Strategic Plan

2026-2031

Warren Community College

Institutional Overview

Warren County Community College ("Warren" or "the College") is a small community college located in western New Jersey. Warren County is adjacent to the Delaware River (the border between New Jersey and Pennsylvania) and is part of the Skylands region of the state. The College serves just over 900 students per semester through its undergraduate program (UG) and just under 2,200 students annually through its high school dual enrollment (DU) program. Warren graduates approximately 190 students annually, primarily in the AA and AS transfer programs.

College History

Warren is the youngest community college in New Jersey. The College's predecessor, the Warren County Community College Commission ("Commission"), was founded in July 1981 by the former New Jersey State Board of Higher Education (BHE) and the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders (now called "County Commissioners"). In its earliest years, the Commission operated as a "College without Walls," holding classes in local high schools and sponsoring (i.e., paying for) Warren County residents to matriculate at neighboring community colleges.

In 1987, the BHE conferred degree-granting authority upon the Commission. Classes began in a temporary educational facility leased by the Commission. Warren became licensed as the 19th and final community college in New Jersey by the BHE in 1991. Warren was initially accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education ("MSCHE" or "Middle States") in 1992. In 1996, the College moved into its permanent campus site in Washington, NJ, which was renovated/expanded in 2006, 2012 and 2018. In July 2011, Warren acquired a renovated education center in Phillipsburg, NJ (the Phillipsburg Education Center or PEC), approximately nine miles from the main campus. This site houses the college's continuing education programs, the UAS/Robotics offerings, and the Medical Assisting program. The NJ Department of Labor's One-Stop office is housed in this building along with a small business incubator.

Mission and Vision

The Mission and Vision of the College were revised by the Board of Trustees in April 2025.

The **Mission of Warren** is to educate and develop all students to achieve their academic and career goals to provide value for themselves and for the region's economic, social, and community needs.

The **College's Vision** is that Warren will become a more adaptive and relevant collegiate institution that implements region wide learning opportunities to create an educated, skilled and community centric population that works to improve the quality of life in the Northwest New Jersey region.

Situational Analysis

The landscape of higher education in 2026 presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities for community colleges across New Jersey and the United States. Shifts in demographics, declining enrollment, reductions in public funding, and the disruptive influence of artificial intelligence (AI) are converging to reshape the academic, fiscal, and operational environment. In response to these dynamic pressures, Warren should enact transformative strategies to remain viable, relevant, and aligned with the evolving educational and workforce needs of society.

Enrollment Declines and Demographic Challenges

Community colleges face a critical enrollment decline due to multiple demographic and societal shifts. The national "enrollment cliff" is the result of lower birth rates from the early 2000s, changing student preferences, and growing skepticism about the return on investment of higher education (Craig, 2024). In New Jersey, these factors are compounded by intense competition from community colleges, online institutions, and private training providers. The rise of AI-powered self-learning platforms and accelerated credentials is further eroding traditional student markets (Krause, Panchal, & Ubhe, 2024). To counter this decline, community colleges must expand adult reengagement initiatives and flexible learning modalities that integrate technology to personalize education.

Shrinking Public Funding and Fiscal Accountability

Simultaneously, state funding for community colleges continues to decline. New Jersey, which has historically underfunded its community colleges compared to national averages, now faces additional reductions due to budgetary realignments and competing policy priorities (New Jersey Monitor, 2025). Governor Murphy's FY2026 budget proposal included a significant reduction to higher education allocations, intensifying the financial strain on institutions (McCarter & English, 2025). In response, the state has emphasized the importance of fiscal accountability and transparency. Colleges are thus compelled to innovate operationally by implementing AI-driven resource management, prioritizing data analytics, and diversifying revenue streams.

The Need for External and Private Funding

Given the diminishing reliability of state and federal appropriations, community colleges must develop new funding models that prioritize private philanthropy, corporate partnerships, and competitive grants. Building a culture of philanthropy requires not only an expanded institutional advancement function but also a clear articulation of mission impact. Strategic alignment between donor priorities and institutional objectives. Partnerships with local industries can yield both revenue and relevance, ensuring that programs remain responsive to labor market needs. Institutions that embrace entrepreneurial strategies will be best positioned to thrive in a resource-constrained future (Deloitte, 2025).

The Emergence of Artificial Intelligence and Its Transformative Impact

Artificial intelligence represents both a challenge and an opportunity for community colleges. AI is transforming how students learn, how faculty teach, and how institutions operate. Tools like adaptive learning systems, generative AI tutors, and predictive analytics are revolutionizing student support and instructional design (Rutgers School of Communication and Information, 2024). However, the same technologies are rendering many traditional academic disciplines and career pathways obsolete. As AI continues to replace mid-level cognitive work, majors in administrative support, routine accounting, and certain design fields face steep declines in employability (Niebuhr, 2025). The strategic response must involve reimagining the curriculum to emphasize AI literacy, ethical reasoning, human creativity, and interdisciplinary problem-solving.

Enhancing Academic Offerings in an AI-Driven World

To remain competitive, community colleges should transform their academic offerings. This transformation includes embedding digital and AI competencies across all programs while expanding into emerging disciplines such as data analytics, cybersecurity, drone security, sustainable energy, precision agriculture, robotics, and health technology. Beyond technical proficiency, colleges should cultivate critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, emphasizing the uniquely human skills that AI cannot yet replicate. Colleges should accelerate program review cycles and strengthen partnerships with employers to ensure curriculum relevance while exploring modularized credentials that can be quickly adapted to changing workforce demands.

