



THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF  
**KURDISTAN**

# STRATEGIC PLAN CLOSEOUT REPORT

2021-2026

A Review of Institutional Progress and Strategic Achievement



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From an institutional perspective, the 2021–2026 Strategic Planning Cycle represents a foundational phase of transformation for the American University of Kurdistan (AUK) as the institution advanced accreditation readiness, expanded its academic and applied learning infrastructure, strengthened governance and operational systems, invested in innovation and industry relations, and progressively embedded a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. This strategic cycle is best understood as a period of institutional construction during which AUK developed and consolidated the core systems, structures, and capacities required for long-term sustainability and reputational credibility. Many initiatives launched during this cycle were intentionally designed as multi-year institutional investments, whose full impact will continue to evolve beyond the current timeframe.

During this period, AUK has nearly doubled its enrollment, growing from 682 (spring 2021) undergraduate students to 1056 (spring 2026) undergrad students plus 23 graduate students in just five years. The number of AUK employees has increased 24.9%. In 2020, AUK offered 10 undergraduate programs and today, through the consolidation of programs, offers 8 undergraduate and one graduate program. AUK is the first institution in Kurdistan and Iraq to achieve Candidacy status with the New England Commission for Higher Education (NECHE). And in respect to the campus masterplan, the University has constructed a men's residence facility and plans for an amphitheater and additional classroom building, which will house a state-of-the-art conference center.

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

### Purpose of the close-out report

This Close-Out Report provides a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of the University's performance under the Strategic Plan 2021–2026. It evaluates the extent to which strategic goals, initiatives, and key performance indicators were achieved. It fosters institutional accountability by documenting progress, highlighting key achievements, and identifying gaps and challenges encountered during implementation. It will inform the development of the next strategic plan by providing data in which future priorities can be grounded and aligned with institutional capacity.

### Institutional context at the start of the plan

The 2021 baseline coincided with the early establishment of key institutional functions. Notably, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, founded in November 2020, which was tasked with building frameworks for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and institutional research. As such, many processes related to drafting and implementing a strategic plan were still emerging and not yet institutionalized. In parallel, AUK had only recently begun formalizing its policy development and management protocols. Academically, the University had established core programs with a focus on quality teaching and learning. Initial priorities were to expand academic offerings and enhance student success structures. Opportunities were identified for enhancing enrollment growth (mainly through the introduction of scholarships), and student services. Operationally, the University made progress in developing its IT and Campus Services infrastructure commensurate with the growth of the campus community. Externally, the University operated within a dynamic regional context, facing economic constraints and global challenges, including the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of geopolitical conflict.

It is important to recognize that when the strategic planning structure was first established, AUK was still a very young institution, having opened only in 2015 and being approximately five years old at the beginning of the planning cycle. As a result, many institutional systems, operational processes, and organizational structures were still in early stages of development. The strategic plan therefore served not only as a roadmap for growth, but also as a foundational framework for building and institutionalizing many of the University's core academic, administrative, operational, and assessment functions.

### Strategic planning framework and guiding principles

The Strategic Plan 2021–2026 was developed through an inclusive and iterative planning process, anchored in broad stakeholder engagement and continuous institutional reflection. A key milestone in this

process was AUK’s first annual strategic planning retreat held on August 18, 2021, which brought together representatives from all academic and administrative units, including students, alumni, and a representative of the Board of Trustees (BOT). The retreat provided a platform for wide-ranging discussions, enabling participants to review and debate the institution’s mission and vision and articulate both short-term and long-term aspirations for the University. These collective inputs directly informed the Eleven Institutional Strategic Goals and Action Priorities. The Strategic Plan and its revisions/updates are annually reviewed with the BOT.

The strategic planning process was designed to be ongoing, dynamic and adaptive, with annual retreats serving as checkpoints for review and refinement. At each annual retreat, completed action priorities were removed, ongoing initiatives were updated, and new actions were introduced in order to keep the Strategic Plan relevant, responsive to opportunities that may have arisen, and the needs of the campus stakeholders.

Throughout the initial retreat discussions in 2021, three core objectives consistently emerged, forming the foundation of the University’s Guiding Principles; a fourth principle was introduced during the second annual retreat, a fifth was added by the BOT in October 2022; these were revised in August 2024 to reflect evolving institutional priorities. In August 2025, stakeholders concurred that no further revisions were necessary.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES

### Guiding Principle 1:

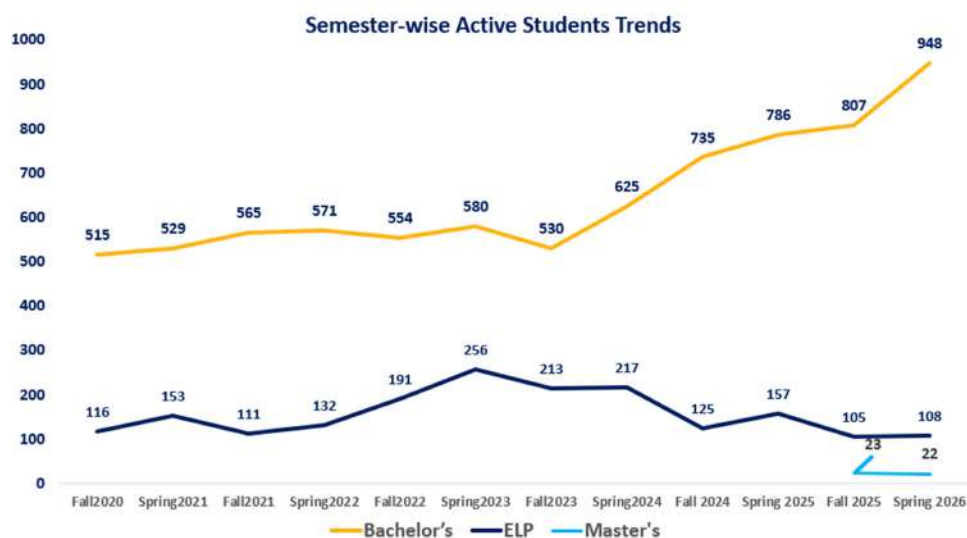
**Developing a green and sustainable campus masterplan that reflects best practices in teaching and learning, IT infrastructure, and LEED certified technologies, and serves as a model design for higher educational institutions in the region.**

- **Male Residence Hall:** Designed according to the standards for LEED certification, reflecting the University’s commitment to sustainable campus development and environmentally responsible infrastructure.
- **Solar Lab:** Funding was secured through the U.S. Department of State, with implementation scheduled for Fall 2026, supporting the University’s long-term sustainability, energy-efficiency goals, and curricular inclusion of topics on renewable and clean energies.

### Guiding Principle 2:

**Diversifying and increasing the revenue streams to ensure institutional growth and sustainability while guaranteeing that all academically qualified students have access to American-style higher education.**

- **Doubled Enrollment in Five Years:** This growth represents a major institutional achievement, which reflects improved branding and marketing and adherence to a value proposition dedicated to academic quality, student experience, and career preparedness.



- **Establishment of the Office of Advancement:** AUK diversified its revenue streams through increased donor engagement, alumni relations, and philanthropic development.
- **AUK 10th Anniversary Gala:** On December 1, 2024, AUK hosted its 10th Anniversary Gala commemorating a decade of institutional growth, educational transformation, and contribution to the Kurdistan Region and society. Beyond its symbolic importance, the Gala represented a major advancement and fundraising milestone for the University as AUK successfully secured approximately **\$6.2 million in philanthropic commitments** to support student scholarships and long-term endowment development through the **“Support a Student” Campaign**.
- **Implementation of SAP and Financial Operational Modernization:** The implementation of SAP-related systems significantly strengthened financial operational infrastructure, ensured adherence to GAAP standards, and facilitated annual audits.

