The university recently published its 2020 Vision Mid-Cycle Review. Can you briefly discuss the successes to date?

We have achieved success in each of our strategic priorities. With a total of 8,100 freshman applications for fall 2018, we have surpassed our target by 33 percent. Moreover, our efforts have resulted in a 4 percent increase in retention rate (to 88 percent) and a 6 percent increase in six-year graduation rate (to 65 percent). In addition, the percent of bachelor’s degree recipients who have jobs six months after graduation has reached the 2020 target of 65 percent. Another 25 percent of bachelor’s degree recipients enter graduate programs within six months. We also have emphasized learning outcomes assessment for our degree programs, resulting in 85 percent of all programs currently being assessed.

We have transformed into a nationally ranked research university. Externally funded research has increased 70 percent, from $63 million in 2014 to $107 million in 2018, and our 20 doctoral programs boast a total enrollment of over 480 students in fall 2018. In the past seven years, 128 faculty have been hired, and 44 percent of our current faculty were hired in the past 10 years, bringing the total number of research faculty above 300. We have also made substantial investments, including $75 million in strategic plan activities alone. Between 2014 and 2018, we also invested nearly $400 million in the expansion and upgrade of facilities, resulting in almost 1 million square feet of new space.

Can you specifically discuss the progress in research?

NJIT continues to recruit and retain exceptional faculty, as well as encourage and support multidisciplinary collaborations. This year we continued to grow the number of collaborations, with 35 projects involving researchers from multiple departments — twice the 2020 target. Moreover, our faculty members are producing an average of 2.6 refereed publications per year, and the number of prestigious faculty awards has exceeded our 2020 target.

Our faculty is bringing diverse research expertise to NJIT and actively engaging with colleagues abroad, increasing the number of international research collaborations from a baseline of 24 in 2014 to 63 in 2018. Our university also values entrepreneurial research, supports inventions, and facilitates technology transfer through its Enterprise Development Center. Three years ago we set ambitious goals for research at NJIT. It is incredible to see how far we have come, particularly in the face of declining federal dollars for research.

What are some trends in higher education that affect research and how has NJIT addressed them?

In recent years, obtaining research funding, particularly federally financed research funding, has become increasingly competitive. We have addressed this challenge by placing greater emphasis on applied research in those areas where we are acknowledged leaders. As a result, funded research in computing, engineering and science has grown significantly. In addition, hiring faculty with leading skills in their fields and equipping them with state-of-the-art research facilities has enabled NJIT to compete for and win many more grants.

NJIT has moved up 34 positions in the 2019 U.S. News & World Report Top National University rankings — the third-highest jump in the rankings history. What contributed to this success?

By improving the student experience, we have significantly moved our retention and graduation rates and shown that NJIT is comparable to America’s best public universities. We have also been recognized for the upward economic mobility of our students by both The New York Times and Forbes. We believe that our commitment to supporting students in the lowest income brackets has had a significant positive impact on our ranking increase.

In the areas of research and scholarly productivity, NJIT has also achieved exceptional results with externally funded research, putting us firmly in the ranks of America’s finest research universities. The lesson we learned from this ranking is that you can’t just talk about being comparable to the top universities in the country. You have to offer a top university experience to your students and faculty if you want to reach that level.