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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of a comprehensive participative planning model for colleges and universities that includes processes of environmental scanning, proposed by J. Morrison and others, and key elements of the Objective-Based Assessment, Planning, and Resource Allocation System (OAPRAS) proposed by M. Capoor. The process is explained through its application at Cardinal Stritch College (Wisconsin). A discussion is provided of the three overlapping components of the planning process: strategic planning, operationalizing, and allocating resources. Discussed within the strategic planning component are the role of environmental scanning and the development and use of environmental scanning advisory committees and planning advisory committees. The operationalizing section examines the development of college-wide and departmental goals within an updated context of the OAPRAS model that includes meaningful participation by each planning unit (department or office). The resource allocation component is then examined, and planning and budgeting elements are integrated. The paper then discusses the creation of an institutional plan, which provides a basis for a systematic method of annual qualitative accountability updates and allows for a quantitative measure of the amount of resources spent on each strategic goal. Finally, problem areas that became apparent with implementation of the planning program are revealed, such as role identification, definitions, reports, and time requirements. (GLR)

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**A Comprehensive Participative Planning Model for Small Liberal Arts Colleges: Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher Meet Madan Capoor**

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*for Management Research, Policy Analysis, and Planning*

This paper was presented at the Thirty-Second Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Atlanta Hilton & Towers, Atlanta, Georgia, May 10-13, 1992. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Jean Endo  
Chair and Editor  
Forum Publications  
Editorial Advisory Committee

### Introduction

Developing a comprehensive planning model for a college or university involves creating or adapting processes to serve the unique characteristics of an institution. Identifying strategic goals, implementing supportive objectives, allocating resources to conduct related activities, and providing accountability are vital components of a planning process which should occur at every postsecondary institution. Although each process is discussed in academic literature at length, institutional planners are left to determine how the processes should be defined at their institutions and how the processes should fit together to form a comprehensive planning system. The integration of two sophisticated, easily adaptive, and participative models has provided a small liberal arts college the basis for a successful comprehensive planning process.

Educational organizations preferring participative planning often find dissatisfaction resulting from a lack of understanding in the overall planning process. Participation, however, is not enough. Meaningful participation is necessary, especially at small liberal arts colleges that often find faculty and staff stretched to their limits as they struggle to survive in an increasingly volatile fiscal environment.

Extending the lines of communication must be a priority so that administrators, faculty, staff, and students actively contribute to the planning process while being afforded the opportunity to realize ownership of the system. Individuals become active in making the future work for a college rather than

having the future happen to a college. A comprehensive planning process must involve opportunities for meaningful contributions by all members of the college community. The described process is founded upon the works of Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984) and Capoor (1984).

