WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
School of Design and Construction

Executive Summary

The School of Design and Construction (SDC) enters the next five years from a position of strength. Since its formation, SDC has distinguished itself through the integration of Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture, and Construction Management within a single academic unit. The original strategic plan established integration, research growth, teaching excellence, outreach, and professional engagement as foundational priorities. These remain relevant today, but the environment in which SDC operates has changed significantly. AI, digital delivery, data-informed decision-making, workforce pressures, changing student expectations, constrained resources, environmental issues (climate change, decarbonization, biodiversity loss, and environmental performance), and evolving industry needs require a more focused and adaptive strategic framework. As part of a land-grant university, we connect disciplinary expertise with public needs to enhance human and ecological well-being while contributing to the economy of the State.

Rather than tracking dozens of tactical metrics, as would be the case with a traditional academic strategic plan, this strategic plan identifies five priorities that will guide decisions regarding curriculum, hiring, facilities, technology, budget allocation, partnerships, and fundraising. The plan is intended to be a leadership tool rather than a compliance document.

Mission

The School of Design and Construction prepares students to shape the built environment through integrated, innovative, and professionally grounded education and research in Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture, and Construction Management.

Vision

The School of Design and Construction will be a leader for integrated built-environment education and research distinguished by interdisciplinary collaboration, applied scholarship, and meaningful partnerships with industry and communities.

The School of Design and Construction will be known for strong individual programs and for what becomes possible when design and construction disciplines work together. We understand design and construction are acts of shaping relationships among people, places, and the built environment, and it is this shared understanding that makes genuine collaboration possible.

We will equip students to apply human creativity, professional judgment, and interdisciplinary collaboration in the thoughtful use of emerging technologies to address society's most pressing built-environment challenges.

Our graduates will be critical thinkers, adaptable, technologically capable, ethically grounded, professionally ready, and equipped to lead.

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Core Values

Student-Centered Learning: We place student success and educational excellence at the center of every decision.
Collaboration: We believe the most meaningful solutions emerge from interdisciplinary partnerships.
Innovation: We embrace new ideas, technologies, and approaches to improve the built environment.
Integrity: We conduct our work with transparency, accountability, and professionalism.
Engagement: We link knowledge and practice through meaningful partnerships with industry and communities.
Stewardship: We invest school and program resources wisely to ensure long-term sustainability and impact.

Strategic Priority 1: Transformative Student Success & Teaching Excellence

Goal: Provide exceptional educational experiences that prepare students for successful careers and lifelong learning.

Key Initiatives:

1. Enhance Student Success

- Strengthen mentoring systems – peer-to-peer and/or industry and alumni.
- Expand support for first-year and transfer students.
- Advance critical thinking skills for adapting to evolving industry and societal needs.

2. Modernize Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Ensure all graduates participate in experiential and project-based learning.
- Strengthen industry-connected and community-engaged coursework.
- Increase integration among SDC disciplines.
- Ensure graduates possess technical, professional, and communication skills that foster mutual respect, accountability, and constructive engagement.

3. Advance Teaching Excellence

- Encourage faculty to participate in WSU or external teaching innovation workshops.
- Support peer mentoring and instructional development.
- Recognize exceptional teaching and student mentorship.

Indicators of Success:

- Strong retention and graduation outcomes. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- High employer and alumni satisfaction. [requires employer/alumni survey for current metrics]
- Increased participation in internships, competitions, workshops, and experiential learning. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]

Strategic Priority 2: Interdisciplinary Built Environment Leadership
Goal: Be the leading model for integrated design and construction education in the Pacific Northwest.

Key Initiatives:

1. Bolster and Promote Shared Educational Experiences
Build on existing opportunities and create new experiences that bring students across Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture, and Construction Management together to learn and collaborate.

2. Expand Integrated Studios, Projects, and Competition Participation
Increase opportunities for interdisciplinary problem-solving around:

- Housing
- Community development
- Sustainability (climate, decarbonization, biodiversity, resilience, etc.)
- Infrastructure
- Construction (design build, commercial, mechanical, electrical, heavy civil, etc.)

3. Strengthen SDC Identity
Promote a stronger communication/media presence to showcase outcomes to industry and/or alumni while also encouraging a shared culture through:

- Exhibitions and/or lectures
- Student organizations
- Industry events (networking, workshops, etc.)
- Competition teams

Indicators of Success:

- Increased interdisciplinary coursework. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Growth in collaborative projects. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Positive employer feedback regarding collaboration readiness. [requires employer survey for current metrics]

Strategic Priority 3: AI, Digital Innovation & Future Practice

Goal: Prepare students and faculty to critically evaluate, thoughtfully apply, and lead technological innovation in design and construction, grounded in disciplinary expertise, human creativity, and professional judgment via support and/or input from our industry partners.

Recent industry discussions identify technology (AI and more) as a significant driver of innovation in design generation, planning, scheduling, quality management, visualization, project delivery, and workforce productivity. SDC already possesses strengths in digital technology, BIM, fabrication, and virtual environments; these capabilities provide a strong foundation for future growth.

Key Initiatives:

1. Create an SDC AI & Digital Practice Framework
Define knowledge, awareness, and/or competencies expected of every graduate.
Topics include:

- Responsible and ethical use (classes and/or research)
- BIM & Digital Twins
- Data Analytics
- Automation & Robotics
- Visualization & Computational Design

2. Integrate AI Across Programs
Embed AI appropriately into:

- Design studios
- Estimating & Scheduling
- Construction management
- Research methods
- Visual communication

3. Faculty Development
Provide workshops and resources for:

- AI in teaching
- AI in research
- Responsible and ethical use

Indicators of Success:

- AI competencies embedded in all programs. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Faculty participation in AI professional development. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Industry recognition of graduates' digital capabilities. [requires employer survey for current metrics]

Strategic Priority 4: Research, Creative Activity & Industry Impact

Goal: Advance collaborative research and creative activity that build on SDC's disciplinary strengths, generate new knowledge, inform design and construction practice, and enrich communities.