### Guiding Principle 3:

**Working with industry advisory groups and stakeholders representing the public and private sectors to ensure that graduates have the knowledge and innovative and entrepreneurial skills necessary to be competitive in the regional/global marketplace.**

- **Establishment of the Master’s Program in Artificial Intelligence:** The field of the institution’s inaugural master’s program resulted from an extensive market study, which identified IT and emerging technologies as needed for the advancement of Kurdistan. The first cohort entered in August 2025.
- **Artificial Intelligence Lab:** Supporting the master’s program, as well as serving as a research hub for Duhok, the lab offers state-of-the-art hardware and software to build emerging technologies and digital innovation in artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, and computational problem-solving.
- **Impact Hub Duhok:** The first Impact Hub to be housed on a university campus, this facility serves as co-workspace and innovation center connecting students, entrepreneurs, startup businesses, industry professionals, mentors and community change-makers.
- **Nursing Skills and Simulation Lab:** Equipped with modern simulation technology, the lab allows students to engage in simulation-based clinical and patient-care scenarios within a controlled educational environment. It contributes to regional healthcare development by preparing practice-ready nursing graduates capable of addressing workforce shortages and improving patient-care quality.
- **Fabrication Laboratory:** Aligned with AUK’s commitment to entrepreneurship and workforce readiness, this lab is equipped with unique-to-Iraq technologies, which enable students to design, build, and test their innovative concepts.
- **Building Information Modeling Laboratory:** This lab strengthens the engineering and design curricula by introducing advanced digital technologies used within the international professional sector.
- **Leopard Radio:** Established in March 2024, AUK’s radio station broadcasts across the Duhok region and globally through online streaming platforms; 400 students and staff have received training in the production of recurring student-led programs and multiple live broadcasts.

### Guiding Principle 4:

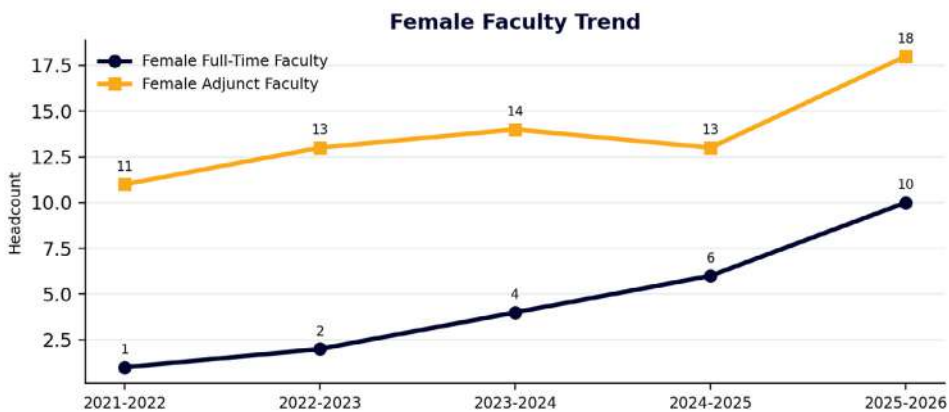
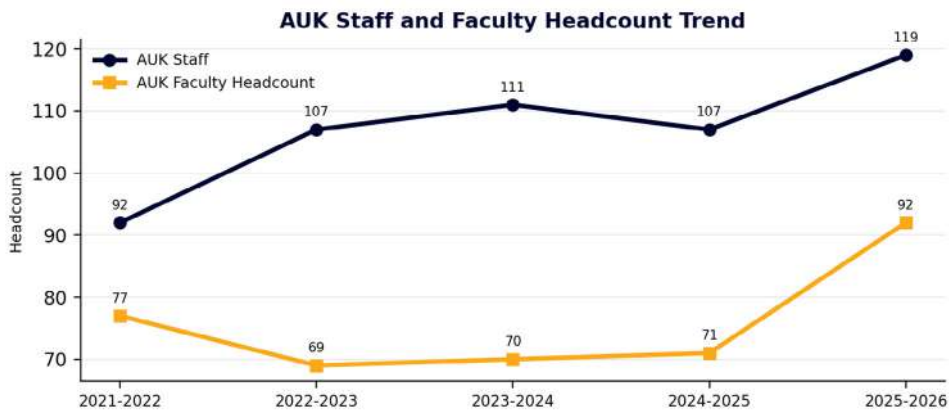
**Implementing tactics to recruit and retain the most qualified faculty and staff.**

- The University has a young and inexperienced workforce with 42.0% of employees having less than 3 years, 18.9% having 3-5 years, and 39.2% having over 5 years of service. In respect to age, 29.4% are in their 20s, 37.8% in their 30s, and 32.2% over 40. Also, consider that except for older international employees, this is the first job in an American-style work culture for most employees. Capacity-building

through coaching, mentoring, and professional development opportunities is essential to develop a strong workforce.

- The below tables indicate a consistent upward trend across all staffing categories between AY 2021–2022 and AY 2025–2026, reflecting overall institutional growth and increasing workforce capacity. AUK staff increased from 92 to 119, representing a 29.3% overall growth, while total faculty rose from 77 to 92, a 19.5% increase. The most notable change is in female faculty representation: female full-time faculty rose from 1 to 10, reflecting a 900% increase, while female adjunct faculty increased from 11 to 18 (63.6% growth,). Overall, the data suggests not only steady institutional expansion but also significant progress in improving gender diversity within the academic workforce.

### AUK Faculty and Staff Growth Table



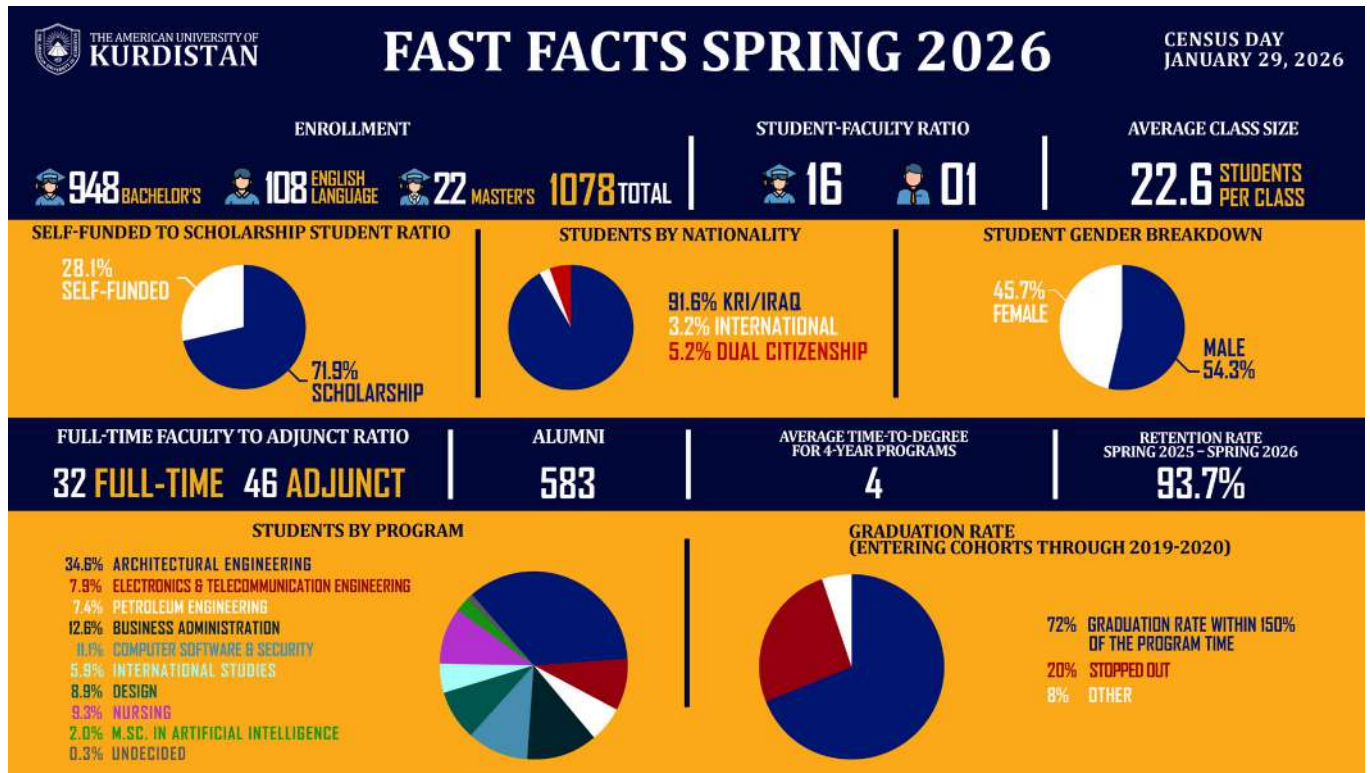
### Guiding Principle 5:

**Prioritizing institutional and program-specific accreditation efforts with the aims of ensuring that academic and administrative units uphold international best practices in professional standards and raising AUK’s profile regionally and internationally.**

- Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning:** Established in Fall 2020, this unit oversees planning, institutional and program-level assessment, data governance, and accreditation coordination, with the intent to create a culture of assessment and evidence-based planning systems.
- Institutional Accreditation:** Under the direction of OIEP, AUK has made great progress in its advancement toward accreditation with the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). In October 2024, AUK was granted NECHE **Candidate for Accreditation** status, which signifies that AUK is progressing toward U.S.-based institutional accreditation and validates the substantial efforts undertaken across all academic and administrative units to align institutional systems, governance, assessment practices, and operational processes with international higher education standards. AUK expects to submit its self-study report for initial accreditation in 2027.

