

FEATURE ARTICLE

Integrated Planning as an Institutional Manifestation

by Robert Brodnick and Donald Norris

Successful integrated planning requires institutional commitment and the concentrated, orchestrated effort of multiple individuals working in concert over time.

WE BEGIN WITH A SIMPLE THESIS: The capacity to practice effective, integrated planning is a core competency of 21st-century institutions. It is manifested at the institutional level. However, it is elusive, requiring institutional leadership to consciously build and orchestrate the commitment, culture, and capability for integrated planning. Achieving integrated planning as institutional characteristic also demands continuous development of the perspectives and skills of the campus professionals who will work individually and in concert to elevate the integrated planning quotient of the institution.

THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF INTEGRATED PLANNING

The idea of integrated planning developed over time as the independent planning domains became more and more sophisticated and sought requisite connections among themselves. Throughout the history of higher education administration, leadership, and planning we see a general lack of coherence in the concept of integrated planning. It displays an elusive nature. While the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) was started by professionals with a physical campus planning orientation, they also recognized the importance of sound academic and financial planning in effective campus planning. And they strove to create best practices for their time. As these professionals harvested their insights on effective planning practice, the term *integrated planning* arose to characterize the merging of the three facets

of planning. But theory and best practice always seemed to outpace normal practice. In widespread application across the whole of higher education, the three elements of integrated planning have seldom been accorded equal importance or truly integrated.

Indeed, what does the adjective *integrated* really mean when used in the term “integrated planning”? Does it simply mean that the academic, financial, and facilities aspects of planning are all combined in the planning process in some form or fashion? Or that they each are accorded equal importance or consideration? Does it mean that the flows of information on these elements come together for decision makers at the same time and are equally sophisticated and well developed? Does it mean that all planning-related decisions facing the institution should achieve a balance of inputs from these three perspectives, appropriate to the issue and decision at hand? These questions hint at the nuanced nature of the concept of integrated planning.

One complicating factor is that the three elements of planning are the responsibility of different professionals on campus. Facilities and master planning staff deal with facilities planning. Academic planning is the responsibility of the provost, deans, and department chairs. The chief financial officer, deans, and department chairs perform financial and budgetary planning and decision making. Moreover, there are a host of other important planning activities that must be considered—student services plans, enrollment management

plans, emergency plans, housing plans, technology plans, research plans, and many more. In fact, nearly every manager has a role in planning, and some have a plan to execute in discharging their duties. Each of these unit plans is the responsibility of a particular office, or in some cases there are cross-cutting leadership responsibilities. While information flows across these organizational silos, its availability is far from perfect and its nature varies considerably.

Equally important, the patterns and times frames of facilities, academic, and financial planning—and the host of other specialized planning activities—do not coincide. Plans for individual building projects are driven by the system for capital projects, where it can take years or even decades to move from concept to occupied building. Campus master planning is conducted on cycles of five or ten years or longer and may or may not be informed by a truly comprehensive and forward-looking academic plan or by academic strategies that consider the dramatic changes in campus footprint that will be enabled by active learning, collaborative learning, and online and hybrid learning. Financial planning for colleges and departments occurs with every year's budget cycle while financial planning for individual facilities is part of the capital project process. Academic planning is typically distributed to the colleges and academic departments and occurs on a continuing basis. Planning and decision making for regional and professional accreditations are on other cyclical schedules. The point is, at any point in time institutions are engaged in a swirl of regular, periodic, and unexpected planning and decision-making cycles, so efforts to achieve integration of all the multiple facets and factors in that planning and decision making must be carefully calibrated and orchestrated.

Over time, most campuses have used a periodic long-range or strategic planning process as the vehicle to pull together and align the elements of integrated planning. As strategic planning grew in widespread application, it served to pull together insights from the many other strands of campus planning. This forced greater attention on achieving fuller,

more balanced integration of the three planning elements. However, the level of integration remains uneven, and the results are often incoherent. Moreover, the rigor and robustness of each of the elements typically varies. In SCUP's publication *A Guide to Planning for Change*, Norris and Poulton (2008) suggest that strategic, integrated, aligned planning should be the gold standard used by campus leadership to position institutions for leading and navigating in the face of change. However, in practice this has remained elusive.

