

Chapter 11

Strategic Planning: Devising the Way of US Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract Strategic planning is the lynchpin of all the internal and external forces that make up US institutions of higher education (IHEs) as they change to adapt to the dynamic environment of the market today. Effective strategic planning requires (1) creating an inclusive, collaborative process that accounts for all stakeholders' input and (2) fostering an environment that reflects an ongoing commitment to collaboratively guide the institution toward meeting its goals.

11.1 Introduction

American colleges and universities are indeed exceptional, made so by characteristics built deeply into our history and institutions that share their capacity to respond to unanticipated events (Trow 1997, p. 573).

A study of the processes of generating human capital in today's global economy is always an interesting foray into the quirks and shortcomings of countries' educational systems. Still, each country will assert that its "way", despite the pros and cons, is fundamentally sound; what was instilled for myriad years to educate their masses continues to work today despite economic failures, changing mindsets of the political powers, and the notion that change must occur to assimilate into the global economy.

One understood belief in America is that higher education is the "ticket to the good life"; it is the gateway to society's economic, cultural, and social benefits. Higher education today is more of an opportunity for the masses, as opposed to the traditional notion that it was a privilege for the elite only. It is available to all

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“motivated and qualified individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or background” (Martinez 2004, p. 9).

As more doors of institutions of higher education (IHEs) have opened to the masses, however, higher education, since its heyday in the late 1970s, has undergone serious transformation on several fronts that compromise this country’s ability to afford that opportunity. Those fronts include fierce budget slashing and a reevaluation of the traditional higher education cost structure, the demand for a greater return on educational investment, the undermining of the concept of tenure, and a changing demographic in the amount and types of students entering the ranks. Leaders of colleges and universities are pressed to reduce costs and increase operating efficiency in the face of dwindling revenue sources (Callan 2007; Dougherty 2004; Heller 2001; Moody’s Investors Service 2013). Indeed, they must summon their most creative resources to strategically plan so their institutions can receive increased funding from states, no small feat given their decreased revenues.

In this chapter, the author underscores the need to focus such creative resources on effective strategic planning. To begin, the paper examines the state of higher education in the United States, and the concept of strategy as the mechanism to effect change in an institutional context. Next, the paper focuses upon strategic planning and describes the Tromp and Ruben (2010) model that exemplifies an inclusive and collaborative process. Finally, a case study of the strategic planning process at a small baccalaureate college is described.

11.2 The State of US Higher Education

Higher education in America today leads a “uniquely charmed yet schizoid existence” (Montez 2002, p. 4). IHEs’ governance goes by the moniker “shared governance system,” one that balances the institutional authority among administrative, academic, and regent (or trustee) factions. Still, it is structurally hierarchical—the administration is led by the president (or chancellor), and executive (vice presidents) and academic (provost) administrators carry out the mission of the institution. In addition, that body functions at the behest of the regent faction, which represents the public’s will. Functioning efficiently or effectively is no small feat, as oftentimes the size of the administration exceeds that of “some in central ministry or a governmental agency” (Trow 1997, p. 574). Faculty also figure prominently into the mix with their academically collectivist orientation.

Therefore, while the figurehead of the IHE may be the president, the crux of the institution’s leadership vests in a group that functions and administers within an interactive, interdependent networked system; a “polycentric authority” (Montez 2002; Walker 1979). By necessity, then, all of the IHE’s decisions, functions, work, and outcomes are joint. As a consequence, change occurs in different ways, at different rates, and at different times.

By design, the US Constitution, which establishes the federal government's power, does not specifically provide for the education of its citizenry. Governance in American IHEs has long been held to be a state-designated right, not a nationalized one. Higher education in America is rooted in the belief that the federal government's authority should be limited in shaping higher education so that the institutions would resemble "living organisms' behavior in an ecological system—competitive for resources, highly sensitive to the demands of environment, and inclined, over time, through the ruthless process of natural selection, to be adaptive to those aspects of their environment that permitted their survival" (Trow 1997, p. 576).

As a result, one of higher education's many defining features is the typology of the various institutions. Where most countries in the world attempt to retain uniformity in the structure of their IHEs, American citizens are offered enrollment at colleges and universities that are privately or publicly funded (or both), in 2- and 4-year institutions that offer abbreviated and specialized training, or in virtual colleges and universities that provide course work for baccalaureate and advanced degrees over the internet. Trow (1997) astutely observed that the US has a "multitude of institutions of every sort, offering academic work of every description and at every level of seriousness and standard" (p. 576).

