



# G R O U N D B R E A K I N G V I S I O N

Laying the Foundation to  
Build a University that Serves  
all West Virginians



FAIRMONT STATE  
UNIVERSITY™





**FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY IS A GREAT PLACE  
TO LEARN, TO WORK, AND TO CALL HOME.**

**PRESIDENT DAVIS** likes the word **GREAT**.

He believes that when we set “great” as our goal, it pushes us to become the best versions of ourselves, individually and as communities. For the Fairmont State University community, it means providing students not only with a high-quality education, but also with the services, facilities, and campus life opportunities that nurture an enriched college experience. It means being a place where employees feel motivated, valued, and purposeful.

And it means we’re “home” to thousands of folks—not just the students, faculty, and staff who choose Fairmont State, but also everybody in our surrounding, supportive communities.

The following pages are filled with insights from President Davis’ first two years as President of Fairmont State University. They’ve been pulled from his many op-eds, speeches, interviews, press releases, and video appearances. They track his thoughts from his first steps on campus to the development of a Strategic Vision that will guide Fairmont State for the next decade.

They represent the birth of a vision that has been embraced by and further developed by an entire community, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, community partners, the Board of Governors, and our friends in the legislature, all of whom are invested in making Fairmont State University a Great Place.

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*Much of this publication has been adapted from press releases, speeches, and transcripts from videos and podcasts. We encourage you to visit the Presidential Communication web page to further explore these and other presidential communications.*



# THE VISION



When President Davis arrived at Fairmont State University, he began to explore and examine the University, the City of Fairmont, Marion and Harrison Counties, and the state of West Virginia. He discovered something that made this region special: Its unlimited potential for greatness.

That discovery led to the birth of envisioning Fairmont State University and the region as “A Great Place,” and laid the foundation for the development of our Strategic Vision.

# EMBRACING CHALLENGES TO DRIVE TRANSFORMATION

*Editorial, West Virginia Executive | Fall 2023*

The university is dying.

That's what national pundits would have us believe with their breathless talk of enrollment droughts and skyrocketing tuition. They point to the closing of institutions and tell us that public confidence in the value of a college degree has never been lower.

So why, when confronted with such a bleak outlook, did I sign up to be the president of Fairmont State University? I believe in the beautiful potential of higher education despite the doubters, and I am certain that there has never been a more important time to be a university president.

What is true is that higher education is at a crossroads—our actions now will determine our future. I'm not just thinking of West Virginia's colleges and universities, but our state itself. The opportunity to help chart that future as president of a storied school like Fairmont State is simply irresistible.

***“I believe in the beautiful potential of higher education despite the doubters, and I am certain that there has never been a more important time to be a university president.”***

That opportunity brings responsibility. How can we reshape a campus culture that fosters individual growth and develops the best and brightest future leaders? How do we make sure we serve our communities as good stewards of place? At the same time, how do we maintain a legacy of higher education excellence?

The truth is, there is still no better investment in public dollars than higher education. According to a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, every dollar invested in a college campus returns at least \$7.46, and this doesn't include such effects as tax revenues and job creation.

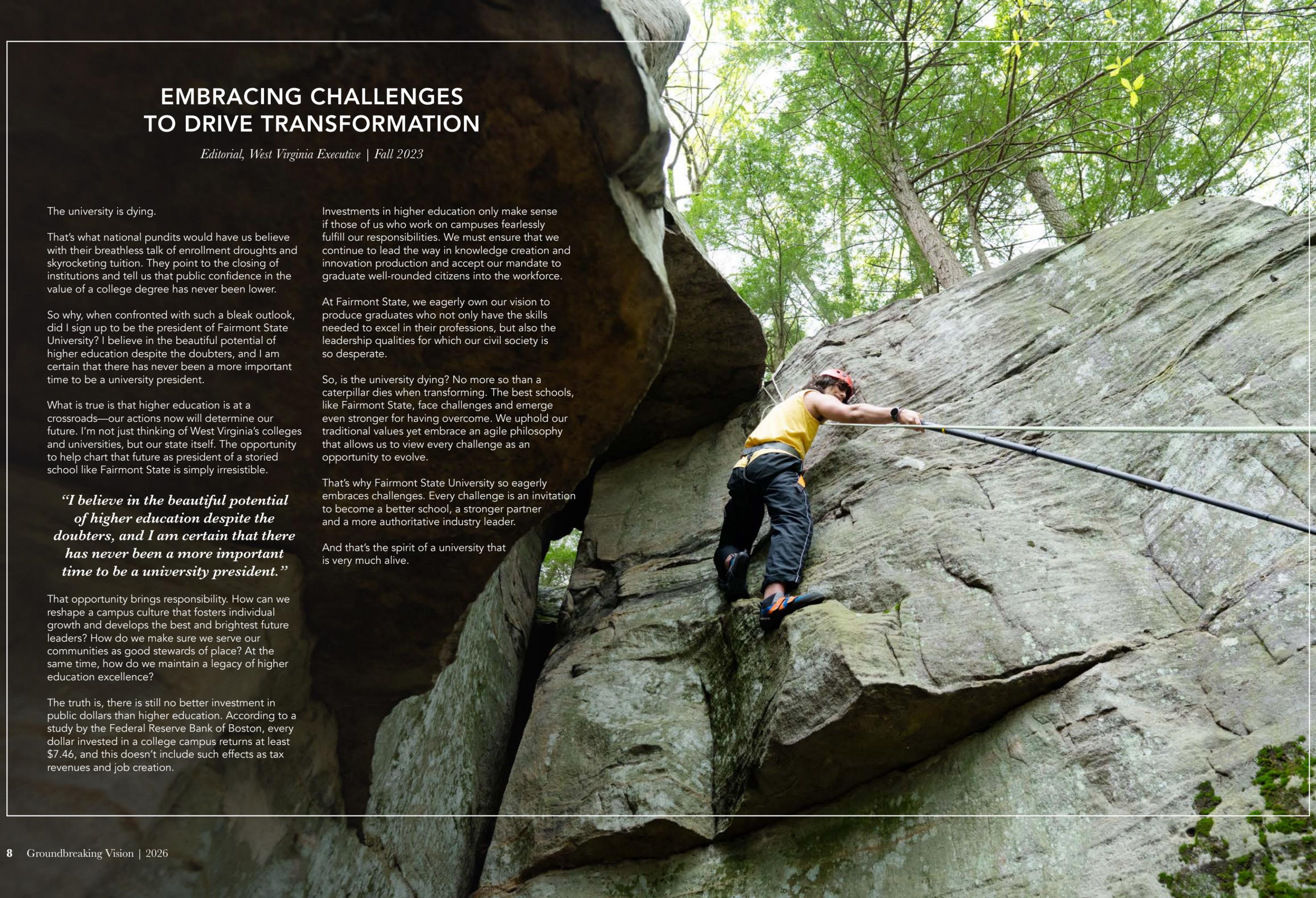
Investments in higher education only make sense if those of us who work on campuses fearlessly fulfill our responsibilities. We must ensure that we continue to lead the way in knowledge creation and innovation production and accept our mandate to graduate well-rounded citizens into the workforce.

At Fairmont State, we eagerly own our vision to produce graduates who not only have the skills needed to excel in their professions, but also the leadership qualities for which our civil society is so desperate.

So, is the university dying? No more so than a caterpillar dies when transforming. The best schools, like Fairmont State, face challenges and emerge even stronger for having overcome. We uphold our traditional values yet embrace an agile philosophy that allows us to view every challenge as an opportunity to evolve.

That's why Fairmont State University so eagerly embraces challenges. Every challenge is an invitation to become a better school, a stronger partner and a more authoritative industry leader.

And that's the spirit of a university that is very much alive.



# A GREAT PLACE: MY VISION FOR FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY

*Adapted from President Mike Davis' Inaugural Address | April 2024*

Fairmont State University must be the best regional university in the state. But what makes a university a great place?

First, it must be a great place to learn. We must have groundbreaking programs and cutting-edge facilities to implement them. If we are going to fulfill the promise that we have made to our students, to prepare them for the world, then we must continue to adapt and find ways to grow and innovate.

It also means we must find ways to engage students outside of the classroom. In our theaters, on our athletic fields, in our residence halls, in the Falcon Center, and in every corner of campus. And we must do it in a way that ensures that a college education remains accessible and attainable for every student who wants to obtain their degree.

I told the first-year class this year that college students get a bad rap. We hear that they are disengaged, self-centered, and only care about themselves. I told them I did not buy it. And I said, "I don't care what a bunch of people who aren't invested in your successes think about you." And I have challenged students every day to show up and prove the naysayers wrong.

Fairmont State University must also be a great place to work. We cannot serve our students, our community, and the world of higher education if we do not have faculty and staff who feel they have purpose and know that their work is valuable. Who feel they are valued.

How do we accomplish that? The value of our faculty and staff cannot be measured by compensation alone. However, if we are the best regional public in the state, we must work to make sure our salaries reflect that distinction. But we also need to demonstrate that we value our employees in other ways. First, by respecting expertise. Every single person who works on our campus has expertise in the areas where they work. That expertise must be respected and when we need to solve problems on campus the solutions cannot start in my office—they must emerge from the people who are doing the work every day.

We must also find ways to help people continue to develop. It is critical that every single person who works on our campus can grow professionally. This means we must

invest in them. We are going to launch several programs to grow the capacity of our existing talent, and we are going to invest in making sure that every one of our employees has what they need to grow professionally and personally.

Fairmont State University must remain a great place, continue to be a place that matters to its region, and be a great place to call home. If we are a public university, we must serve the public. We must prepare to build a better world together. With every passing day, I keep coming back to the question we asked at the launch of our strategic planning process: "What kind of society do we want to live in?"

I want to live in a society that helps people reach their potential. I want to live in a society where people feel supported. I want to live in a society where we believe tomorrow will be better than today.

We can become this type of society, but it is going to take all of us working together: Students, staff, faculty, alumni, our Board of Governors, our friends in the legislature, and our community partners. Furthermore, not only can we do it, but as a regional public university in Appalachia, we are uniquely obligated to do so.

I know in my heart that the moment for the regional public university is here...and that means Fairmont State's moment is right now. We can do things that giant flagship schools and private schools with exorbitant tuitions are not designed for. Access to education, innovative learning, caring service, quality academic programs, bright people, and supportive communities are our cornerstones. And it can only happen at a great place like Fairmont State University.

We are founded on a rock-solid mission of service to the public, yet we are nimble and flexible enough to serve the needs of humanity. We fuse traditional academic rigor with hands on learning, so students leave here ready not just for their first jobs but also for their careers. The combination is rare and sorely needed in today's society. Fairmont State will answer the call because we understand that this is our moment.

This is a great place because it is driven by great people. I promise to spend the rest of my career making sure that we seize the moment in front of us and reach our full potential as an institution and as individuals.



*“I know in my heart that the moment for the regional public university is here... and that means Fairmont State's moment is right now.”*

## UP TO THE CHALLENGE

*Editorial, WV News | May 2024*

As I have settled in at Fairmont State University one thing has become abundantly clear to me—the moment of the regional public university is upon us. What students, communities, employers, and external partners want now more than ever are genuine education partners who are nimble, innovative, and prepared to meet the challenges that lie in front of us. The regional public university, generally, and Fairmont State University, specifically, are up to the challenge.

In one of my favorite books, *David and Goliath* by Malcolm Gladwell, he argues that things that we often think of as weaknesses are often our greatest strength. He writes that “We have, I think, a very rigid and limited definition of what an advantage is. We think of things as helpful that actually aren’t and think of other things as unhelpful that in reality leave us stronger and wiser.”

For decades people have thought about higher education this way. They say: “The big schools with lots of students, huge stadiums and more resources must be better.” And for some students they are.

However, for many students, smaller classes, more intimate environments where they truly are able to connect with each other, and campuses where people have the ability to directly provide support are better suited to help them succeed.

At Fairmont State University, we know our time is now. The benefit of the regional public university is that it is designed to rapidly build things to scale that rely on innovation.

So, our size is not the weakness that people assumed of David due to his stature when compared to Goliath. Instead, it is a tremendous source of strength as we respond quickly and develop flexible programs that meet the needs of students, faculty, and our external partners.

When we tell the story of the next century of higher education in America, I am confident it will be told as the Golden Age of the regional public university.

That opportunity is amplified in the state of West Virginia because for the regional public university, like David, the things that people assume are our weaknesses are actually tremendous opportunities for growth and success.

We must be ready for that moment and Fairmont State will be a great place to start the conversation about what we might be.



*“At Fairmont State University, we know our time is now. The benefit of the regional public university is that it is designed to rapidly build things to scale that rely on innovation.”*

# A GREAT PLACE

TO LEARN • TO WORK • TO CALL HOME

## ASPIRATIONAL GOAL 1:

Provide grounded educational experiences, fueled by personal relationships and holistic support, which contribute to all students' successful careers and lives

### Priorities:

- 1.1. Deliver **outstanding academic programs** in high-demand and foundational fields, with small classes taught by passionate and relatable faculty experts.
- 1.2. Provide **wrap-around student support** services that promote physical and mental wellness, academic success, financial stability, and multiple paths to achieve individuals' goals.
- 1.3. Ensure **exceptional student experiences** outside the classroom, including athletics, campus housing, student organizations, and activities.
- 1.4. Implement consistent, reliable, and predictable **student processes** that allow them to easily and successfully navigate their collegiate experience.
- 1.5. Prepare students for their **careers and lives** through comprehensive preparation, experiential learning, student employment, and civic rights & responsibilities programs.

## ASPIRATIONAL GOAL 2:

Become the premier higher education employer in West Virginia for full-time, part-time, and student employees.

### Priorities:

- 2.1. **Compensate employees competitively** and equitably based on accurate classification, state-wide benchmarks, individual qualifications, and performance.
- 2.2. Offer exceptional **benefits and quality of life** enhancements that attract, retain, and raise the morale of all employees.
- 2.3. Develop **supportive work conditions** that foster employees' success and provide maximum flexibility.
- 2.4. Establish **clear career paths**, with professional development opportunities and support for every employee in all divisions.
- 2.5. Create a **positive organizational culture** in which employees' expertise is respected, collaboration is the norm, we don't start with 'no,' communication is ubiquitous, trust is universal, and adaptability is embraced.

## ASPIRATIONAL GOAL 3:

Create a vibrant campus, where everybody is welcomed, valued, and wants to spend time, which serves as a bedrock institution for North Central West Virginia.

### Priorities:

- 3.1. Maintain beautiful, safe, accessible, and up-to-date **facilities**, with abundant intellectual, cultural, and athletic **opportunities** that attract both university and community members.
- 3.2. Demonstrate to **regional residents** that Fairmont State is their university, a destination for entertainment, and an integral contributor to economic development and opportunity.
- 3.3. Promote the **civic engagement** of students, faculty, and staff with a broad range of community organizations, contributing their expertise while learning from their experiences.
- 3.4. Cultivate **alumni connections** with the University, engagement as Falcons, and support of advancement efforts.
- 3.5. Serve as **stewards of place**, actively contributing to the preservation and celebration of Central Appalachian culture.

The **Strategic Vision** will be operationalized through 11 interconnected three-year **Implementation Plans**:



# MAKING FAIRMONT STATE A "GREAT PLACE"

*Fairmont State University News | May 2025*

Last October, Fairmont State University's Board of Governors unanimously approved Strategic Vision 2025-2035, outlining a bold roadmap for the university's next decade. Now, with the semester underway, the planning process is moving into the next phase: developing implementation plans.

## STRATEGIC VISION

Just 90 days into his presidency, Fairmont State President Mike Davis announced to the Board of Governors that strategic planning was a primary goal of his first year in office. The President launched the process with a campuswide meeting and brainstorming session in December 2023.

"EAB, a leading higher education consulting firm, assisted us with our Strategic Planning Process and called it the most inclusive they've ever seen—something I'm incredibly proud of," said Davis.

Starting this semester, teams from across Falcon Nation will begin working on eleven implementation plans that will serve to operationalize the Strategic Vision. Once approved, these implementation plans will become a part of the overall Strategic Plan, ensuring measurable steps toward making Fairmont State a Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home.

"We're approaching these plans with a growth mindset—building and resourcing academic programs that attract a wide range of students, investing in facilities that set us apart, and recruiting and supporting students who seek an education that blends academic rigor with outstanding student services," said President Davis. "Most importantly, we're going to do these things together."

## THE UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGIC VISION CONSISTS OF FOUR ELEMENTS:

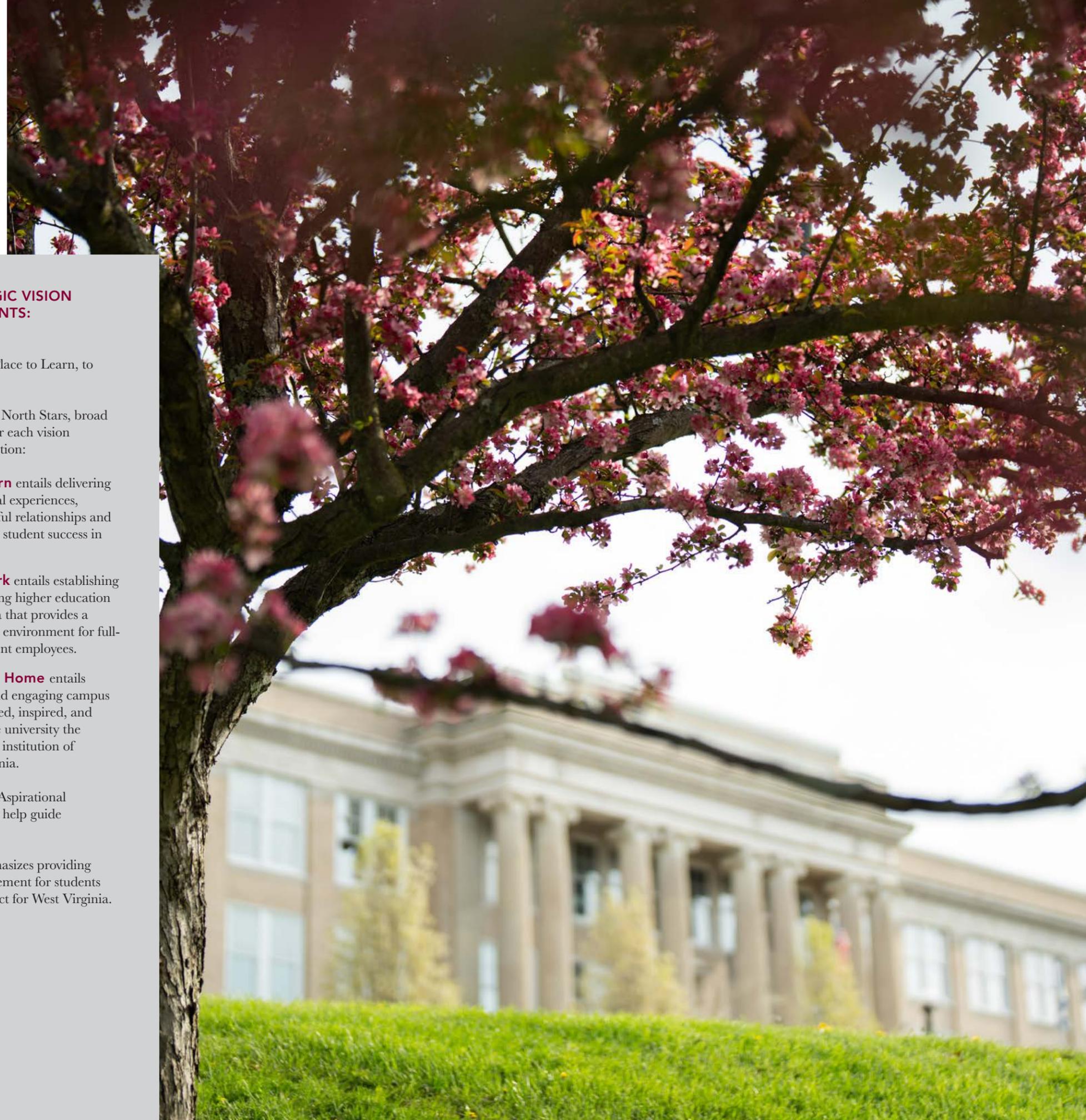
1. A new **Vision**, to be "A Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home."
2. Three **Aspirational Goals**, or North Stars, broad statements of intended results for each vision element that provides clear direction:

**A Great Place to Learn** entails delivering transformative educational experiences, strengthened by meaningful relationships and holistic support, to ensure student success in both career and life.

**A Great Place to Work** entails establishing the university as the leading higher education employer in West Virginia that provides a supportive and rewarding environment for full-time, part-time, and student employees.

**A Great Place to Call Home** entails cultivating an inclusive and engaging campus where everyone feels valued, inspired, and connected, and makes the university the bedrock higher education institution of North Central West Virginia.

3. Five **Priorities** for each of the Aspirational Goals, lines of activities that will help guide implementation planning.
4. An updated **Mission** that emphasizes providing opportunity, growth, and achievement for students as well as transformational impact for West Virginia.





## DRIVING THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

*Forbes | December 2025 - January 2026*

Amid disillusionment about the value of higher education, Fairmont State University embraces a new, nimble approach that will serve all West Virginians.

Dr. Michael Davis, president of Fairmont State University, says the higher education space is facing a new, crucial reality: “there are more unknowns than knowns.” Institutions are expected to prepare students for hundreds of careers, many of which don’t exist yet, while facing rising inflation and shrinking appropriations. Many people are asking, “Why do you need a college education anyway?” And with rising education costs nationwide, Davis says the onus rests on universities’ shoulders to explain the value higher education has.

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***“Nobody tells the bank president’s kid they don’t need to go to college, but they will say that to a custodian’s child. At Fairmont State, we’re building a university for all West Virginians.”***

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“We need to get back to explaining why four years on a college campus is a great way to prepare students for the next 40 years of their careers,” he says. “If we can’t explain that to them, we don’t deserve their trust.”

Regional public universities (RPUs)—such as Fairmont State—are uniquely positioned to do just that. Davis believes RPUs should lean into their strengths and work with each other as well as employers when navigating the rapidly changing landscape of higher education and the workforce. Because RPUs often have 3,000 to 5,000 students—rather than 40,000 like state flagship universities have—they are better positioned to pivot and respond to workforce needs.

For instance, when Fairmont State met with the Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Tourism and were informed there was a desperate need for college

graduates entering the tourism industry, it created the bachelor’s degree in Outdoor Leadership in less than a year to meet the demand for skilled workers in one of the state’s largest grossing industries.

Fairmont State has also created a Strategic Vision for 2025-2035. The strategy outlines three major aspirational goals: to provide grounded educational experiences; to become the premier higher education employer in West Virginia for all employees; and to create a vibrant campus where everyone is welcomed, valued, and wants to spend their time.

“We’re committed to making Fairmont State a Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home,” Davis says. “Everything we do will support that vision.”

### EDUCATION FOR ALL

According to the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, enrollment at public colleges and universities in the state decreased from about 90,000 in 2013 to just under 70,000 at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. And, while higher education may not be for everyone, there are numerous social and financial benefits. On average, according to the Social Security Administration, men with bachelor’s degrees earn \$900,000 more over their lifetime than high school graduates, and women earn \$630,000 more.

When Davis was inaugurated in 2023, he pledged to visit all 55 counties of West Virginia that Fairmont State serves. This summer, he rented a camper van and visited the final counties on his list. Many of the people he interacted with were from working class backgrounds in coal mining or similar industries. No one questioned whether their children should go to college, but they said it needs to be more affordable. As a first-generation college student himself, Davis vowed to act on what these communities told him.

“Nobody tells the bank president’s kid they don’t need to go to college, but they will say that to a custodian’s child. RPUs are the future, because they’re educating the largest segment of our society: folks from blue-collar backgrounds,” says Davis. “At Fairmont State, we’re building a university for all West Virginians.”

# A GREAT PLACE TO LEARN

AS A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT HIMSELF, DR. DAVIS APPRECIATES THE IMPACT THAT EARNING A COLLEGE DEGREE CAN HAVE ON LIVES AND COMMUNITIES. HE AND THE UNIVERSITY FOCUS ON AFFORDABILITY, ACCESS, STUDENT SUCCESS, AND CREATING PATHWAYS TO MEANINGFUL CAREERS.

# PRESIDENT DAVIS' REMARKS TO NEW STUDENTS

Convocation | August 2025



*“ I truly believe that we are building a campus that can be different than others. A campus built on this common experience of supporting each other. ”*

Good afternoon, Falcons. I am Mike Davis, and I am proud to be the president at Fairmont State University. Just two years ago I was in the same spot as you—new to Fairmont State and trying to find my way around. Wondering how I would make friends and if it was all going to be ok.

You are going to be challenged in ways you have never been challenged before. You will encounter new concepts and new ways of learning. You will share this campus with people with opinions that differ from your own. And you will be faced daily with situations that you have to navigate that are nothing like high school or your previous experiences.

You will be asked to step up and forge your own path. I predict you will rise to the challenge and thrive here. But I want to be clear: A LOT will be expected of you.

It is not enough to challenge you and hope you will be successful. It is our job to make sure you have every possible tool to thrive here. Yes, you will be challenged like you have never been challenged before, but you will also be supported like you have never been supported before.

This room and this campus are full of people who want you to succeed. Everywhere you go on this campus you will discover a support structure that is committed to your success—committed to making sure that you learn, thrive and find joy in what you do.

Faculty are here because they love this place and their students. They will be right by your side as you navigate each new challenge, discover new concepts, and explore ideas that you haven't even begun to consider. They are experts in their fields, and they are excited to share what they know with you. They will be there for you every day and will become some of your biggest advocates.

You'll also find a small army of dedicated staff who are here for you. One great part about the best universities is that they are built intentionally to make sure that when you need that extra helping hand, there is someone there to pick you up, push you along and cheer you on, all while accepting you exactly for who you are. There are hundreds of people here, including me, who are dedicated to making sure that you not only make it through to graduation, but that you thrive and lead meaningful lives.

Finally, you are now part of a community of fellow students. Both those in this room who are starting this journey with you and those who are returning students who are ready to welcome you to campus. You will find friendships here that will be with you your whole life, fellow students who will laugh with you, cry with you and change the way you see the world in the best ways.

I encourage you to show up for others. Go to the performing arts, a sporting event or a student academic presentation. Show up even if you think you don't like the theater, football or a fellow student's architecture presentation. Show up because you might find joy in learning something new. Show up because it is a joyful experience to watch someone who is skilled at their craft doing something that truly brings them happiness.

Maybe this makes me sound a bit naïve, but I truly believe that we are building a campus that can be different than others. A campus built on this common experience of supporting each other.

Before I let you go, I want to talk about a mistake. Not a mistake you or anyone on this campus is making but one the world is making as it concerns you. I spend a lot of time reading articles about how college students today are not willing to work hard, don't want to engage, are just going to sit in their rooms on their phones. People doubt you.

They say the college student of today is somehow inferior to previous generations.

I DON'T BUY IT. You wouldn't be here unless you were ready to pursue something really special. I know that you have the ability, the desire and energy to do great things.

And here's another thing—I don't care what people who don't know you and aren't invested in you think about what kind of a student you are going to be. You are capable of greatness and if you show up and work hard then the people on this campus are going to make sure you get there. And when I see you at that alumni event ten years from now, you'll tell me stories of your successes, your friends, and how this place impacted you.

And that will make everything we do here worth it.

# YOU ARE WHY I AM HERE

*Video Address to Students | August 2024*

I hope this semester is off to a great start for each of you. I further hope that this semester is full of success, and fun, and friendship. I hope you get to some athletic events, performing arts events, and take part in some of the dozens of student organizations and activities.

But I know that sometimes things don't always go as smoothly as planned. I was a first-generation student, and trust me, I encountered several obstacles as I started my college journey. Luckily for you, Fairmont State has numerous support services in place to keep you on track academically and ensure your mental and physical wellness.

One of those services is the LEAD Center in the Ruth Ann Musick Library. The Learning Enrichment and Academic Development, or "LEAD" Center, offers a variety of resources to help you overcome many common academic challenges.

They offer individual coaching and tutoring sessions for strengthening college skills, like studying effectively, taking notes, and managing time. You can also get support for any math, writing, science, and other course concepts you might be struggling with.

Fairmont State also has multiple resources for physical and mental wellness. The Health Center is located on the third floor of the Falcon Center, next to the cafeteria.

There, students can receive health services such as:

- Evaluation and treatment for common illnesses and injuries
- Women's health issues
- In-Office lab testing for illness such as COVID-19, flu, Strep Throat, and Mono
- And referrals for x-rays and lab tests

The Health Center has robust mental health services as well, like evaluation and counseling referral for treatment of depression, eating disorders, anxiety, and drug or alcohol addiction. They offer individualized sessions as well group therapy opportunities. You can also make use of telehealth counseling services.

Here's the bottom line: We have many helpful resources, but we often can't help you unless you take the first step. So, at the VERY FIRST sign of difficulty, whether it's an issue with your classwork, your personal life, or your mental or physical health, please come to us. Visit the folks here at the LEAD Center or drop in to Student Health in the Falcon Center.

We've got your back. So, let us prove it. These resources are free and they're here just for you.

You are why I'm here. You are why our caring faculty and staff are here. You are why this school is here.

These resources, and the caring staff who operate them, are just another reason why Fairmont State University is such a great place to learn and to call home.

“*We've got your back. So, let us prove it.*

*YOU are why I'm here.*

*YOU are why our caring faculty and staff are here.*

*YOU are why this school is here.*”



# FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY INVESTS IN STUDENT RETENTION

*Fairmont State University News | September 2025*

Fairmont State University strengthened its commitment to student success and retention by hosting nationally recognized Appreciative Advising leader Dr. Jennifer L. Bloom for a transformative professional development workshop. The event brought together faculty, staff, and student support professionals for an intensive session designed to sharpen advising and support strategies that empower students to thrive.

“The Appreciative Advising workshop equipped participants with a transferable skill set that strengthened student engagement, persistence, and achievement,” said Pamela Stephens, Assistant Provost for Advising and Retention Initiatives. “Open to all faculty and staff, the session underscored Fairmont State’s vision of being A Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home.”

Dr. Bloom, co-founder of the Appreciative Advising and Appreciative Education movements, currently serves as Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Higher Education Leadership Master’s Degree Program at Florida Atlantic University. With more than 300 presentations, six books, 31 articles, and a national reputation as a thought leader, Dr. Bloom is widely recognized for transforming how institutions connect with and support students.

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***“Fairmont State’s continued investment in Appreciative Advising reflects a deep institutional commitment to fostering a culture of care, connection, and student-centered success.”***

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Fairmont State first adopted Appreciative Advising a decade ago, following Dr. Bloom’s initial visit to campus. Since then, the philosophy has become a cornerstone of the University’s student success strategy.

Fairmont State projects an 8% increase in retention rates, a growth trend fueled in part by ongoing investments in training and student-centered practices like Appreciative Advising.

Fairmont State’s continued investment in Appreciative Advising reflects a deep institutional commitment to fostering a culture of care, connection, and student-centered success. By welcoming Dr. Bloom back to campus and engaging faculty and staff in transformative professional development, the University reaffirmed its dedication to empowering every student to thrive—reinforcing its vision of being A Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home.





## FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY TO OFFER FREE TUITION TO IN-STATE STUDENTS WITH FAMILY INCOME BELOW \$70,000

WV News | February 2025

Fairmont State University announced its new Access Scholarship on Monday, a program that will provide new full-time, in-state students with free tuition if their family income is below \$70,000.

Fairmont State President Dr. Mike Davis told WV News that the scholarship was put in place to make higher education more attainable for West Virginians who need it most. He added that between 15% and 17% of the university's current student body has a family income under \$70,000, though he expects that percentage to increase once the scholarship takes effect for new eligible students.

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*“Access to higher education is why I got into the job, so if we can make higher education more accessible, I think we can really move the needle in West Virginia.”*

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“A lot of discussions around higher ed are about how much it costs, and as a first-generation college student who was Pell-eligible, I understand the power of a college degree,” Davis said.

“We don’t ever want finances being the obstacle to students getting a college degree in West Virginia. We started having discussions, and it was a no-brainer. There wasn’t a single person on our staff who spoke up against it, because we know it’s the right thing to do,” he said.

While the Access Scholarship will net the university less revenue, Davis said Fairmont State is in a “strong position” in terms of enrollment, which he explained gives the university some leeway in terms of what it can offer its students.

“It will be a decrease in the amount of funds we bring in, but we think this is in line with our mission to provide an affordable option to students in West Virginia who want to get their college degree,” Davis said.

He added that a lot of Access Scholarship funds will be made available through “optimization of the current scholarship model.”

“We’ll move around some of that money so students will receive the same amount, but it might come from a different pool. We always have students who don’t accept scholarship offers from Fairmont State, and that money goes into another pool we can use. A lot of it is using existing resources,” he said.

Davis further explained that with Pell grants, Promise scholarships and more still in play for new students, the university will have a relatively small gap to fill for those eligible, but he noted that even if that gap is \$1,000, it could be a huge boon for the students themselves.

Davis said he’s looking forward to the Access Scholarship becoming available to new students starting in the Fall 2025 semester, and he hopes it will increase educational attainment across the Mountain State.

“Access to higher education is why I got into the job, so if we can make higher education more accessible, I think we can really move the needle in West Virginia,” he said.

# FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY LAUNCHES NEW MASTER'S IN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE WITH DIRECT PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

*Fairmont State University News | May 2025*

Fairmont State University is pleased to announce the launch of a new Master of Science in Environmental Science (MSES) program, set to begin in Fall 2025. The MSES program is housed in the Department of Natural Sciences within the College of Science and Technology and is designed to address critical environmental and economic needs across West Virginia and the broader Appalachian region.

The 30-credit hour graduate program is delivered in a hybrid format, combining mostly online coursework with in-person lab sessions and field experiences scheduled on weekends or academic breaks. This flexible design is intended to serve working professionals, recent science graduates, and those seeking advanced credentials in environmental and sustainability fields.

“Fairmont State’s new Master of Science in Environmental Science is designed to meet West Virginia’s need for skilled professionals who can tackle complex environmental issues,” said Dr. Deb Hemler, Dean of the College of Science and Technology. “Students will develop applied expertise in areas like GIS, environmental chemistry, and resource management, preparing them for high-demand careers across public and private sectors. The program emphasizes real-world problem solving and flexible scheduling to support working professionals. It’s a prime opportunity to gain advanced credentials while contributing to the state’s environmental and economic progress.”

Graduates will be prepared for roles in environmental compliance, natural resource and energy management, environmental consulting, and public sector regulation—all of which are increasingly vital as the state navigates issues related to water quality, energy transition, legacy pollution, and land use. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in environmental science is expected to grow by 6% between 2022 and 2032, with even sharper demand regionally as federal infrastructure funds fuel new environmental remediation.

West Virginia’s commitment to cleaning up past industrial impacts and embracing new energy technologies has created a unique moment of

opportunity for well-trained environmental professionals. Through this program, Fairmont State is helping to build the talent pipeline required for sustained economic revitalization, environmental stewardship, and technological advancement across the Mountain State.

### Key features of the program include:

- Hybrid delivery: Primarily online with in-person labs and field experiences that accommodate working adults
- Can be finished in as little as 3 semesters
- Interdisciplinary coursework in biology, chemistry, GIS, environmental policy, project management, and applied statistics
- Practical application focused on Appalachian ecosystems and environmental challenges
- Direct pathways to employment in state and federal agencies, energy and utility companies, conservation nonprofits, and private consulting firms

“The launch of our master’s degree in environmental science underscores Fairmont State University’s mission to deliver high-quality, affordable, and accessible graduate education,” said Dean of Graduate Studies Dr. Mary Sortino. “With small class sizes, personalized faculty mentorship, and the convenience of online learning, students gain both the academic foundation and real-world perspective needed to lead in today’s evolving environmental landscape. We are proud to offer a program that meets the academic and practical needs of today’s graduate learners and that will have a meaningful impact on the region.”

The MSES program reaffirms Fairmont State’s broader mission to support STEM education and career development across West Virginia, while advancing the state’s goals for workforce readiness and economic diversification. The University is actively working with agencies such as the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection to ensure the curriculum meets real-world needs and prepares graduates to lead environmental initiatives that support public health and sustainable growth.



“The program features direct pathways to employment in state and federal agencies, energy and utility companies, conservation nonprofits, and private consulting firms.”

# A GREAT PLACE TO WORK



A GREAT CAREER IS MORE THAN JUST A PAYCHECK—IT PROVIDES INTRINSIC REWARDS THAT INSPIRE. IN FACT, THOSE INTRINSIC ASPECTS—THINGS LIKE ‘PURPOSE,’ AND ‘MEANING,’ AND ‘FEELING VALUED’—CAN BE AS IMPORTANT AS THE PAY AND BENEFITS A JOB MIGHT OFFER. PRESIDENT DAVIS WANTS EVERYONE WHO WORKS HERE TO NOT ONLY EARN A WAGE COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS BUT ALSO FEEL THEIR IMPACT ON OUR STUDENTS AND OUR COMMUNITIES AND KNOW IN THEIR HEARTS THAT WHAT THEY DO MATTERS.



# OUR BEST DAYS ARE IN FRONT OF US

*Excerpt from President Davis' Opening Session Remarks | August 2025*

Look at a sampling of our accomplishments over the last academic year to know we are building a great university:

- We awarded 3% raises to all full-time employees and are nearing the completion of the compensation and classification study—you received an email last week that explained where we are with additional salary increases.
- In addition to commitments to continued 3% and compensation adjustments for at least the next two years we are adopting a minimum salary for full-time employees of \$40,212 for a 12-month employee. This is based on the United Way's ALICE Household Survival budget. So existing employees who make below that amount will receive a salary increase to that amount (or the 10- or 11-month equivalent) and new hires will start at least \$40,212.
- Moody's awarded us an A2 issuer rating which is the highest among regional institutions in the state. In doing so they indicated that we have a strong financial position and that is likely to continue which allows us to make some much-needed campus improvements.
- We were awarded \$13.2M in external grant funding for FY 2024 with 44 proposals funded
- We recieved an almost \$2M grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. This is a great example of finding ways to meld the expertise that lives on our campus with the needs of West Virginia communities.
- We have worked with WV News to provide all faculty, staff and students with free unlimited access to all the WV News family of websites including WV News, The Exponent Telegram, the State Journal and twelve community newspapers spanning West Virginia and parts of Maryland and Ohio. Combined with continued access to the New York Times we hope this helps keep you connected to the world without having to pay for this access.

This list of accomplishments that impact faculty and staff gets longer every year, and that's because we know that the talent we have on this campus is second to none. That list will continue to grow as we find new ways to recruit and graduate students; connect with communities around the state, region, country and world; and build a stronger Fairmont State together.

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*“This list of accomplishments that impact faculty and staff gets longer every year, and that’s because we know that the talent we have on this campus is second to none.”*

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## FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY SETS THE STAGE FOR A THRIVING YEAR AT OPENING SESSION

*Fairmont State News | August 2025*

Fairmont State University welcomed faculty and staff back from summer break with its annual Opening Session and Welcome Back Breakfast, celebrating a year of significant accomplishments and setting a course for the flourishing year ahead. Most notably, the University is experiencing prominent growth in both overall enrollment and student retention for the Fall 2025 semester.

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*“We are a university on the rise, and I am excited about the year to come”*

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Specifically, undergraduate enrollment is expected to increase by 9%, retention rates are projected to rise by 8%, and there is an anticipated 18% increase in graduate studies enrollment—bringing approximately 300 additional students to campus altogether.

In his keynote address, Davis reflected on the completion of his West Virginia Tour, marking visits to all 55 counties in the Mountain State. The tour reinforced Fairmont State’s unique role as the only institution in the state serving students from every county.

“The responsibility in front of us is truly humbling,” Davis said. “To serve these students, we need to approach our work with purpose and the belief that if they are willing to work hard, we can build a university that is ready for them.”

Davis shared three key takeaways from his travels: a surprising sense of optimism in communities, a universal belief in the value of higher education, and a hunger for partnership with the University. “Many told me this was the first time they had seen anyone from one of our four-year institutions in their communities,” Davis said. “We cannot just go into communities to find students—we must find ways to use our expertise to serve them. They are hungry for partnership, and I believe with the talent we have here, we are going to answer the call.”

Looking ahead, Davis outlined several initiatives for the upcoming year, including: the rollout of Fairmont State’s Strategic Vision implementation plans, the launch of Engage—an app to boost student involvement—opening the Soar Store as a University-operated spirit shop, expanding the Camps and Conferences Office, adopting a minimum salary of \$40,212 for full-time employees, and celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Falcon Center with a series of events.

Davis closed with a reminder of the commitments he made during his first address to campus: “I would tell the truth, I would trust your expertise, and I would show up.”

“We are a university on the rise, and I am excited about the year to come,” Davis said. “Don’t hold back. Just because it hasn’t been done that way before doesn’t mean we can’t try something new. We have the right size to be nimble, the financial footing to invest, and the people to make it happen. Our best days are ahead.”

# FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT EMPOWERS FACULTY & STAFF VOICES TO DEVELOP NEW STRATEGIC VISION

WV News | October 2024

After more than a year of listening sessions, discussions, planning and replanning, Fairmont State University has finished its strategic vision for the next decade, which centers on the university being a great place to learn, work and call home.

The strategic vision was passed by the Fairmont State University Board of Governors last week and is the result of months of committee meetings and input sessions from different stakeholders across the campus community.

Fairmont State President Dr. Mike Davis said the vision, which is broken down into three aspirational goals and 15 key initiatives, is ambitious and meant to prevent different groups throughout the university from working in isolation.

“The really valuable part of what we did was that we created probably the most inclusive strategic

planning process that a university has ever done,” Davis said.

“I know that’s a bold statement, but the number of sessions we’ve had and the number of points where people, particularly our faculty and staff members, could provide input really shows in the final product. EAB, a leading higher education consulting firm, assisted us with our Strategic Planning Process and called it the most inclusive they’ve ever seen—something I’m incredibly proud of,” said Davis.

“I’ve said all along that the process matters as much as the product, because at the end of this, we’re on the same page whereas a lot of universities aren’t. A lot of universities have siloed plans. We’ll have plans for each of those units, but we’re starting with a unified strategic plan so we’re all on the same page.”

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“*EAB, a leading higher education consulting firm, assisted us with our Strategic Planning Process and called it the most inclusive they’ve ever seen—something I’m incredibly proud of.*”

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## EXERTING PATIENCE WHEN REFRESHING AN INSTITUTION'S VISION

*Adapted from Higher Digital's Transformed Podcast | February 2025*

**Joe Gottlieb:** Okay, so let's dive into this, right? So, we talked about exerting patience and to set the stage, I'll just call it right out, you took nine months just to produce a strategic vision. And I'd love for you to talk a little bit about how that went. Were some participants impatient? Did you get stuck? And so, let's set the stage in that way.

**Dr. Michael Davis:** Yeah, so it helped when I came in, I didn't have a Chief of Staff. I didn't have an administrative assistant. My Vice President for Student Success left pretty early on into me being here. So,

I got to set a lot of the agenda myself when it came to strategic planning. We hadn't had a real robust strategic plan in over a decade. So, I said we're going to set unrealistic goals, and we can talk more about that in a little bit. But I said, we're going to set unrealistic goals which meant we were going to not say, we want to get retention from this number to this number, which is, you know, three percentage points higher. Instead, I said, "We're going to set goals of being a great place to work, great place to learn, and a great place to call home." So, we used EAB, we hired a consulting firm. And my Chief of Staff ran the process. So,

my Chief of Staff started in January after I'd been here for six months. And we already put out a survey for strategic planning, and I laid out some broad overarching tenets which we were going to approach strategic planning through, and both EAB and my Chief of Staff looked at me like I had two heads, you know, they said, "No, these aren't measurable, these aren't what traditional strategic plans look like." And I said, "Yep, that's the point." I said, "If we're going to be transformative then we have to be willing to break the common molds. And that's going to take a while. We're going to go slow."

So, in that process, we did a survey of everybody on campus, students, faculty, and staff. And then we did individual sessions with each unit that EAB facilitated, then individual sessions with each division, then

I said, "I know it's unrealistic, but that's not the question you asked, right? You asked the question, 'What should our goal be?' And our goal should be a hundred percent, because if it's not, if our goal is 80%, right?"

*"I got an email over the break from a longtime faculty member who said, 'I feel really optimistic being here.' ...there was this feeling of optimism and connection that people haven't felt in a while."*

a session for the entire university. And then we did seven sessions with external constituents, business leaders, alumni, our Board, all these different parts. And then the result of that was our strategic vision, which we're about, you know, a third of the way through the process because now come our implementation plans. Those will take two to three years. We've got 11 implementation plans, everything from human capital to alumni and advancement to athletics, all of the traditional things you see in a strategic plan. But instead of directing those from the top, we've got each of those units having leaders leading that internal process for implementation plans.

And, you know, a lot of this is I came in knowing what I wanted to do because I'd been doing strategic planning for nine years. I started doing it at JMU as a faculty member. I led it as Chief of Staff. So, when I came here, I knew what I wanted to do because I knew what I didn't like about every other way I had seen doing strategic planning. So, I had an idea of what I thought could work. You know, I got added to the strategic planning process at JMU after I'd been there for about eight or nine years. And I came in the middle of a process, and they said, "Well, what do you think? What's your goal for four-year graduation?" I said, "A hundred percent." And they said, "Well, that's unrealistic."

Which is very respectable, it's an incredible graduation rate for our regional public. That means when you walk into a class and there's 20 students, you're okay if four of them don't graduate." And for me as a president, that's unacceptable, right? That we enter with that orientation in mind. So, we have to change our orientation, and that will change our long-term goals.

**Joe Gottlieb:** I love it. It really sets up an intentional examination of stretch goals, what they can produce, but also the philosophy behind even the way you word goals. So, I like the way that you leveraged that as a point of emphasis. So even though it took way more time than what most expected or wanted in the service, what were some of the critical benefits of taking your time?

**Dr. Michael Davis:** It's actually something I didn't predict, even though it was my idea of how it would go, I'm surprised by how important the process was. I knew the process would be important because it would lead to better vision setting. I didn't know how important the process would be for getting people to reconnect with each other and for getting people on the same page. The consultant from EAB led all these sessions on back-to-back days. He did academics the first day and athletics the second day. And he said what he was really amazed by, and he'd never seen at any university

before, is how both those groups were singing out of the same hymnal, right? So, both of them were talking about student success. Both of them were talking about graduation rates.

Both were talking about relationships to students. And I think you would've seen lines, you could have drawn between the two before, but the fact that it was so explicit, I think has a lot to do with the process we went through. And now that we're moving into the implementation planning stage, that's really important because we also now know who our allies are. So, if we're working on our human capital plan, we know what each individual in each of our divisions, in each of our units cares the most about compensation, about classification, about professional development, and we can make sure they're looped in instead of trying to guess who those people are, which I think is what happens at most places.

**Joe Gottlieb:** Makes a ton of sense that that alignment started to show. But because time was allowed for a bit of indulgence of those parties to really express themselves, feel connected, feel, feel engaged.

**Dr. Michael Davis:** I'll say too, it's something that it hasn't happened here in a long time. I think that a lot of decisions have been top down probably for decades here. So, I think the fact that people are asked, "What's your opinion of this?" Instead of me talking to six people and coming up with a strategic plan, I think it really makes a difference in how people feel about the process, about how people feel about each other. I got an email over the break from a longtime faculty member who said, "I feel really optimistic being here." And it's because they were in a professional development session over December. They were in that session with people who they hadn't talked to before. They didn't know who they were, but there was this feeling of optimism and connection that people haven't felt in a while.



# A GREAT PLACE TO CALL HOME

PRESIDENT DAVIS, ON BEHALF OF FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY, LOVES FAIRMONT, MARION AND HARRISON COUNTIES, AND WEST VIRGINIA. HE IS PROUD TO CALL THIS PLACE 'HOME.' HE FEELS A STRONG 'STEWARDSHIP OF PLACE'—THAT IN ADDITION TO EDUCATING STUDENTS, HE WANTS THE UNIVERSITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE REGION'S UPWARD MOBILITY, PROSPERITY, AND CIVIC HEALTH. FINALLY, HE AIMS TO HELP TRANSFORM FAIRMONT FROM A 'TOWN WITH A COLLEGE' BACK INTO A 'COLLEGE TOWN,' WITH A RENEWED ECONOMIC VIGOR, A SPIRIT OF OPTIMISM, AND A SHARED FEELING OF PRIDE.

# A UNIVERSITY FOR ALL WEST VIRGINIANS

Editorial, WV News | September 2025

At the end of July, I fulfilled my promise to visit all 55 counties in West Virginia during my first two years as president of Fairmont State University. Most of the final counties on my list were in the southern part of the state. Traveling through Logan, Mingo, McDowell, Wyoming and several others, I learned a great deal about this incredible state I have the privilege of serving.

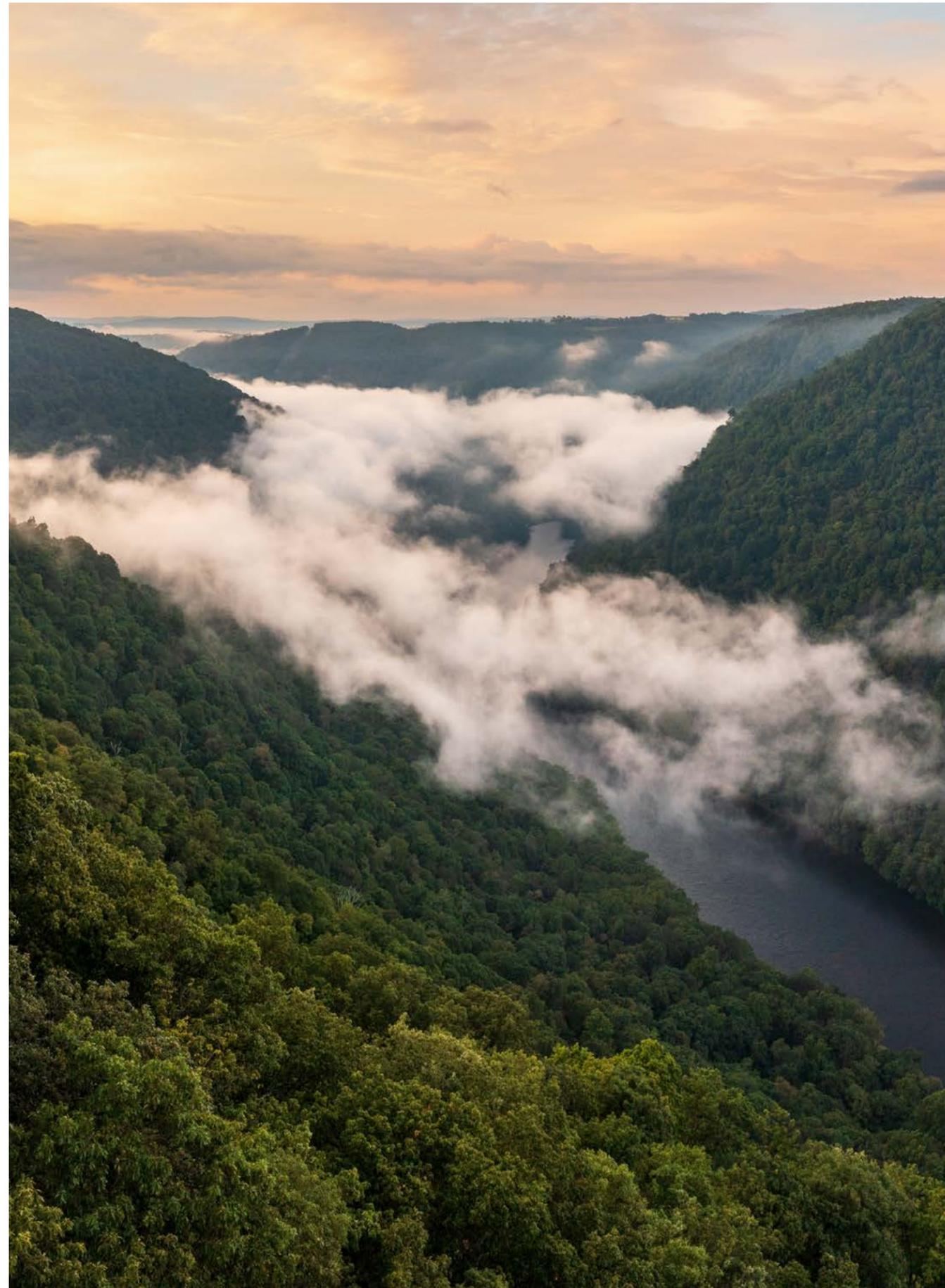
The purpose of my trip wasn't to recruit students for Fairmont State University. We already serve students from every corner of West Virginia. I wanted to better understand their backgrounds and experiences. I wanted to learn what mattered to them and how their communities shaped them. I wanted to know what skills they need to help their communities overcome the challenges that lie ahead.