Left to their own devices and without exceptional, continuous effort, academic, facilities, and financial planning will remain independent (or loosely coupled) until united. Consider the planning flowchart (figure 1) that captures the essence of achieving integrated planning in a complex institutional environment consisting of many planning and decision-making processes and episodes. Starting at the top of the flowchart, one begins with the mission, vision, and values of the institution, which drive the academic plan (academic planning and related decision making). The academic plan is the primary driver that in turn shapes the strategic plan and through it the campus master plan and capital plan. All of the additional plans—student services, emergency, housing, technology, enrollment management, and many others—are in turn shaped by the inputs of the preceding plans. The planning and decision-making activities at each stage of this flowchart should be informed by information flows and insights from academic, financial, and facilities perspectives, each appropriate to the particular nature of the decisions being made.

This flowchart depicts a hierarchy of influence. Planning and decision-making processes further down the flowchart are shaped by the decisions expressed in the preceding plans, updated with fresh information on academic, financial, and facilities dimensions. Integrated planning and decision making occur at each stage and level with a balance appropriate to the issues under consideration.

Figure 1 **Integrated Planning Flow**

Today, in the revised and upgraded Planning Institute, SCUP defines integrated planning as a sustainable approach to planning that builds relationships, aligns the organization, and emphasizes preparedness for change. Integrated planning is both an overarching model of alignment—the connective tissue among loosely coupled institutional planning efforts—and a process of planning within each of the institution’s component planning efforts. But this definition tends to place a great deal of pressure on any one individual to facilitate integrated planning institutionally. Too often, an institutional chief planning officer is tasked with making it happen without an agreed-upon institutional approach and commitment to integrated planning. In such a situation, this person is set up for failure. Successful integrated planning requires institutional commitment and the concentrated, orchestrated effort of multiple individuals working in concert over time.

Let us explore the various ways in which evidence for integrated planning can be found.

EVIDENCE OF INTEGRATED PLANNING

The long-term benefits of integrated planning are numerous. But they can be boiled down to a simple premise—institutions that integrate their planning over time do a better job of adapting to changing conditions in their environment and display continual attainment of the key outcomes set forth in their missions and strategies. They achieve greater alignment in planning and decision making, both *vertically* (institutional level down to colleges, departments, and programs) and *horizontally* (across the different types of planning and decision making). They tend to be more effective and efficient and use measurement to shine a light on achievement and ensure that all decisions are shaped by an integrated blend of insights and perspectives.

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LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

Integrated, aligned planning and decision making require active orchestration by top leadership and a culture that values evidence-based decision making, among other things. In highly integrated and aligned institutions, top leadership frames its expectations for the rest of the institutional community in understandable ways and demonstrates the sort of decision-making behavior it expects—by doing. Planning efforts use qualitative and quantitative information from a range of perspectives in making decisions and strategies. These institutions also depend on data in executing strategies and implementing plans. They use metrics and targets to actively measure achievement and refine plans and initiatives over time. When decision-making authority is delegated downward in the hierarchy, the expectations for the use of planning and decision-making best practices are also communicated and understood. Top leadership nurtures the