Several factors account for the diversity of typology in American IHEs: the size of the institution, its function and curricular offerings, its sources of support, its academic standards, and the configuration of its authority (Trow 1997). All these factors combine to give each institution its "fingerprint," its unique ability to draw from various sectors of the society it must serve.

And, the numbers reflect the effect of this unique nature of an IHE. The US has seen the growth in number of IHEs in states. Indeed, American higher education has followed "the pattern of success in small businesses in modern capitalistic economies" in the rapidity in which they rose and fell, all tied to the fluctuations in the market (Trow 1997, p. 574). For example, in the years following World War II, there were 2.3 million students enrolled in 1,800 colleges and universities. In the period between 1969 and 1975, the US saw approximately 800 new colleges created, while 300 of them closed down (or were consolidated with others). In 1986, there were 12.4 million students in the 3,300 public and private IHEs in this country. In 2006, the number of public and private 2- and 4-year colleges and universities totaled 4,140 and, as of 2010, there are 4,495 of those institutions (Dougherty 2004; National Center for Education Statistics 2006, 2010; Trow 1997). With public 2- and 4-year institutions accounting for 73 % of the country's total enrollment, then, one can imagine the astronomical amount of funding required to sustain their institutions.

While the types of IHEs are many, public institutions are generally subject to the plenary authority of the state government that created them. Statutes that are enacted by individual states often include laws that (1) establish and regulate state postsecondary institutions or systems, (2) create statewide coordinating councils for postsecondary education, and (3) provide for licensure of postsecondary institutions (Kaplin and Lee 1995). Their funding is also controlled, in large part,

by the state government. But as the economy in the US took a huge downturn, as it did most recently in 2008, at the state level, legislatures continued to slash their higher education budgets to forestall bankrupting their states. This budget-slashing has severely affected higher education, in part due to its clustering with other social programs, but in large part given “its less powerful political presence, its lack of organization, inefficiency, and resistance to change” (Dougherty 2004, p. 12).

As an example, in 1985–1986, the collective budgets of IHEs (private/public, 4- and 2-year) in the US exceeded \$102 billion (Trow 1997). In 2009–2010, well over \$506 billion was spent to fund higher education in public postsecondary degree-granting institutions, private institutions, and private for-profit institutions. Although that figure is extraordinarily high, it should be noted that revenues for that period were one percent less (and still dropping) than in 2004–2005 (Aud et al. 2012).

With dwindling public funds, IHEs have been left to their own devices to increase revenue. Some of the ways that IHEs have attempted to boost revenue in the face of declining support has been to raise tuition, attract better paying students through new programs, engage in more aggressive marketing and fundraising, outsourcing services to external providers, hiring more part-time faculty, and retrenchment (Dougherty 2004).

The federal government, beginning with the Higher Education Act of 1965, began the process of funding higher education through grants and loans to students instead of directly supporting or managing the institutions (Trow 1997). As the number of institutions has grown, then, so has federal funding for student loans; in 1970–1971, about 29 % of student aid came in the form of loans but, in 2002–2003, 54 % of student aid comprised loans (Dougherty 2004). The number of students receiving financial assistance has gone from 75 to 85 % in the period between 2006 and 2010. Thus, with more than half of the financial aid dollars coming in the form of loans, more students are assuming higher debt loads to complete their education.

Given the diminution in available resources and the increased debt load on students, IHEs must step up their delivery of education in ways that supersede their competition; they must compete creatively for more money from resources previously untapped while at the same time keep a college education affordable. They are also challenged in their fight for dollars because they are grouped with other social and educational programs that require more immediate funding, such as Medicaid, elementary and secondary education, prisons, and police (Dougherty 2004).

Finally, and while struggling with fewer dollars, IHEs have been plagued with greater reporting responsibilities from their governing bodies or accrediting commissions to account for what funds they do receive and what accomplishments they achieve. Some examples of the criteria to track the efficacy of states’ educational investments have been stated in terms of accountability measures in the following areas (Dougherty 2004).

- Persistence and retention
- Remediation effectiveness
- Graduation rates
- Transfer rates from community colleges
- Job placement rates
- Average starting salaries
- Passage rate on professional licensure exams
- Student and others' satisfaction with the institution.

