

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030



OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY

Darden College of Education
and Professional Studies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Darden College of Education and Professional Studies (DCEPS) extends its sincere thanks to all members of our college community for their active participation in this strategic planning process. The feedback from our community—faculty, staff, students, and external partners—is the foundation of this plan.

We offer special thanks to the members of our strategic planning steering committee for their dedication, expertise, and commitment throughout this process. Their guidance was instrumental in shaping this plan, and our college's future.

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LETTER FROM THE DEAN

Dear Darden College Community,

It is with great excitement that I share with you this strategic plan, the culmination of a year's worth of thoughtful work, collaboration, and reflection. I am immensely proud of all who have contributed to this process and grateful for the guidance of the steering committee. Your dedication and commitment to the future of our college have made this possible.

More now than ever, we are navigating a time of rapid change, and while it can be difficult to move through uncertainty, I have the utmost confidence in our ability to continue thriving. Over the last few years, we have proven our resiliency in the face of changes and challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and internal restructuring. These experiences have made us stronger, and I believe they will continue to shape our college in the years to come. Our mission to deliver the highest level of rigorous education and professional preparation to our students remains as strong as ever, and we are well-positioned to continue fulfilling it.

Our college is experiencing an exciting time as we build upon our national reputation as a leader in preparing students to be educators, industry professionals, and service experts. As we look ahead, we will amplify our efforts to provide our students with transformative experiences—from industry-aligned curricula to comprehensive student support throughout their academic journey. We are committed to ensuring that students receive the highest level of support when they consider our college for their degree.

In addition, we know that the strength of our research complements the strength of our teaching. As we continue to build on our research productivity and equip our faculty and students to meet the expectations of an R1 institution, we will continue to support and empower our community to pursue impactful, meaningful research.

Our commitment to rethinking and strengthening our partnerships is also a key part of this plan. Throughout this process, we've heard from many internal and external stakeholders about the multiplier effect that our partnerships have. These relationships are integral to the success of our students, the strength of our research, and the impact we have on our communities. We will continue to build and strengthen these partnerships, ensuring that we are creating opportunities for applied learning and community-embedded research.

Finally, none of this work would be possible without the people who are at the heart of our college—our faculty, staff, and students. We are committed to addressing and reducing barriers within the college to empower our people to do their best work. Strengthening connections between all members of our community will help us work more effectively and cohesively toward our shared goals.

I am deeply grateful to all who have come together to help us envision this future, a future we all care so much about. While there may still be uncertainty on our horizon, our community will remain united, adapt, and navigate any challenges that come our way. Together, we will build on the incredible work we've done and the strong foundation we've established.

With gratitude,



Tammi Dice, Ph.D.
Dean, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies



CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 01

INTRODUCTION 03

MISSION AND VISION 05

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 06

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE..... 16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Darden College of Education and Professional Studies at Old Dominion University (ODU) is poised for a transformative future as we build on our strengths and embrace new opportunities. This strategic plan outlines the key priorities and strategies that will guide our college in achieving its mission to prepare the next generation of educators, industry professionals, and service leaders.





OUR PLAN IS ORGANIZED AROUND FOUR CENTRAL PRIORITIES THAT DEFINE THE DIRECTION AND FOCUS OF OUR EFFORTS:

1. Enhancing the Student Experience

We are committed to maintaining a high level of support for all students, ensuring they are prepared to succeed academically and professionally. Our focus on student success will include enhancing recruitment efforts, providing comprehensive advising, growing financial accessibility, and fostering excellence in all educational experiences.

2. Expanding Research Output Through Support and Collaboration

As ODU moves to an R1 research classification, DCEPS will continue to lead in research productivity. We will broaden our definition of who engages in research, integrate students into research experiences, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration across departments and institutions. We aim to create a culture of scholarly excellence that empowers faculty and students to address significant societal challenges through research.

3. Strengthening External Partnerships and Engagement

Our partnerships with industries, educational institutions, and community organizations are critical in expanding the impact of our work. By deepening relationships with our external stakeholders, we will create more avenues to provide students with valuable real-world experiences, enhance our research impact, and expand opportunities for collaboration. Alumni engagement will also play a key role in strengthening our community and connecting our work to broader professional networks.

