DO IT BUT DON'T DO IT ALONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF, AND RESOURCES FOR, SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC PLANNING

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Abstract

Recent trends in U.S. higher education have led many institutions to adopt or refine strategic planning efforts. Strategic planning at the academic department level (in alignment with university-wide planning) is crucial to identify opportunities and to provide a quality education to students.   Rather than taking a proactive approach, too often academic departments engage in traditional (ad-hoc or activity-based) planning and leave genuinely strategic planning to be guided by administrators. In this paper, the authors emphasize not only the importance of strategic planning at the department level but also a process that can be used. This process includes following what they refer to as the C-SALT principles (Communication, Specificity, Assessment, Leadership, and Transparency) and collaborating with academic support units such as Institutional Research and Information Technology to aid in the development and implementation of successful strategic plans. The paper concludes with a "real-life" example of a chair who utilized the described process in her department to design a three-year strategic plan.

What Does It Mean to Plan Strategically?

Department chairs, and other academicians regularly engage in planning. We plan what courses to offer, what will be taught in those courses, and who will teach them. We engage in this type of planning on a term-by-term or a year-by-year basis. This operational, or short-term, planning stands in sharp contrast to true strategic planning which is used to chart the more long-term direction and goals for an organization (Barry, 1998). The process of planning strategically involves taking a structured approach to anticipating the future (Paris, 2003) of one's university, college/school, or department. This future orientation is emphasized in the definition of strategic planning put forth by Tucker (1993) specifically written for department chairs. He defined planning as "the process of making decisions in the present concerning which strategies and actions are to be taken in the future in order that certain goals or outcomes may be realized by a specific date" (p. 8).   Strategic planning also involves an economic element. Choices must be made about which goals to pursue utilizing a limited supply of resources in order to "maximize benefits to stakeholders" including students, employers of those students, and society (Paris, 2003, p. 1). As Eaton and Giles-Gee (1996) have noted, the "use of resources to maximize effectiveness is the crux of serious planning at every level within an institution" (pp. 33-34).

Strategic planning has, historically, been linked to military traditions (Konsky, 1999) but was introduced into the private business sector in the 1960s and into the public sector (including universities) within the next two decades (Chance & Williams, 2009). Since that time, strategic planning has become increasingly valuable for organizational decision-making and resource allocation in both sectors due to the rapid changes in society in general and higher education in particular (Konsky, 1999). Several trends within the academy and its environment have intensified the need for strategic planning, including declining resources and increased calls for accountability. The growing demand for accountability has been sparked largely by the rising cost of education (Chance & Williams, 2009) and the drop (compared to other countries) in U.S. degree attainment (Malik & Lees, 2009). From students and their families to state legislators to the U.S. Department of Education, stakeholders are demanding that colleges and universities demonstrate their effectiveness in providing a quality education that is worth the price. By planning strategically, institutions can demonstrate that not only are they achieving their missions and goals (that is, their effectiveness) but also they are doing so efficiently.

What are Typical Steps in Planning Strategically?

Konsky (1999) outlined 25 specific steps involved in the strategic planning process, from analyzing why a plan is needed to building pride in the plan. However, the planning process can be summarized as consisting of eight basic phases (Tromp & Ruben, 2004).

1. Identifying and involving stakeholders: It is important to learn as much as possible about the people for whom you provide programs or services including their expectations and satisfaction levels. It is also important to involve these individuals in the planning process at appropriate times.
2. Scanning the environment: Planning is not truly strategic unless careful consideration is given to identifying environmental factors that could impact the plan or the planning process. These factors might be social, economic, political, regulatory, technological, or cultural.
3. Creating a mission, vision, and set of stated values: A mission states an organization's or unit's reason for being while the vision is a statement of what it wants to become. Values are a list of priorities. Collectively, the mission, vision, and value statements provide a basis for what will be done and how to measure achievements.
4. Writing goals: Although it is tempting to start planning with goals, planning is not strategic without the first three steps in place. Goals are the organization's, or unit's, high level ambitions. Goals should be targeted, developed collaboratively, and prioritized. They should also be understandable, measurable, aligned with available resources, and easily (but not too easily) achievable. It is advantageous to have only a few focused goals; there is value in choosing a critical few planning targets so efforts can be concentrated (Keller, 1983).
5. Writing strategies and action plans: Strategies and action plans outline specific, detailed ways in which the goals will be fulfilled. More than one strategy can be written for each goal but there should be a reasonable number; having too many sets the stage for lack of time, energy, or resources to fulfill all. "Action plans detail what will be done, by whom,

and when" (Trump & Ruben, 2004, p. 64). Successful implementation of goals is dependent upon assigning ownership of strategies, establishing realistic time frames, and estimating as accurately as possible costs that will be incurred.

