

Academic
LEADER TODAY

SPECIAL REPORT

LEADING WITH INTENTION: **Strategic Planning**



About this Report

Strategic planning is a core responsibility of many academic leaders; it's unlikely to find an institute of higher education without a strategic plan. But as N. Douglas Lees, one of this report's contributors, writes, many plans are destined to "sit on a shelf and gather dust" or worse, represent "grandiose plans without the resources to implement them." Whether your goal is to inspire change, influence department culture, or simply avoid the common pitfalls of failed strategic plans, you'll find a wealth of practical advice, all right here in this *Academic Leader Today* free report.



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Considerations for Meaningful and Credible Strategic Planning

N. Douglas Lees, PhD

Formulating strategic plans is a relatively common activity in higher education. Some institutions have strong traditions in this regard, and all levels periodically engage in this process. Others participate occasionally. Much depends on the interest and motivation of the upper administration. In fact, planning of this type is often initiated when a new leader (department, school, campus) comes in.

Mention strategic planning to faculty and you will get complaints about doing much work to produce a volume that sits on a shelf collecting dust until the next round of planning is launched, or unfavorable comments about making grandiose plans without any resources to implement them. It is true that the process is time-consuming when done well and would be a waste of resources if it were not linked to budgeting or forgotten immediately upon printing and posting on a website. The focus should be on spreading the work while getting the best of many divergent perspectives in developing the plan, crafting the plan in ways that make it more likely to attract the resources required to implement it, developing a practice and/or strategy of using the plan to guide unit initiatives, and being very public about measuring performance against the plan.

At the outset of the strategic planning process, thought usually goes into deciding the list of constituents to invite as participants. In campus planning, most faculty members will have input through faculty representatives. Typically, students are invited, although they do not always actively participate. Alumni and external advisory boards are other groups sometimes brought to the table. There is one group that is often absent from the conversation; that group is the staff.

The staff support all our work in teaching, research and scholarship, engagement, and administration. One could easily argue that they are more knowledgeable than most faculty and administrators regarding things like grant budget administration, academic policies and procedures, and—because of their frontline work with students—are doing a good job in the classroom and could use some help. This allows them to bring a unique perspective to the conversation about opportunities, obstacles, and goals for improvement. In addition, they, like faculty, are “permanent” employees who have a sense of loyalty and a vested interest in the success of the unit and institution. Contrast this with students who are transient, alumni who are increasingly removed from the institution, and advisory board members who are peripherally connected at best.

Unlike many faculty who feel they do not have the time or do not want yet another set of meetings, most staff would be pleased to contribute to aspects of the strategic plan. This opportunity is regarded as a reward for their professional efforts rather than another work assignment, and is a mechanism by which faculty and administration can demonstrate how valuable staff are to the overall enterprise. Of course, staff participation means less effort from those faculty who are too busy or reluctant to take part.

Regarding the challenge of generating a plan that will attract the necessary new resources for implementation, there are no guarantees in today’s world of fiscal unpredictability. Assuming, however, that the local situation is not dire or that the institution has made resources available through painful reallocation, there are some planning strategies that can enhance the chances of winning new resources. How they play out is dependent on whether strategic planning is taking place at all institutional levels (campus, school, department) at the same time, or a department or school is initiating planning on its own.

Most strategic plans can be counted on to include objectives for undergraduate students and their institutional experiences, civic engagement, scholarship/creative activity, personal development, and diversity, with research institutions adding graduate program development or expansion, external funding, and other related aspects of scholarship. While goals in these areas may be broad at the institutional level, they become increasingly more specific as they are defined at the school and department levels. The major points in the campus plan are typically articulated with specific language. For example, scholarship, research, innovation, and discovery all may be used as to convey the same priority. For school and department plans, it is most advantageous to replicate the major priorities (at least those for which the unit

Mention strategic planning to faculty and you will get complaints about doing much work to produce a volume that sits on a shelf collecting dust until the next round of planning is launched, or unfavorable comments about making grandiose plans without any resources to implement them.

will be seeking new resources) of the campus plan using the same language. This alignment strategy allows all readers to recognize that the unit's plan is intimately linked to that of the campus.

Many goals within strategic plans will require new resources. Some, like growing the graduate student population or implementing programs to enhance undergraduate student success, would likely be too costly for an academic department budget to absorb, thus requiring investment from some higher-level source. Funds made available for implementing the strategic plan are likely going to be insufficient to address every unit's aspirations, and thus, are likely to be distributed on a

competitive basis. To gain advantage in this competition, it is recommended that departments and schools structure their priorities and goals in ways that demonstrate alignment with campus priorities and goals. Again, this goes back to language, details, and efforts to specifically link what you want to accomplish to the points made in the school and campus plans.

The final topic is one related to the prominence of the plan in guiding the future work of the unit, school, or campus. The complaint that once the plan is completed it goes into dormancy until it is time for another plan to be constructed is the result of the failure of institutions, schools, and departments to keep their plans in the forefront even as they implement promised changes and make progress toward goals. Faculty are busy people and quickly forget what is specified in the strategic plan, and they cannot be expected to connect the dots between a goal written in a document three years earlier and some outcome data presented today. This gap in the planning process can be corrected by an "assessment of progress" mechanism that regularly collects data related to the goals of the plan and reports findings to various constituents in appropriate ways.

The responsibility of tracking and reporting outcomes of the department planning falls to the chair, with some elements delegated to members of the faculty. Some of the goals are measured by check boxes of "met" or "in progress." Examples might be establishing an orientation program for new graduate students or developing a new degree track or certificate. Others will require tracking over time. Examples here might be goals to increase the number of undergraduate majors by X percent, to increase the graduation

rate by Y percent, and to increase the number of faculty holding external support by Z percent, all over a five-year period. Goals of this kind will require the long-term vigilance of the chairs and staff (e.g., the grants office) or other faculty (e.g., the director of undergraduate studies). Regardless of how goals may be met, results and progress should be reported (with memos, reports, meeting agendas) to the faculty within the context of the strategic plan to remind faculty that the plan is alive and being followed. In addition, outcomes of the plan should be reported to upper administration and alumni and displayed prominently on the department website, in each case with a specific link to the related priority and goal of the plan.

At the school level, the associate deans could be assigned to monitor activities in their areas of responsibility (academic affairs, student affairs, research, graduate education, finance, etc.). The dean should set aside some time at each school faculty meeting, start-of-the-year gathering, state-of-the-school address, etc., to report on the progress of the school, identifying those elements that are related to specific goals in the plan. As with departments, there should also be efforts to report results and progress up and out.

