



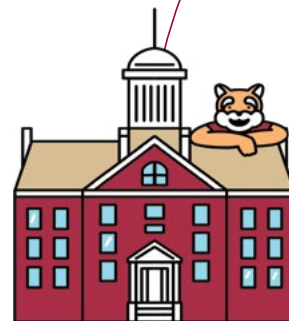
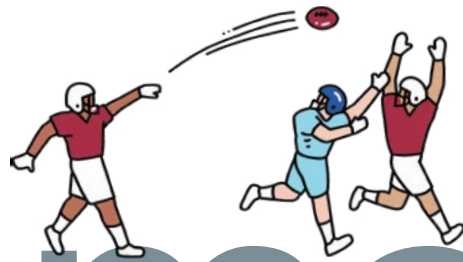
Stronger together.



Willamette University
2026 Impact Report



At Willamette, we are leading the way.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAM ISLAND



Imagine an excavation site in Scotland that predates Stonehenge.

For more than a decade, Willamette archaeology students have conducted fieldwork there with Professor Scott Pike. This year, data science students and faculty joined in. They developed first-of-its-kind software to analyze and visualize data from the site's floor chemistry, deepening our understanding of life 5,000 years ago.

That's just one example of the collaborations and connections forged at Willamette during the 2025-26 academic year. There are countless others. From Salem to Portland, art studios to classrooms to science labs, courtrooms to boardrooms and beyond, each day brings new evidence that at Willamette, we are stronger when we work together.

All five schools—the undergraduate college, the Pacific Northwest College of Art, the Atkinson Graduate School of Management, the School of Computing & Information Sciences, and Willamette Law—grew stronger this year because you chose to support and invest in students.

Thanks to your belief in Willamette, in 2025-26:

- › The university experienced its fifth consecutive year of enrollment growth, especially notable in the broader context of enrollment decline in higher education.

- › The university expanded access with a new partnership with Clackamas Community College



\$16,150,678

Total amount raised, 2025–26

that gives community college graduates a streamlined path to complete their undergraduate education here, the latest addition to our growing Bearcat Pathway transfer network.

› Two competitive scholarship programs—the Schmidt Scholarship and Fairweather Fellowship—helped Willamette recruit top academic performers to the undergraduate college.

› Atkinson launched a one-year master's in finance and accounting, recognizing that traditional boundaries between these fields are blurring, and reimagined its part-time MBA for Professionals, introducing a flexible hybrid format to better meet the needs and schedules of busy professionals. We also lowered tuition for the MBA-P.

› Pacific Northwest College of Art embedded career preparation into the core curriculum through its revamped Office of Career Design, now directed by Justine Highsmith BFA'17. She and her team are building new relationships with area employers, from large companies to local nonprofits.

› Willamette Law launched the Alaska Law Summer Program, an immersion in Anchorage for rising 2L and 3L students from any American Bar Association-accredited school. Hosted in partnership with the University of Alaska Anchorage, it's rooted in decades of collaboration between Willamette Law and Alaska's legal community.

› The School of Computing & Information Sciences announced a new bachelor of science in industrial

engineering that will blend engineering, math, and social sciences to create flexible thinkers who understand the interplay between systems and people. Graduates will help meet the growing demand for industrial engineers in fields from manufacturing to sustainability.

› The Office of Career Development has a new home on the Salem campus. Serving students from every school at the university, it features advising offices, private interview rooms, and community spaces, as well as a home base for staffers such as Claire Martin, who joined the team as the inaugural director of employer engagement. A former corporate recruiter for tech companies, she is developing partnerships with the region's top employers and creating clear pathways from campus to career.

Philanthropic support through annual gifts, endowed funds, and volunteer service fueled all of this important growth.

From this position of strength, our shared future with Pacific University now begins. After gaining the unanimous support of our governing boards, Willamette and Pacific signed a definitive agreement in July to merge. In creating Oregon's largest private university, we plan to build the capacity to offer more academic and career opportunities for students and more flexibility to serve the needs of our region. We will benefit from the scale, strength, and breadth of a larger institution while retaining each school's traditions, identities, close-knit communities, and sense of belonging. We are excited for you to be a part of this bold next chapter.

The university experienced its fifth consecutive year of enrollment growth, which is especially notable in the broader context of enrollment decline in higher education.