The progress on these Guiding Principles demonstrates that the strategic planning cycle successfully advanced AUK toward becoming a more:

- Academically competitive institution
- Internationally aligned university
- Financially sustainable organization
- Assessment-driven institution
- Regionally recognized center for innovation and higher learning



## METHODOLOGY & APPROACH FOR THE CLOSE OUT OF STRATEGIC PLAN (2021-2026)

### Data Sources

The Strategic Plan 2021–2026 Close-Out Report was developed using multiple institutional data sources to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of progress and performance. Primary sources included Strategic Plan annual action tracking reports in the operational maps submitted by academic and administrative units and institutional data systems and internal records maintained by relevant offices.

### Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The monitoring and evaluation framework for the Strategic Plan was based on an annual action-planning and performance-review cycle. Progress was monitored through annual reporting, strategic planning retreats, unit-level updates, and ongoing coordination with responsible offices.

Each strategic goal was supported by defined action priorities that were categorized annually as:

- **Completed:** Actions fully achieved within the academic year.
- **Continuous:** Actions that demonstrated progress and continued into the following academic year.
- **Not Completed:** Actions that were paused, delayed, or not implemented due to identified constraints or changing priorities.

## Limitations and Data Considerations

As AUK's first formal strategic plan, the initial framework did not include clearly defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This limited the ability at the conclusion of the plan to quantitatively assess outcomes, consistently measure impact, and evaluate the extent of achievement against standardized benchmarks. Therefore, much of the assessment relied on qualitative progress reporting and action-status tracking. Other factors included:

- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning not established until late 2020;
- Institutional data systems and reporting processes undergoing development;
- Variance in data availability and consistency across units;
- Limited historical benchmark data for comparative analysis; and
- Institutional priorities and external conditions changing over the strategic cycle.

## Strategic Goals Performance Review

The following section presents the findings and overall outcomes of the 2021–2026 Strategic Plan implementation. Building upon the methodology outlined in the previous section, the findings are organized according to the structure of the University's Institutional Goals to provide a comprehensive assessment of progress achieved throughout the strategic planning cycle.

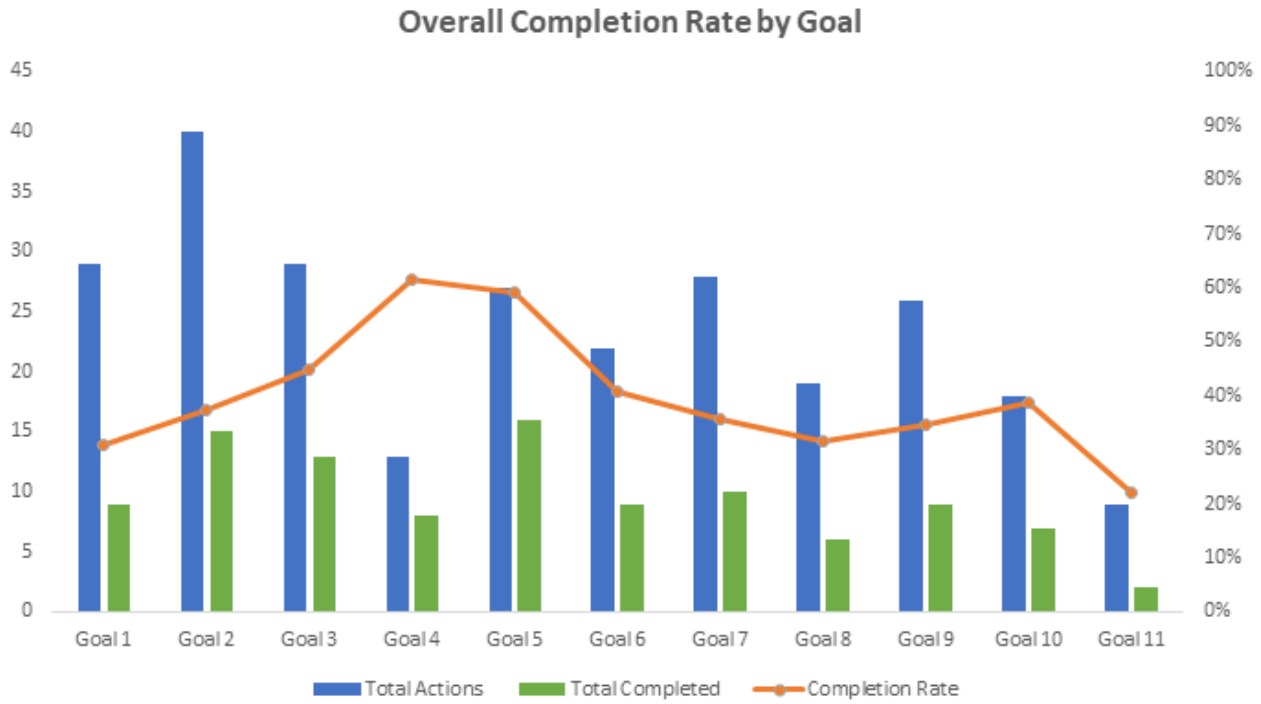
Each goal section includes an overall Assessment and performance analysis, key initiatives and continuing progress. This structure allows for a systematic evaluation of the University's progress for each goal.

### The 11 Institutional Goals are:

1. To develop a university campus that meets the needs of current and future students, faculty, and staff as well as serve as a model for higher education across Kurdistan.
2. To offer academic programs that are designed to meet market demands while exemplifying the best international standards.
3. To offer expertise and programming to the community to foster a culture of life-long learning and position AUK as a visible player in providing quality and accessible education in Iraq and beyond.
4. To recruit students who reflect the profile of those most likely to succeed at AUK and ensure that no student be denied access to an education due to the inability to pay.
5. To provide students with support structures and tools for academic and professional success.
6. To recruit and retain faculty and staff who will contribute to the mission of AUK.
7. To strengthen AUK's communications for the purpose of promoting brand identity and visibility regionally and internationally.
8. To establish and maintain high-level international standards and principles for transparency and effective control in financial operational infrastructure.
9. To promote advancement activities and fundraising to increase revenue streams and ensure resources to sustain and grow the institution.
10. To foster a culture of assessment, evaluation, and data-based decision-making meeting the expectations of institutional and program-level accreditation standards.
11. To support institutional accreditation activities in order to ensure the optimization of the process and timeline.

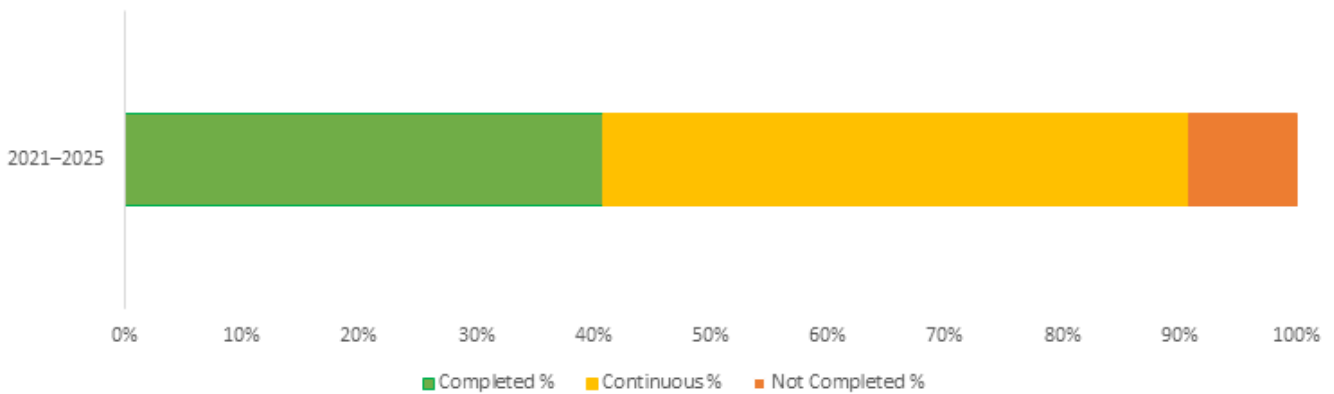
The methodology outlined in the previous section resulted in the following findings concerning the rate of completion by goal and overall annual strategic plan performance. The tables below are intended to provide an overview of institutional progress throughout the 2021–2026 strategic planning cycle by illustrating patterns of completed, continuous, and not completed initiatives across the University's strategic goals. Together, these summaries help demonstrate the pace of implementation, areas of sustained institutional focus, and the long-term developmental nature of many initiatives undertaken during the strategic cycle. Further details and contextual analysis necessary to fully interpret these findings are provided within the individual Goal Performance Review sections that follow.

