital by attracting, training, and retaining diverse and exceptional talent.

Finally, the foundation of the illustration is built upon the University's goals: academic achievement and economic responsibility. Basing the entire illustration on these goals reminds leadership of the strategic importance of the student experience and Aspen's obligation to the economic well-being of its graduates and their families.

Aspen is committed to achieving its vision and mission through monitoring, analysis, and continual improvement. The institution addresses its growth through a process of continual improvement that focuses on data-informed decision making. The process is initiated with a candid annual SWOT analysis of internal practices, policies, and processes and an external reflection of the industry environment. The Strategic Plan provides the University direction in helping optimize opportunities and address challenges in the process of improving quality. The successful implementation and maintenance of the Strategic Plan is highly dependent on the University's ability to systematically collect and analyze data concerning students, faculty, curriculum, and operations.

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**D. SWOT ANALYSIS** *(continued)*

Ends above.

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

Aspen expects to continue to grow at a reasonable pace, being responsive to its vision and mission and ensuring that it provides the best student experience it can at reasonable cost. Its brand is currently well known in post-licensure nursing programs, and it expects that to continue. It expects that its education, business, and technology degrees will continue to meet the needs of working adults who are looking to career shift or simply grow in knowledge in their chosen profession.


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**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.*

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Signature of Authorized School Official:



Print or Type Name and Title of Authorized School Official:

Dr. Joanne Weiss, Provost

Date:

8/25/23

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# INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS

