



Application Cover Page

**American Council on Education/Fidelity Investments Award for Institutional Transformation
Category 2 –Smaller Institutions (FTEs below 5K)**

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Most recent FTE enrollment: 3,101

Other statistical information relevant to your application that you wish to share:
A brief institutional profile is contained in the application narrative.

**INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION:
FROM SAINT PETER'S COLLEGE TO SAINT PETER'S UNIVERSITY – 2012 TO 2017
*Attaining a Higher Level of Student-Focused Educational Excellence***

On March 1, 2012, the State of New Jersey approved the petition from Saint Peter's College to be designated as a university, with a corresponding name change to Saint Peter's University (SPU). In the ensuing five years, SPU has undergone significant transformation in response to substantial challenges, while embracing important opportunities to achieve a higher level of educational excellence.

Institutional Profile. Established in 1872, SPU is one of 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the U.S. and pursues the mission “to educate a diverse community of learners ... to excel intellectually, lead ethically, serve compassionately and promote justice in our ever-changing urban and global environment.” Located in Jersey City, New Jersey, the campus is 10 minutes from the resources of New York City. With a total student body of 3,544 (2016 IPEDS FTE: 3,101), its undergraduate population is 70% minority (40% Hispanic and 23% Black), 53% first-generation and 62% low-income (PELL-eligible). SPU is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), a Carnegie Community Engaged institution and is recognized in the *Princeton Review's Guide to 375 Green Colleges 2017* for urban sustainability.

1. Threat or Opportunities the Institution Faced.

Six distinct yet overlapping challenge areas drove deep institutional transformation from 2012 to 2017: mission, enrollment, student demographics, student outcomes, finances and campus morale.

Mission. Despite successful attainment of university status, by most measures 2012 was an exceptionally challenging year. The campus was working on its decennial reaccreditation (successfully achieved in 2013), while grappling with its changing identity from a primarily undergraduate college to a more complex institution. And though the mission statement (revised in 2009) affirmed the commitment to educate “learners in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs,” more work was needed to effectuate university status (such as adoption of a multiple school organizational structure). The mission was further challenged as the campus struggled to effectively communicate its

core value proposition as a Catholic, Jesuit institution amidst a growing secular society and increasing skepticism around the value of higher education and cost of a private institution.

Enrollment. Not surprisingly, 2012 also brought enrollment challenges, as was the case for many colleges and universities after the 2008 recession.¹ Most alarming was the precipitous decline in freshman enrollment: entry classes that had averaged 550 prior to the financial crisis had dropped to 377 by fall 2012. Ongoing erosion of adult undergraduate enrollment caused further complications. The only growth area was graduate studies (729 students), yet still short of the strategic plan goal of 1,000.

Student Demographics. Student support needs were rising. With a historical commitment to access and affordability, SPU was experiencing a growing number of students with high financial need: from 2008 to 2012 freshman PELL recipients increased from 43% to 62%. The institution also continued to serve a high percentage of first-generation students (over 50%), as well as an increasing number of students from minority groups (from 61% in 2008 to 72% in 2012). Larger populations from underserved backgrounds required additional and enhanced support services and resources.

Student Outcomes. Commitment to student success has long been a focus at Saint Peter's and stems from the Jesuit educational philosophy of "*cura personalis*" or care for the whole person. Through targeted support services and academic initiatives, SPU had achieved stable freshman retention rates of 75%. However, this outcome was still short of the institutional strategic goal of 80%. Moreover, the six-year graduation rate, which had increased to 53% and exceeded SPU's predicted rate from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), was still below the goal of 60%. Further impeding outcomes assessment was limited career data, an increasingly important concern of students and their parents.

Finances. As a tuition-driven institution (92% of operating revenue derives from student tuition and fees), not unexpectedly, decreasing enrollment had a serious impact on finances. Moreover, in the wake of the 2008 market crash, SPU faced a serious decline in the value of its endowment and pension fund.