## Overall Completion Rate by Goal (2021–2025)



## Overall Strategic Plan Performance by Years

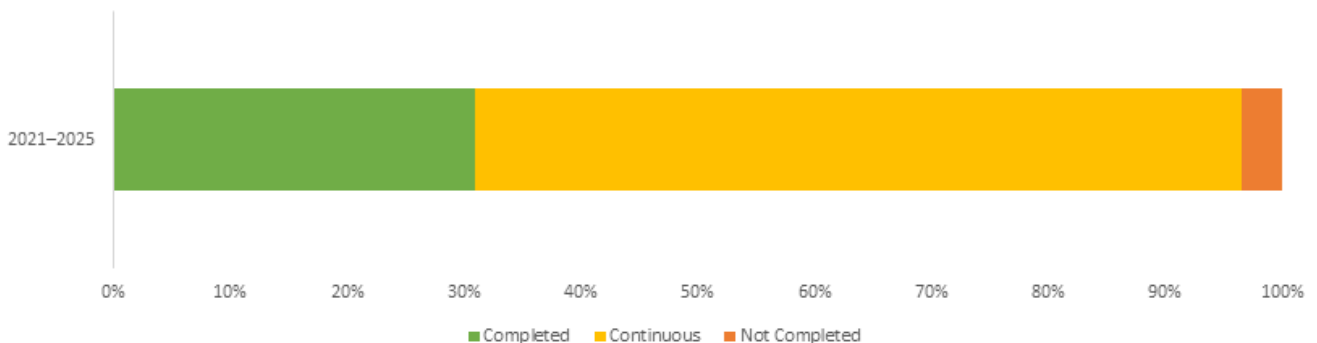
**Strategic Plan Performance**



### Goal 1:

To develop a university campus that meets the needs of current and future students, faculty, and staff as well as serve as a model for higher education across Kurdistan

**Goal 1**



### Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis:

Goal 1 commits to campus development, sustainability, infrastructure modernization, and technology enhancement. The majority of initiatives remain classified as “continuous,” reflecting the ambitious scope and long-term nature of campus development projects.

Progress reflects AUK’s transition from foundational planning activities toward implementation-focused infrastructure development and operational expansion, advancing AUK’s vision of creating a sustainable, technologically advanced, and student-centered campus environment aligned with international higher education standards.

### Key Initiatives

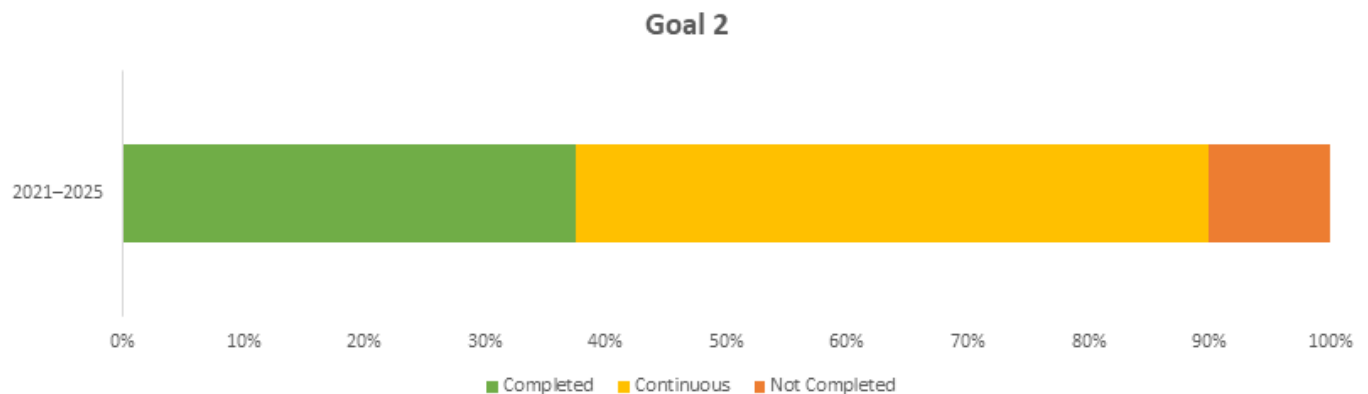
- Activation and expansion of the ERP system across institutional unit
- Improvements to IT infrastructure, including the strengthening of institutional cybersecurity infrastructure through firewall and data protection enhancements
- Establishment of a campus call center system
- Development and enhancement of specialized academic and research laboratories:
  - Nursing Simulation Lab
  - BMI Lab
  - Biology Lab
  - AI Lab
  - Fab Lab
- Planning and construction of the Male Residency Facility
- Planning and development of warehouse and inventory management controls
- Expansion of sustainability and environmental awareness initiatives across campus

### Continuing Progress

- The **Sports Facilities Initiative**, which underwent feasibility assessment and review by the BOT’s Facilities Committee. The findings, balanced against institutional priorities, resulted in the project being placed on hold during this strategic planning cycle.
- The implementation timeline for the **Solar Energy Living-Learning Lab** has been delayed by the search for a strong contractor. The project is currently expected to be completed in August/September 2026.

## Goal 2:

**Offer Academic Programs that are Designed to Meet Market Demands while Exemplifying the Best International Standards**



## Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

AUK made substantial progress in academic planning, quality assurance, and market-responsive program development. Academic offerings increasingly align with workforce needs as defined in recent market studies.

Several initiatives progressed from planning into implementation. The high percentage of continuous actions during the first two years reflected the long-term nature of curriculum reform, accreditation preparation, partnership development, and graduate program planning.

### Key Initiatives

Throughout the cycle, major accomplishments included:

- Development and implementation of a sustainability formula for assessing academic program viability;
- Market studies for graduate education initiatives, resulting in the establishment of the M.Sc. in AI;
- Redesign of the library infrastructure to accommodate 21st century learning styles;
- Integration of IT competencies, soft skills, simulation software, and innovative pedagogies into academic programming;
- Expansion of industry engagement and employability-focused initiatives;
- Advancement of program-level accreditation readiness and quality assurance processes; and
- Continued strengthening of laboratory facilities in support of students' applied learning.

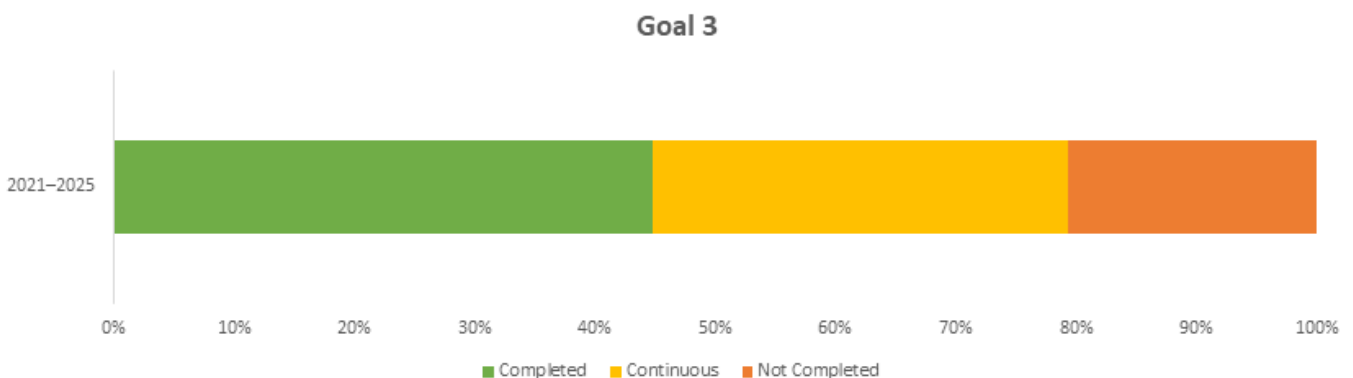
### Continuing Progress

Several initiatives were delayed, placed on hold, or remain under development, including:

- **2+2 Agreements:** Such partnership programs were suspended due to a lack of student interest.
- **Graduate Certificates:** Progress remains at the feasibility and market research stage. Since graduate certificates need NECHE approval, this will be on hold until Initial Accreditation is awarded to the University.
- **Program Accreditation Efforts:** ABET accreditation was halted due to that accreditation body's unwillingness to send a review team to campus; ABET also has halted virtual reviews. Work to align with ABET standards continues.
- **School of Medicine Initiative:** A market study will be conducted starting fall 2026.

