The Society for College and University Planning

A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education

By Karen E. Hinton, PhD

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Society for College and University Planning
www.scup.org

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ISBN 978-1-937724-14-6

20201215

About the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP)

At SCUP, we believe that by uniting higher education leaders, we can meet the rapid pace of change and competition, advancing each institution as it shapes and defines its future.

Through connection, learning, and expanded conversation, we help create integrated planning solutions that will unleash the promise and potential of higher education.

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Foreword

Over the course of my career as a strategic planner in higher education, I have worked with a wide variety of individuals who have misconstrued the role of strategic planning in the academy. A great number of individuals are unaware of the necessary components of a strategic plan and what is required to implement and sustain such a plan. Some of the misinformed were consultants in occupations that serve the post-secondary community, and others were members of a college or university. Regardless of their relationship to the academic enterprise, those who misunderstand or are uninformed about planning practice can be a serious detriment to successful planning.

The costs of engaging in a poor planning process range from disillusioned faculty, staff, and students, to poor use of vital resources, to failed accreditation reviews which, in turn, cause an institution to lose funding and prestige. The stakes are high, but the rewards are higher. A well designed and implemented strategic planning process can provide an institution with a forum for campus-wide conversations about important decisions. The process can also be organized to make assessment, resource allocation, and accreditation easier, and be a source of information about progress and achievement with very real meaning to those associated with the institution.

This booklet is written to provide a practical overview of what strategic planning should be at the post-secondary level and define the elements of a successful process. The content offers a brief overview of the history of strategic planning in the academy from a practitioner's perspective and a more detailed examination of current planning practice. In some ways the content of this monograph is an examination of the criticism that strategic planning as a process is too linear to cross organizational silos and achieve institutional transformation. I believe those who have taken the view of strategic planning as a tool of limited use need a better understanding of the process.

It is my hope that those who engage in all types of planning activities on behalf of a post-secondary institution will use this information to educate themselves about what a strategic plan is and what its potential can be.

—Karen Hinton

About This Book

"Undergoing a strategic planning process can be a monumental task, especially for higher education institutions that are attempting a more contemporary model for the first time. Dr. Hinton's guide shortens the learning curve and unites college leadership with its intuitive, step-by-step approach. It not only takes you through the planning process, but also provides guidance on how to ensure the plan's long-term success."

Kasey McKee
Vice President, College Advancement
St. Charles Community College (SCC) Foundation

About the Author

Karen E. Hinton, PhD, has a career spanning more than twenty-five years in planning and administration in higher education, filling leadership positions at large and small public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and university system offices. She developed, facilitated, and managed numerous strategic plans, accreditation self-studies, and process improvement initiatives in a wide range of situations as a senior member of staff and also as a consultant.

Hinton has taught courses in composition, literature, and research methods, and was an academic advisor for undergraduate and graduate students. She initially served the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) as a membership liaison for New Mexico, and later held the same position in upstate New York. She also was a regional board member for the North Atlantic region, providing support for several regional conferences. Hinton has made numerous presentations at SCUP conferences and written articles and reviews for such publications as *Knowledge Directions* (the journal of The Institute for Knowledge Management) and *Planning for Higher Education*.

The author and SCUP would like to thank in remembrance the former *Planning for Higher Education* Editorial Review Board member and executive director of Planning, Assessment & Research at Brookdale Community College, Arnold J. Gelfman, who passed away in 2019, for his meaningful contributions to the development of this guide.

Section One: Overview of Strategic Planning in Higher Education

From the point at which George Keller published his *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education* in 1983, American post-secondary institutions have struggled with the concept of and uses for strategic planning in the academy. Prior to Keller, long-range planning was practiced by most institutions, but this was often a budget-driven, incremental process intended to ensure long-range fiscal planning. Prior to Keller, strategic planning was conducted in the realm of corporate or military operations, where mission driven long-term objectives and short-term actions needed to be efficiently integrated through a type of administrative coordination most colleges and universities never aspired to emulate.

Cohen and March (1974) used the term "loosely coupled organization" to describe the competing and sometimes opposing operational cultures of the academy. This phrase captures the essence of an organization which, at its core, finds institutionally comprehensive planning antithetical to many of the activities that give American higher education its unique, dynamic character.

The emergence of strategic planning in higher education coincided with the difficulties experienced in all of education in the 1970s and 1980s, as enrollments began to fluctuate, student demographics started to change, and funding became inconsistent. At this point, futures research and the rise of technology-enabled data collection and analysis pointed the way to strategic planning as one solution for developing a proactive stance in the environment of changing demands and declining resources.

The difficulties with initial attempts to convert corporate strategies to the culture of higher education were legion. Adapting a process designed to motivate assessment-based change within a short timeframe was frustrating at best and ineffective most often. While corporations developed their planning processes based on market data and customer-driven production, academe was limited in the data it could bring to bear on its issues and did not view itself as serving "customers".

At its beginning, the strategic plan in post-secondary education was viewed as a tool to articulate institutional mission and vision, help prioritize resources, and promote organizational focus. As a result, many of the early strategic planning efforts produced documents that described the institution, but did little to motivate a process. These "shelf documents" often sowed the seeds of discontent within the institution, since many who participated in the process spent long hours on the plan's development and then saw relatively little implementation.

At the time strategic planning was beginning to gain some acceptance in higher education, federal and state governments, and the major accrediting commissions, were responding to external demands for accountability through the development of standards for assessment and learning outcomes measures. Historically, accreditation standards were based on types of administrative data such as the fiscal stability of the institution, the number of faculty with

terminal degrees, and the number of volumes in the library. However, the need to arrive at specific assessment measures for the academic enterprise was seen as the purview of academic staff who, because of their professional culture, had a difficult time determining what, if anything, could measure the learning process.

To tighten the standards, the accreditation commissions began to insist institutions have a strategic plan and an assessment plan in order to meet accrediting requirements. By the 1990s, workshops provided by the various accrediting commissions outlined expectations regarding the scope of an institutional planning and assessment process. Institutions began to find themselves under serious scrutiny during their reaccreditation processes if they did not have a working strategic plan and some form of assessment plan in place.

The pressure to provide documented planning and assessment did not only come from the accrediting commissions, however. At the same time, state and federal governments began tying funding and regulatory oversight to accountability measures, moving the business of the academy into the arena of political discourse. With the reduction in student populations and funding, most post-secondary institutions were competing for extremely limited resources. Identifying and developing the assessment measures necessary to support the case for institutional self-determination and continued funding created an environment that led to the rise of campus strategic planning offices. The concurrent development of technology and methodology in institutional research supported this organizational focus through accountability measures, making the planning process more data driven.

Also, at about this time, the US Department of Commerce widened the scope of its Malcolm Baldrige award to include hospitals and educational institutions. Application for the award required documented analysis of process improvement within the context of mission-driven activities. The Baldrige application process had originally been developed specifically for corporations. Adaptation of the processes in education took a number of years and was considered by most in academe to be irrelevant to the mission of the academy. However, the underlying concept of the Baldrige application requirements combined strategic planning, assessment, and process improvement in such a way that various accrediting commissions saw in it a framework that influenced their expectations.

By the late 1990s, blue ribbon panels and various educationally related organizations had begun defining some standardized indicators of achievement to be used as evaluation output measures in higher education. A number of state and federal reports were developed based on these measurements, giving rise to an entire industry of consumer-focused comparative reports, such as state report cards and the college evaluation issues of a number of magazines.

By the end of the century, it appeared strategic planning had become a victim of the ever-fickle cycle of management theories du jour. The frustrations of staff and faculty who had spent countless hours on strategic plans that were never implemented created an internal environment where stakeholders refused to participate. “We tried that and nothing ever happened,” was a common response to the calls for planning at the campus level. Even colleges and universities with successful planning processes began to dismantle their planning offices in favor of new initiatives focused on assessment.

The literature of the time shifted from institutional strategic planning to institutional leadership, giving some indication of what might have been wrong with higher education's initial attempts to adopt the practice. The calls for leadership, compounded with increasing demands for accountability and assessment, meant strategic planning was bypassed for shorter-term solutions of immediate issues. In essence, the academy was back to reactive, incremental problem-solving.

However, the accrediting commissions kept requiring institutional strategic plans as a major part of the standards they used to assess an institution's ability to meet its mission. This presented a problem for many colleges. Institutions needing a strategic plan to satisfy accrediting requirements began to develop what they believed were strategic plans in conjunction with some other form of planning. In some cases the institution was in the process of developing an information technology (IT) plan, an academic master plan (including the all-encompassing assessment component), or even a facilities master plan. This, they believed, would fill the requirement for an institutional strategic plan. Of course, various members of the staff might sit on the committee to ensure "realistic" initiatives were implemented incrementally so they would not strain limited resources. But the real issues remained: once an institution produced a document called a strategic plan, what did it do and how did it get implemented?

What was lost during this evolution was the institutional understanding of the role of a strategic plan and what key elements were necessary for the plan to function.

Section Two: Components of a Strategic Plan

Contemporary strategic plans have multiple components and each component serves a specific purpose. These components are planning tools used either separately or in groups, but their development is usually, of necessity, a linear progression. One of the purposes of the planning process is to ensure these individual components are aligned with each other and mutually supportive.

While not technically a part of the strategic plan, the mission statement is the foundation for it because everything contained in the strategic plan must be aligned with the mission. In addition to the mission statement, a vision statement, institutional goals, and an optional values statement comprise the supporting documents establishing the context for a strategic plan. These supporting documents provide specific points of guidance in the planning process. The vision statement is the expression of institution aspiration, and is based on analysis of the institution's environment. Institutional goals provide the mechanism for evaluating progress toward the vision, and values statements describe the manner in which the institution will work to achieve its goals.

Figure 1 **Components of a Strategic Plan**

Institutional Mission and Values

Mission

The foundation of any strategic plan is the institutional mission statement. This statement delineates, in concise language, why the institution exists and what its operations are intended to achieve. For publicly controlled institutions, this statement of purpose may be dictated by the state, but for all institutions the statement serves as the explanation for the existence of the organization.

Historically, mission statements were long, exhaustively detailed descriptions of the institution's founding, curricular history, unique culture and current services. The mission statement also often included an explanation of what the institution stood for and what it intended its students to become. An interested student of strategic planning can open any archived college catalog to find, within the first few pages, a mission statement at least a full page long containing all the historic information about the institution anyone would care to know. These types of mission statements have been termed "comprehensive mission statements" because they tend to include everything anyone thought might be important to know about the institution.

With the advent of contemporary planning methods, however, the comprehensive mission statement became a limiting factor in the planning process. Two major problems were created by trying to develop a strategic plan based on a comprehensive mission statement. First, it could be difficult to sift through the verbiage to isolate and identify *specifically*

those elements of the statement everyone agreed identified the foundation for all activities. This identification was critical because the accrediting commissions had formed an evaluation standard to examine how well all operations aligned with the mission. Comprehensive missions, as a result of their breadth, provided ample opportunity for wide interpretation; a condition called "mission creep". Institutions found themselves having to justify community outreach or academic programs that extended the activities of the institution beyond its actual mission. From the perspective of the accrediting commission, a situation where the institution was using resources for activities beyond the scope of its mission indicated the institution might not be using its resources as effectively as possible. This definition of "institutional effectiveness" meant accrediting commissions were looking for a direct relationship between how the institution used its resources and what the mission statement outlined as the reason the institution existed.

The second limitation of comprehensive mission statements was that most of them were rife with statements about institutional culture and values. While critical to revealing how the institution differed from others with similar characteristics, the effect of these statements was to virtually require the institution to evaluate and assess them as part of institutional effectiveness. With all the other aspects of assessment academe needed to oversee, developing measurements for values was perhaps not the most critical priority.

As a result of these very real limitations, more recent planning practice limits the mission to its primary function. The mission statement is stripped down to a very short, basic statement of purpose. If the institution believes it also needs to provide a separate set of institutional goals, they can be appended to the shorter mission statement in a subsection or displayed in conjunction with the mission statement. The mission statement can then be a clear, concise statement, "This is *what* we are here to do."