In summary, for those who will be engaging in strategic planning, the following recommendations may be worth considering:

- Unit staff may have some insightful perspectives on the development of the plan. For example, advisors typically have the pulse of the student body and have insights into aspects of student success that faculty may miss. Include them in the planning process.
- Structure your plan in ways that match, in priorities and language, the plans of the levels above the unit. Alignment will demonstrate campus unity and improve the ability to garner resources for implementation of the unit plan.
- To make the planning process credible to faculty and to promote buy-in to the process, establish an “assessment of progress” plan at the outset. This will provide a structure that will allow regular reporting of progress toward plan goals and will serve as a reminder that the plan is alive and bearing fruit.

N. Douglas Lees is associate dean for planning and finance, professor, and former chair of biology at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

Inspiring Change with Your Strategic Plan

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti, MS

Almost every institution of higher education has a strategic plan, but how many institutions actually make use of that plan? According to Wayne Smutz, dean of continuing education and extension for UCLA, not many. Yet, an institution's strategic plan can be a powerful tool for spurring it to action. At the recent University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) West 2015 Regional Conference, Smutz detailed a seven-point plan for constructing and using the institutional strategic plan for change.

STEP 1: SET THE CONTEXT

In Smutz's experience, the strategic plan's value begins with communicating why the staff should care about the planning process. In the case of UCLA, the university was facing a decline in public funding of and confidence in higher education, escalating student debt, and an erosion of public confidence. It was clear the institution could not continue with the status quo but must be ready to change. This set the context for planning.

The strategic plan's value begins with communicating why the staff should care about the planning process.

For example, the institution faces societal forces, including the rise of a global, knowledge-based economy in which individuals are likely to have 3–7 careers in their lifetimes. By the year 2020, some two-thirds of jobs will require some college, but a skills gap means there won't be enough qualified individuals to fill these roles. Higher education also faces a

number of challenges, including increased emphasis on performance and accountability, changes in technology, and changes in student expectations.

STEP 2: DEFINE THE PROCESS AND BUILD OWNERSHIP

Next, UCLA Extension engaged in "planning for strategic planning." This involved inviting all staff members, some instructors, and some UCLA administrators to participate in the strategic planning process, a step intended to create buy-in. In addition, Smutz called on an outside source, Strategic Initiatives, a consulting firm from Virginia, to help. "Our approach was narrowing down [our options] to what was possible and then making changes over time," he says. The team started with some 700 ideas contributed from university constituents, which were then developed into four strategic action priorities and 13 individual actions that the university would work on over time.

STEP 3: PRODUCE THE PLAN

These four strategic action priorities surround a central vision statement, "We will engage the power of education to transform lives, business, and communities worldwide." They also support the mission, "We create extraordinary learning experiences for adults."

The four strategic action priorities are as follows:

1. Collaborate with partners
2. Extend our reach
3. Serve students first
4. Reimagine learning

Each item is given a priority order for when it will be addressed, and each is supported by three or four actions.

STEP 4: PACKAGE THE PLAN

Not only was the content of the strategic plan important, but “it was important how we packaged that plan,” says Smutz. The marketing department developed a “colorful, short booklet that builds attention,” he says, differentiating the presentation from many others that appear only as staid documents. “We didn’t want people to be bored,” he says.

STEP 5: IMPLEMENT

“You need to be constantly thinking about what you’re doing,” urges Smutz. Connecting the strategic plan to what’s important is everyone’s responsibility, and it requires involvement from all the university stakeholders. For example, at UCLA Extension, budget managers are required to provide a rationale for the current year’s budget that links need for funding back to the plan. Additionally, each individual action is managed by a steward; these stewards meet regularly to report on the progress toward each of the actions.

STEP 6: MONITOR

These regular meetings of the action-item stewards are also part of the continual monitoring that ensures the plan stays on track. This is a good time to learn more about the makeup of the organization. UCLA Extension launched the strategic plan at a retreat at which participants took a test that determined their orientation toward change. Everyone tested into one of three categories: conservers, pragmatists, and originators. Smutz notes that understanding the makeup of different offices was important for understanding how the strategic plan would be received and implemented. He also points out that it’s essential to have representation from all orientations toward change; an office comprised entirely of people who love to originate changes could be just as unbalanced as one in which everyone wants to avoid change.

STEP 7: ADJUST

Finally, Smutz notes that adjustments must be made along the way to the strategic plan. He explains that, initially, the institution tried to create a five-year plan, but that turned out to be an unrealistic time horizon on which to focus. Instead, the institution now reviews the strategic plan after two years and then conducts an annual review thereafter. “Don’t plan in too much detail too far out,” he says.

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Avoiding the Common Pitfalls of Failed Strategic Plans

Henry W. Smorynski, PhD

Bill Clinton's presidential campaign themes song in 1992 was *Don't Stop (Thinking about Tomorrow)* by Fleetwood Mac. It expresses the optimistic side of strategic planning that "yesterday's gone" and "tomorrow will soon be here," meaning one should act assertively to create a better future. The realistic side of strategic planning was evident in Hillary Clinton's campaign in 2008, where she misinterpreted history, believing that designing the future was best rooted in past successes rather than fully understanding emerging trends and changes in the environment in which any strategic plan will find its relevance and success. She assumed the importance of big state primaries and war chest fundraising, but did not see or evaluate properly the importance of caucus primaries or raising small amounts of money from many donors via the internet. These historical events point out the importance of balancing the optimism of strategic planning with the realism of strategic planning. Most strategic plans do not pass this litmus test and

For a strategic plan to be successful, it must deliver a resonance and provide a representation of a future valued and doable reality that is sufficiently strong to offset the forces of resistance.

fall victim to the common pitfalls that disrupt and destroy the effectiveness of plans for colleges and universities in an ever increasing competitive and changing environment.

Strategic planning needs to be seen as a change process with a time horizon of three to five years. Anything less than three years is to be defined and acted upon through sensible budgeting. Anything more than five years is unrealistic about the effects changes will have on even the most thoughtful and well constructed strategic plans. Strategic plans are, at

their core, an exercise in changing people's minds about things that matter. The change must be created and delivered for both constituencies of relevance within the college or university and outside of the college or university in its competitive marketplace. One must always place a laser focus in strategic planning on the sustainability of changed behaviors that the plan intends beyond a particular president or academic leader. One is always trying to change permanently key actors' perceptions and behaviors regarding valued realities rooted in their previous successes or their current standard operating procedures.