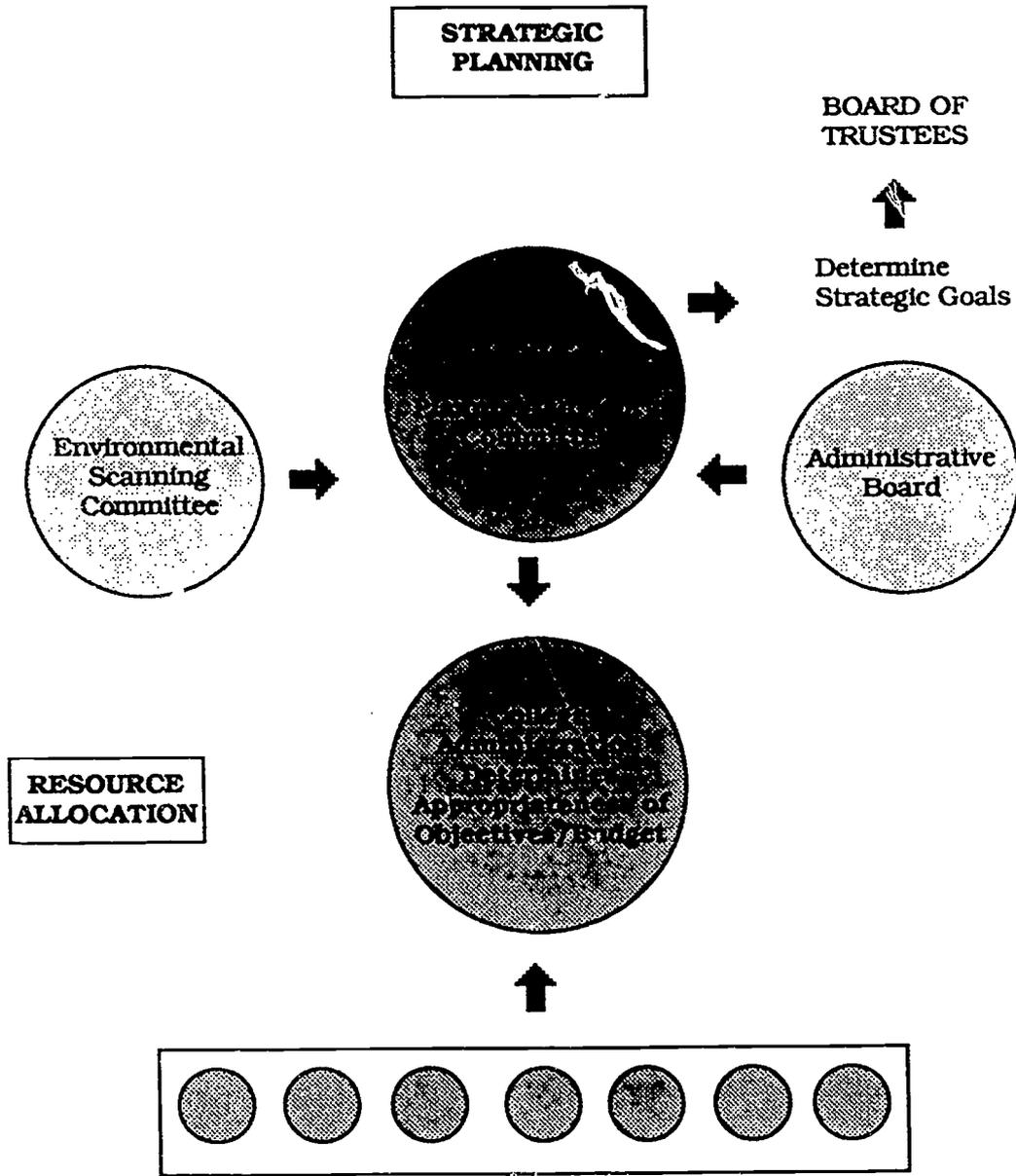
### **Comprehensive Participative Planning Process**

The planning process is comprised of three overlapping components: strategic planning, operationalizing, and resource allocation. **Strategic planning** involves utilizing the broader framework for environmental scanning described by Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984), a college-specific scanning process (Popovics, 1990), and a meaningful college-wide system for establishing and updating strategic goals. Components of such a strategic planning process usually include formalized groups or designated individuals such as an Environmental Scanning Committee, Administrative Board, Planning Advisory Committee, President, and Board of Trustees.

Developing college-wide and departmental goals within an updated context of the OAPRAS model is an essential component for **operationalizing**. This includes meaningful participation by each planning unit (department or office). Formatting the structure into a daily routine is a key element in this area.

The third important ingredient in a successful planning model is **resource allocation**. The integration of planning and budgeting is necessary for an efficient and effective process. Figure 1 displays the essential components of the planning process.

Figure 1: Diagram of Planning Structure



DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL

- A. Prepare objectives related to college-wide strategic goals
- B. Prepare objectives related to departmental improvements
- C. Request funding for activities related to objectives

OPERATIONALIZING

## **Strategic Planning**

### **Environmental Scanning**

In order to stay abreast of environmental changes that may affect the future of a college or university, it is necessary to establish a systematic method of collecting information regarding both internal and external influences. However, it is quite difficult for any individual to be knowledgeable of all occurrences that may affect a college or university and it often requires special expertise to realize how an isolated incident or an emerging trend might impact an organization in the future. Because each postsecondary institution has a distinct mission and specific goals, a single occurrence may affect different educational institutions in different ways and to various degrees. An institution must tailor for itself specific sources of internal and external information, devise a method to collect the information, and effectively use the information in a planning process (Popovics, 1990).

