



RACER SPIRIT

Listening and Learning Tour
2025 REPORT

Dear Racer Family,

On July 1, 2025, I began my journey as the 15th President of Murray State University. Even early on as a candidate for this role, I felt the deep passion and love that the Racer community has for this special place. Now having traveled many miles and interacting with nearly 1,300 individuals in my first 100-120 days in office, I can confirm that the sense of Racer pride runs deep.

I am pleased to share with you this comprehensive report of the Racer Spirit: Listening and Learning Tour. This initiative was designed to engage and collect feedback directly from you — our students, faculty, staff, alumni, community leaders, K-12 and community college partners, business and industry stakeholders and friends across Kentucky and beyond.

My goal was simple but vital: to listen, to learn and to gain a deeper understanding of how Murray State can lift up our communities, our region, and the Commonwealth we proudly serve.

I am filled with an immense amount of gratitude for how much you welcomed me into your community and everywhere the Racer Spirit lives. Through more than 30 tour visits, as well as an online survey, you answered the following two questions:

What is Murray State University doing well?

Where are our opportunities?

In this report, I've outlined the key themes that emerged from our conversations. This information will pave the way for a new University Strategic Plan — a shared vision that will chart the course for a new five-year plan through 2030.

The fruits of this initiative will be seen in the years to come. We will strengthen those attributes that make Murray State exceptional and uncover new opportunities to grow and serve. We have a strong foundation. The wind is at our back. However, we must continue to move forward with a sense of purpose centered around supporting our students.

We are deeply and sincerely grateful to our alumni and friends who went above and beyond — not only by joining us on the tour, but by generously giving back through new gifts that will uplift our students and advance our institutional priorities. Your willingness to engage, listen, and respond to the needs and opportunities you encountered speaks volumes about your enduring commitment and compassion. Thank you for making such a meaningful impact.

Together, we are shaping the future of the “Finest Place We Know.” Now is Murray State University’s time to race toward excellence.

Students First. Murray State Always. Racers Forever.



Ron K. Patterson, Ed.D.
President



MURRAY STATE
UNIVERSITY

36 SESSIONS

1,290 ATTENDEES

132 ONLINE RESPONSES

344
FACULTY

37
STAFF

127
STUDENTS

18 STATES

21 KENTUCKY COUNTIES

914
ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

823 MILES TRAVELED FROM MURRAY



Scan for a video recap
of the Racer Spirit
Listening and
Learning Tour!



RACER SPIRIT *Listening and Learning Tour*

Structured for both depth and reach, the Racer Spirit Listening and Learning Tour spanned over 100 days and included a variety of formats — from in-person town halls and regional community gatherings to virtual sessions and on-campus forums. This mix ensured accessibility while maximizing engagement across multiple stakeholder groups. Each event included guided conversation, open discussion and an opportunity for participants to complete a brief survey, helping the administration compile consistent feedback from every stop.

Feedback was collected through tour attendees as well as an online survey, providing insight into two central questions:

1. What is Murray State University doing well?
2. Where are our opportunities?


Through data collection and analysis, the following themes emerged.

- 1 | **Strong Sense of Community and Belonging**
- 2 | **Student-Centered Focus**
- 3 | **Academic Excellence and Workforce Preparation**
- 4 | **Vibrant Alumni and Community Engagement**
- 5 | **Campus Infrastructure and Operational Efficiencies**
- 6 | **Driving Regional Impact, Access and Growth**



“Murray State has such a good sense of community and life — the culture is a big plus — professors get to know you and you can tell they want to be here. You can tell everyone wants students to succeed.”

CURRENT SOPHOMORE STUDENT



“Murray State pours into me. It’s always a feeling of being a part of a community. It’s not just a school — it’s a family.”

CURRENT STUDENT

THEME 1

Strong Sense of Community and Belonging

Stakeholders frequently emphasize a welcoming, family-like atmosphere at Murray State, where students, faculty, staff, and alumni feel connected. This theme is reinforced by initiatives like the Raising Racers legacy program and events that connect students, alumni and the community (including Homecoming and the residential college system).