Values

Values have been removed from the mission to their own Values Statement component. There, they explain what the institution stands for and the way in which it intends to conduct its activities. In some cases, these values are so important the institution has programs and assessment measures to support and sustain them as key elements. But regardless of their priority, within the context of planning and evaluation, the values statement should declare, "These are the characteristics we believe are important in *how* we do our work."

The Institutional Vision Statement

The institutional vision statement is one of the most important components of a strategic plan. The vision statement is an institution's clear description of what it intends *to become* within a certain timeframe. The vision statement defines the institution's strategic position in the future and the specific elements of that position with relationship to the mission statement. In some cases, the vision is that of one leader at the campus. Often this leader is the president, but the vision can sometimes come from an academic vice president or provost. Usually, however, the vision is reviewed and revised by members of the campus community, especially the strategic planning committee.

Vision statements benefit the planning process by providing everyone in the institution with the same vision of the future. If the purpose of the

planning process is to align mission, vision, goals and resources, it is critical to ensure those who will be called upon to implement the strategic plan are all "pulling in the same direction". This is especially true if the vision statement is really a reflection of one person's vision for the institution. In this case, it is in the best interests of the institution to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to "own" the vision, either through review and revision of the statement or some form of early input into the statement draft.

The mission and vision statements provide the two ends of an analytical view of the institution from which the strategic plan is developed. The mission and vision represent the current and envisioned state of the institution. The strategic plan is used to bridge the gap between the two.

It is regularly assumed by members of the campus community that a vision statement can only be produced if market research has been conducted to determine what educational needs are not being met by peer and aspirational institutions. This perception is only partially true. In fact, market research is more effective if it is conducted *after* the vision statement has been written and approved. What is needed to complete a strategic plan is, more often, an environmental scan. The differences between an environmental scan and market research are explained in Section Eight, "A Table of Troublesome Terms".

One of the most curious problems with writing a vision statement comes when those writing the statement have to decide whether the verbs in the statement are present or future tense. There are so many subtle implications for either approach, and it is often the case that the strategic planning committee will write the vision statement in one tense and then change it to the other.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

There is much confusion about the terms used to name the parts of a strategic plan. Many people use the words "goal" and "objective" almost interchangeably, and have a distinct rationale for their particular definitions. In point of fact, as long as everyone involved in the planning process agrees to a definitional hierarchy, any combination of words can be used. However the words goal and objective carry connotations that can help guide their use in the process. The word goal connotes specific achievement; a target reached and "checked off". The word objective is slightly more general in connotation. An objective helps set a course by giving a general direction, but an objective does not usually contain the specifics of its own completion. Given the nature of the activities required to implement a plan, and the need to assess the achievement of the plan's implementation, it seems logical to use terms that encourage overarching directional guidance for the major themes that organize the plan, and more specific terms for the parts of the plan requiring accountability and measurement.

For example, a major theme in many strategic plans is to improve academic programs. Each institution has its own perspective on what is important about academic programs, and these statements usually reflect an institutionally-specific perspective. One institution might want to ensure programs and curriculum fit the educational needs of its student population, while another institution is more interested in improving its curriculum by expanding its graduate and research programs. These are very general desires, and might best be called strategic objectives, themes, or even directions. However, the specific actions taken to improve academic programs could range from ensuring all academic programs offer an internship

option for students who want "real world" experience to setting target enrollments for specific graduate programs or research dollars brought to the campus. These types of actions seem to fit more closely the definition of a goal, because they can be measured and "checked off".

Regardless of the words selected to name the parts of a strategic plan, these basic elements—goals and objectives—form the basis of the portion of the strategic plan most often used as the public document, approved by the governing board, and distributed to the campus community.

There is one final caution about the goals and objectives of a strategic plan—timing. Most colleges and universities use either a five or ten year cycle for their plans. These cycles are often driven as much by the reaccreditation schedule as any internal issue. For this reason, most strategic plans have overarching themes that are very general and do not tend to change over time. In fact, in many planning processes, these overarching themes can be carried over from one planning cycle to the next with only minor modification. The goals used as the basis for the implementation plan are a different issue, however. There is a tendency to "front load" or "back load" the deadlines for the goals in a plan.

Front loading usually occurs because enthusiasm is high and everyone would like to see the plan successfully completed. Another reason front loading occurs is those who are determining the deadlines are used to thinking in short one or two year timeframes. This approach misses completely the purpose of a five or ten year planning cycle, which allows more complex solutions to be spread out over a longer period of time. In either circumstance, front loaded goals take the form of assuming a goal can be completed in a very short period of time, and also assumes a minimum of effort. These assumptions encourage people responsible for the implementation to take the fastest, least complicated path to completion. In many cases, if an issue has risen to the level of the strategic plan, it is not easily addressed nor is it a simple issue.

Back loading usually occurs when members of the institutional community are not committed to the plan or are unsure about the resources needed to implement. A thoughtful strategic planning committee will use its collective wisdom to ensure each goal is appropriately phased.

There are several reasons phasing is necessary. One of the most obvious is, in many cases, before one action can be taken, another has to be completed. A second reason, where resources are concerned, is any need to accrue the personnel, facilities, or funding necessary for the action. Using the strategic planning committee as a forum to question and test the reasonableness of proposed deadlines is often a challenge. In many cases, institutional personnel are not used to thinking holistically about initiatives with wide-ranging scopes or timelines. It is difficult to develop in planning committee members that sense of strategic thinking that allows them to look cross-functionally to see the implications for the entire institution. For example, if the institution has determined it will expand the number and types of student support services offered through Student Affairs, most planning committee members will assume Student Affairs will see to the implementation. However, what if that implementation requires an upgrade to technology? The IT department needs to consider what the upgrade will require and how long it will take, not only in terms of technology but also with regard to staff training. Additionally, the Facilities Department

will need to know if there are to be changes to the spaces currently being used in Student Affairs, or if new space needs to be found and what length of time it may take to produce that space. While a great many of these types of issues can be discussed in committee and the deadlines revised, in some cases the projects are complicated enough to require actual process analysis techniques to determine the sequence of actions. Regardless of the method used, the result is a strategic plan populated with short-, middle-, and long-range deadlines that form the backbone of a strategic plan that is realistic in terms of what can be accomplished and in what timeframe.

Taking the time to ensure the strategic plan reflects such phasing has two other significant benefits. First, it provides a learning opportunity regarding institution-level thinking for members of the planning committee. Second, phasing the major goals of the strategic plan begins the process of thinking through the implementation plan, which will build on the phased aspects of the strategic plan.

What the strategic planning committee should not allow is an effort to "cost out" the entire plan as if it were all going to be implemented simultaneously. A demand for costing out is often an attempt to scale back the scope of the plan, but can also be seen as a misunderstanding of how the planning process works. Scaling back a plan as a result of tight resources will happen automatically if it needs to happen. What is incumbent on the members of the planning committee is to ensure the transformational aspects of the vision are captured in the goals and objectives and phasing is realistic for implementation.

It is important to remember the ultimate purpose of a strategic plan is to drive resource allocation. If the institution has a vision requiring additional resources, it phases implementation of that vision over time, including securing the resources to make it happen.

The Implementation Plan

Turning goals and objectives into a working plan is the function of the Implementation Plan. This part of the strategic planning process is not usually for public consumption, and seldom is made available to the governing board. There are a variety of reasons this working document is not widely distributed, but the primary one is, more than any other part of the strategic plan, the implementation plan is revised, amended, and changed frequently to respond to environmental factors. While the strategic plan's goals and objectives remain a source of guidance and focus, the implementation plan delves into the messy work of getting the job done.

One other aspect of the implementation plan critical to the planning process—and also to the budgeting process—is identifying the resources each goal and step will require. It should be noted resources, in this instance, are defined in the broadest way possible. Resources for implementing a strategic plan include: people, time, space, technology, and funding. Sometimes, the exact amount of a critical resource is not known at the time of the plan's inception; however, the type of resource can be identified. It is important to know what specific resources will be needed and continue to refine the size of the need as the plan develops.

The implementation plan needs to be directive, clear, and documented. The implementation of a strategic plan depends on the institution's ability to turn strategic thoughts into operational action. For this reason it is necessary to

document who is responsible for implementing an action, a date by which the action is expected to be completed, and what measures will be used to assess completion of the action. It is wise to ensure the person assigned responsibility for the action has the authority to make it happen. It is also wise to identify one and only one person to be the agent accountable for overseeing completion of the action. Obviously many people or departments may be needed to implement a specific action. However, if a group is designated as accountable, each person in the group will believe someone else in the group is taking charge.

Section Three: Coordinating the Planning Process

The Planning Committee

Institutions without a standing planning committee should create and maintain one. Many institutions select representatives from the major stakeholder groups to serve on a planning committee with the intention that, once the plan has been created, the group is disbanded. In much the same way institutions form working groups and a steering committee for reaccreditation self-studies, they try to bring enough insight to the table to give balance and reality to the initial product. However, there are three extremely important reasons to have a standing planning committee.

First, the work of the strategic planning committee has to be learned by its members. Very few people appointed to a planning committee have a working knowledge of strategic planning, or the broad institutional perspective to do it well in the beginning. It takes time and hard work to develop a functioning planning committee that can operate effectively. If the committee is only formed to create the plan, and then does not participate in its implementation and assessment, all the hard-won knowledge is lost.

Second, to ensure the plan is being implemented, there has to be some sort of monitoring process to assist with decisions and keep the planning process on track and responsive. While this can be done by a single individual, it is difficult for a single individual to have a working knowledge of all aspects of such a large and complex organization. This complexity is precisely the reason stakeholders from the various functional areas are called together in the first place. Committee members know why a certain goal or step must come prior to another, or why a particular goal is no longer as relevant in year three of the plan as it was in year one.

Finally, it is vital to have as many stakeholders as possible understand how the planning process works. Non-permanent members of the planning committee, such as students and faculty who normally need to rotate off the committee, can be replaced with new members in staggered terms. Such a rotation allows new people to learn from the committee, while the replaced members take their knowledge back with them to their departments. This type of participatory learning increases the ability of the entire institution to understand how the planning process works and supports strategic thinking across the campus. These benefits accrue in the same way a reaccreditation self-study helps teach the campus community about itself. Part of the advantage with the planning process is it is continuous. The learning should never be allowed to be shelved for five or ten years.

The Charge to the Committee

There are no circumstances in which a planning committee should be formed without a written charge. For standing committees the written charge is absolutely essential and should contain, at a minimum:

The size and composition of the planning committee:

- The most effective size of a planning committee is between 10 and 12 people.

- The senior administrative staff should always be included as permanent members.

- Academic staff and students should be included and given limited terms to account for restrictions in long-term time commitments. Where these members can be drawn from leadership positions, such as President of the Faculty Senate or President of the Student Government Association, the appointment provides additional benefits for distribution of information and access to readily identified groups of stakeholders.

- It is preferable that the president of the institution chair the committee. This stipulation can be a "deal breaker" if presidential engagement is less than complete. The presence of the president is critical because it provides integrated leadership and support as the group deliberates. Few people have a better strategic sense of the institution than its president. His or her perspective brings together not only all aspects of the institution's operations, but also any concerns of the governing board and the system office, if it is a state system institution. Also, if the president does not participate, the group's decisions cannot be considered completed until the absent president is briefed and has commented. This type of situation nullifies the purpose of the group and eviscerates the group's role in producing and implementing a plan.

  Finally, while the governing board is responsible for approving the strategic plan and monitoring it at the policy level, the president reports to the governing board, and therefore will be required to explain, advocate, and interpret the plan to the satisfaction of the board. It is difficult for a president to act as the official leader of the planning process if he or she has not fully participated.

The length of terms:

If the planning group is a standing committee, the length of terms for the non-permanent members needs to be rotated so that the committee does not face large turnovers that leave a leadership vacuum.

- Obviously, most student members will only have a year or two during which they are available.