6. Compiling the planning document: Although writing of various pieces of the plan has been ongoing, this step consists of putting together a formal written report (in both digital and hard copy). Common inclusions in a planning document are: introductory letter from leadership; executive summary; description of the planning process (including planning assumptions, threats, and opportunities); mission, vision, and values statements; goals, strategies, and action plans; implementation timeline; and appendices (e.g., lists of "planners" and stakeholders). By necessity, this will be a "living" document as it will need to be updated periodically.

7. Implementing the plan: Although not every contingency can be anticipated, putting the plan into action should be relatively straightforward if the previous steps have been fulfilled.

8. Measuring outcomes and achievements: This step, of course, is the overriding purpose of strategic planning. "Few issues are as critical to the ultimate success of planning initiatives as [is] ongoing attention to the identification and tracking of outcomes and achievements" (Tromp & Ruben, 2004, p. 10).

What Are Some Important Principles to Keep in Mind in Strategic Planning?

Regardless of the steps one takes in the strategic planning process, implementation of the plan is not always successful. Potential problems include "lack of leadership, failure to communicate, insufficient participation and shared governance, lack of resources, resistance to change, and inadequate understanding of the [planning] process" (Taylor, Amaral, & DeLourdes Machado, 2007, p. 7). One way of looking at strategic planning is as a road trip. What do you need to know to have a successful journey? Elements might include identifying "drivers" and establishing clear and consistent communication with them; being familiar both with where you are and where you want to go; providing detailed directions; and frequently assessing your progress. The lead author for this paper has, through both education and experience, identified a set of principles that can, if followed, contribute to arriving safely at the end of a strategic planning journey. She identifies these as the C-SALT principles: **C**ollaboration, **S**pecificity, **A**ssessment, **L**eadership, and **T**ransparency. Too often strategic plans fail due to insufficient attention to one or more of these principles.

- Collaboration: A good strategic plan provides a road map for achieving an organization's vision; achievement will be impaired, however, if that vision is not a collective one (Chance & Williams, 2009). Identifying and involving all key stakeholders from the beginning of the planning process, as well as maintaining clear and consistent lines of communication with them, is critical. Broad participation (that is, including a wide variety of viewpoints and expertise) will ensure a final plan that appropriately addresses the needs of the organization and maximizes engagement in, and support for, the plan (Keller, 1983). A shared vision will also help in avoiding one of the more common impediments to successful strategic planning: resistance to change. Tromp and Ruben

(2004) argue that "[c]reating a shared understanding of the need for change is perhaps the most important first step to a successful planning effort" (p. 28).

- Specificity: With strategic planning, the devil is indeed in the details. Without sufficient specificity in elements of the plan such as strategies and action plans, what can result is a wish list of laudable goals with no clear picture of how to implement them.
- Assessment: Tromp and Ruben (2004) assert that strategic plan success depends upon assessment (along with leadership and communication). In fact, they note, assessment is one of the most important but one of the most frequently overlooked aspects of planning. Assessment of outcomes and achievements is an obvious necessity but assessment should be emphasized throughout the process. For example, assessing the current state of affairs (i.e., where you are now) is important in planning where you want to go in the future. Learning about key stakeholders (their perspectives, needs, expectations, and satisfaction levels, Tromp & Ruben, 2004) is another role of assessment as is determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats impinging upon an institution. When it comes to plan implementation, it is critical that every goal (and accompanying strategies and action plans) is written in such a way that measurability is possible. There should be a clear answer to the question: How will we know when this goal has been achieved?
- Leadership: Not only should senior leadership take a key role in strategic planning in order to highlight its importance, but also leadership has to be assigned to guide plan development and implementation. In other words, ownership of goals and strategies is a critical consideration. One (or few) individuals should be assigned to guide the implementation of each strategy; leaving implementation solely to committees tends to diffuse accountability. As the saying goes, "If everyone is in charge, no one is in charge."
- Transparency: Openness in the strategic planning process is as important as communication and accountability. No part of the planning process should take place behind closed doors. When clarity and transparency are lacking, the institutional or unit cohesion so necessary to achieving goals is impeded (Taylor, DeLourdes Machado, & Peterson, 2008). The involvement of all is not antagonistic to the points made previously about leadership; effective strategic planning is both a "bottom-up" and a "top-down" process.

What about Strategic Planning at the Departmental Level?

Much has been written over the last few decades about strategic planning in higher education. Unfortunately, most of the literature addresses planning at the institutional level; there is much less available about planning strategically at the departmental level. However, the same process and principles should apply regardless of the level or size of the unit within an institution. It is advantageous when departmental planning can occur alongside university-wide planning efforts. Not only can departments then model what has occurred on a broader basis at the university but also a climate of planning has been created that can reduce the time and energy necessary to convince all members of a department that strategic planning is necessary. One important point to keep in mind in this type of situation is that a department's plan should link to that of the

university. For example, departmental goals should complement those developed for the institution as a whole.

Even if a university has not engaged in (or has not recently engaged in) strategic planning efforts, it is still advantageous for departments to do so on their own. Although proper planning can be time and resource intensive as well as risky (because it involves prioritization and change, Paris, 2003), there are distinct advantages for both chairs and faculty. Being proactive in planning means that departments are less likely to be taken by surprise because they know their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; they have thoroughly assessed their stakeholders, scanned the environment, and contemplated the future. Strategic planning can "minimize crises-mode decision-making" (Paris, 2003, p. 2). Planning strategically can also strengthen departmental unity and commitment, provide stability even with leadership turnover, help higher level administrators appreciate the contributions of the department, and lay the foundation for defending programs and personnel in times of diminished resources (Eaton & Giles-Gee, 1996; Konskey, 1999).

What Existing Units on Campus can Provide Support?

Whether one is a new or a seasoned department chair, leading a departmental strategic planning process can seem formidable. However, s/he does not have to "go it alone." Keller (1983) indicated that one of the critical elements of successful planning at the institution level is the use of existing organizational structures; that is, using existing groups to eliminate the need for creating additional organizational entities. We echo this parsimonious approach by encouraging department chairs not to "reinvent the wheel" but rather to seek out existing offices and functional units on campus to help with the strategic planning process. Although the list of offices from which departments could seek help is probably a long one, for the purposes of this paper, we will use two offices in illustration: Institutional Effectiveness and Information Technology. After discussing how these two offices can provide support for departmental strategic planning, we will end the paper with a section written by a department chair who will reflect on her personal experiences in approaching these offices for help in planning activities.

Institutional Effectiveness

Offices of Institutional Effectiveness (IE), or Institutional Research (IR), exist on most campuses. The most fundamental function of these offices is in the area of reporting; that is, generating both routine reports as required by state and federal agencies and ad hoc reports as requested by on- and off-campus stakeholders. However, many of these offices have additional responsibilities in the areas of research, assessment, and strategic planning. With the continued, and increasing, pressure for higher education accountability, IE and IR offices have expanded in their stature and importance (Voorhees, 2008).

Because department chairs, especially new ones, may be unaware of the wealth of information and skills available in their local IR offices, the authors would encourage chairs to make IR personnel one of their first points of contact when contemplating departmental strategic

planning.   No two IR offices are structured identically, but an initial conversation with your IR director can provide insight into how her or his office may be of assistance. If your IR director is charged with leading strategic planning for the university as a whole, s/he will be an invaluable source of advice on the process. Some IR offices have a structured approach to environmental scanning and may be able to share information on trends in higher education at the state and federal levels as well as how their universities are being impacted. For example, in response to the national call for accountability in higher education, the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) has been developed through a partnership between the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). The VSA is an initiative by public 4-year universities to supply basic, comparable information on the undergraduate student experience to important constituencies through a common web report – the College Portrait. Each year, as part of participation in the VSA, universities update their College Portraits and the responsibility for this often lies within an IR office. As these are publicly available reports, department chairs can learn much about their own universities and those of their peers. For example, every College Portrait includes information on student characteristics, undergraduate success and progress, costs of attendance and financial aid, campus life, undergraduate admissions, degrees, areas of study, and future plans of graduates. An example of a College Portrait (for The University of North Carolina at Pembroke) is available at http://www.collegeportraits.org/NC/UNCP).

Although some universities have a centralized assessment office apart from institutional research, it is not uncommon for IR offices to employ one or more persons who are assessment experts. This means they may be able to provide assistance in designing and deploying surveys of students, faculty, or other stakeholders; organizing and conducting focus groups of these individuals; identifying standardized strategies and instruments to measure student learning outcomes; and, perhaps most importantly, assessing strategic goal achievements. At the very least, they may serve as knowledgeable editors of strategic goals, strategies, and action plans to ensure that they are written in such a way as to be measurable.