11.3 Strategy

As one can imagine, there is a negative outlook for the future of higher education in the US, which places emphasis on all revenue sources. What is needed is “bolder actions by university leaders to reduce costs and increase operating efficiency” (Moody’s Investors Service 2013, p. 1). These bolder actions translate into a dual course of action: One to tap the intellect of its inhabitants to find alternative forms of funding and the other to continue to improve upon the offerings of IHEs to “transform a youthful population into a productive workforce” (Martinez 2004, p. 9; Moody’s Investors Service 2013). The imperative, then, is to come up with a definitive and innovative strategy, one couched in terms of measured change, that “assures realization of long-term goals” that set them apart from other institutions (Alfred 2006).

Callan (2007) recognizes the difficulty in effecting a change strategy. The mere issue of aligning the forces—the institution, the government, and the public—creates the possibility that one faction may be overlooked. However, the task of fostering the nexus between the institutional vision, the interests of the policy-makers, and that of the public, is what effectuates change. David Ward, former president of the American Council of Education and Chancellor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, observed that the “heart of the alignment must be reconstruction of the relationship between government and higher education, and the creation of a baseline for public investment in both democracy and economic stature” (Callan 2007, p. 49).

Of course, the process of change invariably gets bogged down by the very makeup of IHEs; the shared governance model slows the process just because of the countless number of people making decisions or the great number of different (and potentially conflicting) goals promulgated by the many stakeholders. In addition, the tenure system keeps a static flavor in the mix; with the long-standing academic guard in place it’s difficult to bring new and innovative perspectives to the institution of change. Finally, the makeup of the governing boards and president often comprise scholars who lack an entrepreneurial spirit, boldness, and courage in their approach to change (Callan 2007). Thus, leadership is tasked with devising strategies that must juggle diminished resources in already-lean

programs, educate a populace at lower cost, encompass unique programs and services, and provide for quick(er) response to changing needs (Alfred 2006).

As an example, a large concentration of strategy in IHEs today has focused on distance and online courses to reach audiences beyond the institution's walls. Online courses have burgeoned in the last ten years. The total number of students enrolled in postsecondary education in the US totaled 16,611,710 in fall 2002 and has slowly increased (albeit for a decrease between 2010 and 2011) to 20,994,113 in fall 2011. Of those totals, in fall 2002, approximately 9.6 % (1 in 10) of all postsecondary students were enrolled in an online course. Ten years later, nearly 32 % (1 in 3) students were so enrolled (Allen and Seaman 2013).

Phoenix University, a for-profit American IHE, is a prime example of an institution that used strategy to set itself apart from other IHEs. It targeted the working adult learner market and structured its course delivery by use of technology to create a strategy of convenience for their consumers. By designing curricula that directly targeted the career marketplace it managed to tap into a market in which traditional providers did not have offerings.

Another recent phenomenon that has captured the interest of IHEs is the MOOC, or massive open online courses, that were developed to reach even more expansive (up to millions) groups of students on a global scale. They are dissociated from established degree programs (no credit or degree is received) and are not without their shortcomings, such as difficulty in grading, questionable feedback, cheating, and high attrition. Still, the advent of MOOCs "bring to higher education a completely new perspective that could turn the conventional practices in institutions of higher education on their heads" (Pappano 2012, p. 1). On a larger scale, though, despite measures put in place by IHEs to boost revenue, these institutions can ill afford to jettison existing modes of operation. Too much has been invested.

11.4 Strategic Planning

Today, there remains no better method of determining what changes the campus needs to make and how to put those changes into place than strategic planning (Rowley and Sherman 2001, p. 7).

Without a doubt, higher education in the US is a valuable long-term investment. To protect that investment, IHEs must engage in very creative and innovative planning to maintain equilibrium in the face of dwindling resources and a greater demand for the best-trained workers. Governing boards and accrediting commissions, in response to external demands for accountability, now require that IHEs have strategic assessment plans in place in order to meet accrediting, funding, and regulatory oversight requirements. In the past, strategic plans were generated to describe the institution but little was done to implement them; indeed, IHEs practiced "reactive, incremental problem-solving" instead of instituting long-term

goals (a general direction) and short-term objectives (specifics on attaining the goal) (Hinton 2012, p. 8).

