

Ad hoc Committee on
University Strategic Planning and Assessment
Final Report
to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee
West Virginia University
(Draft, 6, November 8, 2004)

Committee members:

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After several months of discussion and exploration the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC), at its August 23, 2004 meeting, voted to establish an ad hoc Committee on University Strategic Planning and Assessment (CUSP). The gist of the charge was to “Outline specific recommendations regarding content areas and implementation of a comprehensive strategic planning and assessment process at WVU, including committee structure and constituency representation, time line, methodologies for assessment and institutionalization of the process for continuous advancement of the University’s mission” and to produce a final report for the FSEC on or before November 25, 2004. The present report is submitted in response to this charge.

The CUSP Committee worked through email and through an interactive, password protected web site and met three times to coordinate our activities and review our preliminary conclusions. The web site has now been converted to an open set of web pages to allow interested parties to review its work. The address of that site is <http://www.as.wvu.edu/mlastinger/cusp/>.

The peer universities reviewed by the Committee are:

- University of Wisconsin, Madison
- **Ohio State University** (<http://www.osu.edu/academicplan/exec.html>)
- University of Minnesota
- **University of Kentucky** (<http://www.uky.edu/Home/2003-06Strategic%20Plan/>)
- University of Florida
- University of Missouri
- Michigan State University
- University of Arizona
- University of Maryland, College Park
- Virginia Tech

Other documents reviewed by the Committee:

- ["WVU 2010 Main Campus Challenges and Opportunities" presented by Provost Lang to the Faculty Senate, June 14, 2004](#)
- [Final Team Report of Higher Learning Commission Site Visit](#)
- **WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR PROGRAM CHANGE** (Accepted by the President March, 1987 Adjusted February, 2003)
- "Dealing with the Future Now: Principles for Creating a Vital Campus in a Climate of Restricted Resources," by Alan E. Guskin and Mary B. Marcy (<http://www.pfhe.org/docs/ChangeFinal.pdf>)

These documents taken together comprise many hundreds of pages and sometimes surprisingly different conceptions of planning and assessment. The ultimate goal of the CUSP committee was to digest and synthesize this material in order to present an overview that is general enough to be accessible and accurate enough to be useful. The notes that follow represent the synthesis of the conclusions the committee reached at its last face-to-face meeting on October 20, 2004.

Two models:

Overall the CUSP group agreed that two strategic plans of two peer universities stood out as representing structures and procedures that might best be adapted to the needs and aspirations of West Virginia University. Those institutions are the **Ohio State University** and the **University Kentucky** (highlighted on the preceding page). We recommend that any future committee on strategic planning take these two plans into careful consideration as they work.

Surface Tangibles:

The committee also agreed that good strategic plans generally took the best advantage of what we called "surface tangibles." Surface tangibles are not integral components of the plans themselves but rather elements that enhance the plans' accessibility and comprehensibility. Among those surface elements, we identified such things as:

- **Planning Committee Structure:** Some of the plans we read seemed to be the voice of one person or of a small constituency in the university. Others seemed so open to input that no mechanisms for prioritization of choices seemed possible. The better organizational structures were built around a reasonably sized and representative steering committee or task force and a limited number of subcommittees with specific areas of responsibility. Care must be taken in order to maintain a committee size that is both manageable and responsive to all major stake-holders. The careful construction of the committee system for planning and assessment is the first step toward achieving the buy-in that is essential to success. It is the successful fusion of leadership and buy-in that stands the best chance to bring strategic planning forth from the committee level to its realization across the institution and its communities.
- **Readability and transparency:** It is critical that language and documents laying out the strategic plan and inviting participation be clear and accessible. Aesthetics are also an important consideration here. Websites that are well designed both aesthetically and organizationally were common to all the good plans we examined. Language used in communicating good plans was straightforward and terminology was direct, specific, and

retainable. Key words and phrases designating or summarizing essential parts of the plans ("academic scorecard," "key indicators," etc.) allowed quick reference and easy communication. The use of clearly laid out graphs and diagrams also enhanced readability. The central strategic planning document was generally succinct and inviting while also laying out the broad lines of the plan. The best strategic plans established guiding principles and measures in a way that allowed units throughout the institution to develop plans of their own that reflected the institution's global plan.