### **Environmental Scanning Committee**

In order to systematically scan the external environment and include findings in the strategic planning process of Cardinal Stritch College, an Environmental Scanning Committee (ESC) was formed. This committee is comprised of faculty and professional staff members appointed by the President of the college based on their areas of expertise in economics, legislation, technology, and society. The committee forwards planning concerns related to external influences to the President and Administrative Board in an advisory capacity. By collecting and interrelating

information its focus is primarily on issues which may affect the institution as a whole. The Vice President for Planning and Enrollment Management chairs the committee.

The ESC assisted in the development of the scanning process for the college. Initially, a working list of materials to be scanned was established by using selected publications listed in the American Council of Life Insurance Trends Assessment Program (Renfro and Morrison, 1983, pp. 32-33). Members of the ESC also suggested publications from their own areas of expertise which would appropriately supplement the list. Additionally, members of the college community were afforded the opportunity to add local, state, and national publications deemed appropriate. The library staff proved to be an invaluable resource by reviewing the list, making recommendations, and citing sources available in the college's library. Approximately 200 publications were selected as a resource base to be viewed for scanning purposes.

Each member of the Environmental Scanning Committee selected publications to read and scan on a continuous basis. The Coordinator of Institutional Research, an ex officio member of the committee, then invited members of the faculty, administration, and student body to volunteer in the scanning process. Presently, more than 120 publications are being scanned by more than 80 members of the college community.

The ESC determined that a quarterly newsletter would be distributed throughout the college as a method to keep everyone informed of external developments that should be considered in planning processes at departmental and college-wide levels. The

various scanners systematically read the different publications and send relevant articles or summaries to the Office of Institutional Research. Through assistance from the ESC and the leadership of the Coordinator of Institutional Research, the most relevant articles are selected to be published in the newsletters.

For the first two years of operation the influx of articles and information produced such voluminous correspondence that the quarterly newsletter was revised to be published six times throughout the year. The newsletter, titled Future Concerns, is organized by arranging highlights or summaries of articles contributed during a certain time period. Sources are listed at the end of the article summary. If anyone requires more information on a specific highlight or summary, the original source may be easily obtained.

Moreover, contributions are logged and housed in a scanning file for future reference. A filing system has evolved and it is continuously updated. It includes such topics as the economy, enrollment management, faculty issues, general information, the job market, minorities, nontraditional students, politics, tests and measurement, and student activities.

#### **Planning Advisory Committee**

In conjunction with the planning process, a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) was also formed. The Planning Advisory Committee is representative of the college community and serves as an advisory group to the President. The purpose of the committee is to prepare strategic goals and suggest areas of

concern for the college. Membership includes the Administrative Board (the President and Vice Presidents) and representatives of the faculty and professional staff. Representatives are appointed from members of the Environmental Scanning Committee. The Planning Advisory Committee operates under the guidance of the President of the college who is the chief planning officer. The Vice Presidents provide information regarding the internal environment within the college while members of the Environmental Scanning Committee monitor the external environment. Therefore, the PAC is a fusion of external and internal concerns whose primary service is to formulate the strategic goals of the college.

Based on a synthesis of external and internal information, the President adopts strategic goals for the annual planning cycle to be recommended to the Board of Trustees. Strategic goals may be recommended directly to the President by any member of the college community at any time. However, formalized vehicles for strategic planning include the Planning Advisory Committee, the Administrative Board, and the Environmental Scanning Committee.

Strategic goals are based upon the needs of the college in the foreseeable future, usually from one to ten years. Moreover, they are reviewed on a yearly basis and, if need be, goals are added, revised or deleted annually. Thus, the college's planning process is dynamic and proactive. Related to the annual budgeting process, the college allocates resources for activities

which are related to identified priorities based on external and internal concerns.

Strategic planning involves the identification of institutional planning goals based upon internal concerns and occurrences in the external environment. The institution prepares strategic planning goals to assure that it will be able to continue to fulfill its mission through mission-related goals and objectives. A sample of the 1991-1992 strategic goals for Cardinal Stritch College include: to assure greater cultural diversity; to promote the effective and efficient use of technology to enhance teaching and learning; to assure an affordable cost of education; and to expand and coordinate the use of assessment measures to determine institutional outcomes.

