

THE 21ST-CENTURY VISION

Educating Christian Leaders for the World



ABILENE
CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

The 21st century demands a higher level of leadership preparation for ACU graduates.

We live in a global, interconnected world that is increasingly urban and diverse. Colleges and universities are no longer confined to cities, regions or states; virtual universities abound. Today's college students learn best when their professors work side-by-side with them and engage them in learning through research, internships, study abroad, service learning, team projects, and learning communities. While lecturing remains important in the classroom, experiential learning, team projects and high-tech information gathering are critical elements of learning for today's students. Taking advantage of online delivery and alternative class-time structures will become more important as well.

University graduates are unlikely to retain the same job or even the same career for more than a few years. For that reason, ACU graduates must learn how to learn, becoming critical thinkers who understand how to handle rapid change in their lives and their professional fields of study.

The broad culture is predominantly postmodern – a culture in which rationality and truth can be seen as problematic. The Western world is becoming post-Christian, as well.

The center of Christianity has shifted from the United States to Africa and South America. Because of the post-Christian direction in which our culture is moving and the secularization of so many formerly Christian universities, it is especially important that ACU remain a Christ-centered university that has “quality with soul.” We are deeply committed to remain so. We also are deeply committed to ACU's rich and historic affiliation with Churches of Christ.

Despite the challenges facing Christian higher education in the next decade, ACU will engage the minds and hearts of students in such a way that they will be Christian leaders after they graduate. Students must be prepared to address the inevitable secularization occurring across the globe. They must be prepared as missional leaders who will live out their Christian beliefs in a world fraught with scandals, corporate ethical failures, and challenging moral dilemmas.

ACU attracts students who are highly involved – in their churches, in their communities, and with their families – and these students tend to be highly involved on campus as well. We want to attract more students at the undergraduate and graduate level who desire to engage in the world as leaders, as volunteers and as thinkers who can help solve problems and make a positive difference.

*“The word *missional* refers to a philosophy of ministry: that followers of Christ are counter-cultural, on a mission to change the culture.”*

ACU'S 21ST-CENTURY VISION

Educating Christian Leaders for the World

There is a growing need for a Christian university focused with laser intensity on challenging academics and leadership preparation for talented students who desire to become “salt and light” in the world. Abilene Christian University will fill that need in the coming decade.

The university will move into a distinctive niche among quality higher education institutions where ACU's faith foundation will become rare and greatly valued. *Clearly stated, by 2020, ACU will become the premier university for the education of Christ-centered, global leaders.*

1. ACU will produce leaders who think critically, globally and missionally. We believe ACU is in a unique position to educate the next generation of Christian leaders – individuals who understand that leadership is service, as modeled by Jesus. ACU will become increasingly attractive to a broad spectrum of talented Christian students from across the nation and around the world who believe faith is about personal commitment as well as community. A strong liberal arts core curriculum will ensure these future leaders learn how to learn, and leadership opportunities will be woven into the student experience. We believe all students have leadership potential – potential to use their God-given strengths and talents to their fullest in His service.

2. ACU will build distinctive and innovative programs. To attract more Christian scholars among the student body and faculty, ACU will significantly strengthen our most distinctive programs and develop new, innovative programs in the coming decade. Partnerships with corporate America and the nonprofit sector will provide uncharacteristic opportunities for student research and hands-on learning. ACU will invest in a fully-developed Honors College and create highly-attractive academic programs that set the university apart.

3. ACU will deliver a unique, Christ-centered experience that draws students into community. For residential students, ACU's culture and physical environment will be shaped to encourage spontaneous, deep discussions with fellow students, faculty and staff about a wide variety of topics. Discussing great books and big ideas will become as common as playing intramural sports or volunteering in the community. The ability to engage in meaningful relationships and work in teams will become characteristic of ACU graduates. For our non-residential students, innovative technologies will be used to develop those same meaningful relationships and team-building skills.

4. ACU will expand its Christian influence and educational reach nationally and internationally. ACU will emerge as a thought leader among those interested in Christianity and culture. Our faculty will engage in research and scholarly activities that not only promote their expertise, but also serve as a resource to mainstream Christian constituencies. Students, faculty and staff will do more than talk about community and global issues – they will be strongly encouraged to tackle them head-on, with passion. At least half our undergraduate students will study abroad. Mentors will help ACU's highly involved students find ways to balance all aspects of their purposeful lives.