Famous management guru, Peter Drucker, always said the best way to predict the future was to shape it by one's actions. Strategic plans that are successful shape the future by their blend of optimism that inspires change with realism that does not overstretch the organization and its leadership's capacity to invent the change it seeks within the time frame or realization of a three- to five-year period of time. Beyond that time, the environment will change dramatically, and what might work three to five years ago will neither inspire nor create the change the organization and its leadership intend.

For a strategic plan to be successful, it must deliver a resonance and provide a representation of a future valued and doable reality that is sufficiently strong to offset the forces of resistance. Those forces of resistance must be measured and accounted for in successful strategic planning. One of the main forces of

resistance is established informal leaders and communicators within a college or university, who have the ear of a critical number of faculty and other employees. Another is to estimate the critical messaging control of subunits in the college or university such as the chief financial officer, student development leaders, athletic icons, and critical gatekeepers in public relations, fundraising, and the alumni. Without a proper analysis of the forces and strengths of resistance, any developed strategic plan will either fail to achieve results intended or underachieve results desired in a very disappointing way.

Why do so many strategic plans start off wrong and end up achieving far less than they intend? Most plans begin in a misguided manner. They frequently are visions of new presidents without adequate and informed appreciation for the history or the market position of the college or university. Others are the dreams and aspirations of new or newly inspired academic leaders rooted in knowledge acquired from readings about other institutions successes in transforming themselves or from national conferences and/or professional organizations' defining the future of higher education. Some are inspired inappropriately by consultants, who define planning as a process involving spreadsheets, teams, and plan definitions of resources and timelines necessary for specific subgoal achievements within a plan. All these starting points lack any common sense understanding of realistic goals and doable institutional achievements.

Strategic plans, to be successful, must start off right. They need to understand and build off of potential futures. To understand potential futures in higher education, one needs to be thoroughly committed to environmental scanning. Namely, one has to anticipate the future of higher education and a particular college or university in terms of how the environment of competition, prestige, faculty attitudes and resources, endowment, market share, and changing student and parent perceptions of higher education will affect future choices of individuals willing to invest in an institution or willing to enroll in the institution.

How can understanding of the future be achieved in the present? One needs to tap into sources of interpreting the future. With regard to higher education, several illuminating sources of information would include futures predictions, Educause's estimations of technologies affecting the future, trends of competition between and among educational sectors for college attendance, trends from the Department of Labor regarding predictions and prognostications about future employment trends, CIRP data on entering college student attitudes for a three- to four-year period, and state and federal government budgetary trends of support for college-going students and higher education institutions. Without this baseline of data, no strategic plan will be successful over the long run and certainly will underachieve in the short run.

What are some of the most common pitfalls that lead to ultimate failure of many strategic plans? First, many colleges and universities underestimate their current lack of realistic talent in the organization or the organization's ability to attract that talent. Wishing to have the people capable of creating and sustaining the change desired is not the same as actually having people to get the job done in the timeframe desired. Next, many underestimate the critical importance of implementation of the plan by not laser focusing on the tipping point goals of a plan versus all the elements of a plan. Plans also frequently underestimate the need for key role players such as the established and credible leader to promote the plan, the necessary cheerleaders for the plan, and the necessary agitators to hold persons responsible for plan implementation accountable. Another weakness of many plans is unrealistic estimates of financial and human resource time commitments to achieve the plan. Plans are always in competition with established and continuing budget commitments relative to the loyalty and commitment to the plan of subunits and leaders in the organization. Plans often founder on the shoals of inadequately inspiring and clear messages about the value of changes defined in the plan for the faculty and other university employees. Finally, successful planning must employ the 80-20 principle related to focusing most efforts on achieving the most important parts of the plan.

Henry W. Smorynski is a Midland University Leadership Fellow.

Keeping Teaching and Learning at the Heart of Strategic Planning

Rob Kelly

As the result of two years of budget cuts, Bemidji State University's finances became unsustainable, forcing the elimination of more than 30 full-time positions, representing approximately 15 percent of the university's budget.

Toward the end of this recalibration of the budget, Martin Tadlock came to the institution as provost and vice president for academic affairs. His challenge was to help move the university forward "without losing its heart and soul."

During this time of low morale, extreme caution, and anxiety, Tadlock sought to restore trust and reengage the university community in rebuilding in a new direction. At the same time, a new strategic planning process was initiated by the university president, and Tadlock was asked to co-chair that effort.

AN UNUSUAL APPROACH

There was no master academic plan, and Tadlock thought that completing a master academic plan before the strategic planning process began would be a good way to engage faculty and put teaching and learning first "to help drive the strategic planning process for the university. That's very unusual," Tadlock says. "The idea came from reading the landscape of the university and seeing that traditionally this institution has always been about teaching and learning first and putting the student at the center of every decision. That's what people espouse, so my thought was if that's what people say they are all about here, let's put teaching and learning truly at the center. Let's start with the master academic plan and define where we're going to go programmatically."

The president agreed to this approach, and each academic program was asked to participate in a self-study. "The faculty stepped up. They became very engaged in the planning process. We had a lot of open forums on campus, and they were well attended. We had a lot of input from faculty who knew this was an opportune time to really set the direction that we want to go academically, and that was going to be at the core of everything we do in the future, including the strategic planning process," Tadlock says.

The master academic planning process was open to the entire campus. As the master academic plan went through various iterations, those were distributed. "When the steering committee for the strategic plan was put together, all the members of that steering committee were already familiar with the master academic plan. Since everyone was familiar with the master academic plan, that informed their direction in terms of how they went about the planning process for creating the strategic plan, and I'm sure it informed everybody's thinking about what should be the mission, vision, and values of the university based on the mission, vision, and values found in the master academic plan," Tadlock says.

A PLAN FOR GROWTH

Although the master academic plan and strategic plan were completed in the context of the recalibration, "it was made clear from the beginning that it is a growth plan," Tadlock says. "We are planning to grow the university, planning to grow existing programs, and add new programs. That was clearly stated, with the onus falling on the administrators to assist faculty to find external funds and creative budgeting internally to implement parts of the plan that are all about growth. The plan also included some programs

that may be reduced in size or phased out. That was included in the plan as well. Even though it's a growth plan overall, there are some internal reallocations that will happen as a result of the plan as well.”

The plan also includes a new budget that allows departments to grow on a revenue share basis using funding from the university that the program pays back to the university over time. It gives faculty an opportunity to launch new distance-based programs and share in the revenue generated with the university.