I've made a commitment to serve as president of Fairmont State University for the rest of my career. That's unusual these days — presidents rarely stay in one place for 20 years. However, traveling the state and listening to community leaders, elected officials and local entrepreneurs reaffirmed to me why this work matters and why I want to stay here for the long haul.

I repeatedly heard what communities need from higher education. Rather than the typical criticisms of colleges, I encountered communities eager for their high school graduates to have the opportunity to go to university — at a cost they can afford, with a real return on their investment. In areas where college attendance rates are lowest, the pressure is highest on us to clearly communicate the value of a degree and to use financial aid resources wisely.

I also heard a consistent call for collaboration. While recruiters visit high schools, many community members told me I was the first university president to come to them and ask what they truly needed. West Virginia has a remarkable group of university presidents, and this was a reminder that we must listen and respond to these communities when they reach out for collaboration.

Finally, I learned a lot about the history and spirit of this state. I knew that West Virginians are resilient and



proud. What I heard repeatedly was that residents of these counties want their communities to thrive. They are frustrated by the stereotypes applied to them. And they feel overlooked. I hear it often: “West Virginia is the best-kept secret.” Well, it's time we stop keeping secrets and start showing the world all that we have to offer.

Higher education can lead the way in West Virginia. We must create affordable degree programs that support our state's needs. Fairmont State has a long history of responding to those needs — from preparing teachers, nurses, surveyors, and law enforcement officials to producing architects, artists, business leaders and everything in between. The addition of our outdoor leadership program this past year directly responds to the needs of West Virginia's booming tourism industry. Fairmont State will continue listening to the state and region as we build new, innovative academic programs and position ourselves as the university for ALL West Virginians.

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*... when we look back two decades from now, we'll see a state—and a university—that is no longer “the best-kept secret,” but a source of pride for all of us.*

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Completing my checklist of 55 counties doesn't mean my travels are over. I plan to return to these communities often, bringing campus colleagues with me and inviting other colleges and universities into the conversation. The truth is, we're not competitors—we're partners in educating West Virginians. The stronger our citizens, the stronger our state.

So, I'll be back on the road in the coming months, working with communities across West Virginia to build a brighter future. The work won't be easy, but together, we can make a difference. And when we look back two decades from now, we'll see a state—and a university—that is no longer “the best-kept secret,” but a source of pride for all of us.

# REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES ANSWER THE CALL

*Editorial, Views & Visions Magazine | Summer 2025*

Higher education in America faces severe challenges, many unprecedented.

Since the pandemic, enrollment nation-wide has dropped by over a million students, accelerating a decade-long trend. On top of that disturbing fact, we're approaching a demographic cliff in Fall 2025 and new-student enrollment in American colleges could drop as much as 15% more.

That outlook is even more dire when paired with the rising costs of attending college. If you earned an undergraduate degree before Y2K, you might be surprised to learn that tuition has risen nearly 180% since the 1980s and has far outpaced inflation during the past two decades. Coupled with increases in room and board and other fees, it's no wonder why so many students (especially those who hail from my institution's

state, West Virginia) cite the cost of attendance as a significant barrier to pursuing a college degree.

Many of these same students and their families question the value of a college degree. When they watch the news, they see prominent public voices deride the value of higher education, they hear national pundits breathlessly declare, "The university is dying," and they witness the closing of schools that have (until recently) stood the test of time. We shouldn't be surprised so many of them opt to enter the workforce upon graduating high school (if they even stay in high school until they graduate). Despite evidence that suggests people who earn a college degree will make as much as \$1.8 million more over a lifetime than those with just a high school diploma, public confidence in the value of a college degree has never been lower.

But is the university really on life-support? To paraphrase Mark Twain, the rumors of higher education's demise may be a little exaggerated.

Regional public universities were made for this moment. These aren't the nationally branded flagship public or private schools you hear about most, like UCLA, the University of Notre Dame, or The University of Alabama. Regional public universities are typically smaller state-funded institutions that are mission-driven to serve, support, and strengthen their regions. I am the president of one such institution — Fairmont State University in Fairmont, West Virginia — and regional public universities like mine are positioned to not only fill the higher ed needs of those communities that support us but also thrive and even grow while doing so.

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***"The moment for regional public universities like Fairmont State is here."***

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Regional public universities are agile. They're big enough to get things done, yet small enough to accomplish important tasks quickly. Regional publics enjoy state funding support, but their "just-right" size allows them to act and react more rapidly than many larger, administratively bloated schools can. They can also pivot when needed to meet industry and state needs. For instance, West Virginia's tourism industry is skyrocketing, creating the need for thousands of new jobs, yet there are few academic programs in outdoor leadership in the region, and some have recently been discontinued. We saw this industry need and we quickly developed our Outdoor Leadership minor into a full undergraduate degree to meet that need, while also offering a fantastic career opportunity for our students.

Regional public universities can offer a more enhanced education experience. Students at regional publics enjoy most of the same advantages of larger schools, but in a setting that feels more like a private school. Compared to students at larger schools, students at regional publics typically enjoy smaller class sizes, a vibrant campus life, closer relationships, and more personal attention from caring staff and teacher-mentors (and, at many regional public institutions, students are taught by full-time instructors, not by graduate assistants). The importance of personal attention can't be overstated — building close relationships between students and their instructors is vital to their academic journeys as well as their post-graduate careers. Additionally, regional public

institutions offer most of the same financial aid solutions that larger, flagship schools offer. Some of these schools, like Fairmont State, have even developed financial aid packages like our new Access Scholarship, a tuition-free guarantee for eligible high school graduates, transfer students, and former Fairmont State students looking to return and complete their degrees.

Regional public universities embrace a "stewardship of place" philosophy. Schools like these accept the responsibility of being a part of their communities. They understand that they share a future, and that the success of an institution impacts the success of the communities that support it, and vice versa.

That's why schools like Fairmont State work so hard to make an affordable, transformational education accessible to anyone who desires one. Through agile academic programming, regional public universities are responsive to the needs of the state and provide highly skilled graduates for in-demand fields like education, nursing, aviation, tourism, engineering, and more.

In doing so, we're also helping the decrease the state's population decline. Our plan is simple: we attract students via unique scholarships and dynamic academic programming. We then embed these students in our communities via internships. These internships often turn into job offers so both in- and out-of-state students can stay upon graduation and build rewarding lives and careers right here in West Virginia.

Regional public universities serve as cultural, intellectual, and entertainment hubs for their regions. Since these schools tend to be more tightly connected to their communities, they have their finger on the pulse of their regions' most pressing needs. For instance, in response to West Virginia's foster care crisis, we created Middle College at Fairmont State, a dual-degree academic program just for youth in foster care. Regional publics are also economic engines, providing hundreds of jobs and contributing to the economy (in our own case, in 2024 alone, we generated \$86 Million in direct economic impact for West Virginia).

The moment for regional public universities like Fairmont State is here. We can do things that giant flagship schools and private schools with exorbitant tuitions simply aren't designed for. By exploiting our agility, our ability to provide a higher quality, higher touch student experience, and our commitment to the prosperity of the regions we serve, we can not only meet the challenges facing higher education but also thrive as institutions and communities.



# FAIRMONT STATE ADVANCES ACCESS, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, AND ECONOMIC IMPACT IN WEST VIRGINIA

*Fairmont State News | February 2025*

Fairmont State University's ongoing and future initiatives to address college access, workforce needs, and strengthen West Virginia's economy were the main highlights of the Feb. 19 Board of Governors meeting.

The meeting opened with the Presidential Report, during which Fairmont State President Mike Davis highlighted the success of Fairmont State Day at the Capitol. More than 160 Falcons participated in the event, which featured 30 displays showcasing the university's contributions to the state. Academic programs addressing workforce shortages—such as nursing and aviation—were prominently featured, alongside student organizations and athletics. Among the many highlights of the day, the Acrobatics & Tumbling team impressed spectators in the Capitol Rotunda with an energetic performance. Board member Drew Paton later spoke with West Virginia state Sen. Ryan Weld, who described the event as “impressive.”

Davis also previewed the upcoming Fairmont State Day of Giving on Feb. 27, a 24-hour fundraising event with a goal of raising \$700,000. Donors can designate their contributions to various areas, such as academic programs, athletics, student organizations, scholarships, and more. The event will feature a 24-hour live-streamed broadcast, kicking off at midnight with a special celebration. Programming throughout the day will include “Good Morning, Fairmont” from 7-9 a.m., a student dinner at 4 p.m., a Coach's Panel at 5 p.m., and the return of “Mike at Night”, a lively celebration in the Falcon Center from 5 p.m. until

midnight, among other activities.

The Board also received an enrollment update, noting a 9% increase in new students this Spring and the highest Fall to Spring retention of first year students on record at 88.5%. There was also an uptick in applications following the announcement of the Access Scholarship. This program allows WV high school graduates, transfer students, and former Fairmont State students who wish to complete their degree from households earning up to \$70,000 to attend Fairmont State full time without paying tuition or program fees.

In line with the university's commitment to workforce development, the Board unanimously approved a new Bachelor of Arts in Outdoor Leadership. Once the Higher Learning Commission has reviewed and approved the program, students can begin enrolling. The decision to expand the minor into a major was inspired by a meeting with Chelsea Ruby, secretary of the West Virginia Department of Tourism, who identified the need for college graduates to support the state's growing outdoor tourism sector.

“Fairmont State University is committed to delivering academic programs that address West Virginia's workforce needs and drive economic growth,” Davis said. “By expanding opportunities in high-demand fields like nursing, aviation, and outdoor leadership, we are preparing our students for meaningful careers while strengthening the state's economy. Our role is clear: to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills needed to

fill critical job openings and support industries that are vital to West Virginia's future.”