Strategic planning has long been a standard practice in business and not-for-profit organizations. It is best defined as “the means by which the most effective organizations establish priorities and goals and coordinate their efforts to anticipate, direct, and manage change” (Tromp and Ruben 2010, p. 7). However, strategic planning in IHEs is a much different animal than it is for businesses. The very system of governance they employ can bog down the decision-making process or even lead their constituents to conclude that they do not want change. In short, a strategic plan must be based on real needs and real solutions. In the implementation of the plan, the leadership of the IHE must “be knowledgeable about what they expect the strategic plan to do, and then put it into practice” (Rowley and Sherman 2001, p. 7).

In the past, many IHEs attempted strategic planning processes that were akin to their corporate counterparts. Unfortunately, given the stark contrasts in business and higher education governance, strategic plans that were produced often were relegated to bookshelves or became wastebasket fodder (Rowley and Sherman 2001) because they failed to account for the very quirks and factors inherent in higher education that sets it apart from the corporate world.

However, strategic planning is the lynchpin of governance in higher education—it brings together the constituents, all of whom have institutional knowledge, into an inclusive dialogue, to improve upon the path of the institution. The process must take into account the current state of the institution, its vision, and the means by which it is to attain its vision. The process is not always the same in institutions, but the outcomes are the same: all strategic plans look to align the institution’s vision to “anticipate, predict, and ideally control future activities or outcomes” (Tromp and Ruben 2010, p. 3).

The outcome of strategic planning, however, is not as critical as the process the organization implements to get to that point. What is put on paper in the final strategic plan must, of necessity, come from a *process* that accounts for the internal and external factors that influence the IHE as well the insights, expertise, and commitment of its stakeholders.

11.5 The Process of Strategic Planning

Tromp and Ruben (2010) describe how the “four critical determinants” of effective leadership of an IHE—leadership, communication, assessment, and culture—must be woven together to facilitate the strategic planning process. This requires coordinated, sustained, and committed action on the part of the many factions of an IHE.

The institution’s leadership must guide the plan’s development and the means by which implementation takes place. The acquisition and sharing of information with respect to the development, promotion, and implementation of the plan is the

product of coordinated communication. Ongoing assessment is defined by the analysis and evaluation of the plan's development and its implementation. Finally, the cultural component deals with the assimilation of the plan into "the customs, norms, and common practices to manage change and guide and shape behavior" (Tromp and Ruben 2010, pp. 7–8). With these overarching themes in place, the IHE then begins the process of working through the various phases of strategic planning.

While there are many strategic planning models in place in the US, a fine example of a comprehensive model of pragmatic strategic planning for IHEs is described in Tromp and Ruben's (2010) *Strategic Planning in Higher Education: A Guide for Leaders*. The following is a summary of that process; for more in-depth treatment of the subject, the reader is directed to this very valuable resource.¹ The strategic planning process comprises seven phases which encompass the following actions:

1. Establish the mission, vision, values of the institution.
2. Identify the institution's collaborators and beneficiaries (stakeholders).
3. Analyze the environment of the IHE and identifying what aspects of it are to be targeted by the plan targets and timelines.
4. Establish the goals (long-term aspirational outcomes) of the organization.
5. Set strategies and action plans to complete the goals.
6. Create a plan that incorporates the goals and strategies and establish a means and timeline for implementing the plan.
7. Conduct timely progress reviews to assess achievements or areas that require further refinement.

Phase 1: Mission, Vision, and Values: The first phase of the process necessarily involves clarification of the institution's mission, values, and stakeholders, elements that comprise the IHE's organizational identity. The mission statement describes the purpose of the institution. Its vision describes what the IHE aspires to become in the future, and the institution's values describe the culture of the organization—what principles guide its operation and the relationships therein.

Essential to this phase is that the mission, vision, and values statements all accurately and realistically capture the organization's work, ideals, and aspirations. In this self-evaluation, collaborative efforts are paramount, as they invariably will yield more accurate and realistic statements.