The master academic planning and the strategic planning are on a three-year schedule and are aligned and synchronized. (The final version of the university strategic plan will be completed this fall.) “Even though we have a three-year plan, to grow strategically it will be revisited constantly. It's not ‘set in stone’. I don't think anyone in higher education can do that anymore. You have to be ready for the changes that are occurring all around you. That's what we intended when we put the plan in place,” Tadlock says.

Indicators of financial sustainability that will be monitored include number of annual graduates within a major or standalone minor, graduate placement rate in related career or graduate school, student graduation rate for the program (fall juniors of the three most recent years' graduation within a total of six years), average enrollment in upper-division courses, student FYE generation per faculty member, cost-study analysis (per student cost), program assessment data and currency, state and/or regional employment opportunity data, program essentiality to the university mission and other indicators related to academic excellence, evidence of student learning, potential for improvement, and other considerations from the college and department.

SHORTER PLANNING CYCLES: THE NEW NORMAL

The three-year planning cycle is a shorter cycle than in the past, something Tadlock sees as becoming the standard throughout higher education. This is reflected in the ways accrediting agencies currently operate. For example the Higher Learning Commission (the accreditor of BSU) used to operate on a 10-year review cycle. No longer. Now, the institution provides documentation every four years and a has small-team visit every seven years. “It's more about constant, continuous quality improvement. If accrediting bodies are looking at it that way, there's a reason, and I think that impacts our thinking about planning. You can have a long-term vision and mission that drives the institution for a long period of time, but how you address that mission and how you realize that vision is going to be thought of as more short-term planning. Universities need to be a little more nimble, a little more responsive now than in the past because the rate of change has accelerated. We have multiple opportunities coming from all directions that we need to sort and prioritize. Which ones do you let go by and which ones do you grab?”

*Rob Kelly is the former editor of *Academic Leader* and *Online Classroom* newsletters.*

Does It Pay to Plan? What We Learned about Strategic Planning in a Big Ten University

Kathleen A. Paris, PhD

As one who has facilitated scores of planning events for schools and colleges, departments, and units on campus, I saw *A Study of Strategic Planning on the UW–Madison Campus* as potentially very useful but also risky. I and my fellow consultants in the Office of Quality Improvement know that planning can bring a college or department or office together by focusing on a limited number of important aims. But leaders have a lot of things going on. Would they remember that we have a campus plan? Are our views of success the same as those with whom we work? Do others get as excited as we do about elegant plans, well defined and executed? Would campus colleagues wonder if we were “auditing” their efforts? We decided to survey a large group of campus leaders, some of whom had used facilitators from the Office

Strategic planning was defined as “an organized process through which members of an organization reflect upon the challenges, opportunities, capabilities and resources of their unit, and the needs of their constituents, and identify priorities, future-oriented plans, goals, and action steps.”

of Quality Improvement and some of whom had done planning on their own, with or without professional facilitation. In that way, the research could focus on the state of planning on the campus, apart from the services offered by one office.

THE CONTEXT

Strategic planning has become part of the institutional culture at UW–Madison. For two decades, the campus plan has been created based on NCA reaccreditation exercises. The plan typically identifies strategic priorities that cut across schools, colleges, and service units.

Associate vice chancellors drawn from the faculty and serving limited terms act as “point people” for sever-

al of the priorities. Annual reports offer data that show progress in priority areas identified in the campus strategic plan.

Annual reports for all schools and colleges, and many departments and administrative units, are organized according to the priorities in the campus plan. The priorities are being used to guide budget reductions and reallocations. The campus priorities also provide motivation for planned giving and donations.

The Deans’ Council holds an annual retreat to review progress on the campus plan and identify issues that require their leadership. Those issues then drive meeting agendas for the rest of the year.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Brent Ruben, professor of communication and organizational psychology and executive director of the Center for Organizational Development and Leadership at Rutgers University, along with the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE) research team, which included Justin Ronca, Beth Stransky, and the author, identified four questions of interest:

1. What is the impact of a campus-wide strategic planning process with clear priorities?
2. What factors most contribute to effective implementation of the campus-wide strategic plan?
3. What is the impact of strategic planning processes at the level of schools, colleges, administrative units, and academic departments?
4. What factors most contribute to the success of effective strategic planning implementation in schools, colleges, administrative units, and academic departments?

Strategic planning was defined as “an organized process through which members of an organization reflect upon the challenges, opportunities, capabilities and resources of their unit, and the needs of their constituents, and identify priorities, future-oriented plans, goals, and action steps.”

An online survey was designed as the first of a two-part research process. The provost launched the survey with an invitation to 283 campus leaders, including campus-wide administrators, deans, directors, and department chairs. Sixty-seven responses were received, for a response rate of 24 percent. The largest groups responding were department chairs (39 percent) and deans, associate deans, or assistant deans (39 percent), so the responding leaders were far more academic than administrative.

The main limitation was the fact that our respondents were not a random sample, and with the 24 percent response rate we cannot generalize to the whole population of leaders on campus. In addition, we relied on leaders’ perceptions of the benefits of planning, without any requirement for supporting data. Finally, the correlational analyses indicate relationships but cannot definitely establish cause and effect.

The study has, however, provided us with a detailed description of the strategic planning experiences of close to 70 leaders on the UW-Madison campus. For the most part, these leaders are experienced planners. All statistically significant associations reported were significant at the level of 95 percent.

THE CAMPUS PLAN

The majority agreed that the campus plan:

- Set clear goals (61 percent)
- Sharpened focus and prioritized needs (58 percent)

This is a huge accomplishment for a campus strategic plan. It is not uncommon to see campus plans that are more like catalogs of what’s going on in all the schools, colleges, and units. Such compendiums are much easier to create than are plans with clear intentionality, but they are not useful for focused action or budget allocation.

The question about the impact of the campus plan also included unintended negative consequences that could result from poor planning processes. Some of the more notorious unintended consequences of poorly designed strategic planning such as “Wasted time” or “Served as an academic exercise only” were seldom seen in the responses.

Over half (56 percent) rated the impact of the campus plan as a four or five on a five-point scale, where one was “to no extent” and five was “to a great extent.” Of note was the absence of low impact scores (one or two). So the majority of the scores are on the end of the scale any planner would hope they would be.

PLANNING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The data reinforced the belief that planning is a common activity for these leaders:

- Ninety-four percent have engaged in strategic planning in the past five years.
- Eighty-nine percent have a strategic plan.
- Sixty-three percent have updated their initial plan.

A majority (59 percent) rated their “local” planning process (school, college, department, administrative unit) as beneficial, rating it as a four or five on a five-point scale.

