

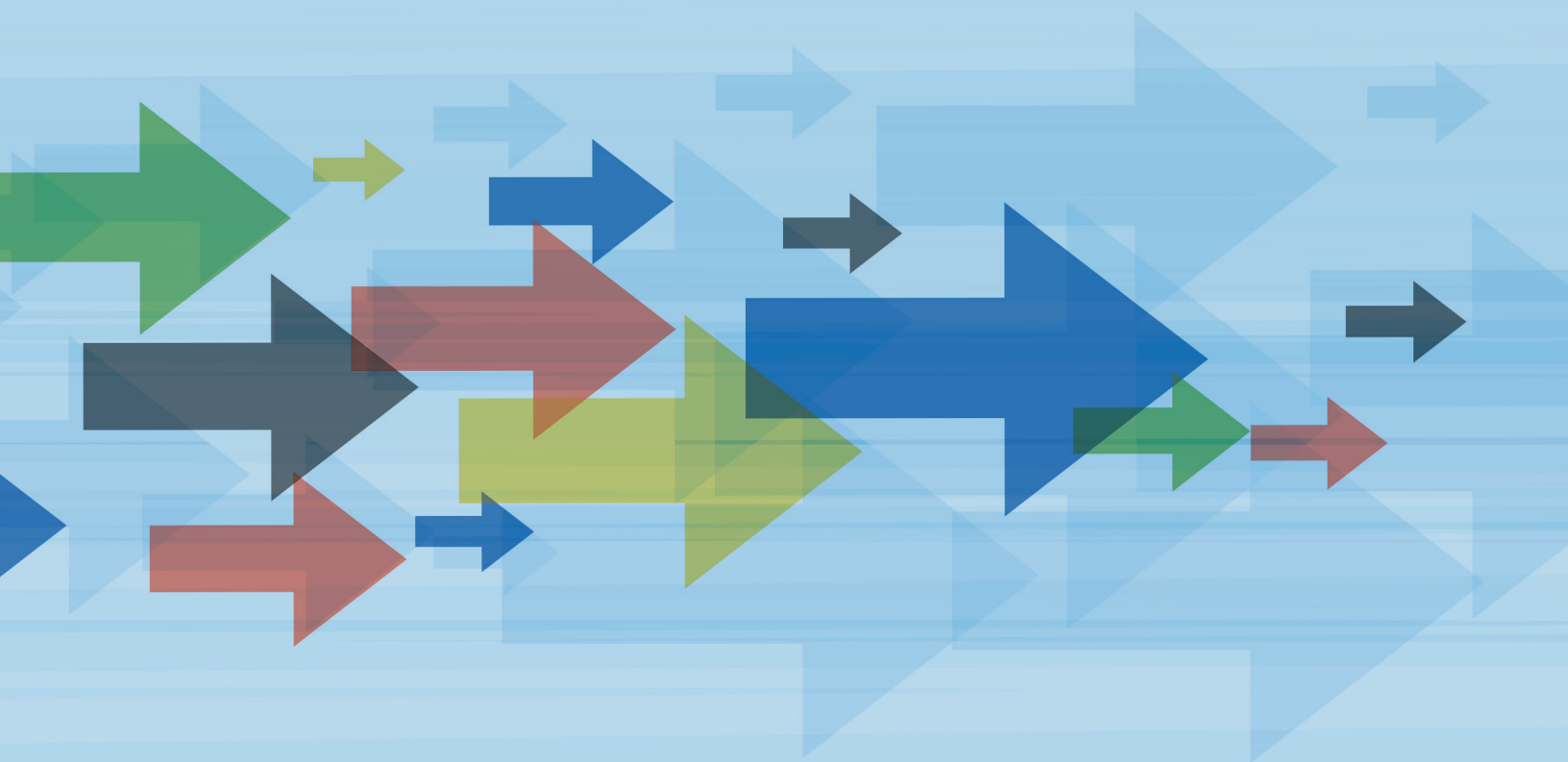
Excerpt

Second Edition, with New and Updated Content

A Practical Guide to

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

Karen E. Hinton, PhD



The Society for College
and University Planning

Excerpt

A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education Second Edition

Karen E. Hinton, PhD

**A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education
Second Edition**

Karen E. Hinton, PhD

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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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Introduction to Second Edition

The content of this guide includes materials and observations I developed over the years to support myriad planning efforts. During the course of my career, I often worked with individuals who misconstrued the role of strategic planning in the academy. Experience taught me that failed planning efforts usually failed before the process even began because participants lacked a solid foundation.