Perhaps the most common reason for consulting IR offices for departmental strategic planning relates to the role they play as the "data keepers" for their universities. Because of the frequency with which they must access local data for reports and requests and their access to national databases, IR personnel are in a unique position to help department chairs (and others) make data-informed decisions in strategic planning. According to Paris (2003), having good data is a key element to effective strategic planning. "The more hard data that are available…the better the chances of a good plan" (p. 8). An even stronger statement is made by Voorhees (2008, p. 77): "A strategic plan that does not make use of data verges on propaganda." Institutional researchers often are skilled as well in converting data into the "actionable" information needed for planning; that is, analyzing and presenting the data in a way that is understandable and useful. Before listing some of the types of data available through most IR offices, a caveat is in order. Voorhees (2008) eloquently warns those who request data to keep in mind the time required for its access and conversion when he states:

There exists a persistent myth among many that institutional data are, or should be, 'computerized' and therefore instantly available to those who simply know the right keys to press or the correct click of a mouse. In reality, considerable effort must be expended by the institutional research office to gather, clean, edit, and organize data so as to produce correct results. My experience in analyzing these issues for higher education organizations is that unless considerable time and effort have been expended in basic data gathering functions, the amount of work that is purely analytical in nature is proportionally smaller than the 'hydraulics' necessary to ensure data quality (p. 79).

That being said, here are some of the types of data typically available through IE/IR offices (Eaton & Giles-Gee, 1996; Voorhees, 2008):

- Basic student outcome information such as retention, 4-year, and 6-year graduation rates
- Results of student learning outcome measures, such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which often can be disaggregated by major
- University enrollment information such as applications, admissions, and acceptances; and data documenting an institution's enrollment from particular demographic segments and geographical areas (that, with available software, can be converted into Geographic Information Systems, or GIS, maps)
- University and department headcount and FTE, both most recent and changes over time.
- University and department degrees awarded, both most recent and changes over time.
- Degrees awarded per FTE student
- Results of previously conducted surveys and focus groups on student expectations, engagement, satisfaction, and skills
- Data on peer institutions' students, faculty, and programs.
- Enrollment forecasts/projections
- Number of student credit hours (SCHs) generated, by level and division (upper, lower)
- Faculty FTE, number of students per FTE faculty, and number of SCHs per FTE faculty
- Number of tenured and untenured faculty and faculty by rank
- Faculty load and faculty out-of-classroom activity

Information Technology

Offices of Information Technology (IT) exist on every campus although the names may differ: Office of Information Technology Services, Division (or Department) of Information Technology, University Information Systems and Technology Services, University Computing Services, Information Systems Technology Department. Information technology in itself can range from applications such as word processing and email, to services such as telephony and printing, to enterprise systems such as web presence and data warehousing. IT offices exist as well in a variety of organizational and service delivery structures, including centralized and decentralized services, free versus fee-based services (that may or may not incorporate student paid education and technology fees), and whether formalized service level agreements (SLAs) are used or not.. However, their missions remain consistent:

- maintaining the backbone-to-end-user technology infrastructure,
- providing consistent and successful access to and services for information technologies, and
- supporting the institution's mission, vision, goals and objectives for teaching, learning and research.

Little literature exists on strategic planning and technology in higher education, particularly on the department level. Most of the literature that is available addresses specific university divisions which rely primarily on technology for their existence (such as distance education or e-learning initiatives) or is culture-based (e.g., closing educational gaps for Hispanic or rural-based students or incorporating technologies into education in other countries). However, the use of technology is ubiquitous on college campuses and your local IT professionals have both the training and the experience necessary to be valuable resources when it comes to good departmental strategic planning. For example, their knowledge of international standards (e.g., ITIL® standards for planning, delivery, and support for IT services, Arraj, 2010) or state policy (for public institutions) can help academic chairs make wise and useful decisions for the future of their departments.

Department chairs may or may not have had contact with their institutions' Chief Information, or Chief Technology, Officers (CIOs, CTOs). However, anyone with a computer on his/her desk or using a mobile device on campus has met at least one of the IT staff. Every faculty member must have a modicum of contact with IT to gain access to computers, email, software, electronic storage space and telephones. A first step to successful strategic planning which includes technology is communication: get on the CIO's calendar for an appointment to establish a relationship with campus IT officials and discuss the campus IT infrastructure. Next, invite the CIO or IT representative to a departmental meeting to discuss the department's mission, vision, goals and objectives in order to begin a dialog and lay a foundation of strategies. Establish a mutually-agreed upon process by which faculty may introduce, and are introduced, to new technologies. This process should include effective communications regarding purchasing plans so that any new acquisitions or upgrades will be successful in the existing infrastructure. Further, make sure the dialog continues and includes both faculty members and IT officials in order to build on the foundation of trust and understanding.

