

FEATURE ARTICLE

Integrating Planning Into the Development of Future Higher Education Leaders

by Linda E. Clark

A practitioner-based program uses the practices of integrated planning to cultivate the knowledge and decision-making capacity of mid-level faculty and administrators, enhancing the higher education leadership of tomorrow.

The accountability movement in higher education focuses on student learning, connecting student outcomes to institutional mission statements, tuition levels, student debt, and the “value” of a college education. To achieve the level of accountability required, higher education leaders must be prepared to balance competing demands for increasingly limited resources. To successfully lead institutions today and into tomorrow, administrators must have an intimate knowledge of planning and resource management.

Unfortunately, however, almost all academic administrators emerge from the faculty ranks based on ambition, service on committees, or, at some institutions, an ability to raise external funds. On the administrative side, many are promoted from within the institution with little formal training to help them embrace the growing responsibilities of upper-level leadership positions. While higher education leaders possess a myriad of successful administrative experiences, few, if any, have benefitted from formal training to understand the complex ideas and skills of effective integrated planning. Instead, most administrators learn about institutional resource management and the “business” side of the institution as they are promoted and encounter these activities on the job. The array of programs and outreach activities offered by professional organizations such as the Society for College and University Planning, the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and the Association for Institutional Research speaks to the need for workshops, conferences, and institutes to support the skill

development of current administrators who find themselves in situations demanding a familiarity with planning and resource management.

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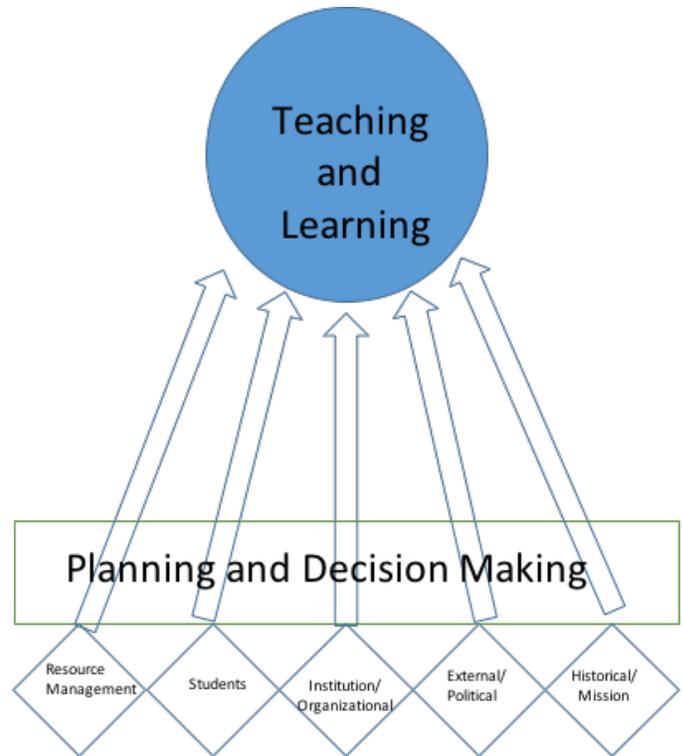
Recognizing this shortcoming in administrator preparation, a regional university developed a part-time doctoral program aimed at preparing current higher education professionals for the advanced leadership positions of tomorrow. A central component of the curriculum is an emphasis on using planning and budgeting to shape the decision-making strategies of these future leaders. The development of the doctoral program was based on a conceptual framework focused on creating learner-centered institutions that support teaching and learning. The program is practitioner based, integrating existing theory and practice into the everyday decision making of aspiring upper-level administrators. Through the development of leadership skills and theoretical knowledge, the credentials and foundations built through the program enhance the higher education leadership capacity of tomorrow.