## Goal 3:

**Offer Expertise and Programming to the Community to Foster a Culture of Life-Long Learning and Ensure AUK's Visibility across Kurdistan**



## Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

This goal reflects AUK’s commitment to becoming a regionally engaged institution that supports lifelong learning, workforce development, innovation, and the general advancement of Kurdistan. The University made significant progress in strengthening its presence as a through outreach programming, collaborations, professional development initiatives, and regional expansion efforts, including the establishment of CAPA’s presence beyond Duhok.

### Key Initiatives

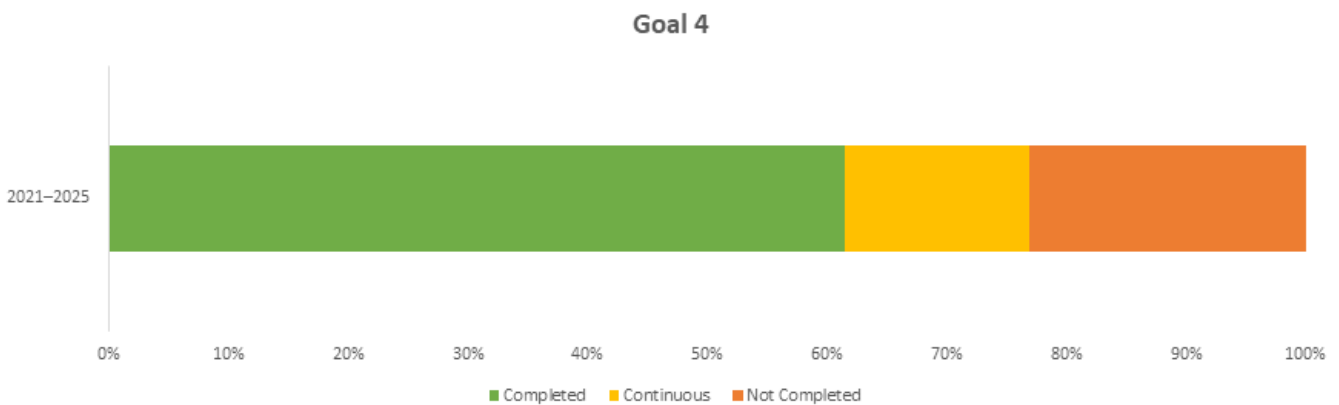
- Establishment of Impact Hub Duhok (IHD), the first in the world to be housed on a university campus, as a community co-working space dedicated to start-up culture and entrepreneurship.
- Expansion of “She Leads” and “She’s an Entrepreneur” to students, alumni, IDPs, refugees, and the general female population across Duhok, Zakho, and Erbil.
- Four years of CAPA’s delivery of the Design Thinking Bootcamp following the curriculum of the UCLA Epicenter. Establishment of the Leopard Radio Station to open direct communication from the University to the public in Duhok and beyond; programming consists of AUK news items, public service announcements, health and well-being advice, and introductory English language lessons.
- Introduction of the Library’s Associate Memberships, providing access to resources by academics and students from local institutions.
- Strengthening of partnerships with private and governmental organizations to further the reach and influence of the University.

### Continuing Progress

Geopolitical regional conflicts and shifting priorities by the KRG and international organizations have limited resources available for educational programming for various demographics. Also, the intermittent payment of salaries to state employees has also impacted on the public’s ability to pay for continuing education.

## Goal 4:

**Recruit Students Reflecting the Profile of Those Most Likely to Succeed at AUK and Ensure that No Student is Denied Access to Education Due to an Inability to Pay**



## Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

This goal evidenced some of the highest completion rates as student enrollment increased from 529 students in Spring 2021 to 970 students in Spring 2026. Strong student completion rates resulted from growing institutional focus on student success initiatives. Fluctuations within the category of “not completed” reflects the complexity of regional and national dynamics and the ability to recruit across a larger geography. Additional challenges include AUK’s relatively high tuition; however, the University has addressed this with 72% of students attending AUK on scholarship.

### First Year Student Retention Trends

Term	Retention Trends
Fall 2021	96%
Fall 2022	93%
Fall 2023	90.5%
Fall 2024	92.7%
Fall 2025	93.7%

### Key Initiatives

- Long-term recruitment plans have been developed to identify feeder schools, target markets, and the effective presentation of AUK’s value proposition.
- Definition of the profile of the student most likely to succeed as a guide to targeting recruitment efforts.
- Expansion of scholarship opportunities for students from vulnerable populations and women; advocacy with private donors, corporates, and governmental entities to support education via scholarships.
- Introduction of a Financial Aid Pool to support students needing additional assistance for transportation or housing.
- Acquisition of technologies in support of students with temporary or chronic physical, psychological, social, or learning disabilities to ensure inclusion and equity.
- Expansion of study-abroad opportunities to support internationalization efforts.

### Scholarship and Enrollment Trends

Term	Scholarship Receptients	Enrollment Trend
Fall 2021	59.6%	565
Fall 2022	62.2%	554
Fall 2023	73.8%	530
Fall 2024	69.8%	735
Fall 2025	71.6%	807

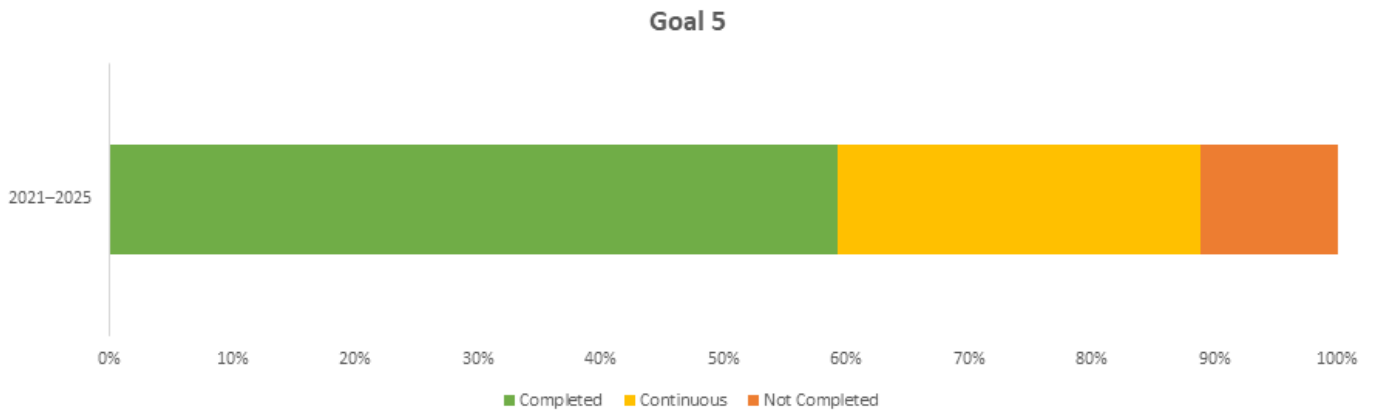
### Continuing Progress

Negotiations with international institutions to expand study-abroad opportunities for AUK students remained limited due to the inability to establish exchange programs as their students will not come to Iraq.

Initiatives related to support systems for students with various challenges remain limited as it has been very difficult to find qualified staff for psychological counseling, disability support, and other American-style student affairs roles.

## Goal 5:

### Provide Students with the Support Structures and Tools for their Academic and Professional Success



### Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

AUK strengthened its capacity to support student success both inside and outside the classroom by establishing a strong foundation for long-term student engagement, retention, and career preparedness. Feedback loops supported the continuous improvement of support systems under the purview of both the Colleges and Office of Student Affairs.

