

**PRESIDENTIAL
PERSPECTIVES**



a higher education presidential thought leadership series

2009/2010 SERIES: **LEADERSHIP IN THE GREAT RECESSION**

CHAPTER NINE

GAP ANALYSIS AND INTEGRATED PLANNING

AFFECTING THE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE PROCESS

Gap Analysis and Integrated Planning

Affecting the Institutional Change Process

Dr. Richard B. Flynn: President, Springfield College

Long-range planning is an important tool for presidents seeking to facilitate institutional change. While planning is an effective means of leveraging progress, the use of gap analysis and integrated planning strategies can encourage successful movement toward goal attainment.

A case description will be used to show how Springfield College in Massachusetts, a small-to-medium-sized private comprehensive masters institution, used a planning process to make great changes and advances while remaining true to its mission. The College's *The Plan for Springfield College* was instrumental in the transformation.

Approach and Strategies for Change

When I arrived at Springfield College in 1999, I was already an advocate for the use of strategic planning, so it was an early priority. As it happened, upon my arrival I needed to hire an entirely new leadership team. All but one of the vice presidents were "acting," and the only permanently named vice president left within several months to assume a presidency elsewhere. Even before all the key players were on hand, we set to work on a strategic plan, mindful throughout the entire process of the need to be attentive to indicators of success for a vibrant college. The president is responsible for addressing issues and also for positioning the College to serve students for generations to come.

Use of the gap analysis model is predicated on creating a healthy institutional stretch.

In addition to developing a strategic plan, within the first few years we addressed infrastructure issues, including policies and practices related to personnel, programs, technology, communications, and data analysis capacity. We revamped the budgeting process, established a program review process, made significant movement toward data-informed decision making, began work on a new campus master plan, and launched the College's first comprehensive campaign in 35 years. A reporting process that was geared around progress toward specified goals also was established. This didn't all happen overnight, nor was it articulated publicly as a strategy for change; however, over time various initiatives designed to move the institutional climate and mindset forward were instituted.

The Strategic Plan

About two years prior to my arrival, an extensive planning process had been completed; however, plan implementation had received little attention. With that in mind, and acknowledging that the mission was sound and not in need of reinvention, a less-structured approach was used to create a new, modified plan. Gap analysis was implemented. This strategic plan model includes assessment of the current situation (facilitated in our case by program reviews); identification of the desired future situation; and the creation of steps to move the institution from the current scenario to the desired scenario—to close the gap. This process entailed lots of listening—both about the current state of affairs as well as with respect to the hopes and dreams of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees.

A new plan was created that incorporated past work and input from the various constituencies while attending to higher education trends. The plan purposefully started out as 10 goals with a minimum of detail. Those goals were approved by the Board and shared with faculty, staff, and student leaders. As the new vice presidents assumed their respective positions, the strategies and substrategies for each goal were developed further. The plan was assumed to be evolving, as it could be updated or modified as opportunities were presented, strategies were completed, and challenges arose. Regular review with the administrative cabinet supported articulation across the institution. Such discussions are designed to align with program review and accreditation processes.

The Campus Master Plan

An architectural firm was identified to assist with the College's master plan. Conversations with select faculty, staff, students, alumni, and board members took place over an extended period of time. The College's strategic goals, mission, and resources were reviewed. Old assumptions were reconsidered, and new priorities were established. For example, previous plans had included closing a road through campus, a concept that had resulted in much disagreement among local residents. I decided closing the road was no longer to be included in the master plan. That decision helped cement improved relations with the neighborhood.

An updated master plan was created, along with a strategy for funding its implementation. Some projects were financed through the College operating budget. This was possible because increased attention to enrollment management had resulted in more students and greater tuition revenue. Other projects were identified for inclusion within the comprehensive campaign.

The Reporting Process

Reporting is centered around progress on the strategic plan and the campus master plan. Vice presidents and individuals in other key positions provide regular updates on progress related to their own areas within the strategic plan. I then incorporate that information, as well as progress on the master plan, within my communications to key constituencies, including my annual update to the Board of Trustees. Additionally, periodic updates on progress are published and distributed widely.

The Budgeting Process

We gradually modified our budgeting process to reflect the strategic plan and division priorities. Additionally, the money came to be aligned more closely with student needs and interests. Projects and equipment allocations came to be included in the budget as a matter of course, rather than the previous practice of considering requests at the end of the year if any funds were left over. Data-driven decision making became more common, with processes put in place for enrollment estimates, residence hall statistics, classroom use, and benchmarking. Bidding processes were developed, negotiations with vendors were carried out, and multi-year financial forecasts were developed and reviewed annually.

