

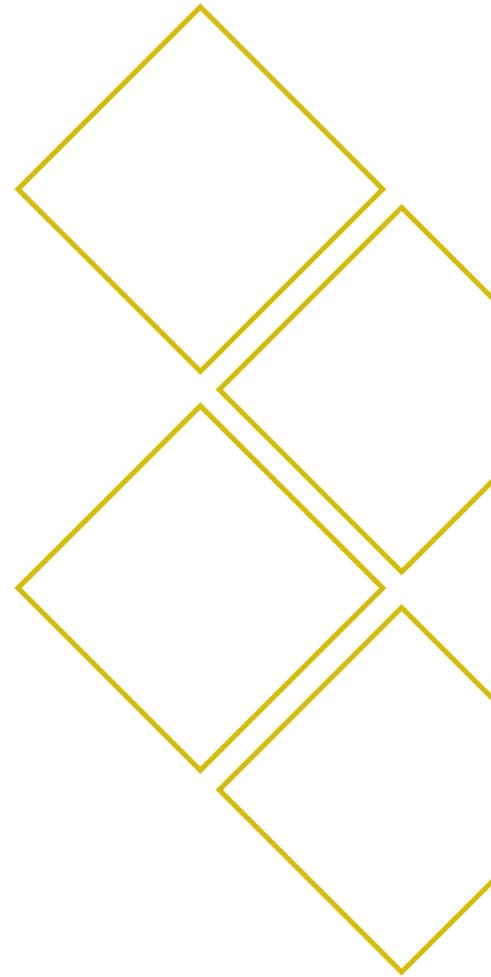
Excerpt



The Society for College
and University Planning

A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education

By Karen E. Hinton, PhD





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Society for College and University Planning
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About the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP)

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

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

What is Integrated Planning?

Integrated planning is a sustainable approach to planning that builds relationships, aligns the organization, and emphasizes preparedness for change.

To learn more, visit www.scup.org.



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Foreword

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

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

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

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

—Karen Hinton



About This Book

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

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

About the Author



Karen E. Hinton, PhD, has a career spanning more than twenty-five years in planning and administration in higher education, filling leadership positions at

large and small public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and university system offices. She developed, facilitated, and managed numerous strategic plans, accreditation self-studies, and process improvement initiatives in a wide range of situations as a senior member of staff and also as a consultant.

Hinton has taught courses in composition, literature, and research methods, and was an academic advisor for undergraduate and graduate students. She initially served the Society for College and University Planning

(SCUP) as a membership liaison for New Mexico, and later held the same position in upstate New York. She also was a regional board member for the North Atlantic region, providing support for several regional conferences. Hinton has made numerous presentations at SCUP conferences and written articles and reviews for such publications as *Knowledge Directions* (the journal of The Institute for Knowledge Management) and *Planning for Higher Education*.

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



Section One: Overview of Strategic Planning in Higher Education

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

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

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

a proactive stance in the environment of changing demands and declining resources.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Also, at about this time, the US Department of Commerce widened the scope of its Malcolm

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

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

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



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

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

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

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