Phase 2: Collaborators and Beneficiaries: Identifying the IHE's stakeholders and their relationship to the institution comprises the next step. Those with whom the institution collaborates are included: the governing board, state government, donors, and industry partners. The groups that benefit from the institution comprise students, parents, alumni, and partner institutions. In this phase, the planning process will identify and document the needs, interests, and concerns of all these people. Without their input, the planners cannot get a realistic view of

¹ The author thanks Drs. Tromp and Ruben for allowing us to summarize their model.

stakeholders' needs, expectations, perceptions, and sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Various methods of data collection may be used in this phase, such as surveys, interviews, complaints, observations, focus groups, and ad hoc conversations. Activities to engage the stakeholders can help to prioritize goals, strategies, and desired outcomes.

Phase 3: Environmental Scan: The third phase of strategic planning involves an “environmental scan” (Tromp and Ruben 2010; also see Hinton 2012; Rowley and Sherman 2001). In this next step of the process, the planners must assess the environment in which the IHE exists, taking into consideration the ever-changing assumptions, threats, and opportunities that affect it. Where governing boards (or state government) mandate a strategic planning process, the coordination of this phase may get (and certainly does) get tricky. The leadership of the IHE must deal with planning strategically to stretch dollars while at the same time accommodating more and more beneficiaries in order to garner greater revenue.

This phase comprises the “introspective” part of strategic planning—the part where a SWOT analysis is conducted by the planners to see how attuned the leadership is to society, the economy, the political and legal climate, technology, and to the internal workings of the institution itself. Here, the stakeholders are tasked with identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats of or to the institution that affect either the planning process or the plan's implementation. The information yielded from this exercise is then translated into categories that identify talking points about potential issues in the planning process (e.g., knowing how to discern what people want, transparency of the process, buy-in) or the logistics of putting the plan into action (e.g., timing, boundaries, and constraints).

Phase 4: Goals: The fourth phase of the strategic planning process is the creation of goals. Goals, according to Tromp and Ruben (2010), are those expressions of aspirations that establish “a clear purpose and a reference point against which to gauge their work and accomplishments” for the IHE's departments, programs, and individuals (p. 65). Goals derive from the SWOT analyses and stakeholder engagement exercises conducted earlier and should identify the aspirations that best align the institution with its mission, vision, and stakeholders. It goes without saying that a collaborative group process is the best approach to further stakeholders' understanding and secure their buy-in.

It is in this phase that the IHE's direction begins to take form as the data collected are distilled into four or five “high-level aspirations or achievements that lead the organization closer to achieving its vision...” (Tromp and Ruben 2010, p. 65). The construction of goals begins with their prioritization, and the potential for achievement in a given timeframe. Goals should be simply expressed, and should be easily measured. During this phase, it is necessary to assess resource availability and constraints but, above all else, goals should be achievable and should “require a ‘stretch’ in creativity, innovation, and energy to achieve” (p. 66).

Phase 5: Strategies and Action Plans: The fifth phase of the strategic planning process involves the nuts and bolts of goal attainment—devising the strategies (or action plans) to fulfill them. Creating these strategies include establishing priorities for the steps to be taken in attaining the goals, assigning responsibility for

completion to the appropriate team, and ensuring involvement from relevant stakeholders. The strategies must also ensure sufficient resources are in place to carry out goals, identify potential facilitators or barriers to achievement of the goals, create a communication plan (message and the media) to assure success and, finally, delineate methods of implementation.

To ensure success, the process must create channels of communication that address needs as action plans are implemented. This translation of goals into action, monitoring, and assessment will define the plan's success. Action plans should specify whether the strategies employed are short-term or long-term and provide detail about the persons or teams responsible, what they must accomplish, and the time within which they have to get the job done.

Phase 6: Creating the Plan: The sixth phase involves writing the strategic plan—the culmination of the process of establishing goals and strategies to fulfill the institution's mission (the short-term) and its vision (the long-term). Whether written as the process progresses or after the creation of goals and strategies, the writing in the end should address the following issues:

1. The plan's audience and expectations;
2. Whether it responds to the outcomes of the environmental scan;
3. Whether it reflects the organization's capabilities and resources;
4. An assessment of whether beneficiaries' and collaborators' needs and expectations are taken into account;
5. An explanation for facilitating feedback, information sharing, comprehension, updating, and progress reporting;
6. Its use; and
7. Anticipated reactions to it.