¹ From 2010 through 2012, freshman enrollment at more than a quarter of U.S. private four-year schools declined 10% or more: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-private-colleges-face-enrollment-decline-1383957321>

Financial stress was exacerbated by limited net revenue growth due to the rising discount rate, along with the elimination of direct institutional aid from the State of New Jersey.

Campus Morale. Financial pressures led to difficult decisions, negatively impacting campus morale. Operating budgets were reduced between 2009 and 2012. Salaries were stagnant, with 0% increases in 2011 and 2012. Faculty satisfaction dropped dramatically: in the 2013 HERI Faculty survey only 50% of faculty agreed with the statement, “the administration takes faculty concerns seriously,” and just 35% agreed that “communication between administration and faculty is adequate.”

2. Steps Taken to Consult Stakeholders, Devise a Plan, and Marshal Resources.

In response to these challenges, SPU’s leadership and campus community engaged in a mission-focused, student-centric strategic planning process that emphasized academic innovation, fiscal stability, and enrollment strategies through leadership, open communication and human resource investment.

Strategic Planning. Two strategic plans bridge the five years under analysis for institutional transformation: 2012 to 2017. The first plan, *Vision 2015 (2010-2015)* was inspired by the vision “to be *recognized* as a leading Jesuit institution in our region.” The strategic planning process engaged the entire campus community, from trustees to support staff, working in collaborative sessions such as the all-day summer planning retreat between Board members and faculty and administrative leaders. *Vision 2015*, which featured clear objectives linked to budget priorities, led to key outcomes. By 2015 SPU had achieved university designation, launched four new graduate programs, experienced 6% enrollment growth, completed the \$64.7 million capital campaign (the largest in institutional history), opened the Mac Mahon Student Center with breathtaking views of the NYC skyline, created a student-run Campus Kitchen offering meals for Jersey City residents in need, and, in collaboration with the local archdiocese, acquired a local parish as the site for the Saint Peter’s University Church. The institutionalization of sound, on-going strategic planning led to the development of the current strategic plan, *Pathways to Distinction (2015-2020)*, featuring an even bolder vision “to be *distinguished* as a leading Jesuit institution in our region,” and with the ultimate desired student outcome to “graduate students for

careers and purposeful lives.” The plan provides a blueprint for continued creativity and success, with realistic and measurable goals to advance excellence in teaching and learning, ensure effective resources, capitalize on unique attributes (including Jesuit identity and location) and invest in prominent and reciprocal community partnerships to enhance student learning opportunities. As noted in the following sections, in its first two years, *Pathways to Distinction* has led to further academic innovation, enrollment growth, student success, financial stability and a stronger campus community.

Academic Innovation. Key to prosperity was academic innovation -- developing new programs, reinvigorating existing ones and restoring some through curricular renewal. From 2012 to 2017 faculty developed exciting new programs (such as cyber security and data science), expanded scholarly activity (56% of faculty engage students in their research), adopted inclusive pedagogies (92% underwent diversity and cultural inclusive training) and introduced high impact practices (HIPs) in the classroom, as validated in the 2016 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results. Table 1 highlights statistically significant differences for SPU seniors versus those at Carnegie peer institutions.

Table 1: NSSE 2016 HIPs/Engagement Indicators	Saint Peter's University	Carnegie Peers
Conducted research with a faculty member	35%	21%
Participated in a learning community	32%	23%
Culminating senior experience	60%	46%
Positive faculty-student advising interactions	68%	54%

Enrollment Growth. In response to the serious downturn in freshman enrollment, in 2012 strategic enrollment growth plans were put into place utilizing a three-pronged approach. First, the institution committed to building and sustaining a robust enrollment management operation, with a highly professional staff working in partnership with faculty, staff, current students and alumni. Second, integrated efforts were implemented to communicate the Saint Peter's value proposition and to stand out from the competition for affordability, the quality of instruction, the student-centered approach to learning and most distinctively, our Jesuit, Catholic character. Third, a long-overdue assessment of retention data and admission criteria led to the decision to go test-optional and adopt a holistic view of student ability that emphasizes rigor of coursework, motivation, leadership experience and other

evidence of potential for success. These three strategies have contributed to five stable freshman classes (fall 2013 to 2017) averaging 600 students.