4. Reinforcing an Efficient and Empowering Internal Environment

We will ensure our internal structures support faculty and staff in doing their best work. Creating clear, standardized policies, enhancing internal communication, and reducing administrative burdens will foster a positive, productive, and inclusive work environment. These efforts will help us attract and retain top talent and position DCEPS for long-term success.

Each priority area has clear goals and actionable strategies, with measurable metrics to track our progress. We are committed to creating a transparent, accountable, and adaptable environment that ensures our continued success. As we move forward, we will create an implementation plan with specific timelines and success metrics to guide our efforts and keep us on track.

This strategic plan represents the culmination of a year-long process driven by input from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and external partners. It reflects our community's shared priorities and aspirations and will serve as our roadmap for achieving the next phase of growth and impact.

With this plan, DCEPS will continue to lead the way in shaping the future of education and professional studies, preparing our students to succeed in a rapidly changing world while contributing to advancing knowledge and societal well-being.

INTRODUCTION



The roots of DCEPS trace back to the very foundation of Old Dominion University, with education courses offered as early as 1930. While the structure of our college has evolved over the past 95 years, one constant has remained: our commitment to preparing the next generation of educators, industry professionals, and service experts.





As we approach the centennial celebration of our college's work, now is the perfect time to look ahead and envision our path to the future. Our college is well-positioned for continued success, with significant assets in place. Our modern building, completed in 2017, provides cutting-edge amenities and collaborative spaces for our community. We are home to a faculty that excels in their fields and is deeply committed to delivering high-quality educational experiences to our students while leading their respective disciplines through innovative, impactful research.

At this pivotal moment, we have an incredible opportunity to move nimbly and operate at the highest level in our fields. We are dedicated to equipping every college community member to excel and deepening our commitment to our core mission. As we look to the future, we will continue to rethink how we support and strengthen our research enterprise, ensuring it remains impactful and relevant. We will also continue to work creatively and collaboratively to deliver transformative educational experiences that prepare our students not only for the careers of today but for long-term success in the evolving workforce.

As we worked through this planning process, a common thread emerged in all steps—our impact. From our research that drives forward both knowledge and real-world application to our partnerships with external stakeholders to our work in educating students who are shaping the future, the impact of our college is a point of pride.

As we look to the future, we will continue to expand this impact. This strategic plan serves as a roadmap for our college, guiding our efforts to fulfill our mission and expanding our influence on students, disciplines, and communities. Through our collective work, we will continue to strengthen our college's resilience, vibrancy, and ability to solve problems, all while preparing our students for success now and in the future.



MISSION AND VISION



MISSION

The Darden College of Education and Professional Studies creates an environment for transformative education rooted in deep community impact and promotes innovative research that addresses emerging societal needs.

VISION

We empower our college community to push boundaries in research, education, and community engagement, creating systemic impact locally and beyond.

This strategic plan is organized around four key priority areas: enhancing student experience, expanding research output, strengthening external partnerships and engagement, and creating an efficient and empowering internal environment. For each priority area, a key goal has been established, providing a focus for progress. Specific strategies, further organized into corresponding subcategories, define critical aspects and actions required to drive success and will ensure that each goal is achieved. To foster accountability and enable progress tracking, each priority area also includes measurable success metrics, allowing for continuous evaluation of progress.

PRIORITIES, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES



ENHANCE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

GOAL: We will continue to provide holistic support for every student, reducing barriers to enrollment and completion, and equipping students for life-long professional success.

At the heart of DCEPS lies an unwavering commitment to student success; this dedication has long been a defining characteristic and a point of pride for our college. As ODU evolves into a research-intensive institution under our new Carnegie classification, our college's focus on providing an exceptional, student-centered experience remains at the forefront of our mission.