- Faculty may also only have a year or two if they experience a change in teaching duties or take a sabbatical that impacts their ability to participate. In order to ensure that the original balance is maintained, the position or type of member should be designated in the Charge. For example, committee membership might include two academic deans, one librarian, the president of the faculty senate, one undergraduate student, and one graduate student. In this way, when, to further the example, the librarian's term has expired, there is a clear record that the position should be refilled by someone from the library. It also avoids the issue of non-permanent members deciding they will stay on when their terms have expired. If the person who has been president of the faculty senate no longer holds that position, the place on the planning committee must be relinquished for the new president.

The scope of responsibilities of the committee:

There is a tendency for planning committees to fall into one of two traps. They either believe

they have no authority at all, and therefore demur from decisions and accountability, or they believe every action taken on behalf of the strategic plan should be approved by them prior to action. Neither position bodes well for the institution, so it is necessary to literally tell the members of the committee the scope of their responsibilities. This scope can be easily described through a series of bulleted statements directing the activities of the committee to the necessary tasks and then establishing who is responsible for each.

The expectation for participation for each member:

It would seem obvious to many that if one is selected to a committee, one has an obligation to participate. However, we also recollect that many parts of the institution believe planning is either not possible or not important enough to take time away from primary duties. This situation is especially true if there has been a failed strategic plan previously, or if the institution's leaders are not actively involved. For these reasons, it is important to specify that members of the strategic planning committee have certain professional responsibilities. Among these are: attending meetings, contributing at the meetings, collecting information bearing on the plan from constituents, helping to educate the campus community about the process, and disseminating the plan.

For a standing committee, the guidance provided by the written charge ensures that, over years of change in membership and environment, it is always clear why the committee exists and what is expected.

Deciding the Planning Year

There are a number of ways in which the planning process needs to be coordinated. One of the most basic issues in coordination concerns the multiple calendars that drive academe. The most important reason for implementing an institutional strategic plan is it provides the framework for making budget decisions and decisions about resources in general. For this reason alone, it is critical that the budget cycle and the planning cycle be aligned, not only on an annual basis, but over the long term. This is a more difficult result to achieve than might be supposed, especially since the budget cycle often follows either the state or federal fiscal calendar (July-June or October-September) and the planning cycle tends to follow the academic calendar. Using the academic calendar not only results in different start and end dates, but also compresses the planning year because so many of the key participants are not available during the summer. So, while it is an axiom that the plan drives the budget, it is also true that the budget calendar drives the planning calendar. It requires careful analysis of the various steps in the annual budget cycle to determine when annual planning goals need to be confirmed to support decision-making in the budget.

There is an additional calendar that should be mentioned in regard to the planning cycle and that is the calendar used by human resources (HR). The HR calendar is usually January through December. Depending on how fully the strategic plan is used, if personnel decisions and the resources to support them are aligned with an HR calendar, the alignment of all three cycles into one may be quite difficult. While it may seem there is little to be gained in adding the HR calendar year to the mix, it is important to remember there are two personnel issues that provide most institutions with plan-critical

data: professional development plans which have attendant training costs; and, annual payroll data, which usually reflect the largest non-capital institutional expenditure.

Each institution is slightly different in its ability to adjust these processes so they are mutually supportive. However, being able to show an integrated calendar and a transparent process between planning and budget is a key factor in documenting that the planning process is working as it should.

Using a Planning Consultant

At this point it may be beneficial to discuss the appropriate use of a planning consultant. A motivating factor in developing this document was my reflection on differences among planning consultants and the ways in which they are used by the institutions that hire them. There are a number of reasons an institution might decide to hire a planning consultant; however, some reasons are more appropriate than others.

The primary reason an institution begins to consider hiring a planning consultant is that the institution has decided to initiate a strategic plan, either through its own volition or because it has been compelled to do so by an accrediting commission, governing board, or state agency. If the first circumstance is true, it is often because there has either been a turnover at an executive position (president, provost, or senior vice president) or, ironically, because an accreditation self-study is coming due and will require demonstration of institutional planning.

Unfortunately, an institution can decide to start the planning process in absence of any knowledge of how to achieve an effective end product. As described in Section I, most of the administrative support for strategic planning (offices and staff for strategic planning) was eliminated during the 1990s. There are few institutions that can boast of staff with enough comprehensive experience to lead and support an institutional strategic plan without some external guidance. So, as the institution begins the process, it discovers planning is more complex and difficult than anyone suspected. It is also true that sometimes the wrong institutional personnel are assigned to lead the process, causing stumbles, misdirection, or even political problems that slow or stop the process.

At that point, someone decides to call in a consultant to "advise" them and make the process workable. Examples abound of institutionally-initiated planning where the institution started with activities that should occur in mid-process, leaving out very critical early-process preparation. These institutions come to a point where they have no idea what comes next but, when the consultant arrives, they are looking for someone who can take the mess and "just tell us what the plan should be".

No consultant, or external agent, should ever tell the institution what its strategic plan should contain or how it should be implemented without the careful development of a forum for institutional consensus-building. Consultants cannot "tell" an institution what it should achieve with a strategic plan any more than an institution's president can "tell" each of his staff specifically how they will implement his vision. Without the ownership developed through a participatory process, the likelihood of a failed plan is enormous, as are incidences of process sabotage and simple non-implementation (Robertson and Tang, 1997).

The best way to understand how the planning consultant can help is to remember: a qualified consultant is a master of the process, but

institutional staff are masters of the content. This means a very good consultant can provide guidance and options for the process based on the content the campus community develops and the way campus culture shapes the issues. An outstanding consultant can even analyze the institution and challenge it with new ways of thinking or doing, but members of the institution must control the plan and its content.

An additional advantage to engaging an experienced planning consultant is to engage someone who has the skill to facilitate the planning committee meetings. This extra benefit allows everyone on the planning committee to participate in the meetings without having to be concerned about meeting management. This situation is particularly helpful for senior administrators who do not often have an opportunity to act as contributing community members. Good outside facilitation is also helpful to the entire campus community because an outside facilitator can balance competing voices to ensure the plan reflects the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders, not just those who can dominate a meeting.

It should be noted that not all "planning" consultants are able to support a comprehensive institutional strategic plan. Understanding contemporary strategic planning is essential to a successful planning process. Institutions that use a consultant need a basic understanding of contemporary strategic planning as preparation to hire the right consultant. There is great value in finding a consultant who has experience as a staff or faculty member at an institution, understands the relationship between strategic planning, assessment, and accreditation, and has a balanced perspective of an institution's many functional areas. It is necessary for each institution to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of any potential consultant and, from that, determine if the "fit" is the right one for the institution at that point in time.

A well-crafted, implemented strategic planning process will be self-sustaining and the consultant's contract is usually complete once the Implementation Plan is drafted; although, sometimes the consultant is further engaged to assist with the implementation process. It is not generally assumed, however, if the strategic plan includes, for example, IT upgrades, new facilities, or new academic programs, that the consultant's role would be expanded. For these reasons, it is important that the campus planning leaders who hire a planning consultant be able to match the culture and priorities of their institution with the skills, training, and long-term experience of the planner they select.

Section Four: Assessment and Metrics

Institutional Assessment

According to regional accrediting commissions, planning-related assessment at the intuitional level occurs in two forms: institutional effectiveness and learning outcomes. Commission expectations for documentation of these processes have not been well defined, and descriptors are relatively vague. (For additional clarification, particularly with regard to institutional effectiveness, see Middaugh's "Closing the Loop: Linking Planning and Assessment").

Both institutional effectiveness and learning outcomes are, in reality, calls for accountability and demonstrated process improvement. For that reason, this section will consider the concepts that support developing metrics for both processes because they are core to the planning process. In addition, this section will discuss a component of institutional assessment that is very often overlooked: administrative assessment. It should be noted, however, that specific program and learning outcomes assessment techniques are not the focus of this treatise and have not been included.

Institutional Effectiveness

Accrediting commissions require documented evidence that all activities using institutional resources support the institution's mission. Using the definition of resources as funding, facilities, technology, personnel, or time, accrediting commissions ask the institution to show how its mission is being advanced through effective use of these resources. Institutions that have developed "Institutional Goals" as part of their mission statements often use these goals as the foundation of their assessment measures. Those institutions that do not choose to have a list of institutional goals sometimes parse the mission statement to develop their assessment metrics. In either circumstance, it is critical that the statements being assessed are clearly written so the interpretive assessment measures make sense.

In the past, institutions have fallen back on the use of the older and more traditional assessment measures to demonstrate their effectiveness, and some of these do fit the situation. Such measures as graduation rates, retention rates, and percent of faculty with terminal degrees in appropriate disciplines do relate to the parts of the institutional mission that concern supporting education to the institution's target student population. However some other types of institutional goals are trickier to measure. A non-specific institutional goal is a goal that requires interpretation to determine its measurement. For example, most institutions currently include institutional goals about technology, either in the learning process or as a way to reduce cost and bureaucracy, or both. The question is: based on the wording of the goal, how does an institution prove this use of technology is occurring and that it is having positive results? Just spending money on technology does not prove it; neither does showing the number of staff engaged in training in the use of technology. The answer to the question is: what did the institution specifically have in mind when it set the goal? In other words, what did the institution expect success to change? In some cases, the answer lies in data that are readily available: the number

of students who apply and register on-line, allowing a reduction in the number of staff in the registrar's office, or the number of syllabi that include competency in the use of program-specific technology as a course outcome. In other cases, the data are not available, nor is there an easy way to get them. This dearth of data is usually the result of a need for clarity and specificity in the goal. There are two questions that are extremely helpful to the planning committee as they draft goal statements: "How will we know if we reach this goal, and how will we prove it?"

Learning Outcomes

The most important thing to remember about learning outcomes is that the assessment is not about people, it is about process. The initial resistance to assessment by many faculty was the perception that learning outcomes assessment was a euphemism for faculty evaluation. The assessment process was not, nor was it ever intended to be, about evaluating faculty based on whether or not students passed their classes. That said, it should be acknowledged that most institutions include the end-of-course student/faculty evaluation as one data set in the overall process. However, the important issue for accrediting is the demonstration, by an institution's academic staff, of mastery of the learning process the curriculum is designed to achieve. This understanding of the process is the purpose behind course and program outcomes statements and the use of multiple measures to capture learning assessment in disparate programs.

Because the focus of this document is on strategic planning, this section will not delve into the myriad ways in which learning outcomes can be assessed. It is sufficient to acknowledge that, in addition to institutional effectiveness, learning outcomes is a component of the institutional planning process that must be guided by and integrated into the strategic plan. These outcomes results also provide process improvement data to inform the planning process. It is critical that those involved in the institutional planning process, including any external consultants, understand the vital nature and role of these assessment activities.

Administrative Assessment

Perhaps administrative assessment is less often an area of concern because it is assumed institutions with strong personnel evaluation systems are monitoring achievement and goal completion and need not specify how this is accomplished. However, there are a number of issues that bear on assessment within the context of "administration". Personnel evaluation systems aside, assessing staff retention, satisfaction, and training and development programs would seem to be an obvious area of import for any institution. While it is clear these issues would provide helpful diagnostic information for the more effective administration of an institution, it should also be clear these same issues have a direct impact on resource allocation and should be included in the strategic plan so they can be prioritized and budgeted. It should also be noted that, while most institutions automatically think of the campus executives and employees who work in administrative offices as "the administration," it is also true there is administration on the academic and student affairs sides of the house. These staff should not be left out of a process when it helps identify and improve supervision, management, and the work environment.

There are also issues associated with the development and maintenance of policies and procedures at the institutional and department level. How these policies and procedures are created, reviewed, implemented, and disseminated is an aspect of administration critical to an effectively administered institution. Examples of why policies and procedures are critical to the effective administration of an institution abound; however, there are two aspects that are less obvious and are worth discussion here.

The first is the group of concerns associated with institutional continuity, demonstrated compliance with legislated regulations, and emergency and disaster preparedness. All of these issues can only be resolved through the appropriate application of policies and procedures that ensure the effective operation of the institution in extreme circumstances.

