

CRITERION FOUR –

*The institution can continue
to accomplish its purposes and strengthen
its educational effectiveness.*

CHAPTER 14 –

Strategic and Operational Planning

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THE FORMER PLANNING MODEL

Planning during the first ten years of the College's history was done by a Strategic Planning Committee under the leadership of the Director of Personnel. The Strategic Planning Committee consisted of college faculty, staff, students, members of the community, parents of college students, superintendents for the county's five school districts and, local business people. The Planning Committee and its subcommittees met periodically over several months to produce a five-year Strategic Plan for the institution.

Elements of the Strategic Plan included a history of the College, a mission statement, an environmental scan including demographic, economic, and enrollment data, division report updates, and the results from surveying various constituencies. Goals were directly tied to the Mission Statement. Each goal was further developed into several objectives. Those objectives were delineated into actions necessary to meet the objectives within time and cost constraints.

The full strategic planning process occurred every two years. The President and Cabinet reviewed progress toward achieving the goals annually, and used the Strategic Plan to guide the decision-making and allocation of resources.

While the old planning process did have shortcomings, the model served the institution well in the early days of development. It was the College's first organized attempt at long range planning on a large scale. More than anything else, it focused institutional thinking on the importance and necessity of strategic planning.

INTRODUCTION OF THE CURRENT PLANNING MODEL

In the fall of 1996, shortly after the arrival of a new president, the College implemented a new planning process in order to improve planning college wide. Dr. Byron McClenney, then president of the Community College of Denver, conducted an all-day planning workshop in December 1996 on campus for all employees. This was the first step in the development of the College's current strategic and operational planning model that specifically ties planning to the philosophy, mission, vision, and values of the College.

The annual process began with a daylong, data-gathering planning workshop in mid-October for all employees and the appointment of the Planning Council to begin the formal work of planning for the next academic year.

The Planning Council included representatives from the three major employment groups, Administration/Professional-Technical, Staff, and Faculty. Each group selected four representatives to serve a one-year term on the Planning Council. The Council met in November, following the general all-day planning session in October. With input from the general session and the College community, the Council was charged with developing the strategic priorities that give direction to and form the basis of the unit, area, and college-wide plan to be developed in the late fall and early spring semesters.

A college-wide plan was prepared each year from area and unit plans. The plan included achievements and results from the previous year, desirable outcomes for the next year, projections for the following year and beyond, and a summary of current staff and faculty who work in a particular unit.

Each unit, area, and college-wide plan was to be accompanied with a prioritized list of new personnel positions and equipment requests required to accomplish new initiatives. Justification for new personnel and equipment was to be submitted with the plan. A maximum limitation of two pages for each section of a plan kept the planning report concise and manageable.

A meeting with unit and area leaders typically occurred during mid-February for the purpose of discussing the strategic priorities and clarifying the planning process.

Unit plans were typically completed by mid-March; area plans by late March, and the college-wide plan completed by early April. After review by the President and Cabinet, the plan was presented to the Board of Trustees in late April.

ADVANTAGES AND STRENGTHS OF THE NEW PLAN

Compared with the previous planning process, the new model had numerous advantages and strengths.

This model encouraged balanced participation and involvement from all employees and representatives from the student population. From membership on the Planning Council to the writing of the unit and area plans, college-wide participation was stressed. The college-wide Planning Day, in particular, allowed everyone an opportunity to participate in planning activities.

Planning was now specifically related to the institution's philosophy, mission, vision, and values. The use of this model resulted in the College re-examining its mission and establishing vision and values statements. Strategic priorities and unit, area, and College goals could then be developed in accordance with the institution's philosophy, mission, vision, and values.

Planning focused on positive achievements and results from the previous year. Accomplishments were listed in each of the area and unit plans. Many of these accomplishments were recognized in the final *College Plan* publication. The President recognized major achievements during the *State-of-the-College Address* and in the year-end *President's Report*.

The planning process is goal oriented and requires that goals and objectives be centered on strategic priorities. The plan includes desirable outcomes or goals for the upcoming year as well as outcomes for the following year and beyond. It is a healthy blend of short and long-range strategic planning.

Unlike the earlier system of planning, the current model connects planning with research, staffing, and budgeting. Each unit and area plan is required to give a report on current staffing and a prioritized list of new personnel positions and equipment requests. These lists are accompanied with a justification of the need. This information is used in driving budget allocation decisions for the following fiscal year.

Planning at the College was now a well-organized and scheduled process. It is designed to begin early in the academic year so that the *College Plan* will be completed in time to drive the budget for the next fiscal year.