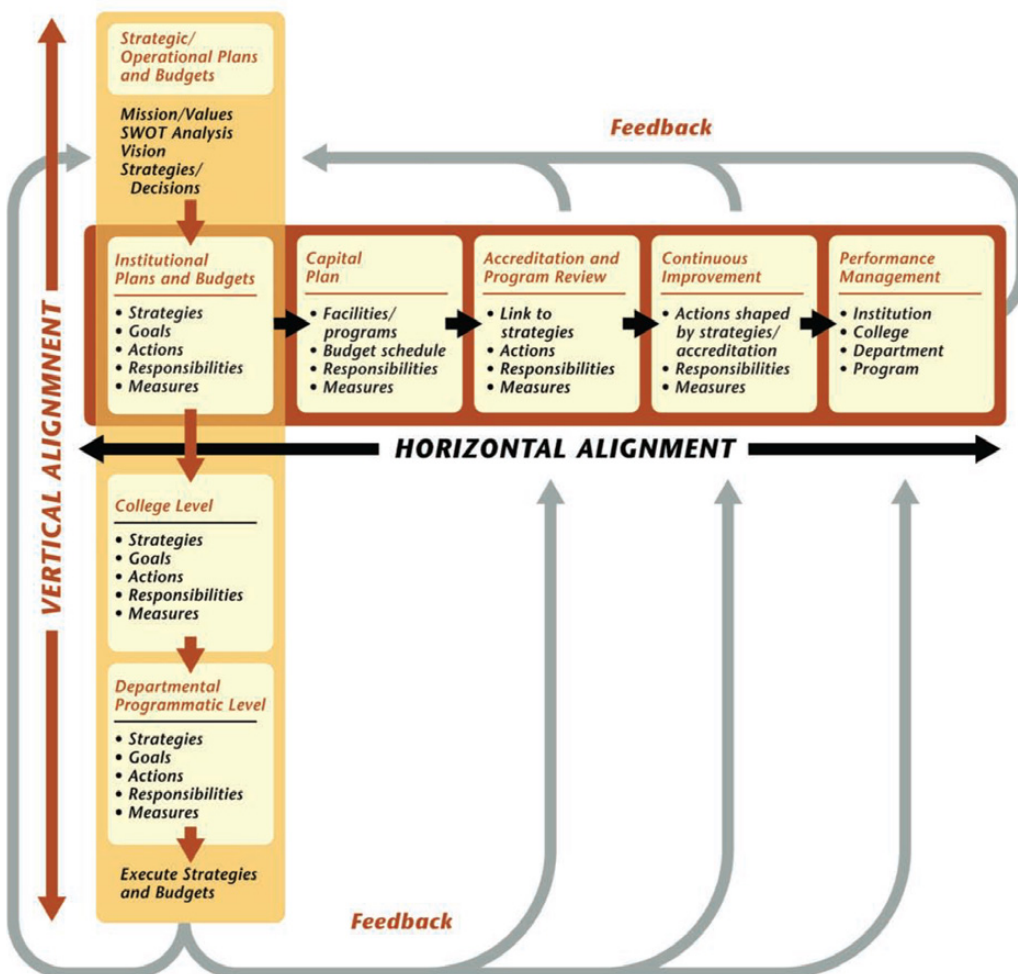
development and continuing health of the integrated, aligned planning culture, eventually leading to a culture of shared vision and commitment.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

It takes a trained cadre of managers, staff, and faculty with basic skills and experiences to employ the mechanics of planning. A toolbox of individual competencies and skills is available for staff and managers at all levels. Some of these tools are easily learned through typical professional development channels, while others can be learned and mastered over time through progressive experience. These tools include both learned perspectives on how to achieve integrated and aligned planning and instrumental tools

and techniques. A mature institution with a sophisticated planning approach has a broad range of individuals with planning experience and evidence of formal or informal development or training programs that move individuals along the continuum of planning mastery (from the most basic tools and concepts to the more advanced and artful). Planning is viewed as a core competency of all supervisory and management positions, from the frontline supervisor to the department chair through the dean and senior managers all the way to the c-suite. Talent development at the institution is deployed and managed to actively build understanding of the tools, frameworks, and processes used to achieve integrated, aligned planning and decision making so that eventually integrated planning can manifest institutionally.

Figure 2 Vertical and Horizontal Alignment in Integrated Planning



PROCESS, STRUCTURE, AND FRAMEWORKS

Does the institution have a clearly understood portfolio of connected planning and decision-making processes, or is it plagued by a set of parallel, independent, or inconsistent processes that thwart consistent culture and practice? Has the institutional leadership consciously mapped its archipelago of planning processes and cycles and articulated how to use structures, frameworks, and evidence to align them? Achieving alignment is a key expression of integrated planning, and the two kinds of alignment to be achieved are portrayed in figure 2.

Source: Norris and Poulton 2008, p. 30.

Vertical alignment ensures that college-level mission, values, strategies, goals, and actions are reflected in department- and program-level strategies, goals, actions, metrics, and responsibilities. Feedback loops will help both college- and program-level strategies and plans adapt over time. Horizontal alignment ensures consonance among college strategies, budget planning and resource allocation, academic planning, accreditation and program review, institutional effectiveness, and the myriad other specialized planning processes that occur. If an institution's map of these processes and frameworks looks like a bowl of spaghetti, then integrated, aligned decision making is unlikely to be living there.

COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND FEEDBACK

Integrated planning fails to drive effective decision making at all levels without excellent communication. Leaders, managers, staff, faculty, and other stakeholders must understand the vision, values, strategies, goals, and action plans that emerge from integrated planning efforts. Communication of planning and decision outcomes is critical. Even better, top leadership must engage stakeholders at all levels in a fashion that builds commitment and generates feedback. Such feedback can shape refinements and pivots in direction that are essential to eventual success. Integrated planning should include formal communication and engagement plans that specify the multi-threaded mechanisms that will be deployed to engage and motivate stakeholders around a shared vision.