The type of graduate and undergraduate students drawn to the ACU experience will be learners, Christ-followers, friend-makers, and world-changers. These leaders will learn to apply their Christian faith to their field of study, and they will engage the world as critical thinkers, creative problem-solvers, global citizens and volunteers – alongside faculty, staff and alumni.

We believe people around the globe will benefit from a distinctive ACU education. Therefore, we will enthusiastically pursue avenues to take the university to the world – and to bring the world to ACU.

Abilene Christian will educate leaders who believe God calls us to *love* with all our hearts, *lead* with all our minds, and *serve* with all our strength.

Produce leaders who think critically, globally and missionally.

We are called as a Christian university to prepare ACU graduates to be “salt and light” in this world. We must prepare them to be exceptionally competent in their fields of study, think critically, handle rapid change, work well in teams, become globally aware, and live humbly and with integrity.

We believe all students have leadership potential – potential to use their God-given strengths and talents to their fullest in His service. All students will face opportunities to lead and serve in their careers, communities, homes and churches.

- ACU students will learn to **think critically** as they analyze and solve problems; organize and manage

projects; learn to ask questions – not just accept answers; and write and speak well.

- Students will learn to **think globally** as we help them understand their own culture and other cultures in the context of their academic disciplines and in light of biblical teaching. Residential undergraduates will participate in transforming, cross-cultural experiences, travel and study abroad, learn a second language, and experience the diversity of our campus. Our non-residential students, who may live anywhere around the globe, will share their culture through electronic means. We will bring the world to ACU and take ACU to the world.
- We will instill in all students a sense of their crucial role in God’s important work in the world, teaching them to **think missionally**. This means our graduates will answer the call to live counter-culturally as Christian doctors and teachers, writers and accountants, spouses and parents, judges and journalists.

Build distinctive and innovative programs.

As one of the nation’s largest Christian universities, ACU is preparing the next generation of Christian leaders, and this responsibility requires us to be more innovative and distinctive than ever before. For decades, ACU graduates have competed successfully for top jobs and acceptance into medical school, law school, and the best graduate programs in their fields of study. While recognizing the continuing success of our

alumni, we know that to remain the same is to rapidly fall behind.

- We will **make academic programs more relevant** in addressing 21st-century challenges and the demands of graduate programs and employers. ACU will maintain a strong, relevant liberal arts core for its undergraduates, while continually assessing its academic programs to meet the learning needs of today’s students.
- We will **build upon areas of current academic strength and develop new areas of strength**

“The clash of competing ideas is an important catalyst ... in students’ development of independent critical judgment.”



ACU's Body & Soul Program enriches the experiences of students preparing for careers in a health profession. They enjoy acceptance rates into medical and dental schools at a rate double the national average.

and distinctiveness. In a few key areas, we will create programs so distinctive and of such high quality that students will be drawn here from across the country and around the world.

- In the next decade, we will **stimulate and reward innovation** in academic and operational areas of the university.
- The desired result is not merely to have high-quality programs that attract top students, but to **produce confident, Christian leaders in certain professional fields.** In programs in which we choose to become nationally distinctive, our peers, corporate partners, media, churches and others in higher education will look to ACU and to our alumni for leadership and solutions.

- We will inspire faculty, staff and students to **become more actively and thoughtfully engaged in issues** important in the world and in our region. ACU will become a significant voice in the broader Christian community and in higher education circles.

Transforming our programs and engaging our campus in today's critical issues will make ACU a shining light that attracts top students, faculty and staff and places the university in a position to impact the nation and the world in positive ways for Christ.

3

Deliver a unique, Christ-centered experience that draws students into community.

Much of a residential student's experience at ACU occurs, not in isolation in a residence hall room, but in places of community – watching a basketball game in Moody, singing in Chapel, attending a campus movie, serving ACU's neighbors, or drinking Starbucks while creating a multi-media project in the Learning Commons. Students today gather in places where they can exercise; they gather where they can eat, talk and study in a high-tech, wireless setting; and they gather where they can praise, play games, plan, pray, listen to music or speakers, and review for their next test.

What occurs on campus has a profound impact on students' learning – and on their future lives. Their experiences are transformational. We believe in the coming decade, ACU must

increase opportunities for leadership growth, develop exceptional facilities that enhance students' holistic development, and stretch students' minds through challenging speakers, dialogue and activities.

- We will **build a cutting-edge student recreational center** that encourages student wellness and attracts new students to ACU.
- To strengthen students' learning experience, we will **enhance or build facilities related to the sciences, technology and social sciences as well as provide permanent facilities for Study Abroad programs.**
- We will **renovate our student center and related dining services** to create places students can relax, eat, drink coffee, study, meet with other students, talk, read and debate great ideas and world issues. Our Campus Center will become central to student life and, combined with the Learning Commons, will enhance the intellectual, social and spiritual life on campus.

