Strategic Planning

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Many institutions are engaged these days in developing strategic plans. Outside consultants are paid fat fees; internal committees spend months or even years producing lists of goals (sometimes with little thought to practical implementation). Strategic planning seems to be a trendy thing to do.

Too often, however, it's just a way to appear to progress without any real change because change hurts. We'd all rather congratulate ourselves on our past successes, give the appearance of earnest self-reflection, and then continue to do what we're used to doing, though we might call it by a new name, but we'd better change--substantially--or face disaster.

Strategic Planning Assumptions

If a strategic plan is to guide the direction of a college in a realistic and meaningful way, it must take account of what leaders in our profession are predicting for the evolving nature and functions of community colleges as we move into the 21st century. Formulating goals for an institution based on concepts of community colleges as they existed and operated over the past generation will not prepare us for the next generation. The following summarizes recent literature that provides a fairly consistent view of the environment in which community colleges must function and the conditions to which they must respond over the next several years. The summary is divided into three major sets of conditions; and, for the first two, the anticipated situation is described with its implications for planning.

Service Population

The Situation. The student population is getting older: 45- to 54-year-olds will increase from 25.4 million in 1990 to 37.2 million in 2000 (+46.5%), while 18- to 24-year-olds will decrease from 30.3 million in 1980 to 25.2 million in 2000 (-16.9%) (DiCroce, 1991; The Hudson Institute, 1987, 1988). Nationally, the college-going rate of high school graduates has changed little in recent years. Though the number of females going to college has increased, the number of males has decreased, with the net effect remaining that over 25% of high school graduates do not attend college (Carnegie Foundation, 1988; DiCroce, 1991; W. T. Grant Foundation, 1988). The number of part-time and evening students attending community colleges is increasing

nationwide (Betts, 1992; DiCroce, 1991).

The prospective student population is becoming more diverse as the large society becomes more diverse: the number of women, minorities, and immigrants seeking postsecondary education will increase as a corollary to their increased participation in the workforce (by 2000, 80% of new workers will come from these populations; and 70-75% of jobs in the 1990s will require training or education beyond the secondary level) (Hudson Institute, 1987, 1988).

Diversity also means greater variation in basic skills necessary to success in college and beyond. Traditional education, even at the postsecondary level, has been roundly criticized for doing a poor job of providing these basic skills in reading, writing, oral communication, computation, and critical thinking and problem solving. In part because of these inadequacies in the workforce population, employers in business, industry, and public agencies are turning increasingly to partnerships with postsecondary institutions to implement programs to improve basic and advanced skills. Accordingly, a growing segment of community colleges' service population consists of corporate consumers, who, like older and less traditional individual students, have different expectations of, and make different demands of, a "college education."

As the costs of many baccalaureate institutions are becoming, if not always prohibitive, at least difficult for the average family to handle, two-year institutions currently serve more than half the nation's underclassmen and the percentage is increasing. Consequently, more academically advanced students are attending community colleges for the first two years of their higher education, further contributing to diversity within the student body.

Implications. Clearly, planning must take into account this older, more diverse, employment-oriented student population of individuals and corporate clients, as well as the traditional liberal-arts students seeking transfer to four-year institutions. For example, ivory-tower class scheduling ("class meets from 10:00 to 10:50 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday") may become the exception rather than the rule. Instead, more courses will be compressed or expanded to suit students rather than teachers, run in evenings or on weekends, at odd times, and at various locations (including students' workplaces) than is now the case. Even the traditional academic year may be past its heyday.

Staffing will probably change as well. We must begin to abandon the artificial distinctions between noncredit and credit, training and education, "continuing education" and whatever that term is intended to contrast with, along with hiring and

personnel practices dependent on these distinctions and used to differentiate classes of employees. Instead, we must employ educators whose business is *instruction*, whatever secondary labels are attached to it. Even tenure itself may no longer be sacred as one might argue that the safeguards it affords (protection of academic freedom and protection from frivolous dismissal) are now sufficiently supported by the courts and such watchdog agencies as the AAUP.