Student Success. Strategic enrollment growth plans have not been limited to new students, but also focused on retaining and graduating students. A campus culture of student success has spawned creative and collaborative academic and student life initiatives. Support programs have been expanded through successful grant funding: Title V HSI (\$2.8 million from 2010-2015), TRIO Student Support Services (\$1.1 million awarded in 2015) and HSI STEM (\$3.8 million awarded in 2016). Furthermore, aligned with strategic plan goals to prepare students for careers and improve student outcomes, SPU completely reinvented the career services operation through the opening of the Center for Career Engagement and Experiential Learning (CEEL) and the adoption of an integrated four-year academic and career advising model. After just its second year of operation, CEEL participated in the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career placement survey and found that 84% of graduates were employed or continuing their education within six months of graduation, exceeding the national average of 82% (2015). The goal for the class of 2017 is 90%. The combined effect of these efforts is an extraordinary, and sustained, 5-point gain in freshman retention to 80% in the last five years, and a remarkable 9-point increase in the four-year graduation rate, from 38% in 2012 to 47% in 2017.

Fiscal Stability. Stabilizing finances was a key priority of all leadership, particularly the president and Board of Trustees. In 2012, it was clear that the institution needed to accomplish three things nearly simultaneously: increase revenue (both tuition and non-tuition), control expenses and redeploy resources to achieve priorities. *Increase revenue.* The previously reported enrollment and retention gains have had a positive impact on finances, increasing the University operating budget 27%, from \$56 million in FY2013 to the current \$71 million in FY2018. To generate non-tuition revenue, SPU's strategic plan called for the development of a comprehensive grants initiative. A task force of faculty, deans, institutional planning and research staff worked collaboratively to dramatically expand SPU's grant production. These efforts have resulted in over \$6 million in federal funding in just two years, as

described in the previous section. Moreover, in the same time period, \$3 million in foundation grants was secured to support campus initiatives. Most amazingly, in one of the most difficult fundraising environments in recent history, SPU succeeded in raising \$64.7 million for the *Students at the Center* capital campaign, the cornerstone of the campaign to build the incredible new Mac Mahon Student Center. Capital projects were financed through creative funding partnerships, such as the 2014 award from the State of New Jersey for \$2.8 million to support the renovation of Dinneen Hall into a modern facility for the School of Business and Caulfield School of Education. *Controlling expenses.* Critically important to a stronger fiscal position was the development of more sophisticated financial tools. Board members worked with internal leadership on a variety of initiatives: a financial responsibility score projection tool for financial plans/decisions, a new budget management function to oversee operating performance, and tasking the University's long standing planning and budget committee, comprised of faculty and administrative representatives, with responsibility for preparing multi-scenario/multi-year budgets linked to the strategic plan to improve decision making and adaptability. *Redeploying resources.* Finally, in 2013 the campus undertook a somewhat laborious and painstaking strategic resource investment and allocation project. While imperfect, the process exposed areas for greater efficiency, led to some reduction/elimination of programs and freed up resources to invest in key priorities, such as the career center, CEEL. Despite modest results, the project created greater understanding and opened campus dialogue on the criticality of reallocating resources to those tasks and initiatives most essential to mission, student success and future growth and stability.

Leadership, Communication and Human Resource Investment. During this period of institutional transformation, the roles of leadership, open communication and engagement of all stakeholders cannot be underestimated. The chairman of the Board and president met regularly (at least five times annually) with faculty leadership to engage in dialogue around four priorities: enrollment, finances, compensation and communication (additionally, the president met bi-weekly with faculty leadership). The Board chair reiterated these priorities at every trustee meeting. The Board was intimately involved in supporting

faculty and staff salary enhancement plans, establishing a special subcommittee to work with faculty leaders and administrators to map a strategy to achieve/exceed benchmark averages. Through budget prioritization, over a five-year period SPU was successful in addressing structural underfunding in faculty and staff salaries, moving faculty salaries from the 3rd to 2nd AAUP quintiles and staff salaries to benchmarks in the regional market. Most significantly, these improvements were not achieved on the backs of students (annual tuition increases were held to 3%), but through strategic resource allocations. Campus morale has also improved: in the most recent (2017) HERI survey, faculty satisfaction with communication by the administration increased from 35% in 2013 to 58%.