Mirroring a successful planning process, the institution conducted an environmental scan that revealed a local need for administrators to learn these skills. The institution leveraged the presence of an existing part-time doctoral program targeting public school working professionals. The combination of these factors resulted in the creation of a curriculum designed to enhance the pool of qualified leaders in higher education. The purpose of this article is to describe the key knowledge base areas and subsequent leadership enhancement strategies included in the philosophy and delivery of the program. From this other institutions may adopt all or parts of these materials.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

This article describes the elements of an existing part-time doctoral program offered to rising mid-level higher education professionals from both the faculty and staff ranks. Students in the program are required to be working in higher education, thus providing context for the course material as well as opportunities to engage in practice to refine their learning and enhance their productivity as administrators. In addition to the formal doctoral program, in-house summer institutes are offered to faculty following the same philosophy and content. The program is housed in a School of Education, leading to an Ed.D. degree in educational leadership. While the program places teaching and learning at the center of the work of educational leaders, the curriculum focuses on supporting this critical function by managing competing demands for limited resources. The foundational elements that support teaching and learning provide the conceptual framework for the program. This is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1 **Conceptual Framework Underpinning Curriculum**



The conceptual framework emphasizes the foundational supports of teaching and learning at higher education institutions.

RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE BASE AREAS

HISTORICAL

While the program aims to develop the leaders of the future, its starting point resides in the past. Hence, the first knowledge base area of higher education studied is the historical or foundational perspective. In learning about the history of higher education in general and of the local institution in particular, administrators gain a better context for present-day issues. By studying historical events in higher education alongside current events, administrators connect past and present. For example, examining issues of access throughout the historical founding of institutions demonstrates the lack of access for females, non-White males, and the poor over much of the history of higher education in the United States. Present-day concerns about access, including preparation, admission requirements,

tuition discounting, and public funding, can be compared and contrasted to historical events. Further, learning about higher education during the Enlightenment period when secular and scientific institutions and foci emerged can be contrasted against the present-day discourse around vocational and liberal arts preparation. An administrator who understands how higher education evolved may have a better understanding of the issues facing an institution now.

Resources used to support the development of historical knowledge include a textbook and current articles. Geiger (2015) provides an excellent overview of higher education from colonial times to World War II. Campus library collections often include historical narratives. Current events covered in the general media or publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Change* provide national context for many local higher education issues.

Activities to reinforce connections between historical and current events include realizing that many current issues faced by higher education administrators have recurred throughout history. For example, in reading about a recent article debating the need for more colleges, one student wrote, “Regarding your first question ‘Do we really need more colleges?’ I don’t believe we do. Thinking back to the proliferation of colleges in the Early Republic and how many of them simply disappeared, it seems to me that to add more colleges ... is unnecessary.” These comments reflect the growing awareness that expansion and contraction in higher education is not unique to the current environment, but a cyclical recurrence over time.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

With a firm foundation in the origins of higher education, the second targeted knowledge base in the development of administrative capacity focuses on resource management. While lower-level administrators may manage departmental or unit-level budgets and resources, few understand

institutional-level budgeting and resource management. Learning about various institutional budget models, such as zero-based budgeting, incremental budgeting, and performance-based funding, enhances an administrator’s ability to manage varying conditions. Because many institutions deal with multiple sources of revenue, understanding where revenue comes from, the limitations of funding sources, and the potential pitfalls of accepting revenue provides administrators with a working knowledge of how to attract and manage revenue flow. This kind of knowledge allows administrators to analyze and evaluate the critical resource functions of an institution, identifying inequitable or ineffective resource allocations.

As most seasoned administrators know, budgeting without a plan is shortsighted. Introducing administrators to the theories and strategies of strategic planning enables effective and innovative use of often-ignored or ceremonial strategic planning documents. Further knowledge of integrated strategic planning enhances the use of existing resources consistent with institutional goals and priorities. Leadership models and theories enable strategic plans to “come alive” in the decision-making process. Demonstrating how decision-making models and strategic plans influence all decision making is a transformative element of the curriculum.