The resulting plan should be well written and organized and include, at a minimum, the following basic components:

1. A charge letter that explains the strategic planning process and expected outcomes;
2. An executive summary which explains the process and its assumptions, threats, opportunities, goals, and actions;
3. An explanation of why the process was undertaken;
4. A statement of the institution's mission, vision, and values;
5. A description of the beneficiaries and collaborators of the process;
6. A complete "picture" of the organization (its assumptions, threats, and opportunities) to assist in the understanding and interpretation of the plan;
7. An overview of the planning process;
8. The goals and related strategies and action plans to carry them out;
9. A timeline for implementation;
10. Outcomes and achievements in the process to date;
11. Conclusions; and
12. Appendices, if required.

As the audience for the plan is larger than those involved in the planning process, continued, inclusive engagement is necessary. Tromp and Ruben recommend broad participation in the plan's drafting process, and sharing and reviewing the drafts thereafter with the larger group of stakeholders. They recommend "continued attention to the priorities that have guided the process thus far—two-way communication, broad involvement, clarity and precision in communication, and care in linking understood and accepted assumptions and desired outcomes" to ensure the institution has produced an accurate, easily understood, and useful document (Tromp and Ruben 2010, p. 82).

Phase 7: Outcomes and Achievements: This is the phase of the planning process where the institution channels Ed Koch by telling the stakeholders "how we're doing" (Tromp and Ruben 2010, p. 87). In this phase, Tromp and Ruben emphasize the use of measures of both activity (what and how much happened) and impact (an evaluation of the extent to which change was achieved).

Leadership's role in this last phase is to foster an outcomes-oriented culture, emphasize systematic documentation, and to evaluate and communicate results. Stakeholders and all others involved in the planning process will want to know that their input and efforts were not in vain; they will want to know what has been accomplished, how much was done relative to other institutions, what the accountability data reflect in light of strategic planning, what was successful in executing the plan, and what needs continuing work. In short, "ongoing assessment and follow-up is essential" (Tromp and Ruben 2010, p. 88).

Final Thoughts on Tromp and Ruben's Model: Implicit in the Tromp and Ruben (2010) model are the inclusive nature of the ideation and formulation processes, the encouraged communication and collaboration of all stakeholders in the process, and constant self-evaluation during the planning and implementation phases. Where the corporate model of strategic planning presumes the advancement of the entity according to the mandate of the corporate board, a higher education strategic planning model must necessarily include the participation of all involved stakeholders (in addition to its board) to ensure success. While a seemingly slower process, the inclusive nature of a model such as the one devised by Tromp and Ruben goes a long way in ensuring buy-in from its inception through to the phase of assessing achievements and outcomes. It is a dynamic process, building upon action, communication and feedback, revision and execution, and further communication and follow-up.

11.6 Case Study: Strategic Planning at a Small Baccalaureate College

The following is a case study that draws from the author's own experience of the strategic planning process at a rural regional college in a small state in the Pacific Northwest. Regional College is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a

baccalaureate/diverse college, a small, 4-year, primarily non-residential campus. It enrolled approximately 3,900 students in fall 2011. This college is unique in that it is driven by a tripartite mission of offerings in academic programs, professional-technical programs, and community programs. In other words, it combines within its walls open enrollment in liberal arts programs, vocational training, and community outreach offerings to a four-city region and outlying counties (spanning two states) with a combined population of nearly 175,000. Interestingly, within that four-city area there are also two land-grant, research universities.

Regional College's one-mission, one-team approach allows it to fulfill its governing board's vision of "preparing citizens from all walks of life to make the most of their individual potential and contribute to the common good by fostering respect and close teamwork among all [the state's] citizens". Its mission is embodied in the institution's motto: "Connecting Learning to Life" through its offerings in academic, professional-technical, and community programs.

In 2011, a new president was appointed. His appointment dovetailed with the college's accreditation process and the need for a new strategic plan as required by the Board of Education, the trustee for all of that state's colleges and universities. The impetus for the new strategic plan was fueled in part by a statewide program undertaken by the Board of Education (in concert with the national *Complete College America* initiative) that, among others, sought an expected graduation rate of 60 % by 2014 in order to meet the needs for a skilled workforce. The mandate was clear: With a low average graduation rate, Regional College had to set its sights on higher levels of performance, all while dealing with a new-student populace that comes from "traditionally underrepresented and underserved populations such as Latinos, Native Americans, and first-generation families with low income" (CCI 2012, p. 3). And, as is the case with most (if not all) IHEs today, the state's support of 4-year public higher education had dropped from \$285 million in 2009 to \$209.8 million in 2012 (CCI 2012, p. 16).