3. Implementation of the plans, including obstacles overcome, and an assessment of the effect.

Fast forward to 2017 and SPU looks like a very different place than it did five years ago. Robust student-focused strategic planning, clarity of objectives and creative resource deployment linked to planning have led to many successful outcomes. Assessment processes are in place to evaluate student learning outcomes as well as institutional effectiveness. Moreover, strategic plan performance indicators utilize a variety of direct and indirect methods, and qualitative and quantitative assessments, to measure progress toward strategic goals. While there is still much to be accomplished, a sampling of performance metrics from *Pathways to Distinction* in Table 2 illustrates positive gains in key areas. Where possible five-year averages (noted with *) are provided to show where gains have been sustained.

Table 2: Strategic Plan Performance Indicators	2012	2017	Gain
Total Enrollment*	3055	3399	11%
Freshmen Enrollment*	470	605	29%
Freshman Retention*	74%	80%	6 points
4-Year Graduation Rate (<i>current rate</i>)	38%	47%	9 points
Faculty Salaries	AAUP 3 rd quintile	AAUP 2 nd quintile	1 quintile
Tuition Increases*	5%	3%	-2%
*represents 5-year averages: 2008 to 2012 for “2012” data and 2013 to 2017 for “2017” data			

SPU also tracks external validations to assess its strategic vision “to be *distinguished* as a leading Catholic, Jesuit institution in the region.” Recognitions and awards in the last three years noted in Table 3 indicate rising awareness of SPU’s distinctive position in the higher education market.

Table 3: External Recognitions	Year	Purpose
Carnegie Community Engaged Classification	2015	Classified for demonstrating both “Curricular Engagement” and “Outreach and Partnerships.”
Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program	2015	Ranked top 7% nationwide in the category of “value-added alumni earnings.”
MONEY® Magazine	2015	Ranked 5th nationwide in the category of “Colleges That Add the Most Value.”
President’s Honor Roll	2016	Only institution in NJ named to honor roll for community service in all 4 categories: Community, Education, Economy, Interfaith.
The Equality of Opportunity Project	2017	Ranked 8th nationwide among private colleges for “Highest Mobility Rate” for improving economic status.
<i>Excelencia in Education</i>	2017	Named finalist for advancing the educational achievement of Latino students in higher education.
Minority Access, Inc.	2017	Honored as an institution committed to diversity.
Princeton Review Green Colleges	2017	Named among most environmentally responsible colleges in the <i>Guide to 375 Green Colleges 2017</i> .

2. How action taken resolved the challenges and repositioned the institution to thrive

While it was critical for SPU to resolve the challenges presented over the last five years, the long-term effect of this transformation is two-fold: first, adoption of clear goals through effective student-centered institutional planning, implementation and assessment processes; and second, development of a stronger institutional culture that positions SPU to prosper and respond effectively to future challenges. And future challenges (and opportunities) are already evident: enhancement of transfer student programs and partnerships with community colleges, internationalization of the curriculum and expansion of global learning experiences, diversification of the faculty and staff to be more representative of students, and addressing ongoing underfunding in capital and technology budgets. Among the successful strategies that are now institutionalized are campus-wide engagement (including Board leadership), working across traditional roles to accomplish goals, strategic allocation of resources, open communication and investment in human resources. The cultural changes are even more profound: adoption of a culture of planning to discern where the institution needs to go and mapping a strategy for getting there, squarely facing strengths and weaknesses, innovative thinking, and a willingness to embrace change and take risks. Our institutional transformation affirms that this great institution, Saint Peter’s University, with its important mission will not only endure, it will thrive.