The second critical facet of institutional policies and procedures usually manifests itself as a deficiency in internal communications. I have observed in every planning process a universal desire to "improve communications." The problem with this desire is it is focused on the symptom, not the problem. In almost all cases, if root cause analysis is conducted, "lack of communication" is the result of non-existent or poorly devised procedures that do not direct appropriate follow-on action. In other words, staff do not know when they have completed a specific action they need to follow up with other departments, log the action, or initiate dissemination of the information to someone. A brief discussion in any planning group about this situation will confirm the problem could be rectified with written procedures and staff training. However, it is rarely within the authority of the planning committee to oversee this type of activity. And while planning committees regularly come to the conclusion the institution should address the problem, the initiatives are rarely delegated unless senior administrators commit to them and a timeframe and accountability are written into the Implementation Plan.

Section Five: The Self-Sustaining Planning Process

The key to keeping a strategic plan flexible and continuously updated is a regular schedule of assessment and revision. If this schedule is maintained, the planning process can continue for as long as the institution desires. There are four times frames for conducting assessment related to a strategic plan; the first two occur annually; the second and third are conducted at the end of the full planning cycle.

Through the mid-year status report and the end-of-year assessment, the institution has two opportunities each year to keep implementation on schedule and provide occasions for the Implementation Plan to be revised. These revisions keep the plan flexible and allow the institution to adjust to changes in the environment.

The third and fourth assessment points occur at the end of the multi-year planning cycle, when the expiring plan is reviewed and the planning process is improved.

Annual Cycle Assessment

Figure 2 shows the two points in the planning year where evaluation is critical to the success of the Implementation Plan for that year, and even longer-term in some cases. The first point is the assessment that occurs at the beginning of the planning year when the planning committee reviews the achievements of the previous year's plan and affirms or modifies the goals and steps for the coming year. The second point is a mid-year review which provides the institution with the opportunity to ensure goal completion. By meeting at a time in the planning year when mid-point corrections and assistance can have a positive impact on achievement, the planning committee can direct resources or identify problems to promote success.

Figure 2 **Annual Cycle Assessment**

Full Cycle Review

Report on the Achievement of the Strategic Plan

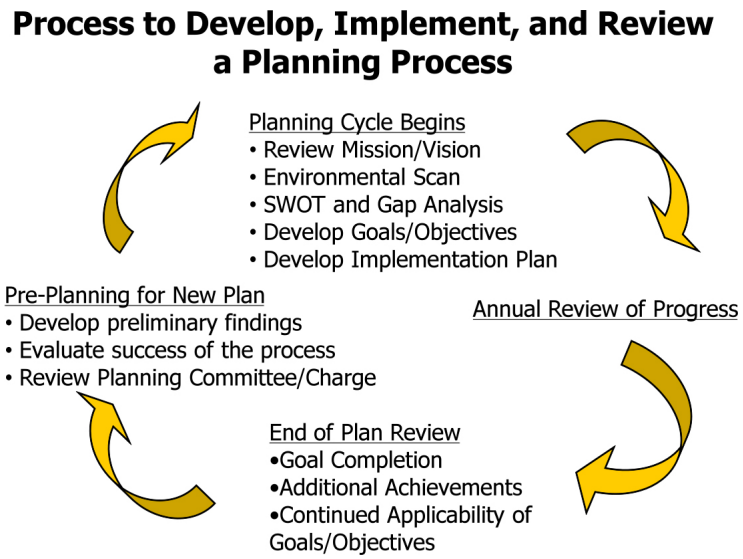
The second set of assessment points in the strategic plan occurs just prior to the plan's end date. The annual assessment process will have produced documented achievement on a year-by-year basis, but it is important to the culture of the institution to be able to reflect on this achievement and begin to learn how much can be accomplished through proper management of the planning process. This assessment produces a final accounting of achievement for the life of the strategic plan. For this reason it is also important to document accomplishments not originally included in the plan. These extra achievements are important because they represent the institution's ability to be flexible,

take advantage of unforeseen opportunities, and still maintain focus on meeting goals that move toward a vision.

Review of the Effectiveness of the Planning Process

The final assessment point of an institution's strategic plan comes as the previous plan is ending and a new plan is developed. The focus of the assessment is not on the achievement of specific items in the plan, but rather a look at how the planning process can be improved. Figure 3 shows the cyclical process and when the process should include reflection on how it worked and what changes might make it better.

Figure 3



In some cases, an institution may identify something in the planning process needing immediate attention. However, an immediate correction does not serve the same function, or provide the same benefit as taking time to have the planning committee work with stakeholder groups across the campus to garner information about what did and did not work.

The "Face" of Planning on Campus

The time-consuming aspects of documenting each year's achievements, integrating the various initiatives, and keeping deadlines relevant and visible can be easily underestimated. The continuously evaluated planning process is one facet of a self-sustaining strategic plan; however, having a person who is the "face" of planning on a campus is equally critical to successful implementation. Many institutions make the mistake of believing stewardship of the planning process can either be added to someone's duties or picked up intermittently. I have never seen a campus where either approach worked successfully in the long-term. As Hollowell et al (2006) point out, the function of integrating data collection, document management, scheduling, and disseminating needs a face and a home.

There is an additional aspect to the designation of a single person to coordinate the planning process and that is the synergy that develops when someone is able to provide context and linkages across the divisional and departmental silos so prevalent in academe.

In my experiences as the staff member responsible for coordinating planning on campus, I was able to bring information about activities and initiatives to disparate parts of the institution that would not, ordinarily, have heard the information. I usually scheduled two visits per year with anyone who had been designated responsible for an item in the implementation plan. These visits were part of the annual assessment and intended to confirm progress, identify issues, and probe for additional

information with an impact on planning. It was common in these situations to share what I had learned from others on campus and make connections between resources and aspirations. Frequently, I had opportunities to put people in touch with each other to collaborate or plan together. The advantages were too numerous to count, and the additional integration of planning and operations kept the planning process visible and flexible.

Understandably, most campuses are reluctant to reopen campus planning offices, but if an institution is committed to successful strategic planning, it should think carefully about who will manage the plan and how it will be managed on an operational basis. Ensuring the planning process has someone who will take responsibility for documentation and support is critical. This person can also coordinate aspects of integrating strategy into operations, which is yet another way to ensure success.

Section Six: The Critical Impact of Institutional Culture

The impact of institutional culture on strategic planning cannot be overestimated. In fact, if you gave the same strategic plan to ten different institutions, those institutions would each interpret the plan differently and develop ten different implementation plans. These differences are usually the result of at least three critical factors: the institution's unique environment (including the institutional mission and history of the organization); the structure and competence of the administrative staff of the institution; and, the development of staff commitment to planning.

The Environment

The environmental situation of any post-secondary institution reflects not simply the external environment of competitors and economic conditions; it also reflects the internal environment. It is why the environmental scan portion of a new planning process is so important, and why focusing that scan on external environment alone leaves the process incomplete.

A college's or university's internal environment is partially defined by the institution's current mission and also by the institution's historical development. And the historical development of any institution is obviously heavily influenced by any of its previous mission statements. Institutions that have experienced a change of mission, such as expanding from a two-year to a four-year college, or changing from an all-male college to co-ed, will carry vestiges of the prior mission with them as culture. Few institutions have missions identical to their original statement, which is one of the reasons mission review is necessary at the beginning of a strategic plan. As internal and external environments change, the institution must change to adapt to conditions. While the examples of change used above are at the extreme end of the scale, there are countless changes in mission statements made on a regular basis to respond to any number of factors, including simple updates to language. However, even these small changes can present a challenge to the planning process by obscuring vestiges of previous institutional belief.

In addition to awareness of institutional history, planners must also be able to listen analytically to what members of the institutional community believe about the institution. It is standard analysis in several disciplines (ethnography, organizational communications, and organizational development, for example) to listen to the stories an organization or culture tells itself about its history. These stories are usually told to help explain why events in the past are still relevant to the present. They also help the outsider understand why the internal workings of an institution are defined they way they are.

A related analysis can be conducted to listen for the types of comparisons the culture uses to describe how it works. In some cases, the comparison may be "this college is like one large family," in others the college may be "a well-oiled machine". In either case, staff members are expressing the ways in which they approach their responsibilities and the problem-solving process. The key factor in this analysis is that

whatever comparison is used automatically limits the ways in which the institution will attempt to make decisions. An institution that regards itself as "one large family" will make decisions based on people, their participation, and their commitment to the organization. An institution that is "a well-oiled machine" will look at processes and the administrative hierarchy to see what can be done. What planners need to know is that solution styles for one type of school will be unacceptable to another type of school. The "large family" culture will not use "machine" methods to make decisions nor will the "machine" institution be willing to make decisions using a "family" method. By extension, strategic plans will reflect the internal view of the institution in its approach and its priorities. Planners should understand that using the internal environment as a gauge of organizational readiness for various levels of planning is critical to a successful planning process.

Administrative Structure and Staff Competence

Another factor influencing institutional culture is the administrative situation of the institution. We all know organization charts for an institution reflect the *theoretical* way work is organized. The reality is usually quite different for a wide range of reasons. Personalities, experience, and competence all play a significant part in how work is actually accomplished in any institution. At the executive level, the relationships among the key players are unique at every institution and depend on such vagaries as office proximity, individual motivation, and even long-standing working relationships. If the implementation of a strategic plan is based on leadership, responsibility, accountability, and coordination, it is easy to see how the individual members of an administrative team will have an elemental role in determining how, or even whether, the plan is successful.

Developing Staff Commitment to Planning

Planning is an administrative activity that depends on the "managers, administrators, and academic leaders" of a college or university (Norris and Poulton, 5). Academic institutions have been defined as "organized anarchies" which exhibit the following characteristics: 1) problematic goals (goals that are either vague or in dispute); 2) unclear technology (technology is familiar but not understood); and, 3) fluid participation (major participants wander in and out of the decision process) (Cohen and March, 1974). Obviously, all three of these characteristics present problems for planners who are engaged in defining goals, measuring progress, and working with organization members who need to be dedicated to a planning process.

Once mission and goals are defined, the need for collective commitment becomes the driving force in effective planning. Organizations that do not achieve the commitment and the organizational will to use the planning process as a tool will not be able to successfully complete a plan. This need for collective commitment is the difference between a planning process that works and one that does not. Commitment is the reason it is important to ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity to participate in the process, and that their participation is recognized. This inclusion becomes as important as the process itself. In order to facilitate collective commitment, a college or university planner must be able to understand and work within the campus culture.

The Various Components of Campus Culture

The previous section discussed the importance of administrative culture on the success of an institutional planning process, but there are more facets in the culture of a college or university than the administrative hierarchy, and they all have a role in the process.

Strategic planning is derived directly from corporate futures research. A significant problem is that simply superimposing corporate practice onto academic organizations does not take into consideration the existence of a unique faculty culture which, in the main, rejects corporate culture. Because the responsibility for planning is largely administrative, planners often have difficulty engaging faculty in the planning process. Differences in the values systems of administrative and collegial culture can produce a tension that can become a serious obstacle to planning. Compounding this cultural difference is the evolution of staff as professional administrators.

In recent times, a wide range of positions at colleges and universities has become the purview of staff who have no experience as faculty members. This was not the case only a few decades ago, when faculty members had a much more active role in administration and student affairs (Schoenfeld, 1994).The specialization was probably inevitable; teaching loads, professional development demands, and higher emphasis on research have increased the number of hours faculty need to spend in their roles as educators. In addition, the administrative complexities of institutional budgeting, financial aid packaging, co-curricular student affairs programming and institutional advancement require an equal professional focus and their own specialized training. The difficulty is that the academy is now broken into various groups with little experience in the work conditions and professional expectations of the other groups.

As a strategic plan begins to take shape, the priorities of the faculty are usually high on everyone's list of issues; however, it is not always true that faculty priorities have undeniable primacy. The rise of programming in Student Affairs; the ever-present concerns over campus safety, especially for urban and residential campuses; the changing profile of the student population and the attendant changes in expectations are but part of an institutional balancing act that is negotiated through the strategic plan. The planning process should provide a forum for institutional discussions about what the pressing priorities for resource allocation are and how they can be integrated to the benefit of all stakeholders.