“If we hope to reach the world for Jesus Christ, we will have to be willing to engage the world on its turf.”



ACU's Center for Christian Service and Leadership helps match students with opportunities to help people in the community and around the globe.

- We will **create additional community spaces across the campus** that allow students with similar interests to work, play, plan and study.
- We will **invite nationally renowned speakers** who will challenge students' thinking, inspire them to serve in meaningful ways, and serve as Christian role models for students' professional careers.
- **For our non-residential students, we will employ the latest in technological innovations** so they, too, can participate in transformational community experiences.

The ACU experience – whether on the Abilene campus, in Study Abroad programs, at education centers, or through an ACU virtual community – helps students develop their intellect, grow closer to God, prepare for meaningful careers, and address global challenges with a Christian worldview. As we begin our second century, we will continually seek ways to draw students into community, prepare them as leaders – and send them out to make a positive difference in the world.

4

Expand ACU's Christian influence and educational reach nationally and internationally.

While ACU will continue to strengthen its traditional, on-campus programs, we will focus attention and resources on educating the leaders of tomorrow around the globe. ACU has a bold plan to send its distinctive educational experience across the nation and to the world.

The university will become a national thought leader in the area of Christianity and culture. ACU does not aspire to be an ivory-tower institution, but wants to become a significant voice in the broad Christian mainstream and in national higher education circles. The people who comprise this university will be called to actively and thoughtfully engage in issues important in our local community and in the world beyond Abilene, Texas.

Our vision is to develop academic programs that send students out into the world to live their

learning through research, fellowships, service projects, internships, study abroad and community partnerships. *In particular niches, ACU will become the leading Christian university taking faith-based, quality education to the world.*

We expect faculty in selected areas to become thought-leaders regionally and nationally – through professional conferences and journals and in the popular press. They will model engagement for our students, and serve as mentors and role models as they relate their Christian values directly to their fields of study.

- Our faculty will engage in research activities that not only promote their expertise, but also **serve as a resource to Christian constituencies.**
- Students, faculty and staff will do more than talk about community and global issues – they will be strongly encouraged to **tackle them head-on, with passion.**

“The world around us is inescapably international.”

– Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education.*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 10



Additional community spaces will be created around campus to give students even more places to gather and interact.

- At least half our residential undergraduate students will **study abroad**.
- Mentors will help ACU's highly involved students **balance all aspects of their purposeful lives**.
- Through ACU WorldWide, we will offer learning opportunities online, off-site and through hybrid programs. We will **focus on high-quality, mission-driven programs that have strong demand**.
- ACU will create or enhance distance education programs that have **niche appeal in new markets**.
- We also will **expand our learning programs for alumni** who live in every state and more than 100 nations, strengthening connections among alumni and with the university.
- We will focus on opportunities to share the expertise of ACU faculty with individuals living in **countries that have limited access to Christian higher education**.
- ACU will advance post-secondary education in selected developing nations. We will **expand selected undergraduate and graduate programs in urban centers and developing nations**.

Conclusion

As ACU begins its second century, we believe the university is in a unique position to educate the next generation of Christ-centered leaders – individuals who understand that leadership is service, as modeled by Jesus.

We desire for our alumni to excel in meaningful careers, live their faith, nurture strong families, serve their communities, and engage in world issues.

To best prepare our graduates for the 21st century, we must provide a distinctive, motivating educational experience that prepares students to be “salt and light” in the world – and we must strengthen our powerful network of ACU alumni to continue encouraging one another in their good works.

Our vision is to send intelligent, inspired, involved Christian alumni into the world to make a positive impact. We will do so by focusing on these areas:

- **Produce leaders who think critically, globally and missionally.**
- **Build distinctive and innovative programs.**
- **Deliver a unique, Christ-centered experience that draws students into community.**
- **Expand ACU's Christian influence and educational reach nationally and internationally.**

As always, we will keep our eyes on Christ, ensuring our academic endeavors are enriched by Christian perspectives as we work together to transform our students into the likeness of Jesus. That is our ultimate vision for ACU and for our graduates.

“Your attitude should be the same as Christ: Who being [in the form of] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ...”

ACU's Study Abroad program develops students' independence, gives them a Christian worldview and teaches them leadership skills to enrich their lives and bless others.