The planning process is flexible and receptive to changes. Each year the Planning Council evaluated its work and made recommendations for changes to improve the planning process. Units/areas and individuals were asked to make suggestions for necessary changes.

The format used for the *College Plan* is more accessible. The overall *College Plan* is shorter in length than the previous planning document, and it divided into easily digested segments beginning with the College-level plan through the unit-plan level. Copies of the final plan are published and available in all major offices at the College, facilitating a periodic review of the goals and achievements by the constituents of each level of planning.

Planning now encourages a positive use of institutional research information. Each year the Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office publishes the *Cougar Count*, a fact book covering current and trend data on students, student outcomes, college finances, faculty and staff, and

library resources. This information becomes a valuable resource for the Planning Council and for those preparing area and unit plans. Additional information and surveys are provided by the IRE Office and the Academic Affairs Office by request.

Position papers on special projects, restructuring, and program changes can be prepared and submitted to the Planning Council for consideration. The advantage of having this connection with institutional research is that planning decisions are now data driven and can be based upon up-to-date, accurate information.

ENHANCEMENTS TO THE PLANNING PROCESS

One of the strengths of the current planning model is its flexibility. Several important enhancements have already been incorporated into the planning process as a result of annual review and input from the college community during the four years that this process has been in place.

The starting date for the planning process has been moved earlier in the year so that there is sufficient time to integrate planning and budgeting. When the College first adopted the model in December of 1996, it did not allow enough time for the planning process to complete the full cycle and to be completed in time to drive budget allocations.

In 1998 the College added a half-day workshop for planning leaders in the fall, following the college-wide Planning Day. This change addressed the issue of providing more direction to leaders who would be working with their staff to create the unit/area plans. The planning schedule was adjusted to permit more time for preliminary planning and goal development at the unit and area plan level in 1999.

Although the college-wide Planning Day was designed to involve all personnel, it did not succeed because all college offices were not closed. Those offices that could close did so. Personnel from a number of support offices, however, were unable to attend because of student registration. Therefore, their input was excluded from the early planning stages. After repeated requests from these staff members and a recommendation from the Planning Council, a decision was made to close all offices so that everyone could attend the October, 2000 Planning Day. This practice of closing the entire college for the initial planning workshop continued in fall 2001. While the college-wide planning days have traditionally focused on a particular aspect of the College, the Planning Day in fall 2000 experimented with organizing activities around a central theme, in this instance, the concept of “The Learning College.” The theme was chosen as one way to focus planning activities on “Student Success,” which has been identified as a strategic priority every year since 1996.

In February of 2000, the Planning Council recommended that the College identify a Planning Coordinator to be responsible for continuity in the planning process and for implementing revisions to the current planning model. The planning coordinator is also responsible for the annual college-wide planning event. The Dean of Math, Science, and Health was appointed to this new role on September 2000. The appointment is for an initial two-year term to give continuity to the planning process.

In November of 2000, the internal governance Core Committee was re-structured to serve as the College's policy and planning council. In the past, the strategic priorities were initially identified during the college-wide Planning Day and the Leaders Workshop, then revised and clarified by the Planning Council. These priorities were then given to college units and areas for adaptation in their plans.

During the 2000-01 planning cycle, the process was modified to encourage additional "grass roots" participation. The change encouraged unit and area planners to submit preliminary planning and goal development to the Core Committee by early December. Core then began to identify strategic priorities based on common goals from units/areas, and returned them to the various units/areas for clarification and development of the unit and area plans. The unit and area plans were submitted to Cabinet where the *College Plan* was developed. The *College Plan* was then reviewed by the Core Committee for final comment and clarification before being presented to the Board of Trustees. This change fulfilled the potential for the Core committee as envisioned in the original *Internal Governance Task Force Report* and linked planning with governance and decision-making while improving communication.

While this modified process proved to add a level of clarity, focus, and grass roots input to the planning process, several issues relative to turn-around time, and the role or responsibility of the Core Committee did surface. These issues are being addressed with the 2001-02 planning process.

During the 2000-01 planning cycle, units and areas were encouraged to state their goals in a manner that can be measured. The goal of this change was for units/areas to report their success in terms of the degree of goal attainment at the end of the year as an additional input for the following year's planning cycle. This change creates a stronger link between planning and college-wide assessment. Part of the Planning Leaders Workshop in the fall of 2000 focused on how to write and evaluate measurable goals.