Three Substantial Components:

There are many parts that go into making a good strategic plan, but throwing these parts together without consideration of their relation to the whole can lead to plans that lack focus and organization. Such plans stand to obstruct rather than facilitate valid decision-making. The CUSP committee concluded that nearly all good strategic plans stood on three solid pillars and that almost all other parts of the plan could be related to one or more of these main components. While terms may vary from one school to the next, the committee identified **Vision, Strategies, and Assessment** as the three structural components from which other elements derive.

I. **Vision:**

The vision embodied in good strategic plans incorporates not only the mission of the university but also the various goals of the plan itself. The vision, either explicit or implicit, expressed in the better strategic plans strikes a balance between the realistic and the aspirational. Current challenges are examined frankly, but the plans also provide hope for a future that faces these challenges and in some cases turns them to the advantage of the institution. Above all, the mission and specific goals reflect the core values of the institution and the state or region it serves.

- a. **Mission:** Some of the plans we read involved an initial review and perhaps revision of the university's mission statement. Whether this step is a review or a revision, it is essential if the strategic plan hopes to maintain and enhance the school's ability to fulfill its mission. Since all the plans we reviewed were those of fully configured modern universities (research extensive and often land-grant), they were often quite broad in scope but still reflective of each school's particular conception of its role in the academic world and in the community it serves.
- b. **Goals:** Goals may be very broad or relatively narrowly defined, but good plans select goals that derive from the mission and open the way to strategies for their attainment and means to their assessment. Some goals, like those relating to infra-structure, etc. may be more a means than an end in themselves. The mission of the university is not "to build buildings." Rather those buildings are needed to attain the primary mission-related goal of "educating the people of ***." While both are essential to success, the distinction between "means-targeted goals" and "mission-targeted" goals may be useful. Goals like enrollment targets, may be seen as both means- and mission- targeted, since a critical mass of student enrollment is necessary for course and programs offerings and since increasing enrollment while maintaining quality enhances the mission of "educating the people..." In all cases, good plans focus on a limited number – usually four to six – of critical goals. The table below outlines the areas of focus of the two universities the CUSP committee identified as exemplary:

Goals: the Ohio State University	Goals: the University of Kentucky
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a World-Class Faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach for National Prominence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Academic Programs that Define Ohio State as the Nation's Leading Public Land-Grant University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract and Graduate Outstanding Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the Quality of the Teaching and Learning Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract, Develop and Retain a Distinguished Faculty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance and Better Serve the Student Body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover, Share and Apply New Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a More Diverse University Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture Diversity of Thought, Culture, Gender and Ethnicity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help Build Ohio's Future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate the Quality of Life for Kentuckians

- c. **Values:** All good strategic plans show a primary commitment to the core values of the university itself. Such values may be common to many great universities, but they cannot be forgotten in the face of the challenges that most of these plans seem designed to face. Such core values are generally expressed in the mission statement and reflected in the goals selected for action. One notes also that the goals not only reflect the traditional mission of the university to create, analyze and disseminate knowledge, they also reflect the particular situation of the institution and its relation to the state whose citizens it serves. From the foundation of Oxford University in 1167 and the Sorbonne in 1157, great universities have always been an essential component of the state itself. This is clear in the goals stated above, but it is also clear in the best strategic plans. Ohio State's main document, for example, opens with a section focusing on "Why Ohio needs a great university..." This point was important in the exchanges of the CUSP committee. One common element of the better institutions we examined was their designation as the "flag-ship university" of their state. The fact that the state of West Virginia has not designated WVU as its flag-ship was a matter of considerable concern with regard to the state's expression of its own core values. No great state has ever existed without a great university. The ultimate goal of WVU's strategic plan must above all be to enhance this university's ability to maintain and enhance both its greatness and that of our state.

- II. **Strategies:** Strategies are, of course, the heart of a strategic plan. They are the operational initiatives chosen to attain the to goals identified for institutional action. Generally strategies, as we perceived them in the better plans, included action plans, funds and resource allocation, organizational adjustments, and other initiatives designed to assist in the realization of missions and goals. Often the better strategies worked in a coordinated manner around complementary objectives. "Improving the faculty," might also "improve undergraduate programs" or "increase funded research" through targeted hiring, recruitment, and retention programs. In all cases, good

strategic plans provide guidelines for making clear and meaningful decisions about advancement, investment or re-allocation of resources. Terms like "priority investment" or "focused excellence" reflect this emphasis on meaningful decision-making. The items below are intended only as examples of the kinds of strategies that better strategic plans envision:

- streamline organizations and bureaucracies to facilitate innovation
- streamline capital resources
- enable new partnerships, both across the campus and in the community
- manage enrollments (graduate / undergraduate according to objectives)
- increase funded research
- raise ACT/SAT scores of incoming students (a way to improve retention...)
- focus on learning outcomes (through various venues)
- innovate and improve on delivery systems
- recognize significant contributions in all forms
- work with legislatures and policy commissions to increase support and flexibility

In some cases laudable strategies may seem at odds (increase faculty-student interaction / increase efficiency through larger enrollment classes). These questions must be pondered carefully with an eye both to quality and to productivity. As suggested earlier, strategies must be carefully aligned with their potential to facilitate the realization of a select broader set of institutional goals and aspirations.

- III. **Assessment:** No plan can be evaluated without measures that allow assessment of its progress toward fulfilling the mission and attaining specific goals. Any global assessment of a university's situation takes into account not only future aspirations, but also institutional history and embedded culture(s) as well as the current state of the institution's affairs. Realistic projections of factors that will affect future conditions are perhaps the most essential component of a solid plan. Some of the plans we read noted the relative uncertainty of future projections, but they also recognized the fact that unpredictable change is no excuse for a refusal to plan (most wisely for multiple contingencies).

Strategies and specific goals must then be adopted based on all of these considerations. Where specific goals, both means-targeted and mission-targeted, are carefully coordinated, assessment of the goals themselves can give a good measure of the institution's realization of the vision it espouses. Some such metrics are relatively easy to gauge. One measure of "to educate the people of ***" may be taken from the numbers of students retained from first to second year, the rate of six-year graduation, etc. Such measures at the institutional level can be duplicated to the unit level and easily used to make informed decisions about resource allocations and other local adjustments. The terminology may vary ("benchmarks," "targets," "steps," etc.), but all the better plans lay out clear objectives and associate them both with investment of resources (human/fiscal) and with a means to measure progress and/or failure. The University of Kentucky's plan associates both allocation of resources and clear "Key Indicators" to every goal designated. Below are a few examples (with hyperlinks) of the metrics used by Kentucky to assess the progress of their plans and missions:

- [Increase the first-to-second year retention rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students to 83 percent.](#)
- [Increase the six-year graduation rate to 60 percent.](#)
- [Increase from 10 to 15 the number of top ranked academic programs, according to the](#)

National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Research Council (NRC), or U.S. News & World Report.

- Increase the average faculty salary to at least 90 percent of the benchmark median.
- Increase the number of patent applications by 10 percent.
- Develop and implement a plan for University engagement that integrates service into the curriculum and recognizes faculty engagement.
- Develop institutional policies and procedures that promote recruitment and retention of faculty and staff.

Similarly, the Academic Scorecard from Ohio State is exemplary in its reports on progress toward attaining specified targets and in its comparative measures with select “Benchmark Universities.” The quick view of the Scorecard is very informative and may be viewed at:

- http://www.osu.edu/academicplan/scorecard_2003.pdf

Overall, the CUSP committee noted that plans laid out in terms of "improve," "encourage," "assist," or "develop" often led to empty promises or vaguely conceived ideals. In contrast, Kentucky was exemplary in its ability to associate concrete measures to laudable goals even though not all of its strategies were associated with measurable outcomes. In the latter example above, the measures are not as clear as they are in other areas, and the sub-strategies, while assigning funds to dual faculty hiring, minority recruitment, etc. do not lay out clear targets for such aspirations. The CUSP committee was cognizant of the many features of our mission that may not lend themselves directly to easy measure, but it also recognized the virtue, both real and rhetorical, of expressing our results in terms that can be measured. It may be that "quantified measures" need their counter part in "qualified measures," but all of us in education live every day with the charge to evaluate such questions and to justify our decisions (to students, etc.). The CUSP committee was unanimous in its endorsement of the need for a global assessment program as essential to a strategic plan. The design of such a program is perhaps the most essential component of the plan itself.

A Final Note: Scope

Many of the plans we considered began in the mid 1990's and project at least to 2005. Kentucky, for example, runs from 1997 to 2020. It seemed generally that the better plans looked back to the beginnings of the institutions and projected forward at least three to five years. Some goals may reasonably be measured on an annual basis and others may require more perspective. It seemed to the committee that a good handle on trends could perhaps be grasped in a three- to five-year cycle. In all cases, a carefully conceived chronology will be critical to the plan's realization and to its ultimate accountability.