STRONGER TOGETHER

How your support shapes student futures



Meet five students who benefited from your 2025–26 philanthropy

Photographs by **Cameron Munn**



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“Financial aid
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to try out as many
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HOW YOUR SUPPORT
SHAPES STUDENT FUTURES

Joshua Torres is living the Willamette motto.



JOSHUA TORRES BA’27 WAS a high school student in rural Nebraska when he decided to leave the religion in which he was raised. Searching for a new place to belong, he threw himself into his studies. A teenager who’d never before cared about school signed up for honors classes and joined student council.

He realized: “I like learning. I’m good at it. I think college is for me.” Josh had found a community in academics. Through a mentor, he learned about the Willamette motto and set out to become a Bearcat.

Philanthropic support made that goal possible. Financial aid—enabled by gifts to the Annual Fund—combined with a College of Arts & Sciences Endowed Scholarship to make Willamette the most affordable of his college options.

Josh is now a psychology and economics major and a business minor. A first-generation college student,

he mentors high schoolers at Willamette Academy. A summer internship with an Oregon state agency gave him a taste of a public service career, while housing provided by the Office of Civic Engagement ensured he could accept the unpaid position.

“At Willamette, there are so many opportunities to not silo yourself,” Josh says. “Financial aid opened up the desire to try out as many things as possible and to be continuously curious.”

All of this exploration earned Josh an Obama-Chesky Voyager Scholarship for Public Service, a national leadership development and scholarship program for future public servants. His application essay was about the meaning of “Not unto ourselves alone are we born.”

“The Willamette motto is about the best of humans,” Josh says. “It’s a moral compass for pursuing a life well-lived.”





Brooke Proctor is using data to make a difference.

“SHOULD I DROP THE CLASS?”

Brooke Proctor BS’26, MS’26 was in her first week of college when she posed that question to Assistant Professor Kristen Gore. Temporarily sidelined by Covid, Brooke was worried she’d fall too far behind in introductory data science, since she had no experience with computers beyond basic use.

“Dr. Gore said, ‘It will be fine; take a deep breath,’” Brooke recalls. “And, it was fine. I loved data science. It married my interests in social science and mathematics.”

Brooke graduated in May with a double major in data science and environmental science, and again in August with a master’s in data science, thanks to a School of Computing & Information Sciences program in which students can earn both degrees in four years plus one summer.

Along the way she helped develop AI models to predict ecological population interactions, examined local environmental hazards and health outcomes, and collected archaeological data in Greece.

“I don’t know that anyone in my family has been out of the country ever,” she says. “I was shocked when I saw that was something I could apply for.”

When her family’s financial situation changed suddenly during high school, support from the Heather Dempsey Environmental Science Scholarship and gifts to the Annual Fund made it possible for Brooke, a first-generation college student from Keizer, Oregon, to choose Willamette.

Once on campus, Brooke got to know Salem from a new perspective as a peer leader in the Office of Civic Engagement. The network she developed through this work led to a summer internship as a Geographic Information System data analyst at the Marion-Polk Food Share. Brooke also leveraged her network to connect peers with potential employers.

Looking back on college, Brooke especially values how data science group projects taught her to collaborate effectively and present complex findings clearly. She knows these skills will serve her well.

“Willamette,” she says, “has changed my life in so many ways.”



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*“I loved data science.
It married my interests
in social science
and mathematics.”*



“At PNCA, I’ve opened my eyes to more art and more learning.”

HOW YOUR SUPPORT
SHAPES STUDENT FUTURES

Casper Mayberry’s younger self would be proud.



GHOSTLIGHT IS A GRAPHIC NOVEL that combines traditional and digital illustration to tell the story of a girl who goes looking for her missing father.

“The novel switches back and forth from the past and the present,” says its creator, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) illustration major Casper Mayberry BFA’27. “It’s a story that’s been sitting with me for a long time.”

Ghostlight is Casper’s senior thesis, the culmination of years spent sharpening his storytelling instincts and artistic style through courses in character design, visual techniques, and comic strip writing.

Casper grew up in Washington State. When he set his sights on art school, the goal felt financially out of reach. “My family and I were talking about other options, like going to community college for a while.” Financial support from the Ann Payne Edlen Scholarship and gifts to the Annual Fund made PNCA affordable.

Casper credits PNCA’s Career Design office with helping him hone his portfolio and explore career paths in concept art, visual development, character design, and entertainment art. A summer internship at Crucial Comix in Portland—supported by a PNCA grant for students in unpaid internships—gave him hands-on experience in the professional art world.