#### **Operationalizing**

One of the key components of strategic planning is the participative nature of the process. Members of the college community provide input to the Environmental Scanning Committee concerning the external environment. The Administrative Board contributes information on the internal environment of the college. Members of each group are united in the Planning Advisory Committee. Under the direction of the President, the PAC formulates strategic goals for the college.

The strategic goals are then communicated to all members of the college community. In turn, department chairs and administrators (all individuals responsible for budget preparation) prepare objectives with input from personnel within the area. The objectives are related to the college-wide goals

and/or departmental enhancements. The objectives are linked to the budgeting process through the cost of activities related to completing the objectives. This is a central feature of OAPRAS.

Without a process of linking planning and budgeting there is a danger that activities conducted in the past may become their own justification and that the amount of resources spent on these activities may not be in agreement with current and future institutional purposes or priorities. An important feature of a planning process is to relate the resources consumed to the objectives conducted (printing brochures, arranging a presentation, hiring a staff member, purchasing equipment, etc.). Activities are related both to specific objectives and to the use of resources. Thus, they bridge the gap between objectives and budget line items (Capoor, 1984). Planning isolated from budgeting can become a futile process unrelated to institutional goals. Budget requests should be justified in terms of objectives to be served.

Strategic goals, accompanied by their rationales and suggested areas for objectives, are forwarded annually to planning units (departments and offices) along with planning and budgeting forms. Planning objectives for a unit are identified at the unit level. Objectives related to strategic goals are prioritized and the costs of activities are determined. (The planning unit may determine planning objectives related to any number of strategic goals. Usually five or six objectives would be the maximum number stated.) Planning objectives related to

changes or improvements in the department are also determined and financially assessed.

Costs of activities to be funded are defined as costs required in addition to those which are currently funded to the unit. However, as institutional priorities change, based upon institutional strategic goals, the time and other resources allotted to certain activities also change. Thus, "spending" time on an activity deemed important to the college may require no "new" funds because current funding may be utilized in a more effective manner. In this way, new activities can be conducted at the current level of funding and replace activities which the college does not place a high priority on at the time (Capoor, 1984).

#### **Resource Allocation**

For each planning objective, a planning unit completes a planning form. On each of these forms, the proposal name, rationale or justification, activities, priority level, evaluation of outcomes, amount and source of additional funds required are stated for each planning objective. Budget request forms are also completed and the relationship between the total budget request and planning objectives is displayed. The forms are then forwarded to appropriate college administrators who tentatively approve, disapprove, consolidate, reprioritize, and coordinate (or initiate) planning objectives of the planning units reporting to them. This process transpires with full communication with the proposal authors. Tentatively approved objectives are forwarded to the Administrative Board for

deliberation and prioritization, before being formally advised to the President. Final approvals are based upon the amount of funds available and college-wide priorities as related to the college planning goals. Copies of approved planning and budgeting forms are returned to planning units. In the end, the budgeting process is integrated with the planning process.

Unapproved objectives which receive high priority but are not funded due to a lack of resources receive primary consideration in college grant applications and development efforts. They also are reviewed later in the fiscal cycle if funds become available.

#### **Institutional Plan**

Documentation of initiatives and costs, which are shared with the college community, comprise the **Institutional Plan**. Based upon the OAPRAS model, it presents information related to objectives in a readily accessible manner and provides a basis for a systematic method of annual qualitative accountability updates. The model also allows for a quantitative measure of the amount of resources spent on each strategic goal.

The Institutional Plan is organized by the Vice President for Planning and Enrollment Management and serves as a reference for the college community. Copies of the document are forwarded to all departments and offices of the college. This open communication strengthens the planning process.

At the end of the planning cycle, each unit of the college completes an **accountability form** to relate the outcomes of approved objectives. The form includes information about the

completion of the objective, the activity performed, as well as a review of the amount of funds allocated and spent. In this manner, an evaluation of activities related to accomplishing college goals occurs. A final accountability report is published.

#### **Problems and Prospectus**

The new planning process at the college was slowly integrated into the daily operating system. The President advised the Vice President for Planning and Enrollment Management to coordinate the development of a process based upon needs of the college community, input from various constituencies at the college, and a review of various planning models. The procedures were discussed and subsequently introduced at departmental meetings, the faculty senate, and presented at appropriate college-wide seminars or assemblies.