Instruction must be further adapted to what has been called the "functional context," meaning that programs are developed in partnership with local employers that place students in a learning environment simulating the work environment (U.S. Departments of Labor and Education, 1988). Students are trained in tasks and on equipment that they would use on the job, and test materials are developed from actual job situations.

Instruction in a functional context often requires what I have elsewhere called an "inductive" approach to teaching (Vivelo, 1990, 1991) in which students learn specific tasks first and then proceed to more general concepts as they are needed. (The more traditional or "deductive" approach in education is from the general to the specific, wherein a broad foundation is laid on which increasing specialization is later based.) The inductive approach may produce anxiety in some instructors because it forces the instructors to tie theory to practice at every step rather than expect some epiphanic synthesis to occur among students at some later date when the disparate pieces of information they've been collecting mystically achieve integration and their practical benefits become apparent.

Since education is a form of socialization, more attention must be given to "workplace literacy." The meaning of *basic skills* has been expanded to include not only entry-level competence in reading, writing, and computation but also oral communication and problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, and good work-related habits including reliability, punctuality, self-discipline, a sense of responsibility, and consideration for others (U.S., 1988). Education does no service to students by allowing them to engage in behavior that will not be tolerated in the workplace.

More community colleges must begin making provision for child care as many students are older, are women, are single parents, or are all three. Some community colleges operate their own licensed child care centers (that double as learning laboratories for their early childhood education programs) while others have made arrangements with independent providers. Businesses are increasingly recognizing the need to provide (or facilitate) this service for their employees; surely, then,

community colleges must find ways to take the lead and provide models for what is fast becoming a nationwide social necessity (Cooke, 1989; *Credit Union Magazine*, 1990).

At the same time that community colleges are adapting to new conditions accompanying changes in our service populations, we must remember that the rate of college-going high school graduates remains fairly constant. We must not abandon our traditional liberal arts, transfer focus.

Still, "traditional" does not mean static. A milieu containing video arcades and MTV and in which personal computers, sophisticated electronic equipment, and Nintendo games are found in more and more homes is producing a population of younger students who are not skittish about technology and who are accustomed to learning in ways that previous generations did not imagine. How we teach, therefore, must be renovated or we will communicate less and less effectively with our students.

If we don't adapt, we may go out of business--or, at least, business won't continue to be so good. Just as students turned from universities to community colleges to meet their changing needs, they'll eventually turn to still other providers if we don't continue to meet their evolving needs in productive ways.

Accountability and Quality

The Situation. With the growing emphasis on product (or "outcomes"), due in large part to demands from our changing service population, has come an increasing concern with quality control (as opposed to quality assurance) and attendant mechanisms to demonstrate, and not just assert, that we're doing what we say we're doing and that we're doing it well--and, an even more fundamental issue, that what we're doing is worth doing.

No longer do the general public, legislators, traditional students, and the growing numbers of nontraditional consumers of our product (education) view academia with the degree of awe and respect for us as scholars and educators that we'd like to think they once did. Increasingly, they look at the graduates we turn out and see people who are unable to read, write, and calculate at acceptable levels or who are unable to function satisfactorily in the jobs and in the society-at-large for which we have supposedly prepared them. They see graduates of education programs who have taken jobs in elementary and secondary education who are unable to pass literacy tests (as in one state in 1986 where 1,119 teachers twice failed the state literacy test). Yet each fall they tune their televisions to the local news to witness strikes by teachers demanding, and receiving, higher and higher salaries. As they watch these salaries climb,

they are bombarded with news reports describing how the academic achievements of their children continue to decline.

Legislators are questioning the continued appropriations of tax money to public and private institutions as allegations of misuse of funds and unethical or illegal conduct at these institutions are brought to their attention. Similarly, community colleges are experiencing growing antipathy from four-year institutions; and this antipathy is often camouflaged in print as a concern for "quality" and for an alleged failure on our part to fulfill our "mission" as our sister institutions perceive it.

However, we should not be fooled. One need not be a sophisticated political scientist or economist to understand what underlies the current attacks on the "legitimacy" of community colleges. It's not the "quality" of education. It's not concern for our society's disadvantaged. It's not any of the high-sounding verbiage or pseudohistorical reviews. It's plain old competition for resources.