The majority rated their planning processes as a four or five on a five-point scale in these areas:

- Set clear goals (74 percent)
- Sharpened focus and prioritized needs (71 percent)
- Fostered collaboration and teamwork (61 percent)
- Expanded awareness of external trends, challenges, opportunities (61 percent)
- Aligned goals and resources (56 percent)
- Achieved important outcomes (53 percent)
- Created commitment to action (52 percent)

This suggests that the leaders who answered our survey are having success with plans that really provide a focus for action. Sixty-one percent said that planning fostered collaboration and teamwork. Although collaboration was not as strongly identified as an outcome of the campus plan, it was identified at the subcampus level as a significant impact of planning.

Respondents who reported successful planning experiences also saw benefits above and beyond those strictly associated with planning (goals, measures, commitment to action, focus, etc.). These collateral benefits included:

- Improved organizational climate (morale, trust, collaboration)
- Stronger external connections, relationships, and views
- More effective resource allocation
- Process improvement
- Enhanced leadership capacity

For these leaders, it did pay to plan.

PLANNING PRACTICES

More respondents (two-thirds) utilized outside facilitation assistance than did not. Of those who used facilitation, 43 percent used facilitators from the campus Office of Quality Improvement (OQI). Those using campus facilitators were more likely to report higher levels of benefits from their strategic planning process than were those using other facilitators or no facilitation.

The study highlights particular planning activities that are associated with successful planning outcomes. Those who reported high levels of goal achievement and/or benefits from strategic planning also tended to:

- Hold meeting(s) to get input before planning
- Hold meetings to get feedback on the proposed plan and to increase understanding
- Engage in a collective review of data
- Identify measures of success

- Identify annual or short-term goals
- Hold periodic checks to monitor progress

The list suggests that respondents take a participatory approach to planning, and further, that there is a relationship between participation and success. Being explicit about collective intentions by having annual goals, measures of success, and periodic checks to monitor progress is also associated with successful efforts. This is powerful information.

Kathleen A. Paris is consultant emeritus in the Office of Quality Improvement at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Coordinating Planning and Implementation of Strategic Initiatives

Rob Kelly

Units within higher education institutions are often characterized as having little knowledge or interest in what happens in other units or at the institutional level. There are many reasons to be critical of the silo mentality—it’s inefficient, it reduces the likelihood of constructive collaboration, and it hampers institutionwide planning and improvement efforts, among others.

In recent years, Butler Community College has tried to get away from this all-too-common institutional mindset and bring about a collaborative, coordinated process for implementing its strategic initiatives.

Improvement of the strategic planning and implementation process has been a continuous evolution from “virtually unrelated strategic projects to more coordinated, interrelated, thematically tied initiatives,” says Phil Speary, director of academic effectiveness and assessment for the college.

When he got involved in strategic planning in 1995, Speary and his colleagues had no reliable way of knowing what the various units were up to. “It was too disparate, too varied for anybody to really have a strong grasp of how things would be interacting. In trying to work through these projects, I discovered

Improvement of the strategic planning and implementation process [is] a continuous evolution.

er people would start working at cross-purposes to each other because they didn’t know what was going on outside their units. For instance, one project might be on retention. Another might be on a different aspect of retention that didn’t complement what was going on in the other unit. When we would have quarterly meetings and people would try to report about what was

going on, we were starting from zero knowledge, and it wasn’t possible to begin to get through all the reports that people were trying to give. Some things were never heard about because they were further down the list,” Speary says.

In 2000, Butler Community College joined the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) and began improving its strategic planning process in ways that seem “painfully obvious” in retrospect, Speary says. “The biggest thing we learned from AQIP was to move to a much more sustainable, systemic understanding of what’s going on at the institution.” For example, if the institution plans to implement an initiative that affects student services, the student services staff should know about it and have input on it from the beginning by serving on a cross-functional planning team.

“What people tended to do before that was when you would put together teams to advance something, you put together a team you worked with essentially on a regular basis. So things got very insulated. One of the moves with AQIP was that inevitably everything is going to be cross-functional. During the strategic cycle we went into around 2000, we were beginning that cross-functional communication. We were still

very much in the mindset of essentially, ‘So, what projects do we want to do?’ And if you looked at the list, it would tend to look pretty random, as though there wasn’t any overarching strategy. Our list of strategic priorities for the institution read more like isolated strategic initiatives than institutional strategic priorities,” Speary says.

The big change in the strategic process came in 2008. The whole institution was involved in reviewing the strategic priorities and identifying four priorities—ensure student success, contribute to our communities, invest in employee success, and advance institutional effectiveness—that are intended to be timeless. “They’ll be reviewed periodically, but we don’t anticipate them changing in the foreseeable future,” Speary says.

Under each strategic priority are goal definitions. For example, “ensure student success” incorporates retention, completion, and student engagement. Each of these is the subject of extended conversations about how to define these terms so that everybody is working from a common framework.

Rather than following the previous approach that had each unit work independently and report back to the institution after the initiatives were implemented, the units work more collaboratively and brief one another throughout the process. “We finally consciously recognized the fact that while instruction at a community college is the central activity, it is critically supported by student services. So those two components need to spearhead the planning so that human resources, finance, and facilities can then complement, work with, and respond,” Speary says. “It’s critical that [collaboration] happens in the planning stage because if it doesn’t, as it moves into implementation, the bus is already gone, and the people who aren’t on it aren’t going to know where it’s headed. In each cycle we try to get it more and more closely coordinated during the planning process,” Speary says.

Speary serves as coordinator of institutional strategic initiatives regarding instruction, tying up loose ends, facilitating communication, and informing people of deadlines. Another coordinator serves the same functions for noninstruction units (they share responsibilities for student services).

Each semester, the college holds an Institutional Development Day, where all employees meet and work through activities related to strategic planning and advancing strategic priorities. This work continues during in-service days and in the cross-functional teams.

In addition there are quarterly meetings of the Integrated Planning and Resource Management team, which includes top administrators; academic division deans; and directors of student services, finance, human resources, and facilities.

“There’s a lot of face-to-face communication that takes place. People have to be able to really talk to each other to avoid misunderstandings, to make clarifications, and to provide focus,” Speary says.

Each division needs to address a set of topics in its documentation and communication; however, there is no common template. “We’ve struggled with that. We tried common templates in our last strategic planning cycle. It doesn’t work. We do strategic gap analysis [forecasting what needs to be done and what resources are needed] in every area. But [a template] hasn’t worked. It became very frustrating to people, and it turns into somewhat of a bureaucratic exercise that people resist. We tell the units, ‘Use the format that works best for you.’ If we’re all talking about common themes, surely we can all understand how they relate to each other,” Speary says.