PNCA funding also covered pens, paper, and other materials for *Ghostlight*.

This summer Casper exhibited his work at Carnation Contemporary and taught a character design class through Portland’s Center for the Arts. He also worked on commissions and sold art through his online shop.

“At PNCA, I’ve opened my eyes to more art and more learning,” he says. “And every day, my art is looking more and more like how I want it to. I think freshman me would be proud.”



Micheal Seraphin is turning a personal goal into professional growth.



WHEN MICHEAL SERAPHIN MBA'27 arrives at work at the Salem Health Foundations each morning, he's likely to draw on something he learned in class days before.

A former Willamette staffer in residential life and administrative services, Micheal is now back on campus as a student in Atkinson's MBA for Professionals program.

"I see it as a capstone," he says. "This was a degree that I wanted for myself. I knew it would be beneficial career-wise, but I didn't do it solely for career development. I did it for personal development."

Micheal has found both at Atkinson. Thanks to professors who build upon one another's lessons, he's able to seamlessly draw connections between marketing and accounting, for example, or leadership development and data analysis.

He also values the program's cohort model, which brings together students in business, government, and nonprofit careers.

"I could have done an MBA anywhere," Micheal says, "but I wanted the classroom experience, and I wanted to experience it with other individuals."

At the Salem Health Foundations, Micheal's job as a fundraiser keeps him in close touch with people who harness philanthropy to help others. At Atkinson, he's personally experienced donor support. The George and Colleen Hoyt Not-For-Profit Scholarship, as well as gifts to the Annual Fund, help make Atkinson affordable.

He hopes to take part in Atkinson's study abroad session in Singapore this fall. After graduation, he's excited about the MBA for Life program, which enables Atkinson alumni to keep taking classes, making graduation the next step in a lifetime of professional and personal growth.

"I could have done an MBA anywhere, but I wanted the classroom experience, and I wanted to experience it with other individuals."





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“Money has always weighed heavily on me. And so I don’t take school for granted. I love every second of it, and I’m so grateful for it.”

HOW YOUR SUPPORT
SHAPES STUDENT FUTURES

Sandra Stewart is becoming the advocate she once needed.



“WHY AM I OK?”

That’s what Sandra Stewart JD’26, then a medical assistant, asked herself at a professional development session on adverse childhood experiences, after mentally counting her own.

Sandra was born homeless. Her father went to prison when she was a baby. Her mother struggled with addiction. Sandra missed a lot of school, and in seventh grade, she stopped going. “My entire life, I was told that I was stupid,” she says.

Having healthy adult role models can offset the effects of childhood trauma, she learned in the session. Sandra had a long list of those, too: school counselors, an elderly neighbor, mentors in Big Brothers Big Sisters, a lawyer who helped enroll her in an alternative high school program.

“How do I repay these people?” she wondered.

The answer led to Willamette Law. But first, it led her to found Light the Way Birthdays, a nonprofit

that throws birthday parties for homeless youth in Marion County. “In creating the nonprofit, I really enjoyed the legal side,” she says. She knew law school would help her advocate for more children in need.

Financial support from the Jonathan Grindell Law Scholarship and gifts to the Annual Fund made Willamette affordable.

“Money has always weighed heavily on me,” Sandra says. “And so I don’t take school for granted. I love every second of it, and I’m so grateful for it.”

For Sandra, the highlight of law school was the Criminal Defense Clinic, through which she worked directly with clients under faculty supervision. She even tried—and won—a case in court.

She aims to work in public defense and continue to be the kind of healthy role model she once needed.

“Little things add up to change someone’s life,” she knows. “They’re seeds planted when you’re a child. You hold onto them, and then they later bloom.”



Building the university of the future.

“We are working to build something bigger precisely to ensure Willamette’s mission reaches farther, not to see it fade.”



As we reflect on a landmark year, President Stephen Thorsett discusses the strategic vision behind Willamette’s move to join forces with Pacific University, creating Oregon’s largest private university.

In an era when many small colleges are struggling, some might wonder if this merger is a response to financial pressure. Is Willamette acting out of a place of need?

Quite the opposite. Willamette is stable on its own and operating a balanced budget, as is Pacific. We are entering this partnership from a position of strength, built on five consecutive years of enrollment growth, the successful integration of PNCA, the launch of our School of Computing & Information Sciences, and a recently completed fundraising campaign that raised \$160 million—surpassing our \$150 million goal.