With some 54% of the country's first-year students attending two-year institutions, the four-year colleges and universities are running scared. They've finally realized that the era of their hegemony is drawing to a close, and they're trying desperately to regain their customers. They have failed to respond to the needs of consumers and society-at-large, and consumers have gone elsewhere. Now, with their market share threatened, they are attacking other suppliers rather than improving their product.

Brint and Karabel's (1989) book, *The Diverted Dream*, is a case in point. Both authors are employed by large universities. While enrollments at community colleges have been increasing dramatically, those in institutions such as theirs have been either decreasing or increasing at a much slower rate. The community colleges, which have made more efforts to bring the benefits of higher education to minorities and the disadvantaged than have traditional four-year institutions, are now accused by Brint and Karabel of just the opposite. However, they do not compare the records of the two types of institutions in this regard because they're not really concerned about the welfare of student; they're concerned about the future of the university system that is the source of their livelihood.

These authors and others like them do not mention the exorbitant costs of a university education nor the outrageously high salaries of their faculty members, who, once all the holidays and breaks are discounted, work about seven or eight months a year; nor the fact that they teach only one, two, or sometimes three courses a semester (which amount to only three, six, or nine hours of student contact work a week); nor that many

classes are not even taught by regular faculty but by graduate students; nor that so much tax money and tuition payments are used to support faculty on released time so they don't face the inconvenience of teaching; nor that the massive, impersonal bureaucracies of universities treat students as nuisances. Nor do they compare any of these conditions with those at the smaller, student-oriented, affordable, teaching-centered, two-year colleges. Instead, they accuse community colleges of not strengthening ties with four-year institutions to facilitate the transfer of graduates into liberal-arts baccalaureate programs. (Translation: community colleges are accused of not feeding a sufficient number of paying customers to universities.)

Decriers such as Brint and Karabel entirely ignore the historical fact that community colleges have always vigorously pursued such articulations (for the sake of their students, incidentally, not because these relationships particularly benefit the community colleges); but the four-year institutions have been the obstacle. They have been reluctant to enter into such agreements; they have themselves created most of the transfer hurdles; they have made it clear that, in the past, they've not especially welcomed community-college transfers; and now, as they suffer the consequences of their own cavalier treatment of transfer students, they wish to blame the community colleges.

In short, the consumer base for four-year colleges is changing. Customers are seeking satisfaction elsewhere. Rather than improve their product, which requires self-examination and discomfort, the old guard criticizes others who *are* meeting today's demand. If we are to judge by enrollments and postgraduation economic improvement, community colleges have been doing a valued and valuable job. Perhaps if universities lowered their prices, demanded measurable productivity from their employees, treated their students as valued commodities and national resources, and concentrated on their product (education), they would convince more customers to patronize them. As long as they're overpriced, underproductive, insensitive to the marketplace (i.e., neither product- nor customer-oriented), and, most important, do not value teaching, they're headed for more trouble.

If you think my emphasis on marketing is vulgar or if you doubt either the sales orientation of our universities or the absence of substance behind what they're selling, take a look at any university's promotional materials, especially the "viewbooks" currently in vogue to recruit students (i.e., to attract new customers), and see just what it is that they're hawking. My economic interpretation of the criticisms against

community colleges is not nearly so crassly commercial as are these materials.

The current predicament for many four-year institutions constitutes a lesson for us. Community colleges cannot afford to rest content with their success so far. If we grow as smug as some of our four-year sister institutions, fabricating excuses to rationalize our existence, seeking scapegoats to blame for our own shortcomings, or refusing to reexamine facile assumptions about our "intrinsic value to society" instead of scrutinizing our purpose and supporting our claims of effectiveness and productivity with empirical evidence, we might as well concede that critics such as Brint and Karabel are right for we will have failed. We will no longer provide an affordable, accessible alternative avenue of quality higher education in the public interest.