During the summer of 2000, as in previous years, a taskforce of previous Planning Council chairs and facilitators met with the President to evaluate the progress of college-wide planning. This group considered recommendations from the previous year's Planning Council and made practical suggestions for progress in the planning cycle. College-wide Planning Day activities were considered as well.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES AND ADJUSTMENTS

Although the existing planning process has numerous advantages and strengths over the older process, it is by no means perfect. No planning model is ideal for every institution. Changing circumstances require flexibility and responsiveness. As discussed in the preceding section, the College has already made changes to the original model to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. Despite the changes that have already occurred, there are still some challenges to be met and new ones are to be expected. While the process allows for engagement and participation by all employee groups, efforts to ensure that such participation is meaningful are ongoing and integral.

Challenges or weaknesses in the planning process can be considered in five categories: unfunded goals, campus-wide awareness, role and responsibility education, responsibilities of the Core Committee, and communication regarding expenditures.

UNFUNDED GOALS

When specific unit or area level goals are not funded with new money at the College Plan level, there has been confusion regarding the ability to access or reallocate current funding sources to achieve the goal. There has been little guidance offered at the unit level regarding these goals that were not funded but which need to be addressed. Unit leaders cannot make major purchases unless they are approved through the planning process, even though reallocation of their individual budgets is listed as an option. Unit leaders who decide to use budget reallocation are required to seek approval from the Cabinet for major expenditures since the purchasing department cannot process orders for items not listed in the college-wide Plan. The President has clarified this issue to allow for easier reallocation of existing budgets at the area and unit level.

At this point, vice-presidents, deans, and directors need to clearly understand and communicate the process of requesting additional funds or reallocating current funds for items not in the College Plan to the faculty and staff in their respective departments and programs. Since reallocation of unit and area budgets is discretionary, then requests for reallocation of funding for special projects or purchasing equipment will be honored and processed.

Another area of concern exists for departments that have requested and received new (non-faculty) personnel but which have not had their staff professional development funds increased proportionately. Since increases in the staff professional development budget line must be prioritized in the overall planning process for all employees except faculty, the situation often occurs that new staff positions are prioritized and professional development funding is not. This situation could be addressed by the development of a system that would include some level of professional development funding in the total budgetary allocation for each new staff position similar to the allocation for new faculty positions.

A level of college-wide confusion exists relative to budget allocation for regular hardware and software computer upgrades for staff and faculty computer resources. While the Instructional Technology Department does plan for and fund most hardware and software upgrades, several individual units have been responsible for the purchase of these upgrades and/or new equipment at various points throughout the year. The College currently lacks a cohesive and clearly outlined Technology Plan to accommodate these needs on a scheduled basis.

Technology upgrades throughout the College need to be built into the annual budget according to a master Technology Plan and should not be a requirement of unit and area plans. The Technology Committee could direct this project and request that a special budget be established for routine upgrades. This would ensure a fair, thorough, and systematic upgrading of all technology on a regular basis.

Another area of concern is that the current planning model provides no contingency plan to address grant-funded situations/programs when the funding disappears. Unit leaders are expected to anticipate, in advance, the availability of these funding sources and if they are discontinued, to include these positions as new goals and budget requests for their unit. The timing of grant-funded positions often does not coincide with the annual planning and prioritization process that the College uses, so reallocation of position often has to occur after the regular *College Plan* is put together.

Care should be taken when establishing positions with soft money, and that employees hired with soft money should be informed about the funding of such positions. The College needs to develop a contingency plan to address this issue more thoroughly.

CAMPUS-WIDE AWARENESS

A gap exists between the unit plans and the college-wide plan. Unit, area, and college wide plans are limited to two pages each for accomplishments and two pages for goals. The college-wide plan, therefore, cannot include all goals and accomplishments listed by the units. Many times the accomplishments are stated in a generic manner to be more inclusive. The units cannot always recognize their goals/accomplishments in the final college-wide plan. The goals and accomplishments from each unit and their impact/importance are not generally shared with the entire college community. Only the college-wide plan is shared with the entire college community.

One way to address this issue would be to lengthen the page limit on the final college-wide plan to include more of the unit/area accomplishments and goals. The area-planning representative could report back to the unit regarding alterations to their original plans together with explanations of such changes. Units could receive copies of all unit/area plans as originally submitted to the Core Committee.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY EDUCATION

There is a general sense that unit and area leaders, members of the Core Committee, and all employees could benefit from additional training in the planning process.

The college-wide Planning Day could incorporate some training into its program. The Staff Development Committee could offer some special seminars on planning throughout the year. Vice presidents and deans could assume more responsibility in training their staff in preparing unit and area plans.