While this material is useful, it is critical for students to connect resource management and planning to accountability. Often, negative attitudes about accountability and assessment rise from the bottom of the institution to the top. Part of changing the assessment narrative includes demonstrating how accreditation impacts institutional change and improvement. Both regional and specialized accreditation outcomes must align with stated institutional-level goals. By connecting accreditation activities to progress on meeting strategic goals, administrators develop a narrative to share with campus constituents reluctant to support assessment efforts. Proactively developing this broader perspective aids administrators in better understanding the

purpose of assessment and in designing assessments that support progress toward institutional missions.

Helpful resources for gaining a greater understanding of resource management include both budget and planning materials. The practitioner-oriented text by Goldstein (2012) provides an easy-to-understand primer on budgeting in higher education. The Society for College and University Planning offers a plethora of practitioner-based books on strategic planning essentials, campus planning, managing the human resource aspects of planning, and financial planning. The *ASHE Reader on Planning and Institutional Research* (Peterson 1999) includes seminal articles on the topic. Finally, Gaston (2013) wrote a summative text on accreditation in higher education that presents an underlying purpose to resource management.

This integration of strategic planning into decision making, including resource management, culminates in an analysis of home institutional planning processes and a simulated exercise of strategic budget reallocation. In the exercise, students mandate a two percent cut from the institutional operating budget consistent with the institutional priorities stated in the strategic plan. Recognizing potential opportunity costs, the effect on human resources, and other unintended impacts reinforces the critical connection between resource management and planning. For example, cutting a landscaping budget may contribute to the two percent reduction; however, the impact on staff, safety, and campus attractiveness to potential students must be recognized in the process. Sharing these hypothetical decisions may broaden a student's ability to anticipate potential consequences, mirroring the kinds of discourse that happen when an administrator faces these difficult choices in real time. These experiences provide mid-level administrators an opportunity to learn how to negotiate these situations before they are actually in them.

STUDENT-CENTERED INSTITUTIONS

The primary purpose of higher education is teaching and learning, and the conceptual framework of the program reflects the contributions planning and decision making make to this core institutional function. Administrators must understand the attributes associated with maximizing the potential for learning. While understanding what these attributes are may be relatively easy, students come to realize that transforming an institution into one that is student-centered without regard to resource management is not realistic and that institutional change, to truly advance the institution, must be made with the larger strategic plan in mind. Building on the foundational knowledge of institutional mission gained by studying the historical and resource management knowledge bases, students begin to understand that prioritizing scarce resources is a major administrative challenge.

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Part of the challenge is for individuals to get realistic about their own institutions and the extent to which they are consistent with student-centered attributes. This effort begins with integrating theories of student-centered institutions within the confines of the strategic plan and resource allocation process. For example, a library designed as a quiet space without small collaborative learning rooms inhibits active collaborative learning. By understanding student learning needs, an administrator can prioritize the renovation of this space and determine how to allocate funds for the initiative. The hidden costs of eliminating existing functional library space, replacing furniture, and changing wiring must also be accounted for. Administrators also need to anticipate questions: How will this impact faculty offices, students, upkeep, etc., at the institution? Is the space open to all faculty, students, and staff? What kinds of programmatic opportunities does this space afford? Are there types of

programming that will not be able to occur in this space? These simulated activities allow students to see the necessity of strategic planning with learning needs in mind.

With the observation that many institutional strategic plans espouse the goal of putting students first, many institutions are not student centered. Strange and Banning (2015) compiled an easy-to-read digest of student-centered institutions. Additionally, institutional inventories of physical space, technological capacity, teaching philosophy, and operations can reveal potential areas for improvement.

An exercise that can assist in developing a student-centered philosophy involves taking pictures of campus spaces. Using criteria put forth in Strange and Banning (2015), an example of a non-student-centered space is presented in figure 2. The mismatched furniture and limited technology convey a suboptimal environment for teaching and learning. The next challenge is to determine how to improve this kind of space to create a more effective instructional environment.