### Key Initiatives

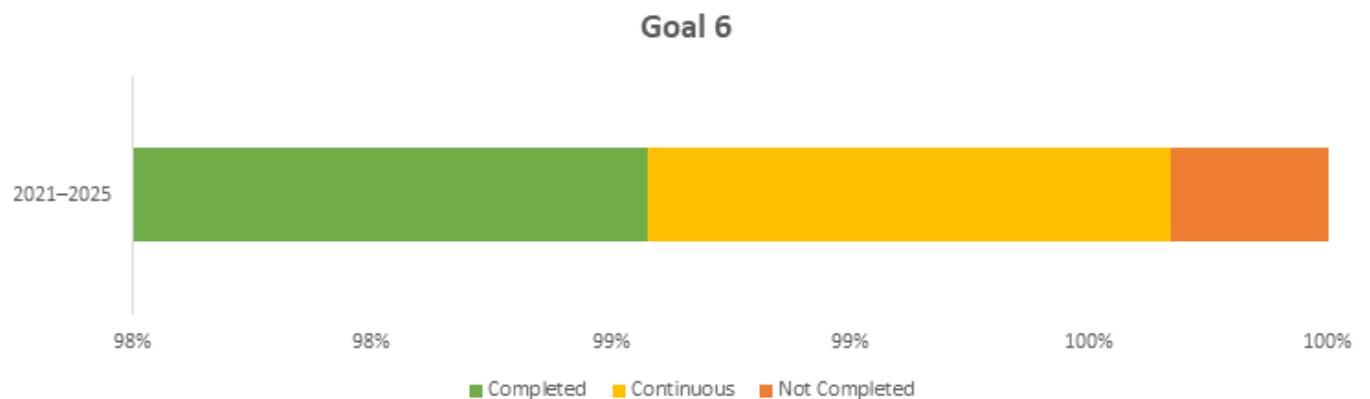
- Development of confidential student feedback and suggestion mechanisms for institutional improvement.
- Establishment of the support infrastructure for students of concern, including counseling and well-being services.
- Implementation of the First-Year Experience (FYE) program.
- Founding of Career Services with its annual job fairs and career readiness workshops for students and alumni.
- Organization of multicultural and diversity programming.
- Fostering of an American-style student governance and club structures.
- Expansion of the Change Makers Program and its mission dedicated to volunteerism within the community.

### Continuing Progress

The definitions of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities need to be further developed, including assessment mechanisms to ensure all programming contributes to meeting the institutional learning goals. Collaborations between Student Affairs and the Colleges will contribute to greater synergy in ensuring graduates have soft skills and leadership skills that will enhance their marketability upon graduation.

## Goal 6:

### Recruit and Retain Faculty and Staff who will Contribute to the Mission of the University



## Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

Institutional quality and growth depend on attracting and retaining talented, mission-driven faculty and staff. Recruitment systems, onboarding processes, employee support structures, and workforce management practices have evolved to improve institutional capacity and operational effectiveness. Increasing employee retention data demonstrate growing institutional maturity in human resource management and employee support practices.

The high percentage of “continuous” actions reflects the long-term nature of workforce development. AUK faced retention challenges during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in over 60% of staff being hired since 2021. Ongoing geopolitical conditions and the Level 4 Security Alert from the U.S. State Department also limit the international candidate pool.

### Retention Table

Group	Period	Prior-Year Cohort	Retained	Departures / Not Found	Retention Rate
Staff	AY 2021-2022 -> AY 2022-2023	92	82	10	89.1%
Staff	AY 2022-2023 -> AY 2023-2024	107	96	11	89.7%
Staff	AY 2023-2024 -> AY 2024-2025	111	86	25	77.5%
Staff	AY 2024-2025 -> AY 2025-2026	107	91	16	85.0%
Staff	AY 2021-2022 -> AY 2025-2026	92	54	38	58.7%
Full-Time Faculty	AY 2021-2022 -> AY 2022-2023	28	21	7	75.0%
Full-Time Faculty	AY 2022-2023 -> AY 2023-2024	30	21	9	70.0%
Full-Time Faculty	AY 2023-2024 -> AY 2024-2025	28	22	6	78.6%
Full-Time Faculty	AY 2024-2025 -> AY 2025-2026	33	26	7	78.8%
Full-Time Faculty	AY 2021-2022 -> AY 2025-2026	28	14	14	50.0%

### Key Initiatives

- Implementation of employee health insurance
- Development of a robust orientation program for incoming faculty and staff
- Introduction of a centralized performance evaluation system with feedback mechanisms that support those identified as needing professional development.
- Benchmarking of salaries and benefits against those of similarly situated institutions.
- Expansion of international recruitment efforts and use of online platforms.
- Regular scheduled staff and faculty satisfaction surveys; data is used to inform initiatives dedicated to addressing gaps.
- Implementation of the ZenHR system to monitor leaves, submit performance evaluations, and monitor job applications.
- Offering development opportunities through CAPA, CELT, and international providers.
- Introduction of a comprehensive employee exit interview process to gain additional feedback on the work environment.

### Continuing Progress

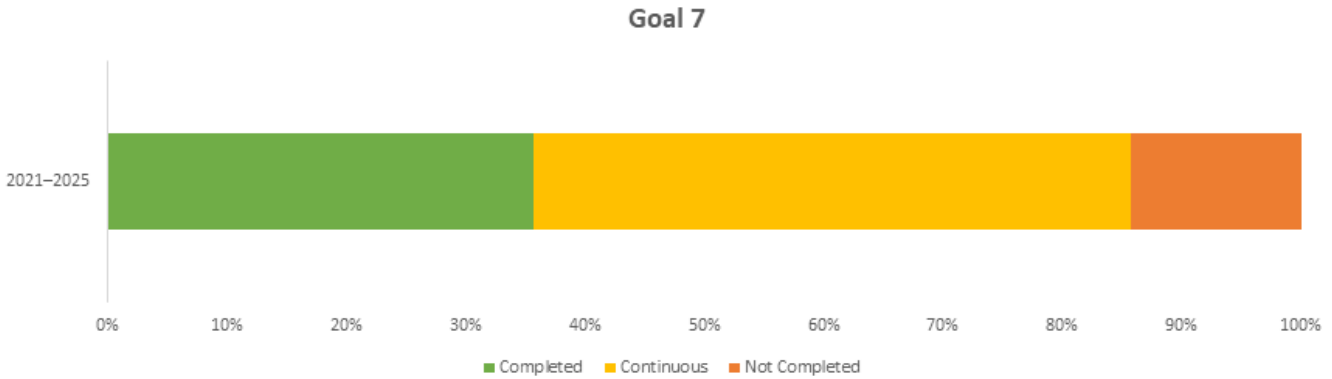
Motivated by the need to provide applicants and new hires with information on the University, Duhok, and Kurdistan, HR proposed the design of a support chatbot, which will be implemented by the close of the strategic cycle.

HR has also identified the need for additional supervisor training related to employee monitoring and

evaluation; this will improve equity in the performance evaluation process.

Faculty recruitment efforts have been largely successful, and identifying new platforms to expand candidate pools will contribute to a robust system of succession planning. An institutional profile identifying the characteristics of faculty and staff most likely to serve as strong institutional citizens remains under development.

**Goal 7:  
Strengthen AUK’s Communications for the Purpose of Promoting the University’s Brand Identity and Visibility Regionally and Internationally**



**Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis**

AUK made meaningful progress in formalizing its institutional brand identity, expanding strategic communications efforts, and increasing the visibility of institutional achievements and community engagement activities. Improvements in multilingual outreach and digital engagement contributed to a more cohesive institutional narrative and stronger public presence.

**Key Initiatives**

- Development and implementation of a formal institutional brand identity guide and articulated value proposition enabling transparency, consistency, and accuracy across all platforms.
- Introduction of the institutional mascot (CENGO) and the AUK Store for the sale of branded merchandise.
- Publication of the AUK Annual Report to highlight success stories and news items.
- Expansion of multilingual communication initiatives (English, Kurdish, and Arabic) to improve accessibility and audience reach.
- Featuring storytelling initiatives featuring students, faculty, staff, and alumni.



### Continuing Progress

Due to the reliance on external contractors, the development of a comprehensive mobile application for institutional communication and student engagement was not fully implemented; similarly, the website needs to be redesigned to accommodate videos and other engaging imagery to resonate with prospective students and their families.

Institutional marketing integration and archiving initiatives remain ongoing due to the need for long-term coordination, infrastructure development, and operational restructuring within the communications function.

### Goal 8: Establish and Maintain High-Level International Standards and Principles for Transparency and Effective Control in Financial Operational Infrastructure



### Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

Outcomes include the implementation of foundational financial reforms and operational controls; recently, the implementation of SAP ensured the efficiency of operations and adherence to GAAP standards. Audit readiness efforts, conducted in collaboration with Ernst & Young, will improve institutional compliance and facilitate the audit process.