Defining Issues in Cultural Terms

While all of the theoretical perspectives used to analyze organizational behavior differ in their foci, definitions, and assumptions about commitment, one common theme is the impact of informal social structures as a mechanism for fostering commitment. Robertson and Tang (1995) point out that the need for commitment is linked directly to the organizational characteristics that have their origins in planning initiatives: decentralization and the setting of missions and goals. Planning groups are necessarily engaged in activities that require commitment. For them, the three elements identified as necessary to fostering that commitment are: social process, leadership, and structural design. Understanding each institution's culture is the key to designing and implementing a planning process designed to work for the specific institution. The designated

facilitator for the planning process must be able to assist the planning committee in using these elements to correctly translate the institutional culture into the plan.

Social processes are a set of cooperative norms or congruence between individual and organizational values which encourage shared commitment and stability of leadership. It is sometimes referred to as affiliation need. The manifestation of this element is that people within the organization will express their approval of the organization based on what they believe the organization is accomplishing and what it stands for. This element is also the process by which people are absorbed into the culture of the organization; a process sometimes referred to as "enculturation".

Leadership is a behavior used to enhance member motivation by facilitating congruence of individual and organizational interests, and to continuously communicate and clarify the vision which becomes the focus of the organization's culture. It should be clear from the outset that leadership can occur at any level of the organization. The key to leadership is that the leader facilitates social processes for the rest of the organization on a continuous basis, using the organization's vision as the focus. This element is critical to the implementation of a strategic plan, based as it is on a shared vision.

Structural design is an organizational characteristic used to foster commitment while reducing the possibility commitment will develop counter to broader organizational goals through support of "bottom-up" and stakeholder participation. By allowing broad access to the process, those stakeholders who might be tempted to view the planning process as an executive mandate instead have a voice in that process. This type of design also offers leaders a forum for reinforcing the vision that binds the goals together.

These three elements of informal cultural structure have a direct bearing on the development of commitment to planning by fostering an environment that promotes "buy-in". In addition, these same elements have a normative influence on group culture and can help to shape the dynamics of group decision-making.

Developing a Culture of Planning and Strategic Thinking

Early in the 1970s, one story that planners used to demonstrate the efficacy of strategic planning was as follows: President John Kennedy had visited NASA to tour the facilities. He reportedly asked a janitor, "What do you do here?" The janitor is supposed to have replied, "I'm here to help put a man on the moon." This story has become one of those mythological tales that illustrates a critical factor in successful planning: everything that happens at an institution can be related to planning and everyone in the organization needs to be involved in the process at their appropriate level. There are several ways to ensure everyone has access to the planning process and participates.

Getting an entire organization involved in a planning process does not mean everyone has to be appointed to the planning committee, nor should everyone expect his or her specific input will be included as a planning document "wish list". What is necessary is to validate the vision and the relative priorities of the strategic plan with members of the organization. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, all of which will require some additional effort on the part of members of the strategic planning committee. This is the reason for having a written charge

to the planning committee specifically defining expectations for members as internal planning advocates.

Open forums and discussion groups led by the president or members of the planning committee are one way to collect important information and extend participation. Another is to use electronic venues, such as websites and chat rooms. An additional method for simultaneously collecting input and disseminating information about the process is to have planning committee members conduct focus groups with the various stakeholder groups of the institution. This can be done by department affiliation or by interest group. Even board of trustee members should have an opportunity to participate in this process.

Once a draft plan is ready for public presentation, the planning committee must go back to the stakeholders and explain the various components of the plan and how the information they received from the institutional community was used in the planning process. This feedback loop in the process keeps the process transparent and accessible to the entire community and acknowledges those who participated.

What should be avoided is the equation of a broadly participative process with an endless series of open forums and focus groups designed so absolutely everyone associated with the institution has multiple opportunities for input into the process. Even institutional brainstorming is more effective if the process is structured and sequential. In fact, the larger the pool of participants, the more crucial it is to have a structured process:

EXAMPLE

The president of a multi-campus college beginning its strategic plan insisted the process include repeated campus-wide stakeholder sessions that would continue throughout the months the plan was being drafted. There was no predesigned structure to integrate these input sessions, so the results of each session were all considered equal to each other. Each new session elicited ideas that either piled more on the heaping list of suggestions or replaced ideas from a previous session. There were two fatal drawbacks to this never-ending type of brainstorming. The first was the process was so chaotic that within a few weeks most participants were completely confused by what was supposed to be happening. For example, items and issues the planning committee believed had been firmly included in the list of goals and objectives had been replaced with something new no one remembered talking about. The second drawback was that stakeholders had been asked to spend significant amounts of time and energy constantly attending meetings, providing feedback, refining documents, and reviewing new information. It was inevitable, once the process reached the point where it was necessary to began distilling all the information down to a reasonable list of goals and objectives, the exhausted, confused stakeholders did not see evidence their suggestions had been included. Disillusionment with the plan permeated the institution before the plan was even finalized.

As discussed in Section V, having a person who is the face of planning on campus is another critical factor in making planning part of the institutional fabric. In addition to senior administrators and members of the planning committee, the person who monitors the

implementation of the plan is able to provide leadership at all levels of the institution in conjunction with the planning process.

One of the most visible methods for making planning important at an institution is to use public occasions, the institutional website, and print materials to promote the plan and report its success. Public acknowledgement of how the plan works and what has been accomplished are vital reminders to the entire institution that the plan is not a shelf document and is actively being used to make decisions and mark progress. If an organization sees the demonstrated participation and support of its executives in the planning process, the process will be taken seriously.

However, the most important way to ensure the entire campus is involved in the planning process is to "operationalize" it, so that everyone is using the planning process as a framework for decision-making.

Section Seven: From Strategic to Operational

The contemporary strategic plan in post-secondary education serves an integrative and coordinating function. Hollowell et al (2006) have indicated the primary driver of the strategic plan is academic planning, a perspective that could be argued.

A strategic plan for any specific timeframe for any individual institution should focus on whatever is necessary to help the institution reach its vision. If that vision is dominated by changes or improvements in academic activities then, of course, it is the engine for the plan. It is also clear, because the primary enterprise of any college or university is educational, adequate support of academic activities is the ultimate rationale for everything done by or on behalf of an institution. However, strategic plans have relatively mid-range timeframes. There are situations where the conditions within the institution require focusing institutional attention and resources on something other than the academic plan. Examples of these conditions can include such occurrences as financial issues; addressing serious deferred maintenance problems over a period of time; or, upgrading the institution's technology systems. These priorities should be reflected in the focus of that particular strategic plan.

Campus planning leaders need to understand that the purpose of the strategic plan is to focus on how resources will be allocated for a specific period of time (usually 3, 5, or 10 years) to achieve the vision. That may mean academic planning, while still continuing, is not the primary driver of a specific strategic plan. A situation of this type is one of the many instances when the function of the planning committee as a forum for campus-wide strategic thinking is invaluable. If stakeholders are asked to subordinate their priorities for the good of the institution, it is better for them to know the reason for the decision and participate in the process rather than simply be told they will not be getting any resources.

To continue the example of a strategic plan not focused on academic planning, there may be a temptation for faculty members of a planning committee to stop participating based on an assumption they have no interest in a plan focused on information technology or facilities. If this situation occurs, it is incumbent on the facilitator and the other planning committee members to demonstrate how the disaffected stakeholders can participate. Pointing out the impact of the decisions on non-priority areas and soliciting cross-functional information from those whose areas are not the plan's focus are excellent ways to reinforce the synergies that can occur in a balanced process. Access to a forum to discuss and participate in the decisions on priorities provides all stakeholders with an opportunity to understand the nature of the competing demands on resources and an understanding of how the decisions are made.

Operational and Tactical Planning

Implementation of a plan becomes a critical exercise in coordination because the institution is a network of divisions and departments that operate as silos and independent actors. A planning process must be successful in taking a strategic view of the organization and weighing the relative demands for resources against the vision of the institution.

The next challenge is to implement those decisions at functional levels within the institution, across divisions and departments. In addition to understanding the strategic level of planning as the key to transforming an institution's vision, using operational and tactical planning provides the institution with the tools and insight to implement the plan.

Figure 4 **Levels of Institutional Planning**

Operational Planning

Operational planning is planning that takes place at the department level of an organization. In institutions where planning is not integrated, operational planning usually means the divisions and departments develop their own visions and, with them, their own list of critical resource needs. What this means at budget time is that each functional area has its own requests for institutional resources and these are not necessarily linked to the budget requests from any other functional area. Additionally, operational units tend to plan for improvements of current operations. It is rare that an operational unit has the vision to plan for strategic positioning. So the types of plans an operational unit makes are usually in response to immediate needs. "If we had a new copier we could be more efficient;" "if only we had more full-time faculty we could increase enrollment in our program;" or, "we need an additional full-time person because everyone in the department is overloaded with work" are some of the common issues that surface during department planning sessions.

One of the very real results of this type of budgeting is that "whoever yells the loudest gets the resources", which can produce a bitter, competitive attitude among those areas not funded. Because the resources of any institution are limited, and the requests for those resources are unlimited, there will be winners and losers at budget time every year. The annual roulette of resource allocation exacerbates the very operational thinking that limits visionary planning at the department level. If departments believe they have to fight for the most basic resources, they also tend to believe dreaming big is a waste of time.

The advantage for the institution using its strategic plan to allocate resources is everyone knows ahead of time which activities have priority and which will be receiving the resources in any given budget year. In addition, because the prioritization of these activities was an institution-wide negotiation, there is some buy-in and some patience with the process. While not foolproof, a budget cycle directly linked to the planning process not only makes more effective use of institutional resources, it also allows the campus community to follow the process with some understanding of how and why decisions are made.

Tactical Planning

Tactical planning involves the policies and procedures necessary for effective management, planning, budgeting, and assessing. For most institutions it does not seem to be worthwhile to spend the amount of time necessary to develop and maintain

written policies and procedures except where they are required by law or because of accounting practices. As a result, the operational procedures and policies of offices and departments across campus are the unwritten legacies of institutional tradition and can be inconsistently applied or changed by anyone at any time, given cause.

It often becomes clear during the planning process that the guidance and regulation provided by written policies and procedures is missing from critical areas of the institution. This situation allows people to disregard process, ignore new initiatives, or even create competing plans. It also prevents the institution from developing standards for operational conditions.

Examples of the importance of this type of planning become clear during the implementation of a strategic plan, especially at the department level. The situations where tactical issues begin to disrupt implementation of a strategic plan usually occur when a planning initiative requires two or more departments to work together in a way they have never done before. Without precedence, the procedures that would normally define and describe such issues as interdepartmental communication, the roles of the supervisors, and the expectations for coordination of staff are unclear and must be created. The creation of such procedures rests almost entirely on the assumption that someone in one of the departments will take the initiative for the necessary activities. This assumption is often incorrect. Examples of this type of situation include:

EXAMPLE

A state university system with numerous satellite campuses and learning centers across the state. The university also supported an aggressive Division of Continuing Education. Over time, the off-campus sites begin to experience declining enrollments, frequently linked to the Division of Continuing Education offering courses in the area. These Continuing Education courses were usually offered in local high schools, were advertised locally, had lower tuition, and were not coordinated with the nearest off-campus site. Because the off-campus sites had higher overhead expenses, and were required to charge standard tuition rates, they believed they were at a disadvantage in attracting local students. In addition, the state provided formula-driven funding that was directly linked to enrollment.

EXAMPLE

A private college determined to eliminate the long lines that invariably formed during the opening day of the semester. Using root cause analysis, the college determined that the reason for the long lines was "registration bounce", a phenomena experienced by many colleges prior to the adoption of on-line registration. The lines formed when a student attempted to register, was told his or her account was on hold and needed to be cleared in Student Accounts. The student was sent to stand in line at Student Accounts, only to find that the problem was related to financial aid. The student was sent to the Financial Aid office to clear the account, returned to stand in line at Student Accounts to confirm the clearance to register, and then returned to the line in the Registrar's office to finally complete the registration. When the college's administrative staff coordinated an effort

to align policies and procedures, the lines disappeared and the number of students who were carried through the first three weeks of the semester with an outstanding balance was reduced from several pages of names to less than twenty students.