Implications

Increasing emphasis on accountability and on demonstrating quality opens some of our most cherished assumptions to dispute (or at least to public scrutiny). We are being asked to show, in practical terms, the "value" of higher education and to provide evidence that we are effective in fulfilling our mission. Indeed, we are being asked to reevaluate and sometimes reformulate our mission to make it more responsive to exogenously defined needs. Especially in public institutions called *community* colleges, an insular, ivory-tower delineation of mission and goals is becoming less and less popular in the community we supposedly serve and it will not be tolerated much longer. We're being asked to put up or shut up.

We must, therefore, take the lead in documenting our worth in terms that our consumers, legislators, and the general public understand, For example, we cannot continue to make assertions about "value-added" education; we must show this value by measuring the difference in knowledge and skills between the time students enter a course or program and the time they exit it. We must compensate employees, including faculty, on the basis of performance (i.e., on measurable productivity): numbers of students served, degree of knowledge attained by students in courses and programs (on, for instance, standardized tests), students' success in securing and retaining employment or achieving transfer (and their subsequent success on the job or at four-year institutions), the ability of students to pass literacy tests as graduation requirements, establishing successful education and training programs for local business and industry that demonstrate real contributions to economic development, instituting empirical measures to assure consistency in content

and quality in multiple sections of the same course and throughout a curriculum....

The list is virtually endless *if* we are genuinely concerned about accountability and *if* we avoid seeing problems ("X can't be done because ....") and instead create solutions ("This is how X can be done"). The consequence of not being responsive to our consumers' concerns for demonstrable quality and empirical accountability is that others will do it for us. Better to devise our own solutions than to have them imposed on us from outside.

Need for Currency

To provide documented quality education and training to our growing, diverse service population, we must remain current. To remain current, we must have resources, including human, physical, material, and financial resources. The best way to maximize resources is to demonstrate the quality and utility of our product to our consumer populations and to be responsive to the changing needs of these populations. This means hiring faculty and staff who are willing to construct class schedules that serve the convenience and interests of students over teachers. It means training office staff to be friendly and helpful, to develop a customer-service orientation, and then evaluating them in part on how well they provide courteous customer service.

It means eagerly adopting and creatively adapting new instructional delivery systems. For example, at my own institution we doubled enrollments when we switched from telecourses to videocourses. (Telecourses were broadcast through the local PBS station and through a cable-access channel by arrangement with an area cable company. When we went to videocourses, we stopped airing the programs. Instead, we invested several thousand dollars in a piece of equipment to duplicate videotapes, which we rent to students, and reduced staffing and overhead associated with the management of telecourses. With few clerical staff--and without the time-consuming, frustrating negotiations with PBS officials, cable operators, the local Council of Governments, etc.--we're able to offer more videocourses to more students at less cost to us, and enrollments continue to climb each semester.)

Currency also means keeping up with lightning changes in technology. No sooner do we acquire a piece of equipment, develop expertise on it, and then begin using it for teaching than we find it obsolete. Some of us throw up our hands in defeat, but if we've established a record of responsiveness to our corporate consumers and shown them we're adaptable and effective as quality educators, they are likely to be receptive to us when we ask them

to shoulder most of the costs of new equipment to train their existing and prospective employees. Indeed, they will often come to us with creative suggestions that result in the college acquiring new equipment and securing funding.

The importance of maintaining currency, the impact of technology on our effectiveness, and the need to maximize resources are well known. What is worth stressing, however, is the need to address these areas explicitly in strategic plans and to base such plans on assumptions that recognize the changing environment, partly described above, in which community colleges operate. That said, let's look briefly at the major areas for the organization of a strategic plan.

The Planning Document

At least seven areas may be identified that probably should be addressed in <u>any</u> strategic plan.

Statement of Mission

First, a strategic plan should review, and possibly revise, its mission statement. The successful pursuit of the institution's mission requires a shared vision; shared vision requires agreement on, and commitment to, principles; principles, to be realized, require articulated action on an agreed-upon set of strategic goals; and effective action to achieve goals requires that every individual accept personal responsibility for transforming an abstract ideal into a tangible, animate reality.

Accordingly, the purpose of a strategic plan is to set down the principles and commitments that constitute an institution's shared vision in a conceptual blueprint to guide and inform our individual and collective undertakings to provide educational opportunity, maintain excellence, and promote achievement. All goals contained in a strategic plan should demonstrably contribute to the college's mission. Any goal, therefore, that does not meet this criterion does not belong in the plan.