Many of those I worked with were unaware of the basic components of a strategic plan or what is required to implement and sustain a planning process. Some of the misinformed were members of a college or university, others were engaged as planning consultants. Regardless of their affiliation, those who are misinformed about planning practice can be a serious impediment to successful planning.

As I wrote in the introduction to the first edition, the cost of a poor planning process is an environment where participants are disillusioned, resources are not used effectively, and accreditation standards are not met. A successful planning process provides a strong framework for transformation, enthusiasm, and community cohesion, but it takes effort and understanding. This guide is meant to provide a practical overview of what the planning process is and clear definitions of the elements in a successful process.

The content of this second edition contains the original brief history of strategic planning in higher education from a practitioner's perspective and a detailed review of current planning practice. This edition also contains a new section discussing how the strategic plan can be a resource for institutions facing the challenge of unexpected changes in the postsecondary environment. There is also an analysis of the criticism by some that strategic planning is too linear to work across organizational silos and within the complexities of the modern academy. I believe those who take that view see strategic planning as a tool of limited use and need a better understanding of the process.

Over a decade ago, I believed there was a need for a short, easily accessible guide to help planners prepare for their own journey into planning. I am gratified my endeavor has helped so many. I am honored SCUP believes the guide warrants a second edition.

Karen E. Hinton, July 2022



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 postsecondary 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. Historically, 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. This is 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 that, 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. During this period, enrollments began to fluctuate, student demographics started to change, and funding became inconsistent. 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 an 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 period of time 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 postsecondary education was viewed as a tool to articulate institutional mission and vision, help prioritize resources, and promote organizational focus. As a result, many of the early strategic planning efforts produced documents that described the institution but did little to motivate a process. These “shelf documents” often sowed the seeds of discontent within the institution since many who participated in the process spent long hours on the plan’s development and then saw relatively little implementation.

At the time strategic planning was beginning to gain some acceptance in higher education, federal and state governments and the major accrediting commissions were responding to external demands for accountability through the development of standards for assessment and learning outcomes measures. Historically, accreditation standards were based on types of administrative data such as the fiscal stability of the institution, the number of faculty with terminal degrees, and the number of volumes in the library. However, the need to arrive at specific assessment measures for the academic enterprise was seen as the purview of academic staff who, because of their professional culture, had a difficult time determining what, if anything, could measure the learning process.

To tighten the standards, the accreditation commissions began to insist institutions have both 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 come only 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 postsecondary 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 National Quality 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 Baldrige Award 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 to 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 an institutional understanding of the role of a strategic plan and what key elements were necessary for the plan to function.

Excerpt

In Praise of the Second Edition of *A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education*

This book is just as the title suggests: practical. A must read for anyone considering strategic planning in higher education, it defines the terms, identifies the limitations, suggests methods, and provides the framework for building a successful planning process and culture on your campus. Karen Hinton's personal perspective on the unique nature of our varied environments and how this form of planning must fit into the fabric of our campus culture makes this book a critical tool in the planner's toolbox.

—JOE LAWLESS, MBA

Chief Strategy Officer

University of Washington Tacoma

My copy of Karen Hinton's *A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education* is dog-eared from use and laden with sticky notes that highlight the invaluable guidance it has offered to my strategic-planning efforts. Especially helpful are the numerous implementation-ready tactical tips and hands-on planning activities that appear in the Resources section. This second edition of the guide includes a special section, "Strategic Planning in Times of Crisis," that will resonate with all senior leaders in higher education today. The only improvement I would suggest is to call it "An *Essential* Guide to Strategic Planning ..."

—DALE GRUBB, PHD

Associate Vice President for Academic Planning & Institutional Effectiveness

California State University - Monterey Bay

Karen E. Hinton's second edition of *A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education* is a timely and essential resource for academics seeking to make planning at any postsecondary institution relevant and manageable. Two years ago the world of higher education looked substantially different from today. The Novel Pandemic of 2020 forced urgent modifications in course modality, how we manage our brick-and-mortar institutions, and how we undertake institutional planning. As a planner, I found Hinton's new section, "Strategic Planning in Times of Crisis," essential during these unprecedented times—or our new normal.

—MISTY RASMUSSEN, MS

Associate Dean, Institutional Planning & Accreditation

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