Strategic vs. Tactical Planning

Given a recent emphasis on "inclusive" planning processes, it will be helpful to draw a distinction between strategic planning and tactical planning. The tendency to replace "top-down" structure and organization in the planning process with "bottom-up" initiatives should be examined carefully. Tactical planning can be a product of a strategic plan, but it seldom results in strategic thinking unless it is used as a means of identifying an issue in its broadest cross-functional context.

At every step in the process of developing goals and objectives in a strategic plan, planners must examine the scope of the proposed action to make sure they are framing strategic rather than operational or tactical actions. A strategic plan that is, in reality, a tactical plan will have little impact on moving the institution toward its vision, and the "to do" list produces small, short-term gains at best. Part of the responsibility of facilitating a planning group is to challenge campus planners on the content and wording of each goal to achieve to make the plan strategic.

The second example, above, of a college determined to improve its registration process is a case in point. The college's vision was of an institution offering excellent student services and effective financial and business practice among other elements. The strategic plan included goals in Student Affairs to improve registration and in Administrative Affairs to reduce the number of students who were dropped for non-payment each semester. None of the offices involved in the solution of this issue had the resources to reengineer the entire process on their own. And while each of them understood the part of the process they were responsible for, it took the larger, strategic view to organize and resolve the problem. A bottom-up process would have produced three or four separate initiatives without context or coordination. Because the strategic plan provided the context, the resources were organized to address the issue based on a broader understanding of why it was in the college's interest to respond.

The Role of the Governing Board in the Planning Process

Of all the stakeholder groups associated with a post-secondary institution, the governing board is the one that hopefully has the best understanding of strategic positioning and strategic level planning. Board members make policy decisions effecting the entire institution and serve on long-range committees from budgeting and academic programs to buildings and grounds. In many cases they can have an overview of the institution few can match. Their understanding of the mission of the institution is based in concrete concerns such as fiduciary responsibility and stewardship. But involving members of the governing board in a planning process must be handled correctly. Where the board has not been involved, or involved inappropriately, in the planning process, the president should make arrangements for board training. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) makes training available to its members, and some strategic planning facilitators are also able to work with a board to provide insight into their role.

Generally, members of governing boards should (1) ensure planning takes place, and (2) insist plans are used regularly for decision making. In carrying out these basic responsibilities, boards should attend to the following:

- recognize and promote the usefulness of planning in higher education and support its use,
- review and approve a planning process for the institution,
- hold the chief executive accountable for the planning function,
- participate in certain steps in the planning process, and
- use the institution's plans to make decisions, especially those that involve setting priorities and allocating resources (Haas, 1).

However, board members should not become involved in the implementation of the plan, and this restriction can be frustrating for some board members. For good or ill, most people who have been appointed to a board are there because at some point they were very good managers. It is probably more difficult than one would suppose for a board member who has expertise in management to not be involved. Regardless, the line between board-appropriate oversight and campus-level management must be maintained throughout the planning process. Despite occasional advocacy (Calareso, 2007), there is a real danger of conflict and usurpation if board members slip from oversight of the strategic policy level of the institution to operations and day-to-day management of implementation.

EXAMPLE

A small college with an active board had a number of board members who were retired engineers from a major international corporation. One of the board members was deeply involved in specific areas related to on-campus housing. At issue was the board's planning mandate to cap enrollment in an attempt to prevent the need for additional housing, a cost the board was attempting to delay. One of this board member's chief concerns was why the college was over-subscribed in housing by progressively larger numbers of students each fall. He spent hours developing his own process for tracking residential students and projecting housing demand. At every board meeting, he would grill the director of housing about her methodology and assert that it was incorrect. The college president finally asked the directors of institutional research and housing to work with the board member to help him understand the process for estimating demand. After six weeks of meetings and discussion, the board member finally realized the complexity of the process and the number of variables he had neglected to include in his calculations. In addition to the time spent by staff to support these meetings, the operational aspect of a board member by-passing the college president and the vice president for student affairs to try to manage housing was disruptive to the entire college.

Driving Strategic Implementation Down Into the Organization

The most comprehensive method for ensuring a strategic plan guides the operations of the institution is to link the institutional plan with department plans. This is done by requiring each department to combine its operational goals

with any items from the strategic plan assigned to the department through the department's annual plan. This department plan should then form the basis for budget requests and show how the requests are linked to the strategic plan. In most cases, the departments discover that assignments made through the strategic plan are actions they would likely have taken at some point on their own. However, with the timing of implementation derived from the institutional plan, when the department accomplishes these items is integrated into the larger context.

The most direct link between the strategic plan and operational plans is the budget. By using the department annual plans as the basis for budget requests each year, an institution can not only monitor how well the plan is being implemented, it can even direct the priorities of the plan through the budget by establishing budget assumptions prior to the time period in which departments are developing their budget requests. These assumptions, which should reflect the strategic goals for the coming fiscal year and the funding limitations for requests outside the established goals, help departments make requests based on realistic expectations for their department and the institution as a whole. One other beneficial aspect to this process is that institutions with multiple-year budgets can actually begin to anticipate budget demands by reviewing the sequence of priorities and projects in the "out" years of the strategic plan.

The impact of plan-based budgeting underscores the importance of aligning the planning cycle with the budget cycle as explained in Section III. Since the budget calendar is almost always fixed, it is critical to ensure the annual planning cycle has reached a point where the guidance it provides has been confirmed and disseminated prior to operational budget development each year. This alignment requires some thinking through, and in some instances the first year of a new planning cycle will overlap a previously approved budget from the preceding fiscal year. The reality of this type of situation is that most institutions begin to implement the first year of their strategic plan even during its development. Very often, many of the actions scheduled for the first year of the plan have been in progress for months by the time the official planning document is approved by the institution's governing board.

One final method for comprehensively guiding operations through the strategic plan is through the annual personnel review process. Although this is common practice in corporations, it becomes a more complicated application in academic institutions. It should be noted this link between institutional planning goals and personnel reviews is rarely used in the same way it is in the corporate world, to set productivity targets. In academic organizations use of the planning process is used more as a method of anticipating than reviewing.

While annual planning goals and accountability can certainly be used as part of a personal development plan or as a guide for setting individual achievement goals for the coming year, one of the most valuable ways they can be used is to ascertain how much and what types of staff development and training will be needed. When an institution develops its vision for the future, much of what goes into that vision is the idea of transforming the institution into something better, stronger, more focused, and more flexible. It is seldom the case that the institution's staff are already prepared to teach and work in such and environment. For example, if the institution wants to more thoroughly integrate technology solutions into both classroom and office, technicians may have to be

hired to support the transformation, and faculty and staff will have to be trained to work with the new technology. Or, if the institution intends to refocus or expand its curriculum, the staff will have to be prepared. Most obviously, there is need to evaluate whether or not the appropriate faculty are available. Additionally, there are issues regarding admissions counselors, career services staff, student learning support staff, and library staff, who all have to be brought along in the development of curricular changes. These are but some of the most obvious types of planning initiatives that have impact on the training, development, and evaluation of staff at any institution.

It is important to use a variety of methods to integrate the plan actively into decision-making at all levels of the institution. It is not enough to develop an implementation plan and assume the institution will adopt planning as a way of conducting operations. If a range of integrative methods is not used, the implementation plan becomes little more than a gloss on daily operations and business as usual. Those who are assigned responsibility for actions in the plan do the minimum to accomplish what they must without shifting to a strategic understanding of their roles. An institution that uses its planning process as a tool to integrate decisions and long-range thinking helps itself stay focused, direct its resources, and control its future.

Driving Strategic Thinking Up the Organization

The previous discussion focused on how the strategic planning process can be used at the highest levels of administration to align and prioritize operations within the institution. That "top-down" perspective is critical because it is necessary to coordinate the various silos with enough perspective to maintain a balanced view of the organization. However, it is equally critical to have information flow up through the process from the operations level. In most cases this practice is accomplished through three venues for collecting and analyzing operational issues:

1. department plans,
2. Strategic Planning Committee mid-year review session, and
3. the goal confirmation meeting held at the beginning of each planning year.

Departments required to submit annual plans as the basis for their budget requests will necessarily document operational issues. These issues are problems the department is currently facing or will be encountering in the immediate future. By incorporating these items into the annual plan, they become part of the flow of information back to the coordinating function of the strategic planning process. These operational issues reflect concerns the departments have about being able to conduct their activities on a basic level and usually involve requests for resources such as physical space, additional staffing, or policy decisions that impact the department.

Another place in the planning process that offers an opportunity for learning what operational issues the institution must address can occur during the mid-year review process of the annual planning cycle. This review is intended to provide an opportunity for extra support in completion of annual planning goals. Since the strategic plan is likely to include goals in every area of the institution, when the strategic planning committee meets to review progress, it hears about unresolved issues from the functional units across the campus. The information from these reports often concerns

departmental difficulty in completing a specific goal, although sometimes the report is more positive and the Planning Committee learns that a goal has been completed early. In either case, the information is critical to understanding what the operational issues and conditions are within the organization.

Finally, the goal confirmation meeting the Strategic Planning Committee holds at the beginning of each planning year is another opportunity for operation-level concerns to be incorporated into the institution-level process. In much the same way the mid-year meeting provides a forum for problem-solving, the initial annual meeting allows those who represent the perspectives of the functional units to examine the impact of various internal concerns with the entire group. Often these concerns are related to external matters, changes in personnel, or the unforeseen consequences of a new initiative. As with the information from the mid-point meetings, these issues may need to be added to the year's list of planning activities, or may have an impact on implementation of established planning goals.

Regardless of the route by which information comes into the planning process, the advantage is that it ends up with the forum most likely to understand and use the information. The benefit to the institution is that, as the strategic planning committee becomes adept at analyzing this type of information, members become better at seeing patterns, opportunities, and synergies.

Section Eight: A Table of Troublesome Terms

Figure 5 A **Table of Troublesome Terms**

Mission	The mission statement is simply a purpose statement. It explains in one or two sentences what the institution seeks to accomplish, why it exists, and what ultimate result should be expected. Language in the mission statement is usually expressed using verbs in the infinitive (to increase, to improve, etc.) and also should identify any problems or conditions that will be changed.
Vision	The vision statement is the institution's destination for the length of the strategic plan. Vision statements contain the specific characteristics or features that will define the organization in its future state. The vision statement is used to motivate and inspire, and is understood to be achievable.
Gap Analysis	This procedure assesses the "gap" between the institution's current status and the specific features of the vision. It also identifies what actions need to be taken to close the gap.
SWOT Analysis	SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is used as a framework for the environmental scan. The procedure allows planners to support the gap analysis with additional information about what actions need to be taken in the strategic plan to move the institution to its vision.
Environmental Scan	Information collected through the environmental scan is general in nature and provides the organization's planners with a common understanding of trends and issues for the future so they are able to develop a vision. The environmental scan provides the basis for organization-wide discussions focused on "futuring". A good environmental scan does not attempt to develop detailed data or market analysis, and does not use projections based on current trends, unless those trends are seen to be evolving into a larger issue. The scan is used to inform the organization's vision and identify the broad strategic objectives that will become a guideline for an action plan. There are two major components to an environmental scan, the external environment and the internal environment. Both should be examined to determine whether or not members of the organization have a unified view of the future and what resources they believe they have or will need as they move forward.

Section Nine: The Relationship of Other Types of Institutional Plans to the Strategic Plan

A variety of plans are developed across an institution, each originating in the functional silo of a different division or department. Few staff, academic or non-academic, on any campus are in a position to understand the full scope of their institution's operations, so each silo believes itself to be the least-supported and most mission-critical on campus. As a result, each silo tends to develop its plan based on its activities and the never-ending need for a larger portion of the institution's resources. If the institutional strategic planning process is not strong enough to coordinate these wide-ranging efforts, keeping track of all the plans can rapidly become an exercise in herding cats.

The advantages of using the strategic planning process for this integrative purpose are numerous; however the two primary gains are in anticipating and prioritizing budget demands and identifying complimentary, competing, or contradictory goals.