West Virginia's outdoor tourism industry generates \$9 billion annually, supporting nearly 7% of the state's workforce. With one in every 15 jobs tied to tourism and approximately 21,000 job openings projected each year, the sector offers significant career opportunities. This new program will equip students with vital leadership, management, communication, and program planning skills, along with the technical expertise needed to guide individuals and groups in outdoor settings such as parks, wilderness areas, and recreational facilities.

Additional workforce initiatives discussed included the possible creation of an aviation minor and rotary flight instruction within the Aviation program, as well as an expanded selection of microcredentials to enhance students' career readiness.

“Fairmont State University continues to play a pivotal role in shaping West Virginia's workforce and economy,” Board Chair Jennifer Kinty said. “President Davis' report highlighted not only the success of Fairmont State Day at the Capitol but also the university's unwavering commitment to meeting workforce demands in critical areas like healthcare and aviation. Soon, we will be able to add outdoor leadership to the list of West Virginia's employers needs that Fairmont State is addressing. The Board is proud to support these initiatives, ensuring that Fairmont State remains a leader in preparing students for the jobs of today and tomorrow.”





# HOMECOMING: UNIFYING TOWN & GOWN

*Editorial, WV News | October 2025*

Fairmont State is proud to call North Central West Virginia home, and we feel a strong “stewardship of place.” This means we actively contribute to the preservation and celebration of regional history and culture. We also strive to contribute to residents’ upward mobility, prosperity, and civic wellbeing. That’s why when we schedule events, we do so with the community in mind.

For example, this year marks the 20th anniversary of the Falcon Center at Fairmont State, and everybody is invited to join the celebration. If you’ve seen the building, you know it is a stunning piece of architecture. And if you’ve gone inside, you know it is the hub of campus activity. The Falcon Center houses many student services including the health clinic, the dining hall, and the recreation center, which offers affordable community memberships. It is also home to Starbucks and Chick-fil-A, so come grab a latte and some waffle fries.

While you’re in the Falcon Center, check out the new mural above the pool, *The Living Bridge, Rooted in Fairmont*, painted by Professor Joel Dugan and his students. It’s filled with visual references to Fairmont, conveying the University’s close relationship with our hometown. Finally, stop by The Soar Store, your new one-stop shop for all things Fairmont State. The grand opening will be at noon on Wednesday, October 22. However, it is already packed with new merch and apparel—with more items arriving daily—so you’ll be ready to cheer on the Falcons!

Speaking of which, Homecoming is here! This year’s theme is “Falcon Frenzy,” and we have a full week of activities, many open to the public. For instance, on Thursday, October 9, we’ll have our annual Homecoming Parade that runs through Historic Downtown Fairmont. That will be immediately followed by “Thursday Night Lights,” held in the gravel parking lot next to Duvall-Rosier Field. There will be food, music, a bonfire, and lots of fun for community members, alumni, and students alike. And don’t forget about the big game, when the Falcons take on West Virginia Wesleyan College on Saturday, October 11. Kickoff is at 2 p.m.

Homecoming isn’t just for current Fairmont State students or alumni—it’s for everyone who calls this region home. And we’re not just celebrating Fairmont State—we’re celebrating you, the people and communities who support the University every day. We’re serious when we say to the region, “Fairmont State is YOUR school.” We could not do what we do without your support, and we strive every day to show our appreciation to everybody who supports our vision. Working together, Fairmont State and local communities can transform this region. I hope you’ll join us for Homecoming and throughout the year.

# FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY HELPING SUPPORT FLOOD VICTIMS

*Fox Weather (National) Interviews President Davis | June 2025*

**FOX WEATHER:** We've got more rain, unfortunately, headed right through the Appalachians. And we've seen and following these stories out of West Virginia over the last few days, heavy rain, it caused intense flash flooding in some of the mountain communities.

Fairmont, West Virginia is one of the towns that was just swamped by these floods and is currently working to rebuild.

hear about some flooding right below campus. There's a road that was flooded and you couldn't turn onto it. Then we started to get some reports of a building collapse and some rescues.

So, we went into action to try and figure out if there were ways that we could house some of those people and support them.

**FOX WEATHER:** As they're going through this, I'm looking at this

**FOX WEATHER:** I've never seen anything like this before. We keep on hearing people say it came down so fast and so quickly, even with a hurricane, we don't see this kind of rain.

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** Yeah. And, you know, that area gets some minor flooding over time, but nothing like this. And, you know, obviously, the devastation that happened at that building is not anything like we've ever seen before.

**FOX WEATHER:** Right. I mean, it's just devastating right there. So, you guys are helping out, right?

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** The University's helping out the community. We have a Red Cross shelter in our student center. We've got three gymnasiums and we've taken over one of those to provide a shelter for as long as people need to be there.

**FOX WEATHER:** I assume you guys have summer classes going on right now. Has that any of that affected what you're trying to do?

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** Most of our summer classes are online, so we don't have a lot of students on campus. We have some, but our student center has three gymnasiums so we can. We're still hosting a camp for local kids, and we have other programming going on.

We're able to manage that, especially since it happened, you know, in the summer when our campus is mostly depopulated.

**FOX WEATHER:** Mike, I have to tell you, we all appreciate your help out there for sure. And thanks for coming on here to tell us your story because it's stories like this, it just reminds us that everybody could see flooding like this at any time. It just happened to be right around Fairmont, West Virginia on Sunday.

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** And you know, we're a public university, so it's our responsibility to serve the public and this is just a small part of that.

**FOX WEATHER:** Great stuff out there. Thanks for joining us on Fox Weather. I appreciate it. Fairmont State University president Mike Davis, thanks for joining us.

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** Thanks for having us.

“*We're a public university, so it's our responsibility to serve the public.*”

Fairmont State University is working with the community to help supply aid. University President Mike Davis right now joins as a talk. Mike, thank you so much for joining us. I appreciate it.

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** My pleasure. Thanks for having us on.

**FOX WEATHER:** Absolutely. Can you take me through Sunday afternoon?

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** I mean, we just saw a deluge smash into West Virginia. It really came out of nowhere. It was in, you know, a half hour to 40 minutes.

We got between three and four inches of rain. So, we started to

building right there. The campus itself took some hits, right?

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** Yeah. We had a little bit of water in one of our residence halls and some minor flooding on campus, but nothing like what happened across the street.

**FOX WEATHER:** Have you walked out there and taken a look to see what it did?

**PRESIDENT DAVIS:** I went out on Sunday night, and I've been out every day since then. The governor was here yesterday, and we did a walkthrough.

But I was also out there on Sunday night trying to figure out what we could do to provide some support.





No person—and likewise, no institution—is an island. President Davis and the University understand that they can only achieve their vision and mission via collaboration. That’s why he and Fairmont State University work so hard to create mutually beneficial partnerships, whether it’s with the private sector, governmental entities, charitable organizations, or “rival” universities. Because at the end of the day, we all share one goal: Helping West Virginia and its people prosper.

## FAIRMONT STATE AND MARSHALL UNIVERSITY: COMMITMENT AND COLLABORATION

*Joint Editorial, Marshall University President Brad D. Smith &  
Fairmont State University President Mike Davis | June 2025*



President Mike Davis



President Brad D. Smith

*“Our shared commitment will help create a stronger, more resilient West Virginia — one where education drives prosperity for all.”*

In higher education, competition among institutions is often assumed to be a zero-sum game — one university’s gain is another’s loss. As presidents of two West Virginia public universities, we can tell you that nothing is further from the truth. In fact, we believe that when West Virginia’s higher education institutions work together, the entire state benefits.

Marshall and Fairmont State are very different universities. Marshall enrolls approximately 12,000 students and Fairmont

State around 3,000. Marshall has a medical school and dozens of graduate programs, while Fairmont State serves mostly undergraduate students (although graduate programs are an emerging strength).

The two of us are quite different, too. Brad comes from the private sector and Mike has worked on a college campus for his entire adult life. Brad was born in West Virginia, while Mike has only lived here for the past two years. However, as is often the case,

we discovered we have more commonalities than differences.

Through ongoing collaboration with one another — and with our fellow university presidents — we’ve identified common ground in tackling the urgent challenges confronting higher education: rising costs, changing workforce demands, and concerns about the value of a degree. These pressures are real, but they also present powerful opportunities for partnership, innovation, and progress.

For many students, the cost of a college education has become a significant barrier. Despite efforts to keep tuition affordable, the reality is that students and their families are bearing an increasingly heavy financial burden. In response, our institutions (and others across the state) have promoted affordable, and in some case zero, tuition. But we can do more.

By sharing resources, streamlining processes, and collaborating on programs, we can reduce costs for students while maintaining the high standard of education that our state needs. Partnerships between universities — whether for joint research, shared programming, or academic exchanges — will allow us to pool resources and make higher education more affordable for West Virginians.

Collaboration can also make college more accessible. West Virginia, like many states, has a high percentage of first-generation college students, many of whom come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ensuring that these students have access to the resources they need to succeed is crucial — not just for their future, but for our state. This means expanding scholarships, providing robust academic support, and developing campus cultures that welcome and support all students. Both of our institutions are also reaching beyond the traditional college-aged population to enroll more adult learners and working professionals.

West Virginia’s workforce is changing, and so too must our educational offerings.

With industries like energy, cyber security and technology, healthcare, and tourism developing rapidly, universities are tasked with preparing students for a job market that demands specialized skills and adaptability. The pace of technological change alone means that graduates must be both experts in their chosen fields and equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

This challenge presents an opportunity for our universities to collaborate more closely with industries and local communities. By aligning our academic programs with the current and future needs of the workforce, we can provide students with relevant, practical education that ensures they are ready for their first job as well as the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Internships and co-ops in our communities help bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world experience, giving students a leg up when entering the workforce. These experiences often lead to full-time employment, and increase the likelihood that students stay in West Virginia upon graduation.

Higher education leaders must also unite our voices, speak up, and passionately reaffirm the value of a college degree. The average West Virginian will see a seven figure increase in their lifetime income by completing college. The investment students and families make in their education is worth it and it is our duty to stress that value every day.

And if we truly believe in the value of higher education for West Virginians, then we must ensure the programs that increase

student retention and graduation rates are not treated as proprietary resources but instead are shared with other institutions, to improve the lives of all West Virginians. As we increase access for students and work to ensure their success, our enrollments will rise, and the state will thrive.