Enrollment management took a more central role, and new strategies were employed. When I arrived, there were many empty beds in the residence halls, and enrollment was generally down. Although creative proposals for alternative uses for the empty residence hall rooms were suggested, I maintained it was in the College's best interest to fill the empty beds with newly recruited students, as opposed to using the space for other purposes. Faculty members were encouraged and became engaged in the recruitment process. Marketing efforts were enhanced. This all was incorporated within the College's plan. Within just two years, the empty beds were filled, and, within four years, a new residence hall was constructed and fully occupied.

The Fundraising Process

For years, consultants had indicated the College wasn't ready for a comprehensive campaign. And, in fact, a major campaign had not been conducted since the late 1960s. Yet, new funding for construction and renovation, in particular, was sorely needed. Three years into my tenure as president, we initiated a six-year campaign. The campaign priorities were identified in relation to the master plan, strategic plan, and the College's longstanding mission. The strategic plan helped solidify the case for giving to the campaign, in that it showed the rationale for the funding request.

All of these functions—budgeting, planning (both physical and strategic), fundraising, and reporting—were integrated and adapted to support change and progress toward the goal of a healthy, vibrant institution.

Outcomes

The College has achieved many positive results directly tied to goals within the plan. It is now right-sized in terms of enrollment. The number of students residing on campus has increased dramatically, in particular that of seniors who are not required to live on campus. In addition to having spent almost \$90 million over the past decade on new construction and major renovations, the budgeted amount for deferred maintenance projects has increased from zero to \$3 million annually. The operating margins and the endowment also have fared well. Unrestricted reserves have grown. Both program review and outcomes assessment systems have been implemented. A Community Advisory Board was established, a partnership with the local neighborhood councils and the city is now in place, and the College is lead planner in an educational corridor being developed adjacent to campus. And, the campaign goal of \$40 million was not only achieved but surpassed by more than 11 percent.

Over the past decade, new revenues generated by the campaign, the increased enrollment, and the more strategic approach to budgeting have supported a major transformation of the campus. During this same time period, a number of program enhancements were implemented, tuition adjustments were lower than the national average, and solid progress was made on faculty and staff compensation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the years, many theories on organizational change have been formulated. Use of the gap analysis model is predicated on creating a healthy institutional stretch. This can be a motivating force for an organization. In combination with an integrated approach to planning, reporting, budgeting, and fundraising—the results can be impressive. Combined, they focus efforts and bring together processes and resources to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Capitalizing on existing functions and using them to leverage change can achieve a jump-start in comparison to any single change initiative that remains disconnected from other important ongoing activities. Recommendations for those who want to try this approach include the following:

- Establish and clearly communicate regularly and repeatedly the vision and plans to all campus constituencies.
 - As each new function (such as strategic planning, master planning, budget process, and fundraising) is considered and integrated, carefully check foundational goals, documents, policies, and procedures that are already in place to ensure they will correspond and not be in conflict.
 - In those places where functions can overlap, take advantage of that fact and include it within the process.
 - Analyze what needs to happen first, and consider the trickle-down effect of changes in advance.
 - Identify and include champions who will help with the change process.
 - As plans and details unfold and progress is achieved in different areas, communicate regularly and repeatedly to various constituency groups.
 - Make sure key people are using the same language.
 - Schedule celebrations as milestones are achieved and plans come to fruition.
-

This model can and does work, and it has lasting power. Although other factors will influence the change process, hopefully this model offers a more stable approach that is less likely to self-destruct than other change models, since it overlaps multiple functions and processes and is less reliant on people's willingness or readiness to change. Aligning the major functions serves to give strength to normal procedures, making change easier, more palatable, and less dependent on personal preference. Significant change is feasible and achievable with this model; however, a key prerequisite is the president providing the navigational leadership and staying the course.



About the Author

Dr. Richard B. Flynn became the 12th president of Springfield College in March 1999. Prior to Springfield, Dr. Flynn was with the University of Nebraska at Omaha as dean of the College of Education, and special assistant to the chancellor for information science and technology. He also served the Nebraska System as acting president of Peru State College.

Early in his tenure at Springfield College, Dr. Flynn proposed an aggressive strategic plan, resulting in many significant changes that have enhanced the quality of academic programming and quality of life for students, faculty, and staff. Over the past decade, campus improvements have been dramatic. Dr. Flynn's commitment to being a part of, and not apart from, the community has led to an expansion of the College's involvement with its local neighborhoods and the city of Springfield. He is personally active in the community, serving on many local boards and committees. The College's community engagement initiatives and economic impact on the greater Springfield area have been acknowledged by multiple local, state, and national entities.

A graduate of MacMurray College, Dr. Flynn earned his master's degree from Ohio University and a doctorate in education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

**PRESIDENTIAL
PERSPECTIVES**



www.PresidentialPerspectives.org