The Call for Fiscal Sustainability in New Jersey

The State of New Jersey has signaled an increasing expectation for fiscal soundness and accountability in higher education. Legislative initiatives and oversight mechanisms emphasize measurable outcomes, efficiency, and transparency. This policy shift reflects a national movement toward institutional responsibility for demonstrating return on taxpayer investment (New Jersey Monthly, 2024). Community colleges should therefore embrace comprehensive financial planning and continuous improvement models. Leveraging AI and data analytics to guide decision-making will be essential to demonstrate value and ensure sustainability.

The Case for Dramatic Institutional Change

Taken together, these trends underscore an urgent need for dramatic change in higher education practices. Incremental adjustments will no longer suffice. Community colleges must adopt a transformative mindset—one that embraces innovation, agility, and collaboration as foundational values. Structural reforms should include reorganizing academic divisions around interdisciplinary clusters, implementing AI-assisted advising systems, and reengineering administrative workflows for efficiency. Faculty and staff should be equipped with professional development in data literacy, AI integration, and change management to thrive in this new era. Hard questions about instructional and program relevance should be asked and addressed.

Survivor colleges will cultivate a future-oriented culture that balances tradition with transformation. This includes a shift from reactive to predictive planning, from enrollment management to lifelong learning ecosystems, and from isolated campus operations to regional hubs of innovation. The successful community college of 2026 and beyond will be one that views itself not merely as an educational institution, but as a dynamic agent of community and workforce transformation.

Conclusion

In 2026, community colleges in New Jersey stand at a crossroads, and Warren is no exception. Declining enrollments, reduced state funding, and rapid technological disruption demand decisive, innovative, and courageous action. The integration of artificial intelligence into both society and institutional practice represents a defining moment in higher education history. To remain relevant, community colleges will need to embrace transformation in academics, operations, and culture. The imperative is clear: survival depends not on preservation, but on reinvention.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Austin
President

AACC President Academy Chair, 2015-2016
AACC Board Member, 2016-2019
AACC Chair, Structured Pathways, 2018-2019

Strategic Goals

The Learning Enterprise

Our academic mission centers on delivering innovative, encompassing, and high-quality learning experiences that empower every student to achieve success in a rapidly changing world. Through dynamic teaching, robust academic programs, and continuous curriculum enhancement, Warren cultivates critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning.

1. Explore robust articulations with regional academic partners.
2. Consider new or modified program delivery/scheduling options to meet student needs and fiscal realities.
3. Enhance instructor understanding of contemporary artificial intelligence tools and create a comprehensive institutional AI policy.
4. Determine programs of the future and discontinue obsolete courses or programs that no longer meet programmatic or student needs.
5. Update general education programs to reflect changing statewide programming needs.
6. Develop apprenticeship programs with local businesses in appropriate fields

Workforce Development

Our workforce development mission is to create agile, industry-aligned programs that equip students with the skills and credentials needed for meaningful careers. By partnering with employers and community leaders, we will build responsive training pathways that support regional economic growth and innovation. We are committed to lifelong learning opportunities that empower individuals to advance, adapt, and thrive in a competitive workforce.

1. Develop relationships with internal/external stakeholders to support additional Federal/State/Local funding opportunities.
2. Increase the use of artificial intelligence to create greater internal efficiency.
3. Develop an internal workforce development program to meet the professional development needs of the Warren employee complement.
4. Examine Continuing Education offerings in light of community needs and program profitability.
5. Consider whether any programs should be added or amended to take advantage of opportunities presented through Workforce Pell grants.

Student Support

Our student support and success initiatives are dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment where every learner is empowered to achieve academic, personal, and professional goals. Through comprehensive advising, holistic support services, and equitable access to resources, we will remove barriers to persistence and completion. By prioritizing engagement, belonging, and individualized pathways, we will cultivate a campus culture centered on student achievement and lifelong success.

1. Ensure that all staff are appropriately trained to offer the highest levels of student support.
2. Expand social media utilization to address Alumni highlights, student success, engagement, and high school recruitment.
3. Consider enhancements to the student orientation process to ensure that students are sufficiently equipped to meet the expectations of higher education programs.
4. Re-examine student services staffing and processes to determine how the student application, registration and advising services can be more effectively delivered to students.

External Relations

Our commitment to external relations and private fundraising is rooted in cultivating strong partnerships that expand opportunities for students and the community. Through purposeful engagement with alumni, donors, businesses, and civic leaders, we will build a culture of collaboration and shared investment in the college's mission. By strengthening philanthropic outreach and stewardship, we will secure the resources necessary to sustain innovation, access, and long-term institutional excellence.

1. Enhance local and statewide business and industry relationships with the formation of more robust academic advising boards.
2. Enhance collaboration with community stakeholders to enhance knowledge of our public offerings and recruitment activities.
3. Expand external funding relationships with corporate and individual stakeholders, as well as the government.
4. Quadruple external fund development within three years.
5. Maintain public and private fund development by training at least 5% of the college instructors and staff to research and author grants.

Mission Support Goals

Our mission support services form the foundation of a safe, efficient, and forward-looking learning environment. Through excellence in facilities management, human resources, institutional technology, and security, we ensure that every operational system advances student success and institutional effectiveness. By investing in modernization, sustainability, and professional development, we will strengthen the infrastructure and people that power our college's mission.

1. Ensure the appropriate use of resources to ensure that sufficient resources exist to support the fiscal health of the colleges without burdening students through significant cost increases.
2. Use artificial intelligence and advanced technology resources to automate and improve safety, cybersecurity, employee training, and records retention.
3. Successfully complete the highest priority capital projects identified in the 2025 facilities renewal and replacement plan.
4. Leverage grants, other funds and cooperative arrangements with other institutions to strengthen programs, technology, and physical facility needs in an affordable manner.
5. Develop and implement a new multiyear technology plan to meet future needs and support improved services, communication, and technology with robust AI policies.

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