Research Platform A: Sustainable & High-Performance Built Environments

Focus Areas:

- Energy (including power/utilities infrastructure)
- Carbon reduction
- Resiliency
- Biodiversity & ecological performance
- Building performance
- Human health

Research Platform B: AI, Digital Delivery & Construction Innovation

Focus Areas:

- AI applications
- Smart construction
- BIM & Digital twins
- Automation & Robotics
- Project delivery innovation

Research Platform C: People, Place, & Culture

Focus Areas:

- Rural and/or urban communities
- Housing
- Landscape systems
- Community engagement
- Applied design research
- Psychological safety (mental health & wellbeing)
- Built environment histories
- Cultural landscapes

Key Initiatives:

- Support interdisciplinary proposal development.
- Develop research and creative partnerships with industry, communities, and public agencies.
- Increase undergraduate and graduate research engagement.
- Expand visibility of faculty scholarship and creative work.

Indicators of Success:

- Growth in sponsored research. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Increased interdisciplinary collaboration. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Expanded recognition of faculty and student achievements including, but not limited to, our local and regional community. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]
- Evidence of work informing professional practice, community decisions, design outcomes, or public understanding. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]

Strategic Priority 5: People, Resources & Organizational Sustainability

Goal:
Build the organizational capacity required to sustain, grow, and excel in the current higher-ed environment that is centered around a culture of respect, accountability, and constructive engagement necessary in a professional environment.

Key Initiatives:

People
- Faculty and staff retention.
- Leadership development.
- Faculty mentoring.

Facilities
- Strategic space planning.
- Enhanced laboratory and studio environments.
- Technology upgrades supporting AI and digital practice.

Operations
- Simplify administrative processes.
- Enhance communication and transparency.
- Increase operational efficiency via AI training and/or tools.

Partnerships
- Strengthen advisory board engagement.
- Expand donor support.
- Increase industry collaboration.

Indicators of Success:
- Improved organizational effectiveness. [requires faculty survey for current metrics]
- Strong employee engagement. [requires benchmarking & employee survey for current metrics]
- Growth in philanthropic and industry investment. [requires benchmarking for current metrics]

Strategic Dashboard

Strategic Priority	2031 Success Statement
Student Success & Teaching Excellence	Graduates are highly sought after, and student success outcomes remain strong
Interdisciplinary Leadership	SDC is recognized as a national model for integrated education
AI & Future Practice	AI and digital skills are embedded throughout the curriculum
Research & Industry Impact	Research visibility, funding, and external impact continue to grow
Organizational Sustainability	Faculty, staff, facilities, and resources are positioned for long-term success

Annual Action Plan

Academic Year 2026 - 2027

Priority 1: Student Success & Teaching Excellence

Action	Lead	Timeline
Conduct curriculum review of all programs relative to future workforce needs	Program Heads	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Establish Teaching Excellence Working Group (committee)	Director	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Develop student success dashboard	Administration	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Expand industry participation in courses and reviews	Faculty	Ongoing
Develop a mentoring framework for first-year students	Faculty/Staff	Spring 2027

Priority 2: Interdisciplinary Built Environment Leadership

Action	Lead	Timeline
Inventory existing interdisciplinary activities	Director & Program Heads	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Identify one new interdisciplinary learning experience	Faculty Team	Spring 2027
Expand shared SDC lecture series	Faculty Committee	Ongoing

Priority 3: AI, Digital Innovation & Future Practice

Action	Lead	Timeline
Form an AI Task Force representing all disciplines	Director	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Develop SDC AI Guiding Principles	AI Task Force	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Inventory current AI and digital technology use in courses	Program Heads	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Pilot AI-related assignments in at least one course per program	Faculty	Spring 2027
Deliver faculty AI workshop series	Internal Experts & External Speakers	Spring 2027

Priority 4: Research, Creative Activity & Industry Impact

Action	Lead	Timeline
Finalize three strategic research platforms	Faculty Research Committee	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Create annual research impact report	Associate Director	Spring 2027
Identify interdisciplinary proposal teams	Faculty	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027
Host one industry-research networking event	Director & Advisory Board	Spring 2027
Increase student participation in research dissemination	Faculty	Ongoing

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Priority 5: People, Resources & Organizational Sustainability

Action	Lead	Timeline
Complete facilities and space needs assessment	Director	Fall 2026
Review staffing and workload priorities	Director & Admin Manager	Fall 2026
Develop donor case statements tied to strategic priorities	Director, Program Heads, & Development Team	Spring 2027
Improve internal communication processes	VCEA & SDC Comms, Director & LT	Ongoing
Establish annual strategic plan review process	Director	Summer 2027
Establish system for collecting faculty/staff “wins” & accomplishments + system to promote	Director, Admin Manager, & LT	Summer 2027

Annual Strategic Plan Review Process

Each summer:

1. Review progress on the five strategic priorities.
2. Update the annual action plan.
3. Identify emerging opportunities and risks.
4. Align budget requests with strategic priorities.
5. Report results to faculty, advisory boards, college leadership, and stakeholders.

The strategic plan remains stable through 2031, while the annual action plan evolves each year to reflect changing opportunities, resources, and challenges. This approach preserves focus while maintaining flexibility – something the original plan's extensive metrics framework could not easily provide.