What the Strategic Plan Provides Other Plans

The Strategic Plan should contain relevant information about the following issues, at a minimum:

- Enrollment goals and enrollment management initiatives;
- Student population goals, such as percent of students living on campus, shifts in student categories, etc.;
- New academic programs, educational initiatives, changes in pedagogy and the need for supporting facilities;
- The impact of changes in enrollment, programs, or student type on support services and facilities;
- Student Affairs programming initiatives;
- Changes in staffing levels and training and development needs for both academic and non-academic staff; and,
- Goals or initiatives from department or division plans that rise to the strategic or institutional level.

These issues all have a direct bearing on the coordination and use of resources: funding, facilities, personnel, and time. For these reasons, an institution's strategic plan must also be aligned with the institutional budget cycle and should incorporate and coordinate other planning initiatives within the institution, such as the academic plan, the IT plan, the Facilities Master Plan, and the various Institutional Advancement plans.

The table below demonstrates the integrative function of a comprehensive strategic plan. The columns on the left list the various types of plans an institution may have developed over time. The row headings are data elements and informational categories usually associated with a strategic plan. Those elements that are checked are common to both the strategic plan and the more specific planning effort. It is clear from the number of checked elements that without a strategic planning process to integrate the multiple and varied issues, there is no one place to organize planning and resource allocation.

Figure 6 **The Strategic Plan as Integrator and Source**

	Enrollment Projections	Student Population	New Academic Programs	Changes in Pedagogy	Initiatives & Partnerships	Student Services Initiatives	Staffing Need	Staff Training & Development	Community Relations	Facilities Initiatives	IT Initiatives
Academic Master Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Enrollment Management Plan	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	
Budget Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
IT Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Facilities Master Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Advancement Plan	•	•	•		•				•	•	
Student Services Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Library Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Residence Life Plan	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Athletics Plan	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	

Long-Range Budgeting

Of all the processes that benefit from a strategic plan, long-range budgeting has the most direct relationship. For institutions that budget without a strategic plan the tendency is to make budget-based decisions leading to incremental change rather than strategic change: the institution only improves or changes as the budget allows. In addition, major changes and initiatives are viewed as an addition to the current budget. The notion of reallocating resources based on planned change requires a vision that provides context for the budget.

In plan-based budgeting, the long-range allocation of resources is not only driven by a context that makes reallocation practical, it also provides a blueprint for phasing initiatives so they can be realistically supported by the budget. Knowing how many and what types of students the institution intends to attract, what programs in Student Affairs (including Student Life and Residence Halls) will be needed to support those students, how academic programs may change, what technology initiatives will need to be developed, what types of staffing levels and training are projected, and what types and number of facilities will be required are all part of an institution's ability to anticipate a budget. The information for all these aspects of budgeting does not come together in one place unless the strategic plan integrates them. The additional layer of information provided through the department plans also brings operational budget issues into the mix. The comprehensive context is crucial to ensuring budget resources are allocated appropriately in support of the institutional mission and vision.

There is also the added value of making the budgeting process easier for stakeholders to follow.

> It might seem too ambitious to strive to make the budget process transparent and participative under such pressure. On the contrary, an inclusive process can make a budget more realistic by taking advantage of the knowledge and experience of faculty, staff, students, and other groups. Their participation increases the likelihood that they will at least understand and support the institutional decisions the budget represents (Chabotar, p.106).

Academic Plans

One of the most misunderstood aspects of academic plans is their relationship to other institutional plans. In many cases, it is assumed the academic plan is a policy document that defines faculty workload, faculty governance, and the learning outcomes process. While this can be true for institutions that do not conduct comprehensive academic plans, for those that do, the academic plan is a font of information for so many other planning processes across campus. However, there is also a wealth of information from other areas of the institution that can be equally valuable to academic planners.

A case in point is the relationship between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. During the last two decades this relationship has changed significantly, and in recent years that change has accelerated. Lines of communication between the two areas are not always as consistent and strong as they should be, however. Partnerships can be built to strengthen co-curricular programs, special interest houses, or combination activities. But these often rely on personalities rather than documented procedures and organizational links.

EXAMPLE

Where there are hidden issues, the solutions are not so clear. One community college, for example, was trying to make positive improvement to its retention rate for students who were declared Liberal Arts majors. The academic departments developed a number of initiatives to address the attrition issues, but nothing seemed to be helping. During a strategic planning meeting, where students were members of the planning committee, one student illuminated the potential source of the problem. New students were being advised by financial aid counselors to declare themselves Liberal Arts majors to take advantage of the broader financial aid benefits, even if the students really wanted a technical degree or a certificate. As a result, students declared the A.A. degree in Liberal Arts, took courses leading to certificates or non-degree programs, then left the institution. In their wake, data showed non-completers at astoundingly high rates. There was no existing forum for identifying the impact of this phenomenon on an academic program, so the problem persisted until the planning process began integrating information.

Academic planners need to ensure the information they have about current and future activities within the teaching and learning environment is made available and is explained to other planners on campus. But it is also clear the links and effects of planning across campus require academic planners know what is being planned by other members of the campus community.

Facilities and Master Plans

Strategic plans provide critical guidelines to an institution by developing the information necessary to ensure facilities meet the current and anticipated needs of students, faculty and staff. Some of the most egregious examples of mismanaged planning can occur during a facilities or master plan process. The costs in these circumstances are large because they involve capital funds and the long-term problems associated with physical spaces that do not support campus operations.

Where an institution believes it has a strategic plan, but in fact does not, the difficulties are compounded. Some institutions develop broad institutional position statements that describe values or philosophies in glowing general terms. In most cases, these statements are not defined but the institution believes the manifesto fills the role of strategic plan. Other institutions collect the wish lists of all their major divisions and believe compiling these resource requests constitutes a strategic plan. Neither of these situations provides the information necessary to realistically inform consultants who program, design, and ultimately build physical space on a campus.

Examples of these types of situations abound.

EXAMPLE

A community college refused to develop an enrollment management plan with enrollment projections based on actual trend analysis. The college could not come to a decision about the number of classrooms it would need over the period of its new master plan. Instead, it relied on the estimates of its academic department chairs, who based their requests on current experience with classroom scheduling problems. This process overestimated the need by a significant amount based on realistic data analysis.

EXAMPLE

A state university made a decision to lower its student/faculty ratio by hiring more full-time faculty and reducing class size. However, during the master planning process, the master planning team was initially asked to program more large classrooms while no provision had been made for additional faculty office space.

EXAMPLE

Another state college had mandated department strategic plans, including personnel projections for improving operations and supporting new initiatives. These projections had never been analyzed by the institutional planning committee. When the master planning team developed personnel projections based on the department strategic plans, the number of new, full-time lines required to meet the proposed need was staggering. The college had to review the department plans and revise each based on the likely number of new positions that would be funded by the state, which was a substantially smaller number.

It is difficult for academic programmers and architects to anticipate need if the institution has not had the internal discussion that leads to consensus about the future direction of programs and services. And to compound this problem, many institutions that have not engaged in a planning process expect the facilities or master planning consultants to provide them with this vision. I have always considered this situation tantamount to asking a stranger how you should do your job. The responsibility for an institution's future depends upon the vision and leadership of its own community. Asking consultants "how large should we be?" or "what programs should we offer?" is ceding the future of the institution to outsiders who have a vested interest in a specific relationship with the campus. There is also the question of whether or not the particular consultant has the knowledge and training to support a decision-making process of this magnitude. In many cases he or she is trained and has worked in an area significantly different from the skills and experience necessary to facilitate a strategic plan.

Institutions considering a major facilities plan or master plan project should take the time to first complete an institutional strategic plan. The amount of ambiguity the master planning consultants will face will be greatly reduced. In addition, the institution will have a more complete understanding of what it will need and will be able to evaluate potential consultants and their proposals more effectively, participate in the facilities planning process more completely, and achieve a better plan in the end. In addition, a competent master planning team will ask for data that will be easily accessible and the purpose for the requests will be more clear if the strategic plan has already been completed.

IT Plans

Given the cost of technology and the need to continuously upgrade both hardware and software, even institutions that do not have a strategic plan will often have a technology plan. Part of the problem with having a technology plan without a strategic planning process is that the IT plan is created in a vacuum. There are two very excellent results for an institution that uses its strategic planning process to integrate IT planning.

First and foremost, everything that occurs on a campus is supported in some way by and has an impact on IT; from academic programs to student services to administrative functions. Whether it is academic or administrative computing, the purpose of the IT department is to keep operations running smoothly with the most advanced systems possible. It is imperative IT planners know what is being planned across campus, not only in terms of current operations but also to help anticipate new and future demands for technology.

The second benefit to IT, and to the institution, is the collaborative knowledge IT staff can bring to the planning process. While I have experienced IT staff who resisted change and seemed to see obstacles in every proposal, those situations are the exception rather than the rule. Most IT staff are eager to collaborate, happy to help solve problems, and more than willing to amend policies for the good of the institution. Having them participate in strategic planning discussions not only helps others envision possibilities, it helps the planning committee with realistic estimates of cost, time, and training for new initiatives. As with other types of campus planning, IT planning benefits from the integrative function provided by the strategic planning process.

Advancement Plans

In the highly competitive world of institutional advancement, any fund raising campaign is dependent on its ability to offer information about the institution that is attractive to donors. This concept is especially true if there are buildings involved; however, donors can be excited by more than brick and mortar. While Advancement's need for information about plans across campus is not as high-profile nor as immediate as IT's need, it does exist. Advancement officers are always ready to promote plans for new programs and services to help donors feel like a part of the institution. Whether the information will be of interest to alumni, corporate partners, or major donors through a capital campaign, Advancement staff have deep interest in being part of an institutional planning process.

In tandem with the benefit of learning about proposed new programs and services, Advancement often can provide information about potential funding for initiatives. This information can come as a result of contacts with potential donors who are looking for a specific type of project to fund. It can also come from knowledge of the numerous types of grant opportunities available through philanthropic foundations.

Section Ten: Summary of Thoughts

Recent critics have asserted that strategic planning is not a transformative process. These assertions label the strategic plan as too linear to provide real transformation (Chance, p.40). They also believe strategic planning is conducted through team leadership and it requires specialist thinking (Baer, Duin, and Ramaley, p.7).

While in theory strategic planning is linear, it should be clear from this document applying the theory is anything but linear. The number of institutional variables, including campus culture and politics, make development of a strategic plan more analogous to conducting an orchestra.

It should also be clear leadership in a planning process, and for the campus as a whole, is leadership regardless of whether it occurs through teams or individuals. In fact, there are a number of individuals who must be leaders of the planning process to reinforce institutional commitment to the process.

Finally, there is the issue of specialist thinking as a core competency in the planning process. Anyone who has had an opportunity to facilitate a strategic planning committee will attest to the fact that one of the hardest things committee members have to learn during the planning process is how to think strategically and at the institutional level. While this requires thinking differently than most people do on a day-to-day basis in the course of their assigned duties, it is not specialist thinking as much as it is integrated, conceptual thinking. It would be a serious comment on the quality of our educational leaders to imply integrated, conceptual thinking is so specialized that members of the campus community cannot apply the concept in a practical way.

What is missed in all the arguments about the failings of strategic planning is it is a transformational process that provides a forum and a method for creating and implementing an organizational vision. It is not easy to do, but those who participate in an effective planning process marvel at the energy and empowerment the process provides to the entire organization. With a functioning strategic plan in place, all types of campus plans work more effectively.

The secret, if there is one, is to ensure someone qualified to facilitate the process is directing it. Most institutions have neither the dedicated expertise nor the understanding necessary to conduct a full institutional strategic planning process without some support. Lack of experience and training can lead to plans that are only partially developed, not implementable, or skewed by the domination of one part of the institution. It can also lead to the contracting of consultants who may or may not have the appropriate background to facilitate the process.

Dedicated planners, internal or external, can bring experience, intuition, and creativity to an otherwise mysterious process. To that end this document is intended to offer some enlightenment.

Section Eleven: Tips, Techniques, and Templates

To assist in planning, organizing, and facilitating a planning process, this section offers various templates and techniques for some of the critical phases.