Each dean coordinates the budgets within his or her division, which needs to tie into the strategic priorities. In the past, strategic initiatives were seen as an add-on—improvements that were budgeted separately. “We’re taking steps so that it’s more centrally tied to these institutional priorities, which are tied to what our basic day-to-day operations are,” Speary says.

With an improved strategic plan that lists specific priorities, it has become much more apparent how the various units are supporting the strategic initiatives. In the past, the question might have been, “What is your unit doing to support the institution’s strategic initiatives?” Now, the questions become, “What is your unit doing in terms of advancing student learning, retention, and completion, and what resources do you need to do that successfully based on the data you’ve gathered?”

Data drives the strategic initiatives, and each initiative has metrics that measure success, with the goal of fostering a continuous improvement process. “There’s an expectation of accountability from the president that people will continue to stay up to date with each other in terms of how things are advancing, where things need to be helped, where things need to be adjusted,” Speary says.

Speary offers the following advice for institutions looking to implement a more coordinated approach to planning and implementing strategic initiatives:

- **Establish the use of common terms and definitions** to ensure that everybody is on the same page. This requires intentional communication.
- **Help people understand what others do.** Encourage tours of the various units. This will give people an appreciation of the entire institution and help them better understand how resources are allocated. “I think getting people to understand what other people in the institution are doing is going to make people have a more collegial attitude,” Speary says.
- **Build strategic planning into the schedule.** It’s unlikely that people will get together to talk about strategic planning without a set time and place.

*Rob Kelly is the former editor of *Academic Leader* and *Online Classroom* newsletters.*

Strategic Thinking, Planning, and Inquiry

Anne Massaro, PhD

Higher education is facing complex problems, an increase in public scrutiny, calls for accountability, and a decrease in resources. These phenomena require department chairs to differentiate between strategic thinking and strategic planning, and to embrace both practices. Involving departmental faculty in strategic inquiry is essential if there is to be a shared sense of direction and agreed-upon criteria for evaluating departmental success. Understanding both the differences and commonalities of strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategic inquiry can strengthen the leadership abilities of a department chair.

Strategic thinking and strategic planning are interrelated yet distinct. Strategic thinking is an individual activity and skill, while strategic planning is typically a group activity. Strategic thinking is the way in which a department chair assesses, views, and creates the future. It is anticipating and creating tomorrow. It is a proactive approach to creating a future that is different than today, and it is about adding value to the institution and its students.

Strategic thinkers ask *why* before they ask *how*. Answering a *how* question moves one's thinking into problem-solving mode. Tactical steps are generated when answering a *how* question. Answering a *why* question, on the other hand, keeps the thinking more expansive and encourages attention on possibilities and opportunities. Focusing on *why* forces one to examine all the issues surrounding a problem before one determines *how* to repair the problem.

Not everyone naturally engages in strategic thinking. Some people, and therefore some department chairs, will be natural strategic thinkers; others will have to intentionally expand their thinking in this direction. Characteristics of strategic thinking include focusing on the most important and relevant issues; recognizing patterns and interactions between actions and consequences; seeing the big picture; looking at things in the long term; infusing creative, divergent ideas while maintaining practical, rational objectives; and making difficult decisions that will inevitably cause discomfort and dissent in the short term but will benefit the department in the future.

Strategic thinking should be an ongoing, everyday practice of department chairs. This is not an annual event or a mental framework exclusively designed for strategic planning. It is a way of being for chairs who are interested in leading, motivating change, and advancing the well-being of their departments.

Strategic inquiry and reflection is a collective act. When individuals gather to engage in strategic inquiry, they use their individual strategic-thinking abilities. Strategic inquiry should be led by the department chair and should involve all faculty in the department. It is about collectively asking and answering questions that determine the future priorities of the department and the quality of the education it provides. In *Departments That Work* (2003), Jon Wergin suggests that a department that engages regularly in critical inquiry is one that asks open-ended questions about itself, reflects about what it does, shares individual reflection through dialogue, recognizes meaning in the data it collects, and connects reflection with action.

One way of engaging departmental faculty in strategic inquiry is to take them away from the physical workplace and immerse them in focused conversations. One Ohio State department spent time off-site asking what high-quality teaching is. Then the faculty members asked for evidence of high-quality teaching in their department. The same two questions were asked regarding high-quality research. In small groups, faculty dialogued and captured their thinking, and then they came together as a whole group

to share what was discovered. This process allowed all members of the faculty to share and voice their opinions, and it illuminated the common definitions of *high-quality* among everyone involved. Creating a shared definition of excellence or the desired end state is a critical first step in devising plans for achieving excellence.

A second Ohio State department explored ways to increase its research productivity. During a private interview with an organization development consultant, each member of the research faculty expressed his or her struggles and successes with their own research efforts. When the faculty came together at a neutral site, the consultant shared common interview themes, focusing on the most significant barriers to research productivity. These barriers were used to focus the group discussion on what might be possible

*Strategic thinkers ask “why”
before they ask “how.”*

if the barriers were removed and to identify what actions were needed to achieve the vision. The strategic inquiry model used with this group is from the Public Dialogue Consortium; it is simply the Concern-Vision-Action (C-V-A) model, an affirmative approach to

planning and problem solving. Instead of centering on problems, affirmative approaches value the best of what is, envision what might be possible, deliberate about what should exist, and create the future. Instead of centering on gaps and deficits, this strategic inquiry model shifts the group from barriers to vision and empowering action.

Strategic planning is a structured, systematic process through which a department agrees on and builds commitment to priorities that are essential to its mission and are responsive to the global world in which it operates. Strategic planning is a means of establishing major directions for the department, and it typically has a three-to-five-year, results-oriented focus. Strategic planning cannot happen without strategic thinking, and it should not occur without collective strategic inquiry. A department chair can establish the academic, human, technological, and financial priorities of the department without the consultation and involvement of the faculty, but to create a plan in this manner is to guarantee resistance and sabotage by those very people who are critical to executing the plan. Instead, actively engaging faculty in strategic inquiry, as illustrated in the two examples above, will result in a more comprehensive and rigorous strategic plan.