INFORMATION, METRICS, AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

To achieve integrated, aligned planning and decision making, institutions must leverage information, metrics, and key performance indicators (KPIs) in ways that cut across organizational silos and align with desired outcomes and targets. A culture of evidence and performance enhancement is critical. If planning and decision making are driven more

by anecdote, intuition, and vision than by evidence, then integrated, aligned planning and decision making will not occur.

So how can we tell if an institution has achieved integrated, aligned planning? Integrated planning is characterized by a number of telltale signs when an institution is doing it well. We have often heard from senior planners, "Well, I'm not sure I can tell you how to do integrated planning, but I know it when I see it." When we talk to institutional planners, we like to ask for a story or two that reveals the presence of integrated planning. Underneath the histories and examples, a few patterns emerge. The basic characteristics and manifestations of integrated planning include

- » focused leadership
- » shared vision throughout the institution
- » effective communication with and engagement of stakeholders, both internal and external
- » alignment of strategies, goals, and actions, both vertically and horizontally
- » nested, aligned plans
- » lack of parallel, competing planning processes
- » informed, evidence-based decision making across silos
- » minimal redundancies
- » flows of resources to key areas of strategy
- » clear set of KPIs, metrics, and targets associated with nested plans
- » focused effort shaped by well-communicated and -understood strategies and action plans

ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION, AND DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES

Informed by an understanding of the telltale signs of integrated, aligned planning, how can an institution determine the extent to which it expresses integrated planning? How can it increase its capacity? What long-term reinforcements need to be present to sustain integrated, aligned planning efforts and results? We provide three approaches to making the shift from the individual to the organizational perspective.

REFRAMING ASSESSMENT TO FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCIES RATHER THAN INDIVIDUAL

Individual competencies are essential to achieving and establishing integrated, aligned planning as a core organizational competence. However, individual competencies alone will not get the job done. It is at the organizational and enterprise level that integrated, aligned planning is expressed and presented. So it is incumbent on colleges and universities to use assessment tools that capture the relative level of integrated planning development and achievement.

There are two kinds of assessment approaches that we might consider moving forward. In the first, we might consider building an individual assessment tool that focuses on the competencies and skills that span the planning profession; individual scores might then be aggregated across the organization. This could allow us to study averages, norms, deviations, and group scores in institutional units and across the entire institution.

A second approach might use the lens of the institution as a whole. Rather than viewing integrated planning as a sum of the parts as described in the first approach, this approach starts holistically, first assessing the institutional characteristics and expressions of integrated planning and only then exploring the components more fully. These two

approaches to assessment move in different directions, but both could be equally effective. In the long run, perhaps both may be required to get a full picture of integrated planning.

SIMULTANEOUSLY ACTING ON THREE DIMENSIONS: INDIVIDUAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Integrated planning is a global concept but a highly localized manifestation. Each institution needs to find its own sweet spot for performing and achieving integrated planning. In the end, integrated planning relies on developing the individual competencies of key employees, creating space for alignment and integration, and demonstrating energetic and persistent leadership along the way. Therefore, an institution must develop its integrated planning quotient by focusing on three dimensions: (1) individual perspectives, skills, and competencies that enable the organization to achieve integrated planning; (2) organizational components and measures that contribute to integrated planning; and (3) leadership that understands and commits to the principles of integrated planning.

- » *Developing individual competencies.* Institutional talent development programs should nurture the perspectives and skills of executive leadership, managers, and staff so that they can effectively participate in and contribute to the component processes that add up to integrated planning. Major planning processes should clearly articulate the values and value of integrated planning as a core function. These development efforts can include punch lists and assessment tools so individuals can know if they are displaying the values, perspectives, and practices necessary for effective integrated planning.
- » *Creating space for alignment and integration.* It takes time, energy, and commitment to achieve integration. Leadership must press continuously to create space for alignment and integration in organizational processes. This includes taking the time to map the various planning and decision-making processes and how their

cycles and responsibilities fit together. Mapping vertical and horizontal alignment and using these maps to build and communicate understanding of what integration looks like are also critical to creating and maintaining a culture of integrated, aligned decision making.