We are committed to fostering an environment that balances educational quality and integrity with student needs and external changes. Excellence in education can take many forms — whether through online offerings, accelerated programs, or traditional on-campus experiences, we are dedicated to ensuring that all options reflect our high standards of quality. Drawing on the deep expertise in curriculum development, pedagogy, and learning sciences within our college, we will create transformative learning experiences that promote the development of the whole student. Faculty and staff remain steadfast in their commitment to offering a holistic, personalized experience for every student. From the moment a student is introduced to DCEPS, through their academic journey, and into their professional careers, we are dedicated to ensuring that each stage of the student experience is excellent, responsive, and designed to meet their unique needs.

In this section, we outline our strategic approach to reinforcing student success, which encompasses enhancing recruitment efforts, providing comprehensive advising and student support, growing financial accessibility, and fostering excellence in all educational experiences. Each of these areas reflects our commitment to reducing barriers, nurturing talent, and preparing students for lifelong professional success, all while maintaining the personalized care and attention that is a hallmark of the DCEPS experience.

By continuously aligning our strategies with the evolving needs of our students and the demands of the academic and professional world, DCEPS will remain a leader in delivering an exemplary educational experience that empowers students to thrive in all aspects of their lives.



KEY STRATEGIES

COORDINATE RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING EFFORTS

- Streamline online channels to ensure prospective students have access to consistent information across all digital platforms
- Highlight the breadth and depth of academic program offerings and student experiences to effectively communicate the full value of the college, including opportunities for accelerated programs and online offerings
- Coordinate direct prospective student communication and engagement that is strategic, personalized, and timely
- Create a central, online location for marketing materials and related recruitment support materials to ensure consistent recruitment communications across all academic programs
- Develop reciprocal recruiting partnerships with high schools and community college systems to develop pipelines of potential students

STRENGTHEN ADVISING AND ACCESS TO STUDENT SUPPORT

- Share best practices in advising, mentorship, and coaching with faculty and staff to ensure that each student receives high-quality, consistent support throughout their DCEPS experience
- Implement systematic communication procedures that provide timely and consistent information about academic progress and support resources
- Develop a central, online information hub for students that consolidates campus and college resources, academic expectations, and support service offerings

GROW STUDENT SUPPORT AND FUNDING

- Create a flexible funding pool to provide completion grants for students as they progress in their degree programs
- Better equip students to pursue financial assistance through improved communication of available scholarships, internal awards, and external funding opportunities
- Expand support of student groups, including the Ambassador program and peer mentorship initiatives, to enhance community engagement

FOSTER EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

- Enable and set expectations for programs to operate at the top of their professional disciplines, engaging with industry standards and professional expectations
- Conduct regular assessments of the student experience to identify and remove explicit and implicit barriers to academic success and degree completion
- Offer regularly scheduled seminars on best practices in learning science, instructional design, and cutting-edge use of technology, including AI, to equip faculty to continually evolve their coursework and instructional pedagogies
- Develop a system to receive and effectively respond to student feedback and requests
- Establish annual advising and mentorship awards to celebrate and encourage outstanding student support

METRICS

- Student enrollment
- Year-over-year retention rates
- Continuation rates
- 4- and 6-year graduation rates
- Licensure and certification attainment
- Total and new dollars invested in student support
- Ratio of total support dollars per student
- Student satisfaction survey results

02

EXPAND RESEARCH OUTPUT THROUGH SUPPORT & COLLABORATION

GOAL: Starting with a strong and consistent culture of research, we will equip our faculty with the resources and guidance needed to conduct impactful research.

With the recent designation of ODU as a research-intensive (R1) institution, the college is presented with a unique opportunity to continue leading and expanding its research productivity. Over the last several years, DCEPS has significantly increased its research output, and this momentum positions us to further elevate our impact. At the same time, we remain deeply committed to fostering a vibrant and inclusive culture of scholarly pursuit, one that empowers and supports every member of our community.

Our approach to research productivity is multipronged. First, we are broadening our definition of who does research, ensuring that all faculty are empowered to engage in research. We will also work to incentivize undergraduate and graduate students to participate in research, enhancing their academic and professional development while contributing to the college's research mission. A strong research culture requires not only clear expectations for faculty and students but also internal resources, infrastructure, and guidance to facilitate success. We are committed to ensuring that our faculty have access to the necessary tools, training, and mentorship to thrive in their research pursuits.

We seek to foster creativity and risk taking for our researchers, supporting emerging ideas and methodological approaches to research.