The half-day workshop for planning leaders in November could place more emphasis on providing training to staff on preparing unit and area plans. Time could be dedicated during scheduled Core meetings to discuss expanded planning duties and how they are to be fulfilled. It may be neces-

sary for Core to retreat for a day off campus to receive special training in the planning process.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF CORE

There is concern that by combining the Planning Council and the Core Committee, the members of Core may have too much work to do. To serve on Core, members must chair one of the six branch committees. These committees meet at least once a month. Chairs are required to attend Core meetings once a month. With the inclusion of planning into their duties, Core members will now have to meet more often and produce more work.

Since 2000-01 was the first year that the Core Committee was restructured to include strategic planning, it will take some time see if this change actually works. The time and energy commitment will certainly be increased. College personnel who are not willing to make this commitment may not be required to serve in this capacity and may be able to serve the College in other ways. Throughout the next year, the effectiveness of this restructuring will be evaluated and necessary adjustments be made.

COMMUNICATION REGARDING EXPENDITURES

Information regarding the disbursement and distribution of available funds is not generally shared or understood by the College community except through the *College Plan*.

INTEGRATION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS WITH INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

In November 2000, the Planning Council's responsibilities were transferred to the Core Committee in order to better integrate the planning process with internal governance. Core has now become the College's policy and planning council. Previously, the Planning Council existed apart from the internal governance process. It was not part of the sixbranch committee structure. It existed outside of Core as a separate council which informed the internal governance process.

The Core committee now has a three-fold function. The first function is to review and develop policy recommendations, particularly those coming from the Branch Committees, to be forwarded to the President. The second function is to lead the planning process by establishing strategic priorities within the context of the mission, vision, and values and to review and recommend the college-wide plan. The third function is to serve as a forum, with representatives from various groups, for discussion of college activities, initiatives, issues, procedures, and policies.

This reorganization of the planning process has occurred with little disruption to internal governance. The structure of internal governance has not changed as a result of the linking of planning with governance.

OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE FUTURE

Now, more than any other time in the history of the College, planning is legitimized and recognized as an integral part of the annual decision making processes. Planning is no longer a step-child or an activity apart from the mainstream of the institution. The linkage of planning to assessment, internal governance, and budgeting has generated confidence for the future.

The current model is conducive to adaptation, and because it is linked to assessment, it will continue to serve the institution well over time. During the 2001-02 academic year, the College is making an attempt to distinguish the operational planning and strategic planning aspects of the current model. A good deal of confusion has existed relative to the long-range strategic nature of the current planning model since its adoption. Areas and units tend to move quickly to the level of annual operational budgeting and requests for new positions and equipment without full consideration of the long-range strategic implications for the College. This year the process is beginning with a review of the mission statement and how the mission informs the strategic direction of the College. It is hoped that this will be an effective first step in separating the two aspects of planning and provide a way for the College community to understand the interrelatedness of both.

STRENGTHS

- The current model encourages balanced participation and involvement from all employees and from representatives of the student population.
- Planning is now specifically related to the College's mission, vision, and values.
- Planning focuses on positive achievements and results from the previous year.
- The planning process is goal-oriented and requires that goals and objectives be centered on strategic priorities.
- Unlike the earlier system of planning, the current model connects planning with research, staffing, and budgeting.
- Planning at the College is now a well-organized and scheduled process.
- The planning process is flexible and receptive to changes.
- The format used for the *College Plan* is more accessible.
- Planning encourages a positive use of institutional research information.

CHALLENGES

- Efforts to ensure that participation is meaningful must be ongoing and integral.
- When specific unit or area level goals are not funded with new money at the *College Plan* level, there has been confusion regarding the ability to access or reallocate current funding sources to achieve the goal.
- Another area of concern is that the current planning model provides no contingency plan to address grant-funded situations/programs when the funding disappears.
- There is concern that by combining the Planning Council and the Core Committee, the members of Core may have too much work to do.
- Information regarding the disbursement and distribution of available funds is not generally shared or understood by the college community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- Technology upgrades throughout the College need to be built into the annual budget according to a Technology Plan and should not be a requirement of unit and area plans.
- There is a general sense that unit and area leaders, members of the Core Committee, and all college employees could benefit from additional training in the planning process.
- The half-day workshop for planning leaders in November could place more emphasis on providing training to staff on preparing unit and area plans. Time could be dedicated during scheduled Core meetings to discuss expanded planning duties and how they are to be fulfilled. It may be necessary for Core to retreat for a day off campus to receive special training in the planning process.
- College personnel who are not willing to make this commitment may not be required to serve in this capacity and may be able to serve the College in other ways.
- The preparation and distribution of a simplified report on current expenditures and projected funds could clear up a great deal of the confusion that currently exists.