- » *Understanding the critical role of leadership.* To move an institution forward and strengthen its capacities for integrated planning, all three dimensions should co-evolve (individual, organizational, and leadership development). Leadership—yes, the chief executive, but also key leaders across the institution and up and down the verticals—should continuously explore and attend to how planning linkages are working and how information and decisions are flowing. Top leadership sets the vision, the tone, and the expectations for integrated planning. The way the president and his or her cabinet make decisions demonstrates the culture and behavior that is expected of decision makers and those who support and sustain decision-making processes. Care must be taken to establish a clear succession plan when a new president assumes the reins of an institution that has already achieved integrated, aligned planning and wishes to continue to maintain that pinnacle of achievement.

COMMITTING TO A LONG-RANGE HORIZON FOR ACHIEVING AND SUSTAINING INTEGRATED PLANNING

Starting from scratch, integrated planning cannot be achieved overnight. But it can be lost very quickly if organizational leadership loses its focus and commitment. Institutional leaders should establish a long-range horizon for achieving and sustaining integrated planning and express their commitment in institutional plans and statements of vision and purpose.

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INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT IMPACT HOW PLANNING IS INTEGRATED

Integrated planning can be both a survival mechanism and a tool for strengthening and transforming the institution and its constituent parts. Beyond what we have already described as the evidence of integrated planning, there are a number of institutional characteristics that fundamentally change the nature of planning and the manner in which it can be integrated into an institution. These observations are not based on a scientific method, but on years of observation and knowing integrated planning when we see it. Here are some provocations for later refinement:

SIZE

Integrated planning appears to manifest itself differently in smaller, mid-sized, and very large institutions. To pinpoint a mechanism for this, size and scope of authority change the location of where responsibility for planning is integrated and the manner in which it is distributed. In the very small institution, integration can reside in a single individual who coordinates planning through one-on-one relationships, oversees the processes, and ensures aligned outcomes. This individual may be the president, provost, or chief planning officer. As organizational complexity increases an inflection point occurs where a single individual cannot manage this well. Planning, when done well, takes on a distributed quality. Structure, process, and technology all become more and more important to keeping planning integrated. The president's cabinet and other leadership teams take center stage. As institutional size increases yet again a second inflection point arises where integrated planning takes on another form. Integration enters the realm of policy. It is rare at the largest institutions that any one person can play the role of hero integrator. Very large institutions also are challenged to keep key leadership teams at the center of planning—there are too many moving parts. The role of structure, process, and technology becomes paramount, and policy, if it can

stop short of forming intractable bureaucracy, can drive integration and ensure alignment.

CENTRALIZATION/DECENTRALIZATION

Each institution occupies its own position on the spectrum of centralized versus decentralized decision making. Highly decentralized institutions are more challenged by integration and alignment than those that are more centralized. However, the insights achieved through decentralized engagement and participation are critical to mobilizing energies around aligned strategies. Factors such as multiple campuses and sites and segmented and distributed budgets also play a role in changing the communication patterns, resource flows, and distribution and development of talent. This all requires special attention to integration and alignment.

PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE CONTROL

Our experience suggests that private institutions have a leg up on public institutions in achieving integration and alignment. Put simply, the demands of state and local controls and accountabilities add layers of required connections and integrations at public institutions that most private institutions simply do not have. This adds complexity but in most cases does not add solutions. One of the most important manifestations of the difference between public and private institutions is the nature and power of boards of trustees; private-institution boards, and their presidents, can make unpopular decisions without generating the same backlash experienced at public institutions.

SPECIALIZED MISSION

This is a special-case factor. There are certain institutions that we have observed whose missions are so specialized that the mission itself serves to keep planning integrated. The mission drives integration through a highly focused commitment to purpose and values—sort of the invisible hand of planning.

PROFIT/NONPROFIT

Like mission, investor interests tend to help focus efforts and create greater integration and alignment. While we cannot suggest that losing an institution's 501(c)(3) status is the golden road to integrated planning, being shareholder driven sharpens a sense of purpose and offers an easily measured outcome—profit. The well-publicized troubles of the for-profit sector in higher education demonstrate that a single-minded focus on profit comes with an unacceptable price tag. Even while seeking new net revenues to enable financial sustainability, seasoned institutional leaders know they must align these ventures with an institutional mission of service.

WEALTH

In our experience, and quite ironically, some of the wealthiest schools lack integration due to excessive resources that enable the indulgent luxuries of redundancy, duplication, and suboptimal resource deployment. Such wealth enables a few institutions to avoid difficult issues that may challenge the status quo. It appears that the benefits of integrated planning may not matter as much to the very wealthy institutions as they do to those operating on slimmer margins or closer to poverty.