### Key Initiatives

- Implementation of SAP financial system.
- Integrating ERP with SAP to facilitate the invoicing of students for tuition and fees.
- Strengthening audit readiness and financial compliance
- Developing unit-level budget management structures to improve stakeholder input and campus conversations on unit-level priorities as aligned with the institutional mission and strategic priorities.
- Establishing a vendor management database system and procurement monitoring process.
- Developing an institutional inventory management and tracking system.
- Expansion of financial operational policies and standard operating procedures supporting transparency.

### Continuing Progress

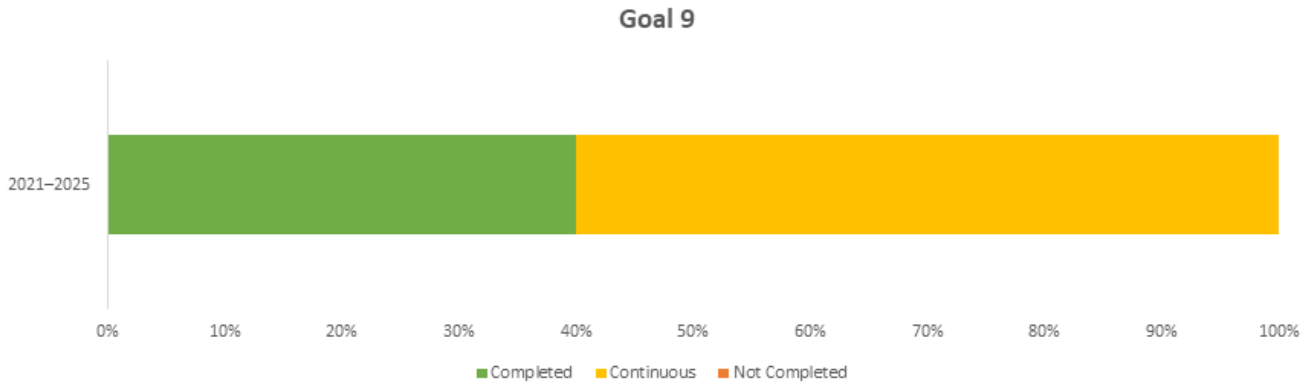
Initial discussions with financial institutions regarding potential student loan programs did not progress to implementation due to limitations within the regional banking infrastructure.

Progress was made in the identification of online payment systems for the paying of tuition and fees.

Further capacity building among the staff within the Finance Office will improve accuracy and efficiency in the execution of tasks. Monthly closeouts and additional controls will improve timeliness in the development of projections vs. actuals and year-end reports.

## Goal 9:

### Promote Advancement Activities and Fundraising to Increase Revenue Streams to the University and Ensure Resources to Sustain and Grow the Institution



#### Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

The imperative to improve and diversify revenue streams is essential in strengthening institutional sustainability. Throughout the strategic cycle, the University made steady progress in building the foundational advancement infrastructure, including donor engagement systems, alumni relations, and campaigns.

A key milestone was the establishment and strengthening of the Office of Advancement, which significantly improved institutional capacity for coordinating fundraising and alumni engagement activities. The establishment of the 501(c)(3) in Virginia and attainment of IRS tax free status further supports long-term fundraising strategies as AUK looks internationally to attract new donors. The 10th Anniversary Gala successfully raised scholarship funds, recognized donors, and fostered a culture of philanthropy in Kurdistan.

The increase in completed actions during 2023–2024 reflected progress in operationalizing advancement structures and strengthening stakeholder engagement. The relatively high proportion of continuous actions highlights the long-term, relationship-driven nature of advancement’s activities, which require sustained donor cultivation through long-term trust-building.

#### Key Initiatives

- Establishment and expansion of the Office of Advancement’s policies and operational capacity
- Implementation of AUK’s 10th Anniversary Gala and launching of the campaign supporting scholarships, financial aid, and program development.
- Establishment of the University endowment in the U.S.
- Strengthening systems supporting donor and alumni communication and relationship building
- Establishment of the Financial Aid Fund to support students with housing and transportation.

#### Continuing Progress

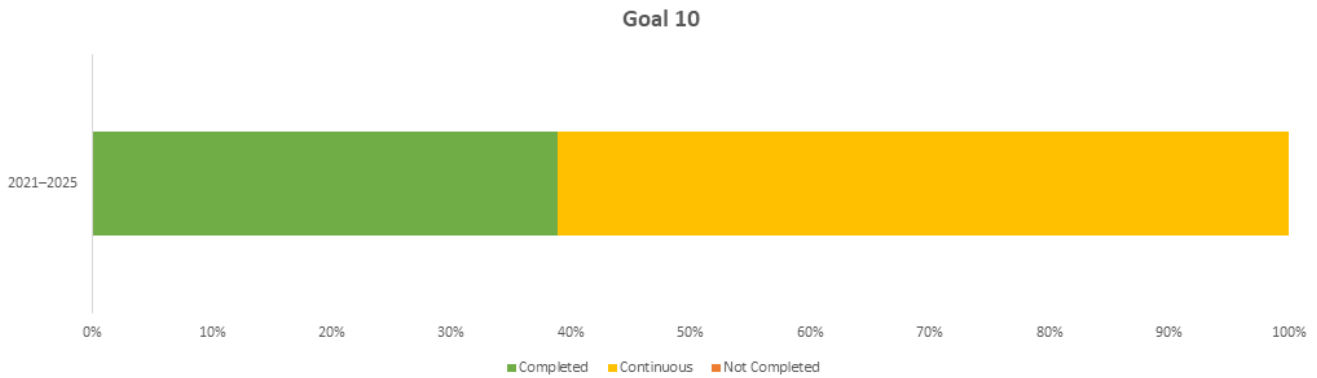
The proposal related to raising sufficient institutional support that would eliminate the tuition-based model was not approved by the BOT; AUK will remain a tuition-based institution.

Initial plans to establish Friends and Alumni chapters aimed at increasing diaspora engagement through greater institutional awareness; accessing this demographic is challenging as the community is quite dispersed without any central international structure. Conversations are ongoing with the AUK Endowment on establishing an office in the US that can be more effective in engaging American audiences.

In November, AUK conducted a workshop in strategic planning for the Kurdistan Diaspora Confederacy. It is hoped that continued relations with this group will result in international network building.

## Goal 10:

### Foster a Culture of Assessment and Data-Based Decision-Making Reflecting Institutional and Program-Level Accreditation Standards



#### Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

AUK made substantial progress in establishing assessment frameworks, standardizing procedures, strengthening reporting practices, and expanding the use of data for planning and continuous improvement across academic and administrative units. The consistently high percentage of “continuous” actions reflects the nature of the work of institutional effectiveness. The increase in completed actions during 2023–2024 demonstrated meaningful progress in operationalizing assessment frameworks, expanding program review and benchmarking activities, and strengthening institutional reporting capacity. The continued presence of ongoing actions in 2024–2025 reflects the iterative refinement and cyclical nature of data systems, assessment processes, and performance monitoring mechanisms.

The implementation of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), Program Educational Objectives (PEOs), KPIs, and institutional performance indicators aligns assessment practices and strategic priorities and will enable more quantitative progress reporting in the upcoming cycles.

#### Key Initiatives

- Development and implementation of program review frameworks for academic and non-academic units.
- Establishment and standardization of institutional SOPs, policies, and general operational procedures.
- Expansion of feedback loops and improvement initiatives based on data from the faculty, staff, and student satisfaction surveys.
- Advancement of benchmarking initiatives with regionally, US-accredited institutions
- Creation of institutional definition guidelines supporting reporting consistency and assessment alignment.
- Development and implementation of an institutional assessment calendar coordinating assessment activities and reporting deadlines across units.
- Introduction of KPI tracking and institutional performance monitoring mechanisms.
- Strengthening collaboration between OIEP, IT, and institutional units for data management, reporting, and accessibility.