Pre-Planning Decisions Checklist

Pre-planning

- What role will senior staff have in the process?
  - Is the president committed to providing the necessary leadership role?
  - Are senior staff committed to leading implementation of the plan?
- How will we balance the Planning Committee membership?
  - How many members do we need to effectively balance institutional perspectives?
  - How will we organize the ongoing work of the Planning Committee?
- How inclusive will the process be?
  - At which points in the process will the entire institutional community be involved?
  - What form will that involvement take?
- Will we use a consultant to facilitate?
  - To whom will the consultant report and what will be the contractual range of responsibility?
  - How do we identify a consultant who has an understanding of all the various areas of institutional operations?

Identifying the Resources

- Is our budgeting process multi-year?
  - If yes, does it align with the strategic planning cycle?
  - If no, what steps do we need to take to develop a multi-year budget process?
  - What is the current resource allocation/ budget request process?
    - How will this process be driven by a strategic plan?
    - Will departments and divisions need to adjust their budget request planning as a result of a new, plan-driven, multi-year process?
- How will we use environmental scanning in the process?
  - Internal and external scans
  - General trends and benchmarks
- What other institutional plans already exist and need to be included in the development of the strategic plan?
- How will regional and discipline-specific accreditation reports be addressed through the planning process?

Managing the Strategic Plan

- Who needs to officially approve the plan?
  - What sequence of approvals is appropriate?
  - How will the approvals be scheduled and who will be responsible for presenting the plan?
- Who will be responsible for draft documents?
- Who will be responsible for monitoring implementation?
- Who will manage and update the documents during the life of the plan?
- Who will be the "face of planning" on campus?

Sample Charge Letter

The charge letter text below contains the basic elements of a written charge to any planning committee. The letter is usually modified to fit the culture and unique needs of each campus; however, these basic elements are always included:

Charge to the Strategic Planning Committee

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee. Your participation is not only critical to the strength of the College, it is also very much appreciated. The planning process is our way of prioritizing the activities and resources that support our mission. The Strategic Planning Committee is charged to support and monitor the planning process in the following areas:

I. The Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee is a standing committee established to develop and monitor the strategic planning process for this institution. The composition of the membership includes:

- 3 Senior Staff
- 2 Faculty Representatives
- 1 Student Representative (SGA President)
- 1 Staff Representative
- 1 Alumni Representative
- 2 Staff Support

Terms of service for administrative committee members will be continuous. Terms of service for non-administrative committee members will be set for a predetermined length of time.

Leadership

- The President will serve as Chair of the Committee.
- The Provost will serve as Vice Chair.
- The Director of Institutional Research will manage the completed strategic plan and support assessment of the implementation plan.

II. Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process will include the following:

- Development and oversight of all appropriate planning documents (Vision Statement, Strategic Plan, Implementation Plan, etc.)
- A 5-year cycle for implementation of The Plan
- A regularized annual cycle of implementation and assessment
- Institution-level and department-level components

III. Roles and Responsibilities

Committee members will be responsible for the following:

- Understanding the components of an institutional strategic plan and developing those that are necessary (i.e., Vision, Mission, Values Statement, etc.).
- Developing and supporting the objectives and goals of the institutional strategic plan.
- Engaging identified stakeholder groups in the development of the objectives and goals for the institutional strategic plan, and providing feedback to those groups on a continuing basis.
- Overseeing review of annual plans for progress.
- With the support of the Director of Institutional Research, identifying or developing key indicators and assessment measures to document implementation of the Strategic Plan objectives and goals and reviewing those indicators and measures on an annual basis.
- Actively participating in committee activities and discussions.

IV. Other Responsibilities

In addition to the roles and responsibilities outlined above, Committee members will also:

- Promote and advocate for implementation of the institution's Strategic Plan to all internal and external stakeholders.
- Actively engage in disseminating information about the planning process, the Strategic Plan, and its implementation.
- Be aware of strategic issues in the internal or external environment related to the institutional planning process and ensure that the Committee is informed.

This document should be issued from the Office of the President as either a letter or a memo, and can be reissued either annually, or in conjunction with new appointments to the committee over time.

Sample Calendar for Integrating Annual Budget, Planning, and Human Resources Processes

Figure 7 **Sample Budget and Planning Year Calendar**

Sample Budget and Planning Year Calendar			
July	August	September	October
Begin Budget Year	Begin Strategic Plan Year		
November	December	January	February
	End HR Year	Begin HR Year Mid-Point Strategic Plan Year	
March	April	May	June
		End Strategic Planning Year	End Budget Year

Note: In this example the planning year has been reduced to 10 months to accommodate the academic calendar.

A Technique for Group Participation in the SWOT Analysis

This technique is a modified facilitator's exercise, the Gallery Walk. It works well for groups of up to 16 people, making it a good fit for planning committees. The object of the exercise is the identification and development of a list of issues based on an internal environmental scan.

Materials:

- A room large enough for the entire group to move freely and enough wall space to post sheets of flip chart paper.
- Four flip charts or wall-sized Post-Its on easels. The easels should be spaced as far apart as possible, for example one in each corner of the room.
- Markers for each flip chart.
- Masking tape for completed pages, unless the large Post-Its are being used.

Activity:

- Mark the top of each flip chart—Chart 1: Strengths; Chart 2: Weaknesses; Chart 3: Opportunities; Chart 4: Threats.
- Divide the committee into four smaller groups. Make an attempt to evenly distribute people from different functional areas so a small group is not composed of all administrators or faculty, for example. Note: Having people count off by fours can be a way to equally distribute them into the four groups.
- Explain to the committee that each group will begin with one of the flip charts and be given 8-10 minutes to identify all the issues related to the institution that apply to the chart's theme (strengths, weaknesses, etc.)
- Assign each group to one of the charts and mark the start time.
- Make a general announcement when there is a minute left for the groups' time at their chart.
- When time is called, each group moves to the next chart—either clockwise or counter-clockwise.
- The time allotted for the second round should be 1–2 minutes less than the first round. Groups will find that many of the issues they want to identify are already listed. When time is called, each group moves to the next chart, with slightly less time than the previous round. The exercise continues until all groups have worked on each chart.
- The facilitator should use some judgment about the amount of time the groups spend at each board. Although there should be an effort to keep the exercise moving along, if members of a group have listed everything they can think of on their assigned chart, the conversation they will have while waiting to move to the next chart is often a good team-building opportunity. Allowing a minute or two for this type of interaction at the small group level can prove beneficial when the entire committee reassembles for the larger discussion.
- The facilitator should remove chart pages that have been completely filled up and affix them to the wall as close to the easel as possible.

Analysis:

» When the group is reseated, a group discussion takes place. The facilitator reads through each item on each page, asking for clarification when necessary.

» Observations that should be made include:

- Does the issue rise to the strategic/institutional level or is it an operational issue? If it is an operational issue, but symptomatic of a larger problem, the issue should be redefined.
- In many cases, there is strong correlation between strengths and opportunities or threats and weaknesses. A discussion of these related issues often helps committee members develop an understanding of possible solutions.
- The discussion should focus on quantifiable definitions where possible.

The discussion generated during this exercise is a foundation for the Gap Analysis.

And alternative technique for groups of up to 25 is an adaptation of "structured brainstorming". In this technique, the planning committee members stay seated and the facilitator uses either flip charts or even a computer and projector to record comments.

Activity:

» The facilitator announces the themes to be considered—strengths, weaknesses, threats, or opportunities, and the method by which each member will be called upon. (A systematic method may involve beginning at one side of a conference table and ending at the other, or indicating the start and end positions of the room.)

» It is recommended that the facilitator focus on one theme at a time to help group members' comments reinforce each other.

» Each committee member is called upon to contribute one statement or issue without comment from the rest of the committee. When that comment has been recorded, the next committee member contributes an issue.

» A committee member is allowed to pass if he or she cannot contribute to the specific issue.

» When committee members have run out of comments, the group should move on to the next theme.

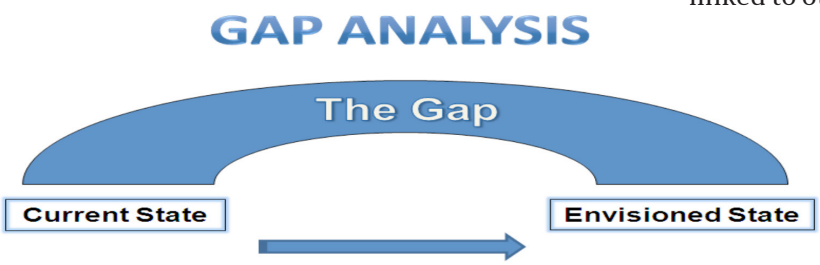
» When all themes have been covered, the facilitator should allow a few moments of silent reflection by the committee and then the analysis follows the same format as the "gallery walk" technique.

Developing the Gap Analysis

There are a number of techniques for helping a planning committee conduct the Gap Analysis.

If the committee members work more productively with visual cues, a diagram such as the one below provides a creative structure for the discussion.

Figure 8 **Gap Analysis**



The purpose of the Gap Analysis is to provide an environment that encourages consensus among group members about what needs to occur to eliminate the gap between the institution's current state and its vision.

Using the Vision Statement and the results of the SWOT Analysis, the group should focus on the gaps between the two. In order to complete a Gap Analysis, the committee will need to align the specific details of both the SWOT and the Vision Statement. The pertinent elements in this analysis are identification of:

» gaps between current conditions and the Vision

» issues that occur in more than one gap or are linked to other issues

» any current condition issues or elements of the Vision that do not have a counterpart in the other

If the group works best within a creative environment, the diagram in Figure 9 will provide a format for discussion.

Figure 9

Current Issue	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Desired Goal

The Gap Analysis is the foundation for the development of the themes or objectives that organize the both the Strategic Plan and its more detailed companion, the Implementation Plan.

Sample Implementation Plan Format

Effective implementation of a strategic plan is the outcome of a process focused on action rather than description. There are a number of specific details that reinforce implementation, including assignment of responsibility, deadlines, and identification of measures of completion. Through the recommended semi-annual review, the goals of the strategic plan can be managed with transparency and flexibility. In fact, the implementation plan format needs to be easily revisable to respond to the changes that will occur during the life-time of the strategic plan it supports.

The example in Figure 10 shows a portion of an implementation plan that includes the most basic parts of implementation. The first three columns indicate the goal and step, the fourth column provides the institution with a deadline for completion. The "Assigned To" column represents the title of the person ultimately responsible for ensuring implementation. Resources can sometimes be estimated as in Step 8, but often can only be categorized in a general way, especially if the action will take place several years in the future. The final column has its foundation in the way the goal is cast, which is why being specific in the language of the goal is critical.

Figure 10 **Sample Implementation Plan**

Goal	Steps	Description	Deadline (Date)	Assigned to (Title)	Resources (Personnel, Space, Funding, Time, Technology)	Assessment (A unit of measure)
2		Implement student learning outcomes & development assessment programs				
	1	Conduct workshops for chairs/faculty		Provost / Dir. IR	No additional resources required	All chairs and faculty will have participated in a workshop by the deadline.
	2	Inventory existing assessment activities		Chairs / Dir. IR	No additional resources required	A comprehensive inventory on file with Provost by the deadline.
	3	Develop / refine department Mission Statements, Goals, & Objectives		Chairs / Dir. IR	No additional resources required	Each academic department will file Mission, Goals, and Objectives with Provost by deadline.
	4	Departments/Schools develop draft assessment plans		Deans / Chairs	No additional resources required	Draft assessment plans will be submitted to Institutional Research and the Provost by the deadline.
	7	Departments/Schools revise and finalize plans		Deans / Chairs	No additional resources required	Final assessment plans are filed with Institutional Research and Provost.
	8	Departments collect / analyze for improvement, annually file report with Dir. IR		Dir. IR / Provost	$50K Assist. to Dir. IR + $20K office/ equip.	Assistant Hired

An Implementation Plan such as the one shown in Figure 10 is invaluable during the semi-annual reviews embedded in a self-sustaining planning process. If the Implementation Plan is contained in a spreadsheet program, it can be filtered by deadline, assignment of responsibility, or even by resource to support long-range budget planning.

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