1. DONE WELL - Inclusive Culture:

Examples include “sense of family and belonging,” “welcoming community,” “Murray State pours into me” and “it’s not just a school—it’s a family.”

2. DONE WELL - Athletic Pride and School Spirit:

Athletics, particularly Racer Baseball and Women’s Basketball, are a significant source of pride, with comments like “highly engaged fan base,” “excellent athletics” and “athletic brand is nationally-known.” Murray State’s success in the Missouri Valley Conference and events like Homecoming boost school spirit.

What I’m Thinking About

- Our most valuable resource is our people who comprise our unique Racer family. We have caring alumni and friends, as well as incredibly talented students, faculty, and staff. When these audiences intersect, it is a reflection of the amazing atmosphere that we possess, and our possibilities for success are endless.
- Athletics is regarded as the front porch of a university or college due to its visibility. How can we continue to grow the momentum of Racer Athletics, and by extension, the Murray State University brand, throughout our region, state, country and beyond?

THEME 2

Student-Centered Focus

The University is frequently described as “student-oriented,” “students first” and “concerned with the whole student.” Faculty and staff are noted for being accessible, supportive and dedicated to mentoring, with specific mentions of positive impact by Career Services, Timely Care (24/7 virtual mental health services), support for first-generation students, and Student Disability Services. Comments like “faculty are mentors in and out of the classroom” and “professors find the support that students need” underscore this commitment.

1. DONE WELL - STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH:

The University’s focus on students is evident in phrases like “student-oriented,” “concerned with the whole student,” “we care about our students,” and “putting students first.” Support services such as Career Services, Timely Care, the Writing Center and Student Disability Services (noted as “Top 5” nationally) are frequently praised.

2. DONE WELL - STRONG FACULTY AND STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS:

Faculty are described as accessible, supportive, and passionate, with comments like “great professors,” “faculty connection with students,” “faculty are mentors in and out of the classroom” and “professors really get to know you.” Stakeholders emphasize faculty dedication to student success and personalized support.

What I’m Thinking About

- Student learning and success must be at the heart of every conversation and decision-making process. Our faculty and staff are committed each day to the success of our students.
- 44% of our students are first-generation. They, along with their families, are navigating the postsecondary education process for the first time, and have expectations for a successful college experience. We must exceed the expectations of both our students and their families.
- How can we build upon our current retention efforts and initiatives to better serve our students in their progression to graduation?

3. DONE WELL - SUPPORT FOR FIRST-GENERATION AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS:

Murray State’s commitment to first-generation and non-traditional students is highlighted, with comments like “serves a high population of first-generation students,” “incredible non-traditional student support,” and “as a first-generation student, I really feel supported.” Programs like the Thrive Lounge and campaigns for “almost alumni” are noted as strengths.

4. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION:

Suggestions include expanding internship opportunities, dual credit programs, and support for first-generation and non-traditional students. There’s also a call for better engagement of commuters, more student jobs and addressing retention through remedial programs, and paid internships and mentorships. Addressing these priorities would also support student access and growth opportunities.

“As a first-gen student, I really feel supported. I’m far from home, so I spend a good amount of time in the First Gen Thrive Lounge. It’s so helpful and encouraging. Professors really get to know you. I love it here!”

CURRENT FRESHMAN STUDENT



THEME 3

Academic Excellence and Workforce Preparation

Murray State is praised for its “world-class and numerous fully-accredited academic programs.” Graduates are described as “impressive and prepared for the workforce,” with strong connections to industries and a reputation for producing “good citizens.” The University’s focus on practical, career-oriented education is evident in comments about graduates securing jobs and the quality of instruction being a key asset. Retaining faculty and staff is critical to maintaining the academic reputation of the University.

1. DONE WELL - ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND WORKFORCE PREPARATION:

Stakeholders praise Murray State’s academic programs, particularly in agriculture, education, occupational safety and health, nursing and pre-professional tracks, with comments like “graduates are impressive and prepared for the workforce” and “academic excellence and academic freedom is everything.”

2. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - EXPAND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND INNOVATION:

Stakeholders suggested adding new programs (e.g., veterinary school, sports management, entrepreneurship associate’s degree) and enhancing existing ones (e.g., veterinary technology, applied engineering). There’s also a call for micro-credentialing, AI-focused programs and addressing regional workforce needs (e.g., teaching, health care, school psychology).

3. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - IMPROVE FACULTY AND STAFF COMPENSATION:

Concerns about low wages for faculty and staff present risks to maintaining the University’s reputation for academic excellence and workforce readiness. Stakeholders frequently mention the need for better salaries, particularly for faculty (addressing compression and low pay for non-tenure-track instructors) and low-tier staff. Concerns include losing talent due to uncompetitive pay, inadequate cost-of-living adjustments and the impact of the Evergreen compensation study not fully addressing disparities.

What I’m Thinking About

- Our portfolio of academic programs is vast, and we are fortunate to have world-class faculty across numerous disciplines who offer excellent instruction and prepare our students for post-graduation success.
- How can we remain in alignment with current and future workforce needs? Proactively identifying trends and aggressively seeking out opportunities is key.
- Within our campus community, a comprehensive framework for student, faculty and staff professional development, opportunities for continuous learning and the development of an equitable competitive compensation strategy beyond the Evergreen Study will allow us to cultivate and retain our greatest resource.

Quality of instruction is
our greatest asset.

MURRAY STATE ALUMNUS, OWENSBORO, KENTUCKY

We understand our role, our
importance and who we serve.
We are here for them.

FACULTY MEMBER





“

Alumni want to be involved because we care, and it is important to us to stay connected. We appreciate the excellent communication and fun events both on and off campus.

MURRAY STATE ALUMNA,
TRIGG COUNTY, KENTUCKY

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THEME 4

Vibrant Alumni and Community Engagement

The University’s alumni are described as “loyal, proud and engaged,” with a strong network that supports the institution through involvement, employment and advocacy. Programs like the Raising Racers legacy program, alumni events and efforts to keep graduates connected (e.g., through social media and communication) are frequently praised. Comments like “I love that, even as an alumnus, Murray State makes an effort to make alumni still feel connected” reflect this strength. There is also a desire for even more engagement opportunities, especially for those living outside the immediate region.

1. DONE WELL - ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AND LOYALTY:

Murray State’s loyal, proud and engaged alumni base is frequently mentioned, with examples like “vibrant alumni network,” “impressed with alumni engagement and fundraising” and “alumni love Murray State.” Programs like the Raising Racers legacy program and consistent communication with alumni are highlighted.

2. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - ENHANCE ALUMNI

ENGAGEMENT AND MODERNIZE COMMUNICATION:

Suggestions include better outreach to alumni, especially those outside the Kentucky/Tennessee region, through regional meetups, concise communications (e.g., texting updates, avoiding lengthy newsletters) and providing department-specific updates. There’s a call for leveraging alumni in rural communities. Alumni want more networking opportunities and a stronger connection to Murray State.

What I’m Thinking About

- Simply put, our 80,000+ alumni throughout the world have a loyalty that is unmatched in terms of their time, talent and treasure, all to support their Alma Mater.
- How can we continue to both ask for and receive their help, to deepen their affinity toward Murray State? We are fortunate to have a nationally-recognized brand, and our alumni wave the Murray State banner with pride.

THEME 5

Campus Infrastructure and Operational Efficiencies

Despite the beautiful look of campus and recent updates, stakeholders offered a variety of feedback pertaining to campus infrastructure needs and outdated processes across campus operations.

1. DONE WELL - CAMPUS BEAUTY AND IMPROVEMENTS:

The campus is described as “beautiful,” “gorgeous” and “well-kept,” with comments like “campus upkeep is amazing” and “facilities are very clean.” Recent upgrades, such as the Curris Center, new nursing building and improved study spaces, are highlighted as positive developments.

2. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - IMPROVE PARKING:

Multiple stakeholders highlighted parking issues, including the need for more parking lots, better access for students with accommodations and closer parking to buildings. Specific complaints include hazardous parking conditions, overselling parking passes or distant parking spots. Specific suggestions include updating the parking manual, adding more Red Zone spots and addressing commuter parking scarcity.

3. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - ENHANCE DINING OPTIONS AND FLEXIBILITY:

Stakeholders express dissatisfaction with dining options, including limited variety (e.g., reliance on Chick-fil-A), inconsistent meal times and reduced options due to hours of operation. Suggestions include partnering with local restaurants, adding flexible meal times, healthier and diverse options and addressing the limited schedule of venues like the T-Room.

4. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - IMPROVE CAMPUS FACILITIES AND HOUSING:

Complaints about outdated residence halls, inconsistent building temperatures and the need for modernization were common. Suggestions include upgrading older buildings, improving heating/cooling systems and creating multi-purpose housing for diverse student needs.

5. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - IMPROVE TECHNOLOGIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES:

Concerns include outdated technology (e.g., handwritten spreadsheets for scheduling, inefficient inventory management), excessive paperwork and the need for an AI plan. Specific suggestions include improving web presence (e.g., browser optimization, shorter URLs), addressing ethical concerns about AI-generated imagery and modernizing administrative systems like work orders.



The growth and expansion of Murray State in the last five or so years is fantastic. Somehow, it still feels the same when I visit campus – new buildings, new people – but the character is the same. Upgrading and maintaining the feel should continue to be a priority.

MURRAY STATE ALUMNUS, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



What I’m Thinking About

- We are fortunate to have a nationally-recognized, beautiful campus that makes a positive impact on our campus community, as well as prospective students and their families.
- How can we create efficiencies to modernize our processes?
- Our students, faculty and staff have expectations that we must exceed as it relates to our facilities, services and overall campus infrastructure.
- How can we continue to avoid complacency, innovate and adapt as needed?





“Let’s keep pushing toward growing our collaborative relationships. Let’s do more 2+2 agreements. Let’s offer our students pathways towards bachelors degrees in every program we can!”

EDUCATIONAL LEADER, HENDERSON, KENTUCKY

THEME 6

Driving Regional Impact, Access and Growth

Murray State University serves as a regional anchor committed to economic development, educational access and workforce advancement. Through strong community partnerships, affordable education and innovative academic offerings, Murray State removes barriers to higher education and meets the evolving needs of students and the region. Strategic initiatives—including regional campuses, partnerships with schools and industry and new programs like the proposed School of Veterinary Medicine—demonstrate the University’s focus on cultivating opportunity and sustaining regional prosperity.

1. DONE WELL - REGIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPACT:

Stakeholders describe Murray State as central to the region’s identity and growth, with comments like “serves the region,” “strong connection to the industries we serve” and “regional economic development impact is evident.”

2. DONE WELL - PARTNERSHIPS:

Collaborative projects and agreements with local schools, businesses and community colleges (e.g., West Kentucky Community & Technical College, Hopkinsville, Henderson, etc.) and initiatives like the Center for Adult and Regional Education and our NPR station, WKMS, illustrate Murray State’s reach and relevance.

3. DONE WELL - HIGH-QUALITY AFFORDABLE EDUCATION:

Murray State is also praised for offering a high-quality, affordable education, with a “national reputation for value” and programs that are “economically accessible for students of all ages.” Programs like Racers Finish, dual credit and support for non-traditional and first-generation students are recognized as key contributors to access and affordability.

4. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - STRENGTHEN RECRUITMENT AND REGIONAL OUTREACH:

Stakeholders advocate for expanding recruitment efforts beyond western Kentucky—targeting areas like Louisville, Tennessee, Indiana and international markets. Recommendations include promoting Murray State’s affordability, translating materials into Spanish and marketing Murray State as a “big fish in a small pond” institution with personalized student experiences. Some concerns reflect the risk of losing prospective students to lower-cost competitors or schools with stronger regional visibility.

5. OPPORTUNITY/HOPE - EXPAND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND WORKFORCE RETENTION:

Opportunities exist to deepen collaboration with regional entities (e.g., McCracken County Library, local schools and employers) and to retain graduates through paid internships, career pathways and financial support for local placements. Suggestions include linking Murray State’s online presence to regional tourism and economic development platforms and strengthening industry partnerships to make post-graduation life in the region more attractive.