Across higher education, many mergers are indeed driven by financial distress, but what we are doing is entirely different. This is a story of ambition and strategic vision. We are choosing to build something broader precisely to ensure our mission reaches farther.

For our donors who have a specific passion—whether it’s a Willamette Law scholarship or a particular Bearcat athletic team—how will this merger affect their giving?

This is a vital question. Our promise to our supporters is that established gifts and endowments will continue to honor the intent of those gifts and will be maintained exactly as-is. You will still be able to make Annual Fund gifts or establish new endowments to support students and faculty in a specific school. Your priorities remain our priorities, and we are committed to ensuring your generosity continues to impact the specific areas of campus you care about most.

Willamette successfully integrated with PNCA five years ago. What did we learn from that experience, and how will we protect PNCA’s unique culture within an even larger university?

Our merger with PNCA taught us that a successful partnership must protect what makes each campus community special. PNCA brought a vibrant, indispensable creative culture to Willamette, and that distinct identity must endure. Within

this new structure, PNCA will continue to operate under its own name on its historic Portland campus, maintaining its unique art and design programs, its student life, and the Hallie Ford School of Graduate Studies. We proved with PNCA that we can expand our resources without losing the close-knit, specialized environments that students cherish, and we are applying those exact lessons to our work with Pacific.

How will this merger improve the student experience by creating academic opportunities?

Pacific matches Willamette’s commitment to academic excellence and public service. They are Oregon’s No. 1 private educator of healthcare professionals, with top-tier programs in optometry, pharmacy, and physical therapy. This merger enhances academic quality by opening doors that neither school could easily unlock alone. Students will soon have direct pathways between undergraduate and graduate programs; collaborative “study away” opportunities across Salem, Portland, and Forest Grove; and access to expanded faculty research and career networks. We are combining our distinct strengths to elevate the value of a degree from both institutions.

Now that the boards have officially signed the agreement, what is the timeline and how will the leadership transition work?

Following our unanimous board approvals in June 2026 and the signing of the plan of merger in July 2026, we have advanced from a letter of intent to a binding agreement. We expect to complete the corporate merger into a single nonprofit entity governed by a unified board of trustees by early 2027, followed by a full institutional merger likely in 2028, subject to regulatory approvals. To ensure a seamless transition, Pacific President Jenny Coyle and I will jointly lead the combined university. I will step into the role of chancellor, overseeing the business and operational side of the institution, while President Coyle will lead our academic programs and student affairs. This shared leadership ensures that both institutions have an equal voice as we build Oregon’s most dynamic private university.

Find more FAQs and keep up to date at willamette.edu/bettertogether



Your gifts and volunteer service made a difference for students in 2025-26.



Total raised

\$16,150,678

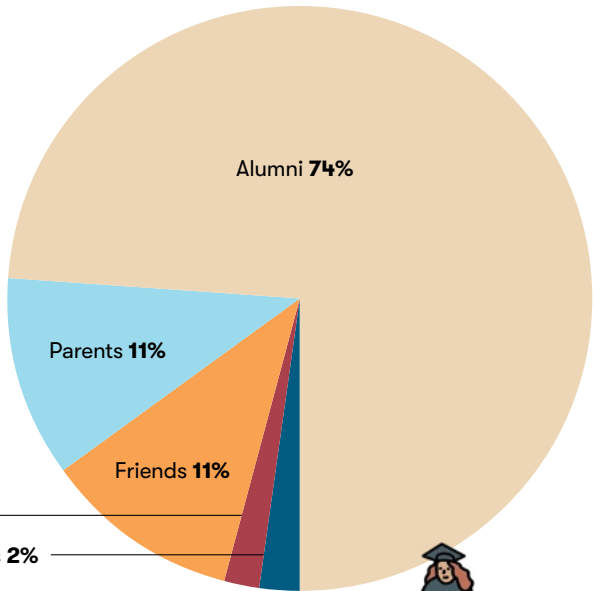


Total number of donors

4,737

Number of first-time donors

804



Annual Fund dollars raised

\$2.8m

Leadership Circle dollars raised

\$10.2m

Planned gift dollars raised

\$7.6m

Total raised from gifts under \$100

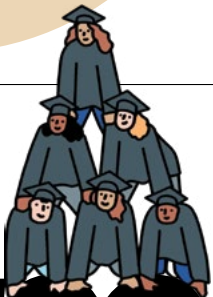
\$38k

Number of volunteers

566

Willamette's Endowment

\$354m



Thank you.





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