Moreover, we understand that some of the most transformative research questions today can only be tackled through interdisciplinary collaboration. As such, we are equally committed to creating an environment that encourages and supports interdisciplinary research—both within the college and in partnership with other colleges, departments, and even institutions. This collaborative approach will allow us to address complex societal challenges with greater depth and breadth, ultimately enhancing the relevance and impact of our research.

By taking this comprehensive, multipronged approach to research productivity, we will not only continue to lead but also create an inclusive, dynamic, and sustainable culture of scholarly excellence that empowers our entire academic community to make meaningful contributions to both academia and society.



KEY STRATEGIES

GROW THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

- Define and communicate expectations for R1-level scholarly productivity, emphasizing the transformative potential of research to impact local and global communities
- Integrate students into research efforts through hands-on experiences including supervised research with faculty, research workshops, training, and showcases, leveraging university-level supports related to both undergraduate and graduate research
- Provide early career faculty with targeted opportunities for engagement in research groups, proposal collaborations, and proposal submissions
- Develop college-level incentives to drive collaboration and leadership in research projects
- Provide faculty with resources and guidance to successfully pursue research, training, and service grants

STRENGTHEN RESEARCH SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

- Hire a Research Center Director to provide strategic leadership in the research enterprise, supporting faculty and empowering them to pursue impactful, high-quality research and grants
- Offer tailored guidance to faculty at all stages of the research process, providing advice on best practices, methodology selection and research design and provide administrative support to facilitate grant proposal submissions

- Implement a methodology training series for faculty and doctoral students, ensuring ongoing development and support for advanced research techniques
- Enhance the integration of research and teaching efforts across the college, ensuring both are mutually reinforcing and that faculty can leverage research outcomes in their classrooms

BROADEN THE SCOPE AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH

- Recognize and reward collaborative research in annual evaluations to highlight the importance of teamwork as well as cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches
- Through close coordination between the Research Center Director and the leader for strategic partnerships, identify the research needs of existing partners that align with the expertise and interests of our faculty, creating research and grant opportunities with local impact
- Identify and cultivate potential partnerships and interdisciplinary opportunities across the college and institution, connecting researchers based on common topics and complementary skills
- Provide dedicated support to help faculty identify and pursue new and non-traditional funding sources, expanding the range of available financial support for diverse research endeavors
- Elevate the role of the college's research centers, building on their models of collaborative research, strong mentorship, and non-traditional funding pursuits

METRICS

- Overall research expenditures
- Number of external grants submitted
- Number of external grants funded
- Percent of faculty involved in grant submission activities
- Number of IDC bearing grants
- Diversity of funding sources
- Number of publications in top-tier journals with impact
- Number of students involved in research activities (e.g., supported by grants, co-authors on publications, etc.)
- Number of external recognitions and distinctions



STRENGTHEN EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS & ENGAGEMENT

GOAL: Building on a clear knowledge base of partnerships, we will expand our responsive and collaborative partnerships to better serve our community and amplify our impact.