This collaboration activates innovation. By joining forces, we are not only tackling our current challenges but also positioning ourselves to anticipate future needs. Our universities are incubators of ideas, and together, we can lead the way in developing solutions that not only help West Virginia’s higher education institutions thrive but also establish a model for other states grappling with similar challenges.

We are optimistic about the future of higher education in West Virginia. We face significant challenges, but West Virginians know how to rise to meet the moment. With a united approach, shared resources, and a commitment to the students and communities we serve, we can overcome these obstacles and ensure that higher education remains a powerful force for good in our state.

Our partnership demonstrates what’s possible when institutions unite around common goals — and we’re far from alone in this effort. Working alongside our colleagues at other state universities, we are building a higher education system that is more accessible, affordable, and impactful. In the years ahead, our shared commitment will help create a stronger, more resilient West Virginia — one where education drives prosperity for all.

# DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS THAT SOAR

Editorial, WV News | March 2025

West Virginia's population is decreasing. This has real-world implications. After the 2020 census, we lost a congressional representative in Washington and saw our electoral votes reduced from five to four. Population loss also contributes to the decrease of state resources, including education funding — as

nursing, aviation, engineering, surveying, and more. Fairmont State also responds to the state's emerging needs.

For example, West Virginia's tourism industry is skyrocketing, creating the need for thousands of new jobs. Yet, there are few academic programs in

*“In doing so, we are strengthening employers’ talent pipelines, helping regional business grow, supporting our communities, and bolstering the state’s economy.”*

the population decreases, public schools close and consolidations rise. This is not just the result of declining birthrates; we are also losing many young professionals, as they seek career opportunities elsewhere.

Higher education must take the lead in reversing these trends. Fairmont State University is a leader in this area, and we know that we must be proactive if we are going to help the state of West Virginia reach its potential. We are working to stem the tide of out-migration, keep our home-grown talent in the state, and attract new talent from beyond our borders. In doing so, we are strengthening employers’ talent pipelines, helping regional business grow, supporting our communities, and bolstering the state’s economy.

We graduate highly skilled students in high-demand fields like education,

outdoor leadership in the region, and some have recently closed. We saw this gap and quickly developed our Outdoor Leadership minor into a full undergraduate degree to meet the need, while also offering students a fantastic career opportunity.

In creating unique programs that meet our state’s needs, Fairmont State helps combat population decline. Our plan is simple: We attract students using competitive tuition rates, generous scholarships and dynamic academic programs. We then embed these students in our communities via internships and apprenticeships.

These work-based-learning opportunities frequently turn into job offers. As a result, both in- and out-of-state students can stay in West Virginia after graduation to build rewarding lives and careers. We also hold career fairs each year to

connect employers and Fairmont State students.

For instance, at the Encova Career Development Center’s Spring Career Fair on March 12, hundreds of our students talked to representatives from nearly 200 organizations spanning 15 industry sectors. In the Fall, we hold career fairs for Engineering, Technology, and Math (STEM) workforce pipeline in North Central West Virginia.

Fairmont State also aggressively pursues partnerships with regional and national businesses, as well as

with government agencies. For example, together with partner organizations, Fairmont State was awarded a nearly \$2 million grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to establish a Regional Career Services and Workforce Development Collaborative. This initiative will improve the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) workforce pipeline in North Central West Virginia.

The University was also recently awarded a \$1 million grant from the West Virginia Higher Education

Policy Commission to enhance nursing education by growing student enrollment, strengthening test preparation, recruiting new faculty, and supporting their professional development.

Our commitment does not stop at the borders of Fairmont State’s campus. We understand that our fortunes are tied to the fortunes of our region and the entire state, and we embrace that responsibility. And we know that many in the region share our commitment. So, I invite you to partner with Fairmont State,

whether that’s through sponsorships, internships, apprenticeships, or in other ways.

In the same way a rising tide lifts all boats, a strong wind supports the wings of all Falcons. When Fairmont State University thrives, so does West Virginia — and vice versa. Together, we can disrupt the diminishing population trend and keep our home-grown talent right here in our region.

Together, we can make North Central West Virginia and the entire state a Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home.



# FAIRMONT STATE SHARES ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL IMPACT TO LEGISLATIVE PARTNERS DURING DAY AT THE CAPITOL

*Fairmont State News | April 2025*



On February 13, Fairmont State University took center stage at the West Virginia State Capitol, demonstrating its significant contributions to the state’s economy, workforce, and communities. Students, faculty, and staff engaged with lawmakers, shared innovative programs, and underscored how Fairmont State is making North Central West Virginia a Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home.

“Our presence at the Capitol is not just about showcasing our programs—it’s about reaffirming our commitment to the future of West Virginia,” said Fairmont State University President Mike Davis. “We are producing graduates who will drive economic growth, address workforce shortages, and strengthen communities across the state.”

This year’s event featured more than 30 interactive exhibits, giving legislators a firsthand look at Fairmont State’s transformational impact. Attendees experienced state-of-the-art educational tools, including flight and nursing simulators, while nationally recognized programs like the Concrete Canoe Team and Acrobatics & Tumbling Team highlighted the university’s excellence in engineering and athletics.

Fairmont State’s initiatives directly support key priorities outlined by Governor Patrick Morrisey, including workforce development, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education, civic engagement, and economic growth.

- **Fueling Economic Growth:** As a major economic engine for West Virginia, Fairmont State generated \$86 million in economic impact and supported approximately 800 jobs in Fiscal Year 2024.
- **Advancing Workforce Development:** Nearly 90% of Fairmont State students are West Virginians, and most stay in-state post-graduation, strengthening local economies and addressing workforce shortages. The university’s flight school is training the next generation of pilots to support the state’s growing aviation sector, while its top-ranked nursing program is filling critical healthcare roles across the region.
- **Expanding STEM Education:** Fairmont State is at the forefront of STEM education, offering premier programs in engineering, cybersecurity, and information systems management. Plus, the university’s partnership with NASA’s Katherine Johnson IV & V Facility enhances hands-on learning opportunities for K-12 students through robotics competitions, drone technology, and STEM outreach.
- **Investing in West Virginia’s Youth and Communities:** Fairmont State is addressing the biggest challenges facing West Virginia head-on. Programs like Middle College provide stability and opportunity for youth who have experienced foster care, allowing them to complete high school while simultaneously earning an associate degree.
- **Promoting Civic Engagement:** Through our Civics Institute, Debate Team, and Presidential Speaker Series, Fairmont State fosters a culture of civic responsibility, encouraging students and community members to engage in meaningful discussions on policy, governance, and societal challenges.

“As West Virginia navigates an increasingly competitive economic landscape, Fairmont State University is equipping the state with the talent to succeed,” said President Mike Davis. “We are developing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and professionals who will propel West Virginia forward.”

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“ *As West Virginia navigates an increasingly competitive economic landscape, Fairmont State University is equipping the state with the talent to succeed. We are developing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and professionals who will propel West Virginia forward.* ”

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Fairmont State’s Day at the Capitol served as a powerful reminder that a strong university is essential to a thriving state. Through economic impact, workforce development, and community engagement, Fairmont State University continues to elevate North Central West Virginia and beyond.

## FAIRMONT STATE PARTNERS WITH SBA TO HELP LOCAL BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS RECOVER FROM FATHER'S DAY FLOOD

*Fairmont State News | July 2025*

Fairmont State continues to serve North Central West Virginia in the aftermath of the 2025 Father's Day Flood. The University is hosting the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Business Recovery Center (BRC) to assist residents, businesses, and nonprofits impacted by the disaster in Room 304 of the Falcon Center.

"Fairmont State University remains steadfast in our role as a community anchor—providing resources, support, and hope as West Virginians rebuild," said President Mike Davis. "From opening the emergency shelter and organizing the housing fair to now partnering with the SBA, we are proud to stand with our neighbors in times of crisis. This is what it means to be a public university—serving our communities not just through education, but through action and compassion when it matters most."

In response to a Presidential disaster declaration issued on July 22, 2025, the SBA is offering low-interest disaster loans to small businesses, private nonprofits, and residents affected by the June 14–15 storms, flooding, straight-line winds, landslides, and mudslides.

"SBA's Business Recovery Centers have consistently proven their value to business owners following a disaster," said Chris Stallings, associate administrator of the SBA's Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience. "Business owners can meet face-to-face with specialists who will guide them through the loan process and connect them with recovery resources."



*“Fairmont State continues to serve  
North Central West Virginia in the aftermath  
of the 2025 Father’s Day Flood.”*

# HELPING

# WEST VIRGINIA

# SOAR



President Davis, students, faculty, and staff of Fairmont State, business and educational partners, legislative leaders, the Board of Governors, and the people and communities who support the institution are building something special at Fairmont State University.

They're creating a place where students feel seen and heard. A place where students have a vast array of support services—financial, academic, mental, physical, emotional—that ensures they succeed. A place where students pursue degrees that lead to rewarding,

meaningful careers and lives, and, hopefully, stay in West Virginia and contribute to its prosperity.

President Davis and the University envision a place where every employee feels valued and feels that their work matters. He strives to empower every single employee to become the best versions of their professional selves.

Fairmont State University will become a place where people want to come and hang out. Whether it's attending or visiting a musical, a sporting event, a poetry reading, a Presidential

Speakers Series event, our recreation center, or an event at the Frank and Jane Gabor Folklife Center, he makes it clear that this campus also belongs to those people and communities who so faithfully support us.

And President Davis wants to support them in return. Not only by inviting them to our campus, but also through the many proactive efforts to serve those communities—community-focused programming, partnerships, and crisis recovery.

President Davis “broke ground” on an inspiring vision for the University, and that vision was further developed by hundreds of stakeholders, leading to the creation of a 10-year Strategic Vision.

Using that Strategic Vision as a guide, and unbound by limitations, President Davis and the University will continue to passionately empower people, partners, and communities to take wing and soar.

## ABOUT PRESIDENT DAVIS

Dr. Michael “Mike” Davis began his tenure as the 27th President of Fairmont State University in July of 2023.

President Davis formerly served as Chief of Staff at James Madison University. He taught courses there and at other schools. He earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Communication Studies from the University of Georgia. He also holds a Master of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication and Rhetorical Studies from Syracuse University. His academic research interests center on women in the Civil Rights Movement, debate pedagogy, presidential rhetoric, and argumentation and advocacy.

President Davis is married to Dr. Alysia Davis, a longtime faculty member at James Madison University who owns and operates a farm in Marion County. They have one daughter, Emme, who won the Golden Horseshoe after living in West Virginia for only two years.





# A GREAT PLACE

TO LEARN • TO WORK • TO CALL HOME



FAIRMONT STATE  
UNIVERSITY™