Success of Students: In the Classroom and Beyond

First and foremost, a community college exists to provide educational opportunities to the citizens of its region. The success of students in pursuing their educational goals is of paramount concern. Since commitment to the success of students is the first principle from which all others derive, effectiveness must be measured by the degree to which this principle is transformed into palpable reality. To the degree to which actions fail to make this commitment an actuality for students, regardless of the college's other accomplishments and stockpiled accolades and assets, to that same extent we fail individually and as an institution.

Moreover, a strategic plan must recognize that students' success is measured not only in academic success, though this is primary, but also in the degree to which they develop personally and socially, define their place in society, secure satisfying and productive employment, learn inquisitiveness and openmindedness, and respect differences. Education, literally a "leading out," concerns more than the acquisition of knowledge; it is a way of approaching the experiences of life; it is a means of determining how to live. In its commitment to provide educational opportunities, therefore, the college is perforce committing itself to assist students to enrich their lives beyond the classroom.

Quality Instruction: Excellence in the Classroom and Beyond

Excellence in the educational enterprise, the bedrock for students' success, issues from the conjunction of

- quality faculty who provide instruction and control the classroom, the curriculum, and the academic integrity of the institution;
- creative and collaborative administrators who facilitate the provision of instruction by nonintrusively managing the affairs and operations of the college outside the classroom;
- an efficient and helpful classified staff who provide secretarial, clerical, maintenance, and custodial services that contribute to effective operations and a pleasant, learning-centered social and physical environment;
- and state-of-the-art technological support, including equipment, materials, and supplies that permit each category of personnel to do its job without artificial impediment.

Accordingly, the college must seek out only the best-qualified men and women to become full- and part-time members of the faculty, individuals who evidence the potential of achieving and maintaining a level of quality performance in the classroom and beyond that is commensurate with the highest standards of excellence. It should staff its administrative ranks with persons who combine managerial expertise and sound academic credentials with sensitivity to the human element in organizational interaction and an appreciation of the distinctiveness of an educational environment. It should employ classified staff who not only possess requisite technical skills but exhibit an attitude and orientation compatible with the characteristics of an academic workplace; and it should allocate fiscal resources adequate to maintain equipment, material, supplies, and services at a level that promotes the pursuit of excellence.

Translating this principle into action requires an uncompromising approach to quality first, with all else being subsidiary concerns, and includes the development of specific goals to do the following:

- Establish academic-assessment procedures, including formal, written evaluations of programs and services on a regular, scheduled basis and periodic course-outline reviews and updates.
- Encourage faculty members to develop new courses and programs, both credit and noncredit, and to be innovative in their approach to teaching.
- Promote professional growth among faculty.
- Allocate sufficient resources to support library and media acquisitions that contribute to effective teaching and learning, while simultaneously eliminating acquisitions that are not directly related to students' success and faculty members' college responsibilities.
- Institute uniform procedures for the recruitment and cultivation of new full- and part-time faculty, administrators, and classified staff to guarantee excellence in teaching, management, and support services.
- Devise a comprehensive plan for both entry-level and update training for all classified staff.
- Insure through planning and broad-based participation that the acquisition of equipment and material proceeds at a pace adequate to support educational excellence.

Resource Development Management

If a college is to fulfill its mission and successfully pursue goals that further its mission, it must clearly define how it will develop and manage resources (human, physical, and financial) to support its activities. A strategic plan must establish goals for a human-resource program that promotes the college's ability to attract and retain outstanding, creative personnel and that provides a program for the ongoing development of employees--not only professional growth for faculty but the development and continued training of support staff and administrators as well. The plan should also serve as a blueprint for maintaining and enhancing the physical environment in which students, faculty, and staff work. This plan should address not only the physical plant but also the socioecological ambience the college wishes to create. Goals should also concern the technological base for the institution (e.g., its HVAC system), the acquisition of instructional and administrative support equipment, and anticipated expansion of faculties (office space,

classrooms, labs, etc.).