The new president set about the task of creating the new strategic plan in the spring of 2012. The process was begun in a brainstorming retreat with a larger group of various campus constituents. The president made clear that the objective in creating a new strategic plan was to establish goals, objectives, and action strategies that were consonant with the college's role and mission. The goals would serve to coordinate efforts to anticipate, direct, and manage the changes the future would bring in terms of enrollment, curricula, administrative function, and the overall management of the college.

The brainstorming retreat was attended by 35 people drawn from all sectors of the college: faculty, professional staff, classified staff, administration, students, and members of the public. Topics they discussed included marketing of the college, student success, academic programs and delivery, outreach and public engagement, administrative organization and communication, facilities and infrastructure, technology, and performance measures. Five discussion groups were formed and each group contributed ideas and commentary about all topics. Within each area of discussion came questions about, and suggestions for, the future, suggestions for institutional improvement, identification of shortcomings, and discussions of the

Complete College initiative. All topics were fair game. Areas of dysfunction were identified; primary among them was the issue of funding for faculty salaries and programs. Issues also raised concerned allocation of resources, dismay with the quality of incoming students (and the subsequent need for remediation), and online (distance) learning and the role it will play in the college's future. The data were summarized, distilled, and categorized, and served as the foundational material to inform the strategic planning process.

The president then appointed a Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) to begin the work of creating the new strategic plan. The SPSC was headed by an administrator who had the least amount of institutional knowledge and bias so as to ensure an equitable outcome. The steering committee comprised members of the faculty, classified staff, professional staff, administration, and students, all of whom were chosen for their leadership roles in their positions.

The committee was given responsibility for refining the issues brought forward from the brainstorming retreat into a workable set of goals that would inform the creation of the college's 5-year strategic plan. The president charged the SPSC with producing a "roadmap" to provide context for future decision making in the form of goals. He also sought objectives (strategies) that would facilitate attainment of the goals and to ensure they were consonant with the college's role and mission. The committee was advised to build the set of goals around the college's tripartite mission. An adjunctive study was conducted to identify concurrent planning efforts within the college to provide a comparative look. Efforts to look at environmental factors also took place asynchronously (via email) to fine-tune the themes of concern or influences on the planning process.

The committee met on several occasions to "hash out" the issues they thought to be covered under the college's goals. A list of four goals that encompassed major groupings of priorities and issues was thus created. These major groupings included instruction, students, partnerships, and resources. In addition, several objectives and the strategies to accomplish them were fashioned through further brainstorming sessions of the SPSC.

Once the goals, objectives, and strategies were identified, the SPSC set out to involve all stakeholders in the planning process. Faculty took these goals, objectives, and strategies to their faculty meetings; students were encouraged to network with fellow students to get feedback; officers of the alumni association were encouraged to get input from their members. Members of the external community were contacted and their feedback was elicited as well. In short, communication and the invitation to provide feedback were essential elements of the process. Further distillation by the SPSC of the goals, objectives, and strategies followed.

As a critical facet of the strategic planning process, the SPSC then presented the list of four goals to the college's stakeholders: the faculty, the staff, the students, and the public in several live presentations (the "Strategic Planning Roadshow"). The "roadshow" presentations were also recorded for broadcast over the internet to allow for further viewing by those who were unable to attend. In these presentations, the constituents were given another opportunity to comment on the goals. The SPSC then refined the list of objectives and strategies to a workable

Table 11.1 A summary of Regional College's strategic planning goals and objectives