The most effective approach to departmental strategic planning is to identify a small, core planning team. This might be an existing leadership group, or it might be a collection of individuals who represent the main interests of the department. The planning team should identify the issues that need collective conversation and inquiry. The team should be responsible for working with a facilitator or consultant to structure discussions and synthesize their outcomes. Once the relevant conversations have taken place and rich data has been gathered, then the core team is the group to make difficult decisions and put those decisions on paper.

Eliminating outdated curriculum, classes, or degrees are very, very difficult decisions. Providing appropriate rationale and evidence is essential, and firmly following through on these decisions is what drives advancement and future growth. Equal in importance to the elimination of that which is not working is the innovation of new programs, classes, and research directions. These decisions may be just as difficult, however, because they typically require new and hard-to-obtain resources.

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Changing Departmental Culture through Strategic Planning

Lon Dehnert, DMA

Imagine the following scenario: Your faculty and staff are meeting in a conference room to develop a long-range strategic plan. A longtime member of the faculty (and former chair), who is quite outspoken and respected by many, begins by sharing her/his input: “Why are we here? What is it that we are going to do that we haven’t done a dozen times before? You know once we’re done, the document will go on a

Developing, publishing, and keeping to a schedule for moving the process forward are absolutely critical to creating and maintaining the new culture and for developing buy-in.

shelf, and we’ll just pull it out each year, dust it off, and resubmit it. And besides, we already have a plan.”

After a quick breath, “We are a great department, we already know what we are doing and we don’t have to put it on paper to make it better.” Someone adds, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Many refer to typical departmental planning procedures as the shotgun approach (good things happen sometimes without intentionality or planning). Departmental culture—a set of

attitudes, beliefs, and/or values accepted by a group—may be a significant obstruction to quality planning when the culture embraces the notion that good happens even in the worst situations.

Considering the increasing expectations for academic institutions, this isn’t good enough. The American proverb “If you don’t have a plan for yourself, you’ll be part of someone else’s,” becomes so apropos. So how can we change the culture of a department to not only accept strategic planning, but to embrace it?

As a convert to planning, it is my experience that you must approach it with deliberateness and intentionality and it must be pervasive. The following are what I consider some key steps on the path to a continuous improvement environment.

DETERMINE WHAT THE NEW CULTURE WILL LOOK LIKE

The goals for a new culture should include (but not be limited to):

- Increased expectation for participation and engagement in planning—to get buy-in, the faculty and staff must participate in the process
- Increased expectation for participation in goal-setting
- Increased expectation for participation in decision-making where it affects the faculty and staff
- Increased understanding of the gathering and value of data (results)
- Increased understanding of planning and assessment at all levels
- Increased clarity of emphasis on the whole university/college
- Increased understanding of the linkage between planning and resources, either new or existing
- Hiring personnel with planning experience and understanding of planning at the core

ENGAGE THE SERVICES OF A GOOD FACILITATOR

A good facilitator can help you and your department(s) develop a quality process that works with your situation. A facilitator can also help establish a workable agenda that the group sees not as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for input. A good facilitator comes with an understanding of quality tools for continuous improvement (e.g., decision-making, team-building and facilitation, brainstorming, brainwriting, nominal group techniques, etc.) and the skills to use them, including the skill to balance participation when certain individuals wish to dominate. They also come without a personal agenda. A good facilitator can allay fears quickly and efficiently and get on with the process. To achieve a successful outcome, everyone must leave believing they had an equal opportunity for input and that they agreed with the final plan.

USE CRITERIA THAT WORK IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING

The National Malcolm Baldrige Foundation and the Higher Learning Commission and its Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) have excellent criteria that include “Helping Students Learn,” “Valuing People,” “Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs,” etc. The facilitator will use these meaningful criteria to guide faculty through brainstorming sessions to determine departmental goals along with an activity to prioritize them. Limit the number of goals to a realistic and accomplishable few (three to five per category).

DEVELOP AN APPROPRIATE FORMAT FOR THE FINISHED PRODUCT

The form should have several specific requirements beyond the list of goals, including:

- Specific **action steps** that will be taken to achieve each goal/objective
- **Ownership** of the action, objective, or goal (an overseer of the process)
- **Deadlines** for when the specific actions will be completed
- Midterm **assessments** to keep them on track
- **Costs** associated with the actions or perhaps the goals/objectives

Very important are the ownership, deadline, and associated costs. Without an owner, the process may wander; without deadlines there will be no hurry to complete it; and a project that costs too much is not valid without new or reallocated funds.

HOLD THE PLANNING FORUM AT AN OFF-CAMPUS SITE

In a single day, the department can, with the help of an experienced facilitator and without influence from the administration (including the chair who is an equal participant in the planning), put together a plan with short-, mid-, and long-range goals along with associated action steps to ensure their success. In addition, holding it at a neutral site away from campus (and its inherent baggage) can help allay the fears of skeptical faculty.

The following elements should be discussed during the forum:

- Threats and opportunities to/for the department
- Long-range goals that address the threats and opportunities
- Mid-range goals that address the long-range goals
- Short-range goals that address the mid-range goals
- Action steps to address each of the three types of goals
- A priority order

During the planning forum, several things should be kept transparent:

- The mission and vision of the institution, college, and department
- The alignment of all of the above
- The environment and how the goals fit

ENTER THE DATA INTO THE CHOSEN FORMAT

Once the planning forum is complete, collect and enter the data into the plan for distribution, review, and comment. During this cycle the participants might find mistakes or slight differences in perception, and this gives them another opportunity for input.

SCHEDULE AND HOLD A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

Schedule a follow-up meeting to review the document. Insist that participants bring their suggestions for ownership, deadlines, and estimated cost. This step helps keep the process transparent.

DEVELOP AND PUBLISH AN ANNUAL SCHEDULE FOR PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

Developing, publishing, and keeping to a schedule for moving the process forward are absolutely critical to creating and maintaining the new culture and for developing buy-in. It is this step that departments normally fail to complete.

I recommend a schedule that does not quite follow the academic year. Assess the outcomes in the spring and fall and then use the data (results) during the spring to adjust the plan for the following year. There will always be some overlap; however, at the beginning of each year, the faculty are all on the same strategic page. In addition, review the plan frequently.

DETERMINE A METHOD FOR ALIGNING THE PLAN WITH THE DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET

It is standard procedure for departments to grab new things as they come along (e.g., new degrees, new facilities, etc.), to the detriment of existing programs. There must be a way, within the plan, to ensure the ongoing support of quality programs and the deletion of archaic programs.

In summary, there are several other elements that can be used in creating this new environment, including a faculty leadership team, a staff council, and task forces to do the research and work. Departments can be brought into a continuous improvement mode; however, they must see the advantages to them and they need neutral guidance during the process.