Just as with overall strategic planning, an important step in the incorporation of technology into successful strategic planning is assessment. A simple survey can assist with identifying those technologies the department has as well as current and future technology needs for individual faculty and the department as a whole. For example, technology needs may change if the department is planning to create a new major or minor in the next year, or if a number of course offerings will soon be available online. The campus IT and IR offices should be able to assist with creating an objective and reusable online survey. Once these needs have been identified, planning for upgrades and future acquisitions should come into focus. Assessing the department's IT needs on an annual basis in alignment with an existing strategic plan is a key component for remaining on course to meet the mission and goals. Consider establishing a small IT oversight committee which will review monthly or quarterly the needs of the department

rather than having faculty members voice needs and wants individually to the department chair. This committee could also be utilized to communicate the departmental needs to a larger campus IT governance committee, should one exist. More pervasive assessment efforts, such as that undertaken each year by the nonprofit association EDUCAUSE, also may be used to inform departmental strategic planning. EDUCAUSE's Center for Applied Research conducts an annual survey of students' preferences for and uses of technology. If your campus has participated, the results should be available for your use from either the IT or IR department. (For more information, see EDUCAUSE's website at www.educause.edu).

Implementation is the last step in creating an environment for successful strategic planning with technology. Follow the mutually-agreed upon processes established with campus IT officials for purchasing only those technologies which have been both discussed and approved. If a guarantee for successful implementation of new technologies is not motivation enough, maybe saving funds is. Often there are other campus departments needing similar or the same technologies for which a campus license or bulk purchasing could provide savings or additional benefits, such as on-site training by the vendor. When the new technologies are delivered, plan for a timely and successful implementation by contacting the IT staff to establish a date for installation. Finally, department chairs may find it advantageous to follow-up with IT officials with any positive and/or negative feedback or assessment. Communicating what worked or did not work is the key to improving the process for greater success.

Most campuses, if not all, can provide the department chair with a more granular perspective of the technologies in their department upon request. Given the current economic environment and decreasing budget appropriations, the following are suggestions for improving the chances of strategic planning success:

- Request a list of all applications/software available to the campus, including descriptions, purpose, number of licenses, remote access options and caveats on use.
- Inquire about the campus technology refresh cycle policy for academic departments.
- Request a listing of all inventoried technologies within the department to include model numbers, age, faculty assignments and refresh cycle policies and dates.
- Request a listing of all classroom and lab technologies to include computers, projection systems, "smart technologies", as well as specifications such as hard drive, RAM and refresh cycle policies and dates.
- Request training for applications and hardware, including software upgrades and new teaching tools.
- Create a "wish list" of needs which is always ready for submission in those times when a chunk of funding needs to be encumbered immediately. The department IT committee could be charged with collaborating with IT officials for approval and for maintaining the currency of the list with vendors and open quotes.

The Department Chair's Viewpoint

In this paper, we have discussed: what it means to plan strategically, the typical stages in the planning process, important principles to keep in mind during planning, how strategic planning can occur at the department level, and the existing units on most college and university campuses that can provide assistance in the process. To conclude, we want to take a look at strategic planning utilizing the C-SALT principles and campus support units from a chair's perspective. We will explain the direct and indirect benefits of departmental strategic planning and provide suggestions for how to get started before offering some concluding thoughts.

The second author of the paper serves as a department chair of a Psychology Department. When she accepted the position, the department had been without a stable chair for many years. This frequent turnover in leadership (with an accompanying lack of unity and direction) provided a desirable environment for strategic planning. Although serving as a chair in this situation can be daunting due to the numerous tasks ignored without a consistent chair, it is also an exciting opportunity to build a shared vision and accomplish goals. To begin the process, she met with each faculty member in the department. This allowed her to better understand what issues where important to her colleagues. She also met with key administrators on the campus such as the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Provost to gather additional insights into desired future directions for the department. Finally, she consulted with adjunct faculty members, undergraduate students, and graduate students. The next step in the process was for faculty members within the department to examine a list of goals expressed by all of the stakeholders mentioned above. The department prioritized the goals and the chair created strategies and action plans to outline how each goal would be accomplished. This information was compiled into a three-year strategic plan document.