What I'm Thinking About

- Mutually-beneficial partnerships with peer institutions, school districts, businesses and others are vitally important if we are to continue to grow and support students.
- We must continue to be good stewards of the region and Commonwealth.
- Murray State is fortunate to have global partnerships that extend well beyond our primary 18-county service region.
- How can our regional campuses continue to deepen their presence and impact in their respective communities with which they serve?

Next Steps

Throughout the tour, my message has been consistent: **Murray State belongs to its people.** The approach has not just been about collecting data — it's about building relationships. From alumni who've returned from as far away as California to re-engage with their alma mater, to faculty, staff and students speaking openly about their vision for the future, the tour has sparked powerful moments of connection. It's clear the Racer Spirit is alive and well.

Looking ahead, the insights gathered from the tour will help shape institutional priorities and strategic initiatives, such as the University's new Strategic Plan. Following the Volunteer Summit, our leadership team will begin synthesizing the feedback and translating it into concrete actions. These next steps will focus on aligning resources, expanding partnerships, supporting student success and fostering innovation across all areas of the University.

Ultimately, the Racer Spirit Listening and Learning Tour was more than a presidential roadshow — it's the foundation of a leadership style grounded in empathy, authenticity and shared purpose. Our deep belief in the people of Murray State is already helping to chart a bold, inclusive path forward. And the journey is just beginning.

“Record support from the state and fundraising have been incredible in recent years - we need to keep that going!”

MURRAY STATE ALUMNUS, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



“Let's keep pushing toward growing our collaborative relationships. Let's do more 2+2 agreements. Let's offer our students pathways towards bachelors degrees in every program we can!”

EDUCATIONAL LEADER, HENDERSON, KENTUCKY





LISTENING AND LEARNING TOUR 2025

JULY 24 – MURRAY, KY

Town and Gown Breakfast

AUGUST 7 – PADUCAH, KY

Paducah Chamber of Commerce
Power in Partnership Breakfast
West Kentucky Community
and Technical College
Murray State University
Paducah Regional Campus

AUGUST 11 – MAYFIELD, KY

Rotary Club of Mayfield
Public Event

AUGUST 20 – PADUCAH, KY

Leadership Kentucky Class

AUGUST 21 – HOPKINSVILLE, KY

Hopkinsville Community College
Christian County Public Schools
Breathitt Veterinary Center
MSU Hopkinsville Regional Campus

AUGUST 22 – HENDERSON, KY

Henderson Chamber of Commerce
Henderson Community College
MSU Henderson Regional Campus
Public Event

AUGUST 26 – CADIZ, KY

Cadiz Rotary Club
Trigg County High School

SEPTEMBER 9 – VIRTUAL TOUR STOP

SEPTEMBER 13 – ATLANTA, GA

Public Event

SEPTEMBER 15 – OWENSBORO, KY

Public Event

SEPTEMBER 16 – NASHVILLE, TN

Explore! Community School
Public Event

SEPTEMBER 17 – EDDYVILLE, KY

West Kentucky Educational Cooperative

SEPTEMBER 22 – VIRTUAL TOUR STOP

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Student Event

SEPTEMBER 25 – MURRAY, KY

Rotary Club of Murray

SEPTEMBER 26 – MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Faculty/Staff Event

OCTOBER 2 – MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Student Event

OCTOBER 13 – LOUISVILLE, KY

Public Event Sponsored
by Capitol Solutions

OCTOBER 16 – MADISONVILLE, KY

Madisonville Community College
MSU Madisonville Regional Campus
Public Event

OCTOBER 20 – ST. LOUIS, MO

Public Event

OCTOBER 23 – HOPKINSVILLE, KY

Hopkinsville-Christian County Human
Rights Commission Unity Breakfast
MSU Fort Campbell Regional Campus
Hopkinsville Kiwanis Club

SPECIAL THANKS

Office of the President
Office of Enrollment Management
Office of Development
Office of Alumni Relations
Office of Branding,
Marketing and Communication
Academic Affairs
Center for Adult and
Regional Education
Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Worth Shemwell
Elizabeth Davis
Joyce Whitney
Aviva Yasgur
Melissa Shown
Brittney McWaters
Jeremy McKeel
Brandon Story



MURRAY STATE
UNIVERSITY

Equal Opportunity Employer/AA.