Lon Dehnert is assistant dean in the School of Education at Kansas State University.

Strategic Plan Defines Common Purpose, Fosters Collaboration

Rob Kelly

When James Dlugos began as dean of academic affairs at the College of Saint Elizabeth in 2005, there was little consistency among academic departments, the result of “opportunistic growth” since the 1970s. Recognizing that the existing structures were not likely to be sustainable over the long term, the college embarked on its first institution-wide strategic plan. The strategic plan laid the foundation for structural changes and subsequent academic master planning. In an interview with *Academic Leader*, Dr. Dlugos talked about these initiatives and what they have meant for the college.

The college, founded in 1899 as a single-sex Catholic liberal arts institution, began to enroll adult students through its continuing education and weekend college program in the 1970s to meet the needs of this demographic and to increase the number of students. “It wasn’t necessarily planned, and so by 2005, when I arrived, we had this array of structures and each had grown in its own way. There was not a lot of consistency or commonality from department to department.

“When I came here we had in place what might be described as a strong-chair/weak-dean culture. The departments were largely functioning as independent entities without a lot of recognition of their relationship to what could be identified as the common purpose of the college,” Dlugos says.

The strong-chair/weak-dean culture evolved naturally, Dlugos says. “As departments and faculty were encouraged to look for opportunities to grow, there were a lot of individual initiatives, which was a good thing. It served the college for an extraordinarily long period of time. When we began this academic planning process, there really was this understanding that in order to be good stewards of our resources, which is one of our core commitments as a Catholic institution, we needed to take a careful look at how we were doing things. We needed to take a careful look at how we were doing things in order to make sure that we really were in a very immediate way enacting our values on a day-to-day basis in the way we’re organized, in the way we interact with each other, and in the way we interact with and relate to our students,” Dlugos says.

The key element of the institution-wide strategic plan is the college’s commitment to a single community of learners, which “led us to reexamine everything we were doing then and would do in the future,” Dlugos says. This included the elimination of the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies and incorporating its functions into the college, retooling the undergraduate curriculum, and general education reform.

By design, the academic planning process addresses a large number of elements concurrently rather than sequentially. “I’m a firm believer that if you’re going to make a change, have as many things in the system as possible. If you do them sequentially, once you take a step in one direction you’ve already begun to determine the remaining steps you’re going to take. Having more things in play at once for a slightly longer period of time allows people to really grasp onto and see the interrelationships of things like faculty governance, faculty work, and the curriculum,” Dlugos says.

Virtually everybody in academic affairs participated in the academic master planning process, and out of that work came a new organizational structure for academic programs. The college had 19 departments and seven programs. The planning process eliminated departments and organized programs into four areas—Culture and Humanities, Science and Mathematics, Health and Wellness Studies, and Human and Social Development.

These areas are designed to bring together a relatively diverse group of faculty to increase collaboration across disciplines. “I believe strongly that while all the challenges in higher education are universal, the best solutions are local ones. What we wound up with was the result of who we are and where we are,

The key element of the institution-wide strategic plan is the college’s commitment to a single community of learners, which “led us to reexamine everything we were doing then and would do in the future,” Dlugos says.

but it did need to be informed by the larger conversation. I think you’ll find that small colleges across the country already have or are in the process of moving from departments into areas. The choice to use ‘area’ rather than ‘division’ reflects a value—that we’re not trying to create silos but trying to create spaces where people can interact, and we hope that there also is inter-area activity,” Dlugos says.

These structural changes also reflect the college’s commitment to subsidiarity, the organizing principle that says that decisions should be made closest to the point where the effects

of those decisions are felt. “A lot of this reorganization really pushed the decision making out of the deans’ and the vice presidents’ offices to the area chairs and to the programs. There is a lot of room for these local communities to determine their own fate inside a constantly reinforced common set of expectations,” Dlugos says.

OUTCOMES

The following are some of the changes that have come from the academic master planning process:

- **General education**—In fall 2012 a coherent developmental general education program replaced the current distribution requirement. The new gen ed program includes three interdisciplinary course requirements. “This allows students to better understand how knowledge is made and how disciplines can interact with each other in productive ways,” Dlugos says.
- **Team teaching**—Faculty are currently developing team-taught courses for the gen ed program, which has implications for faculty work. “We’re in the middle of conversations about faculty work intended to reestablish those common understandings of what it means to be a faculty member at a small institution dedicated to student development. Those conversations had not been happening prior to this planning process,” Dlugos says.

The college is conducting professional development to support faculty members’ team-teaching efforts. “We don’t want this to be co-teaching or serial teaching. We want faculty to work together to develop courses and be in class for all the sessions,” Dlugos says.

Each faculty member who team teaches will receive full teaching credit for those courses as a way to recognize the extra effort involved in this type of collaboration.

- **Graduation requirements**—In addition changes in the gen ed program, the college changed its graduation requirement from 128 to 120 credits and received faculty approval to change from a three-credit course to a four-credit course model, “which dramatically changes the nature of faculty

work,” Dlugos says. The standard faculty teaching load will go from four classes per semester to three, while maintaining the same number of student contact hours.

- **Staffing needs**—The academic master planning process has enabled a data-informed decision-making process regarding faculty staffing. Rather than each program having to ask every year for an additional new faculty member, the college has implemented a transparent, data-informed decision-making process for determining when a new faculty line is appropriate for any given academic program.

PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Dlugos offers the following advice to others looking to initiate an academic master planning process:

- **Assess the current state.** Identify the hot-button issues and move through a process that is cognizant of those factors, particularly if you are asking for buy-in. “If the results are dependent on having [significant] buy-in, then you have to recognize where people are at the beginning of the process,” Dlugos says.
- **Set timelines.** You need to let people know how long the process will take. “A lot of times processes can get undermined because they can drag on forever. People lose interest. We begin lots of things with great enthusiasm and then the energy sort of dissipates, and most folks figure out that ‘if we wait long enough it will go away.’ To avoid that, we need a calendar that clearly states when things are going to happen,” Dlugos says.
- **Establish common understanding.** People may have different views on the institution’s priorities or even definitions for terms. For example, at the college’s most recent internal reaccreditation meeting, it became clear that people had different ideas of what scholarship means in the context of a teaching institution. “Having the chance to work in a collegial way through those shared understandings is really key if you’re going to have a coherent outcome,” Dlugos says.

*Rob Kelly is the former editor of *Academic Leader* and *Online Classroom* newsletters.*

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