This process of creating a plan utilized the C-SALT principles. To begin, the *collaborative approach* that was taken created a team environment. Members of the department were excited about the planning process. This was not an activity mandated by upper administration. Rather, it was a unique opportunity to shape the future of the department and to see personally important issues addressed. Additionally, this approach avoided the potential problem of a new chair implementing an agenda and facing faculty members who were resistant to change. Second, by providing strategies and action plans, the chair allowed the department to move from a list of goals to *specific ways* to achieve the goals. Without such specificity, it is likely that the goals would have remained as a "wish list" for the department. In the three-year plan, the principle of *assessment* was also utilized. Each goal was written in such a way that it could be measured, interpreted, and revised based on results. *Leadership* was key to the process. In this example, the chair appointed individual faculty members to serve as chairs for specific committees. Yet, the ultimate responsibility to ensure that each committee was working to accomplish the goals fell to the department chair. Finally, the *transparency* of the process was instrumental in its success. All members of the department clearly understood the planning process and were given multiple and varied opportunities to contribute. Furthermore, the transparency continued over to all stakeholders, who were provided with regular updates on progress and given additional opportunities to provide feedback.

In order to assess the goals outlined in the department's plan, many campus support units were involved. The involvement of other units was done in a deliberate manner. Returning to a point made earlier in the paper, it is not required that a chair "reinvent the wheel." In this example, the department collaborated with the university research contact person to obtain data on: number of majors at the junior and senior level, graduation rates, retention rates, SCH, faculty FTE, number of students per FTE faculty, number of tenured and untenured faculty, and student responses on satisfaction and engagement measures. The computing center was an additional resource used in the process. The computing center was able to provide information on number of advisees per faculty member and assisted in developing a computerized application to review graduate student applications online. The type of information gathered from these two support units would be nearly impossible for a department chair to compute alone. Yet, with a reasonable time frame, this information can be provided to the chair. It is also not uncommon for collaborations with staff in these support units to result in new ideas and additional measurements of assessment that might not have been originally considered. Thus, involving these units early on in the process can help generate ideas for assessment and ease the workload for both the department chair and her/his faculty.

There are many benefits to departmental strategic planning. Some of the benefits are anticipated and other benefits occur serendipitously. Konsky (1999) outlines many advantages to the strategic planning process and examples include providing a:
1. Direction for the department;
2. Standard to judge new developments;
3. Basis to justify funds;
4. Renewed commitment from faculty;
5. Better campus wide understanding of the department

These benefits were immediately evident to the department after implementing the three-year plan. For example, the department was asked to participate in a joint creation of a new major on campus. The department met to consider the pros and cons of this endeavor. However, what ultimately led to the decision was a discussion of whether this new development aided the department in achieving its goals in an unpredicted way or hindered the department in achieving its goals by serving as a distraction. Thus, the strategic planning process allowed the department to reach a difficult decision in a short amount of time with a strong consensus. The department has also found that involving stakeholders in the process allows many individuals on campus to understand its goals and appreciate the work that members of the department are undertaking to reach these goals.

With the numerous benefits and resources available on a campus, it is difficult to simply ignore the idea of involving them in strategic planning. Nevertheless, you may still be wondering exactly how to get started with your plan. Konsky (1999) provides a list of planning themes for undergraduate programs. Examples include: general education, curriculum, scholarly productivity, recruitment, and graduate education. The departmental plan provided as an example encompassed most of these themes but a strategic plan could be more focused on one particular theme. Remember, it is also wise to align your department's strategic planning with

university priorities.

Finally, it is worth noting that strategic planning can be personally rewarding for a department chair. Engaging in a strategic planning process can help give perspective to the responsibilities and daily activities of academic chairs. As one chair noted:

> If I didn't have the time for strategic thinking, the quality of this job would just go right down for me. I'm trying all the time to grow and think and change and figure out how to influence how the college is operating. It's very gratifying to do that. If people aren't doing that, they should be, because you've got to have that horizon out there. Otherwise this job sort of becomes like painting the Golden Gate Bridge. By the time you get to one end, it's time to go back and start painting it again. The students come in, and you've got to run the classes. Classes end, and things start over again. That cycle is not what this job is about. That's part of what this job is about, but it's not what chairs should live exclusively (Ramaswami & Deits, 2005, p.7).

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Description

This paper emphasizes the importance of, and outlines principles associated with, true strategic planning. Examples are given of how chairs can work with academic support units to create and carry through with successful strategic plans without dramatically increasing their own work loads.

Keywords