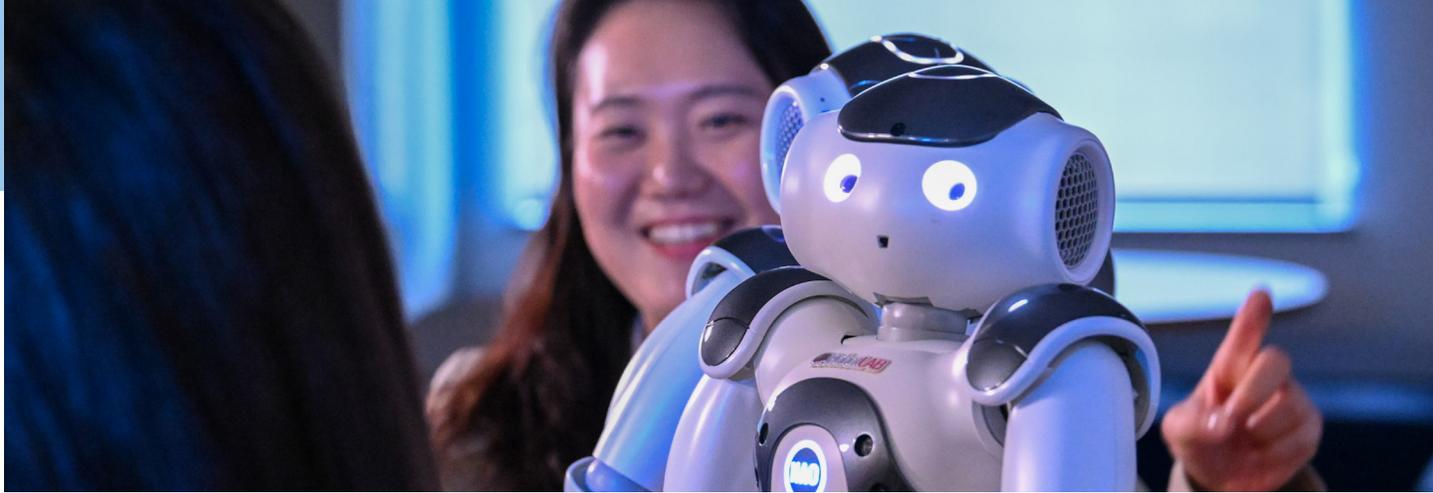
Partnerships are a vital cornerstone of the mission of any university, and particularly so for DCEPS. Such alliances enable us to magnify the impact of our work, extending our reach beyond the classroom and into the communities, industries, and fields we serve. Through strategic collaborations, we can ensure our students are not only prepared for today's challenges but also equipped for careers in industries that may not yet exist.

A key aspect of this work is aligning closely with schools, professions, and industries to provide our students with invaluable real-world experiences. Internship opportunities, practicums, and job placements are critical pathways for students to gain firsthand experience and a competitive edge for life-long success in their fields and for us to validate our curriculum remains relevant and reflective of the latest professional practices.

In addition, partnerships play a crucial role in enhancing the college's research capabilities. By collaborating with other research institutions, pk-12 schools, industry leaders, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and cultural institutions, we can identify projects with high societal relevance and focus our research on addressing pressing issues in education and professional fields. By embedding our research in the community, we will foster continuous learning, practical problem-solving, and impactful societal contributions.

Finally, the bond established between DCEPS and our students extends far beyond graduation. Our alumni are not only our greatest representatives but also our strongest links between schools and industries, and current scholars. We are committed to strengthening ties with our alumni across all programs, providing them with expanded professional networks while simultaneously affording them the opportunity to shape, guide, and inspire future leaders in their respective fields.

Through partnerships—internally and externally, with schools, industries, and alumni—we build a stronger, more impactful DCEPS that continues to drive progress across the nation in education and professional studies.



KEY STRATEGIES

IMPROVE INTERNAL PARTNERSHIP KNOWLEDGE AND COORDINATION

- Create a central database of partnerships to map and track current networks and connections across the college
- Hire and onboard a leader for strategic partnerships to serve as the primary point of contact for both new and existing partners, providing a clear pathway for engagement with the college
- Streamline and align partnership efforts across the college, ensuring external opportunities are matched to internal expertise

SUPPORT DEEP AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIP PURSUITS

- Develop and share best practice frameworks for building and maintaining successful external partnerships
- Advance partnerships that build professional pathways for students and support the local workforce through internships, career placements, and school and industry collaborations
- Create a centralized partnership webpage that highlights success stories, showcases the impact of collaborative work, and tells the story of the value of such alliances for regionally and nationally-recognized research and community impact
- Integrate partnership experience questions into post-engagement surveys to better understand satisfaction

EXPAND ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

- Increase and diversify the types of alumni events locally and virtually, facilitating connections and expanding awareness of partnership opportunities with current students and faculty
- Leverage technology to engage alumni nationally, providing opportunities to remain connected and to collaborate with the college
- Expand outreach to local alumni, providing in-person engagement opportunities, such as serving as a guest speaker or participating in recruitment events
- Share with current students the value of staying connected beyond graduation, outlining the impact that alumni support has on the academic experience
- Celebrate and share alumni stories and successes more widely to strengthen the college alumni network

METRICS

- Number of partners
- Number of repeated partnerships
- Number of students hired by partner organization
- Number of students served by partner organizations (e.g., internships, research projects)
- Proportion of research activities involving external partners
- Satisfaction of partner organizations
- Percentage of alumni who donate to the college
- Alumni event attendance

04

REINFORCE AN EFFICIENT & EMPOWERING INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

GOAL: We will ensure our people can operate in an efficient and transparent environment, creating a welcoming culture that fosters growth and success for all.