Goal	Objectives
Goal 1: Sustain and enhance excellence in teaching and learning	<p>Objective 1A: Strengthen existing courses and programs, and enhance curricula to meet 21st century needs and opportunities</p> <p>Objective 1B: Ensure that the General Education Core achieves its expected learning outcomes</p> <p>Objective 1C: Optimize technology-based course delivery, resources, and support services for students, faculty, and staff</p> <p>Objective 1D: Maximize direct faculty and student interactions inside and outside the classroom</p> <p>Objective 1E: Recruit and retain a highly qualified and diverse faculty and staff</p> <p>Objective 1F: Provide a safe, healthy, and positive environment for teaching and learning</p>
Goal 2: Optimize student enrollment and promote student success	<p>Objective 2A: Focus marketing efforts on clearly identified populations of prospective students</p> <p>Objective 2B: Retain and graduate a diverse student body</p> <p>Objective 2C: Maximize student satisfaction and engagement</p>
Goal 3: Strengthen and expand collaborative relationships and partnerships	<p>Objective 3A: Increase volunteer, internship and career placement opportunities consonant with student career and life goals</p> <p>Objective 3B: Collaborate with relevant businesses, industries, agencies, practitioners, and organizations for the beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources</p> <p>Objective 3C: Increase cooperation and engagement with the alumni in the advancement of the college</p> <p>Objective 3D: Advance the college with community members, business leaders, legislators, and current and future donors</p>
Goal 4: Leverage resources to maximize institutional strength and efficiency	<p>Objective 4A: Allocate and reallocate funds to support priorities and program areas that are significant in meeting the role and mission of the institution</p> <p>Objective 4B: Assess and modify organizational structure and institutional processes to ensure the most effective use of resources</p> <p>Objective 4C: Continuously improve campus buildings, grounds, and infrastructure to maximize environmental sustainability and learning opportunities</p> <p>Objective 4D: Create a timetable for the sustainable acquisition and replacement of instruments, machinery, equipment, and technologies, and ensure required infrastructure is in place for support</p> <p>Objective 4E: Identify and secure public and private funding to support strategic plan priorities</p>

number and, with the data collection now complete, provided the framework for the strategic plan to the president. A summary of Regional College's goals and objectives are shown in Table 11.1. (The SPSC chose to identify further strategies to carry out the objectives but they are omitted here for economy of space.)

Drafting the strategic plan was recently completed at Regional College. The president and his administrative team formulated the plan based on the goals derived in the all-community process, and has circulated the draft for approval to all stakeholders at the college's strategic planning website. Making the plan available to all stakeholders allows for constant access by the public. It also will provide them with instant notice of any changes or reports of any outcomes or achievements attained as the college effects change over the course of the 5-year cycle. Stakeholders' input was given the greatest weight in formulating goals and in devising the means by which to implement them. And, while the strategic plan is still being finalized as of this writing, the stakeholders of Regional College have been assured that they will have similar opportunities to weigh in on the plan's implementation as the institution wends its way through its 5-year cycle.

In the end, the process employed by Regional College in the creation of its 5-year strategic plan closely follows the process employed in the Tromp and Ruben (2010) model. It incorporated an inclusive approach, one which tapped the needs and concerns of its constituents, rather than only those perceived to be important by the administration. It sought buy-in by involving stakeholders at every phase of the process. It engaged in collaborative efforts to articulate the means by which the college will fulfill its vision and mission. It brought to the fore all of the needs, concerns, and issues that the stakeholders believed are critical to address as the institution advances into the future and, more important, provided the impetus to drive change in the institution with these strategies.

11.7 Conclusion

As IHEs in the US today enhance their sustainability through global connections, they are very mindful of the need to strike a balance with those efforts and the need to keep their presence at home as consistent and appealing to its public as possible. Doing so requires innovative strategy; creativity, credibility, and a realistic approach are all necessary ingredients. The execution of a strategy cannot and should not be left to chance or to a few in the administration. Higher education has seen this happen too many times.

The investment in strategic planning is the foundation upon which to build an innovative strategy. Putting a collaborative, inclusive process into place strengthens the pillars of that foundation. Drawing upon the collective wisdom of all of the stakeholders in an institution provides insightful, relevant input. Faculty's specialization in academically substantive matters will clarify the academic goals for the institution. Without this information, any guidelines that address the academic directives may miss short of the mark. The staff perspective puts an

administrative emphasis on goals that exemplify their knowledge of the day-to-day running of the institution. Input from the students comes from the ground level, that area to which filters all of the intellectual churning of the wisdom from the other groups. And, finally, the perspective of the external community brings the ultimate “reality check” to the process by incorporating the wisdom of the captors of the institution’s human capital. Without that connection to the real world, an institution cannot realistically mesh with the global market.

The fittest in the competitive world are those institutions that not only reach external connections into which it infuses its human capital. They must begin with an inner cohesion, a structurally sound foundation built on the creative and innovative genius of the internal stakeholders as well. The process of strategic planning, when well executed, goes a long way to assure that foundation.

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