At each level pertinent feedback was received leading to revisions that helped to fine tune implementation of the process. There were two main focuses. One goal was designed to move the planning process from the philosophical stage to one where it would become part of the daily routine. This was intended to take the process to a higher plateau where strategic planning was not just an added activity but part of the working norm. The second goal was for the college community to assume ownership and become active participants.

Administrators, support staff, and faculty seem to be embracing the concepts with enthusiasm. Participation continues to be strong and participants work diligently to complete the

necessary planning activities in the proper time frame. However, several concerns have surfaced.

**Role Identification.** While their hearts were willing, several of the committee members had a difficult time remaining focused on the task at hand. Both the Environmental Scanning Committee and Planning Advisory Committee delved into a problem-solving mentality rather than a strategic planning orientation. Each of the committees were designed to operate in an advisory capacity. The ESC was formed to organize external data gathering and the PAC originated to assist with strategic planning. However, both groups occasionally lapsed into evaluating specific problems while suggesting possible solutions, usually on the department level.

The lack of experience in this venture was a restricting factor. Strategic planning must be viewed from a broader perspective with the main concern focused on the benefit of the entire college. At times this is difficult. What may be beneficial for one particular area may not be in the best interest of the college. A holistic focus needs to be maintained. The facilitator of each committee must keep the members on track with the designated group goals. Experience proved to be the best teacher in both regards.

**Definitions.** Terms such as strategic planning, long-range planning, self-assessment, objectives, and activities do not possess common definitions within academe--although they should. Concrete meanings and a comprehensive working understanding of these vital elements were not readily inculcated. Repetitive use

of the terms in meetings and reports led to a more complete familiarity with the concepts, thereby producing a deep-rooted knowledge of the entire process. Once the definitions are adopted, they must remain intact and become part of the everyday vocabulary.

**Reports.** The words, forms and reports, sometimes take on negative connotations in academic circles. However, due to limited expertise and time, participants worked diligently to complete the necessary forms but the attempts were not always successful. Operationalizing the process proved strenuous. For example, the differentiation between writing objectives and activities appeared somewhat confusing to many participants. However, the completion and distribution of the Institutional Plan and end-of-the-year report have helped to elucidate the terminology in the appropriate framework and fashion. Individual sessions with heads of planning units by the Vice President for Planning and Enrollment Management also proved beneficial.

The reports produced may also serve as the capstones of the system. Participative models require feedback to active members to demonstrate success, or failures, while providing the opportunity for critique and revision. Freedom of participation leads to freedom of expression and this equates to a more approachable and sophisticated planning process.

**Time.** Without immediate rewards, the planning process may be perceived as just another added task or time commitment to an already over-burdened faculty and staff. Enthusiasm and a participative component will go a long way in assisting in this

regard. However, it took one complete planning cycle for the process to become fully realized. And then it required additional time for it to become part of each department's routine.

Planning is a labor-intensive ritual. Educational institutions must be aware that additional tasks require time commitments that equate to added expenses. Some administrations may believe that adding another task to full-time faculty and staff will not cost anything because the salary is already in the budget, but this is not true. Human resources are precious commodities that must be used in an efficient and effective manner. Proper planning takes effort.

#### Conclusion

Communication, participation, and the development of a comprehensive system are essential components in the planning cycle. The planning process begins with college community members contributing information to the Environmental Scanning Committee. This external data is united with information on the internal environment provided by members of the Administrative Board, often aided by the Office of Institutional Research. In a fusion of ideas, the Planning Advisory Board incorporates the information under the guidance of the college's chief planning officer, the President, in formulating strategic goals. The goals are reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees.

As with the OAPRAS model, communication is both "top-down" and "bottom-up". The specific strategic goals are communicated to the department level. In turn, deans, directors, and

department chairs prepare objectives related to the goals. This is accomplished through input from the college community. The objectives are related directly to college-wide strategic goals and departmental improvements while the associated activities are tied to requests for funding. This information is compiled in an Institutional Plan published for the college by the Office of Planning and Enrollment Management. At the conclusion of a yearly cycle another publication is made available outlining all of the objectives and activities and their current status, e.g. whether or not each one was accomplished and why or why not. It is then reviewed, revised, and the process begins anew. These activities take time but developing a comprehensive participative planning system will proved profitable even for non-profit institutions.

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