The impact we make on our students, partners, and communities would not be possible without the people who do the work—our dedicated faculty and staff. We are committed to intentionally building opportunities for connection, understanding that we are better and stronger together. We recognize that in order to achieve our goals, we must continuously review, reimagine, and invest in people- and impact-centered structures and policies that empower and allow every member of our college community to do their very best work.

Ultimately, the structures and processes we put in place have a tangible impact on the people who navigate them. While we will invest in the well-being and community-building for our people, we will also focus on reducing administrative burdens and clarifying expectations. By making these improvements, we are creating a clearer path for success—one that enables individuals to focus on their work, while feeling supported and valued.

Our long-term sustainability and success are rooted in highly engaged and satisfied faculty and staff. Building a sense of belonging not only enhances well-being but also drives productivity and long-term commitment. We want each person who works for DCEPS to have the opportunity for a fulfilling, long-term career here – and we know that this is possible by removing procedural barriers, providing clear processes, and building a robust, supportive community.

By focusing on both the internal environment and the structures that underpin it, we are better equipped to meet the challenges of the future. This foundation will allow us to deliver high-quality education, maintain a supportive work environment, and continue growing as a college, expanding the transformative impact that we have on our respective disciplines, as well as our students and our community.



KEY STRATEGIES

CREATE CLEAR AND STANDARD POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Review and when necessary, clarify expectations for promotion, tenure, and evaluations, ensuring evaluations for tenure-track, research, clinical, and teaching faculty are clear and consistently applied
- Develop college-wide standards for documentation of staff job descriptions, roles, and responsibilities, fostering greater consistency in workload distribution
- Implement standard, scalable onboarding processes across the college with structured feedback loops to ensure continuous monitoring and improvement
- Establish a process for monitoring and responding to changes in external policies, ensuring these are properly integrated into college-level policies and procedures
- Develop processes for program, department, and college policy development and review to support alignment with university level policy and facilitate effective internal operations
- Centralize and streamline access to resources and relevant documents and policies through regular communications and a dedicated faculty resource page
- Proactively develop succession plans where possible, aligning onboarding and offboarding processes to facilitate the transfer of institutional knowledge
- Modernize DCEPS fiscal operations, positioning the Director of Fiscal Operations to lead efforts in improving and streamlining college-level fiscal processes

STRENGTHEN OUR INTERNAL CULTURE AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY

- Streamline internal communications to ensure employees receive relevant, targeted outreach, allowing for clear information navigation and effective prioritization
- Facilitate community building and collaboration by incorporating opportunities for connection into current standing meetings and gatherings
- Explore culture building opportunities that integrate distance engagement opportunities to strengthen the sense of community across both in-person and remote teams
- Support grassroots, employee driven and organized meetings, engagement, and groups that foster a strong sense of community
- Promote in-person engagement with campus-based students whenever possible, prioritizing opportunities for direct interaction and relationship building
- Implement an annual faculty and staff engagement survey to gather feedback that informs college decision-making

METRICS

- Faculty and staff engagement survey results
- Faculty and staff retention
- Percent of faculty who achieve tenure
- Percent of positions with documented tasks and duties
- Decreased process time for key operations

IMPLEMENTATION

We are excited about what lies ahead for our college as we move forward with this clear roadmap, built around a shared vision for our future. This strategic plan represents the culmination of an engagement-focused process, reflecting the shared priorities and collective aspirations of our college community. It is a living document that will guide our decisions, actions, and goals in the years to come.

An accompanying implementation plan has been developed that organizes the key steps needed to put our strategies into action with clear timelines and success metrics to track our progress and ensure we are making measurable, impactful advancements.





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