Finally, and not least important, a strategic plan should include goals for improving teaching-learning opportunities within a financially stable environment achieved through effective development and efficient management of fiscal resources. Few of a college's activities do not carry a price tag; but many strategic planners, caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment, forget to read the tag. A good planning document will specify ways to display these tags prominently.

Diversity

If education is to be comprehensive and contribute to experiential growth and social development that both reflect and contribute to the values, complexion, and composition of our society and the larger world of which our society is a part, it must promote understanding and acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity and must incorporate heterogeneity and pluralism not as afterthoughts or in compliance with ephemeral trends but as integral components of its everyday agenda and ethos in the classroom and beyond. Exposure to differences and alternatives-- in peoples and cultures, in attitudes, in framing questions and seeking answers, in ways of thinking and seeing--is the hallmark of true education.

Accordingly, a strategic plan must address ways to recruit and retain a student body and employee population that represent diversity in appearance and in ethnic and cultural origins, in socioeconomic background, and in geographic variety. In curricula, as well, the college should seek to foster cross-cultural understanding and awareness of global issues, to combat parochialism, and to recognize the contributions of minority and majority populations and individuals in the arts and sciences, technologies and business, and the history of humankind. A commitment to diversity includes establishing the college's position as an energetic center for free and open discussion, the exchange of ideas, the commingling of cultures, productive social interactions, and economic and political integration that recognizes and celebrates heterogeneity.

Internal Operational Efficiency

The educational enterprise is a collective one that must be managed well to achieve excellence. This requires the active participation of all staff who enthusiastically involve themselves in all aspects of the college's operations and constantly challenge themselves and each other to increasingly greater achievements in an atmosphere characterized by freedom of expression, balanced responsibilities and authority, inspired

decision making, organizational flexibility, and minimal bureaucracy.

The strategic plan should therefore affirm a commitment to a joint governance system that invites unfettered, wholesale involvement of students and staff; that allows those affected by policy decisions to participate in the formulation of those decisions; that is self-critical and eschews complacency; that places the welfare of the institution above self-interest; that seeks new means to promote communication and the sharing of information; that values and promotes organizational efficiency without hampering individual creativity or stifling innovation; that engenders a sense of fiscal responsibility and maintains the economic stability of the institution; and that recognizes the larger political context in which the college exists and functions.

Community Relations

A community college is a college of and in the community, an institution created to serve the needs of the community, at once to reflect the community and to serve as a model for it. A strategic plan should reaffirm the college's intention to remain imbedded in the community but at the same time transcend it, recognizing the community's uniqueness but abjuring provincialism, perpetuating the community's characteristics and values while introducing it to broadening and more comprehensive perspectives. In short, a community college must be both an endogenous and exogenous force that preserves stability while serving as an agent of change.

As members of the college and members of the community, the framers of a strategic plan should commit themselves to furthering relations between the two by active participation, as individuals and groups, in both; by developing and executing objectives and action plans that enhance the college's responsiveness to the community's educational and cultural needs and contribute to the improvement of socioeconomic life in the community; by strengthening interinstitutional alliances that advance opportunities for the populations it serves; by promoting a positive image of the college; by intensifying interactions that bring together the community and the college; and by intensifying relations with alumni.

A Word About Implementation...

Goals are statements of intentions. They describe what is to be accomplished but not how it will be done. An implementation strategy is necessary for the latter, two key elements of which might be:

Annual Objectives. Each administrative office of the college and its constituent divisions or units develop a set of annual objectives outlining actions to be taken in pursuit of some or all the above goals.

Planning Statements. Individuals and college units develop more detailed action plans as needed to implement efforts not included in annual objectives.

...and Performance Evaluation

Having established what will be done and how it will be done, the college must develop efforts to evaluate its success, to assess how well it does what it sets out to do, and what kinds of measurable outcomes these efforts produce. Indices to success include answering the following three questions:

1. To what extent have the college units achieved their annual objectives?

2. To what extent do these annual objectives contribute to the accomplishment of the college's strategic goals?

3. To what extent do the goals promote the mission of the college? (See Figure 1.)

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