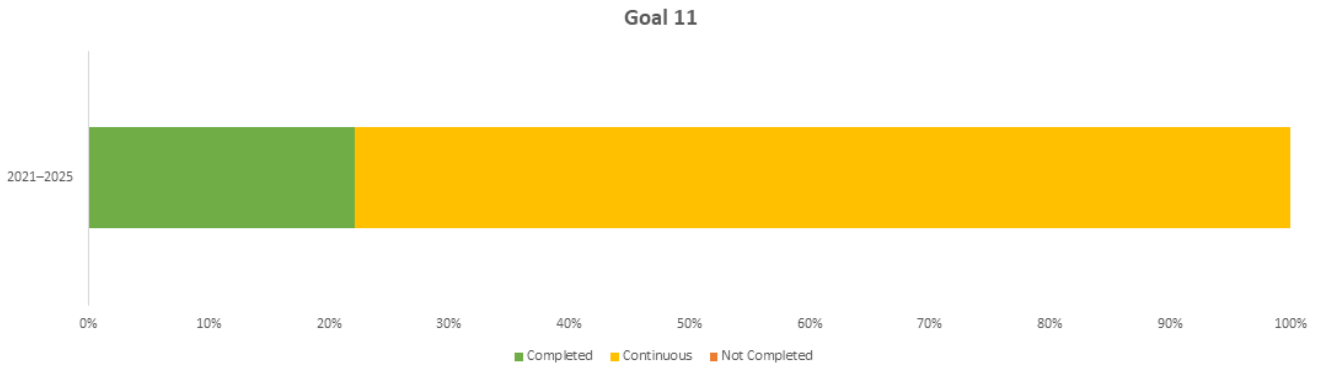
#### Continuing Progress

Substantial progress was made in reporting and assessment coordination, yet the full integration of data systems on the institutional level will take time. The planned data warehouse initiative is expected to serve as the University’s primary institutional data repository, integrating data and electronic records from academic and administrative units to support institutional analysis, program assessment, strategic planning, and reporting.

OIEP has engaged a consultant from James Madison University to assist with development of a centralized institutional data warehouse. Initial progress was affected by contractual negotiations, and the onboarding of a software engineer. Eventually, AUK decided to change its strategy and adopt an off-the-shelf system that can accommodate the data warehouse in a reduced scope.

## Goal 11:

### Support Institutional Accreditation Activities in Order to Ensure the Optimization of the Process and Timeline



### Overall Assessment and Performance Analysis

A key milestone was the successful achievement of Eligibility and Candidacy with the New England Commission of Higher Education. The increase in completed actions during 2023–2024 corresponds to strengthened institutional systems and a focus on accreditation readiness.

### Key Initiatives

- Achievement of NECHE Eligibility in 2022.
- Achievement of NECHE Candidacy status in 2024.
- Implementation of a system of workgroups and collective campus engagement in accreditation preparation for Candidacy and the Biennial Candidacy applications.
- Development of institutional timelines, accountability structures, and assessment mechanisms aligned with accreditation processes.
- Expansion of institutional awareness related to accreditation and its value to the value proposition of the University.
- Strengthening coordination and communication between academic units, administrative departments, OIEP, and institutional leadership regarding data collection and analysis priorities and protocols.
- Advancement of institutional assessment, monitoring, and evidence-based reporting systems supporting greater effectiveness and efficiency.

### Continuing Progress

The NECHE accreditation process commonly spans approximately a decade and requires continuous institutional engagement, documentation, monitoring, and improvement activities. As a result, many action priorities associated with this goal extend beyond any five-year plan.

# CHALLENGES & CONSTRAINTS

## INTERNAL CHALLENGES

### Institutional Capacity and Organizational Development

A principle challenge has been the concurrent development of multiple foundational institutional systems and operational structures. In the past five-year, AUK built, expanded, and strengthened both the academic and administrative structures. For the following, AUK needed to establish entirely new institutional functions:

- Institutional effectiveness and assessment systems
- Advancement and fundraising structures
- Data governance and reporting mechanisms
- Accreditation coordination systems
- Institutional policy and procedural frameworks
- Integrated operational and financial systems

This construction of systems placed significant demands on institutional capacity, staffing, and coordination. Yet, AUK remains an ambitious university which embraced a rapid pace of institutional growth in order to live its mission and attain its vision.

### Human Resource and Staffing Limitations

Several strategic initiatives were affected by staffing limitations, recruitment timelines, and leadership transitions. Areas requiring highly specialized technical or professional expertise such as institutional assessment, accreditation, data analytics, communications management, ERP implementation, and fundraising required significant investment in capacity building among individuals who demonstrate great potential to contribute to AUK over the decades to come.

### Institutional Systems and Data Infrastructure

As AUK pursued evidence-based planning and accreditation readiness, limitations in data infrastructure became increasingly apparent. The absence of fully integrated institutional data systems affected the verification of data, which in turn affected KPI tracking, assessment reporting, and evidence-based planning and decision-making.

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

### Geopolitical Contexts

Regional economic instability, fluctuations in public-sector financial conditions, and military conflicts affected students' and their parents' ability to pay, thereby placing greater emphasis on the recruitment of scholarship funding. Financial forecasting and the introduction of Risk Management Protocols have tried to improve institutional sustainability. Regional geopolitical conditions affected international partnerships, faculty and consultant mobility, accreditation-related travel and review processes and external collaboration opportunities.

### Governmental Partnerships

Several initiatives requiring governmental coordination experienced delays due to shifting priorities among the KRG.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### Importance of Foundational Infrastructure

Sustainable institutional growth requires strong foundational systems. Investments in assessment systems, operational procedures, data infrastructure, financial controls, and governance mechanisms prove essential for long-term institutional effectiveness.

## Need for Measurable KPIs and Data Systems

AUK recognizes the importance of developing clearly measurable KPIs, benchmarks, assessment frameworks, data governance systems, and standardized institutional reporting at the onset of the planning process. Qualitative reporting has value but is not as meaningful as quantitative data for informing decision-making.

## Institutional Transformation Requires Cultural Change

Strategic initiatives must often be accompanied by changes in institutional culture. For example, building a culture of assessment, accreditation awareness, evidence-based planning, accountability, and strategic alignment requires sustained engagement with the campus community. This involves continuous and consistent communication and ensuring that processes are inclusive of all campus constituencies.

## Recommendations for Moving Forward

From an institutional perspective, AUK concludes the 2021–2026 Strategic Planning Cycle in a significantly strengthened position as it transitions into its second decade. AUK has developed stronger systems, clearer processes, and greater organizational capacity, which will help to support sustained growth and progress on its goals. The strengthening of institutional effectiveness mechanisms will further ensure a foundation for strategic monitoring, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement.

### Recommendations include:

- Developing a long-term commitment to continuous and consistent communication, ensuring a wide stakeholder engagement, and professional development/training for all employees on building a culture of assessment, accreditation awareness, and evidence-based planning.
- Refine and operationalize policies, KPIs and institutional analytics, data governance systems, and standardized reporting mechanisms at all levels of planning.
- Develop strong branding and marketing to communicate the value proposition regionally and internationally, which will enhance student recruitment, fostering partnerships, and elevate fundraising.
- Finalize and maintain NECHE accreditation and advance on program-level accreditations.
- Assess the results reported in this report to identify areas needing further research and analysis in order to more effectively develop tactics that can succeed within AUK's reality and optimize opportunities.

## Conclusion

The Strategic Plan 2021–2026 represented a transformational and foundational period in the institutional development of the American University of Kurdistan. As a young and rapidly growing institution, AUK used this strategic cycle to establish and strengthen many of the academic, administrative, operational, and assessment systems necessary for long-term sustainability, accreditation readiness, and regional impact.

This Close-Out Report has provided an evidence-based assessment of progress across the University's eleven strategic goals and demonstrated meaningful achievements in academic quality, student support, operational modernization, communications, advancement, and institutional effectiveness. Major accomplishments including NECHE Candidacy status, implementation of SAP systems, enrollment growth, expansion of applied-learning laboratories, establishment of the Office of Advancement, and the launch of the M.Sc. in Artificial Intelligence, reflect the University's growing institutional maturity and commitment to international standards and continuous improvement. At the same time, the report has documented challenges related to geopolitical instability, staffing limitations, evolving institutional systems, and data infrastructure, while also identifying important lessons regarding the need for measurable KPIs, integrated data governance, and sustained institutional capacity building.

The findings and lessons presented throughout this report will directly inform the development of AUK's next strategic plan by providing a clearer understanding of institutional strengths, gaps, and future priorities. Equally important, this strategic cycle contributed to the development of a stronger culture of accountability, assessment, evidence-based planning, and stakeholder engagement across the University. Although many initiatives remain ongoing due to the long-term nature of institutional development and accreditation

processes, AUK concludes the 2021–2026 cycle in a significantly stronger position than when it began. The University is now better equipped with clearer processes, improved systems, and greater organizational capacity to advance its mission, strengthen its regional and international profile, and continue its evolution as an academically competitive, innovative, and mission-driven institution dedicated to serving Kurdistan and the broader region.





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