Figure 2 **Example of Non-Student-Centered Space**



With its mismatched furniture and limited technology, this space does not convey a student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

INTEGRATING PLANNING INTO A LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Higher education leaders must understand how decision making fits within and impacts an institution. This inquiry echoes the philosophy of integrated planning in which knowledge of best practices must be integrated into existing institutional characteristics (e.g., mission, history, tradition) and resources. When making resource allocation

decisions, potential benefits are weighed against opportunity costs. Thought must be given to how a decision affects the institution and situates itself within the larger institutional strategic plan. The ability of new administrators to consider the various effects of any one decision will allow more holistic development of administrative skills.

OUTCOMES

Continued efforts to invest resources must be followed by positive outcomes. Fortunately, the strategies outlined in this article are quickly impacting the practice of the initial nine Ed.D. students. Evidence includes increased scope of current positions, new positions, recognition, and modifications to daily practice.

One of the most meaningful assessments of outcomes comes from individuals external to the program. Several students reported the external validation they received when putting integrated planning into practice. One student, appointed during the program to an institutional strategic planning committee, demonstrated advanced knowledge based on the concepts presented in this article. As a result, the scope of the student's position was increased and its reporting line was modified to report directly to the provost of the institution. At a conference presentation, a second student was commended for including planning material. An administrator lamented the dearth of similarly knowledgeable higher education professionals, encouraging the student to pursue higher-level administrative positions.

Additional evidence that the program is achieving its goals is found in the changes students made in their current practice in integrating planning into decision making. One mid-level administrator shifted a staff meeting structure to reference strategic planning priorities when making decisions. A second student, who was teaching low-income, underrepresented students, explained how institutional priorities taken from the institutional strategic plan translated to the

undergraduate experience. This interaction was particularly meaningful for the students, many of whom were first-generation students with little insight into how higher education functions.

STEPS TO DEVELOP SIMILAR LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

The purpose of this article is to introduce strategies to enhance the leadership capacity of future administrators in higher education. While not all institutions can develop doctoral programs in higher education, many can implement some of the activities to enhance leadership capacity on campus. Some suggestions for more informal adoption of the strategies include

- » *Introduce current mid-level administrators to resources such as textbooks, articles, and discussions of current issues.* By providing theoretical knowledge about planning and resource management, institutions can better prepare current mid-level administrators for future roles as leaders in higher education.
- » *Provide short, intensive training programs for mid-level managers and/or aspiring department chairs.* These training programs can include simulated exercises in planning, budgeting, and resource management. Such exercises can translate into proactive strategies that simulate leadership challenges, enhancing future administrative capacity and efficiency.
- » *Encourage interactions among experienced administrators, including institutional research and planning officers and mid-level administrators.* Many faculty and staff are unfamiliar with the concepts of planning and lack understanding of how planning impacts leadership. Developing familiarity with the scope of institutional research and assessment offices and the personnel staffing them provides a pipeline to

expertise and resources new administrators often lack to support decision making.

SUMMARY

The approach outlined in this article is an effective training philosophy for mid-level administrators and faculty pursuing administrative roles. While the approach is designed as a core component of a doctoral program, institutions can adopt the same philosophy to offer short faculty institutes to prepare leadership capacity. Overwhelmingly, combining integrated planning and administrative decision making provides future leaders with an effective road map as they further their careers in higher education administration. The continuing emphasis on institutional mission and resource management to support stated institutional outcomes is a critical element of both the program and effective higher education leadership.

Combining integrated planning and administrative decision making provides future leaders with an effective road map as they further their careers in higher education administration.

For far too long, many higher education leaders have been forced to learn “on the job,” perhaps never fully understanding the connections between planning and decision making. The strategies outlined in this article will improve leadership potential and capacity at local levels. The approach may not only better prepare new administrators, saving “early career” mistakes, but also contribute to creating a more diverse talent pool. Institutions can begin to reach out to faculty and staff from a variety of backgrounds to enhance the perspective of the leadership of tomorrow and better serve our students in the future.

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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.