Taken together, these institutional characteristics do not sentence an institution to one form of planning or another. However, they do exert forces that need to be considered and counterbalanced. We have seen sound and integrated planning manifest itself in nearly all types of institutions. With attention and ongoing commitment to individual competencies, organizational processes, and leadership, every institution can use integrated planning to strengthen and transform over time.

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THE PATH FORWARD

So, what are the implications for the higher education planning profession as a whole, for institutional leaders, and for continuing efforts to understand and improve integrated planning?

EXPANDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A clearly articulated blueprint for achieving integrated planning should become part of the curriculum and body of knowledge in the SCUP learning and professional development portfolio (e.g., the Planning Institute). This should include training for individuals who will take these principles back to their institutions where they can be embedded in institutional training and talent development. These principles should be part of the skill development efforts for new staff, participants in major institutional planning activities, and the president's cabinet. Boards should also be acquainted with these principles, including the importance of succession planning to preserve institutional commitment to a culture of integrated, aligned planning and decision making.

DEEPENING THE CULTURE OF SCHOLARSHIP AND PRACTICE OF INTEGRATED PLANNING

As a profession, we have not fully embraced and used the concept of integrated planning. It would be extremely beneficial to concentrate efforts within SCUP, at our institutions, and in the firms that support the industry. Practices and methods could be innovated and sharpened. Frameworks could emerge. SCUP could lead the way by developing an assessment instrument for integrated planning, for example. Such an instrument would be a major contribution to the planning body of knowledge and could be used in conjunction with carefully crafted articulations of methodologies for achieving alignment and other ingredients of integrated planning. This project could be undertaken by the Planning Institute and aligned with professional

development. The SCUP academies could also provide leadership in scholarship and practice.

ORIENTING TO INTEGRATED PLANNING

Orienting to these principles should be part of the onboarding process for new staff, faculty, executive leadership, and even members of the board. SCUP should continue to inculcate the importance of planning professionals and the president working together to create and communicate a continuing culture of integrated, aligned planning and decision making.

By taking a holistic view of higher education through the lens of integrated planning, SCUP can further its mission to develop “individual and organizational planning capacities to strengthen and transform institutions of higher education” (Society for College and University Planning, n.d.).

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ROBERT BRODNICK, PH.D., has worked in the fields of planning, strategy, research, and organizational change for 25 years. He has special skills in strategy, innovation, and organizational development, design, and intervention. He is an expert facilitator of human process from dyads to small groups to large-scale retreats and has notable experience with leadership groups, boards, and planning bodies and with strategic and creative solutions. He has served three universities over the past 20 years, and his work has focused on building institutional capacity and effectiveness through strategy, planning, and innovation. He has managed

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Dr. Brodnick has been active in the Association for Managers of Innovation, the Society for College and University Planning, the International Association of Applied Psychology, the Association of Institutional Research, and others. He was a member of the board of directors of the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium and president of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Directors. In 2009, he was honored by the Society for College and University Planning with its Award for Institutional Innovation and Integration. He served on SCUP's Presidential Search Committee in 2014 and as plenary and invited session chair for SCUP–50 in 2015. Currently, he serves as conference chair for SCUP–51. He has authored hundreds of institutional and peer-reviewed papers and published numerous works including *Transforming in an Age of Disruptive Change* (SCUP 2013); he regularly delivers workshops and speaking engagements. He has taught courses in education, the social sciences, and business and has a special interest in innovation management. He holds a Ph.D. in psychoeducational processes from Temple University.

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Dr. Norris has been active in SCUP for over 30 years. He has coauthored a series of books and monographs for SCUP that have dramatically influenced the field of strategic planning over the past three decades: *A Guide for New Planners* (1984), *Transforming Higher Education: A Vision for Learning in the 21st Century* (1995), *Unleashing the Power of Perpetual Learning* (1997), *Transforming e-Knowledge: A Revolution in the Sharing of Knowledge* (2003), and *A Guide to Planning for Change* (2008). He was awarded the Distinguished Service Award by SCUP in 1994. He received a B.S. in engineering mechanics and an M.B.A. from Virginia Tech and a Ph.D. from the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan. In 2014, he was honored with SCUP's Founders' Award for Distinguished Service in Higher Education Planning.

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WHAT IS INTEGRATED PLANNING?

Integrated planning is the linking of vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making and action. It shapes and guides the entire organization as it evolves over time and within its community.